Timber Creek Collection 2015

Timber Creek Collection contains works produced by Marshalltown Community College students. The publication title alludes to the location of the college at the northeast corner of Timber Creek Township in Marshall County. The north branch of the Timber Creek runs nearby, and a former township schoolhouse, Spring Valley, now a private home, stands just south of the campus. The old one-room school and the growing MCC campus stand in stark contrast to each other, yet alone and together present compelling visual evidence of the importance and value of education over the years.

The Humanities Faculty

Jurors: Connie Adair and Carole Permar

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Cover art by David Adair
Inhaling the icky chemicals created a poison that woke me. My heart felt like it wanted to jump out of my chest. This tingling feeling would slowly scatter across my face. That when my mind was jetting off. I was living in the speed of light. It wired me up, giving me a boost of confidence. Everything wrong felt right. It opened up my mind to see things I’ve never thought I would see. Everything had more contrast. I observed everything to find more sense to it. I was flying in open air, and I wasn’t going to land back in reality. I was happy, but ruthlessly happy. I felt numb to anything that would cause pain. My heart felt empty, not even a drop of love was it. It was silent.

I was getting in deeper. This was an everyday routine for me. Things in my head started scrambling around. Everything seemed so gloomy; I wouldn’t make sense. I was fooled by the beauty I saw when I was high. It got ugly once my mind started thinking for itself. I was seeing things that weren’t real. Black shadows would play hide and seek with me. Fear was building up inside me, killing my brain slowly. I felt like I was the one everyone talked about. It was so easy to detach the top of my skull and spread venomous gossip for my brain to absorb. It caused me to assume and plot unrealistic stories in my head.

The disappointment in my little sister’s eyes got to me. I was supposed to set a good example for Lisa. She would put up a wall whenever I was around her, but I know she was crying behind it. My mother is the women who never smiles. Her hurtful words were like a sharp blade, cutting me deep, leaving me scars of tough love. Her heart was so cold, the heart of a single mother who faced a genocide in a poor land of a third world county. Marissa was the only friend I had. I could feel her frustration. She ran out of energy to hold her patience she had with me. Nothing but anger escaped her mouth. Aiming right at me, she pulled the trigger, loaded up with her words, and shot me down. The pain spread through my body quickly. The people who cared the most were the ones I let down.

My oldest sister is the only one who believed in me when I lost everyone. Dara never looked down on me. She never looked at me differently. Never once did she judge me. She was the only one in my family who experienced affliction. She knew how it felt to be in my position. She knew how it felt to be an addict. My using affected her because she didn’t want to see her little sister going through what she had. Her heart is so big, religious, accepting, understanding, and filled with unconditional love. She helped me with everything she could. The love and caring she had for me showed me enough.

My addiction to meth is in my past, but it’s something that will always be a part of me for the rest of my life. I learned that I had to forgive myself. And the only choice I had was to move on. It’s a challenge every day and it will always be a challenge for the rest of my life, but that will only make me stronger. Strength is what keeps me moving, forward step by step. This is a part of me I will not forget. It is an experience I will not regret because it made me who I am today. You have to know what it’s like to be weak, in order to be strong. The weak are strong.
Duty, Service, Honor, and Doubt?
by Richard Drummer

When it comes to war, no one wins. I came to this realization while serving in the United States Army. I see myself as being patriotic, and I demonstrated both loyalty and faithfulness to my sworn oath to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States for eight and one half years. I began to wonder, “Could I give all that I had to duty, service, and honor during the war while doubting what I was doing?” While I’ve learned that we can successfully accomplish a military mission or meet a military objective, it comes at a cost. Money, property, equipment, and lives are lost and in most cases lives are forever changed.

It was 1990 and I was stationed in Ft. Hood, Texas. That year we received orders that my unit was to deploy to Southwest Asia. We spent days and weeks training and preparing for Operation Desert Storm. My unit would arrive in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. We set up tent cities and continued our training and preparations as we waited for the political process to take place. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are both bare open lands with sand as far as the eye can see. During nighttime, the temperature gets down to freezing, so we needed a coat to keep warm.

We eventually moved ground forces into the country of Kuwait with the objective of removing the oppressive Iraqi regime from the country of Kuwait. All around us we could see and hear fighter jets and helicopters. I could hear the sound of gunfire and feel the explosions from the tanks firing their munitions. Once we were in the country of Kuwait, we witnessed burning oil fields. The fires were intentionally set out of defiance. The smoke was so thick that at midday it was as dark as midnight, and the smell of burning oil was putrid, leaving a bitter taste in my mouth.

As we took countless prisoners, we continued to fight the Iraqi forces still waging war. Most of our prisoners were hungry, thirsty, and happy to no longer be fighting in a war they did not believe in. Almost all had been forced to fight. One day I was called upon to assist the field medics. Their job was to care for the wounded soldiers. In one tent, a wounded Iraqi soldier was lying on a cot. He was old enough to be my grandfather. He had been hit by a bullet in the back of his head. This left a horrible wound exposing his brain.

I was driven by a sense of humanity to do all that I could to comfort him. I started by placing wet compresses to his forehead; then I gently urged him to take sips of water. We were in a tent, and it was very hot with electricity provided by a gas-powered generator. He was dripping in sweat, so I placed a fan on him in an attempt to make him more comfortable. The only way I really had to console him was to sit by him and continue to show acts of kindness and compassion. I wiped his head, offered him water, and showed my concern. He died with me holding his hand. The language barrier disappeared, and I began to get the sense of something very beautiful and universal. He squeezed my hand as he died.

As the cease fire was called and the peace treaty was signed, I was relieved. We were going home, but all I could think about was that dying man. At that moment I didn’t know how to answer my own question. Could I serve and give all that I had and yet doubt? Property and money didn’t matter to me, and I knew that when it comes to war, no one wins.
401 Green Mountain Road
by Cara Gwinn

I see the odd little green grass,
As I’m on my way up the path.
Up to the two lone steep steps,
And into the porch from the front deck.

Three windows greet me on the front door.
I won’t bother to knock because I’ve been here before.
Memories filled every room where we lived,
Out of blue walls, away from our home, we were ripped.

We had gold-speckled panels in our room of living—
The room where we gathered for our Christmas giving.
The place where we’d spent every day of our lives,
We’re no longer home, but we still survive.

Metallic words—spilled all over blue,
As if it matters now, that was my room.
My big, four-paned window that I miss so much,
I can feel it rattle at the thought of my touch.

I would step out and feel all the sun-heated shingles,
And watch over the town, as Green Mountain mingled.
I’d listen to the wind as it blew through my hair,
And carried soft sounds of the town to my ears.

Every writing on every last wall,
And every 474 phone call,
I wish I could have taken it all,
But there, into nothing, our home had to fall.

The Next Generation
by Janelle Cook-Guiles

Best Friends by Cheyenne Mitchell

The Subjects and Their King
by Lyric Tracy

We four live in a
Kingdom in shambles.
Our King is unusual, to say the least,
but we all coexist with Him differently.

My father, the beaten-down soldier,
asks the King for guidance and help.
Sometimes, the King does not help, sometimes He does,
If not always in the way we expect.

My mother, the quiet mouse,
squeaks angrily at the King.
She blames our Kingdom’s misfortune on Him.
They used to be good friends, but now I don’t know where
they stand.

My sister, the unpredictable shape-shifter,
believes that the King is distant, if real at all.
She thinks He created the Kingdom
and left us to poorly fend for ourselves, like the Great
Watchmaker.

As for me, the one for whom the rain does not stop,
I love our King. But as I struggle to tread water in a cold sea,
I wonder why the King would allow such things
and if, one day, His hand will pull me under.

I hope that one day the Kingdom
will be restored to its former glory
and my father will stand tall, my mother will happily squeak,
my sister will feel the King’s presence,
and I will fly with the waters as my sky.

The Next Generation by Janelle Cook-Guiles
2nd Place Photography
Chronicles of a Chronic Bitchface
by Cara Gwinn
1st Place Prose

I remember the first time I heard a variation of the term “Chronic Bitch Face.” I was serving a meal in a nursing home when someone asked me if I was okay. “Yeah, I’m fine. Why does everyone always think I’m upset?” was my response. That’s when a dietary aide turned around, and with an evil grin said to me, “Cara, you are what people refer to as a “Chronic Bitchface,” and she walked away laughing.

I was speechless. All I could do was continue serving while I evaluated the term in my head. Months went by and I forgot all about the insult and the term altogether, until I finally gave into social media and began Facebooking. The term pops up on Facebook and Twitter all the time (depending on whom you’re following). There are videos and lists online about things that happen when you have this condition, and although they are mostly satirical, the condition has been widely recognized as “sort of real”—even by the plastic surgery industry. There are even legitimate tips on what to do if you have Chronic Bitchface. People who have been afflicted with this condition are simply trying to live their lives—despite having an offensive face.

While this condition has always existed, the most common titles for it did not become popular until around 2012, although one website claims the term was coined as “Resting Bitchface” by comedian Taylor Orci in 2013. There are a few different variations of the term, including Resting Bitchface, Bitchy Resting Face, Chronic Bitchface, and Resting Bitchface Syndrome. All these variations mean the same thing, though—a person, usually female, who looks angry or upset without any intention of doing so. There are certain features of the face that contribute to this condition, such as high eyebrows, sometimes a creased brow and pursed lips. Of course, it happens to men as well, (it’s called Resting A-hole Face) but the “aggressive” look is more widely accepted for males than for females, so it is much less noticeable and much less of a problem.

I have noticed that when I become extremely focused and start to concentrate, I tend to put on my bitchy face. It’s not that I intend to look like that, but when my brow creases and my lips purse in concentration, I look like I’m about to blow steam out my ears and breathe fire! Someone who has been labeled with Chronic Bitchface is forever conscious of the way his/her face looks. For example, last week at work, as I plopped pieces of cookie dough onto layers of fruit filling, I thought, one here, one there, there’s one for you, plop plop..., but then I felt the crease in my brow. I better start smiling or someone’s gonna ask if I’m okay... And I put on my fake smile, which I hate doing because I prefer being genuine to being phony.

I have known about my “condition” for some time, so when I saw a link to a video about it by Buzzfeed, I took the bait. But this one minute and 15 second video entitled “What It’s Like When You Have Resting Bitchface” did not do the justice that I had hoped for. I thought the video would highlight the characteristics in a more exaggerated manner to be
humorous, but instead, it underrated the importance of how insulted a person feels when coming into contact with this issue. One of the most dreaded phrases that I hear a lot would be, “Smile, it’s not that bad.” I don’t think it’s fair to make people wear fake smiles all the time. The way I see it, if there’s not a hilarious joke or an adorable animal in my presence, why should I smile? I do it because other people will think I’m upset if I do not have a smile on my face at all times.

Of course, some people are simply bitchy. There are those who say that RBF is just a made up condition used to deny the reality that a person is bitchy, but the reason for that is the way the afflicted have been treated. It’s a vicious circle. Have you ever been asked repeatedly if you’re okay when you’re fine? It’s actually quite frustrating. If I wasn’t upset before people started berating me about my face, I sure as hell am upset now! On the other hand, I do understand the perspective of people who constantly ask “Are you okay”? Some people are only trying to brighten the day, and others simply want to show concern and empathy.

Chronic Bitchface is a real condition of almost epidemic proportions, but there are steps people can take in dealing with it. For those who are afflicted, the best option is to just put on your fake “Super Happy About Everything Face,” and deal. Another good option is to recognize the problem and make light of it. Laugh it off as much as possible to prove your face wrong. For those who have to deal with Chronic Bitchface on others, just try not to judge a book by its cover. If you’re not sure about someone who may have Chronic Bitchface, try making small talk and feeling out the situation before asking if he/she is okay. This will prevent Resting Bitchface from turning into Real Bitchface.

Elementary school: Childhood is such an innocent and fun time for kids. I was different, though. For as long as I can remember, my uncle has called me “Clum-Missy.” I could not talk without falling down, bumping into a wall, or somehow hurting myself. There was not a graceful bone in my body and there was no denying it. Knowing this didn’t make first grade any easier but I had a plan. My very first day of school, I decided to stop talking. It was a purely logical plan: no voice, no clumsiness! In my classroom, my chair fell apart when I sat down, sending me to the floor in my new purple dress. Convincing myself that it was a fluke, I shrugged it off, got another chair, and said nothing. Clum-Missy’s vow of silence begins now! My silence is my only real friend.

My favorite class throughout elementary school was art. Boys drew stick figures with pretend guns and gangster scenes that looked nothing short of a Rorschach print. Girls would paint pink flowers and white picket fences around houses that resembled every other house painted at school.
In sixth grade, I painted my first “award winner,” as my uncle called it. The scene was an Italian waterway with a gondola, complete with two people hitching a ride for the romance of it all. I suppose it was pretty good. Today, it hangs in the museum down the road from my childhood home.

**Middle School:** The most amazing thing occurred to me as I rode the bus to school in seventh grade: I had actually made it to seventh grade without uttering a sound. In fact, I hadn’t even laughed from what I remember. I am not entirely sure how this happened. My vow of silence became a part of me. I thought of trying to talk but wasn’t sure that my voice existed. Besides, I did not really have any reason to talk. I knew one thing for sure; Clum-Missy was no longer clumsy. My silence was my only real friend.

I started painting with acrylics in eighth grade and painted every day. I would paint anything and everything. A winter scene with mountains and evergreens that were so realistic, you could almost smell the pine needles. The painting of a girl’s face poking through a pile of leaves in the fall now hangs in my living room. I was told that my career as an artist had only just begun. I had already sold more than 100 pieces. For someone who doesn’t have a driver’s license, that is a big deal!

I met Darwin toward the end of summer after eighth grade. The day I met him, I broke my right arm in three places.

**High School:** I missed an entire semester of ninth grade. I had three surgeries and each of them gifted me with a new cast and another set of rods and pins in my arm. Darwin spent most of his free time with me. Every morning, he would knock on the front door at 9:06 a.m.

Without saying a word, he would spend the day with me. My casts were always enormous, beginning at the second knuckles and ending just beneath my shoulder, right under my armpit. I was supposed to keep my arm elevated with a special rod/belt device the surgeon gave me.

Darwin would set the bar under my forearm, connecting it to the special belt around my waist. That damned bar kept my arm in the air right in front of me for twelve weeks! I like to think of it more as a visual blockage contraption than a “special rod/belt device.”

The day finally came when the cast was coming off and Darwin came along. Driving to the hospital, I remember thinking about all the years of silence I had tortured myself with. For what? Breaking my arm was clumsy. Yet, I was still silent. Walking in to the room to have my cast removed, I looked at Darwin. He smiled the most incredible smile. I could have melted right then and there.

The surgeon came in and the saw came out. It still freaks me out that he cut that thing off my arm without hurting me. When the cast came off, I saw my arm for the first time in twelve weeks. Shriveled and pale, it looked like the arm of an anorexic child. Physical therapy will fix that, I was told. Shortly after, Darwin held my right hand as we rode the elevator to the parking garage. When the doors opened, I hesitated. Darwin looked at me wondering if I was okay. I looked up at him and said, “I love you.”

**Twenty-nine Years Later:** My first drawing since I broke my arm was a penciled piece. It took me two years to complete it. The scene was a lion pride in Africa. There was a lioness that lay on a bare tree limb, dangling her large paws as she slept. Two more lionesses sleep on the ground near a boulder, their lion cubs playing nearby. The king of the pride was grand, holding his place closest to the edge of the scene. His mane looks soft and seems to blow in a non-existent breeze. His stance is upright and strong, as the stance just before he roars.

This is me, breaking my silence, just before I roar.
Friend?
by Lyric Tracy

Life is full of mysteries
and things you forget or don’t know
and when I crashed that motorcycle,
I had no memories to show.

I was out cold for two whole weeks
in a coma, and yet
My “friend” I went with “didn’t know”
or didn’t care, I bet.

Did this stranger value me,
or did he hate my guts?
Was this stranger friend or foe,
or am I just going nuts?

Was he a friend I should have kept?
I really wish I knew.
But some days I wonder why, why, why
he, unscathed, made it through.

Not Here, but There
by Will Levis

Uncle, you left.
It’s not you who sits over the living room
adorned with flowers and a picture of Christ.
Ashes in a box.
Nor is it you to be buried in the spring.
All the same you watch over us and encourage
faith unyielding from the grave.

We’d laugh together at God’s comedic irony
as your stubborn wife steps closer to God
looking for you.
(Your beloved who hissed at change.)

She shunned the missionaries,
remember, Uncle?

Now she reads the gospel!
Husk that Was
by Will Levis
1st Place Poetry

We’ve all seen him.
The Walmart worker of forty years who fell victim to complacent mediocrity.
Vivid, bright dreams longing to be, but faded and forgotten.
He’s forty years stuck, that spark of humanity gone because he lacked the courage to take a chance. Maybe it was lack of heart—he didn’t have a desire to leave the world a better place. Perhaps an absence of brains enough to see the dead end looming.

He’ll scan my soap after punching in tomorrow.

Where I’m From
by Will Levis

I am from leashes, Betty Crocker and Suave.
I am from the cozy and worn, the cracked and splintered smell of dogs and something cooking.
I am from lettuce and green peppers, lilies and daisies, bright and fragrant.
I am from checkers and tall tales, from William and Lee and Trey.
I’m from clean plates and good will for all men. That’s gonna grow in your belly.
And you’re going to turn into that if you keep eating it! I’m from the golden rule and the one true church.
I’m from small towns, from Indian blood and Europeans, things grown and fresh bread.
I’ve always been told Lee could read a book and recite it word for word, Homer was a self-proclaimed ladies’ man full of advice. He was gassed during the first war and never married.
Little pieces of my family are spread across the world left in the backdrop of Hawaii, Florida, Wyoming, Arizona, the Dakotas, Wisconsin and Illinois. Another part stayed in Europe.
Solace of the Night
by Zakary Herink
2nd Place Poetry

I remember her
She was strong
She was their strength
An open window
in a cold
dark
cell
to comfort
And the hand
which shaded them from the blinding anger
and pain
and sadness
She was their confession
And she died a little inside
every time
Every time a little more
And she could only do so much
give so much
bear so much for them
Before it was her eyes that watered
from that always piercing glare
of her own blinding shadows
Because only those whose eyes sting
from the pain
and the sadness
in their present
in their past
Can truly see when another kindred person
cannot glimpse
cannot perceive
the soft glow of the sunset
Welcoming them into the gentle twilight
Full of stars
No
Of open windows
Spilling forth their sweet breeze
and calming light
to lull those desolate people
with the chorus of loving slumber
If...
Come the dawn
they were not awakened
By the sound of raised voices
and slamming doors
and smashing glass
and rattling chains
and snapping rope
and dripping blood
and anger
and pain
and sadness
Forced to stare into the blinding sun of the
New
Dark
Day.

Evening Ride by Alissa Steffa

My Pain
by Bailey Fogle
3rd Place Poetry

Each night our eyes would shed a tear
Knowing that she was nowhere near.
Filling our nights full of despair
Yet she was never there.
The pain stung us each with a prong
Laughing, for with him, she was all night long,
"My children come first" she would always say,
And still with him, she stayed for days.
Hungry, lonely, and story untold,
That’s how my life was at seven years old.
Playing and loving was all on my mind,
And of course my mother, who left us behind.
For she was in love with a man we knew not,
(Except as a cruel person who never got caught.)
So each night she went to him and left us alone,
And for his kids, she cared more than her own.
The last time I saw her before I moved in with my dad.
Through the tears in her eyes, she looked slightly glad.
I hold back my cry, still to this day
When I think of how she pushed us away.