

The Alchemist: Art of Transformation

Editor Shannon Goodall Dahmes
Published and Sponsored by the
Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs
© 2002

Editorial Board

Adult Volunteers:

David Bly
Cathy Tschida
Laura Ryan
Judie Fox
Melissa Olson
Becky Holum-Brytowski

Student Volunteers:

Sandy Reichert
Kaytie Pieper
Chantelle Smith
Ed Galatovich
Andrew Klasinski
Kejuan Barnes
Mike DeSelms
Becky Holum-Brytowski's Class

Table of Contents

5 Introduction

Narrative

9 Being Homeless by Nawy P.

13 Tuesday by Kristina W.

Poetry

18 S.O.S by Becky U.

19 The White Powder by Rachael O.

20 The Plunge by Betsy H.

21 Sour Krowt by Britni B.

22 Glamorazzi by Angel O.

23 Hey by Sonya N.

24 Day One by Zakari K.

25 Personal Freedom by Betsy H.

26 All I Need by Tyler A.

27 Lifetime Wish by Kaytie P.

29 Dear God by Allison R.

30 Power by Dana H.

31 Testosterone by Tyler A.

32 Inside and Out by Shanae H.

34 The Halting of a Train by Lindsay C.

35 The Secret by Nicole R.

36 Dearest Friend by Heather K.

37 Take it Back by Jamie Z.

38 Too Much to Make Sense of by Elicia B.

40 Violence by Randy H.

42 Why Do by Jayson K.

43 A Nation's Symbol Speaks by Jessica D.

44 Anticipate by Tyler A.

Illustrations

12 Pencil Drawing by anonymous

27 Pencil Drawing by Kevin P.

33 Pencil Drawing by Quinell A.

39 Pen Drawing by Quinell A.

41 Pen Drawing by Quinell A.

45 Pen Drawing by Phil H.

Introduction

Alchemists imagined a world, which was governed by constant progress toward perfection. They believed that baser metals could be transformed into gold – the most perfect metal. Some even believed that it was possible to develop a substance even more perfect than gold, a substance which would cure the sick and enhance life. While alchemy was not science, at least not as we know it, the work of alchemists laid the foundation for modern chemistry. Alchemists were lead by a desire to understand their world (and to become very wealthy) and they constructed their understanding through experiment and observation. The students who contributed their work to *The Alchemist* were recording their own journey towards understanding, were communicating what they have learned through experiment and observation. May the sharing of their ideas be transformational for those that created them and for those that read.

Narrative

Being Homeless

Nawy P.

MERC Alternative High School, Minneapolis

When my father passed away, my mother gave up on everything. She and my brother became abusive. Home was no longer a safe place for me to live. My mother no longer wanted me in the house. She tried her hardest to keep me in lockup and away from our house. I just played along with her games. I completed a lot of my lockup programs without a problem. The county finally figured out that I was not the problem. They sent me home with a family counselor. After a month, my brother came after me with a knife. I had no choice but to leave.

I found a caring family to live with. They welcomed me as a family member. I paid rent and helped out with chores. While there, I started a new school called Skills For Tomorrow. I got back on track and I began to receive my father's survival benefits. Now I don't have to ask anyone for money. I became a straight "A" student in school. After a while, I still felt like I was freeloading. I wanted to do things on my own.

I felt it wasn't fair for that lady to act like my mother. She didn't do anything to deserve the responsibility of another child. I decided to move into a transitional living program. That way I thought it would be easier for me, a 17-year-old female, to get on my own two feet and get an apartment. I was required to have a job. I got a job at J. C. Penney's a week after I moved in. I felt my life was getting better and better. I began to fall more and more behind in school. The place I lived in is called HYP and is located in Uptown, Minneapolis, my school was in St. Paul and I also worked in

Edina. It was hard getting up in the morning and getting to work on time and getting enough sleep. I found out I had to get surgery done on myself. I told my school about it and they said, "O.K. take your time to take care of yourself." They suggested I come back two weeks later. I missed the first day but came every day after that. They told me they didn't quite like me to go back in the class because the new students didn't know how to work with me yet.

They offered me if I wanted to take the next midterm off. I said no, because it wouldn't look good missing all that school. I told them I would do the same work but just do it on my own and alone. The teachers agreed with me. One day, the coordinator saw me in the hall and said, "Get to class." I told her they weren't ready for me to go to class. She said, "Well, I'll have to speak to the teachers." I got to my friend's house that night and the lady said, "I am so upset with you." I said, "why?" She said, "The coordinator from your school called me and said you're disruptive in class, you have a bad attitude." They kicked me out until the next quarter started, but I kept coming back. My feelings were very hurt. I enjoyed going to that school and they turned their backs on me. You don't hear about a straight "A" student getting kicked out of school. Great, more stress for me.

After HYP there was a place called Archdale. If they felt you were responsible, that's where you went. I filled out an application and got on the waiting list. I waited for them to call me. I waited a while until a medical issue came up. HYP doesn't let you sleep during the day, so I had to move back in at my friend's so I could get some rest and recover. Archdale said they'd keep me on the list. Again I waited, I worked and kept saving money. Later I found out my application was denied. I put my friend's address on the application and they didn't consider me homeless. I waited five

months to find this out. I was ready to just give up and even thought about moving back in with my mother. But I went back to Archdale to talk to them and see if they would change their minds. They offered for me to fill out another application. I said, O.K. and told them I was going to move back into HYP because it was a shelter, but it was full. They said that was O.K. as long as I stayed in a shelter the night before. They called me weeks later and asked where exactly have I been staying since November. I told them here and there. They got upset because they thought I was already in a shelter. Once again my application may be denied because there isn't proof of me being homeless. Even if you're couch hopping you're not considered homeless. It's almost been half a year and I'm back where I started. I have been staying in the emergency beds at the shelter so that I may still have a chance to get into Archdale.

People should understand that it is not easy being homeless as a teen. You haven't finished school yet, you're lucky if you can find a job, you are alone and on your own. Why do they make things even harder for us by making it difficult to get an apartment? They know I have no family to help me. I've been in and out of shelters. I'm thankful for even being in school and still keeping my job. Obviously, I am responsible. I am lucky to find a place like Archdale, but a lot of people don't understand. It's not easy keeping a job for six months when I still have school and I can't head to the shelter until 10:00 pm and I have to get up at 6:00 am. It is not easy going to sleep in a different bed and shelter every night. They don't know how overjoyed I'd be to lay on a floor and go to sleep knowing that the floor is mine.



pencil drawing - anonymous
Prairie Center Alternative, Eden Prairie

Tuesday

Kristina W.

St. Cloud ALC PACE Program, St. Cloud

Not many people ventured out on county road 38, but every Tuesday and Thursday Jim Sampson made the trip. Jim drove his old, gray van delivering Meals On Wheels to homes on the road. Jim ran a tight schedule and visited each house at the same time each week.

The last house on Jim's route belonged to his high school sweetheart, Rose Mary Johnston. Usually Rose Mary waited by the door and accepted the meal with the cold formality that now existed between them. One particular Tuesday in May, Rose Mary wasn't waiting in her usual spot. After knocking several times, Jim became concerned and opened the door.

"Rose, Uh, Miss Johnston? Hello? It's me, Meals on Wheels, remember?" Jim called into the house.

"Of course I didn't forget," snapped Rose Mary. "Leave it on the table and be gone!"

"Miss Johnston, are you okay? You don't sound like yourself."

"I'm fine! Now leave my house. You are trespassing and I will not tolerate it!"

With her last cry, Rose Mary fell to the floor in tears. Hearing her sobs, Jim quickly entered the house, shutting the door behind him. Following the sound of her crying, he quickly located her in the hall.

"Please, let me help you. You're obviously in pain," Jim said as he knelt beside her.

"Of course I'm in pain, Mr. Sampson! I'm seventy-three years old. Do you expect me to be in perfect health? Now please leave me alone! While you're at it take your food with you. I no longer wish to receive your charity!" Rose Mary exclaimed between sobs. "I don't need you. I can take care of myself!"

"Why do I bother you so?"

After a few seconds had passed, Jim realized Rose Mary wasn't going to answer. Gently, he lifted her up and brought her to her couch. Rose Mary opened her eyes and began to say something, but she fainted. Minutes later, when she awoke she was amazed to find Jim still there.

"Mr. Sampson, why are you still in my house?" questioned Rose Mary.

"Rose Mary, I –" Jim began.

"Miss Johnston!"

"No! I'm done pretending! You may be a bitter old woman who no longer cares about anyone but yourself, but I do care! I still remember the days of Jim and Rosie even if you've forgotten. I'm sorry I hurt you but I still care. I just want to make sure you're alright."

"I'm fine."

"No, you're not fine! you just fainted because you don't eat and you're malnourished."

"Mr. Sampson, thank you for your concern, but I distinctly recall having asked you to leave. So, if you wouldn't mind, please leave and don't return."

"Fine, my replacement will deliver you meals if you wish."

"Mr. Sampson –"

"Goodbye Rosie."

With those final words, Jim left. Rose Mary, feeling hunger pains, raised herself from the couch and entered the kitchen. Sitting on the table was her foil-covered meal. A white piece of paper lay on top of the foil. Rose Mary read the single sentence, Give love a chance, and burst into tears.

Poetry

S.O.S

Becky U.

Crossroads Alternative , Coon Rapids

Day one

Sonya.

Back in poetry class
again.

eating tootsie pops,
slamming fists

on hyper disorders.

I trade Britni

change for cheeseburgers.

I spill my water

to make myself into an ass,

for everyone to laugh at.

Taylor and I giggle,

about sleeping in cars.

"But it's too cold for that now!"

she says.

Now that we're sober

we laugh nonsense.

Day one Sonya,

together,

back in poetry class

again.

The White Powder

By Rachael O.

Crossroads Alternative, Coon Rapids

The cold sharp breeze
slammed the door shut.
I stood in the warmth.

The monster is not here,
he does not wait under my bed.

Rising into heaven
by angels' wings,
I stand in front of him.

With the bend of his finger,
the whole world could end.

The claw of the serpent
brings me in.
I cannot escape.

The white powder snow
has me hypnotized.

Through the wire
the electricity shocks me.
Now I'm up,

Speeding through the dark.
Why won't the brakes work?

I am not the turtle
or the snail,
I'm going like a cheetah.

Someday the sun will shine,
and I will no longer be rained on.

The Plunge

Betsy H.

Sobriety High School, Edina

I fall like Alice
Millions of the earth's rungs whiz by me
Rushing up to be free in the sunlight
I burrow deeper
I find no treasure
Where is my wonderland?
A steel slide I go down
sensation of heat is growing
Burning and burning until...
Meadows of white and fields of green
Then I puke up the pill

Sour Krowt

Britni B.

Crossroads alternative, Coon Rapids

I had a dream
 last night.
It left me sour
 and sticky.
I don't remember
 the emotion in me.
It made me
 different.
I wish I
 could recall.
It penetrates me
 painfully.
I kill my thoughts
 because I dream.
It makes me live
 asleep.

Glamorazzi

Angel O.

Crossroads Alternative, Coon Rapids

I will not wear makeup that is barely there.

I will not change the color of my hair
faster than I can style it.

I will not embrace a 10-minute breakthrough
because the Glamorazzi says it's hip.

I will scream sweet nothings in your ear.

I will accept a love sparkle in which you
slick white frost onto one spot only.

I will respect myself in the morning.

I will pull off the hooker hoops and not give a damn.

I will not try to be you.

I will be imitating my own individual.

Hey

Sonya N.

Crossroads Alternative, Coon Rapids

Am I psychotic, hypnotic you forgot
me.

Am I confusing, mentally abusing,
sober or using?

Am I unmistakable, irreplaceable,
lay me on this table.

Innuendo, you and who do, I do,
we do

it.

Am I woman, am I poison, am I dirty?

Or can you take me home to mom?

Am I too flirty, should I remember who hurt me,
take me, here.

Hey.

Am I the same, am I game, am I your flame
that feels so good in a sick sense?

Am I like her, tell her, do you love her?

Am I just fun, am I the one, are you done?

You got me, bonus, you won.

Day One

Zakari K.

Crossroads Alternative, Coon Rapids

I began with the scars and chains
of my forefathers.
My heart longed for a change.
In the middle of the story,
I was still trying,
not trying to start a war.
I did not kill the dream,
I woke up.
How did I end up here,
standing on my own two feet,
holding my people on my shoulders?
I am left with the scars and chains
of my forefathers.

Personal Freedom

Betsy H.

Sobriety High, Edina

This pain shrouds my once brilliant solitude.
I lie
Awake
Grabbing at the darkness for some kind of temporary sanity.
The night is dangerous.
Twitching at the glints of silver.
Life is only imagination.
The particles of myself fall apart.
I am scattered alone.

All I Need

Tyler A.

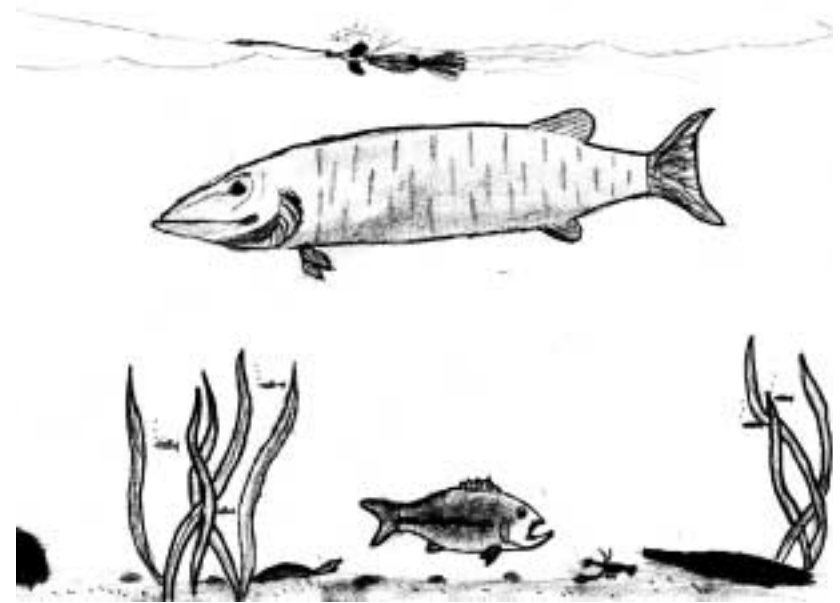
Crossroads Alternative, Coon Rapids

My dreams
lie around
unwashed.

Like my dirty clothes,
I scrub and treat them,
But they're not clay,
like my imagination.

I pick em up,
put em away,
put em on later.

To find a match
or a size that fits all
would be all I need.



pencil drawing by Kevin P.,
South Saint Paul ALC, South Saint Paul

Lifetime Wish

Kaytie P.

South Saint Paul ALC, South Saint Paul

If we could have a lifetime wish
A dream that would come true
We'd pray to god with all our hearts
For yesterday and you
A thousand words can't bring you back
I know because I've tried
Neither will a thousand tears
I know because I've cried
You left behind our broken hearts
And happy memories too
But we never wanted memories
We only wanted you

Dear God,

Allison R.

Sobriety High, Edina

Why did you put this in me?
Why does it hurt so bad?
Why do I stay up crying at night?
Why can't I just tell dad?

I don't know what to do.
I don't know what to say.
This trouble I have fallen upon,
Will never go away.

Is it fair for me to decide
If another one will be?
Will you tell me now to choose
Or does it rely on me?

I hope you will be with me,
For I can no longer hear
The wisdom that lies inside me.
I pray you will be near.

I wish I could only see you,
And touch your holy face.
Your mercy could fall upon me,
And smother me with grace.

I'm going to end this prayer now,
And hope you hear me clear.
These words I've kept inside of me.
Please take away my fear.

Power

Dana H.

Minneapolis Urban League Street Academy, Minneapolis

Power is a man

Power is a rich man

Power is a white, rich, man.

Power is a white, rich, man

That don't

live in the problem

Testosterone

Tyler A.

Crossroads Alternative, Coon Rapids

The mad anger

took away all the considerations.

The beatings

brought us close.

The thoughts of you killing me

don't bother me anymore.

The choking

helps me breathe.

The burns

bring me back.

The spit on my face

quenches my thirst.

You say, "Never come back

but don't be late."

Inside and Out

Shanae H.

Minneapolis Urban League Street Academy, Minneapolis

They like what they can see
But they have no time for what's inside.
My outside will always be.
It can't run or hide

If they knew my inside
Instead of only my outside,
Maybe they would learn to be kind.
And my sweetness inside they would
Be sure to find.

This is no big surprise
They don't know my kindness within.
They only know my eyes
And the color of my skin.

So that everyone hears me,
I'll shout,
Either you like me or you don't .
You get me inside and out.



pencil drawing by Quinell A.,
Freshwater ALC, Staples

The Halting of a Train

Lindsay C.

South Saint Paul ALC, South Saint Paul

For a week I haven't had, but a few thoughts of change. Now as the train of freedom slows to halt my thoughts outweigh my numbness and my feelings, my emotions, flood my overwhelmed head.

Every beat of my dieing heart aches for the love of kin and the strength of my trustworthy friendships. I suppose after the last beat the hurt will be over, but as long as blood pumps through my veins my presence will go on.

My life, a written routine, every step following those of the day before, and since the walls that surround me are too tall to climb, too strong to break down, and are barricaded at the foots, I'll sit suffocating behind enclosing boundaries. Then, when my puppet masters pull the strings I will dance for them, I will follow them, and I will satisfy them to make the days go by.

Perhaps the day the walls crumble with age and the strings that had been attached fall from my limbs, freedom will again rise. Life could burst into my limp body, beaten with do's and don'ts, or would my body have lied cold too long? Frozen from all that was once known, stuck behind translucent walls, my mind infinitely attached to invisible chains and locks of death for eternity to hold.

The Secret

Nicole R.

Brainerd Area Education Center, Brainerd

Kept silent and dark is a horrible secret I was forced to keep It is the reason I appear weak and have trouble falling asleep.

For years I felt the pain and thought I had nothing to gain. Everyday I felt insecure and lived my life in fear.

People look at me and see I am sad never knowing it is because of my dad.

The "Dad" who was chosen for me never showed me love. All I felt from him, was his violent shove.

Every time he would attack, I'd try to fight back.

I only wanted his acceptance and approval, but I ended up wanting my removal.

I hid behind my books and got used to everyone's wondering looks.

Due to the constant lack of love and hugs,

I found myself quickly wrapped up in drugs.

My self-esteem was destroyed before it even had a chance to grow.

That was my horrible secret, the one I wanted no one to know.

Dearest Friend

Heather K.

Hopkins Alternative Program, Minnetonka

If it weren't for you,
I don't know where I'd be.
The drugs were taking over me.
I never thought,
I would be addicted,
But, you told me once,
And that stuck with me.
You told me I'd lose you,
If I kept using.
But, with a straight face,
I looked at you and said,
"I promise, I am not using.
You can trust me. I am a good friend."
I lied to you for so long,
But, with grief in my heart,
I was busted.
I apologize for not listening,
And when I told you,
Your eyes started to glisten.
I regret hurting you,
and losing your trust,
But I promise you this,
I won't mess it up.
Your friendship I cherish,
And will never give up.
Please give me one more chance,
Because I have sobered up.

Take it Back

Jamie Z.

Crossroads Alternative, Coon Rapids

Crooked thoughts
As if I did something wrong.
Is it my fault?
No.
You did the crime,
Betrayed my fear,
unleashed my tears.
Again I ask,
Is it my fault?
No.
You told the lies.
Shattered my heart,
Revealed my emotions.
So why is it me
paying your time.
I'm not supposed to feel this pain
Because you started it.
You made it happen.
Why isn't it yours?
It should be!
Why is my life in your hands?
I didn't give it to you.
You can't keep it.
I want it back,
Along with my dignity

Too Much to Make Sense of

Elicia B.

Crossroads

I'm taking a ride in my crazy psychotic mind
and that is something I can not find.
So, I cried because I tried, now I'm left behind...
wait ... rewind.
I don't even know how this started. Over analyze
revise, contemplating concentration.
Forget it. You'll regret it. Terrific, I can't fix it.
Why worry just hurry through it.
Slow down, red light, STOP!
Too many things just not enough time, makes me rhyme.
Tongue twisted.
No burdens lifted, no one's gifted just sheep in a herd,
that's what I heard now you heard.
My intentions, protections, aggressions, not enough atten-
tion.
Fulfill, I will, you still drill.
Now I'm tired and a bit admired.
Spoke my mind,
I thought I couldn't find.
Crazy psychotic.
Good times, bad times, old times, new times,
just not enough time for these times.
I guess I could make some
If I don't I'm still not dumb.
Your fears, my tears, it's not clear and no one is all that they
appear.
It's like you.
It's like me.
You can do better but you are still losing.
Everything could fall back into place

after it disappeared without a trace.
What am I talking about?
Making no sense.
I'm confusing you. Oh, I'm sorry.
Will you just listen to how I'm thinking?
I don't think you can, I can't
Compensate, it's too late, try again
Regulate, it's your fate, losing faith, I did.
That's why I don't know that I still grow.
But what do I have to show?
Who cares? I'll go with the flow.
Did you know I found it, I know it, figured it out, I'll show it.
Ooops! Just did.
Your fault if you missed it.



pen drawing by Quinell A.,
Freshwater ALC, Staples

Violence

Randy H.

Oak Land ALC, St. Francis

Teeth clench, anger builds up as the heart starts to pump.

Get a grip

It's too late, the choice is made.

Instead of peace, he chose the blade.

Sirens blare, eyes turn black, hands are cuffed
behind his back.

He's put in jail for this treason.

Someone died for no reason.

But in the end

he got his appeal

and learned the lesson

that violence is real.



pen drawing by Quinell A.,
Freshwater ALC, Staples

Why Do

Jayson K.

Crossroads Alternative, Coon Rapids

Towers kill thousands of innocent people,
zaftig purple petunias help heal the pain.

I skateboard to the café for a mocha and a slice of melba
toast,
sit here wondering why snowflakes seem to fly
lazily right above the soil, where the orange irises grow.

Pecking at my dreams, hoping to crack the egg.
Why do people try to bleach their own minds?

A Nation's Symbol Speaks

Jessica D.

Columbia Heights ALC, Columbia Heights

We will remember
that September
As flags went up in respect for the lost
as our nation suffered a great cost
but yet through it all the flags speak out
Even without a doubt
Whispering in a light breeze
They would say...
"Always be true," said the blue
"Do what you think is right," said the white
"And I'll watch over you while you're sleeping in your bed,"
said the red
And together we'll become a great nation
so caring and strong
but until then
United We Stand.

Anticipate

Tyler A.

Crossroads Alternative, Coon Rapids

I'm going to stop trying
to be someone for someone else.

Rekindle wishes,
thoughts.

Cover my feet if they get cold.
Be fearless, bold, cunning.

Stunning myself
cause I'm glad to meet me.

Anticipating beauty,
living my life to the last drop.

Indulged
in every taste.

Rekindle thoughts,
wishes.



pen drawing by Phil H.,
South Saint Paul ALC, South Saint Paul

Thanks to the MAAP board who supported the creation of *The Alchemist* both personally and financially. Thanks also to the student and staff readers who helped make the difficult final selections. Special thanks to the students who submitted their work and the teachers, advisors, directors and others who encouraged them.

Call For submissions

If you would like to submit work for consideration in the next edition of *The Alchemist*, please contact Shannon Goodall Dahmes at:

sgoodall@sspps.org
651-450-9966
South Saint Paul ALC
151 6th Street East
South Saint Paul, MN 55075

Entries will be due by December 1st 2002. If you would like to help make the next edition of *The Alchemist* even better, contact Shannon Goodall Dahmes. Students, MAAP members, and other interested parties are welcome.