

Oregon State University
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Prism

Provost award: poetry

A Portrait of Every Child

- *Tabitha Stickel*

A Pee-wee Herman face
the kind you practiced as a child
for hours in front of the bathroom mirror.
Beneath that stretched and contorted face
that face that took hours to master,
arms and legs as straight as sticks
and just as thin.

Shoes laced up tight,
one bunny ear around the other,
a jumper worn by how many siblings before
and a patterned shirt, starched and wrinkle free.
A picture of any child
in any childhood, with one
little, teeny-tiny, minute Difference
clutched in that small, bony hand.

How natural for boys to play
with guns and bows and arrows
playing cops and robbers and war and glory
How natural for boys to have fun
with metal and plastic
that will one day cease to be toys
and become the tangible demons that steal lives away
How natural for boys to hold, to play, to grip
a play instrument of death.
But how unnatural he looks,
this child with the Pee-wee Herman face,
how strange it seems to see
the explosive object overwhelming
his small hand.