**On The Beach, Belmar, New Jersey**

Ginger Graziano

That first morning, my brother Jim and I bike

tree-filled streets to buy jelly donuts and eat them

at the boardwalk. Sun glints off breakers

that rise like cobras, curl, and crash on the beach.

Water as far as we can see. No apartments

to crowd the view. Gulls careen overhead.

Our barefoot toes sink into sand as waves

beckon. Deeper. Deeper.

When my aunts and grandfather arrive,

I retreat to my own attic bedroom.

Steamy. Privacy an unheard-of luxury.

Jim not snoring in the other bed.

None of his stinky underwear on the floor.

I strip to cool my sweaty skin. The mirror

reveals my naked hormone-flooded body.

At the window, salt breezes caress

my budding breasts. My emotions swirl

like the dark clouds building outside.

That night the wind moans. I race to the beach

as the sea crashes over the miniature golf game

on the boardwalk. Over ocean-side streets.

Over porches and driveways. Rain lashes my body,

whips hair into my eyes. My gut churns, shocked

by the menacing face that arose like a wraith

from noon’s calm water.

Nightmares haunt me when we return

to our suffocating Bronx apartment. I thrash

in sleep as waves suck me down. I wake in a sweat,

night after night. The ocean no longer beyond me,

but inside.