

The Cat in the Jacket



Danielle Basford

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Writings by Danielle Basford, B.A., JHU 2012
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Biography

Danielle Alyse Basford was born on August 10, 1989, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. After spending her first three years in Baton Rouge, she spent most of her life growing up in the Houston, Texas area, and graduated from Klein Oak High School in Spring, Texas, in 2008. She also lived briefly in Morristown, New Jersey, Brussels, Belgium, and spent her last four years in Baltimore, Maryland, attending Johns Hopkins, where she graduated with a Major in The Writing Seminars. Her promising life was cut short by a diagnosis of cancer, and the following week, on May 6, 2012, she passed away unexpectedly. Danielle was an independent spirit with an avid love of books. She had an unwavering goal of becoming an author and a special talent for writing poetry. She enjoyed learning and was curious about everything. Words intrigued her, and it seems her entire life was spent with a book in one hand and a pen and notebook in the other. Growing up, she read the dictionary for fun and taught herself Japanese, while formally studying French. Nothing got past her wonderful sense of humor, and she will be remembered for her laughter, her sense of adventure, and her wide range of tastes from Korn to old musicals, from *Lord of the Rings* to Japanese manga to Kafka. She was a loving girl with a kind heart, who will be forever loved and missed by her parents, Laurie and Jerry, her grandparents, Phil and Joyce, her sisters, Allison and Jessica, her nieces, Janice and Emily, her core friends, Megan, Zach, Alan, Jay, Monika, Kayleigh, Cynthia, Dan, Ashley and Lyssa, her aunts and uncles, Kathi, Cathy, Tony, John, and Robert, her ever devoted cat, Schuyler, and many others. Danielle remains forever in our hearts and will live on through the wealth of writings she has left us.

–Jerry & Laurie Basford

The Danielle Alyse Basford Prize in Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing:

To honor the late Danielle Basford, our 2012 graduate, The Writing Seminars will offer an annual prize of \$200 to the student writer who has composed the most compelling piece of science-fiction/fantasy writing, either in the form of prose or poetry. Those eligible to compete include Johns Hopkins' graduating seniors who are Writing Seminars' majors, or who have taken at least one course in The Writing Seminars.



The Cat in the Jacket
by
Danielle Basford

My Mom

The summer sun sets, and so does something else.
Grief and memories spike,
and the longing to take some sense of her with me
back to school
flooded my senses while I packed.

Tucked away in my apartment now, I have a shoebox
full of memories of my mother.

I packed the letter she wrote when she was 23,
traveling with her sister through France.
The swirly marbles she collected as a little girl,
The pressed petunia my dad gave her on their first date.

The yo-yo she gave me when I was 7
we found behind the toilet four months after
our Great Dane ran off with it.
The tin we kept the dinosaur cookies in.
The season of *Dancing with the Stars* with Osmond.

A pink hairpin from when she was small.
her high-school yearbook with doodles all over it,
my baby book with even more comments and doodles
than the yearbook,
and the photo we took on the top of the rock
before NYC lost her for all time.

Biff and Bop

Biff was a boy who traveled the stars.
He had friend who came from Mars.
Green, with toenails gray like lead
and two antennae on his head!
His name was Bop.

They played great music on the Moon
and astronauts danced to their tune.
They had picnics on Jupiter,
played baseball on Saturn,
they weaved cosmocloth into dizzying patterns.
Then came this idea:

They'd make outfits out of the stars
and then they'd go and leap off of Mars
and sail to see what kind of fun
two kids could have right on the sun.
They won't come back.

Haikus

Blackest

Flitter, fear, crumble.
The shadows are blackest when
You are alone.



A Fragile White Rose

A fragile white rose,
blossoming in the moonlight,
unfurls its petals.



Butterfly Wings

Heart flutters, like the
wings of startled butterflies.
You are close at hand.



Me, You, and Who

Sometimes I search,
for the Me I gave You,
and I wonder Who I am now.

Other times I repent,
for the sins that I swathed myself in,
and dearly miss Who I was.

Sometimes I create my own quandary within.

Other times I trick myself
into being hung by a silver chain,
inclined as I am toward such things.

Yet I never dreamt of the joy You brought,
And as the rain spirals downward and slicks my hair

I am still longing
For the You I never had.

Moonless

The girl was sound asleep in her room, snuggled up underneath her thick blankets. She didn't hear the wolves lope into town, their paws beating staccato rhythms against the dusty ground.

They were monstrous. One stood almost as tall as a full story of a house. This one stood up on his hind legs, braced himself against the wall with his front paws, and stuck his head curiously through her window.

She breathed in deeply. The giant wolf's tail wagged. He seemed more like a giant white dog than a wolf. He took the child gently in between his sharp teeth, still ensconced in her blankets. The other wolves snuffled or beat the ground with their paws. The giant wolf turned and started towards the woods with the girl. The other wolves frolicked at his heels, nipping at them and howling delightedly. Still no one in the village awoke.

The girl stirred in her sleep, but her eyes did not open. She would have found herself sprawled across a hot tongue, in between

teeth half as long as her body; the only thing keeping her separate was the presence of her blankets. The world outside would have been rushes of grass and sky, both dark, and the occasional gray and white of a wolf bobbing in or out of her line of vision.

Although they were all running fast, they didn't have far to go.

The girl did awake, much later, in a clearing in the forest. She was on her back, gazing up at the stars—hot, white pinpricks of light. The moon was a strange, deep yellow, more like cheese than she had ever seen it. Her blankets were gone. She was confused. She had never sleepwalked this far before. Not knowing where she was or how to get back, she gathered soft-looking leaves in a pile. She was small, and she gathered enough to almost cover her up completely. She had picked live leaves from the bushes and trees, instead of gathering the dead, crackly leaves already on the ground. She crawled into the pile, covered herself comfortably, and gazed heavenward, imagining mice playing on it. Only her head and arms were visible.

Moonless, cont'd.

She fell soundly asleep again. This time she was woken up by the nudges of a furry black muzzle. Opening her green eyes, she did not scream, even as she found herself surrounded by wolves much larger than herself. One was so large, its back brushed against the branches of the trees.

They weren't looking at her. Instead, they were looking down a path behind her. She scrambled to her hands and knees.

A woman was walking down the path. Her feet slipped softly through the grass and dirt. Her hair, body, and clothes were all a deathly snow white.

She had no face. The girl screamed.

The woman extended her hand. Quite against her will, the girl put her hand in it. The woman's grip was viselike. She dragged the small girl through the dark woods. The wolves followed steadily, growling at the dark.

She wondered why they didn't like it; didn't they live in it?

They emerged from the forest, spilling onto a clearing under a different sky.

This one was starless. And moonless. In front of them sprawled a giant lake.

In the lake was the reflections of millions of stars. And, dead center, a full, yellow moon. She wondered if mice could swim.

But, while the lake was disastrously beautiful, the sky was inky dark, like paint. They always said disaster would strike when the moon was off-balance. She shivered.

Suddenly the wolves dashed around her in circles, faster and faster. Then they sat down, threw their heads up, and all howled. Except it sounded like a human scream.

She woke up. She ran to the window. Outside houses nearby were on fire. The flames licked up the sides of the building with a slow, beautiful grace. Her gaze rose to the sky.

The moon was missing.

Transformation into a Spirit *Inspired by “A Thousand Suns” by Linkin Park*

She was running away. Her boots crunched satisfyingly in the muddy ice. The bitter cold stung the inside of her nostrils, and especially the little slit on the right one. With bruised hands she pulled her shawl closer as the wind tried desperately to strip it away.

The hard-packed tundra stretched before her. Further ahead, the tundra segued slowly into glacier. Ice was cold and pure, and it was for that reason that she was fleeing towards it. Escape. She felt full of the damp smell of snow, as if it were streaming in through her mouth and inflating her.

The way to her final destination lay before her with the clarity of a straight line. She was chilled in patches, as if a crowd of people were grabbing her by the back of the arm, touching the small of her back, the nape of her neck. She could almost see their taut, ethereal faces, could feel the gentle breeze filtered through their locks of waving, white hair. She took a few steps forward. There was a cramped feeling on her back, like a living skin of cold hands, as the spirits behind her pushed, making sure her steps didn't cease.

Instead of feeling like a touch, the living skin was a sensation. The importance of the physical world sloughed off.

The sky ahead was ice, the ground under her feet was a reflection of its infinity. It used to frighten her as a child. She marched forward, calm. This campaign towards the horizon should have always seemed inevitable. She walked for minutes, or ages. Night fell and the stars vibrated at her frequency. When day broke, she was left with the immensity of the raw power of the rising sun. She had never seen it this large; a half-circle that swallowed the sky. It would swallow her, too. But her back spasmed with so many shivers, with these hands assuring on her, that she wasn't worried about melting. She would evanesce in its hot innards.

She mused that she was probably being chased. By the time her hunters found her, though, she'd be gone, her spirit floating, part of the wave of ice, fog, cold, heat, light. Drifting into the sun.



Transformation into a Spirit, cont'd


The snow was a threadbare carpeting across a mostly polished blue landscape, continuing until the horizon and the bottom of the sun smoothed together.

The sun rose slowly, like a parent walking at an extra-leisurely clip in order for her child to catch up. It was a half-disc squatting at the end, waiting to envelop her. The stars, invisible even with the day, were brighter than ever, fierce, leering, tribal-warrior pinpoints that hummed and sang to her in lofty, elfin syllables.

Eventually, she heard shouts after her, and dogs, and the wind whistling around multitudes of sleds thousands of yards behind her. She didn't pause in her steps, but listened, listened hard. She heard the gasping breath of dogs. She heard nature. She heard the stars.

Her mouth was full of water. The water was in the air. It misted. She loped through the mist. She would rejoin the spirits soon. She was drifting.

And she made her way triumphantly across the empty arctic wasteland, and she embraced the sun.



“There Was A Child Went Forth” Based on Walt Whitman’s Poem

There was a child went forth every day;
And the first object she look’d upon, that
object she became;
And that object became part of her for the
day, or a certain part of
the day, or for many years, or stretching
cycles of years.

Printed type became a part of this child,
And ghost stories read at night, and fantasy
adventures, and dark hallways,
And brightly-colored balloons, and scraped
knees, and *The Beast from the East*,
And Napier Lane, the neighbors next door
and down the street, each with a kid
“my age,”

And time spent writing poems, and
sandboxes, and the one time it ever snowed,
became a part of this child.

Loving parents became a part of this child,
A New York accent, stories of how boring
Iowa is, and hugs,
And pathetic Guitar Hero battles, jokes with
laser pointers, and Yiddish swear words,
And the latest scientific theories, and cherubs,
and constant longing for redecoration,
Financial advice drilled into her head at a
young age,
And tales of “when I was your age,” and late
night trips to Kroger to fulfill quests
for snacks—
they became a part of this child.

“There Was A Child Went Forth”, cont'd.

Yeager Elementary became a part
of this child,
And Thomas Jefferson School, and
Intermediate School of Brussels, and Hassler
Elementary,
Recess time spent playing Pokémon, and the
first three Harry Potter books,
And Four-square, geese flying overhead and a
bus ride in Brussels spent playing
Donkey Kong,

Tantrums after missing an episode of
Dragonball Z, Game Boys stolen and broken,
Falling and hitting her head on a piece of ice
when her neighbors had already gone inside,
And sledding in her own backyard,
And the rocks climbed over and over, and her
neighbor's swing set, and the popsicles in her
neighbor's garage fridge, that she was allowed
to partake of,
And the art teacher who was horrible, and the
dodgeball games that were legendary, became
a part of this child.

Doerre Intermediate became a part
of this child,
And a clique called the “posse,” and anime,
and an art class with boys who swore a lot,
And books shelved in the library as the library
aide, and “*watashi wa toosuto ga suki desu,*”
And Inuyasha, and fanfiction.net, of a crafts
class spent watching movies like
Scary Movie 3,
And her first time at summer camp, and calls
to her mother at eleven at night, and the
teacher of
her Journalism class at camp who spoke in
blue streaks,
And Web Design class at camp, and sharing
books with her classmate, and the only truly
amazing dances she ever attended,
And songs about Goldfish, became a part of
this child.

“There Was A Child Went Forth”, cont'd.

Klein Oak High School became a part
of this child,
And trips to Canada every summer, and a trip
to France, and to the Big Apple,
And the duel between Lysander Demetrius,
and Juliet calling the nurse “lame,”
And *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and
confusion during history,
And bad puns in Dunnagan’s class because
he’d run out of good jokes,
The time spent talking to Mrs. Lankford, and
the *Fahrenheit 451* project,
And the hours and hours spent watching
Prince of Tennis, with its character
development, and
the episodes when the characters were small,
and the one with the bike chase scene that
made her laugh,
And the Homecoming dances that always
disappointed, that never seemed quite perfect,
And the sleepovers at Sabrina’s house, eating
beef jerky at two in the morning,
reading *Chobits*,
The anime conventions spent leafing through
seas of manga and choosing what to spend
money on,

The French classes, the time spent wondering
whether such-and-such phrase used the
subjunctive tense or not, the verb cards,
The raucous pep rallies, the few football
games attended, they became a part
of this child.

A collapsed building became a part of this
child, and many other children, on
September 11,
And the war fought for uncertain reasons,
and the popular blame game,
And the hurricane that devastated Louisiana,
and the current primary elections,
The approach of a unique President, black
or female,
The omnipresent label *Made in China*, the
abundance of illegals seeking a better life,
And Bill O’ Reilly blaring from the TV, day
after day, became a part of this child.

These became a part of that child who went
forth every day, and who now goes, and will
always go forth every day.

Put Some Spin On It

The doctor's explanations of how the time machine was supposed to work made absolutely no sense to the intern, but then again, all Bob the Intern was qualified to do was to fetch coffee. The time machine was made of two hemispheres fit together, a top and bottom. Something about the way they spun, or whatever, was supposed to affect the "time particles." Bob tried to explain it to Dave, another intern, over at the water cooler, one time, and he couldn't help but use air quotes when it came to "time particles."

The doctor was notorious around the company, mostly because his first trial runs were utter failures. He would always come back in the second trial with something completely different, though, and completely and unequivocally brilliant, which explained why he was never fired. He was also notorious for smelling like cheese. When the mice had infested the lower floors, they were said to have followed him around like the Pied Piper. Also, the young French inventor down the hall supposedly had a thing for him, and the French liked cheese, right?

Anyway, Bob's opinion of the doctor was not high, considering that A) he smelled like cheese and B) he had yelled at Bob once for spilling his coffee, when Bob had slipped on a wet floor that hadn't been marked with the usual yellow *Attention! Cuidado!* sign. Bob was also utterly convinced that "time particles" was something the doctor had made up. And Bob would love to have a chance to tell the hot Frenchwoman how he witnessed the doctor's invention fail completely. After all, no one was really waiting with baited breath, thinking that the doctor had actually invented time travel. They thought that this was the sharp beginning of a decline; he was getting old. So Bob volunteered to help the doctor with his experiment.

"See this wheel?" The doctor pointed at a wheel set into the wall, while he and Bob were both standing next to the blindingly obvious wheel.

"Yes," Bob said, trying not to glare.

Put Some Spin On It, cont'd.

“Put some spin on it,” the doctor said, “when I get into the machine.”

The doctor clambered into the machine, and the two hemispheres closed. Wondering how the hell this was supposed to work, Bob stupidly cast out his hand and spun the wheel. The hemispheres spun slowly in opposite directions. From inside, he heard a *squee*.

Bob spun the wheel harder. The hemispheres continued to spin slowly, then picked up speed, until they were a whirlwind force. A sparkle flickered across the room. The machine shook. A vertical seam appeared, and then Bob realized the machine was cracking in half.

The pieces fell away. Bob vomited.

The “time particles” or whatever had indeed worked. Apparently, though, the spheres should have spun in the same direction—one half of the doctor’s body was in the future, one was in the past.

The bottom half of his body had shrunk to baby proportions. His tiny feet kicked around in the crotch of his jeans until they freed themselves, and a tiny bottom half of a baby was sitting on the seat, wearing oversized underwear.

But the top half was more horrific. The top half of the doctor was aging. His back gnarled, his hands spotted. His face suddenly went from bloated, to pug-wrinkled, to taut. His baby half, unable to support the weight of the older half, made a sickening snap as its spine broke like a twig. He fell to the ground. The top of him continued to contort. His eyes were milky, and he clawed at the air with feeble arms. His body was racked with spasms. His withered lips moved, and a soft groan came out, perhaps an instruction to turn off the machine. Bob was paralyzed, though, and it didn’t matter; the bottom half of him continued to get smaller, until it took on a slick, fetal sheen, became tinier, then disappeared. The top half hit the ground, already having died and gone through rigor mortis. In a few more moments he was a pile of bones and dust.



Put Some Spin On It, cont'd.

Bob stared in amazement. Then he went to get a drink of water, and, on the doctor's clipboard that was to have documented the degree of success of his first venture, Bob wrote "another failure."

The Cat in the Jacket

“They’re exactly the same,” Duster insisted. “You should love them equally.”

“Bullshit,” Terry said. “One’s flesh and blood, yeah? And the other is a bundle of circuits.”

Katie looked at the two new additions to her household: Gary, a lazy gray tomcat, and Persei, a lizard-green, sleek, electromechanical pseudokitten. Persei nuzzled her with his cold, metallic head, gave out a static mewl, and blinked his eyes at her like camera shutters.

“I like the little robot one,” Gnancy said, taking the glass of lemonade given to her by her robot butler. “He’s a cutie.”

“Plus, it won’t cough up hairballs,” Duster said, just as Persei coughed up a realistic faux hairball made of bits of wire and slick with oil.

“Realistic,” Terry admitted. Duster nodded in surprise.

“Robots are very realistic,” Gnancy pointed out. “They’re just like anything organic.”

“They’re programmed to be that way,” Terry pointed out.

“I don’t see how that’s either here or there.”

“Does it leave tiny little metal poops, too?” Katie wondered.

“It’ll do everything, hon, it’s a cat,” Gnancy said.

“Pseudocat,” Terry corrected.

“Whatever.” Gnancy stood up, and turned to her butler, a personalized Jeevesbot50203782.5. “Come on, Steve, it’s time we got going.”

“I hope you all like my lemonade,” the Jeevesbot50203782.5/Steve said. “I’ve been waiting to test out my slightly altered recipe and see what people think.”

The Cat in the Jacket, cont'd.

“It’s delicious, Steve,” Katie said. Duster thanked Steve, as well. Steve gave them a magnetic smile.

“I have to get going,” Gnancy said. “Robert and I are going to some boring opera that he’s infatuated with.”

At the mention of Gnancy’s husband, everyone winced.

Later, after her friends had all gone, Katie watched her two new cats adapt to their surroundings. Gary settled onto the couch and yawned. Persei sniffed the carpet mechanically, his paws whirring as he pussyfooted his way around. He walked into a chair, meowed, and then sauntered over to nestle on Katie’s sandals, programmed with a cat’s natural affinity for feet and footwear, and using them as beds.

In the mornings, Katie would wake up, shuffle drearily into the kitchen, and, after pouring herself some orange juice and making herself some eggs, dole out the kibble for

Gary, and niblets for Persei that looked like ball bearings. Then she’d give Gary some water, being careful not to spill any near Persei (being an indoor model, he was not completely waterproof) and give Persei some oil. After the two cats gorged themselves, Gary would then hop up on the chair and stare at Katie, trying to will her to fill his bowl up with seconds, while Persei jumped onto her lap and just sat there, purring. If Katie didn’t feed Gary again, he would soon get bored and attack her feet.

She bought him some toys, but her feet were still the prime target.

It happened that Persei was watching Gary demolish one of Katie’s old sneakers, when Gnancy came over. Normally, Katie didn’t allow smoking in her house, but Gnancy looked so anxious that she threw up the windows and told Gnancy to just sit by one, if she wanted to smoke. Gnancy hadn’t asked, but Katie could see her fingering her cigarette carton in her purse.

The Cat in the Jacket, cont'd.

“It’s OK,” Gnancy said after a little bit, blowing smoke out of the side of her mouth so that she resembled a volcano. “I’m probably a lot more nervous than I look. I’ve been thinking this decision over for a long time.”

“What is it?” Katie’s teeth rested on her lower lip.

“I’m leaving Rob,” Katie said. “Steve and I are moving out, and moving into a condo at the edge of the city.”

Katie blinked. “What finally pushed you? Did you meet someone new?”

Gnancy raised an eyebrow. “Honey, I’m leaving with Steve.”

“...Your Jenkinsbot? Gnancy, what are you—?”

“Steve and I are in love and moving in together,” Gnancy said matter-of-factly.

There was a long and very awkward pause.

“Uh,” Katie said. But she couldn’t think of what to say, so another, longer awkward pause followed. Gnancy crossed and uncrossed her legs.

Katie had heard of cases like this. But, she had never thought she’d know someone who— well.

“Robots can’t replace husbands,” Katie finally blurted out.

Gnancy bridled. “Why not?”

“Well, um. Robots can’t love.” Katie felt stupid pointing this out.

“They might as well. And nobody really knows for sure how far artificial intelligence extends to emotions. And Steve told me he loves me, and that’s good enough for me.”

The conversation was punctuated with yet another pause. Gnancy looked at Katie.

The Cat in the Jacket, cont'd.

“It could be a glitch in his programming,” Katie said finally.

“It’s a romantic glitch, then. I hope it never gets fixed.” Gnancy stood up. “Anyway, it doesn’t matter if you don’t understand. I just wanted to tell someone about leaving Rob. Keep it under wraps while I move my things to my new place, won’t you? I’ll tell everyone when I’m all settled in.”

“About Steve?”

“About leaving Rob.”

“For Steve?”

“I’m not ashamed of it. Steve’s a much better person than Rob is.”

Katie was about to protest that Steve was not a person *per se*, when Gnancy apologized and said she had to be going. Katie walked her outside, where Steve was waiting in the car. Steve got out, opened the door for Gnancy, and asked Katie how she was doing.

“Gnancy and I are having a dinner party in a few weeks,” Steve said. “You are, of course, most welcome to attend, being one of our dear friends!”

Katie nodded. Waving goodbye, she went back into her house and closed the door. Persei walked over and nuzzled her with his tin head. Gary leered at her from atop the remnants of her now ruined sneaker.

It happened, one day soon after, that Gary ran out the door. Katie ran after him, but cat fur is a slippery thing, and every time she grasped onto him, he wriggled easily out of her hands. This chase went on for two miles, with Katie growing more frustrated all the time.

“You stupid shit,” she called after Gary, apoplectic. “What, I didn’t give you enough food or something?”



The Cat in the Jacket, cont'd.

Finally, Gary skittered to a stop by the bridge at the end of town, but inertia sent him tumbling over the edge, into the shallow waters of the river below. Shallow, but not so shallow that a cat couldn't drown in it.

Meanwhile, behind her, Katie heard an electrosneeze. Turning around, she saw that Persei had followed her. His joints clanked and clunked, and an irregular whirr was coming from his chest. Pseudokittens weren't tailored for long-distance running.

Just then, it began to rain. Pseudocats were definitely not geared for rain. Katie reached down and picked up the mewling Persei, and stuffed him in her coat. She watched helplessly as Gary tried to make his way to shore. Eventually, he did make it, and the gray tomcat came crying to her, tail drooping, pride swallowed.

A car drove by, splashing more water onto poor Gary. Katie glanced at the car. To her surprise, inside, she espied Steve driving, and Gnancy next to him, gossiping away, so content that she didn't even notice Katie and her bedraggled pets on the side of the road.

Fear

It grips you with a frosty-gloved hand
and in the back of your mind, you can hear the band
play a chilling concerto that screams in your brain
and no matter how you struggle, you're still under
the strain because that man with the glove and the
labyrinthine cape won't let go of you until you make
an effort to escape.

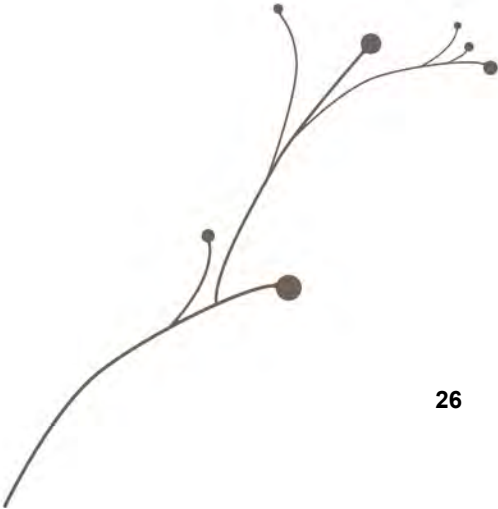


Onett

I know you. How could I not?
Everyone knows everyone here.
Even the boy from the mountain in his trademark red
cap,
eleven years old though he may be,
knows by name the goons in town who stormed the
arcade.

Their leader reformed, you know,
Frank works in the store now,
the one next to the burger shop
where the woman claims the burgers replenish one's
vitality.

And everyone knows that if you go to the hospital
in the southwest part of town, the old healer,
looking crazed with his flyaway blue hair,
will shuffle in front of the counter, offering his services
in lieu of those of the doctor;
or that the woman at the library will give you a kiss
if you return that book that seems to be so popular
these days.



**Eulogy Delivered at Danielle's Memorial Service on
May 9, 2012 by Professor Jean McGarry**

I first met Danielle Basford two years ago when she enrolled in my course on the novel. From the beginning—from her first oral report on the construction of Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility—I knew Danielle was an original. She had the usual capabilities of Hopkins' students: she was very bright, confident, articulate, and hardworking, and her reports on each of the novels we read that spring had all these qualities in spades, but there was something else. That something else was a rare, hardheaded, down-to-earth fearlessness. She was a writer—and a reader—who knew exactly what she thought, and could deliver her verdicts straight, no frills, no phoniness, no academic mannerisms. Her critical eye was unflinching, and her prose was plain, terse, with a wisk of dry humor. Brisk and no baloney.

I came to look forward to seeing how that gimlet eye would size up the likes of Balzac, Conrad, James, Turgenev, etc. She spared no one; she was unimpressed by the judgments of the past. She would decide herself.

That semester, she ended up, to my delight, a real fan of Balzac's door-stopper, the three-volume Lost Illusions, with its windy digressions, fiery politics, philosophical natterings; and, of course, the French master's unparalleled ability to tell a good story with plenty of drama and high jinx. In a way, Danielle had ambitions on a Balzacian scale. She had started early as a writer, as I discovered, when she came to my office to lament the fact that The Writing Seminars offered no courses in novel-writing. She was a novelist, and had already written several, and it was frustrating to be a writer of the long form and be stuck turning out sketches and stories—little things. She could do it—oh, yes—her stories were good, wildly inventive, freely venturing into other worlds, because she loved science fiction.

We had this talk a month or two ago, and she wasn't well, but soldiering on, finishing her senior year, no complaints, no excuses, as she battled a persistent fever and cough—and who knows what else—to get her work done. And to do the writing she was always doing on the side.

Eulogy, cont'd.

A few days before she was admitted to the hospital, she came to my office to ask me how and when to deliver a story for my class, one that she'd been, finally, too ill to complete in a timely manner. This was the Friday of the Hopkins Spring Fair. Danielle looked better than she had all semester, shining eyes and glossy hair, and I told her—for it was a beautiful, warm day—not to worry about the story, but to take a book and read out in the sun. She could finish this work, and I trusted she would—in the fullness of time. She considered my suggestion, and said that, yes, she was in the middle of two or three bulky novels, (her own picks, nothing we'd assigned) and yes, sitting outside in the sun sounded like a good idea. What she owed me as a student in advanced fiction, she would deliver in what I hoped would be comfortable intervals.

Two days later, she emailed me that she was in the hospital, facing some serious tests, and she wanted me to know that she wouldn't be in class. Always practical, ever conscientious.

When I taught my last advanced fiction class last spring, I told my students that I had terrible news: their classmate had died the day before. They knew Danielle was in the hospital because we all signed a get-well card, but no one was prepared for this. For a long time, they were too shocked and sad to speak. But, when they started talking, they had, as a body, a single idea: to publish Danielle's stories, as many as could be gathered, in the campus literary magazines. This, they understood, would have mattered to her.

We in The Writing Seminars would like to honor our student, Danielle Basford, by creating a new senior award—a writing award for a work of science fiction—in her name. It's little enough in gratitude and remembrance for such a rare—and wonderful—bird as she was.