

**1<sup>st</sup> Place, Professional:**  
**Zhenya Yevtushenko, Tulsa OK**

Obituary in Pink

I am no interpreter or examiner  
of life. Writing an obituary is unlike  
writing a biography. It is not carefully  
painting a portrait. Format ruthlessly dictates,

between family mandates - Be sure to mention  
pallbearers, great grandkids, avoid ungentle typos.  
You know the difference between *preceded* and *succeeded*  
in death? Don't get too colorful. Then begin to write

a song like a clear church bell chorus,  
a perfect melody of imperfections. I  
wrote, with her husband and son in mind.  
She was different. Pink was her favorite color.

Pink was her favorite color.  
She wore a Hello Kitty fedora  
at her funeral. The white little cat  
danced past the sweat stains of her hat.

"She was the heart of the family,"  
the words pulsed past  
me through cigarette yellowed teeth,  
"She always says a hat makes the outfit."  
her son told me between tears like chain links,

"I guess I say-  
*said*  
-instead of says now.

Please, I can't write this,  
can you make it honest, warm?"  
Aromas of menudo were still  
fresh, preserved in her still black hair.

Her husband, a biker, had recently found Jesus,  
his club too, somewhere on Route 66, maybe Sturgis?  
A patch with a simple white cross read, "Bikers for Jesus"  
on his cracked weather tested leather vest.

“She loved to ride” he told me, folding  
tattooed arms over fresh sunburns  
bracing himself as he stared down.  
Fainted pink stitchwork showed on his vest.

“Mama was different...” her son began the service.  
Hair slicked back; his broken teeth not as scary  
as he wore a poor fitting black suit, mists of dull cologne.  
he looked at her, “sorry I don’t have a matching hat, ma.”

The bikers nodded as tears rained passed  
their Ray-Ban sunglasses. Droplets froze in dreamcatcher  
beards. Men formed a line, each one with a pink  
carnation to line the tufted pink interior of her pink casket.

I looked to her son, I looked to her  
husband, they nodded and once more  
I saw a little white cat dance before  
closing the casket in soft finality.

Then the men lifted her square  
onto their uneven shoulders,  
unready for her lightness, they carried  
Mama to a homemade plexiglass carriage.

Motorcycles roared and cascaded,  
their black wheels mudded with red  
dirt. Sunbeams danced in the plexiglass,  
a kaleidoscope gracing the cemetery.

After the laughter spiced  
their stories, like tears  
and smiles in menudo.  
“She would have loved it, thank you.”

This was my last day  
on the job, I told them,  
“It was an honor, after all  
pink was her favorite color.”

**2<sup>nd</sup> Place, Professional:**

**Seyi Omotoso, Ikorodu, Lagos, Nigeria**

A Decade Spell

To Ibukun

I am that quiet noise snoring in your skull  
Calm yet rigid, young yet aged  
My day here is a thousand and two  
I once knocked and would cease not knocking  
At the bridge of your heart  
Staring, at the sole of your feet  
Wanting to say one or two  
Waiting, tirelessly, on the queue  
I'm that river  
You are that fish  
I'm that river destined to mother your fish  
I'm that soil  
You are that crop  
I'm that soil birthed to nurture your crop  
I once knocked and would cease not knocking  
At the bridge of your heart  
I'm that thing you feel  
When dusk blows day to night

Leaving you lonely and needy  
At the edge of your bed  
I am that thing you wish  
When again night chameleons to day  
I am right there  
I have been right there,  
In your room  
Greeting you 'good morning' every day  
that passes  
I have waited well enough  
Floundered east and west to make life sweet for us  
I'm not in this poem  
I'm this poem.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Place: Professional:**

**Nathan Baker, Ojo Feliz, NM**

Spinster

she's watching out her window when  
someone from behind her picks a  
grey hair from her shoulder  
and holds the gossamer to the light

“Pee-breaks at lunchtime  
only at lunchtime”  
a foreman actor on the TV states

so where does she go?  
she reaches out to take  
the strand from a stranger  
arresting the hair in belay  
fingers cold as promontories  
and the ocean's a din of sunlight  
dapples and earrings  
the TV's always going

“Gotta get to ‘em, those fickle  
hard to reach places”  
the Apple Vinegar cleaning product  
interlude speaks through a proper lens

then a phantasmagorical  
relay of intimate places  
her fingers slip  
the hair falls  
behind the toilet  
in the basement corners  
there's crud everywhere  
the evidence of leaks  
under the sink and from the roof

“Never suffer the embarrassment of  
your neighbors in the kitchen again”

it's her heart, they tell her it's her heart  
but it's always been her heart

and they've managed to magnify the sound  
channel it through an external perforation

“Splash a bit of it everywhere”  
“Safe for all surfaces, good for your hands  
adds luster to your hair”  
the TV solvently perspires

she touches her scalp  
her breathe intakes  
it's like a lizard's skin  
the music, the scales ringing  
from the tempering of the sun

“It's all vibration”  
the visiting Ontologist Buddhist posits,  
or profits, or prophets, or, what the hell?  
a mendicant drawing in a crowd of people  
who aren't allowed to be anywhere else

she wished to die quietly in her chair  
she's reposed in a seat, but it's not hers  
it's warm from someone else's ass  
they wanted her closer to God  
closer to a more ruddy skin tone  
closer to the emergency call button  
to her bedpan  
to the worry  
they wanted her to have more proximity  
to the application of memory  
to the post-nascent rebirth of language  
they wanted her to be closer to her future  
the sun pulling up on her naked feet

end.

**1<sup>st</sup> Place, Adult:**

**Joseph Updike, Rapid City SD**

Stay, Still, See, Stay

Not long ago, winter's prime of light and fires  
Led to chimneys smoking. It stayed the ice  
That crowded around the window's edge,  
sneaking to steal the warmth which always  
Waited at the door. Apples roasted for the pie as  
Butter melted, the sweetness rising with the scent  
That whispered, stay...still...see...stay.  
Heart thundered at chopping block mutters. Both  
Clung together as animal-bound hands reach to tear  
Apart what iron could not. A brother's craft.

Harvest gave her soiled bounty to heal  
All she knew winter would burn in time  
To come. We worked the ground to the bare of both  
Our bones, and she has watched us well; gifting  
Her strength in wheat and hearty barley to  
Face the ash of winter's so-called mercy.  
I see the gray-once-red bush of thorns.  
Does it remember the hummingbird?  
It flew on children's laughter.

I will not want as much as they, the constant  
Ones, who always stay and cry and laugh and  
Die with the land that gave them life.  
But now they cry for me too, the changing one.  
Discontented by the roast we killed, or the land  
that raises sage, juniper, and those crab apples  
That mother always wished to make into jam.

I am a sail torn by starboard fair of  
Grass unseen and muses unsearched, harvests  
Unmet for my heart to ponder; yet port  
With garden memoirs and soiled doors  
Planted in me. If roots of trees are not touched by  
The frost, why am I so cold? The tallest trees die  
From the top down. They stay...still...see...stay.

**Adult, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place:**

**Keith Hoerner, Murphysboro, IL**

Nooning Tree Estates

\$10,000 down

Gets you in

Your choice of

Ranch or two-story

In prestigious Nooning Tree

“Is there one, a Nooning Tree?”

“Of course,” the saleslady answers

Loose strands of hair catching

The corner of her mouth

Like a lie

Tempered by talk of tradition

She motions; I follow

Slipping on the deceptively

Green sod

Outside her display home

She points, arm outstretched

Fingers fanning

In a ta-da moment

“There ...

The Nooning Tree”

Under that very shade (weather permitting)

Noon meals were served

To plantation workers

Every day

Quaint, now, isn't it?”

Yes, if

It were true

If *\*only\** it were *\*true\**

For a few of us

Still know fact from fiction  
About this suburbanized  
183-year-old black walnut

Its gnarled branches  
Leafing through secrets

Midday laughter filtered  
Not  
Through this century's autumnal rush  
Frenetic excitement hung thick in the air  
Frozen families, slack-jawed gawkers, jeering landlords \*gathered\*

On what is now  
Premium  
Lot 241 (backing to woods)  
Where a barbarian's buffet  
Was laid

Bulging  
Blood-shot eyes  
Subtle smells of rope-  
Burned flesh  
Slaves \*lynched\* on the strike of \*noon\*

On a \*tree\*  
On  
A  
Bountiful  
S t r e t c h o f L a n d

**3<sup>rd</sup> Place, Adult:**

**Bryan Waters, Memphis TN**

Poptarts: A Story of PTSD

In the street...

A little shoe...

Still smoking...

These the words heard over soldiers radios

Amongst the ringing in ears

And the realization of fear

As ash falls to scorched sand-

The blast wave from an improvised explosive device travels at 1600 ft. per second-

I saw a little girl and her family everyday while on patrol. She was scared of me, I brought her gifts of pop tarts from the mess hall, so much that she ran to me with her hands out smiling, no longer afraid of my rifle.

On a day like any other, as she walked towards me her teeth retreated behind trembling lips as her family retreated behind stone walls.

I saw her tears fall as her hand raised a detonator-

The blast wave from an improvised explosive device travels at 1600 ft. per second-

Frozen in disbelief, I was pulled to safety behind a Humvee before I felt it.

She gave me a gift too.

She waited until I would be safe

And I can't even remember her face

My mind can only replay

Ash falling to scorched sand

And the realization of my fear

Amongst the ringing in my ears

My words heard over soldiers' radios

In the street...

A little shoe...

Still smoking...

**1<sup>st</sup> Place, 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grade:**

**Kimberly Pinder, Grove OK**

Vast Waters

The waves moved calmly on the underside.  
Saturday morning was high tide.  
The sky was filled with the color of orange blossoms and lemons.  
I could feel the salt on my skin,  
the blazing sun shining on us,  
creating a cherry spread on our faces.  
Friends of the sea came to join us,  
jumping our wake.  
We floated along the waves,  
casting and casting—  
catching what was near.  
Voices from the deep calling our names.  
Our lines cast,  
with bait compelling the schooling fish.  
When the sky was filled with pink gumdrops and oranges,  
the current brought us home—  
only to find us amongst the waves next sunrise.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Place: 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grade**

**Lakelan Bro, Bluejacket OK**

NIGHT TIME

The sunset is in the west  
The birds finish up their chirping  
Bullfrogs hum their mellow tone  
The moment the sun meets the moon  
and then the stars are bliss  
There are 20 minutes of dead quiet  
And then you start to see each and every star light up  
The wind rushes through the tree limbs  
The moon is as bright as a flashlight  
You sit and have conversations with the man in the moon  
But on some nights, he doesn't like to talk  
He is shy and faces away  
Some nights the moon isn't there at all  
But the night must move on into the morning  
As dark turns into light the stars disappear  
Then there is the rooster that everyone hears

3<sup>rd</sup> Place, 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grade:

Emma Barton, Grove OK

hillside

runs

the golden

water

On

the

tracks of deer