

Erica Plouffe Lazure

*finalist***WHY WE STOLE THE DISCO BALL FROM SATELLITE SKATE**

Before our dad died, the dangling ball used to sparkle in the middle of the rink as we careened around it in semi-dark, the light rotation beaming off the globe in a spray of shine and color. It made our pink shirts shimmer. And on the Saturday after, Mom tried to help us forget by bringing us back to the rink, treating even for SK8 ALL DAY Milky Way Special. She used to run the marina so she laced my skates tight, like my feet were still the boat and she was still the harbormaster and the skates were still the moor. *I'm not a boat*, I wanted to tell her. But she looked too worried to worry about my skates, and when she sent me off to the rink to join my sister, Jackie took my hand as usual but wouldn't look at me, because she didn't know what to say, or how to look, and that was okay, because neither did I.

The DJ proclaimed it Opposite Day, and made the whole rink skate backwards, as he played "Celebrate" and "Lucky Star" in reverse, song after song, and with all of us not seeing where we were going, we kept colliding in the glittering semi-dark. And even though we'd changed directions, the ball in the middle didn't, and the spray of light moved with us, not against, and for a minute the ball looked like one of those satellites they tossed up into space to take pictures of the earth, sending signals from heaven so we can have 500 channels on the TV. And then as the end of "Thriller" began, I thought maybe this sparkle ball was a time machine, and all we had to do was skate backwards long enough to undo the awful of the awful week. And maybe, if Jackie and I could hook into one of the light's tiny beads, follow it across the floor, over the skaters, and onto the ceiling, we could somehow skate inside it, and slip into the time, before, when we perpetually hurled forward into everything, never once considering how or why we'd ever want to travel back.

Michael Martone

*finalist***THE DEAD MALL**

I still broadcast my cable show from the deserted and ruined food court. Yesterday, I talked with Beth Ehler, a nurse, who gave me a quadrivalent flu shot on air. I own a one-person advertising shop, doing coupons, mainly, for the Stetler's Auto Parts. Years ago, I had the idea of doing this PSA filled infomercial each noon on WEEP-TV in Winesburg. The wicker chairs and wicker screens, the ferns and the mother-in-law tongues were my idea. They are with me still though the wicker is worse for wear and the plants need dusting. Once, we had an audience applauding between bites of the pizza slices and chop suey. Back then I worried that the bells and buzzers from the arcade would drown out the audio track. There was a shoe store over there, and you could watch people try on shoes in the background of so many episodes. I thought of them as the show's dancers, my chorus line. At night, I watch the tapes. I still have tapes. And I can track the dwindling. There I am talking, talking, talking, talking. Middle school kids are singing. Karate classes are kicking. The Kiwanis are raising money. This dog, this cat needs adopting. And the set grows dimmer. And the ambient noise hushes up. The wicker frays. And more likely than not I am there alone on the little stage, no one to interview, no one anymore urgently seeking access to public access TV. One day, you look up and you realize you are this hermit in a ruin. I swear I must feel like that Roman centuries ago walking the streets of Rome, thinking he is still a citizen of a vast empire when he notices, suddenly, the walls of the grand coliseum are being quarried by the Visigoths to build their outhouses and the center of the world he thought he once inhabited is now smack dab in the middle of nowhere.

IN THIS ISSUE

- | | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Lauren Albin | Christopher Childers | Amy Meng |
| Elina Alter | Cassandra Cleghorn | Jed Myers |
| Sue Hyon Bae | Aria Curtis | Lee Ann Roripaugh |
| Pamela Baker | Kim Hyesoon | Greta Schuler |
| Erica Berry | Lee Huttner | Andrew Smith |
| Alexandra Brenner | Myungsung Kim | Brendan Stephens |
| Mark Broyer | Erica Plouffe Lazure | Sylvia Sukop |
| Caylin Capra-Thomas | Michael Martone | William Torrey |
| | Nathan McClain | |

