

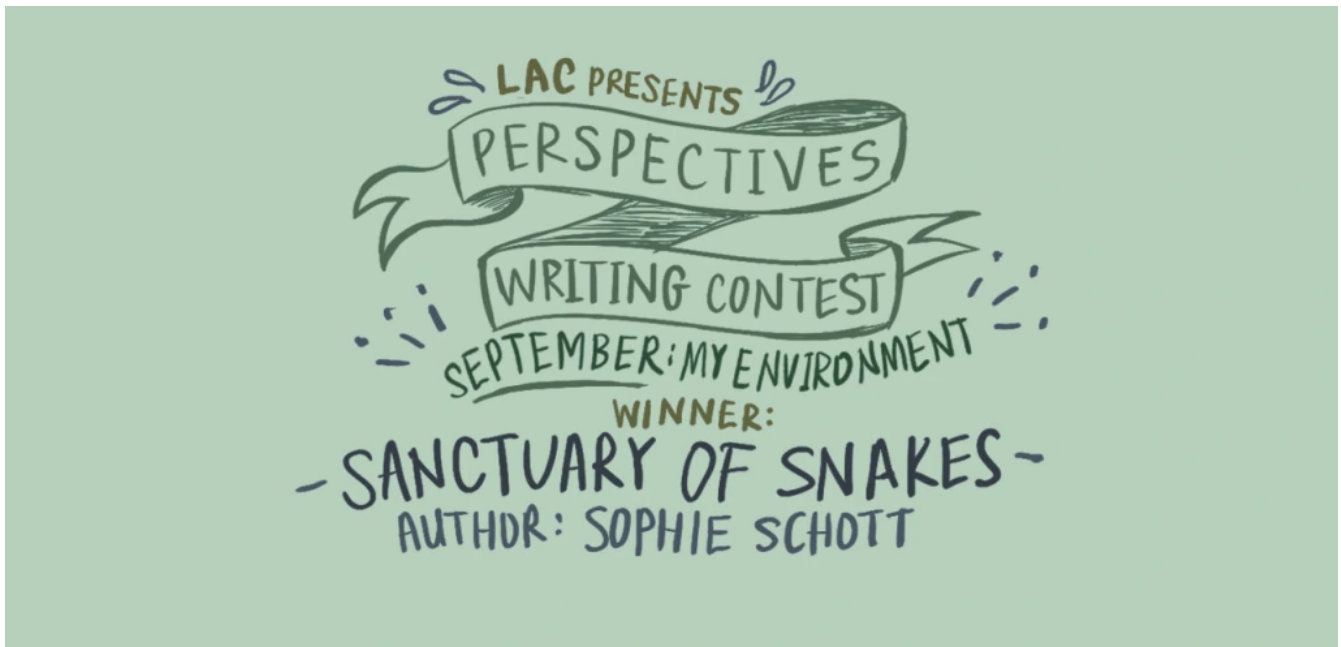


THE LIBERATOR MAGAZINE



September 29, 2019
The Liberator Magazine
Sophie Schott
libfeatured
No comments

Sanctuary of Snakes



Written by Sophie Schott.

Graphic by Quynhmai Tran.

–

“God smites people who smuggle snakes into Mass.” As we crouch in the dapple of discolored fall leaves and plunge our chubby fingers into the writhing nest of baby garden snakes on a misty Sunday morning, my oldest cousin, Charlie, hailing from the wise, ripe age of eight, whistles this sincere warning through the impish gap in his smile which marks the former residence of his front teeth. Breathing this theology into the autumn wind with a warm drawl, Charlie holds the captive attention of his four rambunctious brothers and I, the six-year-old city girl in stained overalls. I shudder and wonder at the small animals swirling in my cupped hands. Despite my desire to carry my new pets into Mass with me, I deem his statement paramount to parochial law, slip the garden snakes into my pocket, and deposit their wriggling bodies in the safety of a produce jar before I don my starched Sunday best and stride into Mass hand-in-hand with my grandparents.

Reflecting on the few words about “cardinal sins” that filtered down from the priest’s lofty Latin to my unholy ears, I squirm in my pew. I fail to understand how the pretty red birds that adorn my 1998 St. Louis Cardinals’ Baseball Club tin lunchbox trespass against the Lord. After much thought, I arrive at the conclusion that only adults can comprehend such complex matters. In the summertimes of my youth, my parents ship me away from the city with wishes that I partake in the simple splendor of rural Missouri. Here, I wrestle with angels and demons as the culture of my city upbringing and my grandparents’ countryside manner collides, most clearly in my childish confusion regarding the differentiation between my casual Protestant upbringing and my grandparents’ devout Catholic practices.

I often felt tension in these transfers from city to country, from faith to faith. Beyond my cousins’ musings over mud-pies, I received little explanation regarding the system of belief that my extended Missouri family tenaciously clung too. Given, as a child, I always exhaled in relief upon my return to my relaxed Sunday School in the city where I received salvation in the form of pretty gospel picture books and Goldfish snacks. Over the years, as I sharpened in my knowledge of my grandparents’ religion and my own beliefs, my misconception that adults better

understood the nuances of navigating religious differences shattered. With my coming of age, I witnessed a world torn by miscommunications of faith and religious tension.

Eleven years from the summer that my cousin informed me that God aimed intense antipathy at those individuals who dared consider bringing snakes into Mass, I squat in the red dirt of Haiti, encountering complex religious and cultural environments far more diverse than the difference between city and country spiritual cultures that I experienced as a child. I plunge my hands into a curved metal dish and grasp the sliver of lye soap bubbling at the bottom and scrub the soiled laundry with intensity. As sweat beads across my brow and soap squishes through my clenched fingers, I direct my eyes into the bright face of the Haitian woman who sits across from me and query in broken Creole, “Do you understand the main message of the Bible?” I soon learn that while she understands the gospel; she cannot accept Christ because her husband practices voodoo healing, and God will punish her for this. I desire to assail her misconceptions with a collection of theological facts, but catch myself, reminded of my cousin’s attempts to cure my religious confusion that resulted in catastrophe. Instead, as we toil over the wet clothing, I speak of my personal encounters with family division, faith, and grace.

Somewhere along the rugged path of adolescence, I realized most of my early discomfort with the idea of Catholicism stemmed from a type of misunderstanding facts cannot remedy. God did not desire to “smite” my curious six-year-old-self as I cradled the curling bodies of harmless garden snakes. God desired that I would find his beauty in sanctuaries of snakes, in my most uncomfortable experiences, in challenging and diverse environments, in those collisions of culture that showcase the multifaceted splendor of belief and push me to further examine my own perspectives and worldview. Today, I embrace the varied environments of my upbringing— the beauty of interdenominational grace.



Posted by:

The Liberator Magazine

[Previous Post](#)

[Next Post](#)

Leave a Reply

Enter your comment here...

The Liberator Magazine is the official publication of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Texas at Austin . Don't forget to follow us on:



[Website Powered by WordPress.com.](#)