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illuminations

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Southeast Community College

i lluminations

A magazine of creative expression
by students, faculty,
and staff at
Southeast Community College
Beatrice/Lincoln/Milford, NE
Falls City/Hebron/Nebraska City/Plattsmouth/Wahoo/York, NE

Volume 20
2019

“Human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.



Southeast Community College

ILLUMINATIONS VOLUME 20

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Illuminations publishes creative prose, poetry, and visual art, as well as academic and literary writing. We encourage submissions from across the disciplines. Our mission is to feature outstanding artistic works with a diversity of voices, styles, and subjects meaningful to the SCC community. *Illuminations* is further evidence that original thought and creative expression are celebrated by Southeast Community College.

Illuminations is published in April of each year. Submissions are accepted year-round from SCC students, faculty, and staff. Email submissions to Editor Kimberly Vonnahme, kvonnahme@southeast.edu, with the following information:

- 1) The title and a brief description of each submission;
- 2) Your name, ID#, and program/position at SCC;
- 3) Your physical address, phone number, and email address;
- 4) Your motivation for creating each submission;
- 5) A brief, informal bio of yourself; mention unique traits, habits, or guilty pleasures—whatever makes you *you*;
- 6) The following statement with your typed “signature”: This submission is my own original, unpublished work.

Written work is accepted as .rtf or Word files. Submit high-resolution images of artwork or photographs as .tif or .jpg files with a minimum resolution of 300 dpi and a minimum size of 1500 pixels wide and 2100 pixels tall, or 5” wide and 7” tall. A digital camera other than a phone is recommended, if possible. We can photograph or scan artwork for you if needed. Images embedded in Word or PDF files will not be included. You must provide a separate image file. Video files of dramatic, musical, or other creative performances of ten minutes or less can be submitted as MPG4, MPG2, MPG3, AVI, MOV, FLV files. **The deadline for Volume 21 submissions is June 7, 2019.**

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SHAWN SHONERD

WINNER OF GRAND PRIZE FOR PROSE

"I ENJOY WOODWORKING, STRATEGY GAMES, AND SPENDING TIME WITH DOGS. SOMETIMES, I'LL DO A LOAD OF LAUNDRY JUST SO MY PUP CAN 'STEAL' HIS TOY SOCK FROM THE BASKET. I WROTE 'AN UNBROKEN MAN' BECAUSE MY GRANDFATHER'S RECOVERY FROM A STROKE HAS CONTINUED TO BE A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR ME."



AN UNBROKEN MAN

SHAWN SHONERD • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I stand a respectful distance away. In front of me, an old man crouches within a maze of copper pipes while staring at a black and rust-brown beast of a machine. I hold a portable work light in my hands, futilely trying to angle it correctly. No matter which way I turn the flashlight, the shadows cover something important. After a minute of waiting for me to position myself correctly—watching me struggle (and probably enjoying it, knowing him)—the old man smiles slightly. Only the left side of his face can smile. His right eye, right cheek, nose, and part of his lip remain immobile, impassive. He reaches into his right pocket and takes out his cell phone. Expertly flipping through the apps on the screen, he turns on the phone's light and uses it to illuminate the bottom of the boiler. I'm impressed with his skills; Grandma could never do that—the woman still has a *pager*.

The old man searches for a second, then reaches down a weathered, massive hand and flips an unseen switch. The sound of a click then and an almost imperceptible hiss in the air—the propane line. The old man looks back at me, triumphantly.

"That was never the problem, Grandpa. The propane always worked."

His smile doesn't dim though; he just turns back to the boiler. He seems to be waiting for something.

"The real problem," I continue, "is getting it to light. The ignition switch is out."

"Oh," is all he says. It's one of the few words left in his vocabulary.

He shines his phone light around the boiler in a broad arc, finding the ignition switch next to the wall—and dangerously close to the electrical panel. He frowns at that. If I lived in a city and had to follow city ordinances, I'm

pretty sure that little infraction would incur a hefty fine.

“Grandpa, nobody really cares what you do in the country. As long as you don’t blow up your house or something, it’s fine,” I say, a bit too quickly. He shoots me a look that can only classify as “benevolent disappointment.”

He presses the switch and waits. He flicks the switch back and forth repeatedly—but as expected, it has no effect. He frowns, then looks at me and holds out an oil-stained hand.

“Pipe wrench?” I offer, helpfully.

“No,” he replies, another one of the few words he can still speak.

“Screwdriver? Voltmeter?”

He shakes his head.

Hmm. “...Sledgehammer?” God, please don’t let it be the hammer.

“Yah!” he says, and nods enthusiastically.

Damn it.

I hand him the sledgehammer, mournfully, careful to avoid bumping it on the twisted, probably really illegal mishmash of copper pipe. Knowing my luck, any slight tap to the pipes would probably knock out a fitting and flood the place. Unlike me, Grandpa doesn’t waste any time worrying. He takes a huge over-the-shoulder swing and brings the hammer down on the boiler. I wince as the head lands with a huge bang on a spot neighboring the ignition switch. There’s a sprinkling sound—a flash of memory: little kid Shawn dropping an open bag of sidewalk salt on Grandpa’s kitchen floor. The salt scattering on the kitchen floor had made a similar sound. Decades of rust dislodged from the boiler and littered the ground.

He reaches for the ignition switch again. The pessimist in me is utterly convinced the hammer blow broke it permanently. There’s a brief moment of anxiety when I realize that the propane has been running—unlit and flooding this tiny room—for an uncomfortably long time. We might very well blow up the house today. But when he presses the switch now, there’s a new sound—a fast series of clicking, like someone flicking a lighter repeatedly. The clicking continues for a brief second before the propane finally flares with a *whoosh!* Yes! I hear the boiler kick on and smell the pungent odor of eons of accumulated dust burning. It’s a rancid smell, and Grandpa grimaces with half his face. But when he turns to look at me, the grimace has vanished. This time, I return his triumphant smile.

He groans as he stands up, and his back makes a sound like a bucket of firecrackers going off. His forehead glistens, slick with sweat. What little hair he has left, just a messy brown pile now, flops on his head. He raises one oversized

hand at me in the universal “wait” gesture as he tries to catch his breath. He’s a large man, but not what I’d call fat. An imposing figure, but not arrogant. As a kid, I thought him invulnerable, immovable. The breaths he struggles to take now, a shrinking ragged sound, prove that theory incorrect.

“C’mon, ya old man, quit playing around,” I say to him, teasingly.

He just laughs—a big, hearty laugh that hasn’t changed for years. At least the stroke hasn’t stolen that.



On May 15, 2007, Grandpa drove his semi-truck on a highway just outside of Scranton, Pennsylvania. I’ve asked him about this day before, the day of his accident, but he still doesn’t remember much. According to a website that tracks historical weather data, it was a sunny, cloudless, windless day. It was a beautiful day. He’d driven truck for years—he loved the sense of freedom and adventure. He loved to travel and to meet all different kinds of people.

“Ants in his pants,” Grandma said with a slight smirk. She sat at my kitchen table with her eternally present cup of coffee. “He couldn’t stand staying in one place too long.”

On that day, as the birds chirped and the sun shined and Grandpa sat in the driver’s seat, probably listening to some audiobook and thinking about the long trek back to Nebraska—on a day like that, Grandpa suddenly had a massive hemorrhagic stroke. His truck veered off the road, narrowly avoiding oncoming traffic. It came to a stop, tilted so that the driver’s side door faced the ground. Rescue workers had to climb in through the passenger seat to reach him.

“They said his truck ended up on its side at the bottom of a ditch,” Grandma said, taking a drink and setting her cup of coffee on the table. “By the time I heard about the accident, he was already at the hospital in Scranton. The police called his trucking company, and they then called me. Dennis [the owner of the trucking company] was so nice about it. He bought me a ticket to Philly.”

Fortuitously, the Scranton hospital realized they did not have the equipment to deal with a traumatic brain injury. They quickly stabilized Grandpa’s vitals and life-flighted him to Philadelphia. The normally two-hour drive by truck took only an hour by helicopter. He remained in intensive care for almost a week. After five long days, Grandpa finally woke up.

“At the time, they weren’t sure how bad the brain damage was going to be. I guess it’s not really something that shows up on an MRI.” Wistfully, Grandma looks down at her cup of coffee. She doesn’t take a drink.

“They...well, they told me to be prepared for anything.”



Grandpa miraculously made his way out of the labyrinth of pipes that

composed my jerry-rigged heated floor system. His bulky body barely fit through the small pathway. I designed the pathway for someone as small as myself—a mistake, apparently. When he finally escaped, he turned to look at the ugly, abominable conglomeration of metal—sections of pipe that didn't even go anywhere, just capped at a dead end. All of it, my sad attempt at saving a few bucks rather than paying a licensed plumber to buy the proper parts and install a radiant floor system correctly; I had decided to try it on my own. After all, you can learn anything on YouTube, right?

No. Apparently not. Grandpa stands there, shaking his head and chuckling to himself. He points at the water circulator, a small pump set at the base of the boiler. It's a machine that acts as a "heart" to the system, pulling water in and pushing it through the pipe.

"I don't get it. What's wrong with the circulator?" I ask, incredulous (and admittedly, a bit defensive).

He just laughs and motions for me to follow him. We exit the cramped, dark room and enter the larger garage section. He leads me over to the whiteboard, picks up a marker, and begins drawing.



The hemorrhagic stroke caused massive bleeding in his brain. As a result of the pressure caused by the blood, the temporal lobe of his brain sustained heavy damage. The temporal lobe manages—among many other things—memory, speech, and recognition.

Grandpa's memories of the past ten years shattered. His courtship to Grandma, the day he proposed to her, his wedding day itself—all of them dissolved and swept away like sand in a river. Memories of his grandkids vanished. He completely lost his ability to talk. Sure, he could make sounds with his vocal cords, but he could not manipulate that sound into words. The doctors in Philadelphia told Grandma that he would probably never recover those faculties.

"I said to those doctors, 'If you only knew how stubborn he is!'"

I laugh at this. It's true.

"They let us fly back to Nebraska a few days after he woke up."

While recovering, he stayed at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital in Lincoln. There, Grandpa was presented with the fragments of his life and asked to put them back together. His days were filled with hours of painful physical therapy; the left side of his body remained weak and mostly unresponsive, a common consequence of a stroke. Several different speech therapists worked with him on rehabilitating his ability to talk. A doctor once explained to us that for

Grandpa, after the brain injury, speaking was like trying to think of a word that was just on the tip of his tongue—only it was every word, all the time. This, understandably, frustrated him.

The demon Confusion visited Grandpa frequently.

“One time they called me at work and said he’d tried to leave the building. He had a set of cards with pictures on them—I guess the speech therapist thought they’d help—and he kept showing the nurses a picture of a semi-truck. He was mad. He thought he was late for work.” Grandma laughs a little to herself.

While the confusion would eventually lessen to a degree, moments still exist—even now—when he suddenly forgets what he’s doing. He doesn’t leave the house by himself anymore. His ability to speak only marginally improved. After countless hours of frustrating speech therapy, he managed to sustain a small vocabulary of simplistic words. Most other words hide from him in the abstract darkness of his mind. These days, he measures his life in yeses and nos.



I wait while Grandpa traces out a design on the whiteboard. The picture he draws looks crude, but effective. A series of lines that indicate my unnecessarily complex system of copper pipe (which he points and laughs at, to my embarrassment), a big black circle for the boiler, and a little triangle for the circulator. It all seems pretty much the same.

Only one obvious difference—the circulator he draws is installed in an entirely different place than mine.

“Why would I put the circulator after the boiler, and not before?” Clearly, there’s something I can’t understand here.

He just stares at me. A normal conversation with Grandpa—piecing together his intentions through context. Luckily, he’s gotten pretty good at it. He pulls out his phone. He taps on the app for the internet browser, which opens up to Google. Then, smiling like a sly dog, he hands me the phone. *Figure it out yourself*, his smile says.

Touché, Grandpa. Touché.



My siblings and I visited them almost every weekend. It felt weird, seeing this man that looked so much like my grandpa, yet still subtly different. He still heckled the referees on TV (in his own angry, wordless ranting), he still laughed like his old self, but he no longer looked at me with any sense of recognition. He didn’t remember the fishing tournament he took me to in Minnesota (in the middle of the school year, much to my mother’s chagrin), where we ended up devoured by mosquitos and catching nothing but “Stickfish.” He didn’t

remember driving me to my first job interview at Shopko – giving me his own version of a pep talk with the treasured, wise advice of, “Just stop freaking out! It’ll be fine—Jesus!” And I never did ask him, but I don’t think he remembered the day he pulled me out of a barbed-wire fence—dazed, bleeding, and cut to hell—passing an overturned four-wheeler with its engine still idling.

Most of his memories of Grandma never did come back. To this day, Grandpa and Grandma no longer share a bedroom. They sleep on opposite sides of the house.

“I can’t sleep with him. He snores so loud it’s like trying to sleep with a freight train!” Grandma exclaims.

Grandpa responds by holding his nose, waving his hand, and pointing at Grandma. *Grandma smells.* He laughs.

She swats him. “Oh you. Stop it!” But she’s laughing, at least a little bit, too.



“OK, so you had a lucky guess with the circulator. Big deal. Stop gloating over it.”

We’re standing outside the garage. Grandma sits in the passenger seat of their old Ford Explorer, heater blasting to fend off the cold. She has probably cranked it up to sauna temperatures already. Smiling, Grandpa gives me one last hug and taps me lightly on the forehead. His touch has a mocking, but playful feel. *Think next time, Shawny-boy!*

He takes a small step back and places his huge, leathery hands on my shoulders. A little bit of the oil from the boiler smears on my shirt. I don’t mind. I’m taller than he is now. When I was younger, he used to joke that he’d “have to put bricks on yer head to stop ya from growin’!”

I wonder if some small part of him remembers that.

He looks into my eyes. His face looks tired, but his gaze seems...approving.

“I love you, you know?” I didn’t mean to ask it as a question, but it came out like that anyway.

He nods. Then he gives me one last crooked, lopsided smile before opening the driver’s side door. I can hear Grandma inside, already planning their stops on their way back to Lincoln.

“We haven’t seen Judy or William since Marcia’s wedding, and David City’s just a few miles out of the way. Oh, I wonder if Carol still lives in Brainard?” The list goes on and on, and I can just imagine Grandpa *groaning* in his mind.

The door shuts, cutting her off midstream. I watch as they pull out of my gravel driveway. They give me one last wave before they disappear around the bend in the dirt road. I stand in the driveway and watch the road until the dust

finally settles.

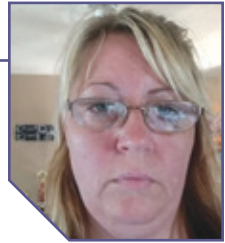
A thought hangs in my mind: *How can a man survive beyond memory?*

Behind me in the garage, I hear a faint sound—a series of clicks followed by a triumphant *whoosh!*—the sound of an old, broken boiler roaring back to life.



JENNIFER SEIBOLT

"I AM A SINGLE MOTHER, WORKING FULL-TIME AND TRYING TO FINISH MY DEGREE. THANKS TO MY CERAMICS INSTRUCTOR, NELSON DUNGAN, FOR ENCOURAGING ME TO SUBMIT TO ILLUMINATIONS."



PEDESTAL SERVER

JENNIFER SEIBOLT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



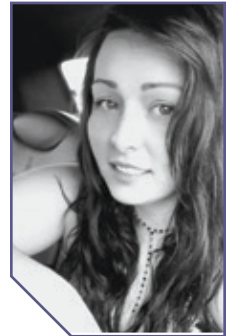
THREE STONWARE PIECES

JENNIFER SEIBOLT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



KYLEE ALYSE GUENTER

"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN OUTSIDE THE NORM, DOING THINGS AT MY OWN PACE, AND IF YOU WOULD HAVE TOLD ME AT THE AGE OF 18 THAT I WOULD GO TO COLLEGE OR EVEN WRITE, I WOULD NOT HAVE BELIEVED YOU. A HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT AT 16, I GOT MY GED AT 27 AND ENROLLED IN COLLEGE AT 29. I'VE HIT THE GROUND RUNNING AND DON'T PLAN TO STOP! I DESIRE SELF-EXPRESSION AND DREAM TO WRITE STORIES I CAN SHARE WITH THE WORLD. I KNOW MY PATH DOESN'T END HERE; IT IS ONLY THE BEGINNING. RECEIVING PERMISSION FROM MY MOTHER TO TELL HER STORY AND THEN PUTTING IT ON PAPER HELPED ME IN A DEEP WAY. I KNEW I WANTED TO PUT HER PAIN AND EXPERIENCE IN THE FORM OF A SHORT STORY SO THAT I COULD HELP PEOPLE UNDERSTAND A MOTHER'S PAIN AND HOW PRECIOUS LIFE IS."



NEVER BE AFRAID OF DEATH

KYLEE GUENTER • PRECISION MACHINING & AUTOMATION TECHNOLOGY

We document life and death, but what about the story behind closed doors and dark shadows? We sometimes hide, not allowing the light of day to bring forth what's really going on. This is Vicki Guenter's story, and to her, the day of January 9th and the time of 8:00 p.m. symbolize more than just letters and numbers. There is one thing you need to realize before reading this. To have sympathy is a start, but to feel empathy is

hard to do when dealing with a death. Our paths are all different. We can't see or touch another's sorrow, but we can see the person and only try to understand while offering words of comfort.

January 9th, 1992, was a day like any other in any average household: a son comes home from school as his mother prepares dinner. Tyson came home late that afternoon and was filled with excitement, talking about the school project of building a fishpond, which was the reason he was late coming home. He was eager to discuss his plan to open his basement bait shop again that summer. Dinner was almost done when Vicki sent him to the store to get sauerkraut for the Polish dogs. She had also made rice pudding for dessert. This was the first time she had ever made rice pudding, and it would be the last time she ever made it. "I can't," Vicki told me. "He was the only one who ate it that night."

As dinner ended, Vicki cleaned up the table and wiped down her five-year-old daughter Kylee and two-year-old daughter Jessi while Tyson washed dishes. She then made a plate for her husband Danny for when he got home on his lunch break and put away leftovers. Tyson then grabbed a bowl of rice pudding and went downstairs to the basement. The basement was where he had his bait shop last summer, where his bedroom was, and where the family's pet Dalmatian currently lay nursing her eight or nine puppies. Vicki soon made her way downstairs to check on her son when she spotted broken glass.

"Tyson, you get that cleaned up right now! You, your dad, and your sisters come down here barefoot." She grabbed a broom and dust pan, handing them to him while saying, "Here, get it up, now!" Broken Christmas tree bulbs laid scattered across the concrete floor. She went back upstairs to check on her girls and was angered by the mess. Several minutes went by before she checked on him again. As one would figure, a 12-year-old boy didn't get on it right away, and broken glass still laid on the floor. "He wasn't listening and was just doing what he wanted to do," Vicki said. She yelled at him once more. That would be the last time she ever spoke to him.

The show *The Simpsons* was starting, and Vicki had made popcorn. She was in the living room where she sat breaking off little soft pieces of popcorn for Jessi, and Kylee sat next to her with her tiny hand reaching in for more. The introduction streamed across the television in bright yellow letters followed by the musical and comical intro. She hollered out for Tyson, letting him know the show was starting; it was his favorite show, but she got no response. She got up from the couch, placed her daughter down, walked to the kitchen where the door to the basement was, and went down the steps.

"That's when I saw him," Vicki said. "Total panic-stricken, I knew I had to

do something, and I didn't know what to do." She ran to grab scissors to cut the rope. "The nylon rope, fucking nylon rope." She managed to cut through the tight nylon rope around his neck. He laid lifeless on the ground. She didn't know what she was doing as she began to frantically perform CPR. While Vicki was fighting for her son's life, the sound of footsteps heading to the basement went unnoticed. She looked up and saw Kylee staring at her. She screamed, "Get upstairs! Get upstairs!" Vicki then had to make what she called the hardest decision of her life—to get up and walk away from her son's body. She needed to call 911.

The sound of bloodcurdling screams from a panicked mother filled the house as she called 911. She spoke each painful word to the emergency operator. A neighbor who lived upstairs at the time later told Vicki he could hear her; the sound of her piercing screams gave him chills. Vicki stood on the basement steps while on the phone with the cord extended as far as it would go. She desperately tried to reach her son's body in the basement while still maintaining contact with the emergency operator, but it only stretched so far. She erratically screamed to the operator, "Please help! Please help! Please help!"

To her, it seemed like an eternity had passed before the sound of police sirens could be heard. In the midst of all the chaos, the family dog had left her puppies to protect Tyson. Vicki had to get the dog upstairs so the crew could reach his body. The first responders were in the basement working on Tyson, and Vicki sat in the living room with a police officer. At that point, she realized her pants were wet. "When I was downstairs and saw Tyson, I had peed my pants, so I was sitting there just drenched."

Vicki tried getting up from the chair three different times. The need to be with her son was overwhelming. She needed to go see Tyson. The cop had to sit her down, telling her, "No, Vicki. Please, you need to sit down." It was perhaps the only way he knew how to protect her from the painful sight. Vicki's sister showed up to take the girls back to her house at the same time that the first responders put Tyson on a gurney and made their way to the ambulance.

Many people showed up to the house that dreadful evening, lured by the sounds of sirens, and every face that night was somewhat of a blur for Vicki. Her husband Danny showed up on his lunch break during the commotion, and together they drove up to Saint Elizabeth Hospital. They sat in the waiting room as the doctors worked to bring life back to Tyson's body. Soon, they were sent to a small room in the hospital where sat their family doctor, a priest, and medical staff. Vicki was quick to ask as she sat, "How's Tyson?" She watched the family doctor as he shook his head.

She then spoke out a dreadful, “What?” as everyone in the room looked down at the floor, unable to make eye contact with her.

The family doctor finally spoke up only to reveal what she could already sense. “He didn’t make it.” All feeling drained from her body as she became like Jell-O and slid down her chair. She couldn’t remember much after that point and was only able to recall what she was later told by her husband Danny. She couldn’t bring herself to go see Tyson, since to do so would only solidify reality.

When the doctors addressed the matter of harvesting his organs, they were met with a protective response, as she screamed, “No! You can’t have him!” and even the priest and God were cursed that night out of anger from a mother who lost her only son. “I did not sleep that night, I didn’t sleep for nights. I couldn’t sleep. Every time I closed my eyes...,” Vicki told me. She described herself as being numb and detached from life.

Two weeks after Tyson’s death, she had a mental breakdown in the old Kmart on 48th and Vine. She was with her mother and two daughters. “I was OK; I was with it, and in the moment, but I had a breakdown inside that store. I could not figure out how to get out of that store. I did not know where I was.” Danny and her brother showed up at Kmart; they took her to a therapist that day whom she saw twice a week, but for only a month.

Things had changed for the family.

Danny switched to the day shift and threw himself into his work. They kept their daughters close, and they all slept in a king-sized waterbed, but the house was an empty and quiet place by day. Vicki and the girls would only return once her husband got off work, and then they would all leave the house together once again at 8:00 every night to distance themselves from the memory of Tyson’s death. It was a routine that took place for a year.

Tyson’s bedroom remained untouched, his bed sheets and clothing never washed. “The only place I wanted to be in that house was in his room because that’s where he was, where his smell was,” Vicki said. For her, his room was the only place she found some form of comfort. “I would go down there; it didn’t matter what time of day or night.” Many times, Danny would find his wife in the basement.

She joined a gym and would swim laps in the pool where they had a stereo system always tuned into a local radio station, and music would fill the room. The song “It’s So Hard to Say Goodbye to Yesterday,” by Boyz II Men, was the song played at Tyson’s funeral, and the words that were inscribed on his headstone. Vicki told me, “That song started playing, and I just inadvertently kept swimming laps and laps until I was so exhausted. I thought to myself,

‘I’m going to drown, that’s what I’m going to do!’” She had hoped she would just sink to the bottom. “I kept contemplating suicide; that was something I...I really contemplated on that whole year. But I was too chickenshit to do it, ultimately; I’m pretty sure that’s what it was. Just being such a chickenshit to actually end my own life. Thank God.”

On April 20th, 2011, Vicki lost her mother, Grace Watson, born December 30th, 1918. She was in the Intensive Care Unit at Saint Elizabeth Hospital with congestive heart failure as her daughter sat at the edge of her mother’s bed, and they had a conversation about death.

Vicki asked, “What do you think it’s going to be like, Mom? What do you think is going to happen?” Grace was unsure and asked her daughter what she thought, so they began to speak of an afterlife. Vicki made a request, “Mom when you do go, when you see Tyson, put your arms around him and love him and tell him how much I miss him and how much I love him.”

Grace agreed and with a request of her own. “You’ve got to do a favor for me. This gold tooth in my mouth—don’t you let those sons of a bitches have it.”

“Who?” Vicki asked.

“Those morticians—they’re crooked. Don’t you let them have that gold tooth, Vicki Lynn! Promise me you won’t let them have it!” Grace persisted. Even in her condition Grace still maintained her sprightly wit.

“I promise you, Mom.”

Vicki then asked her mother if she was happy in her life. Grace was indeed happy with her life; she could honestly say for the most part she was.

That death was a different experience from the death of her son. Vicki told me, “She gave me something back when it came to death because I’ve never been afraid of death all my life.” She went on to explain that the loss of her son was a life not fulfilled, not met with a proper end, making it harder for her to say goodbye, and yet, while the loss of her mother was still painful, it gave her peace.

The night before Grace passed, she spoke, even though doctors said she would be unable to. Grace spoke only four words, “They’re here! They’re here!,” followed by sounds of amazement. For Vicki, she knew her son still lived, and this gave her the peace for which she had so long been searching.



RICHARD HADLEY

"I USED TO ENJOY THE WITTY OBSERVATIONS OF LIFE, BUT SOMETIMES THAT IS JUST NOT GOOD ENOUGH, I GUESS. A BIG WHITE BUILDING MOTIVATED ME TO WRITE THIS PIECE."



GRETA GRAFFENBURG HAD AN UNFORTUNATE NAME

RICHARD HADLEY • SPEECH INSTRUCTOR

Greta Graffenburg had an unfortunate name, an unfortunate room, an unfortunate bed, but a fortunate view. She had the only window in Women's Complex 473740-4763. It was just a 3x3-foot square without a windowpane, but she was able to look outside, and on every fourth day, the sun would shine enough to create a little extra light in her room. The single hanging light bulb illuminated the room enough to see the starkness of the white walls, the small white desk, the small single bed with white sheets and a white blanket; across from the desk was a white toilet and a white sink. At the desk, there was one wooden chair, painted white. On the chair hung an empty white shoulder bag. The sun, when shining, gave the room a little warm, yellow hue.

Every morning, the door would open, and the thousands of residents would filter out into the hallway and proceed to walk silently on the three-mile trip that included many flights of stairs down to a room where each of the residents would pick up a box with her name on it. The box would contain the supplies needed for the day: toiletries, food, writing paper, and a new pencil, if needed, and every third day, there would be a new white gown and pair of underwear. Everybody changed in the box room and left their old clothes folded neatly on the table, and then everybody would diligently walk back to their rooms.

While the trip was undistinguishable, Greta knew the route by heart. She could tell you the path, the footsteps, the slight difference in the white walls from one hallway to the next, the one door that was slightly crooked. In a maze of conformity, the path of the trip was brightly lit. When she got back to her room, she sat at the desk and began to write. Page after page, she would write and precisely file each page into the white notebook on the desk. Every time she added the last sheet the notebook would hold, there was an immediate

across the lane.

To her astonishment, the one lone window directly across from her, of Men's Complex 473740-4763, had a light shining through. For as long as she could remember, the window had always been dark. Now, a stark white, dim glow of light that looked like it was coming from a single hanging light bulb illuminated the 3x3-foot square.

Fixated by the possibility, she stared at the window as time ticked away. She wasn't sure what she was looking for; she wasn't sure what she was hoping for. It didn't matter; it was a moment of hope that anything would be better. Hope turned to concern, and concern turned to a spasm of fear that shot throughout Greta's body. Gasping for breath, she scurried under her covers, pulling the sheet around her body and wishing she'd never seen the light.

A sleepless night later, and a request she'd regretted but had been granted, Greta switched rooms, down the hall and to the right, quietly one night, into another room that was painted white. After a time of continuing fading memories of counting the days down, her window was gone.



SILO

RICHARD HADLEY • SPEECH INSTRUCTOR



SHADOWS ON THE BRIDGE

RICHARD HADLEY • SPEECH INSTRUCTOR



BIRD ON A POLE AND SOME ROCKS AND SOME CLOUDS

RICHARD HADLEY • SPEECH INSTRUCTOR



UPSIDE DOWN DAY

RICHARD HADLEY • SPEECH INSTRUCTOR



TERRY WOLF

WINNER OF RUNNER-UP PROSE AWARD

"I'M A MIDDLE-AGED FATHER OF FOUR ADULT CHILDREN WHO FOUND HIMSELF BORED. IN SEARCH OF NEW CHALLENGES AND AT THE URGING OF MY DAUGHTER, I ENROLLED IN COLLEGE CLASSES AT SCC. I'M PRETTY SURE I WAS THE OLDEST STUDENT IN MY COMP. 1 COURSE."



THE DEER STAND

TERRY WOLF • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

At 4:30 in the morning on the first day of deer season, a clear moonless sky with stars twinkling in the pre-dawn darkness greets me. The temperature on this November morning hovers at a crisp 32 degrees. I fill my thermos with the best German chocolate coffee money can buy. I dress warmly, wearing my camouflaged coveralls and an

orange hoodie that my children bought me for Father's Day. I lace up my winter boots, stuff my gloves in my pockets, and grab my rifle. I treasure this time of year—not because I get a chance to shoot a deer, but because I get to spend copious amounts of time at my favorite place, the deer stand. My stand, located approximately one mile from my house in a tree near the pond, remains my favorite place to hunt. This location provides a quiet setting, perfect for observing all sorts of wildlife. In the past, I've seen deer, coyotes, raccoons, squirrels, turkeys, and even a mother bobcat with two cubs walk past.

I think to myself, "Go slow, be quiet, and don't fall," as I make the one-mile trek through the pasture as quietly as I can. I don't want to disturb any sleeping animals that might show themselves later after the sun rises. I built my tree stand 25 feet up in an ancient Cottonwood tree. The natural hollow in a branch next to my stand functions perfectly as a cup-holder for my coffee mug. The structure itself measures four-feet wide by four-feet long with a three-foot-high wooden railing around the outside. I have placed some green camouflage netting on the surrounding branches to mask my silhouette while I sit there. I washed my clothing with a non-scented detergent to help prevent the animals from smelling me. I'll probably ruin that with the coffee, but a day that doesn't start with coffee is a day I should stay in bed.

I take my seat in the dark green canvas chair I placed there weeks ago. I can barely make out a tiny sliver of light starting to brighten up the eastern sky. I notice the flickering lights of town four miles away. The wind barely moves the camo netting, adding to the tranquility of the morning. I smell the decaying leaves and the cedar trees that surround me. The neighbor's cattle bawling in the distance reminds me that I have chores to do.

The birds wake up first, flying from their morning perches to the pond for a drink. The birds notice me sitting there but don't seem too concerned. Oblivious to me sitting there, a raccoon wanders up to the edge of the pond hoping for an early morning snack. The raccoon's looming presence and hungry looks scare off a group of barn swallows currently taking a bath. Taking flight, the swallows voice their displeasure at the interruption with a series of raucous squawks.

A small pack of coyotes trots out from the gully that leads into the pond. The large male first emerges without a sound, his nose to the ground and eyes continually darting back and forth searching for danger. The female and two cubs follow behind the male. I've seen this family several times this year. The first time in the spring, the cubs were half their current size. Most nights, I hear their plaintive cries and answering calls from other packs. It reminds me that I share this land with all of nature's creatures whether I like it or not.

The sun, having just cleared the horizon, glows red and yellow at my back. It casts long shadows in the gully where the coyotes return. The raccoon left the pond in search of less wary prey, or, more likely, to sleep the day away in a tree somewhere nearby. A flock of turkeys wanders into view next to a small cedar tree 50 yards away. The big tom turkey struts around, proudly showing off for his hens. The six or so hens ignore his ridiculous antics and continue pecking at the ground in search of seeds or small insects.

I saw my first deer of the season two weeks ago. I was scouting trails near the deer stand when the most majestic buck I'd seen in years walked out from behind a tree. I thought to myself, "You're mine come hunting season." The buck had stood 20 yards away from me and just stared at me. He had enormous white antlers, approximately 24 inches wide, with six points on each side. "That buck will look fantastic mounted and hung on my wall," I thought to myself. We stood there observing each other for a brief minute. Then, with an indignant snort, like he knew what I thought, he wheeled around and sprinted off. I hope to see him through the scope of my rifle today.

At about 8:00, one large doe, followed by three smaller does, steps out of the trees 100 yards from my position. They don't notice me sitting here as they pause to munch on dried grass. The does slowly make their way to within approximately 50 yards of me; standing broadside, they make for a perfect shot. I wait, hoping for the buck I'd previously seen to make an appearance. The does make no sound except for the occasional rustle of leaves. They now are directly under my stand, and still no sign of the giant buck. Two of the smaller does start prancing around in a silly game of tag. I smile as I think of the similarities between animals and humans. My brothers and I used to make up silly games to pass the time. I wonder if the deer have ever observed humans playing games.

The does leave my field of vision, and still, the buck hasn't appeared. It's now 9:00, and I must do chores. I grab my rifle and empty coffee mug and climb down the ladder to the ground. The sun is entirely up, having wholly dispersed the shadows as I make my way back to the house. I consider today a success even though I never saw my intended target, nor did I fire a shot. I spend time in the tree stand to experience the solitude and peacefulness that I can find only there. Shooting a deer rates second to that. Besides, if I get my deer on the first day, what excuse would I have to sit in my tree stand for the rest of deer season?



CARRIE KNAPP

"I TEACH ENGLISH TO ADULT LEARNERS. I'M ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN HOW STUDENTS WHO NEVER LEARNED LITERACY SKILLS IN THEIR FIRST LANGUAGES MASTER THE PROCESS OF READING AND WRITING IN ENGLISH. I'M ALSO MOM TO A SON, A DAUGHTER, A SPOILED PUP, AND AS MANY CATS AS MY HUSBAND WILL ALLOW. I HAVE BEEN MAKING COLLAGES AS PART OF A JOURNAL PROJECT, AND I HAVE ALWAYS FOUND JOY IN MAKING THINGS."



THE THINGS WE MAKE, MAKE US

CARRIE KNAPP • ADJUNCT INSTRUCTOR OF ELL



ABOVE ALL, TRY SOMETHING

CARRIE KNAPP • ADJUNCT INSTRUCTOR OF ELL



FINDING REFUGE

CARRIE KNAPP • ADJUNCT INSTRUCTOR OF ELL



a child needs the spiritual refuge that books afford.

Once a child becomes absorbed in his book he feels safe and secure with the world closed out.

EASY TO MAKE

LITTLE BLOSSOMS

CARRIE KNAPP • ADJUNCT INSTRUCTOR OF ELL



LET US BEGIN

CARRIE KNAPP • ADJUNCT INSTRUCTOR OF ELL



MICHAEL J. KAMARA

"I AM FROM SIERRA LEONE, AND I AM A STUDENT AT SCC. MY MAJOR IS INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE STUDIES. I WROTE THIS STORY BECAUSE I LOVE MY MOTHER, AND I ALWAYS THINK OF HER AS AN AFRICAN MOTHER WHO BROUGHT ME UP WITH RESPECT AND DIGNITY. I TOOK THE HONOR TO PAY A TRIBUTE TO HER BEST TIME AND THE WORK SHE DEVOTED TO RAISE ME UP. I ALWAYS THINK OF HER."



BLACK POWER: A TRIBUTE TO MY MOM

MICHAEL J. KAMARA • INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE STUDIES

I was a little boy playing around my father's hut. How old I was at that time, I cannot remember exactly. I must have been very young, maybe five, six years old. My mother was in the workshop with my father, and I could just hear their familiar voices above the noise of the anvil and the conversation of the customers, who were farmers in our small village in Sierra Leone.

Suddenly, I stopped playing. My whole attention was focused on a snake that was creeping around my father's workshop. I went over to the snake. I took a stick that was laying on the compound, and I put it into his mouth, and the snake did not try to get away; it was enjoying our little game. The snake swallowed the entire stick, and its jaws were close to my fingers. I was laughing. I had no fears at that moment. Hamusa, one of my father's friends, came out of the workshop and saw what was happening. He called my father, and then I was safe in the arms of my father's friend. Around me there was a great commotion. My mother was shouting hardest of all, and she gave me a few sharp slaps. I wept bitterly, and later when it was calmer, and the shouting had cooled, my mother solemnly warned me not to play that game again.

I often played beneath the veranda that ran around the outside of my father's workshop, and like all the other workshops I'd known in the rural area, its walls had been pounded and molded with water, and it was round and proudly covered with thatch. It had a rectangular doorway inside and a tiny window where a thin shaft of daylight entered. A bed on the right was molded from bricks with a mat on which lay a pillow stuffed with kapok. Close to the window, where the light was strongest, was my father's tool box. At the head of the bed was a pillow, and over my father's slumber bed were containers of extracts from plants and the bark of trees. These pots all had metal lids and

were profusely and curiously garlanded with chaplets of cowry shells. It didn't take me a long time to discover that they were the most important items in the workshop. They contained magic charms—those mysterious liquids that kept evil at bay—and, if smeared on the body, made it invulnerable to every kind of black magic. My father, before going to bed, never failed to smear his body with a little of each liquid, first one, then another, for each charm had its own particular property, but exactly what property I did not know.

From the veranda where I played, I could keep an eye on the workshop, and the adults could keep an eye on me. You could find my father in the workshop looking after his work as a blacksmith, repairing delicate mechanisms, hoes, knives and cutlasses. There he received his friends and his customers. The place resounded with noise from morning to night. Moreover, everyone who entered or left our concession had to cross the workshop. There was a perpetual coming and going, though no one seemed to be in any particular hurry. Each had his bit of gossip, each at the forge to watch. Sometimes I crept near the door, but I rarely went in. Everyone frightened me, and I would run away as soon as anyone tried to touch me. It was not until much later that I got into the habit of crouching in a corner of the workshop to watch the fire blazing in the forge.

My private domain at that time was the veranda that encircled my father's workshop, my mother's workshop, and the orange tree that grew in the middle of the compound.

Ever since that day when I had been forbidden by my mother to play with snakes, I ran to her as soon as I saw one. "There is a snake!" I would cry.

"What? Another?"

She would come running to see what sort of snake it was. If it was a snake like any other normal snake, she would immediately beat it to death, and like all the women of our country, she would work herself into a frenzy beating the snake to a pulp. One day, however, I noticed a little black snake with a strikingly marked body. He was proceeding slowly in the direction of the workshop. I ran to warn my mother, as usual. But as soon as she saw the black snake, she spoke to me gravely. "My son, this one must not be killed; he is not like other snakes, and he will not harm you; you must never interfere with him." Everyone in our concession knew that this snake must not be killed—everyone except myself and, I supposed, my little playmates, who were still ignorant children. "This snake," my mother added, "is your father's guiding spirit."

I gazed dumfounded at the little snake. He was proceeding calmly toward the workshop, gracefully, very sure of himself, and almost as if conscious of his immunity. His body, black and brilliant, glittered in the harsh light of the

sun. When he reached the workshop, I noticed for the first time a small hole. “Look,” said my mother, “the snake is going to pay your father a visit.”

Immediately after the evening meal, when the palavers were over, my father bid his friends farewell and sat under the veranda of his workshop. I seated myself near him. I began questioning him in a dilatory manner, as all children do in Sierra Leone, regarding every subject under the sun. Only this evening, I withheld what troubled me, waiting for the opportunity when my face betrayed nothing. I then might ask the question that had worried me so deeply from the moment when I first saw the black snake going toward the workshop. Finally, unable to restrain myself any longer, I asked my father about the little snake that came to visit him. “What snake do you mean?” my father said.

“Why, the little black snake that my mother forbids to kill.”

He gazed at me for a long while, like he seemed to be considering whether to answer or not. Perhaps he was thinking about how old I was; perhaps he thought it was not too soon to confide such a secret to a twelve-year-old boy. Then suddenly he made up his mind. “That snake,” he said, “is the guiding spirit of our race.” He finished by saying, “That snake, he has always been with us. He has always made himself known to one of us. In our time, it is to me that he has made himself known.”



AMBER ALLEN

“I LIVE FOR ADVENTURE, THE SPONTANEOUS ONES MOST OF ALL. I NEVER LEAVE MY HOUSE WITHOUT A PEN, PAPER, AND A CAMERA, SO I CAN WRITE DOWN ANYTHING THAT COMES TO MIND AND CAPTURE A FLEETING MOMENT. IT’S SO EXCITING TO FIND PERFECT MOMENTS IN THE MOST UNEXPECTED PLACES! I BASED ‘HAZE’ OFF OF MY OWN MEMORY PROBLEMS THAT I DEAL WITH ON A DAILY BASIS.”



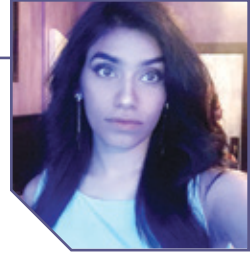
HAZE

AMBER ALLEN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

As the days pass me by,
my past becomes more like a haze.
As the dawn breaks,
yesterday slowly fades to haze.
As you speak about all the fun and games of days now passed,
I smile and remain silent,
maybe nod in agreement.
But these iron gates of days long passed
stay locked away
in the depths of my broken memory.
And though I try to grasp it,
I lose it as you change the subject.
How I try.
How I wish I could remember as so many do.
Yet I still feel this haze following me,
taunting me.
I can't seem to remember what was right there in front of me.
As the fog covers my past,
I sometimes feel like a memory is so close,
but then it is lost,
and I remain a bit stricken with anguish at the loss of it.
The things I remember
are not significant to you
and hold little truths of little snippets of memories for me.
I wonder why this must happen.
As I ponder over why some of these memories come and go,
I struggle to remember who you are.
I ask myself,
Are these memories even real?
Sometimes I remember it differently from all of you,
and that terrifies me,
but I act as though it never fazes me.
Here I smile
and go along with you.
Hey, how are you?
Don't worry, I'm sure that I remember you.
I pause and rack my brain,
but all I see is this never-ending haze.

SAMAH ALSARHANI

WINNER OF GRAND PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



"I AM A JUNIOR IN THE COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE. I HAVE BEEN LIVING IN THE U.S. FOR SIX YEARS NOW. I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN IRAQ. I MOVED TO LIVE IN SYRIA AFTER THE IRAQ INVASION, AND THEN I FINALLY MOVED TO THE U.S. I'VE ENJOYED DRAWING FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER. I WANT MY ART AND MY WORK TO INFLUENCE EVERYONE AROUND ME AND BE MY MARK IN THIS WORLD."

ARTWORK COLLECTION

SAMAH ALSARHANI • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

MIRROR



AURA



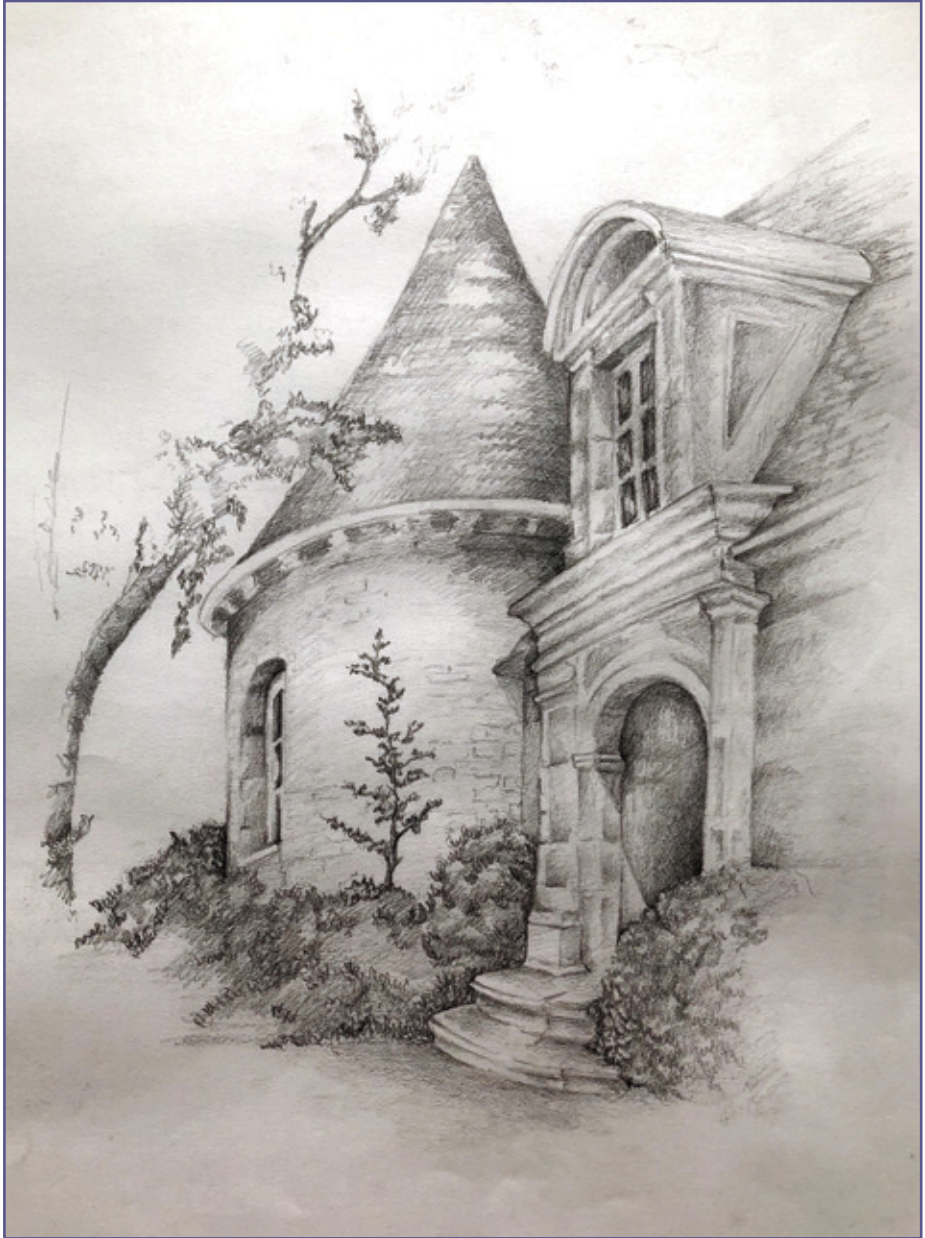
ME-TOON



CLOUDS OF COLOR



PART



ADAM TAGART

"I ENJOY PLAYING SPORTS AND VIDEO GAMES, AND I'M A BIG MINNESOTA VIKINGS FAN. IN MY FREE TIME, I LIKE TO READ PHILOSOPHY; MY FAVORITE PHILOSOPHERS ARE JESUS OF NAZARETH, MARCUS AURELIUS, THOMAS PAINE, AND WILLIAM LANE CRAIG. I WROTE THESE POEMS IN MY INTRO TO CREATIVE WRITING CLASS. I DIDN'T HAVE MUCH EXPERIENCE IN WRITING POETRY, BUT I WANTED TO CHALLENGE MYSELF. I RESEARCHED ABOUT SONNETS AND EVENTUALLY DECIDED TO TELL COMPLEX IDEAS THROUGH THIS TYPE OF POETRY, WHICH SEEMED TO ME TO BE ORDERED AND SIMPLE. THE IDEA WAS THAT ALTHOUGH THERE ARE BIG, COMPLEX ISSUES WE FACE, THERE IS STILL SIMPLICITY TO BE FOUND."



THE REFUGEE

ADAM TAGART • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Division has laid waste to this nation
Sides have been chosen, my countrymen killed
Once a vibrant people, now with darkness filled
Leave, choose sides, or wait inauguration?
I have no desire to bear arms, to kill his creation
No more, too much blood has been spilled
A new life for what's left of my family is what I will build
I will leave my native land and chase this worthy aspiration
Through hills and desert I moved with determination
Leading my family with wisdom instilled
We made it to our new home, for centuries tilled
A land filled with tradition and culture, my new fixation
Although my mind was present, my heart was in the past
My longing to return to America, will never go surpassed.

COUNCIL OF CREATION

ADAM TAGART • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Who can contain this? What I have to give.
This love I am, this desire to create.
I want children, a place for them to live.
Free will, for them to learn which way is straight.
They may go astray, much pain to endure.
To live among them, my goal to achieve.
This road is long and painful, this I assure.
Do I gift my life although I may grieve?
Still their choices I will not violate.
I can see the chaos they will conspire.
A plan of redemption to formulate,
Empty myself on a cross to inspire.
But they are worth it, oh, are they worth it.
To be with them, I vow to never quit.

BEFORE THE BATTLE

ADAM TAGART • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

The hands shaking, the mind waking
This soldier will go to war
Her control waning, her nerves need taming
Tomorrow's battle, what is in store?
Look into the fire and see your future
Move swiftly and engage the doubt to come
Tell yourself, tell yourself until you are sure
About the victory that is to be won
Gird yourself with this mindset
Mount your horse and ride
You have chosen yourself and bet
That you will stand as the armies collide
The night before a warrior's heart is wrought,
This battle is to be won before the battle is to be fought

IN PRISON I WAIT

ADAM TAGART • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

As I sit here, my hands and feet bound in chains,
It seems all there is left for me is to reflect.
Is it you, Lord, the Romans, who to blame?
Is this part of your plan or a failure to protect?
For I remember what you said,
“Never will I leave or forsake you.”
It now seems in your steps I was led;
From what I overheard, in moments my life is due.
I hear them coming for me, God.
I’m a sheep about to be slaughtered.
In my death, the wolves will laud.
For my life, no one has bartered.
Nonetheless, I will die with my head held high
As I wait to be ushered into your all-consuming light.

DEATH OF A TYRANT

ADAM TAGART • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

For years and years, your heavy hand has laid
Upon the backs of us peasants and slaves.
Our lives and homes you took; nothing you made.
We wanted dignity; nothing you gave.
The limit to how far we can be pushed
Now overflows with rage and violent speech.
In your high castle you will be ambushed;
Those you thought as lesser, will impeach.
Your walls were broke through; the people ran wild,
Met with armored and loyal guards to you.
The clashing of bodies, tempers not mild.
The horde prevailed, dead laid the few.
To your chambers we went to seek your head.
Though too late, by your hand already dead.

ANGELA CYZA

"I WAS IN THE SCC MUSICAL VERSION OF QUILTERS, AND I MET SOME LADIES WHO HAD HAND-QUILTED A GIANT QUILT, AND THEIR LIVES RAN SIMILARLY TO THE PEOPLE IN THE MUSICAL. I WAS INSPIRED TO CREATE A PIECE OF PROSE WRITING ABOUT THE QUILT, AND I'M A VISUAL PERSON, SO I LIKED HAVING THE ARTWORK AND WRITING TOGETHER. I LIVE IN LINCOLN WITH MY HUSBAND AARON AND MY DOG FRANNIE, AND I LOVE TO BE IN MY FLOWER GARDEN. AS A KID, I HATED HELPING MY MOM AND GRANDMA IN THEIR LARGE GARDENS, BUT SOME BUG MUST HAVE BITTEN ME AS AN ADULT BECAUSE NOW I SEE WHAT THEY LOVED ABOUT IT."



THE LORD'S QUILT

ANGELA CYZA • RADIOLOGY PROGRAM INSTRUCTOR

After laboring in the garden during the late days of May, I sat down next to a cool running stream to rest. As I lay back against a tree, nature's embrace hugged me gently, and I found myself dozing against her tranquil bosom. As I slumbered, I began to dream, and in my dream, the LORD appeared to me. He bid me come with him, so I rose and took his hand while he led me down the garden path.

As we arrived at the center of the garden, we took our rest on a bench that seemed to be awaiting our company. The LORD placed upon my lap a quilt. HE never spoke, but as I looked at the counterpane under HIS gaze, I slowly came to understand the meaning held within it. At the moment of my creation, strips of calico were placed in my crib by the heavenly hosts. The colors were pure white contrasted by a dark blue. As I peered closer into the quilt, I began to recognize that the white fabric was placed over the joys and good deeds in my life. The dark blue lay over all the sadness, burdens, and shameful sins I had encountered. The strips were not patterned in any traditional way, yet each connected to create a beautiful pattern all its own. Each strip was fit together with a precision that no earthly hand has ever achieved. In some areas of the quilt, the white pieces stretched on and on. In others, it was a sea of blue as vast as the ocean. Still other areas were candied, striping back and forth with the two colors.

Right then, the LORD touched my hand, and I gazed into his lovely countenance. HIS love and sorrow gleamed so brightly, my soul bid my eyes to look away from it, but HIS strength held my gaze, and my soul quieted. That

moment seemed at once an eternity and an instant. When I turned back to the quilt, my eyes looked at it afresh, and I noticed for the first time tiny quilting stitches. I saw one thread that ran through the center of the quilt. I came to understand that this was my thread, and I saw stitch after stitch passing over the quilt of my life's events. There were many other threads, too. Some ran right alongside mine. I then noticed some stopped abruptly, and a knot was tied as that life finished. But the thread remained forever a part of my quilt. Some of the threads passed in and out over the top of mine. Some passed over it only once. But each had left its mark, and each would remain forever with no way to remove the effect and addition to the pattern.

After sitting and gazing at my life for a long while, I finally gained the strength to speak. "What shall I do with my quilt, LORD, when it is finished?"

And then, HE finally spoke aloud. "My dear child, I have provided you with the materials to form this quilt. I guided you and helped you sew it, but it was you who decided the pattern. When your quilt is finished, I will sit at the right hand of MY FATHER as you present to HIM the work of your hands. Make this offering worthy of HIS gaze, for it is said,

'Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded'" (2 Chronicles 15:7).

A light mist began to form, and as the water dripped from my lashes, I awoke from my dream. My hands reached out, but the LORD'S quilt had faded into the mist. I rose as I heard footsteps down the garden path, and there appeared my husband clothed in blue and white. And hand in hand, we moved into the house as two threads running down the center of a quilt.



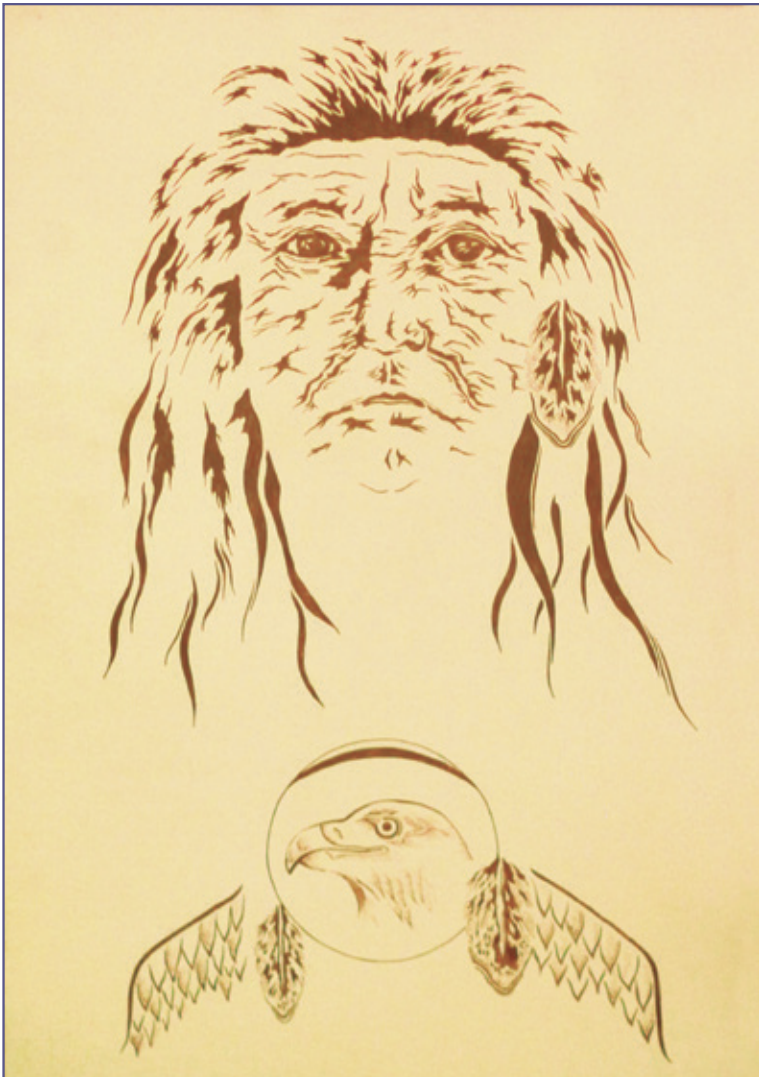
KENNY FREE FOX

KENNY WORKS AS A CUSTODIAN FOR SCC'S CONTINUING EDUCATION CENTER. HE WAS INSPIRED TO SUBMIT HIS BEAUTIFUL ARTWORK AFTER PICKING UP A COPY OF ILLUMINATIONS.



CHIEF NEZ PERCE

KENNY FREE FOX • CUSTODIAN



NATIVE FACES

KENNY FREE FOX • CUSTODIAN



JASON BETZ

"I AM A STUDENT AT SCC GETTING MY ASSOCIATES IN WELDING. I WORK THREE JOBS AND AM GOING TO SCHOOL FULL-TIME. I'M ALWAYS DOING SOMETHING TO KEEP MYSELF BUSY! COME TO FIND OUT, I EXCELLED IN MY COMPOSITION I CLASS BY WRITING A PROFILE ON SCULPTOR FRED HOPPE AND A MEMOIR ON CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP."



THE MAMMOTH

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JASON BETZ • WELDING TECHNOLOGY

With my class, I went on a fieldtrip to Morrill Hall at the University of Nebraska campus. The goal of the field trip was to find something to write about for a Nebraska profile paper. As a child 25 years ago, I had enjoyed the bronze mammoth sculpture, Archie, in front of Morrill Hall, and I was thinking of writing my paper on it. Prior to the fieldtrip, I had talked to my godparents, Bill and Sandra Harder, about why I was going to Morrill Hall. They had told me that they had participated in the fundraiser that built Archie. Their intimate knowledge made me want to write

my paper on Archie more than ever because I had a little more of a connection with Archie other than enjoying him as a kid.

Although I felt like I already knew what I was going to write my paper on, I went into Morrill Hall with an open mind because there was so much to see there. After the field trip, I returned to my godparents' house. I began talking with them about what I had seen. I told them that even though there were many artifacts, sculptures, and taxidermy animals to write my paper on, I was still writing my paper on Archie.

I was talking with Bill about what he knew about Archie when he said I should call the artist. At first, I thought he was crazy. Then he told me that he knew the artist, and they had been friends for many years. So I did—I contacted Fred Hoppe. I am so happy I did, too, because Hoppe was more than happy to let me interview him. I sent him an email with some questions, and Hoppe answered them all. He was a tremendous help for my research on Archie.

Archie the mammoth was “discovered in Lincoln County, by a rancher when he noticed his chickens pecking at something white in the ground, which turned out to be a mammoth fossil,” Fred told me (Hoppe). Archie the sculpture took approximately one year to make. UNL couldn't come up with the funds for the sculpture, so Hoppe made 100 miniature sculptures of Archie to sell. Those miniature sculptures of Archie sold for \$1000 each, making \$100,000 to fund Archie. Hoppe didn't hold back to find the research to make the mammoth. He was given permission to use the records of the Natural History Department. There he “measured actual bones of a Colombian mammoth and consulted the experts with UNL” (Hoppe). Hoppe made the sculpture as precise as possible. He had an agreement with the staff at Morrill Hall to approve for precision the final prototype of Archie. He “relied on the advice of the experts at UNL, even for the size of the ears and the amount of hair to put on the skin” (Hoppe). That

mammoth, still to this day, is the largest one found in the world. That is something great about Nebraska I did not know.

In the process of finding more research about Archie, I began to find out more about Mr. Hoppe. My godparents



had purchased one of the miniature sculptures of Archie, and they told me that they had other bronze sculptures made by Hoppe—a total of three sculptures and even two taxidermy animals. The three sculptures show elk sparring, geese flying in formation, and the miniature sculpture of Archie. The two taxidermy animals are a mountain lion and a bobcat. Therefore, Hoppe does more than bronze sculptures. The more research I found about Hoppe and the making of Archie, the more I learned how extraordinary Fred Hoppe is.

Fred Hoppe is from Schuyler, Nebraska. He graduated in 1975 from Nebraska Western with an Associate in Arts Degree. Later, Hoppe went to the University of Nebraska and there became a business major. While he was a student at UNL, Hoppe had a studio in the old downtown Lincoln



building. Hoppe liked to hang around at Morrill Hall and at the university's Natural History Museum. Hoppe had "always been interested in the study of wildlife and wildlife anatomy" (Hoppe). The resource, "About Fred Hoppe," mentions that "director Harvey Gunderson had an impact on Hoppe with inspiration for museum taxidermy." Hoppe's field studies have taken him to Alaska 42 times, and eight of those field studies have been above the Arctic Circle. Hoppe has been to Canada's Yukon and Northwest Territories and most of North America's back country areas. He has also made it over to Europe and Africa (Hoppe).

Hoppe is widely known in Nebraska for his bronze sculpture of Tom Osborne and Nebraska football player Brook Berringer, located near Memorial Stadium on the UNL campus. Hoppe's most successful sculpture is a "Bald Eagle in sitting position," which was commissioned for President George H. Bush (Hoppe). Hoppe's favorite sculpture is Rocky Mountain Challenge, "The Fighting Elk that the Harders have" (Hoppe). Knowing that Hoppe is doing artwork for someone's home and for an ex-President goes to show how extraordinary his work really is. Not that many people can say that about their artwork.

Additionally, Hoppe's artwork has added to the pleasantness of homes and

offices other than for my godparents Bill and Sandra. For example, Hoppe's work can be found in the homes and offices of the late former President George H. Bush, General Norman Schwarzkopf, the President of Ireland, King Juan Carlos of Spain, and Ross Perot. Sculptures have even made it into the homes of old actors, comedians, singers, and songwriters, such as actor and political activist Charlton Heston, Bob Hope, Mickey Rooney, singer Tony Orlando, and country singer Dolly Parton. Hoppe even has two pieces in the White House (Hoppe). Once again, Hoppe is showing me how extraordinary is his drive for success and what he has accomplished.



According to "About Fred Hoppe," Hoppe has donated hundreds of sculptures to charity. One of those charities was the Make-A-Wish Foundation. He has also planned, paid for, generated, and carried out the Veterans Memorial Museum in Branson, Missouri. Hoppe put over 2000 exhibits and artifacts in an 18,000 square foot area and wrote every script on each display himself. Hoppe did this as a gesture for veterans of the 20th century. For Hoppe's honoring of his country's veterans, in 2005, Tennessee gave him the Medal of Freedom. Hoppe "has completed over 200 life-size monuments across the United States, including the world's largest wildlife sculpture for Cabela's Kansas City. Over 100 of these life-size sculptures are soldiers created to honor our country's veterans" ("About Fred Hoppe"). Hoppe's bronze sculptures "have been donated to non-profit organizations, such as the Eppley Cancer Center, Nebraska schools, and others, raising over \$1,000,000" ("About Fred Hoppe"). Hoppe is an amazing gentleman and a true patriot. Hoppe does not hold back—from having the Archie sculpture in front of Morrill Hall to all his efforts making so many donations.

My first choice for my Nebraska profile was Archie, but it seems I have found a new role model. Fred Hoppe is an extraordinary and amazing gentleman. He is a great patriot to his country and to the state of Nebraska. Hoppe has accomplished more than most people and is a very talented artist. I'm an artist, as well, although I'm going to SCC to be a welder. I, too, have an

outstanding drive and motivation. Hoppe's work led to bronze sculpting, and my road may lead me to some kind of sculpting later in life. Little did I know that Hoppe and I have some things in common.

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CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP

JASON BETZ • WELDING TECHNOLOGY

My mother used to make the best chicken noodle soup. Mom would make her chicken noodle soup from scratch, and when I was a child, that soup was my favorite. On nights we had chicken noodle soup, I was never late making it to the dinner table. She would also make enough to have leftovers for days. I wasn't the only one in my family to think the same way about her chicken noodle soup. However, one night there was a subtle change in the soup.

She would use slow roasted rotisserie chicken. This wasn't some slow roasted chicken from the store. She had a rotisserie machine, and she would let the chicken roast all day while she was at work. That was how we always knew that we were to have soup that night; when we would wake up and get ready for school, there would be chicken cooking. When we would get home from school, the whole house would have that comforting smell of slow roasted chicken. She used this secret blend of spices. She never would let us know exactly what it was, but anyone could take a guess by the distinctive smell of rosemary, garlic, oregano, and black pepper. I know she used salt, but we wouldn't be able to smell the salt. Still, who uses black pepper without salt? The slow roasted chicken was one thing that made Mom's soup taste unlike anyone else's soup.

My mother always had two or three gardens. She had one at home, where she grew lots of flowers and some herbs. I could go out to the back yard in the middle of summer and enjoy the airy, clean, floral smell of the lilac bush, roses, dill, mint, and rosemary. The other two gardens were at small community gardens close to home. In those gardens, she grew tomatoes, bell peppers, radishes, celery, corn, zucchini, squash, cucumbers, onions, carrots—just about any kind of veggie. When she would make her chicken noodle soup, she would use the vegetables from those gardens. Using those fresh veggies were another

thing that made the soup something special. Nonetheless, those were not the only two things making the soup so celebrated.

Mom would make egg noodles from scratch. Using those egg noodles set the soup over the top. Now, I will say, not every time she made the soup did she use the fresh egg noodles. Sometimes, Mom just didn't have the time to make the noodles. My mom was always doing something to stay busy. From about 5:00 in the morning until about 9:00 at night, she never stopped moving. If Mom wasn't working, she was in the garden or working at a food give-away. Mother was an extraordinary, motivated, and productive person. That is where I get the same drive—from my mom.

One night, Mom made her distinguished, legendary-to-the-family chicken noodle soup. But this batch of bouillon was different, making it even more special. There was something that made it like no other. Most of the time, I would have two or three bowls of soup. That night, I had four. The whole family would grub down on her soup. No one could really place their taste buds on what was so different about the soup that particular night. Every single person at the table made comments on how delicious and extremely tender the meat was. Everyone had more than normal, some eating twice as much as usual. Usually, there were plenty of leftovers, but oddly enough, there wasn't much left over that night.

The next day, I couldn't wait to get home from school to have a bowl of that curiously different soup. I purposely had not eaten lunch to have room for that soup. On the ride home, I asked the driver to speed up—he wasn't driving fast enough. When I finally made it home, I ran into the house and made my way to the kitchen to warm up some soup. I ate all the leftovers. When I was eating the soup, there was one point where I wasn't even using a spoon, just drinking the soup right out of the bowl. I spilled the soup out of the corner of my mouth and some down the front of my shirt, and I wiped the excess soup away with my wrist. I made myself look like a pig, but I enjoyed and savored every bite.

When Mom got home, she noticed I had eaten all the leftovers. She wasn't necessarily upset, but more disappointed that she couldn't have any. I had never seen my mom act that way; the look on her face concerned me. One minute, she had the look of excitement, and then all her emotions just completely left her face. Her lower lip stuck out like the lip of a sad child not able to get candy from the store. Her body language said the same thing. Mom shrugged forward, started to hunch over, and looked to the ground like she was never going to be able to have any of her soup again.

So, in order to cheer her up, I asked her to make some more soup, and I

volunteered to cut up veggies. Then she replied, “I don’t have all the ingredients.” When she said this, I was confused. I thought she had more than enough of everything to make the soup.

However, I looked in the refrigerator, and I saw there wasn’t any chicken. I said, “Let’s go to the store and get another chicken.” I had started wondering what the heck she was talking about. I asked her, “Well, what the hell else are we missing?”

With a concerned look on her face, Mom asked me with a downward glance, “Do you remember Snookum?”

My heart froze. I said, “Let’s go to the store and get another chicken.”

One day after school, when I was nine, I had found a rabbit in the yard. I took the rabbit in the house after spending almost an hour trying to catch it. I waited for my mother to get home to ask her if I could keep the bunny. It was several days after Easter, and Mom thought it might be someone’s pet; the rabbit was just a baby bunny—probably a gift to a child. So she wanted to put up flyers for a bunny that had been found. It wasn’t like a wild rabbit; it was all black with a little brown spot on its chest, and I had been able to catch it in the first place, so we knew it wasn’t feral.

We put up flyers all around the neighborhood, but I really wanted to keep the bunny. That night, I went out and took down all the flyers. I was thinking, “If no one calls for the rabbit, Mom will let me keep it.” And I did get to keep the bunny.

Over time, I stopped taking care of the rabbit, and Mom took over. Mom worked at one of the dorms on UNL in the cafeteria. Every shift, she would bring home scraps from the salad bar to give to Snookums. The rabbit got so big and lazy that it would just lay next to the pail of food and eat, barely reaching over to get food and not even sitting up to eat. Snookums had a big cage, which was kept outside.

One day, mom asked me if she could take Snookums to the bunny farm. She described the bunny farm as a playground for rabbits. I said OK because I was almost 15 years old and not that into the rabbit much anymore, and I wasn’t taking care of it. Snookums just slept, ate, drank water, pooped, and peed. Snookums became a massive rabbit, like a five-gallon bucket with legs. I had never seen a rabbit so huge before. It would stretch out to more than five feet. Snookums slept all day and laid around getting no exercise. As a result, Snookums’s meat became very tender.

The distinguished, legendary, celebrated chicken noodle soup my mom had made that particular night was priceless. I understood then exactly what ingredient

Mom was missing to make that “chicken” noodle soup, and that was why she was disappointed and sad when there weren’t any leftovers. She knew that she would never be able to make a batch like that again. She had put in all the work and didn’t get any of the awards of leftovers. It was almost like she had been raising the rabbit to eat one day, like she would a farm animal.

No matter what, to this day, that was the best “chicken” noodle soup I have ever had. Even though Snookums was my pet rabbit, I was old enough to know not to be upset with Mom, and I thanked her for the priceless “chicken” noodle soup.



TANYA HARE

“I LOVE TAKING PHOTOS; THIS IS SOMETHING I INHERITED FROM MY MOM. “BE CAREFUL WHEN YOU LOOK INTO THE MIRROR” IS ONE OF MY FAVORITE PICTURES OF MY PARENTS AND THEIR DOG, PETEY. I WAS TAKING PHOTOS OF MY PARENTS FOR THEIR 50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY; I HAD TAKEN A COUPLE OF THEM, AND PETEY SAT WELL FOR THEM. THIS WAS THE LAST PHOTO I TOOK, AND WE ALL LOVE THE ENERGY.”



BE CAREFUL WHEN YOU LOOK INTO THE MIRROR

TANYA HARE • ACCOUNT CLERK, BUSINESS OFFICE



MARK BILLESBACH

"I WAS THE KID WHO ALWAYS HAD TO TAKE TOYS APART TO SEE HOW THEY WORKED, AND I LIKE MAKING THINGS WITH MY HANDS AND WELDING FOUND OBJECTS. I'M AN ELECTRICIAN FOR THE BEATRICE CAMPUS."



THE POTTER

MARK BILLESBACH • MAINTENANCE WORKER, PHYSICAL PLANT



DEVLIN ANDREW HARRIS

WINNER OF GRAND PRIZE POETRY AWARD



"I WROTE 'BUBBLEGUM AND LEMONHEADS' FOR MY BEST FRIEND, WHO HAS BEEN HELPING ME FIND MYSELF. THERE WILL BE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE THAT WILL MEAN THE WORLD TO YOU; DON'T LET THEM LEAVE WITHOUT LETTING THEM KNOW HOW IMPORTANT THEY ARE. 'LOVE, I THINK' IS ABOUT AN OVERWHELMING PASSION THAT LASTED FOR ONLY A MINUTE. SOME OF THE THINGS I WRITE SOUND BETTER WHEN SPOKEN, AND 'ARTISTIC INTENT' IS ONE OF THEM. I LOVE THIS PIECE FOR ITS BUILD-UP AND RESOLUTION, AND REPETITION IS ONE OF MY FAVORITE TECHNIQUES TO USE. FINALLY, 'BELIEF/OUR CATHEDRAL' WAS THOUGHT UP IN A SHOWER BRAINSTORMING SESSION! THIS POEM MEANS A LOT TO ME BECAUSE IT IS ABOUT WHERE I HAVE BEEN EMOTIONALLY FOR A WHILE NOW. THE FIRST THREE LINES OF THAT POEM ARE MY FAVORITE LINES I HAVE EVER WRITTEN."

BELIEF/OUR CATHEDRAL

DEVLIN ANDREW HARRIS • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

She believes in God

I believe in the ocean

Under the sun soaked in faith

An open vase with two matches, a home for two soulmates

She says she wants a love like that

But I can't tell the smoke from the ashes

Or the fire from the mattress

She believes in love

Maybe I'll believe in time

BUBBLEGUM AND LEMONHEADS

DEVLIN ANDREW HARRIS • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

Hands like a magic trick

Favorite band sounding like an activist

But every song takes him back to this

In vain, pulling rabbits out of wrists

Maybe this is something he can fix

She smiles like the sun, he's reminded of a son

Just a boy baking like a raisin praying for the one

If he could find in a friend what he confides in the end

He won't have to lie in the sin or hide from who he's been

He burns like broken embers in a kiln

Forging words from iron and steel, she's made of iron and will

They fly higher and still desire fire to feel

She is stronger than her namesake, her and Hercules in the same place

Pacing in parentheses, he's not as patient as he used to be

"Why is she choosing me?" Her eyes are where her truth could be

Window shopping in the same way, but his would never vacate

Hands liken to a tragic tick

Abstract fashion fit for a masochist

Imagine this. They'll make it there and back again

Only to find she's magic and he's rabbit-less

For my best friend, Val

ARTISTIC INTENT

DEVLIN ANDREW HARRIS • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

Love.

*A dangerous, cantankerous thing. No anchor is made for this
Pen and paper blamed for it, if I had a name for it
If I had a name for it, then I would be a slave for it*

She said that I scoff too often
That I'm often too lost in the moment
The moment we first met, she smelled like a poem. Like loose leaves in the fall.
She had me falling like a paper plane with clipped wings
Winging it onstage because I reached the spotlight and forgot all my lines
She said it was fine. She never liked my acting anyway
She said if she wanted to date a phony, she would have gone for Oscar or Tony
If she wanted a Golden Globe she wouldn't have settled for a Lemonhead
She said I'm too sweet. That my lips look like strawberry fields and my kisses
taste like forever. Yeah, she's a Beatles fan.
I was more of a fan of needles.
On a syringe binge, she was my heroine in a red dress
I wanted her address to correspond with where my head rested
I wanted to take the rings from my eyes and wrap them around her finger so
she would know she was the reason I couldn't sleep at night
She said I was her knight in shining armor. Like a page from a fairy tale

Love.

*If I had a name for it, maybe I could've changed for it
Played the game a different way and kept
her away from it*

Her laughter was supposed to be my happily ever after. But it was stifled by
heaven's rifleman
Like lightning striking twice, and thunder had the audacity to applaud
She said I'm going home. I'm going back to God.

She said that this was the plan all along and if I'm ever longing for her face
then I need to face the facts, retrace our steps and reenact for a friend. This isn't
the end.

This is just a long-lost friend coming back to visit, isn't it?
Cold hands gripping getting wet. Blurred vision, can I see her yet?
Timid lemonhead pressed against her wilting smile
She asked what were the first lines I remember writing about her...

*Roses are red
Violets are blue
Every road has led me to you*

She said that I scoff too often
That I'm often too lost in the moment to know when she's gone
The moment she left. She smelled like a poem. Like loose leaves in the fall
I'm falling from cloud nine, the wind constantly reminding me that she was
never mine
And if she was His the whole time, she should have told me. Because now...
Now I have no one to hold me when I drop
No one to scold me when I scoff
No one to write a poem about when I'm lost

*If I had a name for it, my mother would tell me
to pray for it. Ain't that a shame that I am to blame for it?
What's in a name but a home and a place to grow?
Every passing season gives me a reason, too...
Spring showers, summer sun, and winter cold
Hold my name in contempt and place the blame*

...she smelled like a poem. Like lost leaves when she fell for me.

Love.

LOVE, I THINK

DEVLIN ANDREW HARRIS • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

The summer smells of swisher sweets
The tip of my tongue between your teeth
Two lips first broken as if to speak
These words like wine, I pine for a taste
A red like love, I'd love if you had some to waste
On a drunk like me, in a place like this

NYAMUOCH DUOTH

"I AM A WOMAN WHO WAS BORN IN A REFUGEE CAMP IN ETHIOPIA; I HAVE BEEN IN AMERICA SINCE I WAS FOUR. 'USE OF EXCESSIVE FORCE' WAS WRITTEN FOR MY AMERICAN GOVERNMENT CLASS."

THE USE OF EXCESSIVE FORCE

NYAMUOCH T. DUOTH • ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE/ACADEMIC TRANSFER

The term "excessive force" is defined as when the use of force is greater than that which is reasonable under certain circumstances. In legal terms, the use of excessive force does not seem to have a direct law holding officers and others accountable if the findings show that unnecessary use of force was committed. The Supreme Court has made it clear that the Fourth Amendment applies to questions regarding the use of excessive force but does not give a clear and concise set of guidelines to when excessive force, whether deadly or not, should be implemented. The facts remain that without a new law or ordinance to the way excessive force is used, members of society will continue to be subjected to unnecessary harm.

This problem has been around since law and order was formed, but it made public notice as early as the 1980s with one of the landmark cases being that of

Graham v. Connor, 490 U.S. 386 (1989), in which the Supreme Court reversed the appellate court's earlier judgment under a four-part substantive due process.

The key players in preventing an actual excessive force law are those of the governmental position, such as lawmakers and politicians in the higher positions. The reasoning behind the resistance to forming an excessive force law is because of the analysis widely used by courts all over the country. The courts' assumptions on excessive force equating self-defense for law enforcement is what has allowed the use of force as the directed choice by law enforcement officials. Granted, officers must have the ability to serve and protect, as well as keep members of society safe from the harm of those committing crimes; they must also protect themselves in the matter of life or death situations. The lines have become blurry, however, when it comes to the use of excessive force, leaving other options such as negotiations and deescalating tactics ignored.

The other issue that plays a part in certain situations is the qualified immunity given to law enforcement in cases regarding death if it is found that the officer had reasonable suspicion to use deadly force on a suspect, whether or not the later results show that it was needless. According to the *Texas Journal on Civil Liberties and Civil Rights*, when the number of homicides committed by law enforcement is compared to the number of officers killed in the line of duty from 2003 to 2009, the data shows that 94% to 97% of the time, the suspect was the one killed.

Another poll done by the *Texas Journal on Civil Liberties and Civil Rights* also shows that officers killed during an arrest have a 0.00077% chance of happening, and that officers killed during a routine traffic stop have a 0.00004% chance of happening. These two polls illustrate the rarity of an officer facing death during an interaction with a possible suspect.

So how is this problem of excessive force going to be rectified? The problem would first have to be addressed on the state level. According to the Nebraska State Unicameral website, a senator would have to introduce a bill to the legislature (which meets every January). Anyone can suggest an idea for a new law, but regardless, it would still have to be introduced by a senator or a member of the legislative committee. The committee would then meet to debate any amendments needed to add to the bill before making its ultimate passage into law.

The other way a law can be fashioned is through the petition process, which can be done one of two ways: one being an initiative petition, and the other a referendum. An initiative petition has two functions. One is to add or change a law for the entire state. The second use is to amend the state constitution.

A referendum petition is used to rescind a law that the legislature has newly approved. Because of a 1994 Nebraska Supreme Court decision, the mandatory number of signatures is grounded on the number of registered voters at the filing deadline. For an initiative to recommend a law, signatures equaling 7% of the registered voters in the state are needed. For a constitutional amendment, 10% of the registered voters must sign, and for a referendum, 5%. For a referendum that suspends a law from taking effect, 10% of the registered voters must sign the petition. In addition, signatures must be collected from 5% of the registered voters in 38 of the 93 Nebraska counties. This delivery condition applies to both initiative and referendum efforts.

My desired outcome for the excessive force circumstances is that laws should be passed holding officers accountable, training can be offered to teach officers how to deal with certain scenarios—such as dealing with civilians that have illnesses—, and alternatives to deadly use of force or excessive force should be found. I feel that this can be achieved if the citizens and government work together to correct certain areas that make it difficult to ensure both the officers’ and the civilians’ safety. The use of body cameras and dash cameras don’t give society the protection they need, nor do they give enough protection for the police, but regulations, education, and better training can prove to be beneficial for all parties.

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TATIANA STARTSEVA

WINNER OF RUNNER-UP ARTWORK AWARD

"I WAS BORN IN THE USA, BUT I LIVED ALMOST MY WHOLE LIFE IN RUSSIA. YOU CAN SEE THE INFLUENCE OF RUSSIAN CULTURE, PEOPLE, AND ATMOSPHERE ON MY PHOTOS. ALSO, I'M A SAD AND HAPPY GIRL WHO IS TRYING TO ACHIEVE MY GOALS. LET ME CREATE. LET ME OPEN YOU."



PHOTO COLLECTION

TATIANA STARTSEVA • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

POWER OF WOMAN



CAN YOU LIVE HER?



TENDERNESS



OUR SKY IS IN A CAGE



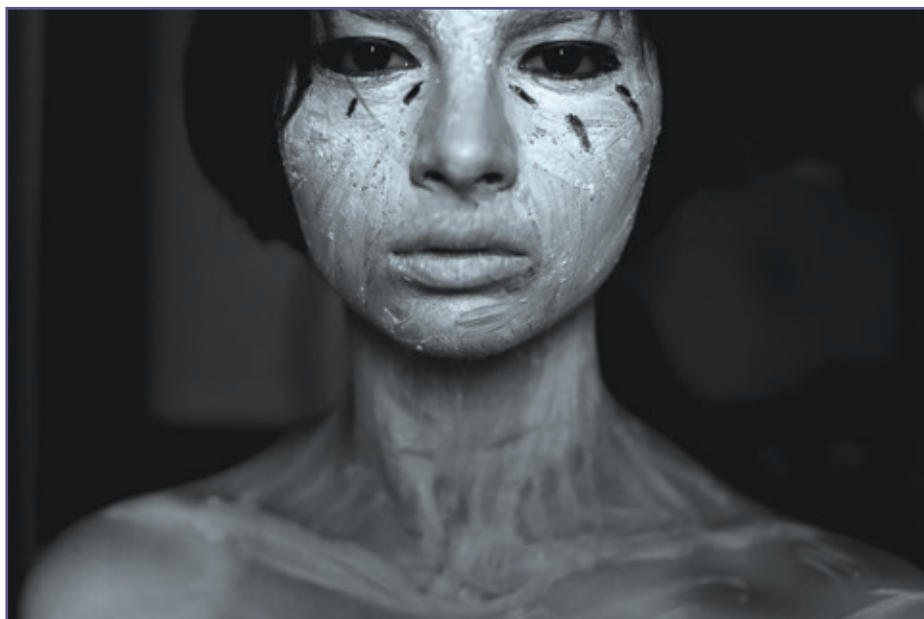
ALONE



YOUR CAGE



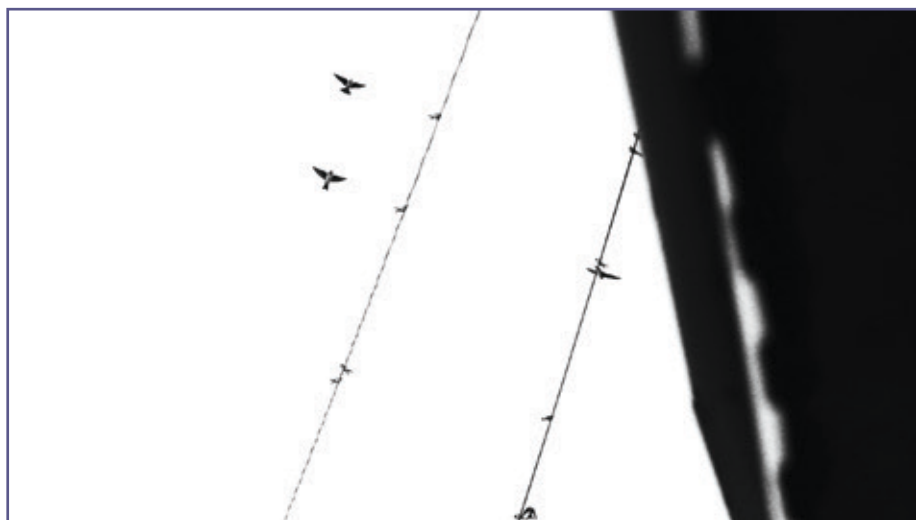
MASK, PAIN



RUSSIA



TOGETHER



VIBRATIONS OF LOVE



ASHLEY SKODA

"I AM A MOTHER OF TWO—ALLIE, 11, AND AIDEN, 8. IN MY SPARE TIME, I READ, DABBLE IN PHOTOGRAPHY, AND SPEND TIME WITH MY FAMILY. I WROTE 'THE ASH TREE MEADOW' FOR MY DAUGHTER. I HOPE THAT SHE TAKES THIS STORY TO HEART AND THAT IT REMINDS HER OF OUR SHARED MEMORIES, WHICH I TREASURE DEEPLY. EVEN WHEN I AM GONE, I WILL BE WITH HER ALWAYS."



THE ASH TREE MEADOW

ASHLEY SKODA • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

It was midday, and Adira made her way through the meadow, the sun shining, casting sunbeams through the trees. She walked to the old ash tree where her mother used to bring her; the lush green grass stretched out to touch the calm sapphire pond. The leaves had just begun to change, and a cool autumn breeze blew her wavy blonde hair. This was their haven, and on days like this, she could still feel her mother next to her.

They used to come here when she was a child. Her mother would pack a picnic lunch, and they would lay in the tall grass talking and looking for shapes in the clouds. Now, in her hand, she held a worn envelope with *Adira* written on the front. When she found the letter, it had been years since her mother had passed. It was still sealed; even now, she didn't know if she could bring herself to open it. This was the first time she had been back to the meadow since her mother's death, and if she was going to read the letter, she wanted to be there, close as she could get to her mother.

As Adira sat and enjoyed the weather, she remembered the first time going to the ash tree meadow. Even though the memory had faded, she could still see her mother. She had wavy blonde hair, deep blue eyes like the pond, cream-colored skin, and a soft smile. Adira imagined her mother sitting next to her younger self on that old blue blanket they had kept in the picnic basket. She had been about five, and that day her mother had packed her favorites: peanut butter and honey, pears, sparkling juice, and lemon bars. She had been anxious about starting school the next week, but her mother had assured her that she would love making new friends and gaining a little independence. When she had started school, it had been just as her mother had said. Within the first few days, she had been so excited to get to her friends that she had almost forgotten to tell her mother goodbye.

Adira got up and walked to the pond, collecting smooth stones as she went. She stood before the pond thinking, as she skipped stones across the clear waters. She liked the way the stones skipped across the water and the way the ripples distorted the reflection of the trees on the far end of the pond. It had been rare for Adira and her mother to spend time, just the two of them. Life had always been busy, but in those moments at the meadow, everything had slowed, and the rest of the world had melted away.

When she was a teenager, Adira and her mother had fought often. She thought she knew better than her mother, and time with friends and boys became more important. Her mother was too controlling, overprotective, and pushy and didn't understand what it was like to be a teenager, Adira would say. Her mother had said she had been a young girl once, and she knew how difficult it could be and just wanted the best for her. Her mother was always pushing her to do things, and Adira felt as though her mother wanted to change who she was. She could remember how angry she had been with her mother on one occasion when she had wanted to visit the meadow with her. "I hate you, and I hate that meadow!" Adira had yelled. Her mother had stood there. Adira knew she had hurt her, but her mother had said nothing, and Adira had immediately wanted to take it back, run over and hug her, say she was sorry—but she couldn't.

Adira returned to her spot under the tree. Her mother had always loved that tree. She could remember her mother telling her how strong and beautiful it was. "The most beautiful things have strength; they go through struggles, but they stay strong," her mother had said. "Storms will come. They will cause damage, but the tree will remain strong."

As Adira slowly opened the envelope, she still didn't know if she could read it—or if she wanted to. She feared what her mother had left to say. She knew this was the last time she would hear her words, and then her mother would be truly gone. As she pulled the letter out, she took a deep breath before beginning to read.

My Sunshine,

I know things are difficult right now, and you are going through a lot. I know you will miss me and be sad sometimes, but know that I will always be with you in your heart. I loved being a mother to you and your brother. Watching you both grow gave my life more joy than I ever thought possible. I remember how I felt at your first school performance. My heart was so full of pride for you, and I never knew what happy tears were until that moment. I loved our dance parties in the living room, reading to you, kissing you goodnight, and singing your song. I loved teaching you to ride

your bike. You fought me and said you couldn't do it, but minutes later, I watched you peddle down the street alone yelling "WOOHOO!" at the top of your lungs. You looked so free and proud, and I am glad I got to share that moment with you.

You are so kind and caring. I remember how you cared for your baby brother when he hurt his foot—carrying him to the chair, bandaging him up, getting him a drink, and sitting with him until he felt better. I loved watching you grow, and my only regret is that I don't have more time with you. You are an amazing girl and a wonderful daughter. I never wanted to change you, just push you to be your best. Make sure your children know how much you love them. Be patient and enjoy your time with them; it goes too fast.

You have grown into a wonderful young woman. I have always been so proud of you. You and I struggled sometimes, I know, but it never made me love you any less. The things that you have struggled with are also the things that make you so strong. Love with all your heart, but never forget who you are. I know I can't be here with you anymore, but know how much I love you. Always remember that storms will come, but the tree stays strong. You will always be my sunshine.

Love, Mommy

The sun was setting over the meadow, and shades of purple and pink hung in the sky, reflecting on the pond. As Adira folded the letter and returned it to its envelope, she stood there, tears in her eyes, and a somber smile on her face. As she looked toward the tree, she saw her mother standing there smiling back at her.

"Mommy!" Adira heard her daughter Nadia call. She turned around as the young girl leaped into her arms; when she turned back, her mother was gone.



It was midday, and Nadia made her way through the meadow, the sun shining, casting sunbeams through the trees. She walked to the old ash tree where her mother used to bring her; the lush green grass stretched out to touch the calm sapphire pond. The leaves had just begun to change, and a cool autumn breeze blew her wavy blonde hair. This was their haven, and on days like this, she could still feel her mother next to her.



CLINTON SMITH

"I'M ALMOST DONE WITH MY DEGREE AT SCC. I LIKE OBSCURE MUSIC, AND FOOD IS FUN, TOO! I WRITE THINGS, AND SOMETIMES, IT WORKS OUT."



THE SPOONWOOD DREAM

CLINTON SMITH • ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS TECHNOLOGY

A respite betwixt laurel castles

To ponder the life of a short, soft glance

Dream the spoonwood dream upon

The eyelashes of the world

As a katydid in a fever dream

Cast a second question

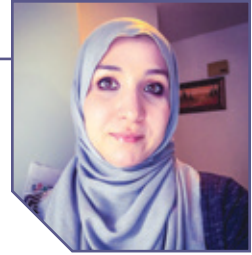
Or a burl affixed to a sapling-neck

Finite grit of reminiscence

Feral and misunderstood

As a vagrant silhouette

NOOR AZEEZ



"ONE DAY, A PROFESSIONAL ARTIST SAID THAT I DIDN'T HAVE THE TALENT TO BE AN ARTIST. I WAS SAD AND WANTED TO GIVE UP. DURING THE SAME WEEK, I SUBMITTED A SIMPLE SKETCH TO MY CLASS AT SCC. THE INSTRUCTOR SAID, 'YOUR SKETCH HAS DA VINCI'S TOUCH.'" AT THAT TIME, I BELIEVED THAT I SHOULD CONTINUE IN THE ART PATH. THEN, INSTRUCTOR BARBARA NEUWERTH TOLD ME ABOUT ILLUMINATIONS AND THAT I NEEDED TO SUBMIT MY ARTWORK. SHE WAS SO HELPFUL IN ENCOURAGING ME TO GO FORWARD. I GRADUATED FROM IRAQI CIVIL ENGINEERING UNIVERSITY IN 2008 AND AM CURRENTLY A STUDENT IN DESIGN AND DRAFTING TECHNOLOGY AT SCC. I LOVE EVERYTHING ABOUT ART."

BE LIKE A CHILD

NOOR AZEEZ • DESIGN AND DRAFTING TECHNOLOGY



LANDSCAPE

NOOR AZEEZ • DESIGN AND DRAFTING TECHNOLOGY



LOUISVILLE PARK

NOOR AZEEZ • DESIGN AND DRAFTING TECHNOLOGY



BIRDS

NOOR AZEEZ • DESIGN AND DRAFTING TECHNOLOGY



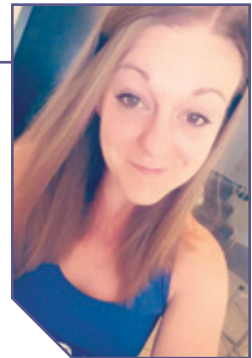
THE SPRING

NOOR AZEEZ • DESIGN AND DRAFTING TECHNOLOGY



AYSCHIA RENSCHLER

"THIS ESSAY IS ABOUT, BY FAR, THE MOST PIVOTAL MOMENT IN MY LIFE. I WANTED TO SHARE A PART OF THAT WITH OTHERS WHO MIGHT BE IN A SIMILAR SITUATION AND SHOW THAT IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO GET OUT. I AM A SINGLE MOTHER OF THREE RAMBUNCTIOUS, KIND, AND INTELLIGENT LITTLE BOYS, WHO HAVE MASTERED THE ART OF KEEPING THEIR MOM ON HER TOES! I AM PASSIONATE ABOUT MY CAREER, WHICH ALLOWS ME TO ASSIST PEOPLE AS THEY OVERCOME SOCIOECONOMIC BARRIERS. I AM ALSO A FULL-TIME STUDENT AT SCC."



CERULEAN

AYSCHIA RENSCHLER • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

My eyes fluttered opened from an afternoon nap on my couch. I wasn't much of a nap taker, but the previous night had been particularly long, and at seven months pregnant I was becoming more easily exhausted. As my eyes opened and I rolled over, my position below the window left me staring up at the most beautiful blue sky. Blue has always been my favorite color—the deep blue that accompanies the clearest of ocean waters and cloudless summer skies. Cerulean. “Wouldn't it be a shame if you never got to see that gorgeous shade of blue again?” I thought to myself.

My relationship with my husband had never been particularly healthy. Control, jealousy, and verbal attacks frequently left me questioning my worth. “But he doesn't hit me,” I justified; I saw so much potential in this person, and I wasn't ready to throw in the towel quite yet. My spouse had been injured on the job—a 95% tear in his ACL which had required urgent surgery. As a recovering addict, the pain pills he had been given had transformed his dormant addiction from a pile of smoking ash into an out of control inferno in the blink of an eye. As soon as he could no longer manipulate the physician into giving him more pain pills, he had turned to alcohol. Once he was released to work and couldn't find employment while reeking of hard liquor, he had turned to illicit drugs.

“I vowed through sickness and in health,” I reminded myself. Upholding my vows was of the utmost importance to me, and my husband had become incredibly sick. Before my eyes, the strong, charismatic man I had married had wasted away into a lying, manipulative shell of his former self. The meth addict that stood before me had transformed into a stranger I had never seen before.

“I can help him become healthy again,” I fooled myself. “We will be over this bump in the road in no time.”

Within a year, he had blown through our savings, and the account was completely dry. He had soon learned that his paychecks were insufficient to fund his addiction. As soon as I thought my home life couldn't become worse, he had proven me wrong. I was diligent to leave nothing on countertops, and from the walls of our once cozy home, I had removed decorations and pictures, which turned into painful projectiles when he was in a wild-eyed fury. Soon, I could no longer use the excuse, “He doesn't hit me,” as a reason for staying. It was quickly replaced with, “I vowed through better and worse. Besides, life could always be worse than this!” The extent of my denial was almost embarrassing to admit to.

His drug of choice resulted in him staying up late at night and, like clockwork, he would become belligerent and aggressive around half past midnight. Sleep deprivation seemed to be one of his favorite forms of abuse to put me through. The night before, he had stormed into the bedroom, nearly knocking the door off the hinges. His long, fast strides made a beeline directly to the bed where I was sleeping, and before I had a chance to process what was happening, he had grabbed the bed by the bottom of the frame and flipped the entire thing over in one swift motion. The nightstand so kindly caught my fall, leaving behind a prominent scar on my forehead. After several hours of being cornered in our bedroom under verbal attack and physical intimidation, I was relieved when he finally stormed out of the house around 4:00 a.m. Tears streamed down my cheeks as I put the bedroom back in order. In two hours, my alarm clock would buzz, and our morning routine of preparing for school and daycare would commence, in addition to the prenatal appointment I had to attend before going to work. Looking back, I am so thankful these events occurred in the nighttime hours, as my young children were always sleeping; to my knowledge they never awoke.

“Wouldn’t it be a shame if you never got to see that gorgeous shade of blue again?” I thought to myself as I gazed into the cerulean sky. With each passing day, the abuse was becoming more physical, and it had become a real possibility that I might not be given that opportunity in the future. I thought about my two young sons; they were the light of my life.

Who would be the educational advocate for my six-year-old, who struggled with speech delays and ADHD? Who would sit in his classroom for countless hours watching for triggers caused by his teacher and providing feedback as to improvements she could make in her delivery methods? Who would sit with him in front of a mirror every night practicing how to shape his mouth to make certain sounds as he was learning in speech therapy? Who would promise him that the beloved freckles which kissed his cheeks after playing in the summer sun would come back next year? Who would be the recipient of him saying, “I love you the mostest—I win!”

Who would build habitats for and help catch every bug in the neighborhood with my five-year-old? Who would teach him how to ride his bike with no training wheels? Who would encourage him to play in the rain and make those enormous mud pies he loved so much? Whose neck would he wrap his chubby little arms around while laying butterfly kisses on their cheek? For whom would he pick flowers for and proclaim, “These would look beautiful in your hair, Mama!”

Who would be the mother to my unborn son? Who would have the pleasure of experiencing all his first milestones? Who would he toddle to when he took his first steps? Who would pick out his first birthday cake? Who would take him to his first day of school? Would he know who I was?

What about my own dreams? I never in a million years imagined that at 25 years old I would be so far removed from any goal I had set for myself. I could not have fathomed being in such an unloving and unhealthy environment. Didn't I deserve to love and to be loved in a healthy relationship? Didn't I deserve to finish college and meet my career goals? Had I tried hard enough to uphold my vows of "in sickness and in health, for better or worse"? Had I explored every avenue possible to help my spouse back onto the road to recovery?

The son growing in my belly stretched his body and snapped me out of my thoughts. "Wouldn't it be a shame if you never got to see that gorgeous shade of blue again," I thought as I stared up at the most beautiful blue sky. I felt a strange calmness wash over me at this epiphany. Cerulean, the deep blue that accompanies the clearest of ocean waters and cloudless summer skies, is still my favorite color and brings me a sense of peace.



AARON REDDING

A GRADUATE OF WAHOO HIGH SCHOOL, AARON WAS A SENIOR WHEN HE WROTE THIS PIECE IN HIS COMP. I CLASS AS A DUAL CREDIT STUDENT. HE IS A TWIN AND ATTENDS COLLEGE AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY IN IDAHO.



COUNTY ROAD O

AARON REDDING • DUAL CREDIT

A gravel road placed in the quiet Nebraskan countryside that borders mainly fields of corn and soybeans. This road is dotted with little scenes of wilderness waiting for someone to explore it. I've lived on County Road O for more than ten years of my life. It is located only two miles outside of Wahoo. The road provides my family with beautiful scenery, and it is the place where many family memories have been made. My house, my country school, and Lake Wanahoo are all places on the road.

A half mile east of Highway 109, an old brick schoolhouse is situated

between tall oak trees. Every weekday morning, my siblings and I walked to school with our lunch boxes in our hands. Well-kept sides of the road dropped off into ditches full of water. In the mornings, all one could hear were the songbirds chirping and whistling to each other and the gravel crunching under our feet. On our way, my brother Isaac and I scanned the road for cool looking rocks to collect. School in the country seemed like a joke. All we did was play computer games on the desktop and eat lunch. During recess, Isaac and I delved into the tree line next to the road to play pretend. After school, it was time to pack up and make the half-mile long trek home for an afterschool snack. During this time, Isaac and I would throw the rocks we had collected into the water-filled ditches as hard as we could. If we were lucky, a couple of ducks were available to use as targets. We'd find little crickets to put in Addy's shirt or pieces of grasses to tickle the back of her neck. At night, the ditches came to life with the sound of toads croaking to each other in the dark. As the years went by, the road became narrower as the weeds and grass slowly reclaimed their ground.

The Wahoo Municipal Airport is only two miles from our home. Crop duster planes fly over our house at least once almost every day. During the summer, we have planes fly over almost every hour. In my whole life, there has been only one yellow plane. I see it all the time as it flips and loops through the air. As a kid, I thought it was awesome to watch.

My home is in the midst of giant oak and pine trees right off Highway 109 on County Road O. I remember as a little kid hitting softballs with my family across the road into the neighboring field—that is, after we had cut down the three largest oak trees next to the road. My dad would normally cut down the trees himself, but these three were too big to cut on his own. Instead of employing his small children to help, as he usually did, he hired professionals to get the job done. Cutting the trees that once provided shade for our front yard made our property feel ten times bigger.

The removed trees uncovered the wide-open view of the adjacent field. During the summer, the field grows corn or soybeans every other year and is a rising sea of green that produces eloquent waves in the wind. In the fall, the field is still and yellow. It waits to be harvested by the monstrous machines driven by men. I've always enjoyed watching them move and work the field. The field turns a golden yellow in the sunset. I have never seen a field look any prettier. It's the time of year when escaped corn leaves can be seen everywhere in the surrounding country, and a corn leaf might be lucky enough to make it into town to enjoy its spoils.

In the winter, the fields are left barren, the soil looking exhausted from providing a summer's worth of nutrients for the crops it raised. I can see the deeply cut tracks of the center pivots that slowly made their way across the field giving the crops water. It looks like a battlefield. Broken corn stalks lie amidst their brothers who grew before them. In the spring, fields are prepared and lined with small plants. They have always looked like mini soldiers lining up for battle.

When I was a little kid, my parents warned me to never cross the highway. It seemed reasonable enough. Cars and semi-trucks often barreled down the highway at 70 miles an hour. My dad would occasionally take the dirt road to school as opposed to taking the highway. On the other side of Highway 109 was a single mile-long road that led to a T intersection. The bridge on this road went over Sand Creek. It was an old wood and metal bridge. It went over a part of Sand Creek that cut deep into the ground. As I grew up, the town of Wahoo decided to make a lake. It covered a one-by-two mile country block that ran under the bridge on County Road O. Dad started taking us on family walks to the bridge. These would often take place on Sunday evenings. To the right was another field that alternated corn and soybeans. To the left of the road was a prairie grass field. It was often full of many colors: green, yellow, orange, red, and brown. It housed pheasants that people hunted. The farmers cut the field every few months for hay bales. The enormous bales would be stacked in a way that resembled a caterpillar. County Road O is flat until about another half mile where it slopes down into the creek/lake area.

The bridge is a place of thinking and peace for me. Since Lake Wanahoo opened to the public six years ago, I've loved coming out to enjoy the simple, peaceful nature of Nebraska. The area surrounding the bridge is full of trees and water. One group of tall and slender trees has white bark. It is so pretty to see in the sunset. As middle schoolers, Isaac and I regularly came down to fish for large and smallmouth bass. Our bikes were our only mode of transportation. One of us had to carry the tackle box, so we took turns. The way to the bridge was slow and wobbly. The goal was to make it to the hill in order to coast down it without pedaling.

We fished under the bridge on top of big boulders while balancing ourselves to keep from falling in. We had to fish under it because there were white signs that specifically said, "No Fishing from Bridge." Directly under that sign was another one: "No Swimming or Diving Allowed." I wasn't about to dive off a bridge, so I never paid that sign too much attention.

As it got darker, we would start to make our way home. The hard part was

going back up the hill. After that, we could see the house. Hundreds of swallow nests made of mud and grass hung under the bridge. I was always confused as to how they were able to keep them up there. During the summer, the bridge is swarmed with adult and adolescent swallows that try to catch bugs. There are a couple of muskrats who live near the bridge that we can see swimming with their backs above water. The experience is short-lived once they retreat to their underwater dens. A couple of hawks can be seen scanning the ground for mice to eat. There was a time when I found three separate red-tailed hawks in three minutes on County Road O!

Perhaps the most interesting thing about this bridge is that it is within 100 meters of a bald eagle's nest. Its humongous nest can be better seen in the fall when there are no leaves. The eagle itself is commonly seen surveying the area atop its nest. There are a lot of photographers who come and take pictures of them.

My favorite season to take walks is fall because of the many beautiful fall colors that the prairie grass take on. I wait until sunset to start so I can admire those amazing "Nebraskan sunsets." Along with the lake, the builders built a wetland reserve next to the northwestern part of the lake. I see countless numbers of cranes and herons fishing in them.

My whole time spectating this wonderful landscape had me yearning to go out there. One day during summer break, my friend and I took our shoes off and walked along the lakeside. We went into the middle of the lake and messed with the soft and squishy mud. It was only ankle deep. The shoreline was littered with mussels. It smelt really bad. The mud was mixed with bird poop. It was one of my favorite memories that whole summer. Farther past the bridge was the T intersection surrounded by a single field and prairie grass.

These past few years, I've been running on County Road O almost every day of the week, which has gotten me familiar with the landscape and wildlife. I never put headphones in during my runs, so I am forced to listen to the birds and wind brush through the grass. I've run almost 1000 miles on County Road O alone. During the school year, my cross country team would run on County Road O for a 1000 meter repeat workout. A dog named Abby occasionally greeted us. She ran our workout with us if we were lucky. I've familiarized myself with all the smells of the country, and I enjoy all of them except for skunk and dead animals.

This road has seen a lot of my life. It's taught me many lessons. It has shown me how animals live and how we humans use the land. To most people, it is just another gravel road with a couple of houses on it. They don't realize that

for some people, it is all they know. It doesn't just have to be a road. It could be a suburb or an apartment building. As I'm writing this, the field in front of my house is being harvested. This isn't a place where nothing happens. This is the place where I grew up to become who I am today. I can say with confidence that living on this country road has been the best part of my life.



MARJORIE ITZEN

"I LOVE OUTDOOR PHOTOGRAPHY! I ALSO WRITE AND BELONG TO THE BEATRICE WRITER'S GROUP. I GARDEN, DO CRAFTS, AND LOVE TO READ. I ALSO LIKE TO FISH AND COOK/BAKE FOR MY FAMILY. MY FAMILY IS MY WORLD! I DO GENEALOGY, AND I WORKED FOR MANY YEARS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH. IN FACT, I WAS HONORED TO WIN THE BEATRICE VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD. I ALSO LOVE TO TRAVEL; NEW ORLEANS IS MY FAVORITE PLACE TO VISIT."



PEACEFUL PLACE

MARJORIE ITZEN • ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, PHYSICAL PLANT



MATTHEW HO

"I WAS BORN IN NEBRASKA AND HAVE LIVED IN LINCOLN ALL MY LIFE. I LOVE THIS CITY AND ITS PEOPLE JUST AS MUCH AS I LOVE WRITING. MUCH OF MY INSPIRATION COMES FROM MY FAMILY AND MY ASIAN HERITAGE. AS A SENIOR IN HIGH SCHOOL, I LOOK FORWARD TO THE FUTURE AND WHAT IT HOLDS, ESPECIALLY AS OUR CITY GROWS. ON ANOTHER NOTE, I'LL BE PRAYING EVERY FRIDAY BEFORE A FOOTBALL GAME FOR A NEBRASKA WIN."



I AM FROM CHOPSTICKS

MATTHEW HO • CONTINUING EDUCATION

I am from chopsticks,
From fish sauce and peanut oil.
I am from hot woks and steaming pans,
From sautéed pork and simmering vegetables.
I am from the propane stove,
Whose burner is black and covered in grease,
Oily and dirty like my own hands.

I'm from family reunions,
From red envelopes and Tèt money.
I'm from *How do you do?*
And *How is school?*
From *Do you have a girlfriend yet?*
And *You're so tall now.*

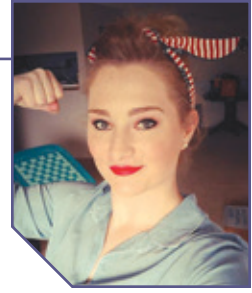
I'm from starchy corn fields,
From rolling hills of golden wheat and emerald soy.
I'm from bitter winters
And 50 mile-per-hour winds
That make me squint my watery eyes.
I'm from blistering summers
And swampy humidity,
The drops of salty sweat on my forehead.

Lastly, I'm from red, Husker red,
From spiraling footballs and volleyball sets,
From tailgates and cookouts.

I am all these things:
Another child of these memories,
Another piece to the puzzle to this Earth,
And finally, another chapter to this story we call life.

REBECCA WELSH

"I'VE BEEN TAKING PICTURES FOR A FEW YEARS, BUT IT'S MOSTLY BEEN FOR FUN. LAST YEAR, I GOT TO TAKE MY YOUNGER SISTER'S SENIOR PICTURES. I WAS VERY HAPPY WITH HOW THEY TURNED OUT, SO I DECIDED TO GET MORE SERIOUSLY INTO PHOTOGRAPHY, AND I AM LOVING IT! MY TIME IS SPLIT BETWEEN WORK AND SCHOOL, BUT THE FREE TIME I HAVE IS SPENT WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY AND MY FUR BABIES, THOR (CAT) AND BELLA (DOG). WHEN I WAS WALKING OUT OF SCHOOL FROM CLASS ONE NIGHT, I SAW A COPY OF ILLUMINATIONS ON A TABLE NEAR THE BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION OFFICE. I LOVE SEEING AND READING DIFFERENT ENTRIES IN THE BOOK, AND I WANTED TO ADD MY PERSPECTIVE OF THE WORLD TO IT."



WAITING FOR THE TRAIN

REBECCA WELSH • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



THE LEADER OF THE PACK

REBECCA WELSH • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



SAM THE MOOSE

REBECCA WELSH • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



I'M A TRUMPET PLAYER

REBECCA WELSH • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



KIMBERLY GILLELAND

"I AM A 45-YEAR-OLD METH ADDICT WHO HAS BEEN IN RECOVERY FOR 18 MONTHS. I WENT FROM LIVING ON THE STREETS FOR FIVE YEARS TO NOW ATTENDING COLLEGE FOR DRUG AND ALCOHOL COUNSELING. I WANT TO BE ABLE TO HELP THE STILL SUFFERING ADDICTS AND TO LET THEM KNOW THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO CHANGE THEIR LIVES AROUND."

I AM NOT WHO YOU THINK

KIMBERLY GILLELAND • HUMAN SERVICES

I am Bobby and Judy's daughter; I am Debbie, Kathy, Susie, Troy, and Kenny's sister; I am Kia, Madison, Dallas, and Adam's mom; I am Weston's grandma; I am an aunt to my nieces and nephews; I am a friend—at times, a kind, caring friend, and at other times, you wouldn't want me as your worst enemy. As you can see, I was a part of a loving, caring, supportive family. I had a normal childhood; my dad worked, and my mom stayed home with us kids. I did what every other kid did growing up: rode bicycles, went swimming, played with my friends from school. I graduated high school with a scholarship, and I left my little hometown to move to the big city of Lincoln for college. That is where I became a wife, and soon after that, I started my little family.

I was married for eleven years to my husband, but we had been together a total of 17 years. Our marriage began to unravel soon after the birth of our last son. He was born almost two months early. My husband was busy working and trying to provide for our growing family, busy with his friends and family, and busy with just about anyone else except me. I was feeling like I had done something wrong that caused Adam to be born early, stressing about the fact that our other son, Dallas, was only 14 months old—and who was going to take care of my girls? I was the caretaker for my children; I did everything for them. They were my world.

I never thought that I would leave the hospital without my son, but that day came. I spent almost all my waking hours at the hospital with my son, struggling to juggle the act of also being present for my other kids. I finally decided that I had had enough of an unhappy marriage and filed divorce papers. I had never felt so free as the day that the divorce was finalized. I got my freedom back. I wasn't going to be put down anymore; I could say and feel whatever I wanted to without the fear of consequences.

I began to thrive in my newfound freedom. I was working and earning my own money, and I could do what I wanted. I was finally a voice. I shared joint

custody of our four kids with my husband. I know this sounds silly, but we became better friends than we were as husband and wife.

December 14, 2013, is a day that will haunt me for the rest of my life. An owner of a local hotel kept calling, asking me to leave my current job and to come work for him. I was in the process of trying to find a place to live, and his offer was to work for him as bar manager, and I could live at the hotel. I wondered how that would work; I needed to be making a paycheck, and I wondered how much rent he would charge me. He said that he would pay me enough so I could pay for the room and still have some money for myself. After thinking about it not that long, I decided to take him up on his offer. I thought it was a win-win for the both of us. Boy, was I in for a surprise.

Little did I know that I would see my kids less and less. After just a few weekend visits, their father decided that where I was living was not the best place for our kids. He went after and got full custody of the kids. Deep in my heart, I knew that was the best choice, but I also began to feel like a horrible mother. When I was little, I would always say that I was going to be nothing like my mother, and here I was letting my kids down again. I'm sure that was where my spiral out of control started, knowing that I didn't try to fight my husband when it came to custody. I just hoped my kids knew that I wasn't giving up on them. I was in a dark place in my life, and I didn't want to drag them into it with me.

I had worked before at the bar that was in the hotel. When I worked there, the bar was separate from the hotel. It was individually owned and operated by someone else. At that time, the bar was always busy; you made very good money as a bartender. There was always a lively, fun, loud crowd that would go there to do karaoke, gather with friends, have special events, and grab a bite to eat while they had a drink. I guess that's what I expected to see when I returned there to work.

The first night back to work, I just sat at a table and watched the crowd. There were a few faces that I recognized and some I didn't. I thought that the job would be somewhat challenging, but I could handle it and live there. As the days went on, my boss began to give me more and more responsibilities. I was asked to not only bartend on my shift, but I was also supposed to help guests who were trying to check in to the hotel. Running back and forth like a chicken with its head cut off, I was juggling so many tasks that I barely had time to breathe. From my previous place of employment and my position there, I had made many connections with beer vendors, pool players, and VVH (who organized pool and dart teams out of local bars). I had the knowledge of how to

run a bar and make it successful, and that's what my new boss wanted. He saw what I could do for his business and took advantage of it.

It was a gradual increase of all the duties my boss expected me to do. I had remodeled the bar across the hall from the currently operating bar (on my dime) and opened it to good solid response from the clientele. I had VVS wanting to put pool tables in my bar, and I had alcohol reps wanting to have events at my bar. All the customers that used to frequent the old bar now came only to mine. Once I had that open, my boss decided to train me on front desk/night audit duties and housekeeping, and I began being his personal assistant. He then requested me to make a flyer advertising that we had facilities to host birthday parties, wedding receptions, graduation parties—the list was a mile long that I had come up with of events that we could do. So guess what? I was now the Event Planner for the hotel since I was doing such a great job of being Bar Manager (for both bars). Event Planner, Front Desk/Night Audit, Personal Assistant, Housekeeper—and let's go ahead and add Maintenance to my already larger-than-life to-do list.

I was being taking advantage of, and there was nothing I could do about it. I lived, worked, and started to play there. By play, I mean I began to use meth. I needed something to keep me going. I would literally work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. I had no days off, no time for my kids, no time for myself. I dove deeper and deeper into work since my visits with my kids became less and less. Their dad didn't think where I lived was an appropriate place for our kids to be, and he was right. The clientele had changed. Instead of the business workers, husbands and wives, families, and kids, I started seeing things that a "normal" person would find odd.

One thing that stood out in my memory was the first overnight that I worked. I went to walk back through the enclosed dome of the hotel, and the lights were off. I turned them on, and it looked like cockroaches running, but it wasn't. The "cockroaches" were people. They were either making drug deals or meeting up with people to get high. I was in shock and disbelief. It wouldn't be long, and I would be one of those people.

The hotel had changed, it seemed, overnight, but really, it hadn't. I was a zombie walking around with less to no sleep, so I made a choice to change that. I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. I wanted to get high; I wanted to feel alive again. I wanted to feel like I was part of a family. By this time, I had no visits with my kids, nor any contact with any of my family. My "family" was now the dysfunctional, homeless, meth-using people that lived and visited the hotel. All my job duties seemed easier, and I was working like a mad woman. I

guess you could say that I was the Energizer Bunny running around this dirty, nasty, unlivable, should-be-condemned property. I was trying to put a Band-Aid over a huge open sore.

In-between all my jobs, I would run to my room to either snort a line or hit the pipe of meth. I had to hurry because if the owner couldn't find me, within minutes he would be banging on my door like the police.

As my addiction grew, my job performance suffered. Instead of wanting to do my job and help the owner make the place nice, I was 100% consumed with getting high, making sure that I had enough meth, and knowing where I would get more if I didn't have enough. I had a friend that lived with me at the motel; he, too, was an addict. Our addiction had gotten so big and out of control that we began to sell it to support our own habit. Life was getting more and more out of control, and I couldn't pump the brakes on the crazy...why? I could see all the shitty things that were coming my way, but it was like I had given up and accepted my fate.

I lost my job at the hotel, and we were evicted that day. We packed up the few belongings that we had, and that was the first time in my life that I was homeless. I became another homeless, good-for-nothing, waste-of-life meth addict. I had remembered that I had a garage at an apartment complex that I once lived at, and I remember putting all my belongings there. I went to that garage with the key I had, and to my surprise, the door opened. I thought, "Thank God. At least I have a roof over my head." The only means of transportation I had was my bicycle unless one of my meth customers stopped by. Even a ride would cost me meth because they knew I had it. I would always be high and would ride my bike for hours at a time. It was something that would keep my mind busy and off what my life had become.

I woke up one morning to someone banging on the garage door. At first, I thought it was my friend who lived with me at the hotel, but it wasn't him. In fact, it was the Lincoln Police Department and Lincoln Fire and Rescue. They had received a call that someone was living in the garage, and they hadn't been seen for a couple days. I was calm, cool, and collected about the situation. I acted like I was moving my stuff out of there, and I was just waiting for my friends to show up with their truck. LPD looked around; they knew what the real story was. Why were there lit candles? Why was there a bed made up? Why was everything so organized as if someone was living there? That was the last time that I saw my boys' bunkbeds, all the old homework, all my personal belongings. The day that I was asked to leave that garage, a part of me died. That was my opportunity to be honest with people that were there to help, my

chance of getting my life back, my chance to be a mom again, but what did I do? I put a couple changes of clothes in my backpack and took off on my bike.

For the rest of my addiction, I became friends with people that you wouldn't want to have as friends. I squatted in places that people had died and lived in places with no electricity, gas, or running water. I became a full-blown, homeless, no-job, staying-whenever meth addict. I would go into grocery stores and steal food to eat. I would steal bicycles. I would go into the donation dumpsters throughout town to have clean clothes to wear. I was the person that no one saw.

The law finally caught up with me on October 16, 2016. I had an active warrant for my arrest because I didn't pay a fine for shoplifting. I was at a gas station trying to get their free Wi-Fi. I couldn't pay for service on my phone, but I always found a way to get meth. A police car pulled me over and asked my name. I was so high and so preoccupied with my phone that I had forgotten I had a warrant. Once I told him my name, he drove off slowly. Then it hit me like a ton of bricks: "Shit! I got a warrant!" I quickly took off on my bike because I had meth on me, like usual. They caught up to me, and I was processed into Lancaster County Jail. I could make phone calls, and the person that I called was my friend who was right beside me when my addiction began. He told me, "You will be fine, and I will try to find some money to bail you out." My bail was \$250, but he never came to bail me out or put money on my books; he didn't even accept my calls.

So there I sat in jail with nothing but time to think and to sober up. After being in there for a week, someone had scheduled a visit with me. I was sober for the first time since I didn't know when, and I couldn't think of anyone else it could be but him. The screen came on, and there sat my oldest daughter, Kia. I instantly couldn't breathe. I was shaking so much I could barely hold the phone to my ear. My stomach was turning, and my eyes were filling up. I had not seen or spoken to my child since I left the hotel in 2014, and I didn't know what to say. How, as a mother, was I supposed to explain to my child why I picked meth over her?

She was very quiet. I saw all the pain, hurt, abandonment that I had caused. We had little to nothing to talk about; it felt as if we were strangers. After our short visit, that was when I decided that it was time for me to change my life, or I was going to lose my children forever. I started to attend Bible study and to go to a treatment class that the jail offered. The instructor for the class was Alice, and she worked at St. Monica's Treatment Facility in Lincoln. St. Monica's was a treatment place for women only who had not only substance abuse issues, but

also mental health issues.

After sitting two weeks in jail, I was released. There were none of my so-called friends that I used meth with to pick me up. My daughter wasn't there, and my mom sure in the hell wouldn't be there. I called my friend, and he said that he was at a friend's house, and they agreed to come pick me up. I sat there for what seemed hours, so I started walking. I headed down West O Street, looking and waiting to see my ride that was supposed to be on his way. I finally hit Dairy Queen and called my friend again. Again, my friend's friend told me, "Wait there; he is walking out the door now." I had time to eat a full meal and my supposed ride still wasn't there. I began to walk again, making it to 9th and O. Finally, there was my ride, but first, I was handed a SNAP card and was told that I was going to the grocery store to get food for the house where I was going to be staying.

Walking into a place where all people do is meth is like walking into a horror movie set. The house had a smell to it that was a combination of cigarette smoke, filth, and meth. I was there for only about an hour before I was on the phone with St Monica's getting into treatment. I was told by Liz to be at St Monica's on Tuesday of the following week. I waited and checked myself into treatment.

It is now 14 months later, and I am CLEAN! While at treatment, I discovered that I was bipolar, I had depression, I had anxiety, I was OCD, and I was extremely co-dependent. I began to forgive and love myself. I soaked up all information that counselors wanted to give me like a sponge. After treatment, I moved to Fresh Start, which is transitional housing for homeless women. While there, I had a case manager who helped me believe in myself and to figure out what I wanted to do with this new life that I was given. My goal while I was still in treatment was to go back there one day not as a client, but as a counselor. I want to help the homeless, addicted mothers who desperately want out of that life and want reunification with their children. With that determination and fire in my heart, I enrolled in classes at SCC-Lincoln in Human Services—the Alcohol and Drug program.

I am a daughter; I am a sister; I am a mother; I am a grandma; I am an addict. I truly am all of these, but the one that I am most proud of is: I AM A SURVIVOR!



TERESA BURT

"I AM A LIFELONG BEATRICE RESIDENT WHO HOPES TO SOMEDAY LIVE ON A CARIBBEAN ISLAND AWAY FROM THE NEBRASKA WINTERS. WRITING IS A PASSION AND A HOBBY. I AM PURSUING AN ASSOCIATES OF ARTS DEGREE, AND I LIKE TO LIVE LIFE OUTSIDE THE BOX!"



FREE FALLING

TERESA BURT • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

As the plane prepared for takeoff, Lisa bit her nails. Skydiving had been on her bucket list for years, but she was a bit nervous doing it for the first time at age 60. Encouraged by her boyfriend Mick, Lisa had been checking things off her bucket list at a fast pace in the six months she had known him.

Lisa's husband, Jerry, had passed away two years ago after battling prostate cancer. They had been married for 33 years, and while they hadn't been rich by any means, they had had a comfortable lifestyle. With the life insurance money, she would have enough to live out her life without pinching pennies and be able to travel and do a few things she had always wanted to do.

Jerry had been a hard-working railroader for 35 years when he got sick. He earned a great wage, invested well, and didn't spend a lot on frivolous things. Jerry and Lisa's only child, JeriAnn, died tragically at age 19 in an accident. Lisa was lonely until she had met Mick.

Lost in thought, Mick brought her back to the present, "How you doing, honey? Ready for your first jump?"

"A bit nervous, but yes, I'm ready!"

Lisa had been thinking about her marriage to Jerry. Though she had loved him dearly, he was happy staying home. Jerry wasn't much for travelling. He always told her he did enough of that on the trains with his job. When he was home, he just wanted to enjoy the simple life—drinking iced tea on the porch while watching the traffic go by, eating a good steak at home, gardening, and drinking coffee with his friends on Saturday mornings while Lisa did the grocery shopping.

Lisa, however, had dreamed of seeing exotic places, walking beaches, hiking in the mountains, and skydiving. They had the time and money, but she could never convince Jerry to do anything. Once she had turned 50, she had pretty

much given up on her dreams.

Mick had changed all of that. Sixteen years her junior, he was athletic and enthusiastic. Despite the age difference, he seemed to enjoy their time together, whether it was eating at the local Mexican restaurant, walking at sunset, or travelling. So far, they had visited San Francisco, gone camping for a long weekend at Yellowstone, and now—skydiving! What a difference he had made in her life.

The only thing that bothered Lisa about Mick was his lack of willingness to share much about his past with her. She knew only that he had never married but had a son with his high school girlfriend when he was 17. As a freelance writer, he had the freedom to travel. He was often gone for several days at a time, but he and Lisa always kept in touch by phone or Skype.

Mick had jumped on several occasions. He was confident as he prepared his chute and helped Lisa with hers. Stroking her arm, he told her how much he loved her.

“Now remember, as soon as you jump, look up so you’ll see me, then pull your cord. I’ll pull mine a little later, allowing me to catch up with you. Or *down*, I guess it is,” he said with a chuckle.

Lisa nodded. They had been over the routine several times.

As the plane neared 12,000 feet, Mick opened the hatch. “It’s time!”

Mick reached for Lisa, carefully helping her to the edge. He blew her a kiss as she took a deep breath and turned toward him.

Free falling, Lisa was scared out of her mind. *What do I do?* she thought? Oh, yeah. She looked toward the plane. Mick gave her a thumbs up and jumped. He was holding something above her head. It looked like a parachute, but it wasn’t. A banner of sorts. Falling faster, Lisa pulled her cord, making her rise several feet before she started sailing toward the ground. She couldn’t find Mick. Where was he?

Something swished past her. It was Mick. He was tangled in that bright yellow banner. Apparently, it was preventing his chute from opening.

Lisa watched Mick fall to the ground. Her ride seemed to take forever, although in reality, she supposed it was only a few minutes. She safely landed and quickly fought with the parachute before remembering how to unhook it. She ran the few hundred feet to where she had seen Mick land.

Lisa never got to answer the question on the banner: “Marry me, Lisa?”



SAUERKRAUT

TERESA BURT • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

I want to throw things.
Breakable things.
Pretty things.
Colored glass and hand-thrown pottery.
Wooden things that will splinter.
Smash them against the wall,
pound them, bounce them off the carpeted floor.
I don't, though.
I'm a peaceful person
or so I like to think.
Besides, I've done that before.
Things break.
Things I need.
Things I like.
Things I care about.
Then it's only me
left broken.
Life's just a crock
of shattered pieces
of clay.
Even if you fix it,
it leaks.
Who wants a leaky
crock to pickle sauerkraut?
Sauerkraut—there you have it—
turning a head of garden-grown
cabbage into something
bitter.

SALT

TERESA BURT • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

It smells like salt
(can you smell salt?)
bitter and briny

It's not the sea salt kind
of smell like the ocean breeze

It's the salt of buttered popcorn
rich and warm and in-the-shell
peanuts in a bag

The salt that makes my lips swell
after a big soft pretzel
or potato chips

Maybe it's the smell
of 30,000 sweaty bodies
baking in the sun
on a 90-degree day
sitting in Kauffman Stadium
clapping, laughing, cheering
their loyalty to the Royals

Or the salt of the earth
from every player
in the last 44 years
who has poured out sweat
or shed blood or tears

I smell the salt of baseball!

IN MY MIND'S EYE

TERESA BURT • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

Exhausted but restless, the house
too stale with warm air and onions,
I roam out into the darkness
of my porch to catch a hint of breeze.

The painted floorboards
grime my bare feet. An outdoor
spring cleaning is needed.
My mind's eye declares it is sand
on a veranda
overlooking the wild ocean waves,
not the grass of Nebraska.

In my mind's eye,
the headlights of passing cars
and streetlights are ships sailing
near the shore and moon rays
moving across the waves.

In my mind's eye,
the dog I hear
is barking at two lovers holding hands
strolling the ocean shore,
not barking at a feral cat, dark against the night,
streaking across the lawn.

I scour the sky for stars.
A red blinking light catches
my sight. My mind's eye
sees a falling star veining
through the sky.

My mind's eye entertains
the notion
of an ocean
knocking at my back door.

THE INVESTIGATION

TERESA BURT • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

This neighborhood is falling fast into the hands of Hell. This last happening nearly gave me a heart attack.

We've recently gotten new neighbors, as there were several old folks who have since moved on to a different plane. Most likely Heaven, but one really doesn't know for sure, does one? The old lady across the street, who wouldn't even wave when she was out hanging up her wash, may have gone a different direction. Can you imagine in this day and age not even having a clothes dryer? I wonder if her washing machine was an old Maytag wringer.

Well, anyway, back to my story. The other day, I was looking out my window. Now I'm not the nosy neighbor type, just curious. And a concerned citizen. I usually only watch the house across the street to the west where the unfriendly old bitty used to live. I'd call her by name, but I never found it out in the four years that we lived across the street from each other. So the reason I watch that house now is because it's a rental house. The first renter who lived there had some strange goings-on, like the time she had the front porch light on and was outside on her porch. As soon as her boyfriend/brother/son drove up, she turned the light off. He walked up the steps in the dark, went inside for a few minutes, and left. Things like that happened all the time—until her boyfriend hit the dog and she called the cops. They arrested him for domestic abuse (he beat her, too, but she didn't call until he hit her dog). He had warrants in four states and got a three-year prison sentence.

Here I go rambling again. Anyway, the new lady to the west does some strange things, too. She comes and goes a lot. I don't think she is ever gone more than four hours, so I don't think she works. I called Animal Control one day because she left her dog outside tied up. It was whining, crying, and howling. I walked over, but seeing as it was a Rottweiler, I decided I didn't want to get too close. He was all tangled up and had no chain left to move around. If he had water or food, I didn't see it. Anyone who keeps a Rottweiler must be up to no good.

So, the other day I'm watching out the window to see what she might be up to when I see a delivery van pull up in the driveway of the house to the south. The lady who lives there, Elda, is new to this area as well. She's a petite little old lady, and if I had to guess, I'd say she was around 70 or so. She doesn't have a car, but she gets others to take her to the grocery store, and her daughter lives nearby. I'm 5' 1", and Elda is a good three to four inches shorter than me, and

probably doesn't weigh 90 pounds.

This delivery van wasn't familiar to me. I guess I forgot to tell you that I live in a little podunk town the size of a couple large shopping malls and a football stadium all put together. Now if Elda bought a piece of furniture or an appliance, she would have gotten it at Bob's Furniture & Appliance store located on Main Street. I know Bob's delivery van, and this wasn't it.

It wasn't so much the van that worried me, but the driver. He was black. Is it okay to call them black these days? I get confused. Oh yeah, right, African American, if that term is still in. Now I want to go on record to say I am not prejudiced, racist, sexist, a bigot, or anything else like that. In fact, I am probably one of the least likely people in this town to be that way. But you have to realize here in Podunk Town, we don't have any people of color—in fact, we don't have any minorities at all. That's not to say we haven't ever, but there aren't any right now.

So a suspicious van pulls up with a very large African American driver. He was still sitting in his van fiddlin' with a portable phone or some such thing. Oh, I didn't tell you why the van was suspicious looking. The side was marked Acme Delivery and had one of them there portable phone type numbers on it. First of all, does anyone really call their business "Acme"? Isn't that from the old Roadrunner cartoons? Secondly, the phone number—back in the day when we all had normal phones like I still use (you know, the ones connected to the wall that you dial in a circle, not some portable thingy with little push buttons on it)—well, anyway, everyone in this town had a number that began with 228. And, I know all the prefixes for all the surrounding towns and most of the whole state (which, by the way, is Nebraska), plus those from northern Kansas and western Iowa, and this number didn't have any of those prefixes. I know all of this because of the 25 years I worked for the telephone company until they did away with it. I know those little portable phones have different prefixes, but in Podunk, they all start with 806 or 230, and this van had one that started with 395. That is not a Nebraska phone number.

Why would a little old lady who doesn't even drive be buying something from a different state? That is exactly what I was thinking. I was worried about poor little Elda. Well, I'll tell you, I thought about calling up the police and getting them over there right quick, but for some reason, they don't seem to come any too quick whenever I call. Now, I mind my own business most of the time, but I have called them on a few occasions. Like the time the young neighbors to the back of me had a party. Now, I didn't call them right away—anyone has the right to have a good time—, but when the hootin' and hollerin'

was still going on past 10:30 p.m., well that was just too much. Have you ever? Lordy, why anyone would stay up half the night like that, and on a weeknight no less, I have no idea. The cops did come eventually and put an end to all the racket. Then there was the time Mrs. Canfield's teenage son was driving their four-wheeler with the snow plow on it up and down the street through the snow, tearin' round, whipping circles. He wasn't even plowing anything, and I was afraid he'd get hit or fall off. I didn't dare call Mrs. Canfield to tell her about it, as she thinks her little Tommy would never do anything wrong. Well, the police took so long getting there that Tommy had long been gone before they arrived. Just because I have reason to call and report the goings-on around the neighborhood to the police now and then doesn't mean I'm a meddlin' old fool, mind you.

So here I am, not knowing what to do, but I couldn't just stand there at the window whilst little old Elda gets murdered, could I? No, siree.

A quick plan hatched in my head. I ran to the closet and pulled an old flowered dress over my head. Now, anyone who knows me knows I don't wear dresses. Pants and button-down shirts is all I ever wear. I keep some old clothing around for my grandchildren to play dress-up when they come a visiting. I threw on a large floppy yellow hat, grabbed the baby stroller which already had my granddaughter's doll in it with a blanket over it. I headed out the opposite door from which Elda lived, crossed the street, and rounded the corner.

Now directly across from Elda's, I walked around the front of the stroller, peeked under the blanket, and cooed to the "baby." The man was on the porch holding some papers, and Elda had just stepped out to talk to him. Thank God, I was in time. I hollered over to them just to let that man know I was watching him. I finished going up the block, crossed over, and slowly walked towards home.

Just as I was directly in front of Elda's, a small scream escaped Elda's meek voice. Tossing the stroller aside, I ran into the yard.

"Don't you hurt her!" I yelled. "Go! Just git! I already called the police. They'll be here any minute!"

"Oh Mimi, I'm fine. This lovely, wonderful young man just told me the happiest news. Come on up here so I can introduce you properly."

Wearily, I trudged through the yard. Tears were streaming down Elda's face, and I was still scared for her.

"Mimi, this is Roger. Roger just came knocking at my door today. He's the son I gave up for adoption 52 years ago today."



VICKI WILLIAMS

"I WORK PART TIME AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT IN STUDENT SERVICES. I AM MARRIED, HAVE TWO CHILDREN, AND TWO GRANDCHILDREN. SPENDING TIME WITH MY FAMILY TOPS THE LIST OF THINGS I LOVE. I ENJOY SCRAPBOOKING, TAKING PHOTOS, TRAVELING, READING, AND PLAYING MY DULCIMER. I ALSO LOVE LEARNING AND EXPERIENCING NEW THINGS AND MEETING NEW PEOPLE."



THE COWBOY

VICKI WILLIAMS • ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, STUDENT SERVICES



THE LANDING

VICKI WILLIAMS • ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, STUDENT SERVICES



SANDIE PIRNIE

"I'M THE MOTHER OF TWO BOYS AND HAVE BEEN MARRIED FOR 13 YEARS. I'M GETTING MY BUSINESS DEGREE TO BETTER MYSELF AND TO SHOW MY BOYS THAT I CAN DO IT. THAT WAY, THEY DON'T HAVE ANY EXCUSES AS TO WHY THEY CAN'T DO IT. I WORK ABOUT 60 HOURS A WEEK AND GO TO SCHOOL ONLINE WHILE MAINTAINING MY HOUSEHOLD AND TAKING CARE OF MY BOYS. I AM A HARD-ON-THE-OUTSIDE, SOFT-ON-THE-INSIDE KIND OF GIRL—SORT OF LIKE A CHEWY JAWBREAKER. I HAVE A WALL A MILE HIGH, BUT ONCE SOMEONE GETS OVER IT, I'M A GIANT SOFTY. NOT MANY PEOPLE GET OVER THAT WALL. I AM A HARD WORKER. I GOT HIRED ON TO KAWASAKI AT THE AGE OF 20, AND I WAS A SUPERVISOR BY 22. STILL TO THIS DAY, I HAVE NOT SEEN ANOTHER SUPERVISOR THAT YOUNG. I SUCCEED AT EVERYTHING I DO BECAUSE I NEVER GIVE UP. WRITING HAS ALWAYS BEEN A WEAKNESS FOR ME; I'VE ALWAYS BEEN NERVOUS ABOUT LETTING PEOPLE READ MY WRITING BECAUSE I DON'T GENERALLY LET PEOPLE KNOW THE REAL ME. THIS ESSAY MAKES ME VULNERABLE."



GOODBYE, GRANDPA

SANDIE PIRNIE • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

My grandpa was a strong, stocky man. He was about six feet tall. His name was Cleatus, which I found odd because everyone called him Dick. He wore dark rimmed glasses and had tattoos all over his arms. His hair was combed over to the side and back with gel in it. It reminded me of Elvis Presley's hair. He had a harsh, deep voice. When he spoke, everyone in the room listened.

My first memory of my grandpa was at Christmas time in 1989. My father took my brother, sister, and I over to visit. His house was dirty, cluttered, and smelled like animals—rightfully so, because he had three dogs and at least 20 birds.

He had gotten us some Christmas presents and wanted us to open them. My brother opened his first. It was a red Matchbox car with silver stripes down the side. His face lit up and he told my grandpa, "Thank you."

My sister was next. She unwrapped her present with one rip of the wrapping paper. It was a doll with long blond hair. The eyes opened and shut when she tipped it. My sister smiled and said, "Thank you."

It was finally my turn. My box was two feet wide and two inches tall. It was wrapped in shiny red and gold wrapping paper. I tore open my present as fast as I could. Inside was a plain, white box. I took the tape off the corners, and inside

was a sweater. The sweater was green with white polka dots all over it. It had a reindeer on the front and writing that said Merry Christmas. It was made from the itchiest material I had ever felt. I tried to hide the disappointment in my voice as I said thank you.

It was obvious at that point that my grandparents didn't know us at all because my sister hated dolls, and I would never wear that sweater.

As a child, I didn't see my grandparents often, and I never knew why. But one night, our parents were in the living room in our small house. I was laying in my bed just down the hallway. I heard my father say to my mother "My father is a very mean man. That's why I don't want our children around him. It's only the five of us. No one else."

Occasionally, I would hear my parents talking while I was supposed to be sleeping. I would hear my dad tell my mom horrible stories about my grandpa. My dad said that my grandpa always told him he would never amount to anything. He was not only verbally abusive, but also physically abusive. He would hit him almost like he was taking all of his aggression out on my father.

At that point, I was skeptical of my grandfather. He had never been mean to me, but I wasn't around him much. I couldn't imagine anyone treating my father that way. I hated the thought of someone treating my father badly. After the stories I had heard, I was mad at my grandpa.

Cleatus was wrong about my father. My father was the best dad I could have ever had. He had always been a hard-working man, a man that took care of his family and was there for us every day of our lives. He is and always has been the example of what a man should be in my eyes.

As time went on, I would generally see my grandparents only on Christmas and the Fourth of July. Independence Day was my grandpa's favorite holiday. He had a fireworks stand every year, and my father would work there. He did this because my grandpa paid him in fireworks, and my dad wanted us to have as many as we could get. We all enjoyed the Fourth of July.

In 2004, I got married. My grandpa showed up dressed in a black suit with a baby blue vest underneath. He looked amazing. When the father/daughter dance came over the speaker, he wanted to dance with me first. To my surprise, he was a really good dancer. We did the two-step for the entire song. Afterward, he told me how proud he was of me and that he was glad I was happy.

Seven months later, my first baby was born. My child was two months premature, so he was very tiny. He was only three pounds, but he was the longest baby I had ever seen. He had the bluest eyes. They were like the sky on the most beautiful day. This baby stole my heart from the beginning.

Later on that day, my grandpa called me. He said to me, "I heard you had a baby today." I told him that I had. He said, "You had him on my birthday. This is my only grandchild that was born on my birthday." He had so much excitement in his voice. He went on and on about how proud he was. This was the longest conversation I'd ever had with my grandpa.

In the summer of 2008, my grandfather got really sick. He was in and out of the hospital getting blood transfusions. They couldn't figure out what was wrong with him. I decided to go visit him with my husband and father. When I walked into the hospital room, I couldn't believe my eyes. My grandfather wasn't the same man I had remembered. He was very skinny. He had lost at least 60 pounds. His eyes were sunk in, and his voice was no longer harsh. His tattoos had turned into blurry blue ink spots. You couldn't even tell what they were anymore. His hair was a mess. It no longer reminded me of Elvis's.

My grandpa told me he didn't think he was going to live much longer, so I piped up and said, "What about July 4th? We are going to light off three Saturn missiles in a row." The Saturn missile was my grandpa's favorite firework. His face got some color back in it, and he talked for an entire hour about what we were going to do for July 4th.

My grandpa never made it to that Independence Day. He died a couple days after I visited him.

The day he died, I was bombarded with questions in my head. Why had my father kept us from him all of those years? If he was so bad, why wasn't he bad to us? Why had I been so mad for this long?

At that moment, I regretted not spending more time with my grandfather. I regretted being mad at him for all of those years. I regretted listening to what everyone had said about him. From that moment on, I was going to make my own opinions of other people.

I forgave my grandfather that day. I forgave him for all of the things he had done to my father, and I chose to no longer be mad at him.



LYNDA HEIDEN

"I AM AN EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT AT SCC. I USE PHOTOGRAPHY TO RECORD MEMORIES OF PLACES TRAVELED TO AND MOMENTS THAT FADE AWAY IN THE PASSAGE OF TIME THAT EVENTUALLY COULD BE FORGOTTEN. MY PHOTOGRAPHY IS ALSO USED TO DOCUMENT THE STORIES OF MY FAMILY HISTORY."



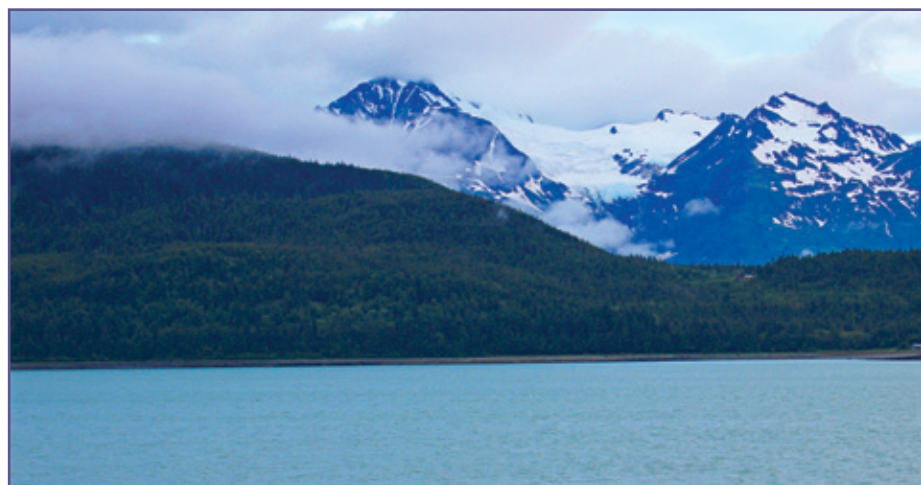
WAITING PATIENTLY

LYNDA HEIDEN • EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT



4 A.M. ALASKA TIME

LYNDA HEIDEN • EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT



BLACK EYED SUSAN

LYNDA HEIDEN • EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT



YOUNG BUD

LYNDA HEIDEN • EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT



DENALI: THE GREAT ONE

LYNDA HEIDEN • EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT



CASSIE SHEPHERD

"I GREW UP IN CADIZ, KENTUCKY. MY FATHER WAS AN ALCOHOLIC, MY MOTHER WAS CO-DEPENDENT, MY GRANDFATHER WAS A PEDOPHILE, AND I HAVE TWO LITTLE SISTERS. MY HAPPIEST MEMORIES WERE CHRISTMAS WITH MY PARALYZED AUNT, GOING TO CHURCH WITH MS. TISHIE, AND BOTTLE-FEEDING THE BABY GOATS. MY FAMILY MOVED BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN LINCOLN AND KENTUCKY; I ENDED UP IN TROUBLE AS A TEEN AND BECAME A STATE WARD. I'VE STRUGGLED ALL MY LIFE, AND I DREAM OF BEING SUCCESSFUL. I AM VERY CREATIVE AND SMART, AND I HAVE A GREAT SENSE OF HUMOR. ONE DAY, I WILL SAY, 'I MADE IT!'"

UNTITLED

CASSIE SHEPHERD • CONTINUING EDUCATION

He comes to my window
Late at night,
So, I hide in the corner,
And out of sight.

You've seen him, Mommy,
Touching me there,
But you walked away
Like you didn't even care.

I'm hurt, I'm scared,
I don't know what to do.
Are these the same things
That he did to you?

You tell me to go away
And keep my mouth shut.
Those words slice me deeper
Than a razor-made cut.

Now I'm in trouble;
I made a mistake,
And you're telling the Judge
You've had all you can take.

Now I get moved around,
Being placed and replaced.
No one knows anything
About the troubles I've faced.

Nothing can help me
With the pain that I feel.
These are the kinds of wounds
That don't just heal.

Now I do drugs
Just to numb the pain,
With only a temporary fix
Straight into my vein.

People ask questions,
Who, where, when, why, and what?
But I do just as she said
And keep my mouth shut.

They don't understand
Why I do what I do.
They simply know nothing
About the pain I go through.

UNTITLED

CASSIE SHEPHERD • CONTINUING EDUCATION

Lies, Deception, and Unshed Tears.
Grief, Guilt, and Lifelong Fears.
Unwanted, Unneeded, and Unloved.
I've been punched, kicked, and repeatedly shoved.

Tired, battered, and deeply bruised.
Lost and shattered from being abused.
Misguided, mistaken, and misunderstood.
I've gone through things no person should.

I'm breathing, my heart is beating, and I am moving on,
Using my story to dictate an unlikely phenomenon.

BULLY

CASSIE SHEPHERD • CONTINUING EDUCATION

How do you sleep at night?
When you hold a grudge;
When you pick a fight.

What do you gain?
When you hurt someone;
When you cause their pain.

Does it make you feel tougher?
When you break innocent hearts;
When you make people suffer.

They took their last breath;
Now, how do you feel,
After you bullied them to death?

AARON ODVODY

"I'M A SMALL TOWN GUY THAT LOVES CHESS, FOOTBALL, AND THE ARMY. MY LOVE FOR CHESS INSPIRED THIS ARTWORK, AND MY ENGLISH PROFESSOR, PATTI BURRIS, ENCOURAGED ME TO SUBMIT."



DECLARATION OF WAR

AARON ODVODY • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



BRITTNEY DEAN

"I AM A NEW COLLEGE STUDENT. I HAVEN'T DECIDED WHAT I WANT TO DO WITH MY LIFE YET, AND I HAVE CHALLENGES THAT I NEED TO GET THROUGH. I LOVE ANIMALS, ESPECIALLY HORSES, AND I HOPE THAT THIS IS THE FIRST OF MANY PIECES I WILL PUBLISH IN MY LIFE."



FINDING COMMON GROUND

BRITTNEY DEAN • EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

I was born with a disability called Asperger's. It is mostly a problem for me. My family and friends accept me for who I am most days. My teachers, co-workers, and many peers do not. They try to figure out all the reasons I'm not like them instead of finding a common ground. I don't see things the way "normal" people do. I can't read facial expressions, sarcasm, and figures of speech, and I really can't think outside the box. It makes it hard to go to school, work a job, read a book, cook food, price shop at stores, navigate through life, and be "normal."

Here is what I want people to know. No matter how many times you tell me to "just figure it out," I really can't. I am unemployed because on my good days, I don't think I need to take my medicine that stabilizes me, so I don't. The problem with that is, when I am not on my medicine, I think I am completely fine. That is what I see. What others see is that I am unable to complete a task; I cannot follow an instruction that involves more than two steps. I can't follow a list because if I am supposed to stock the ketchup, and it is not where it is supposed to be in the back room, I panic, get anxious, start to hyperventilate, and cannot move onto the next task until I stock the ketchup. If someone finds me and gets me the ketchup, then I can move on. You guessed it; my manager got tired of handing me the ketchup, and my co-workers pretty much walked around me and ignored me.

The next thing I want people to know is that I didn't choose to be this way—it chose me. I don't want to live my life with so much confusion. I know that if I try to do things my way, I get yelled at or laughed at, or I feel like a failure because I just don't get it. On the other hand, I find the simplest things to be funny. I identify easily with small children who live their lives so freely, and I have a huge support system. Although my family wants to help me get through life, I want to step out on my own and create my own future. I want to find a

job where I can work with animals. I want to someday live on my own. In time, I want to get married and have children. Based on my experiences, I haven't had much success at any one thing, and I am pretty sure I will fail the next step.

I know one thing that would help me is to take my medicine the way I am supposed to. I know it would help balance me out because when I am on my medication, people smile a lot more around me. When I am off my medication, people look angry all the time and don't seem to want to help me. My mom typed up lists for me—just simple daily lists that said things like, “Brush your teeth, comb your hair, take a shower, take your meds, eat a healthy breakfast, say hello to people....” As long as I have a list in my hand, I can do these things.

I really want to be like everyone else. I look around and try to do what I see “normal” people my age doing. I want to talk to people, but instead I just walk around with a cell phone in my hand and try to shut out the world. This is a solution! I look like everyone else. It seems easier to try to blend in than to have people try to figure out why I am the way I am. No one questions you or tries to have a conversation with you when you look like you are busy on your phone.

Another thing I think would help me is if I would write down simple daily goals—something that I know I can be successful at, like do a load of laundry, fold it, and put it away. Another goal could be to eat a healthy lunch or go for a walk every day. I know if I could complete one thing every day, it might build up my confidence to try bigger things.

I know tomorrow will come. I know I will wake up with Asperger's, and that is all I really know for sure.



AMANDA BARÓN

“I'M A LIFE-LONG LEARNER, MEAN SALSA DANCER, AND ART LOVER. I TRAIN MY CREATIVE EYE WHEN I GO FOR RUNS ON THE LINCOLN TRAILS. THIS PHOTO WAS INSPIRED BY LATE WINTER LIGHT THAT FILTERED THROUGH THE WINDOW AND, FOR A MOMENT, PRODUCED THESE REPLICATIONS.”



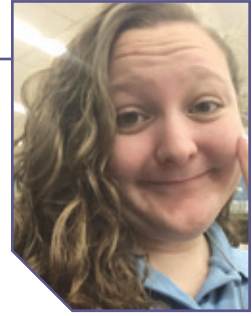
THE FIVE O'CLOCK SHADOW

AMANDA BARÓN • ASSOCIATE INSTRUCTIONAL DEAN



JENNIFER MCCREARY

"I WAS INVOLVED WITH DRUM CORPS FOR FOUR YEARS, AND I AM CURRENTLY TEACHING MYSELF PIANO. I LOVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH MUSIC, AND I COLLECT VINYL. I ALSO ENJOY PHOTOGRAPHY AND EXPLORING RANDOM PLACES."



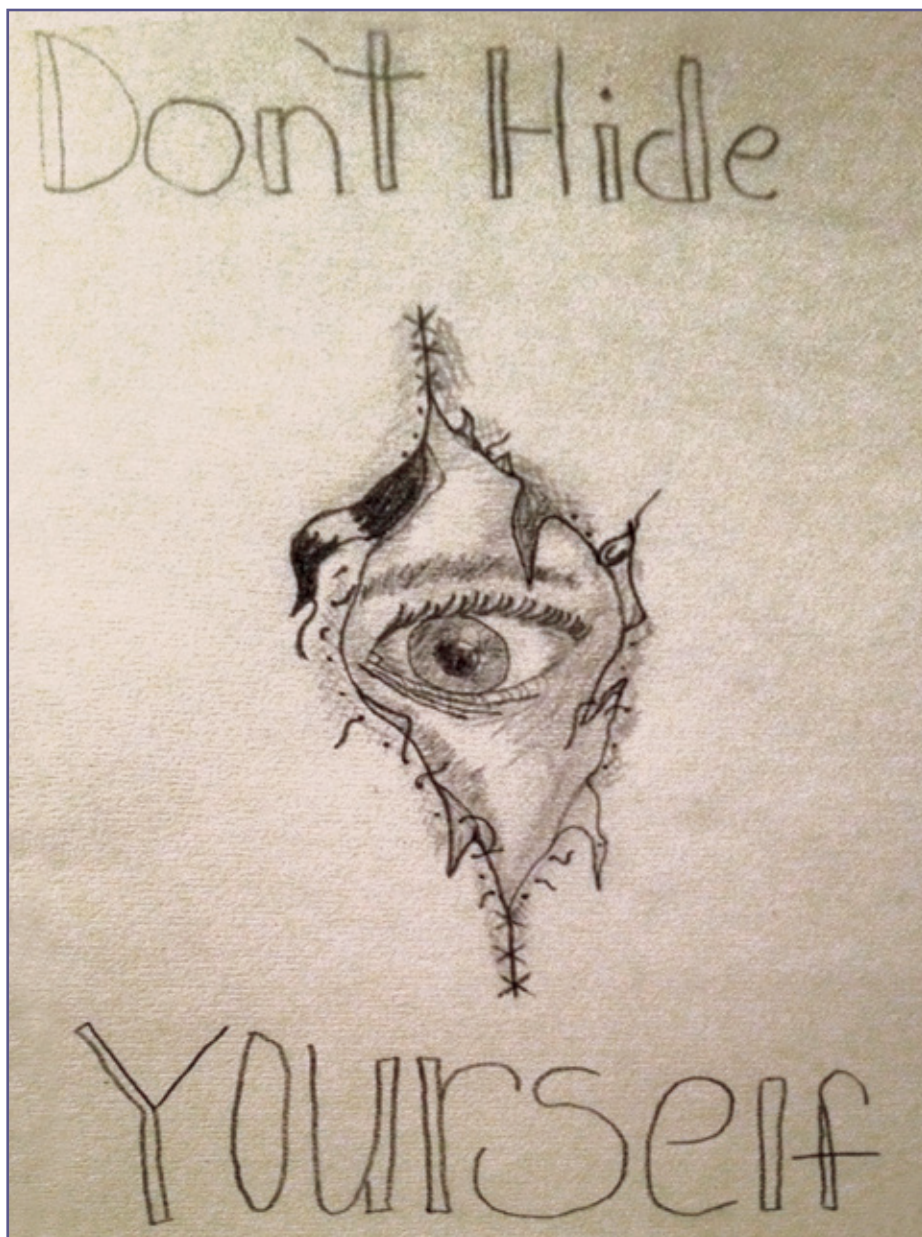
HISTORY

JENNIFER MCCREARY • DESIGN & DRAFTING TECHNOLOGY



DON'T HIDE YOURSELF

JENNIFER MCCREARY • DESIGN & DRAFTING TECHNOLOGY



NATURE VILLEGAS



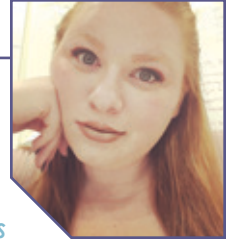
"I AM A CULTURE EMBRACING QUEEN, UNAPOLOGETICALLY SWIRLING IN ALL MY ETHNICITIES. I HAVE FACED ENDLESS UPHILL BATTLES THROUGH THIS THING CALLED LIFE—BATTLES RANGING FROM BEING ORPHANED AT THE AGE OF NINE DUE TO MY MOTHER'S ILLNESS, LOSING MY LOVED ONES TO BAD HABITS, GUNS, AND VIOLENCE, TO LEARNING TO WALK AND TALK AGAIN AFTER SURVIVING MY OWN FACE-OFF WITH DEATH. I FOUND SOLACE AND AN ESCAPE FROM LIFE'S HARSH REALITIES IN MUSIC, DANCE, ART, AND POETRY. I REALIZED AT A YOUNG AGE THAT FEW LISTEN TO HEAR, SO I BEGAN TO WRITE, ONLY TO FEEL LIKE EXOTIC POETRY IN AN ILLITERATE WORLD. I THEN ADDED MASS GENRES OF ART AND LET THE BALLET, EXPRESSIVE DANCE, PENCILS, AND PAINTBRUSHES DO THE TALKING. I HEALED AND GREW MYSELF FROM THE CONCRETE AND DIRT I WAS LEFT IN WITH THE USE OF MY ART. I FORMED PHENOMENAL KALEIDOSCOPE BEAUTY FROM ALL MY BROKEN PIECES. I LIVE UP TO MY NATIVE NAME, MEDICINE SONG, WITH THE USE OF MY ART, AS THE WARRIOR IN ME SPREADS THE WISDOM I CARRY WITHIN TO INSPIRE ALL AROUND ME. FOR ME, ART IS PERFECTION, AS THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG."

LIFE

NATURE VILLEGAS • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



TAMMY JOLENE ATHA



"I HOLD AN MFA IN CREATIVE WRITING FROM MIAMI UNIVERSITY IN OXFORD, OH. CURRENTLY, I LIVE IN LINCOLN WITH MY PARTNER AND TEACH IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT AT SCC. MY WORK HAS WON AN ACADEMY OF AMERICAN POETS PRIZE AND HAS BEEN PUBLISHED IN FICTION SOUTHEAST. I AM A HUGE FAN OF COOKING AND TRYING NEW RESTAURANTS IN THE LINCOLN AND OMAHA AREAS. 'NIAGARA FALLS' IS A STORY MY MOTHER LIKES TO TELL AT FAMILY GATHERINGS, MOSTLY TO POINT OUT THAT MY FATHER, A TRUCK DRIVER, IS NOTORIOUSLY BAD WITH DIRECTIONS."

NIAGARA FALLS

TAMMY JOLENE ATHA • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

In the summer of 1996, my parents took loan against their home to go on vacation. It was our first family vacation before my brother arrived, but while he was a secret from the rest of the family gestating inside my mother's womb. We packed up the car, a light blue Chevy Celebrity Eurosport Wagon. My father sat in the driver's seat, my mother in the passenger's seat, road atlas in tow. I sat in the backseat next to my sister, and my great grandmother sat in the back of the wagon on a lawn chair between suitcases and a red cooler full of Capri Sun pouches.

We set off from Ohio with a course for Niagara Falls, but along the way, my father got lost, and my mother, only 19 years old at the time, kept turning the road atlas around and around in her hands trying to locate our position.

We didn't make it to Niagara Falls that night although my parents took the loan with the high interest rate and planned the trip and tried to hold together a relationship along the way with two screaming girls in the back seat. And though they tried to hold it together, the map was in my mother's hands, and she couldn't figure out my father's (mis)directions.

We stopped the car along Lake Erie, bundled up in blankets, and watched fireworks over the lake. The colors flashed and reflected off the surface of the water. It may have been the Fourth of July, or maybe it wasn't. We set off the next day with fresh directions and made it to Niagara Falls, yet I don't remember the Falls. I remember the fireworks, my parents arguing in the front seat while my great grandmother tried to distract my sister and me with sugary drinks. The endless hours of nonstop driving only to end up somewhere we didn't intend, watching fireworks over the wrong body of water.



IZCHEL QUINTERO

WINNER OF RUNNER-UP POETRY AWARD

"I READ A LOT; I WRITE SOMETIMES. I'M STILL SET ON MY GOAL OF MAKING PEOPLE UNCOMFORTABLE, AND I AM STILL NOT AMERICAN. THESE POEMS ARE FOR NEAL KIRCHNER, FOR BEING THE FIRST PERSON TO MAKE ME BELIEVE THAT I COULD WRITE POETRY AND TO MAKE ME BELIEVE THAT I COULD KEEP WRITING. IF HE'S READING THIS, I CAN'T THANK HIM ENOUGH FOR BEING PROUD OF ME (NOT POKING THE READER ON THE FACE HERE)."



AT THAT

IZCHEL QUINTERO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I
wanna kiss you
that mole
on the length of
your arm
where your hair grows
thick, warm.

I wanna kiss you
that scar
you have in your
thin wrist
that you did yourself
alone, late.

I wanna kiss you
that mark
you have on your
soft thigh
where your skin stretch
wide, bright.

I wanna kiss you
good night
on the corner of your
closed eyes
where you sleep in the dark
still, sound.

SHE AIN'T GOT NOTHING ON YOU

IZCHEL QUINTERO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Mary is kind to every john.
She greets them all with a smile
when they're approaching by the corner
on their Benz, VM,
their soccer mom's car.
Sometimes even one or two bikes.
"Hi, sweetie, you wanna gimme a ride?"

But every time
Laura is coming down the street
she stops to yell
"What a bitch!"

After blowjobs in the
dark, damp alley,
she takes muffins to the church.
Good morning, Mrs. Carlson,
How's your husband doing.

Like clockwork for five minutes
she stays every day.
What a nice young lady,
Mrs. Carlson always says.

She greets the mailman every morning.
Asks him if she'll see him tonight
and he blushes and backs down,
like he's ashamed,
shuffling away
like nobody knows.

Laura helps the old ladies
carry produce to their homes
up the stairs after work
high-heel boots and thigh-long
skirt

What a nice young lady
Mrs. Carlson thinks.

Laura bakes for the auctions
at the end of the month
feeds the kittens on the streets,

and some other hungry things.
What a fucking bitch.

They went to school together
three years ago
ripped the smiles off their faces
with kisses.

Mary says Laura ain't got
no good in her soul.
Laura says she was in love.

BACK IN THE DAY

IZCHEL QUINTERO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

He sits at the porch every morning
throwing stones at couples
holding hands

Damn people in love
Damn people these days
Back in my time,
The good ol' golden age.

Grandma died ten years ago.
The major closed the movie theater.
Back in the day,
we didn't kiss on the streets.

She had long hair
and big eyelashes,
Laughed with the head thrown back.
And at seven, every day
came out the window to kiss his face.

There's a picture of her
right around the corner.
He hit a man on the head
Then brought her a bouquet of roses.

Back in the day,
We loved like it mattered.

COMING TO THE START

IZCHEL QUINTERO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

She has big hands
and it's the simple things
she can do with them that
make me look up in the
morning, sometimes.
Just making sure she's still there.

she reads me fairy tales
at night
when the dark is
too much to handle

She has small eyes,
but they're enough to point
out the way I should've followed.
She doesn't tell me where to go
looks into the nothing
and follows a road.

she walked away
too soon
and me,
not waiting
not watching her go

She has big shoulders
to carry me on,
like she carries the world
at night
she cries
when she thinks I can't listen.

she saw the life she didn't have
decisions she couldn't grasp
and she learned to be silent

She has big hands
that look too small
when she tries to
grab onto her problems;
her small eyes
not big enough for crying,
her big shoulders
not small enough for falling

she reads,
tales at night
when it's too
dark to handle

LORA HUDGENS



"I AM IN THE HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAM WITH A FOCUS ON GRIEF AND ADDICTION COUNSELING. THIS ESSAY STARTED AS A SIMPLE COMPOSITION ASSIGNMENT, BUT IT QUICKLY TURNED INTO A THERAPEUTIC RELEASE OF A LOT OF FEELINGS AND MEMORIES. I AM ORIGINALLY FROM DETROIT AND LIVED FOR SEVERAL YEARS IN CHICAGO BEFORE FINALLY RELOCATING TO LINCOLN TO TAKE CARE OF MY MOTHER, WHO HAD FALLEN ILL. I BECAME HER FULL-TIME CARETAKER. AFTER FIGHTING FOR TWO YEARS, SHE UNFORTUNATELY LOST HER BATTLE WITH CANCER. IN THE TIME I SPENT HERE, I BEGAN TO FALL IN LOVE WITH LINCOLN AND TO FIND MYSELF. THAT WAS A HUGE REASON WHY I DECIDED TO RETURN TO COLLEGE—IN PART TO HELP MYSELF, IN PART TO HELP OTHERS, AND DEFINITELY BECAUSE I KNEW IT WOULD MAKE MY MOTHER PROUD."

A FIRE IN HER EYES

LORA HUDGENS • HUMAN SERVICES

That warm October afternoon will be burned into my memory for the rest of my days. A hot breeze came and went like a passing tide as I spread my mother's ashes across her prized wildflower garden. I'd never felt such a real ache in my heart, knowing that this beautiful woman was gone from this world with one swift shift in the wind. The realization that I was now completely alone came crashing down on me like the weight of an avalanche. Before this moment, the death of my father had been the worst experience of my life. Losing my mother was a thousand times worse. As I stared across the empty yard, I couldn't help but to reflect on the last two years and wonder how to carry on from there.

At the age of 59, my mother was an ocean of boundless energy and ambition. She toiled in the earth for countless hours, shaping the gardens that she loved so much. The look of pure admiration as she gazed upon her newly grown flowers could almost take your breath away. There was a fire in her gaze—one that convinced you that it couldn't be extinguished for many years to come.

The day the doctor called to give her the results of her recent physical all but smothered that fire. The dark spot on her lung was not a glitch in the x-ray, as they had prayed it would be. She hung up the phone in a slow, awkward way. My mother turned to look at me and breathed just one treacherous word: "Cancer."

At that moment, I noticed the years in her eyes. The wrinkles I hadn't noticed before covered her face like a mask. I thought, "Could this really be

happening?”

My mother hid in her room for two days. I could hear her soft steps pacing the length of her room. Her pleading prayers rose over the constant humming of the ceiling fan. When she finally emerged from her room, the light in her eyes shone brighter than ever before. “I will beat this,” she chirped to me. It was then that I remembered her abhorrence to traditional medicine and cancer treatments. After watching my father go through surgeries and suffer through chemo, she knew she would never go down that road. I recalled a conversation we had had many months before, of her belief that changing your diet and taking the right vitamins and minerals could retrain your body to attack the cancer cells and obliterate them from within you. She was my mother and my rock. This was her body and her life she was fighting to keep. I had no choice but to support her and help her.

The following months were a whirlwind of online research and trips to the library. Copies of medical journals and holistic teachings were printed and strewn across the house. The pantry that had once contained a momentous amount of snacks and sugars was now stocked to the brim with gluten free flour, organic honey, and more vitamins than you could name in one breath. Bottles of turmeric, fish oils, and eastern herbs that were unknown to me at the time now filled the medicine cabinets. If one had tried, they wouldn't have been able to find an item in the entire house that wasn't organic. She filled her head with as much knowledge as she could, stating boldly that she was convinced this would work. I supported her blindly. She was my mother, and a mother always knew best.

For months, I shopped health food stores and farmers markets. I cooked for her—gluten free, vegan meals. Some were delectably flavorful and filling. Others tasted as if I had sautéed cardboard and served it to her on fine china, hoping the presentation would distract from the fact that it may have been organic cardboard. My mother always ate the food gratefully and happily. Her unprecedented optimism about her medical outlook always shocked me. The fire in her eyes grew daily, and I began to finally believe that we were making progress and that maybe, what she was doing might save her life.

There were times I would plead with her to contact the doctor and have a few more tests done, just to be sure we knew what we were dealing with. My pleas were met with a stubbornness I had grown to know quite well. It wasn't until a year into her holistic cancer treatments that I sadly got my wish. A persistent cough and dramatic weight loss finally led her to angrily return to the doctor. After a combined urging from the doctor and myself, my mother

begrudgingly agreed to a new chest scan. Awaiting the results, I could feel the lumps rising in my throat. My fear and panic began to overtake me. Even sitting in the office, surrounded with surgical textbooks and framed medical degrees, my mother believed that her methods were the way, and the doctors and I knew nothing. The crisp leather of the sofa felt cold beneath my hand. As the doctor, wearing a stark white coat, entered the room, the solemn look on his face shot into my heart, and my fears came to life. Although there was no proof that our holistic methods hadn't helped, the results were as the doctor had imagined. What was once a dark spot on one lung had now spread into a dozen or more tumors, filling both lungs. Stage four, treatment-resistant, non-small-cell lung carcinoma. The words rang in my ears like a thousand buzzing flies circling the room. Without the help of doctors for the previous year, the cancer had grown at an alarming rate. My mother was now looking at a life expectancy of six months. As I gazed through tear-filled eyes at my mother, I was greeted with a look of fear that I was not expecting.

The drive home from the doctor was quiet and still. I glanced at my mother, who hours earlier had still looked so strong and full of life. It was then that I noticed how frail her frame had become. Her body looked gaunt and weak, as if a slight breeze could blow her away. "How had I not noticed how slight she'd become?" I thought to myself. Over the next several hours, arrangements were made—phone calls to insurance companies and a particularly difficult phone call to hospice to arrange home care. I stressed and panicked. My mother sat quietly. I noticed that the fire in her eyes still burned bright. It was the moment I knew that despite her weak appearance, her strength was immeasurable. She wouldn't give up. She would fight until her last moment. There was still hope to be had.

The next few months were a whirlwind of pain medications and treatments to keep my mother comfortable. A revolving door of hospice nurses came through the house at all hours of the day and night. A portable oxygen concentrator was brought into the house, for my mother could no longer breathe without it on her own. It sat outside the door to my room, constantly humming and buzzing, making sleep for me the most daunting of tasks. My days were filled with pain monitoring and medication dosing, keeping a journal of pill types, amounts, and times given. I had to constantly stay upbeat and supportive to keep my mother in high spirits. My nights were filled with tears and regrets. I had to constantly sleep, whenever sleep came to me, with one ear open, listening for the soft yelling of my name from her room. Every cold sunset, I wondered if it would be my last with her. Every warm sunrise, I was

blessed with another beautiful day with her. While she slept, I often worked in her garden, trying to keep up on the plants that she loved so immensely, never keeping them quite as beautiful as she could. I did anything in my power to keep that fire in her eyes burning bright, even if that fire was clouded by the pain medication.

I can remember a time when I was young, maybe six or seven years old, that I grew very ill. I woke from a nap with a sizzling and dangerously high fever, and I softly cried and called for my mother. She floated like an angel into my room to check my temperature. She calmly scooped me from my bed and effortlessly carried me into the bathroom, where she had already run a cool bath to help lower my fever. I remember feeling how much she loved me as she gently washed my hair and spoke softly to me to keep me calm.

Roughly 24 years later, I was the one who was scooping my mother from her bed to carry her to an already drawn bath to help lower her fever. I thought, "When had she lost so much weight that I am able to so effortlessly carry her? How have I not noticed that over the course of a few months, she had dropped to an alarming 74 pounds?" I had spent so much time every day and night trying to keep her alive that I had neglected to notice her dramatic weight loss. I had spent all my time hoping for more time with her, and now I felt like I had wasted the time I had left with her.

The day she died, it was business as usual. I awoke around 9:00 to prepare her breakfast and her pain medication to go with it. I walked quietly into her room to see if she had already woken up. She still slept, looking beautiful as ever, despite her frail and delicate frame. I decided to let her sleep in, knowing that it would do her some good. I glanced out the window and noticed that her beloved wildflowers were in full bloom and decided to bring some inside to cheer her up when she woke. Upon entering her room an hour later, I felt in my heart that something was wrong. I tried and I tried, but I couldn't get her to wake up. I called the hospice nurse, and she rushed over to the house. After running a few physical tests, the nurse explained that my mother had fallen into a coma and that it wouldn't be long before she passed.

My heart sank like an anchor into the pit of my stomach. I climbed into bed with her, and I held her close and cried. I sat all day talking gently to my mother, wishing with every fiber of my being that she would open her eyes and show me the fire that, even then, I could feel slowly going out. I talked to her for hours, telling her how much I loved her and how strong she was for holding on for so long, hoping she could hear me. I watched her chest slowly rise and listened to her soft breath rush in and out. I took my mother's hand and gave it

a gentle squeeze.

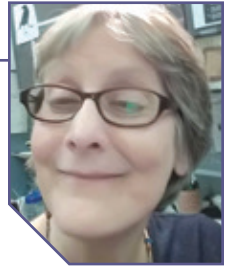
“It’s OK, Mom. You’ve fought long and hard enough. It’s time to let go and finally rest,” I whispered to her, gently kissing her cheek.

On October 6, 2016, at roughly 10:00 p.m., my beautiful mother took a long last breath and slipped into an eternal sleep. The fire that had burned so bright for so long was gone, and the world was worse because of it.



NANCY HAGLER-VUJOVIC

“I COME FROM A LONG LINE OF BIBLIOPHILES. I ALSO TAKE IN RESCUE DOGS AND CATS. WHEN I RETIRE, I HOPE TO BE ABLE TO RESCUE POSSUMS (THEY ARE A FULL-TIME JOB!). IN CREATING ‘UNTITLED’—I LIKE HOSTAS, AND WHEN I SAW THE SIZE OF THIS LEAF, I WAS COMPELLED TO PRESERVE IT BY CASTING IT IN PLASTER, THEN USING IT AS A PRESS MOLD FOR STONEWARE DISHES.”



UNTITLED

NANCY HAGLER-VUJOVIC • ART INSTRUCTOR



FLORAL

ANGELICA JASIAK • UNDECLARED



NELSON DUNGAN

"I RECEIVED A B.S IN ART EDUCATION FROM COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY, WHERE I WAS FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO RECEIVE AN ART SCHOLARSHIP. I EARNED MY MASTER'S DEGREE IN ART EDUCATION FROM UN-KEARNEY. TEACHING ART HAS BEEN MY PASSION FOR MORE THAN 44 YEARS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM. I HAVE RETIRED FROM PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHING, BUT I CONTINUE TO TEACH AS AN ADJUNCT IN THE ART DEPARTMENT AT SCC IN BEATRICE. SOME OF MY ARTWORK HAS BEEN PURCHASED AND PLACED INTO PERMANENT ART COLLECTIONS, AND ONE BECAME PART OF THE COLLECTION AT THE MUSEUM OF NEBRASKA ART, MONA, IN KEARNEY. I CONTINUE TO PRODUCE ART AT MY HOME STUDIO WHERE MY WIFE AND I RUN A BUSINESS CALLED POTTERY POSSIBILITIES. HERE, I TEACH CHILDREN AND ADULTS IN DRAWING, PAINTING, AND POTTERY. I WILL CONTINUE TO TEACH AND PROFESSIONALLY PRODUCE ART FOR AS LONG AS I CAN."



FALL LEAVES

NELSON DUNGAN • ADJUNCT ART INSTRUCTOR



PORTRAIT OF STONES

NELSON DUNGAN • ADJUNCT ART INSTRUCTOR



STONES FROM LAKE MICHIGAN AND FALL LEAVES

NELSON DUNGAN • ADJUNCT ART INSTRUCTOR



VIEW AT ELEVEN MILE RESERVOIR IN COLORADO

NELSON DUNGAN • ADJUNCT ART INSTRUCTOR



DIANE PAUL

"I AM FROM FREMONT, NE. I LIVED IN LINCOLN FOR TEN YEARS WHILE PURSUING MY DEGREES, THEN LIVED IN NEW MEXICO FOR 34 YEARS WHERE I TAUGHT AT CENTRAL NEW MEXICO COMMUNITY COLLEGE. I'M NOW BACK IN LINCOLN TEACHING ENGLISH AT SCC. MY MOTTO IS, 'WORK HARD AND BE NICE TO PEOPLE!'"



MID-LIFE HAIKU

DIANE PAUL • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

The horizon quivers

Washed out by hot bright light

Destination lost

CORN QUEENS

DIANE PAUL • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

I planted corn in the desert

With visions of miles of dew damp green
Rustling in the breeze
Rows upon rows of stately queens
Leading me back home

I could see them

Dancing, swaying to a private prairie dance
With graceful leaves applauding life and
Golden crowns blowing
Pollen kisses across the humid hills

I so wanted corn in the desert

The tiny sprouts fought
Against the sun and sand and the dry desert air
They, too, dreamed
Of wombs bursting with fat cobs

But I languished in the searing sun

I let the burning blue heat
Dry up the possibilities
And it left bent old women
Brown and sharp

Cutting my fingers I tore them out of the ground

Next time I will nourish their souls
I will sway with the wind
Like the graceful leaves of the
Beautiful green queens

Next time I will join in the dance

MARNIE BOLEN

"I PLAY THE CELLO AND VIOLA. I LOVE DARK CHOCOLATE, AND COFFEE IS MY GREATEST WEAKNESS. WRITING AND DRAWING ARE BOTH HOBBIES I LOVE TO INDULGE IN WHEN I HAVE TIME."



ILLUSIONS AND DAYDREAMS

MARNIE BOLEN • NURSING



HEIDI ISEMANN



"I HAVE GROWN UP WITH STACKS OF BOOKS AND CONVERSATIONS OF POLITICS ALL AROUND ME. JOURNAL WRITING HAS BEEN A WAY TO RELIEVE STRESS, AND OFTEN, POEMS HAVE EMERGED! TAKING SCC COURSES ON MY PATH TO A PRE-MED MAJOR HAS BEEN THOROUGHLY ENJOYABLE. I WROTE 'I HEAR AMERICA CHANTING' AS THE RESULT OF MY FRUSTRATION WITH THE CONSTANT CONVERSATION ABOUT KNEELING FOR THE NATIONAL ANTHEM THAT WAS TAKING THE FOCUS AWAY FROM THE REAL ISSUES FACING OUR COUNTRY."

I HEAR AMERICA CHANTING

HEIDI ISEMANN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I hear America chanting, cheering all around stands

All in various tones and voices

The fans are screaming down the stadium onto the 100-yard field

Chanting at the players

Chanting at the refs

Chanting at each other

I hear America chanting through the Internet

Taking away 1st Amendment rights

I hear America chanting over the National Anthem

Another issue the country is divided on

No wonder nothing gets done

I hear America keeping up with the fake news,

Rather than understanding actual news

I hear America chanting

No one understanding

CARI FORBES

"I AM ALWAYS DOING THINGS—CUB SCOUTS, WORKING, READING, JAZZERCISE, GARDENING, OR REMODELING MY HOUSE. THIS ESSAY WAS WRITTEN AS PART OF AN ASSIGNMENT FOR CLASS."



THE POLICY OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

CARI FORBES • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

In January of 2002, President George W. Bush, signed H.R. 1, The No Child Left Behind Act, into law. No Child Left Behind was enacted so that the federal government could meet its responsibility of ensuring that all schools were consistently representing educational standards for all students equally. This law required all schools to adhere to a strict set of criteria to meet yearly annual progress and tied Title 1 funding to performance levels (Hewitt 175).

To gauge progress, standardized tests became the tool to measure performance. Principals were under increased scrutiny to produce test score gains (Gardiner 149-150). By requiring schools to define progress by the results of standardized testing, the teaching of critical thinking skills was abandoned. Student success and failure rates would be tied to teacher performance. Student achievement without reference to student growth led many states to lower their standards, and this began the practice of “teaching to test” (Hewitt 174). Under pressure to perform, teachers and administrators found ways around the legislation, including suspending students and cheating (Hewitt 176).

No Child Left Behind had unintended consequences for the school districts it had intended to help. With most schools dependent upon Title 1 funding residing in less affluent neighborhoods, these schools were put at a disadvantage. Schools with a history of underperformance or successful performance with a subgroup failing would be labeled as failed schools. Failing schools created neighborhoods that were viewed negatively by prospective home buyers and were shown to drive home values down (Bogin 789). This impacted how much funding a school district could secure via property tax revenue. Communities with less revenue sources from property taxes received far less in local funding than children in more affluent areas (Bogin 794-795).

To change the policy of No Child Left Behind, legislative reform would

be needed. Reform to Federal Legislation requires introduction to Congress and must go through the same process as bill creation. Legislation can also be overturned through judicial review. The President can use the bully pulpit to help usher in new legislation by helping to sway public opinion or by listening to public opinion and by pressuring congress. Or, in a reauthorization period, it can be included in the language of the bill; with No Child Left Behind, there was a reauthorization period.

In 2015, President Barack Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which included the standardized testing to continue to measure student progress but untied the Title 1 Funding from test score failures to ensure that all schools were funded (Dennis). Continued reform must move away from just using test scores to analyze progress and must look further into the actual root causes of the poor achievement rates in schools. The Federal Government must allow states to monitor and develop corrective courses of action within their own borders that are compliant with the federal mandate set forth.

No Child Left Behind exposed an achievement gap between white students and non-white students. The federal government must act upon fulfilling the goal of Brown vs. The Board of Education, serving as a watchdog to ensure that federal funding is being used to see that districts create equal environments for all students (Hewitt 173). The data compiled from standardized test scores should be used to identify at risk districts to determine if and what intervention would aid their student populations. States and local governments should be working together with their school boards to ensure equal opportunities in learning are made available in accordance with Every Student Succeeds.

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ROGER EVANS

"I LOVE TO TRAVEL THE WORLD! I TOOK THE FAMILY ON A MEDITERRANEAN VACATION IN AUGUST OF 2017, AND MY WIFE AND I WENT TO ISRAEL IN MARCH OF 2018."

GOLD COAST

ROGER EVANS • COMPUTER PROGRAMMER



TEL-AVIV

ROGER EVANS • COMPUTER PROGRAMMER



WAILING WALL

ROGER EVANS • COMPUTER PROGRAMMER



MARCO BRAVO

"I AM A SPANISH INSTRUCTOR AT SCC. MY UPBRINGING AND CULTURE INSPIRED ME TO WRITE THESE POEMS. WORDS ARE PUZZLES, AND SOMETIMES, IF YOU PUT THEM IN THE RIGHT ORDER, MAGIC HAPPENS."



DUBBED IN ENGLISH

MARCO BRAVO • SPANISH INSTRUCTOR

To better understand you,
I pretend you talk to me in Spanish.

I close my eyes to a sound
similar to that of 1492.
When men with ember revelations
and moonlight skin
arrived,
orphaning a continent
with a single syllable
that spread like wildfire.

I pretend you talk to me with the presence
of the Sun
in your mouth.
With buried treasures beneath your tongue,

As I sit here, as mute
as a shipwreck
resting on the ocean floor.

I close my eyes a little tighter
and I pretend
you talk to me in Spanish,
but when I open them
you are still there,
my conquistador.

PROLOGUE TO SELF

MARCO BRAVO • SPANISH INSTRUCTOR

It came to him in whispers. In subtle
kisses that made their way toward the universe
of his soul.

Pablo Neruda was one of the lucky ones,
one of the few.

Poetry came to him between the river, the rain,
and the shadows of winter.

Between the shallow branches of the night
and the violent fires of the day.

Life would have it
that I would not be one of the lucky ones.

Poetry came to me in the burly voice
of a drunk 300-pound man I called:

Tio Moncho.

There was nothing romantic
about him.

He didn't come from the rain,
or the rivers
and certainly not between the cold shadows.

He came as he was.
Big as a lion, loud as thunder.
But long before I knew the meaning,
he spoke in a language similar to swans.

There he stood with a rum and coke,
 swaying as if the patio yard
 had now turned into a castaway ship,
 and with the exhale of a polished anthem,
 he recited in slurred words:

(words that I recognized,
 but couldn't have)

*Juventud, divino tesoro,
 Ya te vas para no volver!
 Cuando quiero llorar, no lloro...
 Y a veces lloro sin querer.*

And with those brutal words,
 the swarm
 of my identity
 began to crawl
 toward me.

And as many of you have experienced,
 something happened.
 Something growled and awoke.

Something that had always been there,
 something that had been dormant since I entered this world,
 was finally ready to emerge.

And it was at that age....

The Mombacho,
Momotombo, and *Masaya* arrived in search of me.

LA MAREA DE TUS LABIOS

MARCO BRAVO • SPANISH INSTRUCTOR

Cómo no querer la marea
Que resbala de tus labios.
La simplicidad de ese beso
Vuelto un secreto, para decir
Nada y sentir todo.

El mar está pensando en vos.

Vuelva a besarme querida,
Como si fueras la última puesta del sol,
Deteniendo el continente, latido
De un fuego, en un movimiento lleno
De silencio como las hojas de noviembre.

Deja que todo nos cubra!
Las estrellas de Nicaragua, el vino
Del cielo, los caracoles de nunca,
Las sábanas del caribe, que todo nos cubra!
Porque ahora que te quiero, nada es secreto.

Tienes la nostalgia de una noche sin luna,
Y vuelvo a pedirte que me beses.

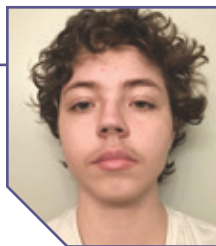
Toca mi labios y bésame
Con la alegría de tu niñez, porque
Más al fondo que pareciera, me recuerdas
De las últimas sirenas que nadaban, por el pecho
De mi corazón.

Bésame,
Y vuelva ver como me pierdo
Por los caminos transcurridos,
Viajando como un huracán,
De norte a sur, por el universo
De tu boca!

Bésame en total, porque algo menos,
Sería inútil!

BENJAMIN STARA-O'BRIEN

"I'M VERY QUIET, BUT ONCE YOU GET TO KNOW ME, I CAN BE REALLY OBNOXIOUS. I ENJOY CREEPY STUFF LIKE STEPHEN KING BOOKS/MOVIES AND SPENDING TIME WITH FAMILY, AND THE WAY TO MY HEART IS THROUGH VIDEO GAMES, GOOD FOOD, AND MORE CREEPY STUFF! MY DREAM IS TO DO SOMETHING WITH CREATING THINGS FOR OTHERS TO ENJOY, SO BEING AN ACTOR, VOICE ACTOR, WRITER, OR ANIMATOR."



DON'T TAP THE GLASS

BENJAMIN STARA-O'BRIEN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Abby seemed to have it all—good looks, good grades, a good car—but what she didn't have was a good heart. Even though her mother was single, she still provided well for herself and Abby, but Abby wasn't thankful for the things she had. She had always had anything she wanted, and her parents had always given. When she wasn't parading around her expensive outfits and good looks at school, she lived her life on social media. She loved to use her \$800 smartphone and \$2000 laptop to cyberbully all the geeks and weirdos she could get her digital hands on. Despite this, she still managed to be one of the most popular girls at school, and all the football jocks and other members of her cheerleading team flocked to her like flies on horse manure.

Abby pulled her shiny black Jeep into her driveway, scooped up her backpack, and headed inside the front door of her four-bedroom, four-bathroom home, slamming the door behind her.

"Hello, sweetie! How was your day?" her mother asked as Abby walked through the kitchen. Her mother sat at the white marble kitchen counter surfing the web on her laptop. She was in her PJs, which was understandable, as she worked overnight shifts at Elmwood Hospital. Her neatly brushed opal black hair flowed down her shoulders and rested atop the front of her white T-shirt.

"Horrible!" Abby hissed, rolling her dark brown eyes. "Chad dumped me!"

"Chad? It's about time! That boy is nothing but trouble, Abby," her mother replied.

"Mom! No, he's not! He's like the hottest guy in school—the head of the football team!" Abby shouted angrily. She headed toward the fridge and rummaged around for a soda.

"And now that he dumped me, *my* reputation is going down the toilet! There are already rumors spreading about why we broke up." Abby's eyes landed on a can of her favorite soda, Bub L. Fiz, and she snatched it up quickly, annoyed

that it wasn't readily available for her in front of all of the other junk in the fridge. She glanced down at the can—a light blue background with purple bubbles dotted around the can, the name of the soda in popping white bubble letters with a black border around the words.

"Sweetheart," Abby's mother said sadly, gently closing her laptop to focus all of her attention on her daughter, "you really need to distance yourself from all of these people and this drama. You don't need it. I don't need it," she explained sternly.

"So now this is all about *you*?" Abby questioned, annoyed. She had heard this ten million times before already. "You don't know what it's like to be popular—you probably never were. Drama is the best part! It's the thrill, all of the juicy gossip that gets spread around." Abby's eyes lit up for a second as she thought about the fun she had had discussing rumors with her friends and talking trash about the people they hated. "And these 'people' are my friends—we're there for each other. Didn't you have any friends in high school?"

"You don't talk to me like that, young lady," Abby's mother snapped back. She pursed her lips and stared at her daughter. "You used to be so much better than this, Abby. What happened? I deserve some respect from you."

"Whatever," Abby mumbled. She began to head to the stairs to the second story, where her bedroom was.

"Excuse me—I wasn't done talking to you!" her mother hollered. Abby kept walking.

"You're doing these dishes by the end of the night, or else I will take away that precious phone of yours!"

Abby uttered a loud, frustrated, "Ugh!" as she stomped up the stairs. First the Chad thing, and now this? How could her day get any worse?

When she reached her bedroom, she slammed the door behind her, threw her backpack onto the floor, and hopped onto her bed. She cracked open her can of Bub L. Fiz and took a sip, then set it down on her nightstand and whipped out her smartphone. Her friends were pelting her with questions about Chad. Chad this and Chad that. Her thumbs began to quickly tap the screen and soon, she was reaching for her laptop to video chat with her friends about the whole ordeal.

As she chatted with her friends, she searched her phone for the most embarrassing pictures she could find of Chad and uploaded them immediately to her social media. She made up stories about how rotten of a person he was, and when she got bored of this, she began to take out her anger on the innocent, kind "nerds" and other kids she knew.

Before she knew it, the sun had set, and Chad called her. He had seen her

posts on social media, and he was furious. They argued, and after thoroughly cursing him out, Abby blocked his number. She was hungry now, and she had finished her can of Bub L. Fiz long ago. She closed her laptop and, annoyed, she trudged out of her room to fetch a snack and another can of soda.

When she reached the kitchen, new anger swelled up inside of her as she stood face to face with a mountain of dishes in the sink. She had completely forgotten about them. She wanted to blow them off, but she knew her mother was serious about taking her phone—it had happened once before—and she angrily called up a friend to gossip and complain about Chad while she tackled the dish monster.

When she had finished, it was already one in the morning. She wasn't tired, though. She popped herself some popcorn and grabbed another can of soda, and then she began to head back to her room. At the top of the steps, however, she noticed a strange blue light coming from under her mother's bedroom door. *Wasn't she supposed to be at work at this hour?* Abby asked herself. Intrigued, she first silenced her phone, then stood quietly by the door and listened.

She heard what sounded like the pouring of a liquid and the turning of a page. *What on earth is she doing in there?* Abby stood, listening, and then heard a mixing sound, as if her mother were stirring a thin, liquidy soup. Abby grew impatient, and she just wanted to know what silly stuff her mother was fiddling around with.

Knock, knock, knock.

Abby heard her mother quickly withdraw her stirring utensil from the liquid.

"Y-yes? What do you want, Abby?" her mother's voice came. She spoke quickly, and she sounded worried.

Abby tried the door, but it was locked. She decided to get right to the point.

"What's this blue light coming from under your door?" she questioned. Abby heard shuffling coming from inside the room.

"Uh, uh...nothing. It's just...don't worry about it. Did you get the dishes done?"

"I don't know. Why don't you come and look for yourself?" A slight pause.

"I'm busy right now."

"Doing what?"

"Some medical stuff. You wouldn't understand it."

"Well, just tell me anyway," Abby insisted, annoyed.

Silence.

The blue light under the door vanished. Abby heard footsteps approaching her, the click of the lock, and then the door opened to reveal her mother before her. Abby craned her neck around her to peer inside the bedroom. She didn't

notice anything out of the ordinary. Her mother smiled at her, although the smile was more of an “I told you so.”

“What were you doing?” Abby asked, her eyes narrowed.

“Nothing, dear,” her mother smiled.

Her mother said nothing more, and neither did Abby. They just stared at each other for a few seconds.

“Aren’t you supposed to be at work at this hour?”

“I wasn’t feeling well, so I called in sick.”

Another awkward pause.

“Whatever,” Abby finally sighed. She turned and began to head to her room. Her mother didn’t say another word.

As Abby walked, she kept tossing back glances toward her mother’s room. Abby noticed that her mom had closed the door for the most part, but it remained open just a crack. Was her mother watching her return to her room? Abby thought so.

When she reached her room, she turned and noticed that her mother had closed her bedroom door, and no light was crawling out from beneath it. Abby closed her own door, flipped the light switch, and sat down on her bed. She pondered what her mother could have possibly been up to. Her mind couldn’t think of anything. However, she decided to lock her bedroom door, just in case. She plopped back down on her bed and munched on her popcorn, sipped her soda, and chatted away with her friends. She fell asleep a couple of hours later.

The next day was a typical day for Abby: gossip, spread rumors, the usual. After school, she pulled her shiny black Jeep into her driveway, scooped up her backpack, and headed inside her large home.

“Hey, sweetie, how was your day?” Her mother smiled at her. It was weird, though; she was just sitting at the counter, her hands folded in her lap, as if she had been waiting for Abby to return home.

“It was fine,” Abby replied. She thought about the day’s events, of all the drama surrounding Chad and all the gossip she and her friends had shared. She grinned to herself.

“That’s good,” her mother answered coolly. “I got you a little something. It’s in your room.” She smiled again.

Abby shot her a puzzled look. “What for?”

“Oh...you know.” That’s all her mother said.

“Um...okay...”

Intrigued, Abby headed for her room. As she walked, she thought about what had happened last night. What had really been going on in her mother’s bedroom? But most importantly, what had she gotten for her? And what did

she mean when had she said, *Oh...you know...?*

Abby finally reached her bedroom. Excitedly, she threw open the door and scanned her room for anything new. There on her dresser was a five-gallon rectangular fish tank filled with crystal clear clean water, sky blue pebbles carpeting the bottom, healthy looking bright green plastic plants extending from the bottom like long, flat fingers, and a brightly colored goldfish swimming around, taking its time to explore its surroundings. Abby's eyes were glued to her new goldfish. She stepped towards it, and her backpack slowly slid off her shoulders and onto the floor. She bent over slightly to level her eyes with her fish, and she watched as the fish looked back at her. It seemed to be staring at her, watching her intently.

"So, what do you think?" Abby's mother's voice came from behind her. The sound startled Abby.

"It's cute," she replied. She had always wanted a goldfish, except....

"But I wanted a fish *bowl*, not a tank. It doesn't look as cute."

"It's better for the fish, honey," her mother explained coolly.

"It's just a fish. Why does it matter? Can't we just change its water and stuff?" Abby whined. Her mother pulled her lips into her mouth and stared at Abby. Then her lips reappeared and curled themselves into a smile.

"Sure. Of course. We can get you a bowl tomorrow, dear." She turned to leave, then paused and faced Abby.

"Oh, and sweetie," she paused again. She looked at Abby very seriously and said, "Do NOT tap the glass." She then simply turned and left.

Abby returned her eyes to her fish. It was still watching her.

Dumb fish, Abby thought to herself. What was the point of having a fish if it wasn't going to swim around? Abby seated herself on her bed and peeked up at her new fish again. It was still watching her. It was beginning to make Abby feel uneasy. She decided to ignore it and opened up her laptop and began texting her friends, as usual. She stopped to snap a picture of her fish, and she was somewhat relieved to find that it was now swimming around the tank again.

A thought returned to Abby, and she looked up from her phone, which was now resting in her lap but still gripped in her hands. Why exactly had her mother gotten her that fish? It was probably just a mom thing for her breakup with Chad. Yes, that was it. But still, something didn't feel quite right. She couldn't shake the thought of what had been going on the night before.... Did it have something to do with this fish?

Abby turned her head toward the tank and saw that the fish was resting near the bottom of the tank and seemed to be watching her again. She was getting annoyed now. She set her laptop and phone off to the side and rose from her

bed. She took small steps over to the tank and bent over slightly, her hands on her thighs, closely above her knees.

Their eyes met, and the two began to have a staring contest. There was something not quite right about this fish, but what was it? Suddenly, Abby's mother's voice rang in her head: *Do NOT tap the glass.*

Abby's eyebrows furrowed in confusion, and her lips turned down into a frown. Maybe that would make this dumb fish stop looking at her, and it might startle it into swimming around more. That's what fish were for, right?

Abby hesitated but then raised her right hand and slowly extended her index finger towards the fish. Its eyes remained fixed on Abby.

"Stupid fish," Abby whispered.

Tap, tap, tap.

Suddenly, Abby felt dizzy and like she was going to fall over. She tried to reach out her arms to catch herself, but she couldn't move. Her vision became black.

When her vision came to, it was blurry. She tried to focus on what was in front of her. She made out her gorgeous face staring back at her, her eyes focused on her, her long, cleanly brushed dirty-blonde hair flowing down from her head. She noticed a strand of it was in front of her eye, and she moved her right hand to fix it. However, her hand didn't move. Instead, her whole body turned to the left.

Confused, she tried to move her left hand, but instead, she turned to the right.

What the heck? Abby tried to say. Instead, bubbles came from her mouth. Wait—*bubbles?*

Abby watched as a smirk spread across her own lips, but she wasn't telling them to do so. Her eyebrows pressed down atop her eyes.

"Stupid fish, huh?" she heard her voice say. It sounded like she was underwater, though. What was happening? Abby frantically looked about and noticed the same sky blue pebbles and green plastic plants that were in her new fish's tank. Wait....

Abby turned back toward herself and focused her eyes on what was right in front of her. Glass. And she also happened to notice a faint golden reflection staring back at her—in the shape of a fish.

Abby heard her door open and saw the blurry image of her mother entering her room. She looked to Abby's body—the one outside of the fish tank.

Abby's body said to her mother, "It was successful, Mrs. Wells." Her mother's face lit up like a sinister Christmas tree, and she eagerly walked over to the tank and peered at Abby, the one inside of the tank.

"I knew you would do exactly what I told you *not* to do," she snickered. Her face was that of a successful villain.

What? What are you talking about? Mom, what did you do to me?

Abby tried desperately to speak, but only bubbles escaped her lips. She swam around in desperation, terrified. Her mother and Abby's body giggled in amusement.

"I gave you your chances, Abby, and I got sick of it. So I figured the only way I could get you to be a good, well-behaved daughter was if I made you that way myself. So, in case your little fish brain can't put it together, *that's* what I was doing last night—concocting a potion for the perfect daughter."

Abby couldn't believe what was happening.

I'll be good—I promise! I'll do anything you want! Just please, let me out of here!
PLEASE!

Abby swam around madly, and she wanted to cry, but she couldn't tell if she was crying; if there were tears, they blended in with the water around her. This was her world now.

Abby watched as her face grew closer to the glass.

"I have a lot of work to do before you are seen as a perfect daughter to anyone outside of this house. Or should I say... *I?*" she chuckled.

Abby stopped swimming. It was useless. She simply watched as her body and her mother headed toward the door. She noticed her phone erupting with messages. She saw her body reach for her phone and rejoin her mother on their exit from the room.

"You hear that, Mrs. Wells? I mean... *Mom?*" Abby's voice asked. Her mother chuckled.

"Hear what, darling?"

"Nothing." Another giggle. "Isn't silence golden, Mom?"

"It sure is, my Abby. It sure is."

And with that, the lights turned off, and the door closed on Abby, leaving her alone in the tank.

Alone.

I shouldn't have tapped that stupid glass.

Abby sat on the sky blue pebbles, alone, and tried desperately to weep.

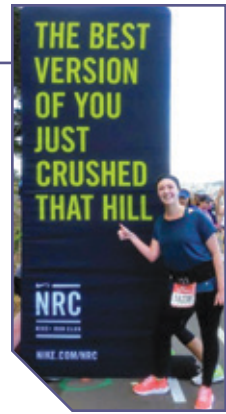
She could see her pillow only a few feet away, but she knew she might never touch it again. She wanted nothing more than to lay on her bed and weep into that pillow.

I shouldn't have tapped that stupid glass, she kept repeating.



SARAH HELIKER

"I WROTE 'TO STRUGGLE AND TO CONQUER' ABOUT MY RECENT MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH ISSUES AND THE STRUGGLES I HAVE FOUGHT SO HARD TO OVERCOME. THIS STORY SHEDS A LIGHT ON MY LIFE AND HOW HARD PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES HAVE TO CLAW TO MAKE THEIR WAY BACK TO A HEALTHY AND HAPPY LIFE WHEN THEY HIT ROCK BOTTOM. THE STORY STARTS DARK AND ENDS WITH A LIGHT OF HOPE FOR THOSE IN MY SHOES. MY MOTIVATION FOR CREATING THIS SUBMISSION WAS MY ENGLISH TEACHER, AMY DOTY. SHE HAS BEEN A HUGE SUPPORT AND POSITIVE INFLUENCE, AND SHE HELPED ME SEE THE VALUE IN MY WRITING."



TO STRUGGLE AND TO CONQUER

SARAH HELIKER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER/SURGICAL TECHNOLOGY

I was feeling tired, my feet dragging heavily behind me, always. No motivation, no desires, and no goals. Depression was creeping in more and more each day. As I sat on the cold, stiff medical table, I felt worry edge into the room. My hands were clammy, and I knew that what I was going to hear wasn't going to be the best news I had heard that year. He walked in with a solemn look on his face, and as he relayed the news, I could hear only parts, as my anxiety made my blood begin to bubble and ring in my ears. Overweight. The word echoed in my mind. I was overweight, and my health was suffering for it.

My health had deteriorated and with it, my joy and hunger for life—my hunger for excitement, for adventures, for taking risks to grow and become closer to my goals and closer to my dreams. The metaphorical weight was pressing down on me just as heavily as I saw the task I had to face become clearer and more daunting. Ready to climb under the covers and hide in my embarrassment and disappointment, I dragged my feet as I walked through the front door. I laid there trying desperately to remind myself how amazing I had once felt, how proud of myself I once had been, and how my marriage had also taken a hit when my weight had begun wreaking havoc on my body and my mind.

I decided at that moment that that was it. I wasn't going to treat myself that way and allow that toxicity to taint my marriage and my ability to appreciate all that I was so abundantly blessed to have. I was done, and I knew I wouldn't look back, not to that sad part in my life—not unless it was going to be to appreciate

how far I had come. I could finally see my future, and it was bright. It was filled with laughter and pride in myself. It was filled with trips to the park and jogs by the lake with my husband and our rambunctious puppy, Baxter. I was excited for the next morning to arrive for the first time in what felt like forever, and I could feel my husband's joy and recognition radiating back at me.

I woke up that next morning and walked into the family room, the golden light gleaming through the crisp white shades, and I felt a ray of hope enter my mind and my soul. That excitement for the rising sun was still there, and although it was a little shy after all this time, I could feel it building in my chest. Although what lay ahead felt like an impossible task, and honestly, quite terrifying, I knew that the results of doing what had to be done would be a reward well worth it. It was then that I pushed myself to my feet and slipped on my flexible black pants made to support my strong legs as they slammed against the pavement, made to make me feel like I had an endless range of motion.

All dressed, I felt invincible. I felt like my goals were already more attainable, and my spirit lifted. I dashed over to the sheer blue curtain that was swaying as the breeze that had enveloped the room danced across it. I swept the curtain aside and pulled out my bright orange running shoes with their shimmering shoe strings. "Long time, no see," I thought as I slid my feet snug into their haven of health. Bouncing on my feet, I pulled my hair back tight to keep the wind from blowing it around recklessly.

As I stepped outside my doorway, I felt the sun shine through the clouds and kiss my cheeks, and a weight lifted off my shoulders. I started forward, at first hesitant, almost unsure of myself like a baby first learning to walk. As I continued running, I began to shed my shame as a snake sheds its skin. I felt renewed and ready to tackle the issues I had so recently swept under the rug time and time again.

With this new sense of confidence and self, I formed a fresh routine. I hopped up with enthusiasm every single day. I remembered that feeling of accomplishment, health, happiness, and rejuvenation that filled my mind. I felt like myself all bright and shiny for the first time in almost two years. I saw a different person now when I looked in the mirror. I saw beauty and a glowing smile that said, "THIS IS ME." Several months passed, another season was approaching, and the leaves had turned to a beautiful radiant amber.

I was preparing to run the Nike Women's Half Marathon in San Francisco. So much had changed over the course of my training, and my next visit to that cold, stiff medical table was a much more positive experience. The news was that I was within my weight range, and it showed not only outside but inside,

as well. My struggles had done a complete 180, and I was ready to tackle not only that race, but life. As I ran hard across the finish line that crisp October morning, I heard the cheers, and I felt the hot tears of pride run down my cherry red cheeks. As that sense of pride warmed me throughout my entire being, I knew that all that hard work had been worth it. Having my health and my hunger for life back was all I had ever wanted.

A person can feel lost, depressed, sick, and overall unhappy if they carry extra weight. The happiness exercise brings into a person's life and soul to make them spritely and skipper is so worth the struggle of a daily run or a match of tennis. Exercise saved me in more ways than one, and I now know that to love myself is to make healthy choices, and to make healthy choices is to find joy in life. I will wake up again tomorrow and throw on those dirty old orange running shoes and those pants that give me a sense of invincibility, and I will do it all over again, gladly.



KHANH NGUYEN

"I AM AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT WHO HAS LIVED IN LINCOLN FOR MORE THAN THREE YEARS. DURING MY SENIOR YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL, I WON A SILVER KEY OF SCHOLASTIC ART AND WRITING AWARD. UNLIKE MY FELLOW COLLEGE FRIENDS, I AM MORE OF AN OBSERVER THAN A SPEAKER OR A WRITER. EVEN THOUGH I'M A MAJOR IN BUSINESS, I CONSIDER PHOTOGRAPHY AS ONE OF MY FAVORITE HOBBIES. I LOVE TAKING LANDSCAPE PHOTOS AND PHOTOGRAPHING ANIMALS' MOVEMENTS, AND THE SQUIRREL IS SUCH AN ADORABLE CREATURE."



PHOTO COLLECTION

KHANH NGUYEN • UNDECLARED

NUTS



SQUIRREL 2



LAZY SUMMER



SQUIRREL 3



SQUIRREL 4



BRIANNA CURRENCE

"I AM AN AVID READER WHO DABBLES IN WRITING WHEN THE STORIES IN MY HEAD ARE TOO HARD TO ORGANIZE."

RUNAWAY TODDLER

BRIANNA CURRENCE • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

My younger brother has always been prone to running off for no reason. No one could ever figure out why he would do it, though. He would be sitting in front of someone playing with his toys, they would look away for a second, and when they looked back, he would be gone!

The first time I remember him running off was when my family lived in a house that was across the street from a small basketball court. The summer after I turned four, my parents let me go across the street and play basketball with my older cousin. While I was playing, my younger brother and cousin, Nathan and Corey, who were two, decided that since I wasn't in the yard anymore, they didn't have to be either.

The yard around our house had a four-foot fence all the way around it with a gate at the front that had a latch just high enough that a two-year-old couldn't reach it. When Nathan and Corey realized they couldn't reach the latch, they decided to climb the fence instead. I don't think anyone will ever figure out how they managed to get completely over the fence without anyone noticing.

Instead of going across the street, where I was, they decided to take off. Of course, they couldn't make it easy on anyone going after them, so they took off in opposite directions. I don't remember who first realized they were gone, but I know that my parents, grandmother, and their friends, Mike and Diane, were suddenly frantically searching the whole block for runaway toddlers in Pull-Ups and t-shirts. Back then, none of them had cell phones, so they ended up wandering the neighborhood with toy walkie-talkies shaped like Power Rangers.

About half an hour after the boys hopped the fence, the adults made their way back to the house, only to find that Nathan and Corey had somehow managed to end up back at the basketball court across the street without anyone noticing them.

The second incident I remember was a couple months later, on the first night in our new house, which was on the corner of 19th street where it intersected

with one of the busiest streets in Lincoln, L Street, which was connected to most of the major streets in the city. That night, my mother put us to bed in our rooms and then went to bed herself. At about midnight, she was woken by police officers at the door. The first thing the officers asked was if she had any children and how old they were. When my mother answered that she had a four-year-old and a two-year-old, they asked if she would check if we were in the house because a little boy had been found wandering down the street alone. When my mother realized that Nathan wasn't in his bed, she ran down the stairs crying, begging to see the boy they found.

It turned out that little boy had been Nathan. He had woken up and figured it was an appropriate time to go for a walk. When he got to the door, the deadbolt was too high for him to reach and unlock, so he improvised. First, he rolled his rideable toy car over and pushed it against the door. Then, he dragged in a kitchen chair and sandwiched the car between the door and the chair so it wouldn't move. After he was done, he was finally able to climb the chair up to the roof of the car and unlock the door.

Luckily for Nathan and our family, a nurse driving down L Street on her way to work saw him and stopped to grab him so he wouldn't get hurt. She then took him to the police, who started knocking on doors in the area because Nathan didn't know our address yet. They didn't let my mother see him until she described him to them and told them what he was wearing when she had put him to bed. Then she had to answer a lot of questions about what time she had put us to bed, when she had gone to bed, how long we had lived there, and where our father was.

Our father and grandmother had been at our old house finishing up the packing and moving the rest of our stuff over to the new house. They didn't get home until about two o'clock in the morning. When they walked into the living room, the first thing they saw was my mother sitting on the couch and rocking back and forth with Nathan and me in her arms.

Nathan and I didn't really understand what was happening, but our family became very overprotective. Suddenly, there were multiple locks on every door leading outside; Nathan's car had been locked away where he couldn't access it, and he was being followed around by one of our family members religiously.

My parents spent a lot of time going to doctors and specialists after that, trying to figure out why Nathan constantly felt the need to take off on his own and why they couldn't keep him in one place for more than five minutes at a time. Eventually, he was diagnosed with ADHD—Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder—, and the escapes stopped after he started receiving

treatment.

At four years old, I didn't understand what ADHD was beyond the fact that it was what made my brother run off all the time. Over the past 17 years, there have been various points where Nathan would not have his medicine, for whatever reason, and I would see what ADHD really was. It was being loud. It was not being able to sit still for long amounts of time. It was being so impatient that my brother tripped down a couple of stairs and cut open his arm on a broken bowl in a trash can. It was having an attention span so short that he made ginormous leaps between topics. It was being extremely bored, trying to rectify the boredom, and ending up annoying everyone around him, but never usually meaning to.

Finding out my brother had ADHD didn't make an outwardly noticeable change in my life, but that was my first encounter with any type of mental/chemical disorder, and it started to reshape the way I perceived the world around me. It has shown me that no two people are the same, and some differences may not be as obvious as others. I have learned that most differences are not automatically "bad" or "weird," just because they are not immediately obvious.



JESSICA GRIESER

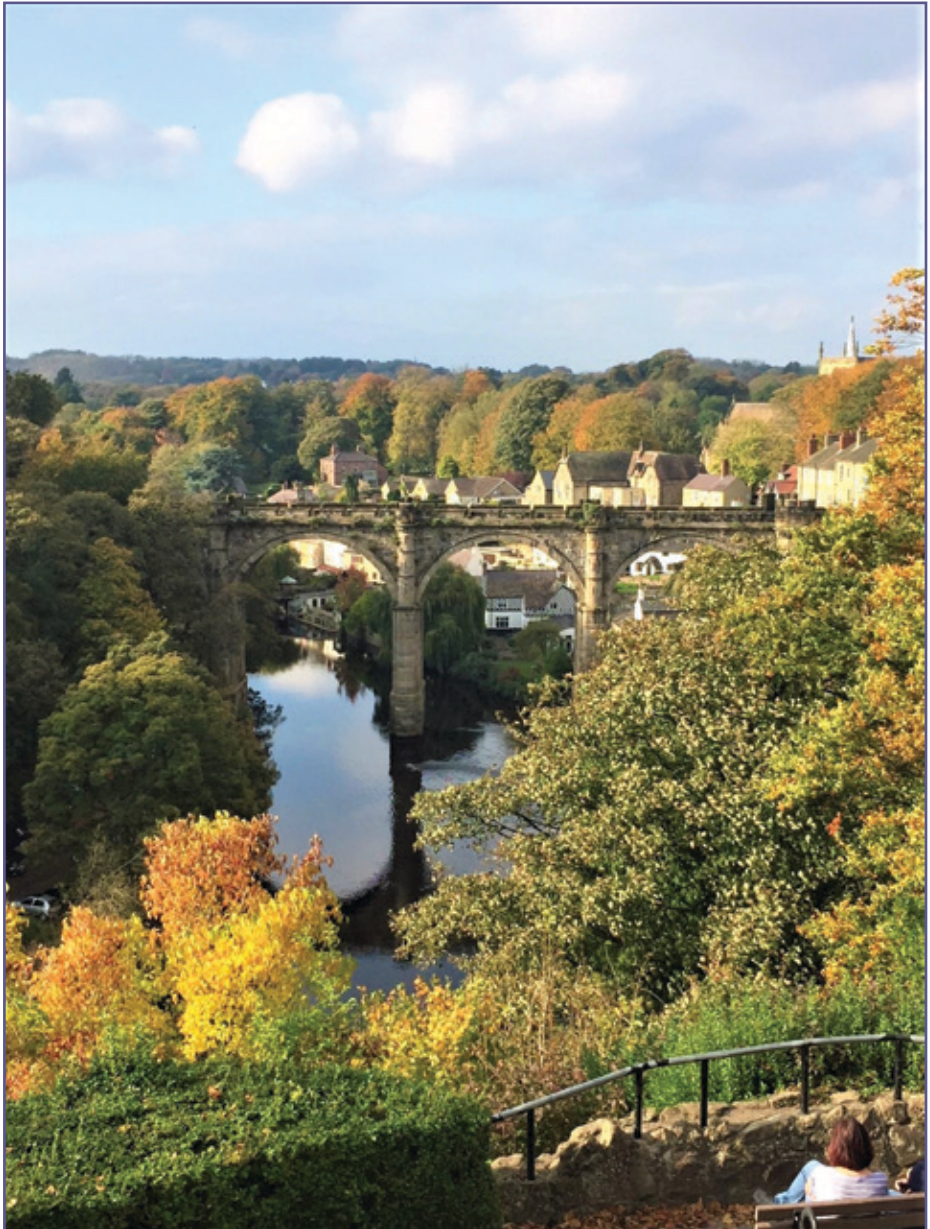
"I AM A LINCOLN NATIVE. IN FACT, I GREW UP IN THE SCC CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER FOR MANY YEARS. I LOVE TO TRAVEL AND HAVE SPENT A FEW YEARS DURING MY 20S LIVING ABROAD IN EUROPE. ON THE WEEKENDS, YOU CAN FIND ME DOING ACTIVITIES AT MY FAMILY'S LAKE HOUSE OR WATCHING A SOCCER MATCH WITH FRIENDS. MY GUILTY PLEASURES ARE POTATO CHIPS AND BRITISH REALITY TELEVISION. I AM ALSO A SELF-DIAGNOSED MISOPHONIC."



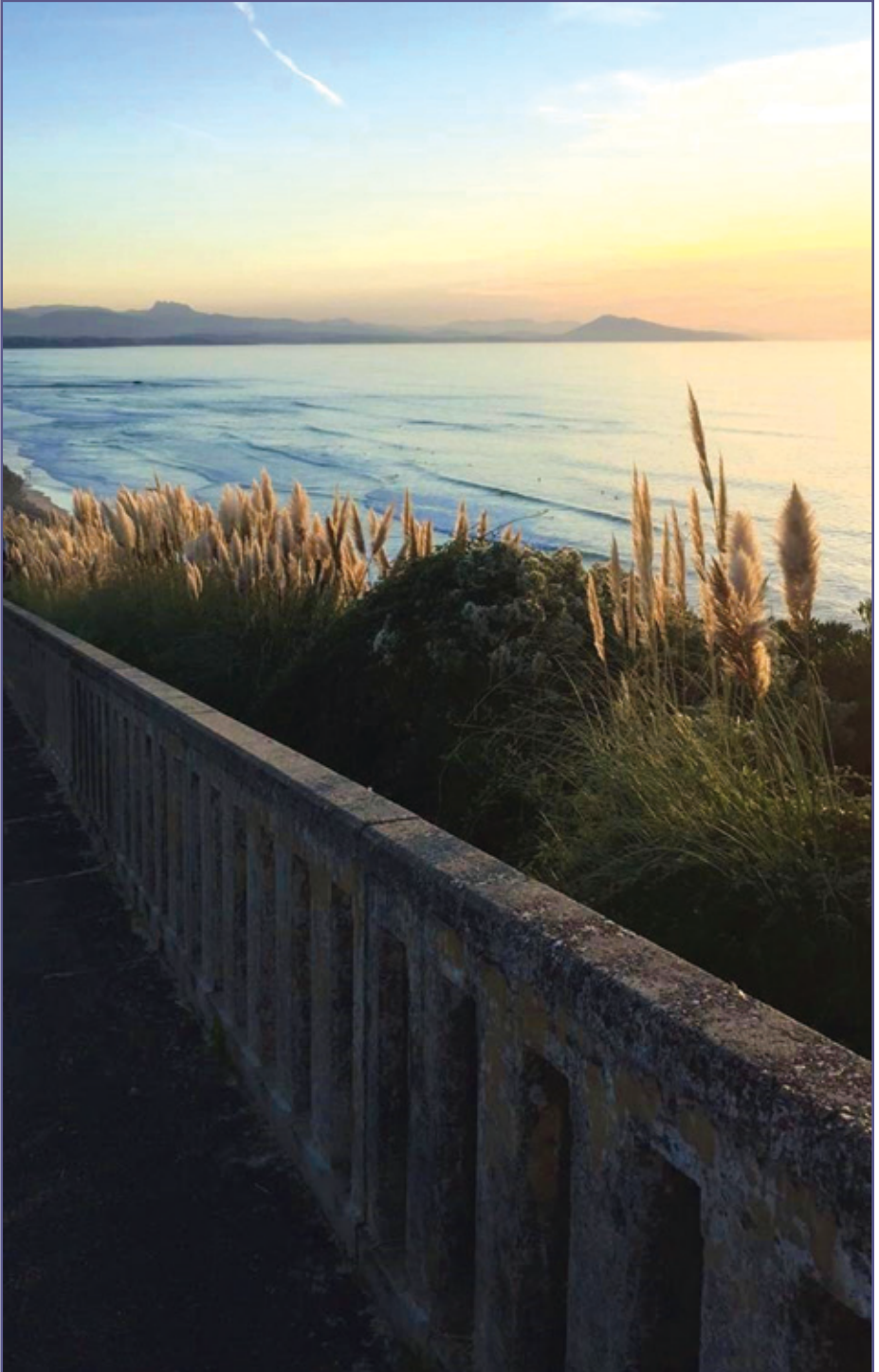
PHOTO COLLECTION

JESSICA GRIESER • GLOBAL EDUCATION COORDINATOR

KNARESBOROUGH, ENGLAND



BIARRITZ, FRANCE



AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS



ZARAGOZA, SPAIN



JENNIFER SNYDER

"I WORK FOR SCC IN PUBLIC INFORMATION AS THE SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING/Writing SPECIALIST. CONTINUALLY SEEING THE WORLD AS AN INSTAGRAM POST, I AM RARELY SEEN WITHOUT MY PHONE OR CAMERA. AFTER CONNECTING VIA FACEBOOK WITH A FOURTH COUSIN LIVING IN SWEDEN, I EMBARKED ON A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME JOURNEY TO DENMARK TO DISCOVER MY ROOTS. AS YOU CAN SEE, I TOOK A FEW PHOTOS."



PHOTO COLLECTION

JENNIFER SNYDER • SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING/Writing SPECIALIST

NOT ON MY WATCH



OUR HISTORY STARTS HERE



FORGIVE THEM, THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO



WHEELIE GOOD



TIVOLI MAGIC



DANUL PATTERSON

"I JUST WANT TO LIVE A MODERATELY COMFORTABLE LIFE AND HAVE THE ABILITY TO PEN IT DOWN IN FAIRLY WELL-WORDED SENTENCES. THAT I AM ANY GOOD AT THIS 'WRITING THINGAMAJIGGER' IS LIKE A WELLSPRING OF WONDER TO ME, FOR I CONSIDER MYSELF, AS COLETTE SO ELOQUENTLY PHRASED IT, 'A PERSON OF LETTERS WHO HAS TURNED OUT BADLY.' GIVEN HALF THE CHANCE, I'D GLADLY SEQUESTER MYSELF AWAY ON AN UNCHARTABLE ISLE WITH A FEW GOOD BOOKS TO WHILE AWAY THE EVER LISTLESS HOUR."



NOW DON'T YOU GO AND START TELLING SOME LIES UP IN HEAVEN OR ELSE THIS ANGEL IS GONNA HAVE TO GO AND GET GONE (EXCERPT)

DANUL PATTERSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

We were having a party, Johnnie and I. We were having a party, a party, for his bosses, his bosses. I was a flurry of activity for the past four days, and now, the big day was at last here. Only hours to go and so, so, so very much to do, but to hear Johnnie put it, "If we listened to you, we'd be buttoning our shirts at the same time we were shucking the oysters."

He says I have a nervous disposition. I say if I am nervous, it is because he has made me so. In fact, he has made me so, and it was for that exacting reason, along with that of him not being able to resist my charms—*my charms*, scant as they are—that he married me some five years ago when I was still little more than a fresh face and boyishly handsome almost-adult of 18, just barely out of the puppy fat of youth with the beginnings of coming into my manhood and he, the Darcy to my Jane, was the budding neophyte lawyer twelve years my senior. Yes, he married me for my nervous disposition that at times bordered on an obsessive need, nay, in-magnanimous Pyrrhic daemon, that demanded, demanded, always demanded perfection.

As I tied the knot in Johnnie's black silk tie, wishing for the umpteenth time that he'd decided on the cerulean one with the midnight-blue suit that so lovely played up the ocean that was his eyes, I double, double-checked my mental tally of tasks completed. Everything was done and crossed off. Now all that remained

was to get through the night with Johnnie and those stiff-as-washboard lawyers and their more-so stiff-necked wives, trophies if ever a person was one. *But, at 23, wasn't I in the same boat as they?* That may yet be true, but—I am not like them, not like them. I am free, and if I lean on Johnnie too much, it is with the knowledge that should I ever leave him, it will be with half, if not more, of his possessions.

It is now two hours into this supposed to be four-hour fête, two hours that seem like days, upon days, upon days. I am only able to survive by the heady grace of the six glasses of red wine I've consumed. A life preserver to a drowning man, thus far, and, the only thing sustaining my air of quaint and gay hostess is the solemn hope that those six glass won't be the last of the night.

We've split off now. Johnnie, Mark Gale, Larry Hamilton, and Paul Marsden retire to the drawing room for the required cigars, sherry, and drawing room shop talk. What I wouldn't give to be a fly on those peach and emeraldine trimmed walls. A fly in a room full of unencumbered men. What words would fall from their wagging lips when they were free to speak as any Yenta, when there was no one, no one at all, around to filter them?

I understand why Mark and Larry were invited to this...shindig. They are the senior partners at the firm (Mills, Gale & Hamilton founded by the late George Mills, Mark's father-in-law.) Mark, with his rotund stature and spry tan, looks the spitting image of what one imagines the offspring of an Oompa Loompa and Bibendum would look like were it to have a godawful bleached blond coonskin-like hat for a toupee and a personality akin to watching white paint dry on a white wall. Larry is a snake in the grass if ever there was one with the inability to keep his pants zipped around a PYT in a skirt, a pantsuit, anything, anything at all. Then there is Mr. Marsden. Pretty, pretty, young Mr. Marsden, who rather pretentiously pronounces his name like P-aw-uu-l. There is no denying that the 24-year-old was an oasis of blushing Venus in a desert of malformed Hephaestus with his flawless skin like fresh cream, lips as lush and red as any red, red, rose, and the possession of a conceited confidence that only one born to the lap of beauty can possess.

The men had retired to the drawing room, and that left me with the chore of entertaining the women, the women. We were in the solarium, Mrs. Mary Gale nee Mills, Anne Hamilton, and I. We had scarcely been out there more than 20 minutes, and Mary was a third of the way through her fourth Virginia Slim and half way through her second glass of second glass of Grand Cru of the hour, a bottle of wine I had had to specially order for her because she wouldn't drink anything other than white. I so despise a women for whom drinking

is as natural as breathing water is to a fish, although only a brave, brave fool would tell Mary Gale that she had a drinking problem to her face. Mary was, by sacrosanct virtue of nature, very much into correcting other people. It was an infamously known fact about this sleepy little hamlet that when encountering Mary, you were expected to call her *Mrs. Gale*, and she'd reply with, *Please call me Mary. Mrs. Gale is my mother-in-law.*

Mary was talking at Anne. Anne, poor thing, that poor, poor, wretched thing. She was very much into being Mrs. Larry Hamilton. I've little doubt that were he to attempt to leave her for his half-his-age secretary or for one of his many by-now-too-numerous-to-place-a-guesstimation-on amorous liaisons, and she were not to kill them both dead on the spot, that she'd die from the sheer, flensed, and indifferent realization that she really was nothing without him.

I was startled out of my contemplation of Anne's sorry state of existence by some pointed question tossed at me by Mary—a live grenade poised to explode at the drop of a hat.

"I'm curious as to how he got an invite to this quaint petite fête. Mr. Marsden is, after all, not associated with the firm," Mary said as she expelled a plume of smoke, giving her the appearance of the dragon she was often, behind closed doors, painted as.

"I believe that Mark is considering hiring him in some capacity. He is a lawyer, after all, and not just a Shayner ponim.¹"

"No, Mr. Chandler. I do not believe Mark agreed to hire him," Mary said. What she really meant was that *she hadn't told Mark to hire Paul*. Everyone in town knew that, when all was said and done, it was Mary, or rather her vieux riche, that really called the shots.

"Between us," I said in a conspiratorial manner, "Jackie Monroe is about to go on maternity leave, and Paul is the best Erzsung² for the job."

"Jaqueline Monroe is not with child," Mary hissed emphatically as she expelled a plume of smoke to hide her wide-eyed amazement at having been left in the dark.

"Oh, it's true, alright. She's putting in for vacation time and going down to Raleigh to put the child up for adoption."

"Do we know who the father is?" Anne said timidly, as though she were a student speaking out of turn without first raising her hand. She vocalized a question Mary would not let herself ask in any means other than a burning eyed gaze.

Annotations:

1. *A pretty face.*
2. *Replacement*

“No, Anne. I don’t know. She won’t say who the father is,” I said while giving Mary a subtle sideways nod of affirmation. We both knew who the father was. I just wasn’t going to say it aloud in present company.

I let my eyes wander over the garden whilst my mind began to wonder what I’d do were I in Anne’s shoes. Naturally, I would never, never be her. We were two different creatures—a tortoise and a two-headed snake. She was a thing born out of a love that possessed you so completely that when it ended, it consumed your heart, mind, and soul, not even leaving a hollowed-out husk of a shell in its wake. Hers was a love that killed.

I was possessed of a love that endured. Though the heart may die, stillborn in the chest, the mind and soul would remain, haunted by the phantasm-like beating of a still and lifeless heart, yes, but intact, nonetheless.

A spell of silence, a grotesque and malformed Morning Glory, bloomed around us as I continued to contemplate the majesty of nature. The night was unseasonably warm for this time of year in the high mountains of North Carolina in the winter. It seemed to me that Nature was at odds with herself. The should-be-icy-armed-and-still California Silver Bell tree grew in the back of the garden here—an ecological anomaly if ever such a thing could exist in this quaint, oddball patch of earth called Hot Spring’s Oasis, North Carolina, where the odd and the unusual were as common as the daily birth and death of the sun. In fact, wasn’t it just this morning that Mercy Roberts, the aging Post Mistress General, went in to do the post and found all the mail to be gone? This was the day that the Mayfair-Martin invitations were supposed to go out, and all morning those matte robin’s egg blue envelopes kept popping up in some of the oddest of places. (I found ours as I was opening the box of Raisin Bran). Our California Silver Bell tree was in full bloom. In the daggers of incandescent light cast by the pregnant, full-bodied moon, the tree’s pale, bell jar blooms took on the appearance of white sheet, Halloween ghosts drifting in the black-blueness of the ether. In that light, the lush green, green grass became an unperceivably vast sea swirling with daemons one could only imagine in the darkest hours of the night in the deepest depths of a dream. The house, boxy, utilitarian, and earthy, was a phantom ship long ago given over to the deep. It was Atlas with the world-like sky on his back, and there were no Alcides to relieve the weight.

How very unlike my hometown of Angel Falls, 30 miles to the north, was Hot Spring’s Oasis. Yes, it was true that both were resort towns, that both boasted hot springs and ski lodges as their claim to fame. It was true that both had their ecological oddities, with trees growing where they were not native

or were known to thrive and bloom long into the heart of winter when they should be dull, lifeless, and asleep. In the Oasis, it was the California Silver Bell that was the oddity, and the one in our backyard was even more odd in that her winter blooms seemed to want to show you things from your past—the long forgotten or what your mind had suppressed that you should have dealt with there and then but didn't. For the Falls, it was the Southern Crab Apple, and the one that grew in the back of that Queen Anne at the end of Cupid's Head Lane took the cake. One bite of its bitter, pear-shaped fruit was enough to give you a clarity of mind strong enough to evaluate the pain of your most heartrending days and to see for yourself the silver lining in that dark, dark cloud. But there, the similarities ended. At least for me.

It still amazed me, sometimes, how I found myself dreaming of it, in the deepest, deepest darkness of sleep. Home. That peach and cream Queen Anne at the end of Cupid's Head Lane. In that dreamy half-light shed by the cow-heavy moon, the house took on the appearance of milky-skinned Cora. The copper-capped window ledges reflecting that silvern light were her defiant eyes. The crab apple tree's aubergine petals looked like a hood made out of fairy wings once the Moon Lay hid her face behind a mask of downy clouds as white, white-gray as falling snow. When taken in with the dark blackness of the sweeping lawn, that was only broken part way by the flensed bone-white heads of the Moon-flowers and the night blooming jasmine (planted by, and still tended in the dead of dark, a distant somehow still living after nobody knows how many years relative known only as Grandmother), became like a psychopomp Kharon, and the lawn became the Acheron upon which he ferried those dead soul flowers across.

What was wrong with me that night? The rivers of my mind seemed overflowing with the waters of Mnemosyne. I knew that when the time came to slip betwixt the cool crispness of the sheets, it would be to the caressing arms of the past, awaiting just on the other side of that gate of horn, that I relinquished myself unto. There was little I could do about it. If I had my way, I'd be done with memory, and it would be the sweet butterfly kisses of Lethe that I'd surrender myself of selves to—that blessed, all-consuming sea of oblivion just on the inside of that ivory gate that would embrace me, enfold me, guide my footfalls through the eternal fog of sleep.

Once more, I was startled from my memories by a pointed grenade of a question spoken so quietly that had I not been standing second-skin close to Anne, I wouldn't have heard her speaking. "He's the father, isn't he. My husband?" She said this as though it were a self-fulfilling statement. She spoke

those words, even as her disbelief of them was as palpable as the carpeted wood beneath our feet, in a sticky and sickly sweet voice that proclaimed the indelible irrevocable truth. That: her much beloved husband had taken another to bed, had begun a family with a woman that was not her.

I stood rooted to the spot, tongue tied in my throat as intricately as any Icovellavna knot. Struck mute as though my voice were eyes hit by a sudden blinding burst of sunlight, I couldn't find the words to dispute her statement, nor the words that would restore her faith in her husband, in humanity, in anything, anything at all.

For once, I was overjoyed to find that Mary was there. If anyone would have those words and the will to speak them, it would be Mrs. Mary Gale. "I'm afraid it is," Mary said in a dour voice like sorrow made corporeal. "Something we all have in common." That last part she said while her gray, gray eyes poured their soul in depths of my own. She tore her eyes away a second, an eternity later before she turned with a flourish of mauve fabric and sauntered over to the sidebar and went about fixing a drink. Once done, she came back over and handed it to Anne. "Don't forget what you are. You are a woman. A Goddess. And no man can undo you unless you allow him to." She then turned toward me and said, "The soul of a woman is not such a beatable thing. It is the soul of a survivor. It will weather the bitterest tempest of a man. It may shatter under that force. It may scatter to the winds. But it will reform and be more strengthened than before. This is the true power of a woman and those who possess the soul of a woman."

A heavy spell of silence grew around us like a quilt of neutron stars stitched with threads of osmium. I felt an overwhelming need to say something, anything, everything. It was a pushy, needy, demanding little thing. A compulsion to fix the mouth to move. A call to action for that dead silent voice. Try as I would, no words would come to me. My voice lay still in its formless grave.

As luck, that fickle preening goddess, would have it, the men chose that very moment to merge their demimonde with ours. "Well, my lady," Mark said to Mary as he awkwardly cuffed his hands around her wrists and pulled her in for a sloppy kiss that fell short of the passionate and loving rouler un patin he intended it to be. "It's high time for these old bones to carry themselves home."

Mary didn't say a word. She just cast icy daggers with her eyes as she imbibed the remains of her drink at a pace that made a pair of circling snails seem to be going at warp speed. With her drink done, Mark and she, mercifully as those last few minutes were pure torture for us, took their leave of us. At

some point between the time the men arrived and the time the Hamiltons departed, so ten minutes after the Gales took their leave, it was decided, mostly by Johnnie, that Paul would be staying the night, as he was too drunk to drive himself home.

Me, being the ever so magnanimous host that I was, made up the guest bed for him and then went to bed. I was joined some moments later by Johnnie. I turned over in my half-sleep haze, a homing missile seeking the hard muscled warmth of his flesh, and wrapped myself around him. Legs wrapped around legs preceding the firm caressed of bare, wanting, and longing loins. Arms snaking through arms. Encircling. Drawing. Drawing closer. The heavy weight of my head pressed to his chest. Hearing. Listening for the rhythmic drumming of his heart. My cold, cold flesh pulling in his warmth, radiating it outward like a beacon, a lighthouse in a black sea of doubt proclaiming for all the skeptical world that *I am home. I am safe. He is mine. Mine alone...*



REBECCA BURT

"I AM A LIFE SCIENCES INSTRUCTOR AT THE BEATRICE CAMPUS OF SOUTHEAST COMMUNITY COLLEGE. I GREATLY ENJOY LONG-DISTANCE BICYCLE RIDING, TRAVELING, SPENDING TIME OUTDOORS, BIRDWATCHING, READING, AND LEARNING NEW THINGS BEYOND SCIENCE. MY OIL PAINTING PORTFOLIO, COMMENCED A FEW YEARS AGO, NOW INCLUDES SIX COMPLETED PAINTINGS."



TROOST LINE

REBECCA BURT • LIFE SCIENCES INSTRUCTOR

Oh, the smells. In my posh hotel room near the Kansas City Plaza, I knew I could wash away the smells. It didn't even take a minute. The smells of their sweat and other funk, the drops of spittle I'd seen land on my arm...all washed away in my shower in a blink of my tired eyes. While I showered, I thought, "I am so tired."

"Really? I'm tired?" I said out loud. I'm tired from riding all day in a spacious air-conditioned car, bottles of cold water and snacks at my reach? I'm tired from serving food and drink from Styrofoam plates and red "party" cups for one-and-a-half evening hours? Seriously? I'm "tired" from serving the homeless, the discouraged, the dirty, the truly tired souls who sought "a radical welcome to all" at Micah Ministries?

My “tired” was not from serving the homeless. My “tired” began earlier in the afternoon at the “Country Club” church (so aptly named) gilded in millions of dollars of artwork, stained glass, and sculpture. I was soul-tired and heart-weary after a “learning session” at that place, my eyes more sore than feasted by the magnificent palace. True, it funds some missions in far-away places; yet, does it offer “a radical welcome” to all? Or just a grand welcome to people like me who are privileged, well-fed, and clean? “What if,” I thought to myself, “a homeless person graced their door? Would he or she be welcomed as I had been welcomed?”

Later, after cleansing my soul’s palate of the bad taste left by the Country Club church, I truly “feasted.” My feast was not of food, but rather of heartfelt smiles—gratitude exchanged for plates of spaghetti, corn, and salad I helped serve to the homeless at the Micah Ministries Robert’s Café, named for a homeless man who froze to death in 2002 on a Kansas City street.

We served them—really served them—they stood not in a line. They stand in those infernal lines at the VA, at the clinics to get help (or at least hope of help) of all sorts. At Micah Ministries, there were no lines. All were greeted and seated, and we served them “restaurant style.” Food, drink, and dignity for all. Nourishment for their bodies, kindness and dignity for their hearts and souls. Dignity. That’s the gift I tried hardest to give that night. There’s just so little dignity in living on the streets, in a tent, or under a tarp.

For I, with my privileged life—not rich, but not poor—, know nothing of lines, tents, or tarps. The “lines” of my youth were at the grocery store, at the swimming pool, and at a restaurant door. Later, my lines were at college waiting to register and pay, one more step in my life’s privileged way. Now the lines of my life are at events—concerts, sporting events—to enjoy ticketed entertainment. I’ve never stood in a line to wait for necessities like food, clothing, and medicine.

Oh, yes...back to my hotel room at the Plaza hotel. I had five fluffy pillows on each bed. Two beds, ten pillows. One person. How many pillows does each homeless person have? How many pillows do you need when you don’t have a bed?

Judge them, some say—“They’re lazy...no job.” Judge them, others say, for their addictions. How much better to just care for them, to heap up servings of food, clothing, and dignity. A wise companion reminded us, “Just remember that each one was once someone’s baby.” That thought, indeed truly food for thought, as well as food for my soul.

At the end of the next day, I knew I could soak away the smells of the

homeless, the abused...all children this time. Sweet little children at the Operation Outreach center on that Troost line road. The smells this time from deep in their cots, the afternoon refuge from their world's constant threats. We scrubbed cot after cot, wiping off those smells. Boogers and sweat, blood hopefully from just a casual nosebleed; likely more poopie and pee than I could bear to know, and certainly the salty tears of their fears. Their young lives touched—assaulted, really—by guns and by drugs. We were told that by age four, most had been assaulted in at least four ways.

Again, I peeked into the homeless world. I saw the children, spoke and smiled with them, yet I still really knew nothing of their lives. I absorbed their smells—really, with my soul—and those “smells” I would not wash down the drain, but rather keep in my heart. These were the hopeful “smells” of little ones who knew they were loved, cared for by the kind staff at the Outreach center. The happy smells were of sticky fingers after a good morning snack, smells of clean clothing, fabric softener, and mostly of hope.

As I now reflect on all these things, my heart and mind go to this thought: perhaps the “smell” that really needs washed away is not theirs but mine and ours? The “smells” of our privilege and lives lived so easily compared to their struggles and pain.

May I never forget my glimpse into their world. I went to serve and to learn. I hope I blessed them with my feeble and fumbling efforts; I know my heart will never forget, and I know I am forever changed.



ST. CROIX BLOW HOLE

REBECCA BURT • LIFE SCIENCES INSTRUCTOR



GOLDEN GATE

REBECCA BURT • LIFE SCIENCES INSTRUCTOR



USUAL LAZY DAY IN SAN FRANCISCO

REBECCA BURT • LIFE SCIENCES INSTRUCTOR



MELISSA HERRICK

"I'M THE MOTHER OF THREE GREAT KIDS THAT KEEP ME ON MY TOES AT ALL TIMES. I LOVE TO WRITE, AND I LOVE TO SPEND TIME OUTSIDE. SOME OF MY FAVORITE THINGS ARE FISHING AND CAMPING, AND I THINK IT'S SAFE TO SAY THAT I'M AN AVID HORSE PERSON. THERE IS NOTHING LIKE SEEING THE WORLD FROM A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE BACK OF A HORSE! I WROTE 'WHAT MAKES A MEMORY?' FOR MY COMP. II CLASS; I HAD RECENTLY LOST MY GRANDFATHER, AND I WANTED TO USE HIM AS THE SUBJECT FOR A PAPER, WHICH GAVE ME THE IDEA TO WRITE THIS."



WHAT MAKES A MEMORY?

MELISSA HERRICK • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Look at my children and all of the things they have, and I'm torn between being grateful and sad. It's probably a cliché thing to say, but they have so many things that I never had growing up. They have the newest gaming systems, cell phones, tablets, laptops, not to mention the entire Internet at the tips of their fingers. At times, I begin to envy their childhood, yet, someone is always whining, "Mom, I'm bored!"

My reaction is usually, "You have got to be kidding me, right?" They're not kidding. It's amazing how quickly they grow tired of the newest technologies that they begged for with such zeal. I didn't have any of this stuff when I was little, so what on earth did I do to not be bored all the time? I think back to my own childhood.

When I was a little girl, every moment that I wasn't in school was spent with my grandparents. I was there every weekend, I was there on all the holidays that school was closed, and I was even there if I was home sick from school. They both had jobs, although it seemed as if I was the only thing in life that deserved their attention. There weren't electronics attached to everyone at all times. I do remember them watching television sometimes, but not very often. When my grandma would get a phone call, I would overhear her tell the caller, "My granddaughter is here right now. I will have to call you back later." Talk about making a kid feel special!

The house wasn't anything fancy. It was a little red house that had seen a few additions and renovations over the years. There was an attached garage that was also the main entry point to the house. The entry door had a long hallway covered by a long, green Astroturf carpet. It was my red carpet, and I was a star making my entrance into what I knew would be a grand event. That hall led to a

small entry room, which took you into the dining room and kitchen or down to the basement. The bulk of my time was spent in those rooms or out in the yard.

The yard was large and surrounded by chain-link fence. I have so many memories there. One year when the snow was deep, my grandpa took me out back, and we became Eskimos. We built an igloo big enough for both of us and the dog to fit in and made up a silly, nonsensical language, the language of our own tribe. There was a tire swing on a huge oak branch that saw countless hours of swinging and talking about anything and everything while soaking up the warm rays of the sun. When my grandpa purchased a riding lawnmower, he taught me how to use it. In turn, I wasted all his gas by turning the yard into a NASCAR track. A playhouse, painted blue with pink trim, also sat in the yard. It had two rooms, a semi-functioning kitchen, and a deck. It was semi-functioning as in the sink worked and the stove lit up, but apparently, it never got hot enough to actually cook the macaroni I used to feed to my grandpa. I still remember the attempt he made at conveying a blissful reaction when he said, “Mmm, mmm, that’s so tasty!”

My grandpa built that playhouse, the deck, and the kitchen that was inside of it. He built the additions and did all the renovations on his house, too. I’m positive there wasn’t anything that man couldn’t build. If my grandma or I could dream it up, he could make it happen. We used to flip through magazines together, and I’d point out my favorite things, usually animals. The next time I would go to their house, those animals would be my new toys in the form of scrap blocks of wood that had been cut out and either painted, drawn on, or had the actual magazine image glued onto it. We would lay on the floor together and play with these for hours.

Sometimes, Grandpa would take me down to his workshop in the basement so I could watch him work. The stairs were steep and narrow, the lighting wasn’t great, and it wasn’t a place I would venture to alone, so it was always a treat when I was invited down there. The carpet on the stairs was a hideous sight. It was textured with large brown patterns all over it, surely the most beautiful of carpets when it was purchased in the 1960s. The smell of sawdust was the first thing that hit me when I entered the room, followed by fumes of paint or glue. The cabinets were an interesting green color, not dark, not light, and not a green I can recall seeing anywhere else—probably another leftover from generations gone by. They housed a bunch of tools, paints, and more types of glue than I ever knew existed. There was a small wall near the doorway lined with what seemed like a billion tiny bottles of wood putty in various colors. At the very back of the room, there was a heap of scrap lumber, saws of all sorts,

and a workbench along a wall lined with shelves of nails and screws. This was our secret hideout.

A lot of the time spent upstairs was spent in the kitchen cooking normal meals and deserts with my grandma and making fun foods and midnight snacks with my grandpa. I absolutely loved peeling all the boiled eggs that Grandma would cook to put in her pea salad and helping to mash the potatoes. There was always dessert of some kind, usually homemade chocolate pudding. There is nothing quite like the aroma of all that melted chocolate, and nothing like the anticipation of having to wait for it to turn from molten chocolate lava into a warm, velvety delight. The later it got, the more interesting the food got. There were fried peanut butter and bologna sandwiches, egg sandwiches, and even tuna sandwiches. Sure, they were just sandwiches, but they were also works of art made into characters. My favorite by far was tuna, which usually got turned into kittens by carving the bread to round out the bottom and cutting out a bit at the top to make pointy little ears. Sliced up hot dog strips were added as whiskers, and green olives made perfect eyes.

It's almost unbelievable the amount of vivid memories that come flooding back from that place, even though I haven't set foot in it for over 20 years. My grandpa is no longer with us, and my grandma no longer lives in that house, but thinking back on it brings everything back to life. Memories of people, pets, the things we did, the smells, the sounds, all come back to me with such intensity that it's like they happened just yesterday. There's a common theme in all of those memories: imagination and creativity were the seeds that were not only planted, but also cared for and harvested by my grandparents. I was engaged and immersed in the world around me—exploring, learning, and absorbing.

Suddenly, I realize not only why my kids are bored, but also that I'm glad they're bored! You can't get these kinds of memories by staring at a screen.



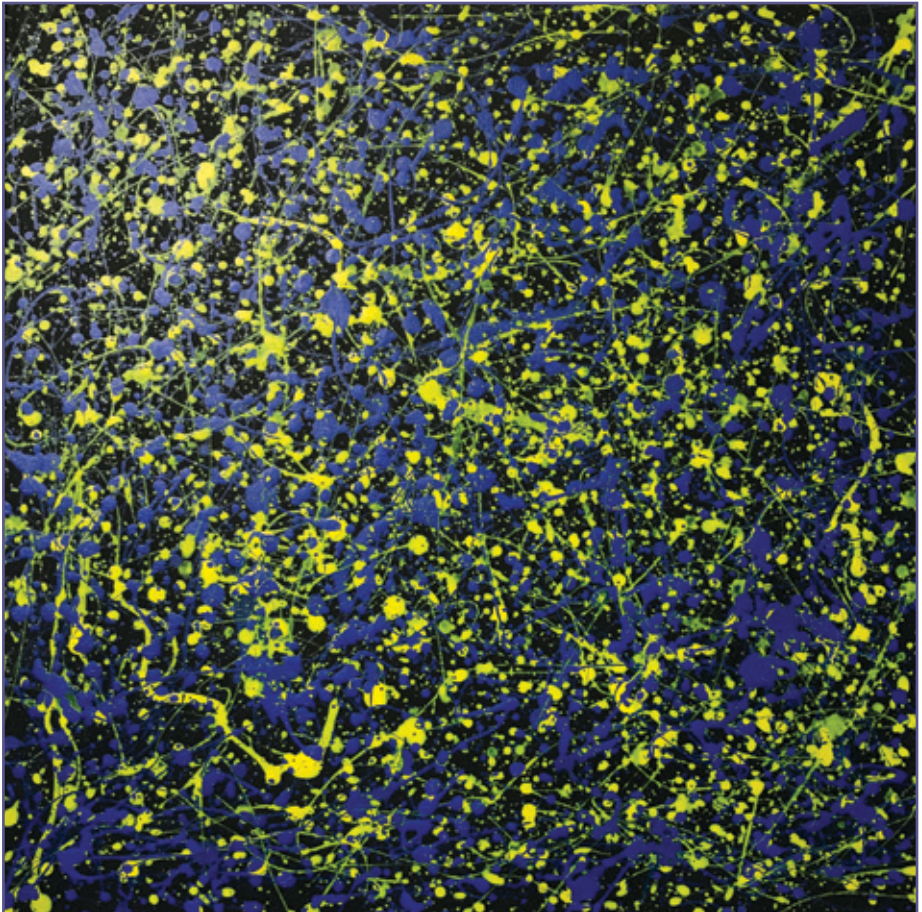
STEPHAN LABOY



"I'M A MUSICIAN WHO CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF THE ARTS, AND I AM ALWAYS TRYING TO LEARN NEW THINGS. MY PHOTO, 'INDUSTRIALIZATION,' WAS TAKEN DURING MY TIME IN AUSTRALIA, WHILE THE DIVERSITY AND DIVISIONS I SEE IN MY OWN COUNTRY INSPIRED 'LAND THAT I LOVE.' A GREATER APPRECIATION OF JACKSON POLLOCK'S WORK WAS THE FUN INSPIRATION FOR 'OVEREXAGGERATION,' AND THE FRIGID COLD NEBRASKA WINTER INSPIRED 'A WINTER'S WALK.' THANKS TO MY SCC INSTRUCTOR, TRUDIE TREJINK, FOR ENCOURAGING ME TO SUBMIT TO ILLUMINATIONS!"

OVEREXAGGERATION

STEPHAN LABOY • UNDECLARED



LAND THAT I LOVE

STEPHAN LABOY • UNDECLARED



WINTER'S WALK

STEPHAN LABOY • UNDECLARED



INDUSTRIALIZATION

STEPHAN LABOY • UNDECLARED



LARRY FANGMAN

*(PICTURED ON RIGHT, WITH NOVELIST JAKE TAPPER):
"I WAS MOTIVATED TO WRITE THIS STORY WHEN I CAME
ACROSS STEVE LANGAN AT A SUMMER LOW-RESIDENCY
MFA PROGRAM. HE IS A POET WHOSE BOOK I DID NOT
BUY OVER 20 YEARS EARLIER BECAUSE OF HIS SCRIBBLED
AUTOGRAPH. AFTER I GOT TO KNOW HIM AT THE
RESIDENCY...WELL, IT IS EXPLAINED IN THE ESSAY. I
TEACH ENTH GRADE ENGLISH AND THE SCC CLASSES
COMPOSITION I, COMPOSITION II, AND INTRODUCTION
TO LITERATURE AT WAHOO HIGH SCHOOL."*



AUTOGRAPHED COPY

LARRY FANGMAN • DUAL CREDIT ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

In November of 1991, I *almost* bought a book of poetry. I was in The Bookworm bookstore in Omaha when a blue book with a cat sketched on the cover caught my eye. The unknown author, Steve Langan, had published his first collection, *Freezing*.

The author's bio said he was a graduate of the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. He lived in Omaha, so the store stocked a stack of his books with a sticker on each one that advertised *Autographed Copy*.

I leafed through the pages. I found a poem titled "The Black Pants."

There is absolutely no sign
of a struggle. A pair of black pants
in the road that was not
in the road yesterday at this time,
six a.m. Its zipper

is to the cobblestone. Its absent
legs are spread.
It has been run over.
It's getting run over right now.
I cannot tell if these are the pants
of a man or the pants of a woman.

There hasn't been a murder
in this town for thirteen months.
Ice remains from the ice storm.
My Ford Ranger will not turn over.
At this time, the bare trees are still.

I turned the page and found "The Black Pants, Day 2." Langan had written a series of seven poems about the pants until on the last day, in the final poem, the pants are gone.

Farewell, black pants. Whoever
took you away must have needed you
for something I can only guess....

These seven poems captured my imagination like no poem had since 1975, when I had discovered "I'm Nobody! Who are You?" by Emily Dickinson in Mrs. Olsen's tenth grade English class. By the time I graduated from high

school, I owned two books of poems by Emily. Sixteen years later, I was considering buying a third book of poetry.

I took one, two, three steps toward the checkout counter. I flipped through the pages until I found the autograph. I stopped walking. Langan's signature, "written" in blue ink, was two scribbled letters. One out of ten readers *might* identify the first letter as an S; no one could identify the second one. It could only be described as being something from A to Z, or just a stray mark—as if the author had been bumped as he signed the book.

I went back to the bookshelf. I looked at the other copies of *Freezing*. Each one had the same scribbled *two-letter* signature.

I didn't buy the book.

I raged in my mind. I worked hard for 15 dollars! Poets complain, "Everyone reads poetry, but no one buys it." So why didn't this poet go the extra mile for his readers? In third grade, Mrs. McDonald had given me a D+ in handwriting. I understand sloppy signatures. I sympathize. But why couldn't Steve Langan sign his full name? Earn my 15 bucks with great poems *and* a great signature!

Since that day in *The Bookworm*, I've been conducting an informal study of authors' signatures.

In June of 2016, I took a writing class in Iowa City. I decided, as part of my writing weekend, to spend some money on books. In the Iowa Bookstore was a table of autographed books. I picked up *The Girls*, a novel by Emma Cline. I'd read a positive review in *The New Yorker*. I opened the book to the author's page. Two looping lines rose and fell across the page like long sloping hills or poor Pictionary drawings—but not letters. Oh, how Emma's fatigued hand must have ached as she signed extra books for the store. Why else would she have slipped off her shoes, stuck the pen between two toes, and signed the store copies with her foot? I wasn't sure if foot-powered signatures were worth more than five-fingered ones, so I put her book back on the table.

Next, I picked up *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. This would be the perfect gift for my nephew. He loved the series! But Jeff Kinney's signature looked like a first grader's drawing of two fish swimming. I did not buy his book.

I picked up *Lucky Alan and Other Stories* by Jonathan Lethem. I'd never heard of him, but I liked short stories. Maybe his autograph would seal the deal. His signature looked like *Rt Wt*. Had he changed his name *after* the book was printed? No sale!

The next book on the table had only one copy left. *The Fireman* by Joe Hill had *the* sweetest signature. First and last name—spelled out in full. Ten out of ten readers would identify the name written as Joe Hill. Even though it cost the

most, \$28.99, I bought it.

Then I went to Prairie Lights Books. In front of the store was another table of autographed books. Unknown authors and poets. Unreadable signatures. No sale!

Writers so often read articles on how to write query letters or how to market their books. Book signings are mentioned as a great way to make sales. The author, after meeting readers, will sign extra books for the store. Sometimes publishers send signed copies to sellers. The authors can show they care about their readers by signing these books like Joe Hill—not like Emma Cline and Jeff Kinney and Jonathan Lethem and Steve Langan.

Fifteen years later, I met Steve Langan in person.

In the summer of 2016, I enrolled in the low-residency MFA program in creative writing at the University of Nebraska Omaha. The students stayed for ten days at the Lied Center in Nebraska City. Steve Langan was one of the poetry mentors. I was there as a fiction writer, but I attended Steve's lecture. He read a poem in progress about his dad. After the reading, I told him about how I had read his poem, "The Black Pants."

"That poem has always stuck with me," I said, "even after 15 years. I loved it!"

"Thanks for telling me that," he said. "That made my night."

I didn't tell him that I didn't buy the book, or why.

Later that night, as I waited for the elevator, Steve came in from outside the lodge. In his hand he held some loose sheets of paper. "I liked the poem you read tonight," I said.

"I'm not happy with it yet. It needs some work." He held the papers out to me. "Here, you can have the poem." He gave me the manuscript he had read from during his lecture.

"Thanks." Wow. This was the guy who I judged did not care about his readers. I told some classmates that he had given me the poem. "It will be cool to compare the poem when it is published someday to the version he read us in class," I told them.

A few days later, I went down to breakfast. A group of ten teachers had just finished eating. I went through the buffet line and sat down just as the group got up to leave. Steve Langan stayed in his seat as the waitress took away his plate. Making small talk, I said, "I can't believe how prolific Joyce Carol Oates is. She writes books of poems, essays, novels, and short stories. Plus, she teaches full time!" (I googled "Joyce Carol Oates autographed book"; she neatly signs her full name—all three words!)

"When I was in graduate school," Steve said, "the novelist Jim Shepard,

who teaches at Williams College, told me a story about Joyce Carol Oates. Jim was sitting in a bar with some friends in front of a window that overlooked the street. He and his buddies wondered, ‘How does Joyce Carol Oates do it? She teaches full time and gets so much writing done.’ Just then, she jogged by on the sidewalk right in front of them. ‘What! All that writing and time for a run?’ They shook their heads. ‘Life’s not fair!’”

I told Steve the first author reading I had ever gone to was Jorie Graham, 30 years ago at Luther College. “That was a big deal for me back then. I grew up in a small town, so I’d never met an author. I listened to her reading. Years later, she won the Pulitzer. I still browse through her books, but I struggle to understand her poems. I don’t have hours to spend figuring out the meaning of a poem.”

“She was my mentor in graduate school,” he said. “Brilliant lady! Great teacher! Read *Erosion*. It’s one of her early books. Those poems are more accessible.”

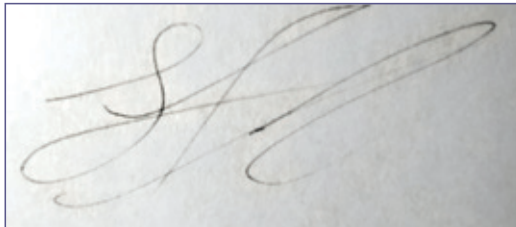
Steve chatted with me until I finished eating.

The next day, I ordered his book *Freezing* from Amazon. Using two-day Prime delivery, I had it sent to the lodge. I tore open the package and found “The Black Pants” poems. I read them again. Loved them again. That night, I went for a walk. I stopped at a bench, took a seat, and opened the book. I started to read the poems I would have read 15 years earlier if the autographed copy had been signed *Steve Langan*. A full signature for a reader paying full price!

The next day, I found Steve sitting in the audience at another teacher’s lecture. I asked him to sign the book. “Be glad to,” he said.

July 2016

for Larry—
do not run over
the black pants.
Yours,



(Poems reprinted with permission of author and publisher)



MARK GUDGEL



"I AM A HUSBAND, FATHER, WRITER, TRAVELER, AND TEACHER, AND I BELIEVE FIRMLY THAT THESE ARE IMPORTANT THINGS TO BE. MY EXPERIENCES IN THE CLASSROOM SHAPE MY WRITING, AND MY WRITING RETURNS THE FAVOR MORE OFTEN THAN NOT. I LIVE IN OMAHA WITH MY WIFE SONJA AND MY TWO CHILDREN, TITUS AND ZOOEY. THESE POEMS WERE INSPIRED BY MY EXPERIENCES TEACHING, AND I HOPE TO RELEASE A BOOK OF POETRY ABOUT TEACHING NEXT YEAR."

"WILL THIS BE ON THE TEST?"

MARK GUDGEL • ADJUNCT INSTRUCTOR

"And so," I start to wind down,
with the smug look of a man
who knows that he is about to short-circuit thirty-two
bright, eager, young minds with the single
nuclear warhead of a question that he is
about to unleash like a madman into their midst:

"If Dr. Mengele's experiments had lead to a cure
for cancer, would you argue that it is ethical
or unethical
for us to use it today?"

Boom! I think, the mic drop in my mind,
my warhead detonating in room 205
so loudly that the kids cutting class in the bathroom
across the hall may very well hear it and come in to
see what happened.

Chew on that, Honors students.

Silence.

The ancient clock ticks audibly behind its
bulbous window.

Their eyes
avoid mine.

I await the first hand, which I know in my
pounding teacher heart will invariably be attached to
a piercing mind,

an articulate tongue, and
a brazen personality, a future senator,
a future news anchor.

At last, slowly arises the hand of the daring,
the sharp, and the strong of will. I nod to him,
the ceremonial passage of the invisible conch
in order that
he may begin our next
epic and mind-blowing conversation.

"C'n I got'th' bathroommm?"

My sharp exhale is audible,
my disappointment visible.

*No, you may not go to the bathroom. Never again!
Hold it until you freaking explode you little dipstick!
I wonder if I could still get hired at Gallup?
This is why arming teachers is a horrible idea.*

"Sure."

He strolls out, removing his
social media database from his pocket as he leaves,
eager to resume
more important conversations about
more important things with
more important people.

I attempt to turn him into a pillar of salt with my eyes.
He doesn't look back, or return for twenty minutes.

After school, I push aside a pile
of steamy ninth grade plagiarism and
begin to update my resume.

I say "call me..."
hoping for "Ismael"
but instead
I get "maybe".

I point out
a speaker's pregnant pause
and hear them murmur
"whore".

I ask them

to think critically;
they ask me
 "will this be on the test?".

Not on the same page?
 Not in the same book;
mine is frail, dog-eared, has my penciled notes
scribbled along the margins and cracks at the spine
when opened.
It smells
 of antique binding glue.
Theirs is on a Kindle,
 and they read it one-hundred-forty
 characters at a time.

I compliment her on her floral cardigan,
 and I can watch her scan the horizon of her mind,
desperately seeking a "like" button
 with which to respond to my compliment.

I shake his hand,
 and I hear his knuckles groan inside of mine,
unused for more than
 sliding his fingertips across a screen.

Sometimes I can almost agree with those
 who say to me: "Kids these days," as if
in that lone dependent clause
 exists every problem our world is facing.

But then I remember—
 I remember, and I remind myself
 of everything I know deep down.

I remind myself
that these kids couldn't even vote
in the last election, that we did that, and
that I, too, was once a surly, angsty teen.

I remind myself
that last year in August,
I'd begin every morning with "good morning,"
and 219 kids would invariably respond
to my cheerful salutation with a sideways glance,
place their damp, limp hand in mine or, worse,
extend a lone, scraggly finger for me to shake,
rather than let go of their God-damn phone.

I remind myself
that by October, we were down to 206, and my
“good morning” was greeted with a general murmur of assent,
and the occasional firm handshake could be exchanged,
sometimes complete with eye contact.

I remind myself
that come February, back up to 211, it felt
more like 105, because gradually, methodically,
consistently, these fledgling human beings
began to act less like socially awkward robots,
and more like the terrific young people they are.

I remember
the email a former student sent me,
thanking me for teaching him to shake a hand
in ninth grade, crediting that small thing with
his new promotion at work.

I remind myself
that finally, in May, the handshakes often turned to hugs,
and many of my outbound seniors
would take one look at my facial expression in the morning
and respond with things like
“You okay?” and “Don’t worry, you’ll get through it.”

Not long after,
with one final ring of the bell,
 they depart,
released into the wild to find their own way forward.

They are armed
only with vague memories about
lessons on ethics,
 but also with the knowledge of how to shake a hand,
 make eye contact,
determine when it is appropriate to use the restroom,
 and for many, the ability to truly connect
with another human being, to
sympathize, to
 empathize,
 even to
 love.

Yes, *yes*, all of this will be on the test.

CONTEXT > CONTENT

MARK GUDGEL • ADJUNCT INSTRUCTOR

I have to remind myself that
her snoring isn't personal.

Once I was so married to my content that
I could never have allowed a student to
sleep through one of my classes.

Today, I let her sleep, let her snore,
because I know she cannot sleep at home.

I wonder how many of my students
cannot sleep at home,
yet are too ashamed to tell me this.

I wonder how many students I have kicked out of class over the years
because their parents liked to party on a Tuesday night. So I remind myself that
her snoring isn't personal, and that she isn't bored, and she isn't rude—
she's just exhausted.

I let her sleep, let her snore,
because there are mirrors
I have to be able to look into.

I can't help the kids I once booted out,
but she is right in front of me.

She will never know about Armenian culture,
but she will leave this place well rested,
and that's something.

Impersonally, she sleeps,
and in the background I drone on.

INTERRUPTIONS – SKOKIE

MARK GUDGEL • ADJUNCT INSTRUCTOR

—first snow of the year, wafting
gently out of a dirty sky, turning to slush in
forty degrees, slowing down our bus,
setting the tone for—

—students are anxious;
fourteen of them,
a thousand miles from home,
not sure what they will—

—but they don't see it at first;
only after they step inside does
the stark contrast of black on white
echo through the industrial archite—

—car still smells of, smells of, of,
just smells, I suppose. Quietly descending
the ramp, past a model,
until at last Sharon leads
us all to—

—He speaks as if it were yesterday,
as if he were right there, as if all of
us were right there with him, facing—

—the way out, the young man in
cheap tennis shoes looks longingly at
an ornate wooden mezuzah. Buying
it for him is one of the simplest—

—others buy yahm, er, yam, er, kipas,
and proudly wear them to Shabbat services.
“*Shabbat shalom! Shabbat sha—*“

“—from Omaha? Then do you know
Rabbi Azriel? Of course you do; everyone
knows him! He’s my daughter’s—“

—transliterated Hebrew helps to
sing, or squawk, along, the Oneg
settling and the smiles telegraphing
around the room, assuring and
reassuring us all that—

—of the cantor reverberates
throughout the chamber, warm
and resonant, proclaiming—

—Veteran’s Day, the old man
standing, hunched with difficulty,
all at once a Jew, an American, and
a veteran of the Second World War,
he is living history, he is—

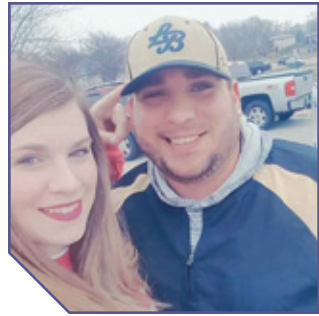
—later on, at Lou Malnati’s,
jokes circulate and we raise our
Cokes, *L’chaim*. Chicago-style
deep dish pizza:
“*Baruch ata Adonai,*
Eloheinu melech ha—“

—then fourteen students think
about what we know inside,
about who we are inside,
about what we learned, and
about the changes we—

—and take personally
the charge to act up and speak out,
and I hope and pray that—

MATTHEW TAYLOR

"I AM A FATHER TO MY FOUR-YEAR-OLD BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER AND MY TWO-YEAR-OLD AMAZING SON. MY WIFE AND I HAVE BEEN TOGETHER FOR EIGHT YEARS AND MARRIED FOR THREE. I WORK FULL-TIME FOR THE NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, AND I GO TO COLLEGE FULL-TIME. I'M ALSO A HEAD COACH FOR A SELECT BASEBALL TEAM. MY MOTHER HAS AND ALWAYS WILL BE MY HERO. AT THE TIME THIS ESSAY WAS WRITTEN, I HAVE BEEN PROUDLY SOBER FOR OVER THREE YEARS; I SUBMITTED THIS ESSAY BECAUSE I WANT MY STORY TO BE HEARD IN HOPES THAT IT WILL INSPIRE ANYONE WHO THINKS THEY ARE STUCK WITH NO WAY OUT. THERE IS ALWAYS A WAY, AND I BELIEVE I CAN BE THE VOICE TO HELP GUIDE ANYONE WILLING TO LISTEN."



CLEAR EYES, FULL HEARTS, CAN'T LOSE

MATTHEW TAYLOR • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS/ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Looking out at the green grass of the outfield and the freshly raked infield, I can feel my heart racing, just as fast as it did when I was taking the field to play. Smelling the popcorn, hotdogs, and the fresh spring air makes the adrenaline run through my body as if I were up to bat. I bring my team together for the pre-game speech that they now know will be coming. Since I have taken on the role of coaching a select baseball team of 13-year-olds, these pre-game pep talks are something I look forward to. As my team trots toward the dugout, I close my eyes; I can still recall a time when my teammates and I would be running toward our coach. We would look at each other with determination and excitement as if we were getting ready to play the World Series. As my team nears the infield, the players circle around me, ready to hear something to get them fired up.

"All right, team, listen up! Once this game is over, you will never get these innings back. I want you to give this everything you've got. Not for me, not for your family, not for your girlfriends. Leave it all out on that field for you. I would give anything to play one more inning. I don't want you guys to live life with that feeling—you guys understand? If you play 100%, you will leave tonight knowing and believing you did your best. I need you to believe in yourselves as much as I believe in you. Now bring it in!"

That part never fails to bring the emotions out of me, since I know that I rarely gave anything my 100%, and it kills me.

"Clear eyes, full hearts!" I yell at the top of my lungs and, as if it was on the

tip of my players' lips waiting to explode, they chant back, "CAN'T LOSE!"

Life has not always been this way for me, and I have nobody to blame for my poor decisions other than the man I see in the mirror. Life has been nothing short of an uphill climb due to the decisions and pain I have caused myself and others around me. If I am going to tell you this painful but true story that I call my life, I need to tell you the whole ugly truth, and there is no better place to start than the beginning.

When I was growing up, I was rarely bothered by the fact that all my friends had both of their parents around. I rarely became upset that they would have me over, and they all sat at the kitchen table and had dinner as a family. I never became jealous that my friends had their fathers around to teach things, like how to play baseball, shave, drive, or simply become a man. I had my hero, my mother, to help me become a loving, caring, and hardworking man. Who better to teach someone how to love and support a family than a strong woman who had to work three jobs to raise my sister and me? I would be terrified every time two weeks would roll by, and it would be time to visit my father. I believe my mother saw it as "a child just being a child" in a torn home. I would throw everything in myself into a world class fit in hopes my mother would somehow find the judge who made this court order and fix this situation called "visitation rights."

I knew very little about my father, and vice versa, but he found something that he and his son could do to bond. From the time I was eleven or twelve, I started asking him questions, such as, "What's in the brown bag?" He would wait until we pulled away on our every other Friday route to reach back, as if he was trying to put his arm around his only child to comfort him. He would then pull out that homeless looking brown bag and crack open his "cold one." Next, he would offer his only child, at twelve years old, his first taste of poison.

From that point on, I would no longer fight like Ali going into the ninth round to convince my mother to allow me to stay with her. My father and I were bonding now, and I couldn't be more excited to see him four days out of the month.

If I wanted to continue being my father's partner in crime, I needed to "keep one promise." That was the promise that every father tells his son to keep as they are doing what father and sons do: "You can't tell your mother." Logical, right? I was on top of the world feeling whole, as I finally had a relationship with this guy I barely knew. Who needed someone to teach me how to play baseball, shave, or treat women right? I had a dad to teach me how to hold my booze like a carnival attendee at the county fair. I now had someone who later

in life would teach me the key to driving while intoxicated. We were doing things every father and son did, like the countless times he would play this game that consisted of hiding me in the backseat to sneak me into the pits at the dirt track races. Once successfully smuggled in, I found it became open season, as I began taking shots with all these “cool adults” who were also my family. My uncles and aunts on my father’s side loved this circus act of their pre-teen nephew stumbling into anything in my way.

My father remarried, and the common denominator in that relationship was also booze. She was a nice lady who, later in my life, I would become close with, but not before the night of the crowbar. Considering I was only twelve when this night happened, one would think I would easily shove this nightmare of a memory to the back of my mind. That was not the case, as I have never looked at my father and stepmother the same.

My new stepmom, father, step-sister, and I had been at the dirt track races, and everything took a turn for the worse when we arrived back home. First, it was just yelling, but it quickly escalated and became physical. My dad had this brilliant idea of pushing his new wife out of the house and locking the door. I heard someone yelling, “Your kid is a faggot! Just look at him, and you can tell that kid is a faggot!” Then, as if scripted for a horror movie, I heard the glass on the door shatter. As I looked up from my safety spot behind the couch, I saw a bloody hand holding a crowbar, and with a click, that door was now swinging open with force. I went into fight-or-flight mode when my stepmother started toward me with blood dripping from her arm—the same arm that was holding the crowbar meant apparently for her “faggot” stepson. (For the record, she used these terms when speaking about me strictly based on the facts that I knew, and still know, every word to every Backstreet Boy song ever made, dyed the tips of my hair blonde to get the “frosted” look, and used an extreme amount of hair gel—but hey, it was the 90s.) I ran like prey running from its attacker to the only place I knew they couldn’t find me—under the tornado slide. I stayed there until I saw a light that could only be God come to take me back to my hero, my mother. To my surprise, it wasn’t God but the next best thing: the sheriff, who was on a first name basis with this twisted love duo. He took me back to the scene of the fight.

As life went on and I dove into my high school years, I felt like I was well-prepared for adulthood. I felt like Michael Phelps going for his 23rd gold medal, and nothing could stop me. For me, watching my mother punch 80-100-hour workweeks had become normal. It never crossed my mind that she was slowly killing herself. Going into what I thought of as adulthood, I took

advantage of her work schedule by doing what I did best—party. I was never alone, and that's the way I wanted it. People would stay for nights on end, going home only to shower and change. We would smoke weed and drink, and we thought that was what living the dream was all about. My mother had no idea about any of this because all the boozing and smoking took place in the garage that nobody ever parked in.

Every other weekend “bonding” that my father so graciously shared with me became my new normal. No longer contained to just four days a month, the beast had broken from his cage, and I refused to slow down.

I have shed many tears thinking about the pain I put my mother through with my lies and the countless times I was quick to take advantage of the life my mother had worked so hard to provide for her only son. For the last 23 years, my mother has worked at a place that helps mentally disabled people live everyday lives. The people my mother works with we consider family, and that has a lot to do with her never clocking out.

If my mom did not want to miss my baseball games, she brought our extended family. My cheering section during my high school graduation was one of the loudest there. These people have shown me that no matter what anybody may be going through in life, they need to be able to face it standing on their feet. Honestly, I acquired this outlook on life the hard way, as I had many more mountains to climb.

Graduation had come and gone, just like my childhood that felt stripped away too early. My mother hadn't the slightest idea that my father had allowed me to binge drink with his friends and that side of my family. If she would have caught the slightest hint of what her baby boy was being put through, the trips with my father would have come to a screeching halt, but I was not ready for this circus show I called a life to have the high-flying act pulled.

I had to spend a few nights in jail the day after I threw my graduation cap to the sky. I graduated with a less-than-average GPA and left high school carrying nine Minor in Possession charges along with me. I let the dust settle in my 9x9 cell that I was so lucky to share with what I called a “thug.” My new roommate for the next seven days had two teardrops tattooed just below his left eye, both arms covered in what could only have been done by a top-notch jail tattooing artist, and neck ink that topped it all. I couldn't shake the thought of how bad those neck tattoos had to have hurt. It was enough to make an 18-year-old kid stop his shenanigans, and that was my plan—until I was released and I moved straight to Hastings where my father resided.

Ninety days and many police visits later, it was time to move on to Lincoln.

I had decided life was like a basketball game at the county fair, where the rim has been modified just enough that the ball would not go through. I stayed on this course until I received a call from Dad saying he had broken his back and needed help for a while. I helped because, at the end of the day, this guy took the time to teach his boy the important lessons in life, lessons that I will carry with me like a monkey on my back until the day I die.

It was during this time that I met the most beautiful woman who, later in life, would become the mother of our two amazing children—my wife, but most of all, my best friend. We moved to Lincoln together and rented our first house. I knew what kind of man I wanted to be, but the seed of addiction planted years prior had now blossomed into a rose whose thorns were quick to hurt anyone trying to get close. Melissa and I had been together for three years, and I knew she was the very best part of me. However, it wouldn't be until after Maddison, our daughter, was born that my world changed forever.

I knew it was time to put the ball in play and ask Melissa if she would be my best friend for the rest of our lives. I had been exposed to my father beating my mother, drugs and alcohol before I could drive, and marriages that were bound to fail, but Melissa came from a different world. In her world, people did not divorce because they simply couldn't get along. Her father was a fighter in every sense of the word. Her father, grandfather, and uncle all served our country. My father-in-law had been away for war on two separate tours. Knowing he was stripped from everything he knew and loved, Melissa wrote her father letters every chance she had to connect. I could see the love she had for her dad, and I knew I wanted to be the best dad I could. I wanted Maddison to know she was my world.

Melissa and I were working full time while she was in school when I received a call from my father. "I know I wasn't there for you growing up, and I know your mother and grandmother raised you. I want to be there for Maddison, and I want to be around to help raise her."

My first thought was, "Not a chance." Neither Melissa nor I would sign off on him having any part of "raising" our children. Next thing I knew, I was driving back to our house with a truck and trailer full of his belongings because, for some unknown reason that I would later chalk up as a learning experience, when he asked to stay for two or three weeks, I said yes. Melissa was furious, as anyone can probably imagine. She didn't know what kind of man would ask his only child for help, knowing we were about to embark on our own life journey.

Two or three weeks quickly turned into two years, a wedding, and a drinking problem that had snowballed into a painkiller addiction. Just like when I was

a child, I was not alone in feeding this addiction. Melissa was working nights while I was working days, and, in the two years of my father's residency with us, he never helped with bills. In his twisted mind, paying his child for the hospitality in painkillers was the only logical way to go. I was not only battling a lifelong drinking habit but was now a part of the growing club in America of opioid addicts.

My life took its last hard turn the day I heard my best friend's voice for the first time in over a year. He told me he had turned his life around and was finishing his stay at the Diagnostics and Evaluation center in Lincoln. He said if I had time, I should pick him up that next day and take him to where he was going to work until his release.

When I told Lance what I was battling, he delivered the wakeup call that saved my life. With the love he would show his own brother, he said, "If you are going to continue with the drugs and booze, I can't be a part of your life. I love you, and you'll always be my brother, but I have fought too hard to throw it away. Matthew, please get clean, and let's fight this fight together."

I called my hero, who had given so many years of her life to provide for me. Like clockwork, she drove the 2.5 hours, and we walked into Lincoln Treatment Center together: a beaten-down man holding hands with a mother who, after the storm of problems, stress, and pain, could still be proud of me for making the right choice.

I finally told my father his stay with us was over, and I needed to better my life because the path I was on was bound to end up in tragedy. He, to this day, never understood why I couldn't do that with him in my life. I have had countless meetings with a counselor, digging up my memories like a gravedigger preparing for a funeral. I had never looked at my weekend stays with my father as abuse until it was brought to my attention at one of those meetings.

I would still receive the occasional phone call from my father asking for money, and not once did he ask how my life was going. I eventually sat down with my grandmother to explain to her that I was in a treatment program for alcohol and opioids. She looked at her first grandchild with such disappointment; I felt like a man who had leprosy. My father, who was there, acted just as shocked, as if he wasn't my main painkiller supplier. A man I had opened my doors to left me hanging out to dry in front of my grandmother. That was the last bit of pain I could endure from that side of my family, and I eventually had to cut ties with all of them.

After three and some change years later, I have remained sober, free from any drugs or alcohol. I have a new outlook on life and wake up each day to provide

for my family, just as my hero of a mother had for many years. My wife and I have been together for over eight years and married for over three. I thank God every day for giving my amazing wife the strength to never give up on me and for riding the storm out, hand in hand. I have worked for the State of Nebraska for over two years now and am in pursuit of my teaching degree. I plan to spread the knowledge I have gained to other children who need a mentor that refuses to give up on them, just like my best friend Lance, who I cannot thank enough for finding the strength to better his life. He knew the big man calling the plays upstairs needed him to spread his love and message to people like me.

We are down by three runs, as we get ready to take our last at bat. I hate seeing my players hang their heads when I know how much heart they play with. I need them to believe in themselves as much as I believe in them. The team circles around me in the bottom of our final inning, and I know exactly what they need to hear. "If you play this final inning with clear eyes and a full heart, you can't lose."



KENT REINHARD

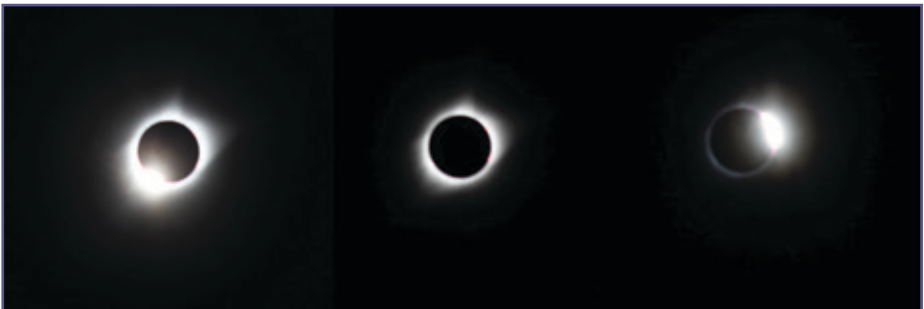
"I AM AN INSTRUCTOR OF PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY AT SCC. SPENDING A LOT OF TIME OUTSIDE WATCHING THE SKY TREATS ME TO SOME GREAT ARTWORK."



PHOTO COLLECTION

KENT REINHARD • SCIENCE INSTRUCTOR

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