

illuminations

Volume 14 • 2013



lluminations

A magazine of creative expression
by students, faculty,
and staff at
Southeast Community College

Volume 14
2013

“Love and kindness take deliberate action.
In this world, the optimist and dreamer must be of sturdy stock,
unflinching in the light of a dark world,
unwavering in its belief in the better part of humanity.”

Dan Everhart

“Let us go forth, the tellers of tales,
and seize whatever prey the heart long for, and have no fear.
Everything exists, everything is true,
and the earth is only a little dust under our feet.”

W.B. Yeats

iIlluminations

CREATIVITY LIVES HERE.



This book is dedicated to Dan Everhart—cherished friend, respected colleague, teacher in the truest sense, and an avid supporter of *Illuminations*. He brought us great joy. (And no one told a better Chihuahua story. *Argh!*)

(in that spark of a memory)

YOU LAST LEFT.

Well, you know how it goes
I'm sure. Someone dies,
and then you feel all shades
of guilt and wonder
whether ...the deceased and you
went out on a good note.

You used to drive me crazy
With your kindness, your loud
And caring ways in the halls.

And I know, reading this,
You would look up and away
From the computer screen
Where you were clearly busy
Scant moments before
And find some way
To congratulate

My clumsy effort.
“Come on, man, this
Isn't that good. Stop with
The effusive praise.”

I still wonder about
That sweat lodge vision
We discussed. I still hold
That your way, gentle,
Confrontational, and apt,
Of reaching our students
Meant more to their lives
Than you could know.

And we were all your students.

*~ Neal Kirchner
SCC English Instructor*



Photo credits to Danny DeLong, Bob Eddy, Kara Gall, Jeanine Jewell, and Dinorah Garcia-Santos

ILLUMINATIONS VOLUME 14

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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 critical thinking and creative expression are valued at Southeast Community College.

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Front cover image, "Always There," by Madelyne Penkava and
back cover image, "Superstition," by Kristyna Holz

ILLUMINATIONS VOLUME 14

PRIZE WINNERS

EACH YEAR, THE EDITORIAL TEAM AWARDS PRIZES TO SIX OUTSTANDING STUDENT CONTRIBUTORS.

PROSE WINNERS



Grand Prize: Erin Urbank, “Puento Rotario”: Erin’s powerful short story moved and captivated the members of the Editorial Team. One team member described Erin’s story as “a vivid imagining of life in a culture so unlike our own. The writing is good, and the storyline is compelling. This is fiction that feels true to life.” Another member concurred: “Although this is fiction, it reads like the truth. It is accurate and timely with current events in Mexico and describes great emotional scenes.” A third team member remarked that Erin’s story was “really, really good. The author has an authentic voice with solid transitions and smooth exposition that stays in voice.” Nearly every team member commented on the

emotional devastation of the story. “Events like these are portrayed in the news every day,” a team member wrote, “but they weren’t real to me until I read this masterfully written story.”

Runner-Up: Jaci Benson, Collection: Jaci’s two short stories delighted Editorial Team members with their wit, skillful characterization, and authentic, distinct sense of voice. One team member wrote of the humorous, “Finally Got Robbed,” “This story kicks butt, and clearly, its author does, too!” Another team member commented, “This story is funny and entertaining; the writer puts the reader in the apartment, and the characters are so relatable.” About the poignant, “They Say I’m a Liar,” a team member remarked, “I thought about this one long after I read it. This is one of those stories that makes one wish for more—so very well done.”



POETRY WINNERS

Grand Prize: Mystery Harwood, Collection: Editorial Team members raved about Mystery’s masterful use of language, rhythm, and imagery in her four stunning poems. Of “Catfish Willy,” one team member wrote, “I like the whimsical view of this relationship... and why coriander? A brilliant and mystifying poem.” Another member remarked, “I like the strangeness of this poem. Once you allow yourself to be swept into it, you see the quirky charm and crisp wit.” Of “Monkey...,” one admiring team member wrote, “I love the way the author uses rough, harsh words that cut and wound and make you taste the story,” while yet another team member called the poem “surprising and odd. This poem challenges the reader to enter into an admittedly weird space and then spins its own logic, which, by the end of the poem, makes as much sense



as any other reality we accept.” Of “Sister,” a team member wrote, “This poem is haunting from the beginning. I like that the poem takes unexpected turns and is not clichéd homage. The poet creates images and metaphors that stick with you and pull you deeper into the poem. By the ending stanza, you are invested, and by the last two lines, you are haunted as well.”

Runner-Up: Janet Zanker, Collection: Janet’s collection of poems enamored the Editorial Team with its creativity and vivid nostalgia. One team member called Janet’s “Snakes” “a good, descriptive illustration of the transience of firecrackers.” Of “The Drive-In,” another team member wrote, “I could smell the popcorn. So many memories were stirred using wonderful word pictures. I could smell the ozone before the rain and feel the wind on my cheek.” Of “Nebraska,” a team member commented, “The poet uses fresh and surprising metaphor to create crisp images. The poem doesn’t necessarily tap into anything more than the scene itself, but sometimes, a beautiful scene is all you need.”



ARTWORK WINNERS



Grand Prize: Madelyne Penkava, Collection: Madelyne’s eclectic collection of photographs challenged and intrigued the Editorial Team members. “‘One Man’s Trash,’” one member wrote, “is definitely a treasure. The saturation of the colors and gritty details work well with the subject matter. I love the framing and composition. This proves art can be found anywhere if you open yourself to seeing it.” Of the compelling “You Are More,” a team member remarked, “The colors and smoke bring me in delightfully, and I feel a part of the crowd.

This seems to be the intent when coupled with the simplistic statement, ‘You are more.’ Even the font is simplistic. It is a message to the viewer that he or she is more, and, perhaps, we can be even better together. The composition is phenomenal.”

Runner-Up: Michela Iwanski, Collection: Editorial Team members were impressed with the composition and tone of Michela’s stylized photos. Of the exuberant, “I Whip My Hair,” one team member wrote, “This is a well-composed shot that looks professionally done. The photographer was able to capture action, fun, and liveliness in this clean, crisp shot.” Of the luminous “Strands,” another team member commented, “The girl’s expression is what stood out to me—there is something mysterious about it. I love the colors in this photo. The model has a kind of natural beauty that is hard to find, and the photographer captured this perfectly.”



CATFISH WILLY

(YOU ALWAYS DID HAVE A GOOD
HEAD ON YOUR SHOULDERS)

*MYSTERY HARWOOD • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE POETRY AWARD*

†he coffee mug tilts
on the edge of the counter.
i dawdle, wipe away yesterday's spills,
oblivious to its teetering movements.
i'm the one who can't forgive the refrigerator
for never being the right temperature.
he says something absurd
about appliance retribution revolt.
i laugh my way back into
the place i came from.



on the pock-marked square of lawn
in front of the kitchen window,
two squirrels fight bitterly over autumn's scraps.
as always, he is unperturbed.
me, i never could ignore a cockfight;
i never could forget to weep.
but he does it.



his kindergarten smile flips on:
i'm standing confused
in the grocery store aisle.
cereal boxes stretch out like blocks.
i want to build a fort and hide.
he touches my arm—we need milk.
he herds me safely to the checkout.
i say, i'll turn to coriander if i look back, won't i.



night in a two-room flat.
he pulls from the closet

old and oft-worn
articles of clothing,
our little fashion scrapbook.
he mentions praying for another good year,
smile still on like the liberty lights.



all these flavors mash together,
a soup of him that i must drink.
i address him:
no coriander,
no oyster crackers. i made a fort of boxes
when you weren't there to stop me.

COLLAGE OF STONE

CAREY GRAHAM • *ACADEMIC TRANSFER*

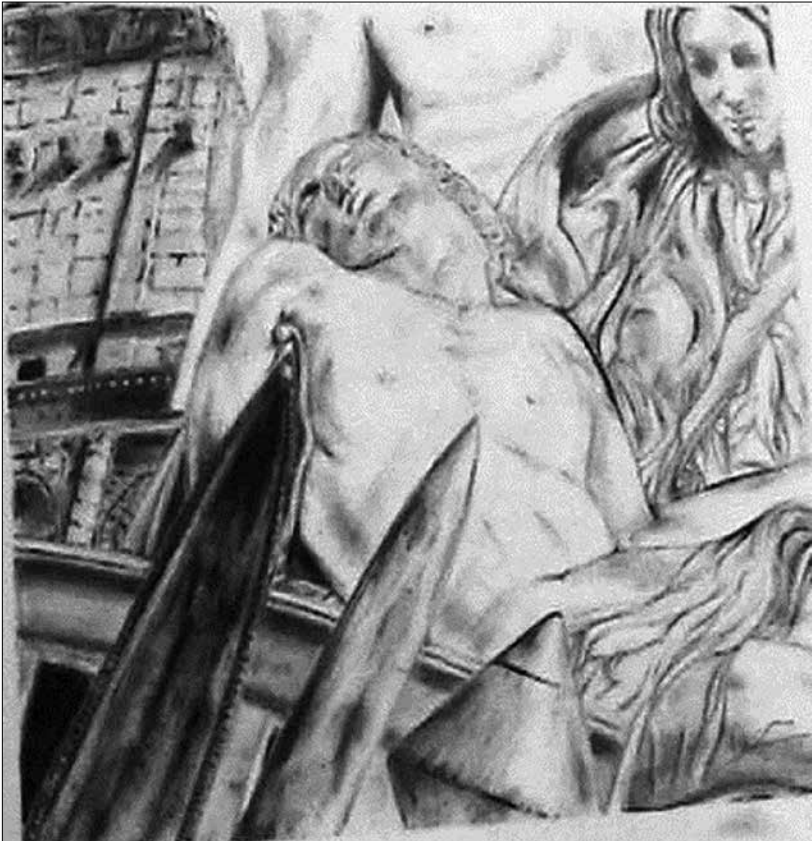


PHOTO COLLECTION

MADELYNE PENKAVA • HUMAN SERVICES
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE ARTWORK AWARD

FIFTY CENTS AND A HAPPY GOAT



YOU ARE
MORE

LONELY TREE



ALWAYS THERE



PUNTO ROTARIO

ERIN URBANK • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE PROSE AWARD

The whispers say that a headless corpse has been found hanging from the Puento Rotario, or Bridge of Dreams. I am disgusted, but not surprised, because I live in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, the most violent city in the world. My city, Juárez, would touch El Paso, Texas, but for the border that slices through the middle. Unfortunately, this border makes Juárez a perfect place for drug runners and gangs. I am Marisela Talavera, a wife of ten years and mother of four children. I have survived in this city for 43 years.

As Valeria and I pass through Anapra, a nearby barrio, we hear talk of the body. We do not ask who this was or whence he came. We wait on the edges of a weary crowd for busses that will take us to the Johnson & Johnson maquiladora. The fact that there is a murder this morning makes no difference, for there are murders every morning. One must work to eat, and though this is a sad and grisly sight, the day must go on.

People stream onto the busses, but we wait for the crowd to thin before stepping on and taking seats near the front. Valeria slides over to the window seat, hands folded in her lap, lips in an uneasy line. My only daughter is 17 and has gone to work in the maquilas with me for a year now. I would never let her go alone. I hear too many stories of girls being kidnapped, raped, mutilated, killed, and thrown out like trash.

The busses pull up a dusty drive, and the building comes into view. The maquila is tall, gray, and unwelcoming. After we clock in, we file to our stations. There is row upon row of industrial tables and sewing machines, each one exactly the same as the one before. Our job is to sew hems on medical cloth and bandages. I begin the hours of tedious sewing, and my mind wanders to my family, as always.

My husband, Arturo, will be working now, as well. He is a construction worker, though I don't know if there is much to build anymore. Arturo and Jorge, my oldest, leave before Valeria and I do. After we're all gone, Enrique and Gustavo are left alone. Only twelve and ten, respectively, they already look mature due to the strong jaws inherited from their father and dark eyes that come from me. They go to school when they can. If they miss the bus, they must stay home because the trip is an hour and a half to the inner city.

The days they miss school, they make thread bracelets that we can sell for six pesos each.

It may sound bleak, but we find our own happiness. Enrique loves to play football. He is very good and wants to play for the Brazil national football team when he gets older. Gustavo follows him around and is forced to play goalie. He admires his brother so much. Two months ago, Gustavo decided he would go to Brazil and play goalie on the national team with Enrique. Valeria sings. She can sing anything, and it sounds beautiful. I don't know where she inherited that talent from because both Arturo and I could be out-sung by a sick frog. Jorge spends a lot of time with his novia, Lilia. They have been dating for two years, and I think they will marry before long. His face lights up whenever they are together. Arturo plays his violin. He learned when he was a small boy and plays while Valeria sings.

I readjust my sore fingers. The needles of these machines often catch them and leave painful pricks. Some days as the hours drag on and my fingers begin to ache, I can't help but to think that maybe we'd be better off if we left. I think maybe we could make it in the United States. Juárez is my hometown, but when I remember the ever-increasing violence, it makes my stomach twist with worry. Three months ago, five severed heads were thrown onto the dance floor of a club in Uruapan. The drug cartels kill many people with their *cuerno de chivo*, AK-47s, even innocents who are just in the wrong place at the wrong time. I mentioned going to the United States once, and a friend said to me, "El país de las ilusiones: Te reciben, y te rechazan," or, "The land of illusions. They receive you, and they reject you."

I have seen many bad things happen to good people. You may wonder why we don't call *la chota*, the police. Ask anyone in Juárez, and they will tell you the same thing: the operators for 066, the emergency number, are working for the drug cartels. The joke is that the best way to talk to kidnappers if a family member disappears is to call that number.

President Calderon has told us that he is fighting a war against the cartels, and his thousands of soldiers will save us. I don't think that will happen in Juárez. There is a *dicho*, or saying, on the street: If Juárez is a city of God, that is because the Devil is scared to come here. Many members of the police force and military are corrupt. We are better off on our own. Everyone who lives here has learned the same hard lessons: don't walk around by yourself, especially if you're a woman, and don't leave your house after it gets dark because only bad things will happen.

The bosses at the *maquilas* give us no breaks, only two short trips to the bathroom. As my mind has wandered and my fingers have kept busy, the day

has passed. Through dirty windows, I can see the light has begun to fade. I meet up with Valeria at the busses. Everyone looks haggard and weary. Valeria looks tired and sick. Dark smudges, like bruises, are below her eyes, but she offers me a small smile. We sit together on the bus, ready to be home with the rest of our family. We pass over the Bridge of Dreams and see that the corpse has been taken down. There will be another one in the days to come. I can only pray that it will not be someone I know.

As the bus nears Anapra, lolling heads and slumped backs begin to perk up. We come to a gradual stop, and the rapid-fire chatter drowns out the diesel engine. We are sitting in the front of the bus, so Valeria and I get off quickly. We walk through Anapra, sometimes waving at families we know. There are uneasy whispers, and they follow us through the streets. They are different from this morning. I see naked fear shining in wary eyes. It feels like a cold, clammy hand has taken a hold of my heart.

“Valeria, we need to hurry. Something is wrong.”

She nods at me, her mouth tightening into a frown.

Our quick steps are loud on the cracked cement. People retreat into their houses as the sun abandons them, hiding from the monsters in the dark. It is five more minutes to our little one-story house. The hand around my heart tightens, and I feel as though something hot and painful has settled in the bottom of my stomach. Valeria clutches onto my hand and squeezes. Her blunt nails dig into my skin, but I don't care. I squeeze back, offering some assurance that everything is fine. I hope I am not lying.

As we near the corner, I hear yelling and cursing. I am running as fast as my legs will let me, and Valeria keeps up, still holding my hand. I sidestep a teetering stack of trash and round the final building blocking my view. There are two police cars in the middle of the street in an attempt to shield the scene from passersby. A chattering crowd fills the sidewalks—some faces blank and some twisted with grief. A police officer holds out a hand and forces me to stop. My legs seem paralyzed. Valeria takes three slow steps until she is in front of me and says something to the officer. He nods. She pulls on my hand, and I follow her forward.

A voice to my left cries, “Mama!” and a small body barrels into my side. I look down at Enrique and see his cheeks streaked with dirt and wet with tears. I pull him into my arms. I give him a kiss on the forehead and squeeze him tight. He holds desperately onto my neck, trying to speak. Uncontrollable shudders and heavy weeping make him indecipherable.

The car in front of me pulls away, and I am confronted by an appalling scene. Blood lies in drying puddles that seem to suck in the fading light. Bullet holes

draw shaky lines across the front of multiple houses. A body is crumpled at the bottom of a decaying brick wall. Another ragged corpse is slumped over the hood of a car.

I look to my house, and a sudden keening wail cuts through the garbled noise. It is haunting and soul-shaking, and everybody is quiet. Enrique's eyes meet mine, and I realize that this cry of agony is coming from me. My hands slip off his shoulders, and I stumble to my front door in a daze. I drop to my knees and snatch handfuls of Arturo's shirt. He is laying face down, unmoving, covered in blood. Jorge, my strong, oldest son, is sprawled on top of his little brother. A bullet had torn through his neck, and I can only hope he felt little pain. Tears are running down my face in a torrent, and sobs feel like they're wrenching my chest apart.

Then, I look at Gustavo. Blood is pooled beneath him, and his brown eyes that were so lively are now dull and empty. His dream of going to Brazil with his brother is over, and I feel like I am dying. I can't see through my tears. I can't breathe, and I curse this city with all my heart for taking half of my family away.

A few minutes later, I come back to myself and see Valeria beside me, crying with me. Enrique is still clinging to my side, staring at his little brother with haunted eyes. A sympathetic policeman interrupts our grief. We stand, and I demand, "Tell me who did this. Who is the *hijo de puta* that killed my family?"

The man shakes his head and replies, "We think it was La Línea, going after some runners from the Sinaloa Cartel. They opened fire in the middle of the street and..."

I turn and walk away before he can finish. Enrique holds on tighter, and Valeria returns her hand to mine. We walk around the building and go through the back door, actively avoiding the front room. I collapse onto Arturo's and my bed.

"What are we going to do, Mama?" Valeria asks, her once melodic voice hoarse and choked.

"Keep living, for now," and that is all I can say. I can hope that the crushing sadness and despair will lift enough for me to live. I must go on for Valeria and Enrique and their future.



Three weeks have gone by. Someone gave us a newspaper the day after and there was a short article, "Six Dead in Drug-Related Shooting," on the third page. No one was arrested, and there were no suspects named. Flowers have been left in front of our house from friends and families around the neighborhood. It seems that life on this street has returned to normal for everyone but us.

Arturo, Jorge, and Gustavo were taken away that night and returned a week later in three ceramic jars. They sit on the antique table from Arturo's mother and watch over us. Valeria has stopped talking and only sings hauntingly in her room. She looked sick before, but now her cheeks look gaunt and pale. Enrique hugs his father's violin like he used to hug his teddy bear. He sits on the couch with the violin and football but refuses to go out and play.

I wake every morning thinking of the family I've lost. I'm angry with President Calderon, who sends out his police and troops to stop these cartels and gangs, and they do nothing. I'm disgusted that people can murder families, and no one cares. This city has killed so many innocent people and destroyed lives, and mine is the latest victim. How many more must it take? I ache to leave my house and leave this place. I want to start again but I don't have the money. I want my children to be happy.

As the bus passes over the Bridge of Dreams for another day of work, there is another body hanging. A pain pierces my heart as I see the unchanged expressions of the people around me. Maybe that person was loved. Maybe he had a brother or a mother or someone who worried about him. Maybe this man will be another ceramic jar on somebody's mantle, just like Arturo, Jorge, and Gustavo. I can only wish for two things: that this crippling pain inside me will fade, and someone, anyone, will begin to care. ❧



"Puesto Rotario" is a fictional story written using factual research.

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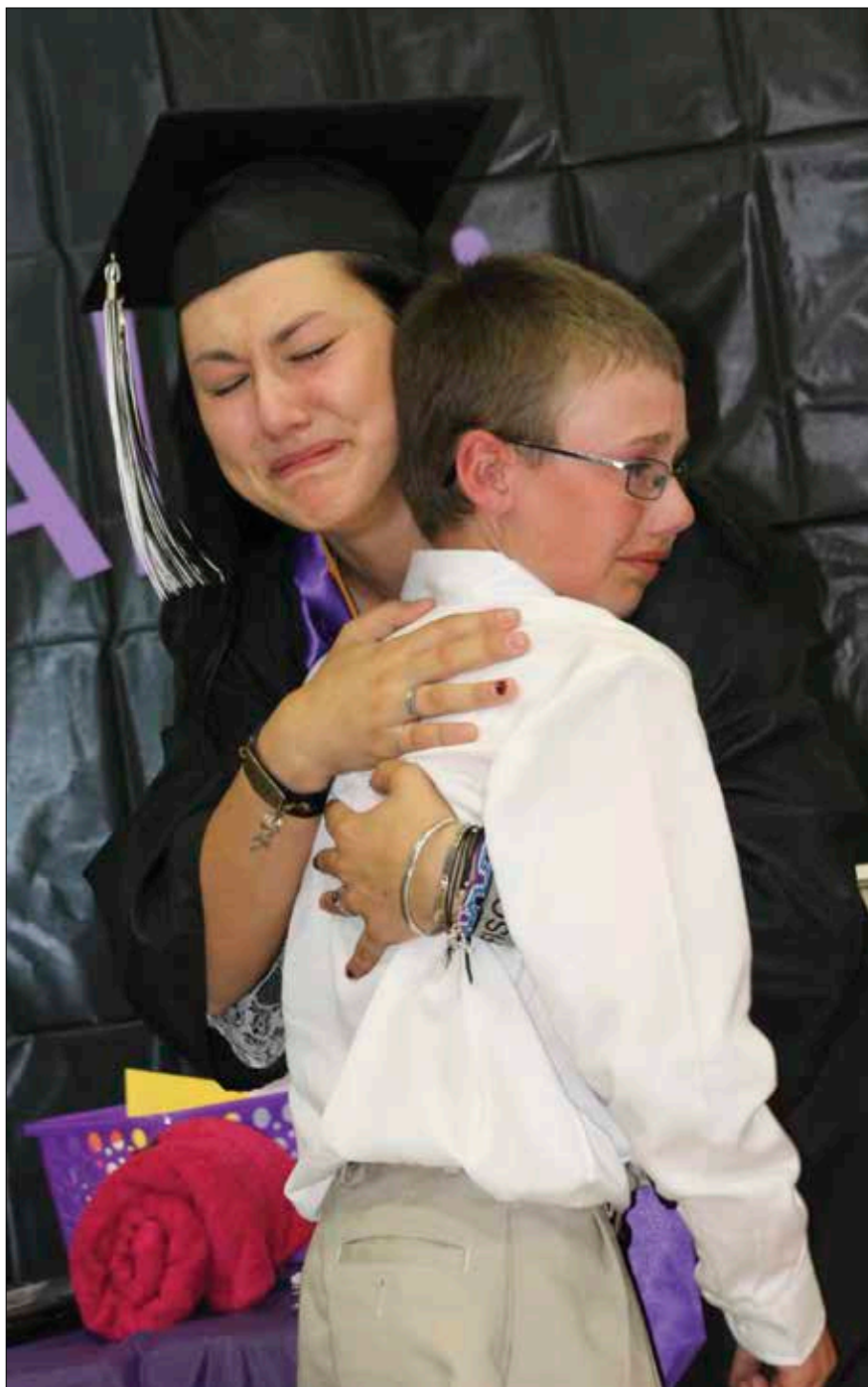
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MY TIME TO LEAVE

MEKAYLA GRANT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



DRUMMER'S DILEMMA

JESSE BYRD • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

*For Jerry Byrd, the subject of this poem and a father
who believed I could do anything*

From the darkness of the stage
Comes the counting of a nervous man.
Flashes of light blink in the crowd
As the rhythmic melody starts
To emanate from the bass drum.
The lights brighten to show the black
Pearl set with Zildjian symbols that
Surround the drummer on all sides.
Smoke drifts up from the center of the Toms
As sticks fly around to bang and
Tap the heads. Cymbals crash
And chimes ring out as a musician
Who cannot read music plays
“In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida.”
As the music plays on, the lights
Brighten to show the rest of the band.
Seventeen minutes later, the lights die
With the calling of last call.
The drummer tears down
His multi-layered pearl set
While he thinks about his future.
The offer to headline in Reno
Could lead to becoming famous.
The children at home have him thinking
That there is more to life than success.

EMBRACE

RANDIAN A. NAVES SPENCER • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



PHOTO COLLECTION

MICHELA IWANSKI • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PRIZE ARTWORK AWARD

I WHIP MY HAIR



RUST



THE PRINCE



A DAY AT THE LAKE

YANCY DITTMER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Leaving Franklin, I turn onto Highway 136 heading west. This is the last part of the drive before arriving at the lake. The longest twenty miles I will ever drive take me over rolling hills and into deep valleys. Driving on the hilly highway leading to Republican City, I anticipate the moment I first see the lake. Then, three miles outside of town as I come to the crest of a hill, I see it in the distance. Like a mirage on the horizon in the dry plains, the gates on the dam glow brilliantly, and I can make out the blue reflection of the sky on the water. This is Harlan County Lake.

Harlan County Lake covers over 13,000 acres of water and 75 miles of shoreline. The wind blows across it most days, creating whitecaps as waves break over themselves. The shore consists of a sandy clay mix, speckled with flat clay stones formed by waves breaking at shore. These stones work flawlessly for skipping across the water. As I navigate my boat along the shores, I notice the sheer cliffs that surround much of the lake. Two small marinas flank the north and south shores; they lay hidden within the coves and provide a place to refuel my boat as well as my body. The east side of the lake is lined with large boulders placed along the dam face, which has 18 gates in the center that open to allow water into the Republican River below. The water released into the spillway is used mainly for irrigation of crops. On the far west side of the lake is the Republican River that feeds the lake, snaking its way across the land. Along the shore, I find many coves with names like Gremlin, Prairie Dog, and Hunters. Within these coves are campsites that spill over in the spring and summer with tents, picnic tables, campers, boats, and vehicles. On the north and south shores, there are cabins—mostly trailer homes that people have brought in to make their stay a little more enjoyable. In the summer, the air is filled with the smell of charcoal grills and the sound of jet skis, high horsepower boats, and stereos blasting pop music on the water.

For the past several years, the water in the lake was low due to drought and high irrigation demands. The water receded from the shore like an aging man's hairline, and in its place, trees began to grow. Thousands of small cottonwood trees, all from seed, had grown to over ten feet tall. The Army Corps of Engineers neglected to remove any of the trees before the lake filled back up, creating underwater snags for engine propellers and fishing lures.

The lake was full this year, though, full of dark greenish-brown water that smelled like fish and lapped the shore with a steady rhythm. This was my first trip to the lake in years.

Late October brought cold temperatures. The morning air felt damp and left frost covering the windows of vehicles, and few leaves remained on the trees. The inside of my grandpa's boat was littered with three tackle boxes, eight fishing poles, a minnow bucket, and a small yellow Styrofoam box keeping a dozen night crawlers. From sitting exposed in a small garage for most of the summer, the windows were covered in dust and bird droppings. The carpet had started to show its age with small tears, beginning in the walkway and under the front console where Grandpa stretched his legs when he was driving. Under the passenger side of the dash was a small wire basket that contained Windex, paper towels, three rod holders, a fire extinguisher, and a few loose tools.

The trailer tires skidded across the pavement as the boat was maneuvered down the steep ramp. As the trailer slowly submerged into the water, air escaped the tubular frame in the form of hundreds of bubbles. The boat became buoyant in the cold, murky water. The winch on the trailer moaned, as it slowly released its hold on the boat. Sitting in the water, tied to a dock, the boat rocked back and forth from the wake created from a passing boat. A metal ring, fixed to a pole on the dock, rang out like a bell with the rocking of the waves.

At the dock, we asked an older gentleman with a thick coat, stocking cap, and full grey beard if he had any luck catching fish. "Haven't caught anything but a cold," he growled as he drove off.

The old two-stroke, 115-horsepower Evinrude engine on Grandpa's boat cranked and cranked but would not fire. An overwhelming smell of gasoline filled the morning air—the pungent smell of the fishy water no longer noticeable. On the water, there was a rainbow of colors at the rear of the boat from the mixture of oil and fuel spilling out of the muffler. The manual choke lever had been moved to the full-choke position, causing the engine to flood. I returned the choke control to the run position, and the cranking proceeded. With a violent shake, the engine roared to life. What a fantastic sound! The muffled rumble of the two-stroke engine in the water reminded me of summer. Blue smoke hung on the water like fog from a horror movie; the smell of the two-cycle engine oil burning was wonderful.

As we passed through the cove, the sound of the engine echoed between the steep walls of the cliffs, and a flock of geese took flight as the boat moved toward them. Water slapped the bottom of the boat rhythmically as it passed over the waves. The water behind the boat was churned from the whirling propeller, and tiny gas bubbles escaped at the surface. Once out of the cove and

past the restrictions of the buoys marked “NO WAKE,” the engine hesitated as the throttle opened up.

The wind in the morning was light, and the surface of the lake shimmered like glass. The boat sped across the lake creating a large wake behind it. The wake rolled on top of the water for 40 feet on both sides before disappearing. Parked in front of the dam, the boat, pushed by the light wind on the lake, moved in a gentle circle as it sat idling. The drive engaged with chatter as we putted along the face of the dam in just 16 feet of water. The boat filled with the sounds of the depth finder, beeping as it bounced sonar waves off suspected fish under the water.

The air on the lake was cold as it blew gently across the water. Other boats raced across, trying to find the perfect fishing spot. The sound of outboards and high horsepower v8’s pierced the stillness of the morning. Standing in the boat, we jigged our lures up and down as the boat bobbed in the water like a buoy. The water splashed against the back of the boat, creating a fine mist that dusted my face, chilling me to the bone.

The day passed quickly on the lake. At the day’s end, we pointed the boat back to the loading ramps as the throttle opened up. As usual in the late afternoon, the wind picked up, and the water became choppy, jarring bones, and shaking screws loose from the old boat. Darkness fell as the boat reached the cove; a lone street light was barely bright enough to allow me to see where we were going.

Night had fallen on the lake, and the darkness gave an eerie feeling. I slowly backed the trailer into the water, and with a clank, the safety chains and winch cable made a connection to the metal loop on the front of the boat. The winch moaned again as it slowly pulled the heavy boat back onto the trailer.

With darkness, the lake became silent. A few boats remained in the night, visible only by their green and red navigation lights. The night brought colder temperatures, and my fingers and toes tingled. The warm protective cab of the pickup offered protection from the cold embrace of the October air. Sitting motionless in the truck, I still felt the rock from the steady movement of the boat as it bobbed in the water. Harlan County Lake’s sights, sounds, and smells stay with me long after I have left it. 🌊

JULIE

RACHEL GOULD • GRAPHIC DESIGN



FINALLY GOT ROBBED

JACI BENSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PROSE AWARD

I finally got robbed after five years of living alone in my one-bedroom apartment in Lincoln, Nebraska. My building was nestled between two other buildings, and they all looked the same: two-story brick tops with flat roofs and a single entrance with shared hallways. I picked a top floor apartment because I figured it would be safer than a main level apartment; plus, it was cheaper. Lord knows I didn't pick the top floor because I thought it would be a neat challenge to drag my couches up two flights of stairs or because I wanted the exercise of taking my dog out every night at 3:00 a.m. No, I was trying to make sound decisions and act like a mature 20-year-old girl. I was thinking things through. Heck, I even thought this whole robbery through before it happened. Let's be honest: I fantasized about it.

I was hooked on the idea of being attacked ever since the self-defense class I took at the university a couple years before the robbery. The class was an easy "A" as expected, but I was surprised how well I absorbed the information. (Most things I learned in school leaked out of my brain the minute finals were over). The instructor was an overweight, middle-aged, bald, white male. I pictured him being a beefy bouncer at a bar or a wrestler at his prime. He was way too inspirational to have been only a teacher his whole life. I couldn't wait to try out my new combat skills.

Anyway, I was really bummed the day he showed a PowerPoint filled with statistics about what types of people were usually targeted as victims. I learned that I would probably never get to twist the skin of an attacker's inner bicep or push upward on a robber's nostrils or bark like a dog to scare an intruder away. Skinny girls got attacked, and I was far from skinny. Naïve-looking girls got attacked, and I was naturally aware of my surroundings. Girls that walked alone at night got attacked, and I usually took Henry, my 20-pound, black and white terrier, with me on walks. I knew I wasn't very likely to get attacked, but I still daydreamed about the details of the perfect encounter and how I was going to heroically defend myself with great confidence. My story was going to make the local newspaper and maybe even the local news if I killed the robber on accident. I couldn't wait to give credit to my self-defense teacher who taught me how to "use the heel of my hand to whack a guy's face" and to use the

“heel of my foot to swipe his kidneys.” I knew this fantasy was never going to happen if I kept thinking about it because things always happen when you’re least expecting them. I was trying to put the fantasy out of my mind, or at least trying to stop assuming every male I encountered was the man I was going to send to the hospital with life-threatening injuries.

My philosophy proved to be true because I was definitely not expecting the robbery to occur when I was making supper for Mitch, the guy I was seeing at the time. People don’t get attacked in the daylight, and the sun hadn’t even thought about setting yet. Mitch told me he would “be there around six,” but he was always annoyingly early. Naturally, I was starting to get worked up, trying to get everything prepared and presentable for our date. I fluffed the couch pillows and folded the blanket over the edge of the couch just right to make sure he didn’t think I was trying too hard. The apartment looked good enough; all I needed to do was make something to eat. Spaghetti was just the right choice; I didn’t want to set the bar too high and have Mitch expect a gourmet meal every time he came over.

To be honest, I was annoyed about making supper in the first place. We had only been seeing each other for a month, and he thought it would be a “fun idea” if I made him supper. Mitch knew I didn’t love to cook because I hated dishes (that was one of the cute things I said on our first date). More importantly, I didn’t love being asked to do womanly tasks—especially by a man that didn’t know how to change his own flat tire. But, I was trying to keep an open mind and not jump to conclusions like I had a pattern of doing with men.

The last three guys I dated before Mitch got the boot within the first week because of their different variations of psychosis. This guy, Mitch, had potential: he smiled at people, he gave me a lot of compliments on my clothes (even though I was too cheap to buy nice clothes), and he didn’t complain about having to drive 17 minutes across town to pick me up for dates. My instinct was to assume he was trying to test me to see if I could take over his mother’s role of feeding him—or so he could stop relying on fast food to nourish his manly, furniture salesman body—but I was finally trying to be mature about the relationship and ignore my instinct to obsess over his intentions. My hopes for him were higher than I had allowed them to be for a long time. How much longer could my dog be my only source of affection? I was five years from being 30 years old, 15 years from being 40 years old (not that I obsessed about trivial things like age). Mitch was starting to look more and more appealing with each date. I smiled at the thought of him arriving soon, which, in my mind, was a sign that I must actually kind of like this guy. A rock station was blaring from my kitchen radio to keep me in an upbeat

mood. The last thing I wanted was for Mitch to see me worked up and to assume I was a basket case all the time.

Between the radio and my clanking around the kitchen, I didn't hear my apartment door open. Henry yapped hysterically when someone was in my hall, let alone approached my door, but Mitch didn't like dogs (they made him "a little nervous"), so I dropped Henry off at Camp Bow Wow earlier to play for the evening. Normally, I would have given a guy the axe as soon as he said he didn't like dogs, but Mitch assured me he was willing to "get to know Henry," and that it would just "take some time to get used to him." His insistence was convincing and decently sweet, so I wanted to reward him by not making him deal with a begging dog during our first home-cooked meal.

Thank God I forgot to actually turn on the stove to boil water for the spaghetti. I would have scorched my bare feet when I knocked over a pot of water as I stumbled backwards in fright. There was a stranger standing in my kitchen.

"I knocked on the door." The stranger looked at me as if it was no big deal that he was standing five feet away.

"Who are you?" I gasped and held my breath for a few seconds out of shock.

"Don't even think about calling no one or making some big scene. Just give me all your cash, and I'm gonna take some of your stuff."

I couldn't tell if he was making a statement or asking my permission.

My forehead crinkled. "You're gonna what? I don't get it." A few seconds elapsed before I realized that it was finally happening: I was getting robbed.

The guy was wearing a baby blue tank top and black gym shorts. He was wearing white tennis shoes (I think they were Nike) and white socks that went halfway up his pasty white shins. This was not right. This was not what my attacker was supposed to look like. He wasn't tall like I had envisioned. He was scrawny, not muscular. He didn't even wear a hat, let alone a facemask. His voice was quiet, not deep and threatening. Even though I was instantly disappointed in him, I was still determined to "memorize his appearance" like my instructor had told us to do if at all possible.

"Walk slowwwwwllly to find some cash and haaannd it to me." He talked to me really slowly (maybe he stereotyped me as an incompetent single woman, I don't know). This gave me time to memorize his gross, patchy, reddish mustache and freckled nose.

"Um, okay, I think I have like three bucks on the table by the door." I was trying hard to sound cool and nonchalant. He was standing between me and the door. I inched toward him to get to the door while I slowly reached over my body with my right hand and grabbed the empty pot off the stove.

He didn't seem to care that I grabbed a weapon and even stepped out of my way so I could get past him on my way to the door. I was hoping he would turn his back to beat me to the money so I could knock him out with my pot, but I guess beggars can't be choosers. I had to think of a new tactic. I finished walking sideways to the table by the door; I didn't want to turn my back to him in case he decided to man-up. I noticed he was starting to look extra pale in the face, and I could see rings of sweat under his arms. His eyes were either green or blue and he had a strawberry blonde receding hairline. He was somewhere between 19 and 25 years old (it was hard to tell in the moment). I probably could have just asked him. Oh, well. Even the smartest heroines make mistakes, I'm sure.

"Hurry up and hand me the money." His voice was a tad more forceful—probably similar to my tone when I told Mitch to hurry up and turn right on red the last time he drove me to the movies.

"Oh, God, Mitch is probably going to walk in on this," I thought to myself as I set the pot on the table by the door and started fumbling with my wallet. Of course, the one time he wasn't ridiculously early, I was getting robbed.

One part of me wanted Mitch to show up and attempt to save me, but a bigger part of me wanted him to walk in and see the aftermath. Then he could see how brave and independent I was. We could eat supper while watching my interview on the breaking news. But, my attacker was not fulfilling my expectations, so I knew I was just wishfully thinking.

"Oh, hold your horses." I was trying to antagonize him, upset him a little.

He walked over and ripped the crinkled three one dollar bills out of my hand and accidentally knocked the pot to the ground in the process. The noise of the pot hitting the linoleum on the landing in front of my door startled him. He finally got a burst of energy and a new sense of urgency.

"This isn't a joke, damn it." He grabbed a small silver switchblade from his shorts pocket and pointed it at me.

"Sit down and don't say a word. I mean it." His demeanor was changing. I believed he was serious, but I wasn't sure I believed this guy actually knew what he was going to do if I said anything.

I sat down on the floor by the table with my back against the wall. He was standing about four feet in front of me with the knife out; his eyes surveyed my apartment. I was getting ready to start barking like a dog when he said, "How old's that TV?"

"Uh, I don't know. Like, three years old." I surprised myself with how timid my answer was and how nervous I felt.


While trying to keep an eye on me, the stranger walked sideways to the TV and then yanked the cord out of the wall. He put the knife between his sweaty lips and grabbed the 24-inch TV with both hands. My mind went blank. I was frantically searching my mental Rolodex of things the instructor had said but came up empty. All I could think about was my cell phone lying on the floor in my bedroom.

“Has Mitch tried to call? Is he on his way up?” I was beginning to panic and trying to decide what time it was.

I quickly snapped out of my co-dependent thought process when I realized this guy, in a baby blue tank top, was actually going to steal my only TV. Wait, what are Mitch and I going to do during supper if I don't have a TV? My inner voice was irritated and urgent. Oh, my God. Stop him! This is your chance to finally do something. Be a heroine; use your skills; save your TV!

I didn't know the sound of my own voice when I started barking like a rabid dog protecting a piece of prime rib during a famine. Before I knew it, I was on all fours. Baby Blue Tank Top dropped my TV and pointed his switchblade at me again. Rage took over when I saw the spider web crack on the screen. My bark was as loud as a roar, and my face scrunched like a bulldog's. He acted like he had never had a person bark at him before. Baby Blue's white shoes and socks flashed before my face on his way out the door. I stuck out my paw to twist some of his skin, but I missed.

The door slammed and made a breeze against my face. After blinking a few times and taking a big swallow, I took a deep breath and walked to my bedroom to find my phone. Mitch had messaged: “Sorry. I don't want to come off as a wimp but I could hear a dog barking as I was coming up the stairs, and it sounded pretty angry. Can I get a rain check? Don't hate me.”

“You have GOT to be kidding me,” I said to my reflection in the bedroom mirror. I started to text him back but realized I really should call 911 instead. As my mind processed everything that had occurred, I walked to my bedroom window to see if I could see Baby Blue's getaway vehicle. Nope, he was gone, but Mitch was petting my skinny neighbor girl's cat in the parking lot. 

JACK

MICHELA IWANSKI • *ACADEMIC TRANSFER*

Round orange clumps
of things we clutch and
stab and paint
pierce the skin and
pour out seeds
that taste so sweet
hear the crunch and scrape
that moment of release
watch and smell the flame
corrupt the perfect piece

CONTRAST

JENNY POLEY • *OFFICE PROFESSIONAL*



FINGERPRINTS

KRISTYNA HOLZ • HUMAN SERVICES/ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Iris tears appeared through the glass
The window stained with children's smeared fingerprints
I saw her glance over if I had come to see her leave
The note from the day before did no justice
All the tears that I kissed
The interrupted perfect days from one tiny cell
It came down to the paper with the writing
A crease down the middle
I reach for it in my shirt pocket
The crinkled edges seem to calm my shaking hands
I continue to watch her as she sits
Her blue baseball cap tries to hide her secret
The train begins to move
She looks one last time
Her eyes seem even more swollen
But the post doesn't let her know
I do see

HEATHER

RACHEL GOULD • GRAPHIC DESIGN



PEACE, LOVE, AND PICNICS

MADELYNE PENKAVA • HUMAN SERVICES
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE ARTWORK AWARD



LIKE A STONE

MARK GUDGEL • ADJUNCT ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

It's been days since I visited Murambi. Check that—it's been precisely a week now, from last Thursday to this one, and still I find myself unable to write or even think freely about the experience I had there. Should I do a sufficient job of explaining Murambi in my writing, then it will mean revisiting the horrible place again, and I am not yet ready to do such a thing. Should I do a poor job of it, however, that would be even worse—it would be a betrayal of the people who still reside there, and a disgrace to their memory and everything that I now know.

I write this after two days of being more or less bedridden by a stomach bug. I spent yesterday laying in the back of a Land Cruiser, taking in glimpses of Gisenyi and Lake Kivu when I could muster enough energy to lift my head to the height of the windows. This was the regrettable product of thinking myself healed of a sickness before I truly was. Presently, I'm in Kigali International Airport. Drew and Kinga got through security early on, but as my flight is still several hours away, I haven't been allowed through yet. So here I am, drinking only water for fear of upsetting my fragile stomach, scratching irritably at fresh mosquito bites, and thinking once again about my visit to Murambi. If not now, when? I fear I won't ever truly be equal to telling the story, not really, and so perhaps the present moment is the best opportunity I can hope for.

Murambi is a memorial to the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, and like so many memorials, it is the location of a massacre. Murambi is in the southern province of Rwanda, near the city of Gisenyi, around a three-hour drive from Kigali, which is itself fairly central in this tiny African state. It is not far from Kibeho, about an hour perhaps, where the Virgin Mary appeared (or so they say) in the mid to late 1980's. Murambi was a technical school, unfinished in 1994, and it sits atop a mighty, rounded hill, isolated and with only a single road leading up to it. All around are steep slopes, and burrowed into them are a few houses, some small fields, and the occasional cluster of banana trees. Children were playing outside the houses when I visited, and I will need to come back to them later in order to try to make sense of all of this.

I have visited dozens, if not hundreds, of memorials, museums, historic sites, and the like since I began studying the Holocaust and twentieth-century genocide after I graduated from college. Each location has its own unique sense of place, its own power, and its own significance. I found Auschwitz particularly

impactful in 2009 when I visited, and the churches of Ntarama and Nyamata here in Rwanda have also cast a spell over me, forcing themselves into my conscious, sometimes even my dreams, and not ever fully relinquishing their grip upon my conscience. All of these places I have written about. I remember finding a few of them quite difficult, wondering if I had done them any justice with my words. Never anything like this, though. Murambi is something else entirely.

At Auschwitz, many people were with me in spirit. The voices of the survivors were ever on my mind, from that of Sam, a friend who lives not far from me in Nebraska, to that of Elie Wiesel, a newer friend in New York, to the voices of Primo Levi, Viktor Frankl and others—so many wonderful people I never met, will never meet, but whose written works and thus, whose lives, have had an influence over me all the same. At Auschwitz, they were there, but as survivors, they offered hope. In the presence of the mightiest death camp of them all, they gave me hope. I thought of their lives, their successes, their children, and I was able to conclude that even in the shadow of genocide, lives will continue to be lived and lived well, and that in turn provided me some assurance that the future may be better.

At the Kigali Genocide Memorial, the final resting place of some 250,000 Rwandans, I found a similar glimmer of light. Though below me were the bodies of the slain, above ground there were survivors, either visiting or employed there, and all of them, somehow, still able to smile, shake hands, drink a coffee with me. They remind me of the beautiful Banyarwanda who fill the cities, the countryside, and the streets dressed in wonderful bright colors, playing games, so often singing. They remind me of the churches and the songs of praise to God that awoke Pete the other morning when he came and got me so that together we could listen to their joy reverberate around the valley. They, these survivors, remind me of the dance, of the music and song, of the sheer and unrelenting splendor of millions of people who call themselves Rwandans. They are marvelous, and they are whom I think of when I am alone in the gardens of the Kigali Genocide Memorial.

But I did not find them at Murambi, so far off the beaten path. Murambi merely haunts me.

In April of 1994, within a few weeks of the start of the genocide, authorities in the southern prefectures of Rwanda encouraged tens of thousands of Tutsi and moderate Hutu—potential victims of the genocide—to flee to Murambi so that they might be protected. These, of course, included women and many, many children. When the school was full, it was surrounded by government troops and Interhamwe—radical extremist militias—and fired upon relentlessly until only a few survived. Those who managed to survive the shelling were cut down

individually when the genocidaires invaded the premises to finish their “work,” as it was often referred to in those days. It was but one of many, many massacres that would take place during 100 days of killing in Rwanda.

At Murambi, the memorial opens with a museum, well done and succinct, and complete with powerful videos of survivor testimony. Of an estimated 50,000 killed there, there are 14 known survivors. Through their testimonies, I am familiar with three or four of them now. Out back is the school, the classrooms and cafeterias, administrative buildings. It is a massive construct by any standard. On the grounds are a few notations, in the form of metal signs, regarding the involvement of French troops in the genocide. It was no small part they played. In particular, a sign denoting the location of a volleyball court erected by French soldiers, juxtaposed within a stone’s throw of the site of three mass graves, the disgraceful conclusion being left up to the interpretation of the person viewing these macabre placards. In the cafeteria are the clothes of victims piled on shelves, bowls of necklaces and bracelets, and shoes, all stored away as though the curators aren’t quite sure what to do with them yet. Seventeen years is not a lot of time.

The classrooms, however, made the greatest impact upon me. When the bodies were excavated at Murambi in 1995, they were surprisingly well-preserved, having been buried almost immediately upon their slaying. For years, they have remained as such, coated in lime as a means of preserving even their facial features. They are stacked upon palates inside the classrooms, some fully intact, others dismembered, hundreds to a room throughout the rear of the school. I had known this in advance. I had seen pictures. I had spoken to others who had been there. I had eagerly arranged this visit. I had not expected to be so overcome by what I saw and by what I heard and by what I smelled. The rooms full of corpses smell like rooms full of corpses, and every body on every palate is a different human being—mother, father, son, daughter, midwife, uncle, aunt—lost to eternity from the blow of a weapon, a bullet, a grenade. The manner of their death is often not difficult to determine when looking at their bodies, nor is their despair. They still have faces, tattered by the elements if not by their killers to the point that they are difficult to distinguish, but faces nonetheless. As I would enter each classroom, they would stare at me, and I would stare back.

Our guide, recognizing that we were from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and—apparently, judging this to be of some significance—made a few phone calls as a professional courtesy of sorts and granted us permission to take photographs. But I couldn’t. Eventually, outside, I took a few pictures of the grounds, though I’m not sure why or even how. Inside, however,

I couldn't bring myself even to remove my little camera, purchased three years prior for my first trip to Rwanda, from my cargo pocket. By the third or fourth room on the tour, I stopped entering them altogether, sometimes standing briefly in the doorway, other times not even getting that far. I eventually turned my attention to the children on the sheer hillsides, dribbling soccer balls and whacking one another with rolled banana leaves. They would notice me and wave to me, and I would wave back. Immediately behind me were rooms full of dead children, some still wearing clothing, some bent in prayer, all of them chalk-white from the lime that preserved their remnants. I needed the living children to keep me grounded. I feared I might lose myself completely if I did not focus entirely on them and on their games. From behind the reeds, a few played peek-a-boo with me for a while, then grew tired of me and ran off to pursue more interesting pastimes. Our guide, Emanuel, showed us around, took us to a few more sites, and then dashed off to prevent a film crew that did not have permission from doing an interview on the grounds. My colleagues and I walked out alone.


Emanuel and I are now in touch. We have emailed a few times. I like him. He works at Murambi because he sees how important it is that someone does that work. He is lonely there, but only in that his companions are silent. He said to me on the day of my visit something I will never forget. Thinking back on it now, I take it as a warning. At 30 years old, I've devoted most of my professional life to studying genocide—be it history, prevention, literature, or some other aspect entirely. Few people I know have ever questioned the importance of my work, at least not in front of me. And though I have no crystal ball, I suspect the rest of my life will be spent in some respect or another studying genocide and, with luck, helping to prevent it through education. I think of all of these things, and then I reflect upon the words of Emmanuel that afternoon, as together we stood overlooking a roomful of his fallen countrymen: "For me, I think I am already dead. There is a difference between living and existing. The stone exists, but it does not live. When you are ever surrounded by death, you become like the stone."

Emanuel hopes to write a book about why it is important to work at memorials and how to do it. I have offered him my support. Perhaps, if I am lucky, I can encourage him to branch out and write it for teachers and scholars, as well. Perhaps, if I am lucky, I will not wind up a stone.

We left Murambi and Drew, one of my companions and friends, headed straight past our car to a waiting crowd of children. Still in stunned silence, I did not immediately understand. I wanted to leave that place quickly, get a beer, speak to living people, try not to be a stone. I had begun to protest when I

realized what was happening, and then I quickly joined him and Pete with the children. There must have been 30 of them. Did they even realize where they were? Perhaps not. But did it matter to young men doing pull-ups on the arms of strangers, climbing all over them, learning how to use their cameras, and demonstrating how well they could count to 20 in English, say the alphabet, and sing their songs? I picked up as many kids as I could, took their pictures, posed in photographs, let them climb all over me. Before we left, we called one of the older, quieter ones over and gave her enough money that, hopefully, each of the young ones got a Coke. It was the finest therapy I have ever received and, while I may not ever be fully recovered from my visit to Murambi, I found myself, yet again, amongst the living, and I was more grateful than I have ever been.

As I finish writing this, I hold sincere doubts about whether or not my words have even come close to doing justice to my experience at Murambi. To share time and space with the murdered dead, the young and innocent and pure, is something that I hope most of those close to me may never experience, lest they, too, run the risk of becoming like a stone. Other memorials brought forth in me inspiration, activism, and a desire to bear witness. At Murambi, I experienced only pain and revulsion as I have never felt before. It's curious to me that the more difficult it is to explain something properly, the more important it seems that this be done. And so, in the case of Murambi, I can say only that I have tried.

I have not eaten anything of substance in several days, my sickness and the fear of complicating the nine-hour flight to Brussels having got the better of me. And yet, sitting here in the airport, I smell a cheeseburger, and it smells pretty good. I will pass on the opportunity this time, but probably not the next. All things pass in time, though I suspect that my memories of Murambi will remain poignant for many, many years. Someday, perhaps, I will be able to reconcile myself to what I saw there and to the idea that while I was turning 13, receiving as a gift my first compact disc player and purchasing Billy Joel's Piano Man album for my first CD, my brothers and sisters at Murambi, near Gisenyi in the south of Rwanda, were dying a terrible and horrifying death. Then again, perhaps it will be better if I am never fully at peace with this experience. Perhaps it will be better if instead I keep those tortured people with me, as I teach and as I live, in the quiet hope that something I do somewhere along the way may contribute in some small way to a future without such realities. I can hope for that. If nothing else, all of us can hope. 

APPREHENSION

DAN EVERHART • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

I can't deny that it grows in my mind—
as I turn the steering wheel at some intersection,
as I offer plates of ripened beets to gaping mouths.

If I were to succumb as in love—
in crests of limbs, undulating
amid a turbulent sea of print roses and blue wool,
bodies whale-like, submerging, ascending in paced breath—
if I were, would we head for rumored waters
handed down in myth?
Would I ever be the same?

I can't deny that it festers in my mind.
A calculation, the urge,
a possibility of a possibility, unspoken—
Could I change my mind if the milk turns?

MOON EYES

MICHELA IWANSKI • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PRIZE ARTWORK AWARD



NEBRASKA

JANET ZANKER • *ACADEMIC TRANSFER*
RECIPIENT OF *RUNNER-UP POETRY AWARD*

I.

The spider spinning webs
in the door of the barn
twisted her silk
across the loft door.
The milk bucket filled
with petunias, dancing.

II.

Honeysuckle granted
the bees cool, sweet
nectar from hundreds
of fiery trumpets,
their scent erupting
into the air.

III.

The old horse crosses
the dark green pasture
biting on a sandwich
of soft new hay.
Its tail parting the air,
swatting at flies.

IV.

Beanfields listen to trite
conversations of corn,
growing in rows
like troops lining up,
their cobalt uniforms
engraved with their spirit.

PITCH

RANDIAN A. NAVES SPENCER • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



THE CORNER

TROY POOLE • *PHYSICAL THERAPY ASSISTANT*

The cumulus grey clouds stayed in town for many days, and in that time, it had been raining—sometimes a few sprinkles each day, and sometimes a long, drawn out, heavy rain. Standing by the street and leaning against a black, painted lamppost in front of the coffee shop café was a woman. She was not properly dressed, for this was the one day it wasn't supposed to rain. Her curly, silky red hair drowned and became drenched in the rain. Periodically, she would put her hair back, pushing it out of her pale, smooth, creamy white face. She shivered as she held herself and tried to keep the rain from her eyes.

The rain stopped. It was almost immediate, like someone shutting off a faucet, but in front of her was still a shower. Slowly, she turned around and noticed a man in a trench coat placing an umbrella over her. She gladly took hold of the umbrella, and he undressed himself. Already warm, he put his trench coat on her wet, cold shoulders. Her soft skin let the pours run down as if she were made of glass. She tried to say, "Thank you." Her cheeks were glazed not with rain, but with tears.

Not caring about being soaked, he guided her into the café, sat her down in a booth, and ordered two coffees. She began to explain why she was crying. It was over between her and her lover—the feeling of love, romance, inner and outer beauty suddenly tossed in the trash. She no longer felt that way. She felt cold inside, like the dismal cold outside the café. Maybe for one last time, she could wait outside and see if he would come, for this was where she and her lover had first met.

Looking into the stranger's eyes, she saw they appeared innocent, yet his eyes saw many things. His eyes saw relationships come and go and things in the world far worse than that. He didn't seem to mind that she poured her heart out to him. He liked listening to her talk. Her words came more easily the more she talked. Morning turned to noon, as she kept going. Not once did he look bored. Setting his third cup of coffee down, he saw her hands were still a pale white. Holding them gently, he warmed her, and for the first time that day, she smiled.

"I want to know you more," he said. Holding back, he added, "However, if you must need time alone to heal, would you mind if I waited?"

He had understood everything she had told him. Nodding her head and sniffing her nose, she replied, "Yes." As she wiped her tears on a napkin, the rain stopped.

He pulled out some cash and handed it to her. "Here. Take a cab, buy some clothes you like, and get out of the wet ones you have on."

Shocked, she didn't know what to say. Thinking he was trying to buy her relationship, she refused. "You can't buy me; I don't know you," she said, keeping her voice down.

"As I don't know you, but I would like to. Please, I would like you to take this." Sliding the money toward her again, he left.

Days turned to weeks. It had not rained since that day. The sun beating down on the concrete made the day hotter than what it was. Had it been a dream or a figment of her imagination? She stood at the same corner waiting for him—not her old boyfriend, like the first time, but the strange man who desired her, who gave her something she needed—attention, compassion, and dry clothes. She wore the trench coat the man had worn. The sun pelting on it soaked her with sweat. From the time he gave her the coat until that day, she had never once put her hands in the pockets. The left pocket contained a wilted rose. Trying to beat the odds, she pulled the wilted petals off. "He loves me. He loves me not." Biting her lower lip, she felt her eyes water as she grew closer to, "He loves me not." A shadowed overcast loomed overhead. Her eyes widened, and she stopped pulling the petals.

Above her was an umbrella. 🌂

SUMMER THUNDERSTORM

KATHRYN UNDERHILL • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR



THEY SAY I'M A LIAR

JACI BENSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PROSE AWARD

I burned down the house I grew up in last year, on my eleventh birthday. A two-story farmhouse with chipped light-blue siding and white shutters. The house was surrounded by cornfields on three sides, and a dirt road in the front. I always pictured the place as being a perfect farmhouse for the family that lived there before my mom and I moved in nine years ago. I was three years old, and my mom said Dad was no good anymore, so we moved from town out to the country to “get some privacy.” She said we got a good deal on rent cuz a man owed it to her, and I never really asked more questions about why we moved out of town. I don’t remember much about my dad. All I know is that if he would’ve been around, maybe I wouldn’t be in this detention center for burning the place down.

The people here think I’m a liar. They don’t think I regret the fire. They don’t understand how much I loved that house. The family that lived there before us wrote me a letter telling me how awful I am and how they couldn’t believe a little girl could do such a thing. They don’t get how I already know everything about their perfect family, and I really didn’t mean to hurt their feelings. They signed the letter *The Carsons*. I hope they know I’m real sorry, but something had to be done. My mom never told me anything about the people that used to live there. But, the house told its own story about the Carsons.

The doorway in the main bathroom had a height chart etched into the wood. The highest mark said, “Dave is most tallest.” His sister, Carol, was always shorter than Dave. I was taller than Dave by the time I was in 3rd grade. I remember thinking about writing *Grace is taller than all of you* but never did. The wooden chicken coop in the back yard matched the color of the house, but by the time we started living there it was empty. I was jealous of the kids that lived there before me because they were real farm kids. They got to take care of real chickens. I used to pretend to take care of chickens, but Pete didn’t make a very good rooster. Pete was the dog mom stole us when I was little. He’d try real hard to do what I told him, but Golden Retrievers just weren’t made for playing pretend. I hope he’s somewhere good right now. Hope no one stole him.

The people here at the detention center won’t tell me what they did with

Pete. He's my favorite thing mom ever brought home. My counselor Maryanne says that I don't need to worry about Pete, that he is probably with a very happy family by now. Yeah, right. Maryanne keeps telling me I'll probably be released soon and move in with some foster parents soon, too. She thinks I'm weird because I don't cry enough, and she thinks I'm a liar. She doesn't think I burned the place down all by myself. No matter how many times I tell her about that day, she still doesn't believe me. She just doesn't understand.



My mom stole for a living. I didn't realize stealing was bad until last year, about a month before the fire. A police officer came to school and told us that people who steal go to jail. The idea of my mom going to jail was scary because I didn't know how else I was ever going to get new clothes or a decent backpack. Pete relied on me for table scraps, and I relied on my mom to steal food. But the thought of her going to jail and being replaced by someone like the last mom that lived in our farmhouse, was something I thought about a lot.

The mom that lived there before us must have really liked windows 'cause they all had white lace curtains around tops and sides. My mom would always tell me to shut the windows and close the curtains so people don't see inside, but the summers got so hot in the middle of Nebraska, and Pete and I liked to air out Mom's cigarette smoke. My bedroom was the only window I could reach. All the other windows had cardboard boxes and clear plastics sacks piled in front of them filled with stuff my mom brought home. Maryanne says my mom was a hoarder. I say my mom just liked to collect things. Maryanne just doesn't understand.

I can't believe it's already been a year since I accidentally burned the place down. Well, okay, at first I was setting the house on fire on purpose, but I changed my mind as soon as I saw the flames and thought about the lace curtains and the Carsons kids' height chart. If we lived in town, like normal people, someone could have helped me and called the fire station or helped me hook up the hose at least. Maryanne keeps asking why I thought it would be okay to burn the place down. I didn't think it was okay, I just freaked out a little. I wanted to make sure the cops didn't see all the stuff my mom had collected. Once I lit the last match, I couldn't get the flames to go away. They keep asking why I didn't run to my neighbors' house and call 911. Well, I did. They weren't home, and I didn't want to break in—that's illegal.

All I ever wanted was next-door neighbors, or at least friends like my classmates wrote about in their *What I Did This Summer* essays. The closest neighbors we had were a quarter-mile down the road, and they were an old

cranky couple with no kids. One time I snuck over to their house to look at the rooster I heard every morning, and Pete accidentally ate one of their chickens, so they weren't too fond of me or my *mangy mutt*.

I wasn't mad at Pete for eating a chicken. He was just doing what came naturally to him. Wish people weren't so mad at me for burning the place down. I didn't really do it on purpose. I was just doing what came naturally. Maryanne just won't stop asking questions. She wants all the details. She doesn't understand how it all happened. Everything happened so fast. The day is part blurry, part clear.

My mom called the house phone around 3:00 on August 4, my birthday. Well, that used to be my birthday. Now it's always going to be the day the house burned down. I thought she was calling to wish me happy birthday, but she had bad news. She had been caught shoplifting for the second time that week, and her voice was shaky and quiet. Said it was a *collect call*, so she was gonna make it short. She told me she wasn't gonna be coming home for a few weeks and that police officers were gonna be comin' over that night to look around and find me a place to stay. She told me, "You need to get rid of everything, girl" or "we're gonna be in for it." Said, "I love you, girl," and hung up.

Now I get why she always talks bad about cops. They really are snoopy. All they do is ask questions. *How'd you start the fire? Why'd you do it? Where did you get your shoes? Where's your dad?* Maryanne is still stuck on the dad thing. She wants to know everything I know about him and how I feel about not knowing him. Why doesn't she just leave me alone? I keep telling her that if I had a dad around, this whole thing wouldn't have happened. She just doesn't understand.

The kids that lived there before us must have had a dad because there was a bunch of cigar butts in the back of the chicken coop, and Pete dug up a hole filled with empty chewing tobacco cans. I'm pretty sure my dad smoked, too. There were Lucky Strikes on the table behind him in the picture I stole from my mom's *don't ever open box*. That's the only picture I've ever looked at closely of my dad. He had a beard. My mom was standing next to him in the picture. She had really long straight brown hair and was wearing an orange and white dress. Maryanne keeps asking me about my dad and what I know about him. It's simple. I know he was no good anymore and that he died a couple years ago from some sort of cancer. My mom got some money out of the deal and was sad for a while. I think Maryanne wants me to cry because he died. She wants me to cry all the time. She's always telling me that it's okay to cry. I don't feel like crying. She just doesn't understand.


The Carsons kids were so lucky. Their dad would go outside to smoke, and I bet their mom never smoked inside. I would sneak out to the coop to see Pete

every morning in the summers from 6:00 to 9:00 while my mom filled that beautiful house up with her morning cigarette smoke. Around 9:15 she would leave to go 28 miles into town to work because most stores opened around 10:00 a.m. Pete and I spent most of the summer day in my bedroom until Mom would come home when the stores closed. She's tall and skinny, like me, and always wore pink lipstick and green eye shadow when she went to town. Makeup was one of her favorite things to pick up while she was there. She would pick me up lip gloss and nail polish from the little girls department. I miss dressing up. Bet she does, too.

Maryanne is right about one thing: I do wish I had a dad. He could have helped me hook up the hose when I realized I didn't really want to burn the Carsons' house down. Or maybe if I had a dad, he could have helped move the boxes and bury all of Mom's stuff before the cops came. Who knows, maybe if I had a dad around, I could have had chickens or maybe a horse or something. Better yet, maybe he could have been one of those guys that went to a real job in town. Then we could have lived in town. Then I could have had next-door neighbors.

I wasn't trying to be bad, I promise. People just won't believe me. That call from jail was the first time my mom ever said *I love you*, and it felt good. I wanted to make her proud. Pay her back for all the things she brought home for me my whole life. The thought of her being in jail forever just because I couldn't get rid of all her stuff made me panic a little. I picked up a box of matches she took from a gas station and a can of hair spray she got me from Walmart. The good kind she knew I liked. The first three matches didn't strike. Pete was barking at me like crazy. At the time, I thought he could hear a car coming down the road. I was scared it was the cops. Now I know he was just warning me not to do it. He knew me better than anyone, and he knew I was going to regret starting that fire. He was right.

The fire was so hot and so big and spread so fast. The garden hose wouldn't screw into the outside faucet. I ran as fast as I could to the neighbors' house to call for help, but they weren't home, and I didn't feel right about breaking into their house. By the time I came back, everything was on fire, even the chicken coop. The cops came by around 6:30 just in time to save the cornfields.

Mom's still in jail, but they let me talk to her on the phone on Wednesday nights. She is the only one that believes me that I didn't mean to do it—it was an accident. Maryanne says I just need to tell the truth, but she won't listen. *Did one of your mom's male friends help you with the fire?* No, no one helped me. I always tell the truth. She just doesn't understand. 

PURPLE MAN

JANET ZANKER • *ACADEMIC TRANSFER*
RECIPIENT OF *RUNNER-UP POETRY AWARD*

I walked into the room
and cringed at the carnage
before me.

The floor was covered
with fluffy white guts
mixed with bits and pieces
of the friends that lived
in the toy box next to my buffet.

Mr. Lion lay sprawled,
belly-up,
tummy torn open.
His squeaker
off to one side,
filled with holes.

Blue Hippo,
Fuzzy Duck,
Pink Bunny,
Red Dog,
and even Long Green Snake,
his disabled squeaker
still attached to his tail,
all lay
in this scene of horror.

Purple Man lay unharmed,
permanently smiling, and
I wondered if he sold the others out....

With a squeeze of his body, I heard
him squeal—and I put him
on my list of suspects.

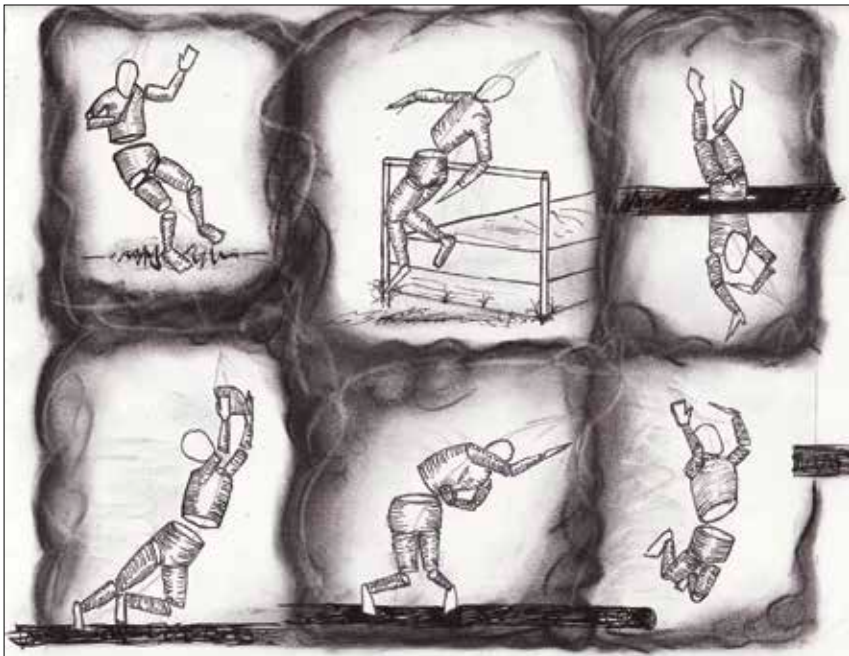
WALL FLOWER

ALLISON NEUJAHN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

She sits in the hospital bed, dentures removed. Her dark brown hair disheveled like a soap opera with exhaustion swept across her face like blush. A fresh yellow rose sits on the corner of the table. Every day, the water's changed; sometimes, the nurse adds an aspirin. An old anecdote promises to keep life in the delicate flower, but no matter what the nurses do to the rose, the flower seems to fade, bowing its head into submission. The edges of the silky petals become rigid. A vibrant yellow turns a goldish brown as they drop onto the table. As the last petal falls, she exhales her last breath.

GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS

ANTHONY MUHLE • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



A WALK WITH AN AMERICAN ENEMY

JOSH URBACH • ENERGY GENERATION OPERATIONS

One of the simple joys in my life is walking Zeus, my pet Pit Bull. Walking a dog is usually taken for granted because it is an activity done by many pet owners. I admit, I also never thought much of our little journeys until I moved to Seward. Seward is a nice little town where everyone knows everyone, and the people are kind. Most days, I blend right in, except when I'm with Zeus—because like most things deemed dangerous, he is illegal. Seward has had a ban on Pit Bulls for the last year and a half.

Zeus has a strong presence to him; he exudes a quiet confidence and a desire to please. His stoic expression can appear to be that of either a dangerous animal or a loving puppy. His body is sculpted into a strong and lean machine. His chest protrudes with gladiator-like muscle that is more fitting for a bear than a dog. His massive head is supported by shoulders that ripple and bulge while in motion. Short, powerful legs support a barrel-chested torso that widens to Olympic sprinter thighs. A whip-shaped tail wags constantly, knocking down any object that isn't bolted down. Covering his body is a platinum black coat of short, coarse hair that is interrupted by a single white patch on his chest and white on all of his feet. He has the indents of teeth from another Pit Bull—that did not share Zeus's carefree demeanor—on his forehead. Zeus, by my definition, is a perfect dog.

Preparing for the walk is simple. Zeus is usually sleeping by the screen door before we start. When "walk" is mentioned, Zeus bounces and barks with a toddler's enthusiasm. The rattle of his chain only heightens his anticipation. When the steel of his collar is latched to his leash, he can't wait to step out the door. Before the first steps, Zeus is whining with eagerness and sitting as if waiting for a treat.

The cool air hits us like a blast from an air conditioner. It's a perfect October day to be out and about. The wind makes the fall colors dance and blur into beautiful mixes of orange and brown. The amount of dead leaves gives the air a vague potpourri smell reserved for the bathrooms of grandmas. The only noise is the rattle of trees and the sharp clicks of Zeus's nails on the sidewalk. It's the kind of day that you could wear anything and be comfortable.

Walking Zeus always has a different way of being interesting. People in Seward like to wave and smile, but when I'm with Zeus, people often go out of

their way to disapprove. Most of the town knows of the Pit Bull ban in Seward, so they look at my dog as a symbol of crime, as if I was walking down the street with an open bottle of tequila. Zeus, however, is three years old, so he is immune to the two-year-old ban on his breed. Even if they are unaware of what type of dog Zeus is, his muscular form and black coat are reason enough for them to avoid him. This is a condition known as Black Dog Syndrome.

On this day we happened to walk by a park. This one-slide-and-two-swings park has been around since I was in kindergarten, and the only new feature is a merry-go-round that is off its axis. During this beautiful day, the park is filled with a group of young children playing on the dull blue equipment. I let Zeus run with the kids while I stand near the corner of the block. In an open field, there is no doubting his athletic ability. The kids try to catch Zeus, but he is faster than most people, and he is in full sprint. His jowls rise with the force of his bobbing head, causing his substantial set of teeth to show.

I love to watch my dog play; however, their sight of the kids running and laughing with a Pit Bull is troubling to the parents. While the kids play and tug on Zeus, who is more than willing to be roughed up, the older crowd warns them to stay back. This is a normal situation with Zeus. I can handle the concern for the children but not blatant objection to my dog's presence. I give my standard answer of "He's nice," but they don't want to take my word for it. I am always confronted when I am with this black nightmare. Impatient and wanting to go on, I pull Zeus back onto the sidewalk and keep moving.

We walk to the closest gas station to my house. It's a Git-N-Split run by a quiet man in his thirties. I am a regular at this location because Zeus actually likes it there. Some of the workers have Pit Bulls and don't mind holding him as I go in or take a minute to admire his build. After I exit, I speak with a worker, Brian, who owns a male Pit Bull that was once a fighter. I know of his dog, Knuckles, because we have met before.

Knuckles' story is one of redemption. He stands around 19 inches tall, the same as Zeus, and is thick through his chest. Knuckles was part of an underground dog fighting ring in New York. These rings are a large part of why Pit Bulls have a dark reputation, one I do my best to keep Zeus from having. Knuckles bears the scars of his past; he has thin scars throughout his seal blue fur. His ears are cropped short into small points, giving him a demonic appearance. However, Knuckles had been away from fighting for four years after Brian adopted him from his former owners. Brian has worked Knuckles into a pleasant and well-behaved dog that is happy to live out his later years. I'm happy to know that while Knuckles has had such a tragic and heartwarming past, he and Zeus are great friends.

The fall winds are chilly, and I can sense Zeus wants to get going. We say goodbye to Brian, and I tell him to say “hi” to Knuckles for me. Halfway home, a woman takes the time to ask me to keep my dog away from her pug. I ignore these comments. It’s not worth my time to let Zeus scare a noisy little dog that demands attention. Most of our walks are interrupted like this.

We finally get home. I can unhook Zeus and let him run in the open lot across from our house. I watch how Zeus lets out energy while chasing an invisible rabbit. He runs in the open field happier than he’s ever been. This helps assure me that he is not the murderer many connect to his breed; he’s just a regular dog.

It is sometimes more annoying than fun to walk Zeus. He has an air of unpredictability and brutality because of his breed’s reputation. I maintain he is as nice, if not nicer, than any dog of any breed. Knowing this, I will always walk Zeus in Seward. Some may say he is dangerous, but for the people aware of the potential kindness of a dog, he is a great animal. When we walk across the street and enter my parents’ house, Zeus wags his tail with satisfaction. I remove his leash and collar, so he can stretch out in his spot in front of the door. Five minutes later, Zeus is asleep. It is just another day in the life of an American enemy. 🐾

MAN’S BEST FRIEND

CASEY BYRD • VISUAL PUBLICATIONS



A PERSON, TOO

MYSTERY HARWOOD • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE POETRY AWARD

i drown in pages of you.
fistfuls of weathered lines,
glossy hair, pressed flowers.
cuts, thin as fishing wire,
a hair's split end,
glitter on all of my fingers.
my eyes eat, hungry
for an alphabet to define you,
to make you something other
than what made me.
in secret chrysler moments
i see his kisses on your neck—
the shroud of turin, jesus's sad eyes,
bunched around your ankles.
i see the filly and the stallion
at drive-in movies, at mcdonald's.
i see roller skates and malteds.
i see the rough bear of my hulking father.
he waits, miles from these sugared inkspots,
looming in your periphery.
soon—months? years? from these pages,
i will be swimming in your ocean;
i will be planting in your grove.
i will be silently demanding,
making every charm on your bracelet
a shoulda, woulda,
coulda.

ECHOES

SAMUEL HUFF • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Imagine a concert hall swirling with noise from the orchestra and its echoes faithfully returning the call. Picture the musicians relying on their instruments as a gateway to release the emotion locked inside. As the fragments of expressions are heard from each instrument, add the rustling of people as they converse among one another, as if unaware that something they cannot foresee is about to unfold. This is my perception of how music has been a part of my life and of how music—inescapable as it surrounds me and echoes my every move—has had an impacting role for almost everything in my life. The underlying notion that music’s potential—and, perhaps, greater meaning—is still unknown tests my patience to no end. As I see other people who haven’t experienced music as a self-expressive art and see it as only a form of entertainment, I question if there is something we are not seeing about what we hear.

Looking back, I see that music has been a double-edged sword. My father was a musician and has held a great part of the influences in my life. He was the reason I was around music from birth on and practiced at such an early age. He may have brought light to music, but with that light, he cast shadows. He was a manic depressive and could be medically classified as a psychopath. He gave reason for music to be a measure of healing and meditation in my life. Would I have pursued music without him? There’s no way for me to know now. I can only accept the fact that with so many unwanted memories, I now cherish music as one of the biggest aspects of my life.

I am at a point in my life when I feel no need to concern myself with what happened before and how it could have been different. I feel the events that have transpired throughout my life have guided me to the person I have become today. Somehow, this serves as a justification—or, perhaps a better phrase, a silver lining—to everything. I am grateful beyond words to have had my siblings and music through every life experience, good and bad. My brother was there with me through our family struggles; my sister, who was in another state, was still able to give more reassurance and guidance than my mother was. Our mother was not able to handle my dad’s situation, and in fact, she made it worse. She became a practicing alcoholic in a failed attempt to cope with her separation from our father. As a result of her mood swings regarding the ordeal, they were never officially divorced. She told me once that the only

thing that seemed to make things better for her was when I played guitar. This is something that, again, had conflicting approaches. I was glad there was something I could do to help her. On the other hand, sometimes I wished she had never told me. She put so much weight in the correlation between how well she was and how much I played that I began to feel wrongfully responsible for her depression.

This was hardest for me when my brother and I moved out to be near our sister, away from the abuse of our parents' decisions. Shortly after we left, my mom made her first trip out to visit us. Unfortunately, overnight on Christmas day, she passed away before we saw her. We soon learned that she had not gotten over the alcoholism. At that point, I was angrier at this discovery than I was sorrowful about her passing. She had agreed that the alcoholic environment wouldn't be brought around my nieces and that she would be sober before even thinking about visiting. I now am thankful that the last time I saw her she was sober. For me, it was like the orchestra. With everything else that was happening around me, music was my gateway. It allowed me to separate myself from other issues along with their bearings. Without their weight, I could relive those events through music and more clearly understand them.

My brother bore the brunt of my parents' attacks. In a way, this seemed harder for me than being the target of it all. The uncertainty of how everything was affecting him made me worry more than anything else. When I wasn't reassuring myself of my brother's well-being, I immersed myself in music and found that it expressed exactly what was needed. It has been a constant for music to provide serenity in my life, to provide the same comfort as talking to a friend or my brother while knowing exactly what I was trying to say and explaining exactly what I really meant.

I hold these beliefs as if they were moral codes—the beliefs that music carries hidden abilities and cannot discriminate against whoever may have an open mind and willingness to listen past the melodies. I don't know if everyone experiences music the same way. I can't tell what connections are being made as memories are unearthed. I can't say everyone will have the same reactions to the same exposures of music. All I know is how incredible it is that I listen to music and can remember something I forgot, feel something new, or understand that no matter what might be wrong in my life, I have the ability to improve the life of at least one other person. I hold strongly to the ideal that every hardship has the power to reshape my life. The decision becomes if I allow those afflictions to shatter me or to redirect them in my favor to refine myself and to aid others. Even when a song has been played during a negative event and the two are forever engraved in the same stone, there is comfort in remembering and

growing from the sadness as long as I don't allow regrets to hold me down. One of my hopes is that others could use music in this way to aid in their recoveries.

Music expresses my words, even though I am an instrumentalist and not a singer. Our perception of events, emotions, or memories constantly changes as a composition progresses. In a way, we have a complex conversation within ourselves when listening to music. As we immerse ourselves in sound, our thoughts undergo the domino effect. Each idea falls onto another, creating a pathway of experiences with each domino containing a snapshot of that time in our lives. Music goes beyond human expression; it's a way of connecting with an otherwise untapped form of communication that helps people reflect or relate with emotions. Music is a part of the human existence, and each culture has its own interpretations—yet, it is a Rosetta Stone among us. Music evokes emotions in all of us. Sometimes, music is the only means of getting through to someone, as if our emotions are a kind of echo to the sounds, as well. 🌸



BLUSH OF SPRING

KIMBERLY FANGMAN •
ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

SOCIAL

BRITTANY FRASER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



THOSE DEAD TREES

CAMERON MAXWELL • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Upon entering the outcropping of the dead trees
Where two hills hide them in their valley,
The entrance is guarded
By bands of small brush;
And the dead trees speak by channeling
The wind through their fingertips.
Many have fallen in their plight;
Only a few stand
Tall, as pillars to hold the sky
And provide shelter
For the small bands that protect
Their feet from entrance.

SECOND LIFE

WITH CREDIT TO TWYLA HANSEN

JEANINE JEWELL • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

What I did, I did because I felt stuck and stupid, typing and photocopying all day, standing at the printer staring into space, my dreams blank like paper whooshing out of some machine; because I felt I'd run out of space, because time talked to me in stern tones. When people asked what I "did" for a living, shame led me to invention:

I'm a soils engineer.

I'm a firefighter.

I arrange flowers.

What *do* I do?

What I did, I did because it gave me a place to go, moving away from crying at the laundromat, watching the garments of marriage mingle behind the glass dryer door, tumbling in hot circles; because it was too hard to find a way out by myself.

What I did was showy, not smart. I learned a lot.

Other people admired me, looked at me sideways,

talked behind their hands, told me I'd reached my dream.

What I did didn't feel like a dream; it felt like jumping through glass.

GLOWING EYES

RANDIAN A. NAVES SPENCER • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



THE CHATTERING BRICKS OF MAIN

KRISTYNA HOLZ • HUMAN SERVICES/ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Paws hit the roughly bricked street
Rumbled engines spruce the air
Ladies' tattered ruffles blow in the tree's fogged breath
Old men's heels mimic the ticking that hangs above my head
I hide behind this periodical of statements and ink
The meager prodigy refills my crockery
A light mist starts to drizzle down the trussing
Wives shield their daughters' curls and silk ribbons with their brollies
Good eye conversation is much obliged
The woman parallel to me flaunts her lovelies
A mistress of good fortune dances in fantasies
The layer of reflections of puddles

WHITE LILIES

KATHRYN UNDERHILL • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR



WHO AM I?

LORI ROBISON • PRACTICAL NURSING PROGRAM

I belong to every race,
every known religion.

I am from 106 countries
and speak all languages.

I am your sentinel
in the night.

I am a cool hand
on your fevered brow.

I hear your first lusty cry
and the last breath
when it escapes your lips.

I am your strength in stillness
when words fail.

I am your voice
should yours fall silent.

I am your gentle remembrance
of days long past.

And when no more can be done,
I will remain by your side.

I am
your Nurse.

THE BUSINESS CARD

BRENDA HOFFMAN • HUMAN SERVICES

It's late March. The weather is just cold enough for a light jacket. The road we are on in upstate New York seems to wind without end. I pass by the beautiful trees and streams on both sides of the road without a second glance; I'm not paying attention to the beauty of it all. Normally, I would slow down or even stop to get a better look at the stream, even to take off my shoes and wet my feet in a small waterfall, but today is not about a vacation. Today is about my father and what he wants to do, and he wants to find a bar.

The story started months earlier with my father finding out he had cancer. The doctor gave him six months to live, maybe eight if he did the treatments. He was told that after he started the treatments, he would not be able to travel, so if he wanted to see my sister in New York, he needed to go soon. We flew to my sister's so my father could see her one last time.

My sister Marie always had activities planned whenever we visited her. She would have breakfast to bedtime lined with activities to keep us entertained. This trip was different, though. The point of this visit was to spend time with Dad doing whatever he wanted.

We started the day by making my father eat a huge breakfast; he was told by the doctor to gain weight in preparation for his cancer treatments. Then we asked him, "What do you want to do?" We were both floored when my father simply pulled out his wallet and from inside, where the bills would go, he removed a white business card. Handing it first to Marie, he watched her read it and then pass it to me across the table. The top of the card read, "Used Cars—Whiskey—Peat Moss—Nails—Land—Flyswatters—Racing Forms—Bongo Drums." In the center of the card was a name, "Ron Purdy," with an address followed by "Monty's Elm Tree Inn." On the bottom half were two lists. The left side read, "Wars Fought—Governments Run—Bridges Destroyed—Uprisings Quelled." The right side read, "Tigers Tamed—Saloons Emptied—Orgies Organized—Virgins Converted." I looked at my sister, and our eyes met. I was thinking this was one of my father's many jokes—until he started to tell us with passion how he got the card and about the elm tree that grew in the middle of the tavern. I looked at him with love in my eyes. How could we not take him on this adventure? He wanted to meet the owner and see the place for

himself. This wasn't the kind of activity my sister had on the agenda, but we had to get him there.

Hours later, Marie came into the living room to tell us she thought she knew where it was. She had been on the phone and Internet all morning trying to locate the place.

Now we've been driving for hours—making a wrong turn here and backtracking there—on these winding New York roads when finally we decide to pull over at the next town and ask for help locating Monty's Elm Tree Inn. We get lucky; we pull right into the parking lot of the tavern we have been looking for. Marie and I had not been sure it was a real place. While we were looking for it, we had kept telling Dad that we were almost there, but in our hearts, we were praying that what we said was true.

As we climb out of the car, my father has the biggest smile on his face. He quickly stands in front of the tavern, so we can take his picture. He throws his chest out and stands a little straighter, like some kind of conquering hero, for his photo. He is proud that he "got us there."

The building is large with wooden planks covering the entire outside. A porch runs the full length of the tavern. A railed bannister runs to the right and left of a wide staircase that leads to the double doors going into the tavern. Above the doors is a large sign that reads, "The Elm Tree Inn." Thank God we found it.

As we enter the tavern, we notice that the walls and ceiling are all wood. It has the look of wainscoting. Just to our left is a huge fireplace. The warmth from the fire can be felt as soon as we walk in. To the right, against the wall, is a row of booths that seem to go all the way to the back, and dead center in front of us is the wooden bar. The bar crosses in front of us and then turns toward the back of the tavern.

Nobody is in sight. The place is completely without customers, but we can smell food cooking from the back and hear the sounds of distant voices. It's past lunch time, so that might be the reason for the empty tables.

I tell Marie that I'm going to see if I can find someone in the back to find out if the card "story" is true. My father is so excited with the place and with taking pictures that he doesn't realize I have left the front of the tavern to locate the owner.

Following the sound of voices, I quickly find a middle-aged man in his fifties and a slightly younger woman standing in the kitchen talking. They both stop when I say, "Hello." Not sure how to start the conversation, I simply hand the man the business card. "Are you Ron Purdy?" I ask.

He starts to smile as he reads the card and hands it back to me; he explains that he bought the tavern a few years back and was allowed to keep the name. The disappointment is written on my face. We had tried so hard to find this place for Dad, and we didn't want to let him down.

I explain to the man about my father's reason for the trip and that my father had received the card from a friend, who had told him to give the card to the owner, Ron Purdy, who would take care of the bill. "Everything will be on the house," Dad had said.

My father did not have the funds for this trip or for anything else. The only money in his wallet was a 20 dollar bill I had given him for souvenirs. He wanted to go to the tavern to be important again in our eyes—to treat us to a nice meal that we didn't have to buy or cook for ourselves. He had been feeling like such a burden now that he was sick. He really needed this to happen.

We talk for a short time in the kitchen and plan to help my father. The owner agrees to pretend to be Ron Purdy, and I will pay in advance for all the expenses. We come to the front with a big smile. I get my dad's attention by saying, "Dad, look who I found." My father beams. He shakes the man's hand and reaches back for his wallet. He is looking for the card. "I got it," I say. "Remember, you gave it to us at breakfast?" I hand the owner the card.


He looks at it as if for the first time, and then he hands it to my father and asks, "What can I get you?" My father is on cloud nine.

We sit in a booth in the back, next to a doorway by the kitchen. The woman I had seen earlier takes our order. We eat soup and sandwiches, but we could have been dining on caviar by the way my father is acting.

I take several pictures of my father as he eats his cream of mushroom soup. The mushrooms, he explains, have to be fresh, wild mushrooms that are locally grown to be this good. He goes on and on about the soup.

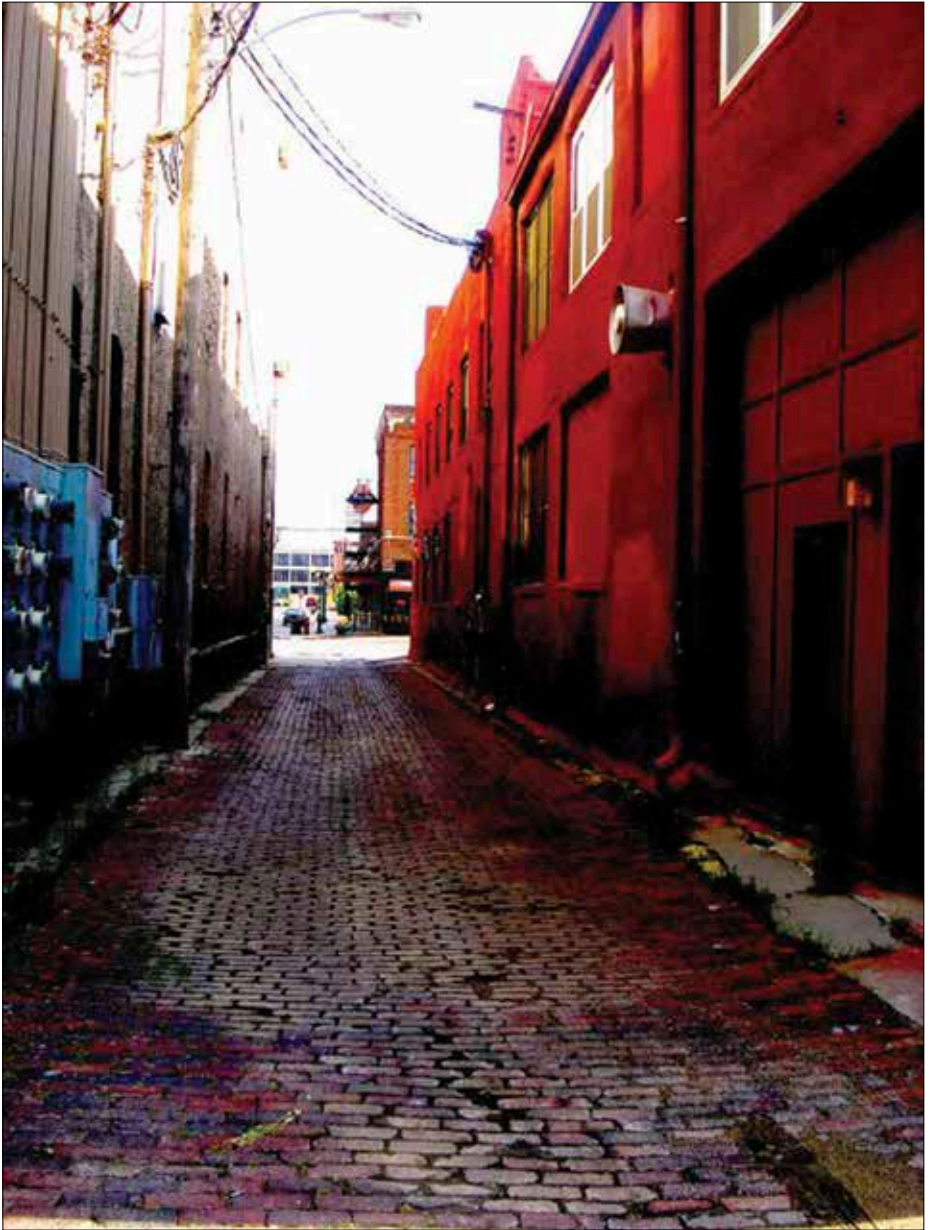
We are the only people in the tavern, so after the meal, we sit and talk for about an hour. This is when we realize we haven't seen the tree. My sister quickly calls the waitress over to ask to see the owner. When he comes to the booth, my father shakes his hand again and thanks him for his hospitality. "Where is the elm tree?" my father asks. "I thought there was supposed to be a tree growing in the middle of the tavern?"

"Come right this way," says the owner. We get up and follow him through the doorway we have been sitting next to the whole time. There it is—a full-grown tree about three feet around growing out of the floor and up through the ceiling. The owner explains that the room we are in was the original bar, and the side we had eaten in was added on later. The original part of the tavern wasn't used much anymore except for parties.

I take several more photos of my father standing next to that tree and throughout the bar. That day is one of my favorite memories of my father. I keep the card and the photos from that day in a frame that hangs on the wall along the staircase in my home. That was one powerful business card. 

BRICKS AND PATHWAYS

HARMONY L. CULP • VISUAL PUBLICATIONS



THE BREAKUP

HANNAH L. DENNICK • ACADEMIC TRANSFER/ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

I pulled my cell phone out of my pocket. “Hey, I’m here,” I texted Andrea. She was probably driving, but that never stopped her from texting before. I looked at the backside of the bar in my rearview mirror. I always thought sitting alone in a bar was a drunk’s habit, even if it was just to wait for someone. Knowing Andrea, it could be a long wait. I cracked my window and let the winter night hit my face. The music from the bar seemed to be pounding me back, willing me to stay in the car until I absolutely had to go in. I should have known we wouldn’t meet at some quiet Applebee’s bar for a glass of wine when I let Andrea pick the meeting place.

I looked at the green pack of cigarettes sitting in my center console. I should throw those away. I tried not to dwell on it too long. As I reached for the phone in my lap, the tiny, pink clothespin on the wrist of my sweater caught my eye. I must have forgotten to take it off after the game at the baby shower earlier that day. I remembered seeing Brittany walking around slowly, a little smile on her glowing face, holding her giant belly as if the baby it contained was in her arms. The gift table contained boxes of all shapes and sizes wrapped in pink pastel and matching bows. Each seemed to be a symbol of the baby it was for—a precious gift waiting to be presented to the world.

Id love a little girl. John and I had been talking about it. We felt we were ready. We were engaged and had been together through family deaths, job losses, and graduations over four years. We knew things weren’t going to change. I could tell John had been ready for a while. His son was seven, and we wondered how far apart he was going to be in age from the child that we would eventually have. I had never told him, but I had always thought that when we had a baby, I would no longer feel like I was competing with his past. No matter how much I loved his son and how much I knew that John loved me, it was hard to play family when the only child in the house had to go home to “Mommy” for two weeks after each three-day visit. Despite any arguments against it, we finally decided to wait until after we were married, like we had originally planned, but still, we weren’t as careful as we had been.

Andrea and I bumped into each other for the first time in almost a year at the shower. I could tell she was out of her element. She stayed for only about half an hour, hardly speaking to anyone and clinging to my sister. They had been

talking more now that they went to the same college. My parents kept telling me how “Andrea stopped by today.”

In contrast to Andrea, I was very comfortable at the shower, floating from one small group of women to another and playing silly baby games. If someone would have told me in high school that this was the person I would become, I would have laughed. In high school, I was more interested in where the next party was and who was buying the alcohol. That’s probably why Andrea and I got along so well. In our Catholic high school, we were the first ones to discover (some say too soon) that alcohol wasn’t the devil. The situation outcasted us to a world of older people who could drink with us, yet, we never really fit in with anyone. Our classmates thought we were too wild, and the people we drank with thought we were too naive. We had each other, though, and our friendship got us through the four years.

My phone vibrated with a response from Andrea: “On my way.”

I closed the text and pressed the *Solitaire Deluxe Edition* app on the screen. I won two-and-a-half games before I saw the silver Jetta in my rearview mirror. Throwing her arms above her head, Andrea climbed out and screamed, “Isabelle!”

I had been in bars before, but I’d never gone to a downtown bar on a weekend night. When we walked in, there were seven people within a one-foot radius of me. I couldn’t see a clearing between all the bodies. The lights were so dim that the crowd was a big, black mass with many heads poking out of the top. The music made my head pulse.

Andrea easily pushed her way through the crowd to the bar. I tried to waddle past people to follow her, saying, “Excuse me,” every two seconds, but I didn’t get very far. I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and pushed, thinking to myself, “You will never see these people again in your life, and they are in a crowded bar; they expect to have people pushing past them.”

I finally caught up to Andrea as she was about to take a seat—the only seat available. I stood next to her.

“This is different!” I yelled at her, but her head was turned toward the bartender, and she didn’t hear me over the music.

I picked up the menu off the bar and looked it over. Nothing seemed good. All I saw was grease and slime on every dish, and I could smell the horrible odor of each as I read its title.

I spotted an empty, two-seat table in the corner and pointed it out to Andrea; I pushed my way through the crowd to ensure that someone didn’t take it before we got there. I didn’t look back to see if Andrea had followed me, so I was happy to see her behind me as I sat down.

She must have changed clothes since the baby shower. Instead of the jeans and sweater I had seen her in, she had on a jean skirt that reached only her

thigh, strappy, red, five-inch heels, and a white halter-top that was so low I wondered if it was going to “malfunction” when she leaned over to set her purse next to her seat. When she looked up at me, I saw that her foundation seemed caked on her face in twenty layers—I thought I saw it crack when she smiled. Her lips glistened with the fake gloss I had forgotten she always wore, and she had on too much brown eye shadow. According to the men that constantly hit on her, she was gorgeous. Maybe she was their tall, blond fantasy, even though she was only 5’ 4”, but I couldn’t see it. My mind traced me back to the times when we would get ready to go out, and I wondered what I used to look like.

I was happy we had managed to get farther away from the speakers, and I actually heard Andrea say something about the server not paying attention to us. I looked around and saw a flustered server scribbling down orders for ten people. “I think she saw us sit down. She’ll probably be over in a minute.”

“I guess.” She paused, glancing back at the server.

There was a long silence.

“Hey, you remember that time we almost got stuck on our way to that cornfield?” I asked, hoping to break the ice.

Andrea’s face lit up. “Yes! I thought we were going to die out there!” she joked. “My phone showed no bars, and we were right between the road and the party. I didn’t think anyone would notice us.”

The server made her way to the table. “Can I get you guys something to drink?”

“I’ll have a blended margarita,” Andrea said without hesitation.

I glanced at the menu again. “I’ll take an iced tea.”

The server scribbled down the order and left.

“Iced tea?” Andrea looked puzzled.

I felt the corners of my mouth lift into a cheesy grin that showed all of my teeth. “Yeah, I...”

“Hey, you remember when we had that party at my house, and my parents came home early?” She must have thought another long silence would be a result of her question.

I let the ear-to-ear grin fade into a polite smile. “Yeah. They were so mad. I don’t know what they expected when they went out almost every weekend.”

“Right? They sat us all down the next morning to have a ‘serious talk.’ All I remember of it was that you looked like you were about to puke.”

I gave a chuckle. “I was. You guys kept shoving Screwdrivers down my throat the night before, and then they decided to serve me orange juice at breakfast. Like they couldn’t see that the vodka was half gone, and another bottle of orange juice was opened. They did it on purpose—I know it.” I found myself laughing although I remember thinking it wasn’t funny at the time.

Andrea was laughing. “Yeah. Luckily, we got the other people out before my parents could get to them. All I remember is standing in the living room taking shots with Joey, and he looked out the window and was like, ‘Hey, who drives the white Denali?’ It even took me a second to realize it. I thought someone had invited people I didn’t know. Then it hit me—‘Oh shit! My parents drive a white Denali!’”

I shared her laughter. “Yeah. I was over by the refrigerator getting the orange juice, and all I heard was, ‘My parents are here! Everyone get out! Use the back door!’ I kept thinking, ‘Should I leave with these people I don’t know or face Andrea’s parents?’” I took a sip of my iced tea. “I almost left,” I said and let out another laugh.

“You knew Joey.”

“I had met him once before, but he brought a bunch of people that neither of us knew.”

Andrea laughed. “That’s how you know when it’s a good party. When you’re the one hosting it, and you don’t know half the people there.”

After drinking my iced tea, I excused myself to the bathroom. A combination of stale urine, alcohol, and cheap soap filled my nose as I walked in. I puked in the nearest toilet.

When I got back to the table, I noticed that Andrea had two more drinks sitting in front of her. “One wasn’t enough?” I joked.

“Oh, some guys ordered them for us.” She pushed one toward me.

I pushed the drink back to her. Despite my instant irritation that she didn’t reject the drink for me, the giant grin crept back on my face. “No thanks, I...”

“Oh come on, Isabelle!” she interrupted. I couldn’t tell if she was pleading or demanding.

My grin left quickly, this time replaced only with feigned solidarity. I sighed. “I should probably go,” I said to Andrea. “This was really fun, though. Thanks for inviting me.”

“You don’t have to go. There’s an after-party that I’m going to on Tenth Street; you should come with me.”

“No, I wouldn’t be able to drive if I drank, and I don’t have money for a taxi. Besides, John said he would wait up for me.” I didn’t know why I always felt like I had to provide Andrea with excuses.

“Fuck John. When’s the last time you came out? One sunrise won’t kill him.”

I should have known this was going to happen. “No, I think I’m going to head home.”

“You know, Issy...” (I hated it when she called me Issy) “...you are only 21 years old. I’ve been talking with your family.”

“Have you?” I asked without interest, putting my coat on.

“Yes, and we think you are too young to be acting this old. You’re in college, not a retirement home. You need to go out and get drunk and do something stupid.”

I was pretty sure Andrea had added the last part herself, but I could believe my parents said they thought I was growing up too fast. They never really liked John. They thought he was a phase I was going through. Their daughter wouldn’t marry someone who had a child with another woman. After our first year together, they started to realize that John wasn’t going anywhere, and the dislike started to seep through in small comments.

Andrea and I were right back to where we were after graduation. “So I have to be in a retirement home to focus on my family and school?” I smiled, trying to sound lighthearted.

“He’s not your family. You two aren’t even married. Your family keeps wondering where you are and why you are too busy to see them all the time.”

“We go out there every other Sunday!” I heard my voice rise. “And they are both my family. After a while, Andi, you move out of your parents’ house and create a new family.”

She hated the fact that I used her nickname the same way she had used mine—that her tactic had not worked, and now I was throwing it in her face. I saw anger wash over her. “You didn’t create a new family. You picked one up off the streets.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” I asked with less of a sting that I wanted.

“You got caught up with some guy while you were in high school, and now all of a sudden, he and his bastard child are your family?”

I felt heat wash over me. My heart started to beat faster. I felt my face fall into an astounded expression and then tense up into a hard, focused glare. No words seemed strong enough to express my anger, but “Excuse me” were the first ones to come out. “Just because your one relationship failed doesn’t mean mine is shit, and don’t talk ever talk about Kenny that way.” Even though I found myself shouting, the words still didn’t seem harsh enough. “Whatever—I’m not doing this. I’m not going to sit here and let some skank insult my family. I’m going home. I knew I quit talking to you for a reason.”

I almost expected her to hit me. She gave a slight lunge that indicated she wanted to, but she stopped herself. I almost smiled at her attempt, but I couldn’t shake the stone expression from my face.

“Right, just go home to John and let him brainwash you into thinking that friends are horrible things to have and that you need to stay home every night and never have any fun.”

“Right, because this is fuckin’ awesome. I want to do this every night.” She looked like she was going to say something, but I cut her off. “I don’t know if you

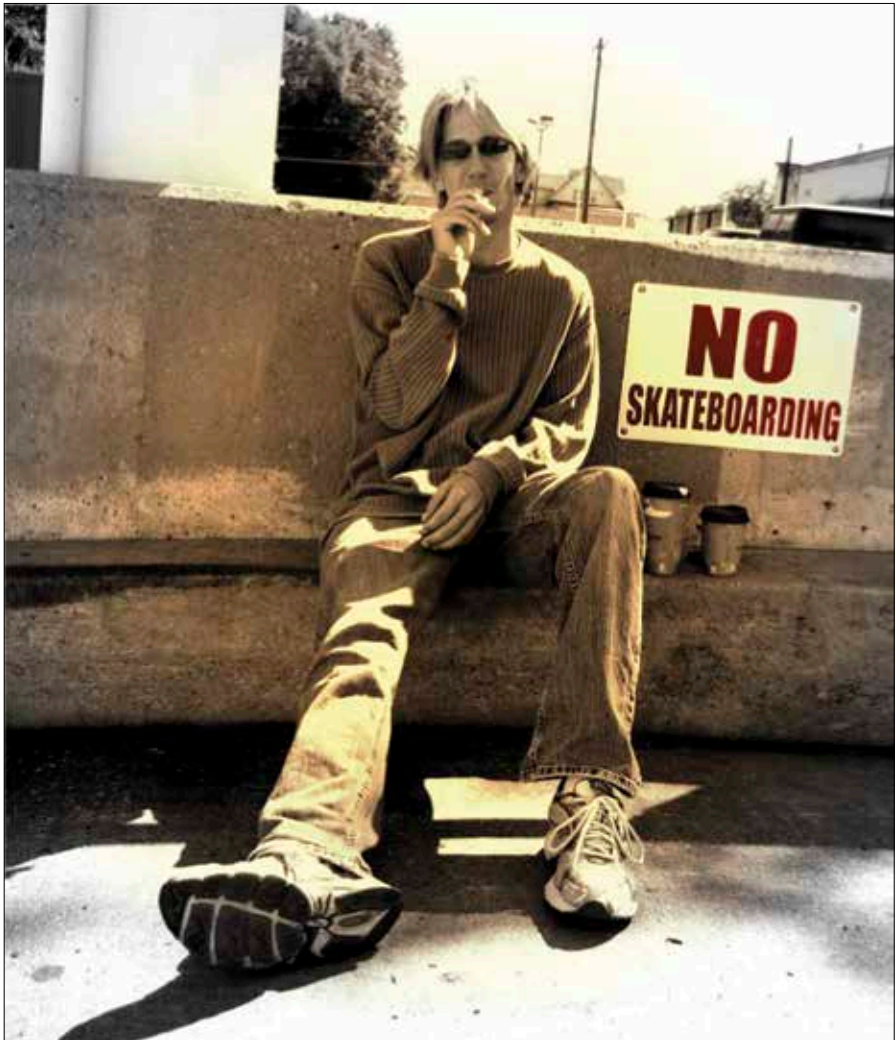
know this, but there are lots of people I could go to a crowded bar with and listen to music that's too loud, but I'd rather be home with John." I turned toward the door.

She started yelling something about how she was one-of-a-kind and how I needed her. I thought about telling her to call me when she grew up, mostly as another insult. A little part of me hoped she would take it seriously, but I wasn't sure I wanted to talk to her again.

Instead, I turned from Andrea and walked out the door. ♪

TRUE AS CAN BE

HARMONY L. CULP • VISUAL PUBLICATIONS



THE DOE

SPENCER AHRENS • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Ever since I was about 15, I had resented God. I had learned at a young age that life wasn't fair. How could God love us unconditionally yet give us such nasty obstacles to face? The thought made me bitter and angry. I figured life was planned but not by invisible force. It was also frightening to think that this was all there was—stress accented with occasional happy moments. Then, one Sunday morning, I realized there could be a God—not necessarily what the Bible dictated as “God,” but a larger force than I was.

It was still dark when I convinced myself to crawl out of my comforting bed. I pushed the covers off and shivered in the cold. The wood floors of my simple apartment were icy under my bare feet. My heater had still not turned on, despite the dipping temperatures. I stumbled around, still half asleep, and located my running clothes. I bent over and tied my shoes tightly, so they wouldn't come loose. My headphone dangled from my pocket. I situated them into my trusty and scuffed iPod. After selecting the familiar playlist, I stretched my stiff hamstrings. With a deep breath, I began my Sunday ritual—a run down my favorite trail.

There was a certain peace and spiritual serenity in the mornings. It was always quiet, and I could escape from the large amount of people I faced at work every day. My constant anxieties and never-ending “to do” lists floated out of my mind and into the spiny brush with every stride. On the trail, I didn't care that I had a heaping pile of laundry to put away or wonder how I was going to pay my rent that month. It didn't matter that I despised my retail job and that I was severely underpaid but expected to reach the unattainable quotas. I always ran early on Sundays to relieve the anxiety of knowing how busy work was going to be and how I was going to have to endure all the entitled people. The only thing I focused on was the uneven trail before me and keeping my breath on a rhythm. A few fellow runners would pass occasionally. Each person seemed lost in his or her own breathing and thoughts. It was obvious that others used running to relieve the monotonous reality of life, too.

Part of the trail passed through an urban neighborhood with carefully cultivated lawns and decorated porches. One house I passed had an eight-foot by ten-foot carving of a grizzly bear in the middle of the lawn, surrounded by perfectly trimmed hedges. It was still the wee hours in the morning, and each

house I passed was dim and dark. I knew most people were still in their cozy beds. Often, my mind wandered to owning a ritzy home like these and never having to struggle with finances or ragged schedules. I hoped to see myself mowing my lush, green lawn with pride on a Saturday that I didn't have to work. I never kept these thoughts long. They made me bitter and caused me to despise the meaning of life.

My sparse fellow runners were clad in their typical running outfits: designer tights and fancy Nike sweat wicking shirts. Some were panting, nearly done with their runs. I passed one gentleman I had seen many times before. I knew he was training diligently for the Lincoln Marathon. His legs were sinewy and powerful, and I could see his individual muscles flex as he ran mile after mile. I didn't try to think about how many miles he had put in before we passed one another. It hurt my legs to think about it. Other runners were dripping with sweat, determination carved into their faces, as they were facing their longest routes yet. Some were up to complete their morning runs before they had to sit in their stiff suits for church. On the trail, though, we were all the same. We were all running for our needs, whether it was training for a marathon or simply exercising to handle our hectic lives. For whatever reasons, we were all running through the breaking dawn.

The early morning air was damp and chilly. Fall had taken over with a brilliant display of red, orange, and yellows. I could see the dew droplets dangling from the nearly bare tree branches that overhung the trail. The few leaves that still clung stubbornly on the branches swayed in the cool breeze. One leaf finally fell and took its place next to the hundreds more that littered the rocky trail. I could feel them crunching underneath my feet as I ran through. The cool fall air stirred as I jogged through it, and I could taste the crisp change taking place. Crimson reds, yellows, and pinks streaked the sky as the neon orange sky rose. I could see the colors painted behind the brush as I passed through. It was like a god was painting a picture, and we were in a gallery to observe it.

A small amount of fatigue started catching up in my calves and hamstrings. It was a familiar feeling and not necessarily uncomfortable or painful, as many people seemed to think. It was a challenge to not let the fatigue control me. The pain was something I could choose to control and overcome. I could feel my breath deepen and catch in my lungs now, my breathing becoming more and more labored. I struggled to focus on my breathing. The brisk air caught in the back of my throat and lungs and burned intensely down my whole body. Still, there was a feeling of euphoria. I was overcoming my uncomfortable feelings by using control of my mind. I felt as if I had control of one thing in life. I felt

as if I was making my own journey and didn't need an invisible higher power to control my life for me.

Pushing past the pain, I focused on the music that was specific for my Sunday mornings. Despite not claiming any religious affiliation, I had always enjoyed Christian and gospel music. For some odd reason, Christian music gave me hope that there was more to life than stress. Christian music sang of hope and peace, so I desperately desired to justify the unfair aspects of life. Along with the hope the artists resonated, the soothing melodies and light beats propelled me into the clouds, and I felt as if I was floating above the reality and gazing down. Running with Christian music was my way of meditation; it brought on a peace I didn't experience any other way. I didn't tell many people about it because many of my friends were atheists or extreme agnostics. They didn't seem to understand my need to know there was more than what I could control out there.

A slight breeze had subtly arrived, and it swirled the golden leaves into the air around me. The foot-long, bristly grass swayed in the breeze. A young rabbit skittered out from the brush about fifty feet away. His gray striped fur was matted from the sticky water he had just hopped through. With his ears raised in attention, he stared at me for a brief second. Another rustle of the leaves startled the animal, and he skittered into the safety of the brush.

Further up, I saw what I hadn't seen in a long time. There was a doe with her newly born foal resting along the side of the path. Quickly, they stood, and the foal wobbled unsteadily on his thin legs. I stopped, and the doe gazed at me with her watery brown eyes. Her fur shined in the opening sunshine, and her foal nestled closer to her for support. She stood with a sense of safety, almost like she knew I wasn't going to hurt her or her baby. I felt as if I was being analyzed by her, as well—my damp hair and clothes. We stood along the path for what seemed like minutes, and I felt a sense of peace swirl through my entire body. It was like someone was trying to tell me something through the doe's somber brown eyes. I took a deep breath to calm my strenuous breathing, as I watched the doe gracefully glide off into the dark brush with her little one trying to keep up.

Francesca Battistelli's song, "Beautiful, "Beautiful," floated through my ear buds as I watched the deer float away.

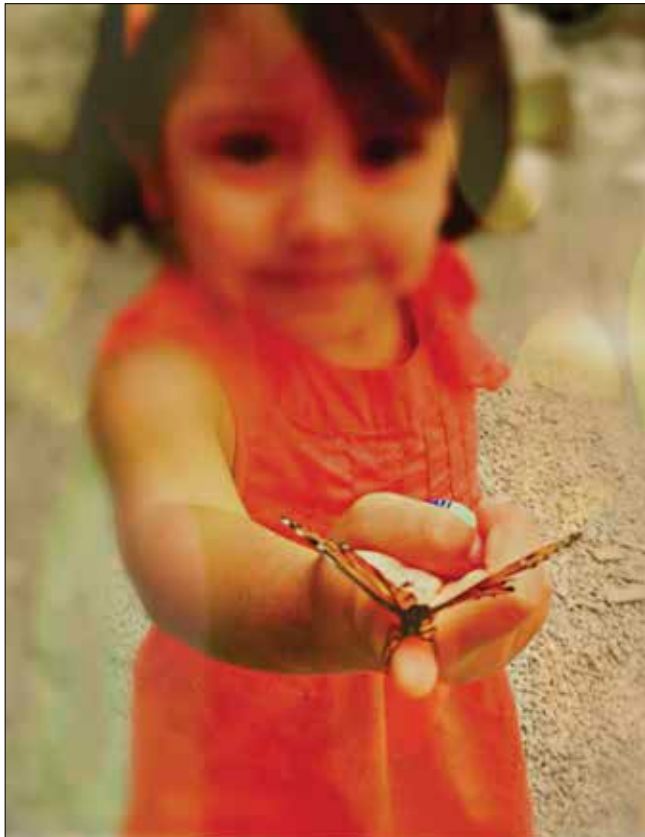
*Like sunlight burning at midnight,
Making my life so beautiful, beautiful,
Mercy reaching to save me.
You are all that I need.
You are beautiful, beautiful.*

A realization that there was more to life than stress, sadness, and anger floated to my conscious brain. Even amongst all the bad things in life, there were still beautiful things that could be found when all hope seemed lost. Maybe seeing that deer and her foal was my higher being's way of showing me he was close and my life was exactly where it was supposed to be. I had a feeling that I hadn't experienced. It was true peace and serenity, and if only for that moment, I felt like life was positive. I didn't necessarily need money or a fancy house to feel content; I could feel harmony with the simplest creatures. I had simply overlooked them before.

I finished the last mile and then sat on my raggedy couch with the first sincere smile I had known in a very long time. I knew life had meaning and that there was hope within the trials of life. 🦋

LA MARIPOSA DE MIKAYLA

ROSALVA MARTINEZ • DENTAL ASSISTING



BEDTIME BLUES

CHRISTAL OUTZ • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

For all the mommies who attempt a bedtime — and to my son, who manages to make it later every night. I love you.



My mommy tucks me into bed;
she kisses me goodnight.

She shuts my door
real quietly, as she
turns out the light.



My stomach hurts;
my throat is dry.
Did I forget to eat?

I think there's something in my eye.
Did I put down the seat?





I forgot—my homework's due.
You don't want me to fail...



My finger hurts; it's
turning blue.. There's a
splinter in my nail.



You forgot to read
my book.
I think I need a drink.



I have
a rash—
you'd better
look.
Did I leave on
the sink?



My room's too dark; I need a
light. I think I heard a noise!



These pajamas are too tight.
Did I pick up my toys?

I forgot to eat
my peas;
I was saving
them for now.



I think the puppy has
some fleas.
I want to sleep, but how?

I have an itch right on my
nose.; it will not go away.



I think I broke all of
my toes—
maybe you should stay.



My elbow hurts;
I have a cramp.
I cannot bend my
knee.

My slippers feel a little damp—
I have to go potty.



My blanket isn't soft enough.
I think it's dirty, too.

My pillow lost all
of its fluff!
I want to sleep with...
ZZZZZZZ. 🌀



THE BOOGIEMAN'S REVENGE

KENDRA NELSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Summer was my favorite time of year growing up—not just because of the welcome reprieve from school, but because the evenings were always filled with games the neighborhood kids and I would play. When the hot Texas sun started to set and the fireflies filled the yards with their intermittent light, I followed my older brother across the street to meet up with the rest of the neighborhood boys to decide what the game of the night would be. We knew how to pick quickly, not wanting to waste a single moment. Our parents would let us stay out only so late—no doubt long enough for the nightly news to finish, so they could watch it in blessed silence.

We stood in a tight circle: Larry, the oldest, who lived next door to us; Reagan, one year older than my brother, who lived across the street from Larry; Steven, who lived next door to Reagan; and the ever-changing kid who lived directly across from us in the one rental house on the block. Of course, the last two kids were my brother, Danny, who was two years older than I was, and me, who was not only the youngest, but the only girl. As the six of us stood calling out games and vetoing or voting for them, Reagan finally said, “Boogieman!”

“Yay!” everyone else in the circle instantly responded.

Inwardly, I groaned. I knew the game well and loved it, but speed was a must for this game, and I was an easy target. After five or six rounds of “Not It,” Larry decided to be the first boogieman. I couldn’t be more thankful; he was old enough to either take pity on me or to not see me as a challenge worthy of him. Either way, I was grateful.

The group, minus Larry, gathered around “base,” a decorative wall, only three-and-a-half feet high, that jutted out of Reagan’s house on either side.

“Kendra, enjoy your only round of not being the boogieman!” my brother snickered.

“Nut-uh, I’m not going to be it next time either,” I said, full of confidence.

“Yeah, we’ll see,” was Danny’s retort before we started our countdown.

“FIVE...FOUR...THREE...TWO...ONE!” we all shouted as we ran out from behind the wall and the side yard into Reagan’s front yard. The first round of the evening was always the most timid. Technically, the rules of Boogieman were as follows: one boogieman hid in the side yards between Reagan’s house

and the rental house waiting for the group to run through. He then would try to catch someone—chasing the victim down the alley if need be. If the prey was caught, he remained behind to become the new boogieman. If he hadn't been caught by the time the runner turned left and hit the grass of Reagan's other side yard, the boogieman remained for another round. There had been many nights when I was the boogieman until the boys either grew bored or parents called us in.

I approached the entrance to the gauntlet squinting, hoping to get some clue as to where Larry was hidden, but no such luck.

"Go, Kendra, you go first," Reagan whispered. "You said you weren't going to be the boogieman, so prove it. You go first," he said in a mocking tone.

"Yeah, go for it, Kendra." Danny echoed Reagan's mocking tone.

I took a moment and weighed the situation. Larry almost never went after me, but if I ran through first, he might be so full of anticipation that he might grab me before he realized who he had caught; on the other hand, if I waited and went last, desperation might force him to grab me so he wouldn't be boogieman twice in a row. After enduring more teasing, I finally decided that going was better than staying and listening to the mocking. Without a word, I started running down the side yard. I made it past the first hiding spot, the matching decorative wall, then past the bushes on rental house side, then the air conditioners. I kept racing as though Larry was hard on my heels. When I passed the end of the rental house where the driveway met the garage, I saw movement. I let out an airy "Eek!" but kept running, hoping Larry would know that bigger prey was coming. As I hit where the driveway met and turned left into the alley, I heard the tell-tale cries of surprise as Larry must have jumped from his hiding spot. I pushed forward even harder now, knowing that my fellow runners were bringing the boogieman hard on their heels. If they passed me, I was done for. I passed Reagan's driveway and turned left again, cutting the corner to get to the side yard. Once I hit grass, I stopped pushing and let momentum carry my legs back to base. I reached out, touching the short wall—one hand resting on the top of it and the other on my knee as I bent over to catch my breath. I was almost immediately joined by my brother, then Reagan, then New Kid, and lastly, Larry. We all looked around to see who the new boogieman was.

"Steven's 'It'?" Danny asked Larry as we all stood and panted.

Larry only nodded his response.

"Looks like you lucked out, Kendra," Danny said.

Reagan quickly joined in. "Nuh-uh. Larry didn't even try to go for her."

“She surprised me. I wasn’t expecting it,” Larry retorted.

Whether or not he was lying to keep from looking like a sissy or to be nice to me, I didn’t know. Whatever the reason, I wasn’t going to turn it down.

“Well, let’s see if you’re lucky again,” Reagan snarled

We all started our countdown, yelling out “ONE!” as loudly as we could. Then we all rounded the corner and started across Reagan’s yard. Just before we reached the mouth of the gauntlet, a figure in the darkness leaped out of Reagan’s bushes in the front yard and took us all by surprise. While, technically, there was no rule stating that the boogiemán had to hide in the side yard, almost everyone did because of its multitude of hiding spots and the narrow space that helped in nabbing the prey. I was toward the back of the pack when Steven sprang from the bushes and grabbed Reagan. I immediately took off running. There was also no rule that once caught, you couldn’t catch someone else and make him stay behind as the boogiemán in your place. Once again, I made it back to base, and we all laughed at the unique approach Steven had used. I was somewhat disheartened when I realized that Reagan was the next boogiemán. In all the surprise, he didn’t or couldn’t grab anyone else. Now I could feel it; I was doomed. I barely yelled the countdown and then rounded the wall while trying to keep myself in the middle of the pack as much as possible, hoping insulation would be my best defense. As we crossed the yard, we took extra care to watch the bushes—although we knew that trick wouldn’t work more than once.

As we approached the gauntlet, my heart pounded in my ears. I prayed I could make it; all I had to do was keep with the pack.

At some unknown signal, we all started running. Reagan leapt out of one of the bushes in the side yard, and the pack dispersed. New Kid cut me off as he doubled back. Robbed of my momentum, I couldn’t make up the difference as Reagan’s hand reached out and grabbed my arm. I was caught! I wouldn’t have to be boogiemán if I could grab New Kid instead, but it was too late—he was already turning the corner with Reagan when I looked up.

With a sigh, I began to search the darkness for a hiding spot. I decided to hide at the garage of the rental house; since it had been a good spot for Larry, maybe it would work for me. I heard the end of the countdown, took a deep breath, and waited. In seconds, I heard the whispers of the group as they were about to enter the gauntlet. They didn’t pause there long; none of them feared me as the boogiemán, which made me angrier. Danny and Steven ran past first; I jumped out as Larry and Reagan skirted past me, leaving only New Kid. “Serves him right,” I thought. “It’s all his fault I got caught last time.”

New Kid faked left, and I fell for it. I lunged to my right as he dashed by and stretched out my left arm in a futile effort to grab him. Now that I was off balance, he skirted by and was gone.

I hit the ground with my fist, sighed, and started looking for another hiding spot. Suddenly, a moment of pure brilliance hit me. I hid right behind the short wall of Reagan's house at the beginning of the gauntlet and its narrowest part. I knew I would hear the moment the other players started to run.

I suppressed a snicker as the end of the countdown was shouted out.

I heard them approach, acting cocky and overconfident, and my brother Danny was the worst. I gritted my teeth, crouched into the runner's start position, and faced the path directly in front of me.

I heard them edge closer.

I leapt with all my might just as the first of the runners crossed in front of me and plowed into someone. We collided with full force. I didn't even know who I'd caught, and then I heard, "Ouch! Damn it, Kendra!" It was Danny! I had caught Danny! I couldn't believe it. I was still sitting on the ground, stunned, when the others darted past us.

My head was still throbbing from the impact, but I got up and forced myself to run after them, leaving Danny sitting bewildered in my dust.


I got to base last, but it was a wonderful entrance.

"Wow, Kendra, I'm impressed," Larry said.

"Thanks," I mumbled back, but my face was beaming. I had done it; I had caught not only the fastest runner, but also my big, arrogant, older brother. I also realized that in the next round, he'd be gunning for me—HARD! And I knew I couldn't outrun him.

Just as we started the countdown from ten, porch lights on Reagan's and Steven's houses flickered on. "Reagan, time to come in!" Mr. Young called. The "come in" command for Reagan was followed shortly by one from Steven's mother.

Finally, our porch light came on, and my dad stuck his head out the door and yelled, "Daniel! Kendra! Time to come inside!"

The news must have been over, and I couldn't have been more thrilled. I didn't have to face the wrath of Danny—at least, not that night. Even though I was bummed to see the game come to an end, I walked through my front door with a big grin on my face, and Danny came sulking in behind me. 

PARALLELS

REBECCA BURT • LIFE SCIENCES INSTRUCTOR



PONDERED

KRISTYNA HOLZ • HUMAN SERVICES/ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Midnight flashes the crimson moon
Flooded irises glance softly
Whispering pinewood hand-in-hand
Her porcelain skin turns swiftly
The tombstone bridge
Talking slab
Somber ghosts at her feet
Small tempted tide
Green curled ribbons float gently
A reflected face with daggered edges
The secrets killing slowly
Blazing red rapid storm
Tender hug goes limp
Gleaming frost beneath
One last breath curling fast
Ships of pale relief
Gentle push
Optic green goes gray

ONCE UPON A SUMMER NIGHT

ALLISON NEUJAHN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Watercolors finger-paint the sky
as my lipstick-red Sunfire ventures
down the country road. Lightning
bugs shimmer like glitter in the dense
soybean field that passes in a blur.

A soft warm breeze wafts through
rolled down windows, tousling the
driver's shaggy hair. A burst of smoke
emerges from his lips, the cancer stick
held between middle and forefingers.

Tobacco perfumes the car, and he
hands me the Marlboro. I stare at it,
quizzical, glancing at the scene
he brought me to, this beautiful place
where expectations don't exist.

I take a small drag, coughing out
its remnants. Gravel crunches
underneath the weight of the car.
The car slows to meet pavement,
leaving behind a billow of dust.

EVERYTHING'S PERFECT

MYSTERY HARWOOD • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

The night I lost my virginity, the moon cleared a swath through the sky like a scythe—all kinds of stars just drifting in its wake. June is a lover's month, Momma says. Says the moon looks down on couples then and smiles on them.

As we climbed the hill behind his house, I could hear Jack swearing under his breath. He stopped to shift all the stuff he was carrying: my little cooler, a large heavy quilt his momma made, and my astronomy book. The astronomy book was how I knew about the meteor shower tonight, the brightest and longest one in a hundred years. I turned back to wait for him, annoyed, because I wanted to watch the moon the whole way. When Momma and I first moved to the country, I learned that here in Aubergine, without the city lights to blind you, the moon is so big and round it seems like you could touch it, like you could pull it from the sky and keep it for yourself.

"Lila, honey?" Jack still hadn't moved. He was squinting up at the copse. "Are you sure this is what you want to do? I mean, Momma will be gone all night—you know how her and your momma and auntie get when they get to card-playing. We could go inside. I could put on some music or something. Momma's bed is real nice, super soft, if you don't like the idea of using mine."

I didn't like that idea at all, in fact. Jack slept on a narrow cot in a room he shared with two of his five brothers; it hardly even counted as a bed. "Jackie, you know the bed ain't got nothing to do with this. This is going to be the first time we ever make love, and I want to see the stars! Now are you going to keep dawdling, or are we going to get up there?" I guess I didn't really wait for an answer; I just turned and started walking again. I knew Jack would follow me.

When we got to the top of the hill, Jack spread the blanket out on the grass then started pulling citronella candles from his pockets. I busied myself emptying out the cooler, setting stuff neatly around the blanket—a bottle of Snow Creek Berry Boone's Farm (I had to beg Jack's cousin Eddie to buy it for us, but I didn't tell him why), two of my Auntie Mandy's wineglasses, and some strawberries (the "most sensual fruit," one of the books called them). Jack came up behind me and touched my shoulder all gentle and whispered, "Baby? Lilypad? Are you all right?"

"Sure, Jackie. Sure." I knew I should turn around and look at him, but I felt all wiggly inside, like I might be sick or tip over if I moved, so I just stayed put,

staring up at the sky. The copse up here is nice, 'cause you can see the moon and the stars, and you can see the house and anyone coming at you from pretty much any direction, but the trees hide you. It's my favorite spot on Jack's land.

Jack's long fingers wrapped around my shoulder, then rubbed down my arm. In the dark, I couldn't see the color of his skin, but I knew it by heart—a warm brown like the crust of an apple pie, dark from years of labor and play in the sun. I shivered a little, and Jack slid away from me, moving around the blanket and picking up the Boone's. He opened it and poured into the two glasses, handing me one. It was cold in my hands, making me shiver harder, so I drank it in one gulp. Jack laughed.

"Nervous?" He took the glass from me and set it down.

"A little." I didn't want to admit it, but I was. Jack took my hand and eased me down onto the blanket. He picked up the bowl of strawberries and shook his head a little.

"I'm supposed to feed one to you, right?" I could tell he was trying not to laugh, and I felt my face heat.

"Not if you don't want to. I just thought we'd like something to eat, that's all."

"Right. Just something to eat." He grinned. "Couldn't find any passion fruit at the farmer's market, Lilypad?"

"Shut up." I scowled, yanking the bowl out of his hand. I set it off to the side and stretched out on the blanket, looking up at the moon.

"Hey, hey." Jack leaned over and stroked the side of my face. "I didn't mean nothing, Lila. I'm just a little nervous, too." He pulled me to him, and I snuggled into the curve of his arm. I always marveled at the way we fit together so well. Like we were two hands coming together to pray. I looked out past the trees and saw the glint of the creek in the distance.

"Jackie, you remember how I used to just wander around your property?" I slid my hand under his shirt and rubbed his chest, tracing the little hollows between his ribs.

"Sure. You were so cute, running around talking and singing to yourself. My brothers all thought you weren't right in the head." He laughed outright. "I tried to tell them you're just...eccentric. Matter of fact, I'm still trying to convince them of that."

"Haha. But, seriously, what did you think I was doing out there?"

"I knew what you were doing. Not that you ever told me. But I watched you once."

"Watched me?" I lifted my head to see his face.

"It wasn't even a year after you got here, just a few weeks into the fifth grade. You walked right past me in the field. I was working on one of the pivots, and you

didn't see me. Like you were in your own little world. I wondered what you were doing, so I went after you. I was going to holler at you, but. . . ." He stopped.

"But?" He'd never told me any of this before.

"Well, you were concentrating pretty hard. You were talking to yourself."

Oh, Lord. "What was I saying?"

"You were pretending that your dad was alive." He turned his head, looked into the distance. "You were talking about how you were able to save him with magic or something. And then you started crying."

Then I remembered. Exactly a year after Daddy died. School had been horrible—no one knew about my dad, really, and it was still too soon for the kids to start ignoring me and my strangeness. Instead, they pointed out every weird thing about me (I read all the time, I didn't know how to milk a cow or drive a tractor, I'd never seen a raccoon). It made me feel like I'd never fit in. Which I never did, really.

"You must've thought I was an idiot." I twined my fingers in his, not looking at him.

"Are you kidding?" He grabbed my chin and forced me to look him in the eye. "That's the day I fell in love with you."

Sometimes I felt like Jack was ancient, instead of only seventeen, just a year older than me. I smiled and whispered, "Let's get comfortable. The meteor shower is supposed to start in a few minutes."

He nodded and stood, kicked off his shoes. I stood too, and started unbuttoning my blue Seersucker blouse and my jeans. I turned my back to the blanket and took a deep breath. Underneath I was wearing a new bra and underwear set that I had bought from a mail order catalog. It had taken all my courage just to buy the damned things, and even putting them on in my room was embarrassing. It felt good, though. I had never worn anything like it, never had silk and lace and all against my skin before. I bit my lip then slid the blouse off my shoulders, the jeans down my legs. I turned and saw Jack staring at me like he'd never seen me before. His pants sat bunched around his ankles, but he wasn't moving.

"God," he said, when he realized I was watching him.

"You like it?" I spun around once, so he could see me from all angles. Then he was right there, his strong arms wrapping around me. He was kissing my neck the way I liked and steering me toward the blanket again. When we got settled, he kissed me on the mouth and then touched the lacy edge of the bra, like it was some space-age thing he just couldn't wrap his head around.

"You sure are beautiful, Lila." He caught a strand of my hair in his fingers. He always says my hair "looks like chocolate, smells like raspberries". "I love you." He smiled that sweet smile of his.

"I love you, too, Jack." The words seemed to mean something more this time, and I thought that no matter what happened, I would always think of this night as our wedding night. Jack said he wanted to marry me right after high school, and I was fine with that. But tonight was what mattered to me. I grabbed his head, pulled it to mine and we were kissing again, serious this time. He slid between my legs and worked off my underwear, and then it was really happening.

The pain at first made me want to scream, but I bit it back. None of Momma's romance novels said anything about it hurting, and neither had any of the girls I had talked to who had done it. They all said like it was the best thing ever. But the pain only lasted for the first few seconds, really. Then it was just a sorta soreness. I looked up at the sky, trying to find a rhythm. I kept looking for the meteors, looking for the signs that we were blessed by heaven, but everything was jerking around. I knew I shouldn't be thinking about it, shouldn't be thinking about the sky or the grass digging into the backs of my legs where the blanket rode up or the bugs biting me God knows where, but I couldn't help it. I sighed, and Jack whispered something in a high, tight rasp—I guess he had taken my noise for a sign of pleasure. I took a look at his face. His mouth was slack, his expression alien. I closed my eyes against it.

I thought about what Momma always says about him: "Oh, that Jack's just as cute as they come." Well, I don't know from cute, but I love the little curls in his mahogany hair and the way he ducks his head and looks sideways at you when he says something sweet. Which he's always doing, 'cause he's pretty much made of sugar. Momma says I've always had a sweet tooth, even as a baby. Says I would try to eat sugar straight out of the bowl. I don't remember, of course, but that's what Jack's like to me. The kind of sweet where your tongue burns, but in a good way, and you feel that little zing going all through your body. That's what Jack's like. A sweetness that burns.

"You're about as hopeless a romantic as they come, Lily pad," he had said when I told him my plans for the meteor shower. I loved when he called me that—it was his special nickname for me. 'Cause I had never seen lilies before I moved to Aubergine, you know? But Jack's momma, she's a real flower whiz; she put 'em all over their pond. Oh, I could look at them for hours. I love how they just float all white and serene on the surface. Anything could be going on below, you know, but those lilies, they just...drift along.

But I knew what Jack meant, about me being romantic. Like the sex. I had it all planned, thought I would see shooting stars, fireworks, that the earth would feel like it just stopped moving. I wanted to be like the girls in my momma's romance novels. I wanted my petals to unfold softly under Jack's touch, to feel

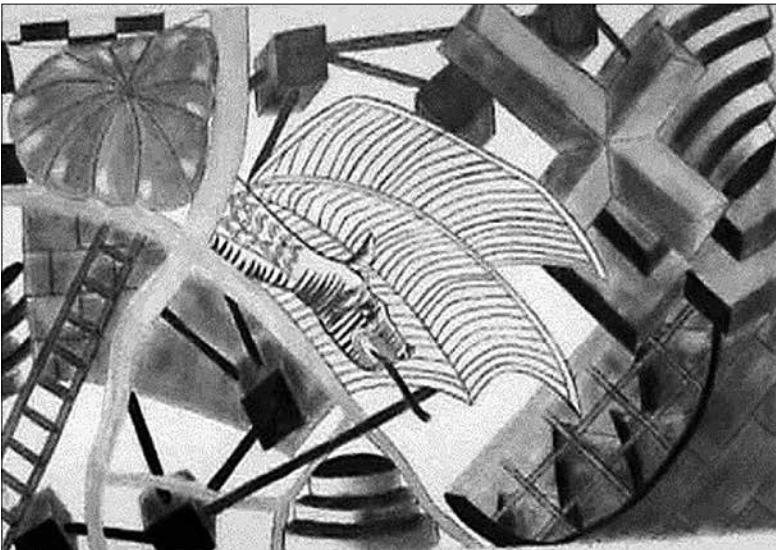
like a woman for the first time. Or something like that. Don't ask me why, but it's always about petals for some reason.

Jack shifted around on top of me, his movements getting a little faster. He was making a strange grunting noise. I tried again to move with him, to make my body and his melt together, but it was no use. Suddenly his eyes shut tight, and I could tell something was different. He went all rigid, and everything did seem to stop for a second, and then he was panting, breathing super heavy and laying his head on my chest. "Oh, wow," he said. He was smiling, almost laughing. I stared up at the stars again. They weren't moving anymore, they were just...sitting there. Like the two of us, I guess. "Lila?" Jack raised his head and kissed one eyelid, then the other. His lips came back wet. I didn't even know I was crying. "Is everything ok?"

I wondered if the stars were laughing at me. If they thought I was a foolish girl, like Momma always says I am. Then I looked back at Jack, at that expression on his face. Like where if I said the wrong thing, he might break. I could feel my heart swelling up for him, fitting to burst out of my chest. "Yeah, Jackie. Everything's perfect." Beyond his shoulder I could see the meteors starting, silver-white streaks spraying down, reflecting in the sweat on his skin. My astronomy book says that meteors are chunks of rock, just space trash. But at that moment, with me and Jack outlined by their glow, I couldn't quite believe it. 🌸

UNTITLED

STEPHANIE BROWNELL • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



THE DRIVE-IN

JANET ZANKER • *ACADEMIC TRANSFER*
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP POETRY AWARD

Hellcats played on the large
drive-in screen. John Wayne, larger
than life, got even bigger as I swung
back and forth on the playground,
strategically placed between the cars
and the movie screen.

Lightening bugs dotting and dashing
through the heavy summer night air,
their rhythmic call seeking out
a life-mate. The speaker resting
on the driver's window made
us feel like John W. joined us in the car
as we munched on a large grocery
bag of homemade popcorn,
popped in bacon grease.

We watched as our hero put out one
oil fire after another; the clouds rolled
and churned—like the billowing smoke and
flames reflected on the movie screen.
The storm waited for the movie to finish
before lightening etched the sky,
followed by booming thunder much
like the dynamite the men had
dropped down into the oil wells.

I lay in the back window with the
purple bobbing-head cow as the wind
chased us across the flat river bottom
back to home. My father dodged limbs
and rain and almost won his race with
the storm when the hail beat down
on us as we closed the cellar door.

GREEN RAMP

MELODI WHEELER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

It was a beautiful sunny day in North Carolina, but I was not outside enjoying the weather. I was sealed in my house, paralyzed in my suede armchair and staring at the phone in my hand. How long had it been since I had hung up? I did not know if it had been a second or an hour; I had no sense of time. My body felt like a bag of angry bees, almost vibrating with excitement, and still I could not move a muscle. In my head, I replayed the beginning of the automated message over and over.

“Good afternoon from 2-508 Fury! Your paratrooper is scheduled to land tonight at nineteen hundred hours.”

I could not remember anything the cheerful, yet impersonal voice announced afterwards. Not that it mattered. My eyes shifted to my two dogs staring expectantly at me from the floor. I took a sharp breath as a single tear fell down my cheek. That tear broke the spell. I smiled and leapt from the chair squealing, “Joe is coming home!” Abruptly I froze, sinking back into my armchair as the realization sank in—tonight, after a year in Afghanistan, my husband would be home.

I had dreamt of this day for over a year, imagining different scenarios of what would happen. I had the facts: the plane would land, and hundreds of soldiers would line up in a formation outside of an airplane hangar. They would march inside where hundreds of family members and friends were lined up and reassemble into another formation. A commander would say a short speech and prayer, thanking the brave veterans for their service and welcoming them home. Finally, the partitions separating the mob from the soldiers would be removed, and a mad dash to find loved ones would commence. Promptly after ten minutes had passed, the soldiers would line up again and load onto busses, headed towards the barracks for in-processing. They would be released to us a few hours afterwards. It would be torture to wait so long for that first ten measly minutes, but nothing would keep me from seeing my husband as soon as I could.

The hours dragged by, and I tried to find things to keep myself occupied. I applied makeup and fixed my hair, numbly watched television, and during short bursts of motivation, cleaned the house. It was difficult to focus on anything

for more than five minutes. Finally, it was time to leave. I picked up my friend, Nicolette, from her house. She was a novice photographer and wanted to capture the event for me. Shaking with excitement, I drove down the road, not paying as much attention as I should have. I would have missed the obvious signs pointing toward Green Ramp if I had been alone. The military policeman directing vehicles to park jumped back as I screeched to a halt in front of him. I waved apologetically as I turned into the lot; I noticed Nicolette's white hands clutching the car door.

"Are you okay to drive?" she asked gently.

"Not much farther..." My voice trailed off, not entirely answering her question.

Our heads jolted forward as I abruptly parked, and we both left the car quickly for different reasons. I wanted to move quickly, as if I would see my husband sooner if I hurried. Nicolette wanted the safety of not riding in the car with me. She nonchalantly took the keys from me, suggesting that she drive when it was time to leave, and we hurried to the giant metal building. Overtaken by a flood of emotion, I paused before entering the door; I was at the legendary Green Ramp. Forget Disneyland—this was where dreams came true! We stepped into the building, and my heart started pounding.

The huge room crawled with hundreds of people waving flags and toting brightly painted "welcome home" signs. Children played games, running around clusters of people and strollers with babies that somehow managed to sleep through the commotion. Wives in dresses chatted both nervously and excitedly amongst themselves, occasionally grabbing their children in weak attempts to make the children behave. Grayed parents, dressed in red, white, and blue, scouted the area for the potential best view of the front. The occasional trumpet or tuba note perforated the general roar of too many conversations, as the small band of soldiers tuned their instruments. Cameras flashed, causing a slight strobe light effect. Fans in the corners of the room oscillated the heavy air, bringing the smell of different perfumes, sweat, and the unmistakable must of an old building. There was a feeling in the room, a mix of expectation with an edge of hysteria. It was both breathtaking and contagious.

The large garage-style door that the soldiers would be walking through and the front of the giant room were roped off. Nearby, a small door led outside to another roped off section where people could stand to watch the plane land and cheer as the soldiers marched by. Despite the heat, I chose to wait outside, hoping for a glimpse of my husband as soon as possible. I grasped that rope for over half an hour, as the area filled up with the anxious mob. As the sky

darkened, several planes landed, causing false hopes and premature cheers. Strangely, a hush grew over the crowd as we saw lights in the sky getting bigger. My heart skipped a beat: this was it. A large jet began to descend toward the runway. We began to cheer, apprehensively at first, then louder and longer than before. People began to dab at their eyes as the plane slowly taxied towards us. It stopped, and within minutes, a few hundred soldiers in green ACUs and maroon berets began filing out. My brain registered patriotic songs playing as we restlessly waited. Strange, I thought, I had not even heard the band begin.


We cheered as the soldiers marched in formation and filed past us into the building. We were all scouring the sea of green and tan for our own soldiers. When the last warrior entered the building, the huge door began to close, cutting all visibility from the outside away. It was a mad dash, as the spectators fought to get inside. I weaved in and out of people as I pushed forward, not caring about courtesy. Once I squeezed into the building, I barely registered the commander's voice droning on, as I began to search for my husband.

It was a surreal experience, staring at hundreds of identically dressed men. They wore the same uniform, had the same haircut, and even seemed to have the same facial expression. It was like looking for Waldo in a crowd of Waldos. My brain stopped seeing individual faces and focused instead on facial features. I stood on the tips of my toes and scanned each soldier, looking for a familiar face. Seeing blue eyes made my heart flutter, only to drop when the nose did not match my memory. Looking at face after face, my heart beating irregularly from the excitement and disappointment, I began to worry that he'd missed the flight, and I was there for nothing. I quieted my mind, as I spotted yet another pair of blue eyes. Those were the right shade! But I could not allow myself to get too excited. What about the nose? There were freckles sprinkled across the bridge of this nose. A strong jaw? Definitely. My heart pounded when I looked at the mouth. This soldier was lightly chewing on the right corner of his lower lip, something Jodie always did when he was stressed or thinking. Words seemed to light up slowly in my mind, one at a time. This. Soldier. Is. My. Husband. When I put the words together, time returned to its normal pace. "It's Jodie! I see him!" I exclaimed frantically to Nicolette as I pointed. "He's right there!"

At the sound of his nickname, my husband's head did a sharp turn, and his eyes began frantically sweeping the crowd. I jumped and waved with no regard to the people around me. Then his eyes caught mine, and he did a double take. I smiled. For the second time that day, I lost my sense of time. I heard nothing, saw nothing, except his face. My husband, my heart! We were separated by only 20 feet. Suddenly, he looked away from me, his gaze fixed to the front. I found

out later that he was on the verge of tears. I could not, would not, stop staring. I wanted to study him. He was skinnier than before, but otherwise matched the handsome image of my memory. Once again, I registered the voice droning wordlessly over the loudspeakers, but all I heard was my own breath, loud in my ears. I focused on my husband and counted my heartbeats as my chest pounded. Only he and I existed.

The droning voice in the background suddenly reached a crescendo, and like a swimmer resurfacing, everything instantly sounded loud and clear. I snapped back to reality and took off like a sprinter in a maze, keeping as much eye contact as possible with Jodie, as we ducked under arms and squeezed between bodies. We collided, embracing and kissing like teenagers. I vaguely heard a few “Awwws.” We were one of the first couples to find each other. The next ten minutes were a blur of hugging, kissing, stepping back, and looking at each other. Nicolette kept her distance, circling us like a satellite and snapping away on the camera. She could have been close enough to touch us, and we would not have noticed; we were lost in our own moment. I struggled for words, simply buried my head in his chest, and listened to his heartbeat in disbelief. My hands explored his face, neck, and chest. After a year of almost no physical contact with anyone, it was surreal to feel someone so close again. I took stock of the smallest details: his scent, his laugh, the way he stood. My heart skipped a beat every time I relearned something that made him so unique.

All too soon, the dreaded part came. He kissed me for the millionth time and marched to the busses. I numbly sat down and waited for the busses to leave, my brain trying to process the day’s events. Only hours before I had been frozen in my armchair repeating an automated message in my head. Now I was frozen on an uncomfortable wooden bench trying to grip reality as a new message looped in my brain: Jodie is really home. Whenever I had imagined my experience at Green Ramp, I saw myself crying tears of joy and sadness when he left again. I was surprised that I had not shed a tear and was not heartbroken when he left. We would be reunited for good in a few hours; if I could go a year without him, surely a few hours would not be that difficult. Only one thing mattered now: my husband was home. 

THE FINAL CUT

KAYLA BRHEL • DUAL CREDIT

She sits there across the room watching me carefully, examining my every move. After a while, she leans forward in her chair and asks, “So, are you ready to tell me why you are here?” I just sit there silently, staring at the floor and listening to the hands on the clock turn with every passing minute. There have been 42 clicks, which means it is 4:42. While thinking about the time, I contemplate telling her what she wants to know; I want to give in and explain, but I don’t think I’m ready to confess my “little problem”—as Mom calls it—to anyone else.

I think a little more, and I decide to go with my better judgment and tell her. After all, she is here to help me. So, I push the sleeves up on my jacket, hold out my arms, and look up at her. “I guess this is why I’m here.”



Today is Friday, and this morning, I am waking to my parents fighting again. I have come to the conclusion that something is seriously wrong. They have not spoken to each other for the past few weeks. As I lay there thinking about their situation, my door opens and Mom comes in.

“Abigail, wake up! You’re going to be late for school!”

She doesn’t sound happy, so to please her, I climb out of bed and start preparing for school. As I am frantically running around my room, I ask, “Mom, is there something wrong?”

“No, Abigail, nothing is wrong.” With that, she leaves.

Moments later, I shut the door and walk over to my nightstand. I shove my hand into the drawer and pull out the razor blade. For months, I have not even considered cutting, but just looking at the razor makes my skin tingle. I sit on my bed, take off my jacket, and softly press the razor blade to my wrist. At first, only a small stream of blood comes from under the edge of the blade. Within moments, the line of blood grows larger, and it becomes harder to stop the bleeding. I have no idea what to do. Nothing like this has happened before. Out of instinct, I scream, “MOM!” She rushes into the room, and the last thing I see before everything goes dark is the look of disappointment on her face.

I awake shortly after leaving the emergency room. Just Mom and I are in the car; Dad did not even bother to show up. Figures. Finally, we make it home, and I get out of the car; before I go to my room, Mom says, “Abigail, we need

to talk.” We walk into the living room. She sits down and motions me to do the same. I sit, and we stare at each other for a while. Finally, she says, “Why did you do this to yourself?”

I watch her assess me, and then finally, I reach the point where I have enough courage to say, “You and Dad are the reason I do this to myself. If you two wouldn’t fight, I wouldn’t resort to this.”

I can see the hurt on her face, and it kills me inside. Now, what I should have said was that it was my own fault, that I was just too stressed, and that it relieved tension, but I did not. She stares at me, and I wish I could take it all back.

After a while, she says, “Your father and I have decided that we are sending you to counseling.”

“Okay,” I say after a brief pause.

“All right. Well, we made an appointment for you at 4:00 this afternoon,” she says. I nod and quietly go to my room to wait until 4:00 comes.



So, I sit here silently, staring at the floor and listening to the hands on the clock turn. If I am listening correctly, it is just about 5:00. She stares at me intently, and I wait for her to reply. Finally, she says, “That was a good start, but that is all we have time for today.”

SUPERSTITION

KRISTYNA HOLZ • HUMAN SERVICES/ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE



THE HIDE

JERILYN HOPPER • PRACTICAL NURSING

I want to thank you, the reader, ahead of time for reading this piece, as it is with the strongest and warmest love for my oldest son, Mikel, that I write this. My name is Jema. I am of Native American descent, the mother to four active and imaginative children, and the proud wife of a tribal elder.

Being of Native American descent and growing up on the Shawnee Reservation, I was taught to live as one with nature as much as possible. So, it is with this knowledge that I choose my tools, colors, and materials with which I create my art. I like to incorporate pieces of nature into my art, so I am creating this piece, the hide from the first buffalo my oldest son killed himself, without any store-bought items, such as paint or tanning tools, just as my ancestors have done for centuries.

As a rite of passage in the Shawnee tribe, it is customary for a young warrior to hunt and kill his own buffalo. This shows the other tribe members that he is a man. My oldest son, Mikel, is one of these tribe members looking to become a man. He is 17 at this time, and since he has returned with a beautiful buffalo he took down himself, I'm sure the elders will smile in his direction soon.

Mikel, being the respectful boy he is, presented this beautiful hide to me; all the meat has been removed from the hide and stored for the future meals of the tribe. It is now my job, since my son has yet to choose a wife, to process this hide into something he can use for warmth when the weather turns cold again. It is traditional that the bounty the warriors come home with is shared with the tribe, but the hides are given to the wives to be processed into blankets or covers for the teepee. As his mother, this task has fallen to me.

After the leather has soaked in rainwater for two more days, I then need to scrape the remaining flesh from the skin. I use a good fleshing tool I made from a flat and reasonably sharp stone. I have used this same tool for the many hides my husband has brought to me over the years we have been together. This fur is special, though; I am not going to remove the hair from this trophy for my son. The added hair will help keep him warm and possibly impress some of the young women from the tribe. With this hide, I will be making the most beautiful leather covering for Mikel with hope that he may find a wife someday soon to share this gift with.

Once I have the leather scraped of any remaining flesh, I again soak it in rainwater for the night. Then I tie the hide onto a stretcher using many leather straps to keep it taut as it dries. After drying overnight, I boil three to five gallons of water; then I mix the brain from this buffalo into the water and rub it into both sides of the pelt to condition it, so it will retain its softness as well as assist with repelling water. The final step of processing the hide is to smoke it with rotten, dry wood. This weatherproofs the leather and provides a nice bug repellent.

It is a lot of work to prepare a fur of this size, but every step is necessary for preservation, so an item such as this can be used for many years and possibly by many generations of my family to come.

The colors I will be using to paint images are all developed from the natural environment around me. I have red from crushed red berries, yellow from crushed mustard flowers, green from the leaves of ivy, as well as other colors I have developed. I also use feathers; some of them I find on the ground when I walk through the wooded areas around our compound, and others I choose when I clean a bird before cooking it. I use feathers as painting tools because they are versatile; I can use the hard tip for more rigid strokes and the soft feather part to add movement and flow to my figures.

I begin to paint this by starting on the center inside of the hide because I did not remove the hair from the outer part of this hide. I start here because this is where the heart and soul of the beast was.


I have painted an orange sun with rays of red and green in the center of this hide; the sun provides food for our souls, feeding our bodies with light and warmth. Right outside of the sunrays, I have placed three stars, all solid red in color, as this is Mikel's favorite color, and he is my shining star. Next to the three stars are three crescent moons, with the inside of the moon closest to the stars. Each moon is outlined in green since it is coolness, not heat, that the night brings.

To add a little fun to this piece, I'm also adding figures. Mikel, when he was a young boy, loved to play with little metal and wooden figures of the Cavalry soldiers and Indian warriors he had. He would play for hours all alone making such a racket while he played. I have added three Cavalry soldiers. The first soldier is carrying a sword, the second soldier is wielding a rifle, and the third I give a hand pistol. They are all wearing uniforms of blue with yellow stripes down the length of their pants. The first soldier is wearing an officer's hat with the brim all the way around; the other soldiers are sporting the traditional infantry caps with a short brim out front. All three soldiers are on horseback, and the horses are running.

The Indian warriors are behind the Cavalry as though they are chasing them away. The Indians and their horses are odd-colored, but Mikel, he will understand. One day, when he was a small boy, I was busy painting another hide, and my son came to me and wanted to paint, as well. He wanted to paint his toy figures. I didn't see anything wrong with his request, so I gave him some feathers to paint with and let him paint those figures. When Mikel was finished painting, his Indian figures were quite a sight. There were pink Indians, blue Indians, a green horse, and a pink horse, and one was multi-colored with pink, orange, green, and red. They were all so beautiful, and he was proud of his accomplishment. I still have these figures, and someday I will pass them along to his children. For now, their likeness decorates this hide.

I have adorned the outside midsection of this hide with two knotted red ribbons, one on each side of the pelt; these are to represent the blood that was spilled from this beautiful animal so others could live. The spot that these two ribbons hang is the exact location the arrow pierced the buffalo, killing him.

In the very center of this skin, inside the center of the sun I had painted, I have placed a piece of jewelry about twelve inches long that I made from several strands of the tail hair from the buffalo. I also used a strip of leather the same length as the tail hair that I colored a bright white using the white root of the Lemon Star tree. I have strung several beads, hand-blown by a tribal elder the summer before this one. There are four vibrant red beads representing the four children my husband and I have brought life to and continue to nurture as we journey through our lives together. Also, there are four lavender beads standing in for the four phases the moon makes each month—the new moon, the waxing moon, the waning moon, and, of course, the full moon.

It will be with enormous love and respect that I will present this fabulous buffalo pelt to my son, the tribe's newest Indian warrior and great hunter. May the spirits of our ancestors bless us again. 

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

MARY ANN PARTIN • CRIMINAL JUSTICE/ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

My daughter called tonight.

I often daydream long, intimate conversations
sharing everything,
even the scary things,
but when she calls, I can't find words.

It's easy to talk about the weather, the kids,
but the fragile, feeling things
are locked behind a wall I cannot breach.

I imagine telling her my fears,
sharing truths, dispelling myths,
fables of "happily ever after,"
traded for reality that is sometimes better.

I see us sitting on the bed
or at the beach laughing, talking,
comfortable, knowing all our secrets safe.

I practice telling her the things
I wish I'd said when she was young,
teaching lessons I had to learn
the hard way,
hoping to give them to her easily.

There are so many things I'd say—
if we could climb the wall between;
so many things I'd share if we could talk,
really talk,
but the walls are too high,
and we're afraid of heights.

I wish we weren't;
I wish we could.

MY AMAZING PICTURE

JILL ENGLEHART • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I find myself wondering how I could have survived without this place. The sun wraps its heat around me like a warm blanket as I stand staring at the giant cotton trees. The nearly naked branches are slowly losing their cover. I stand and watch one branch sway quietly in the autumn breeze as a burnt orange leaf falls, slowly and quietly, to its destiny. I watch as the wind picks up the leaf again and dances it around. It swirls along with the other leaves in the distance and then vanishes.

My first memories of these cottonwoods happened when I reached the age of five. I remember standing back here behind my grandparents' house with my grandma. I recall the smell of Noxzema on her skin when she whispered, "You see those trees, honey? One day they will stand taller than this house."

I remember jumping on the large, rectangular trampoline so high that I could see over the tops of those cottonwoods. My sister and I asked if we could paint the trampoline green and purple. That next day, my grandpa went out and bought those colors, and the trampoline sat bright and proud next to the green apple tree.

Now those cottonwoods stand tall and strong. They were so small back then, but now they are strong and solid like the home they stood behind.

Walking across the three acres that my grandparents owned behind their house, I head toward our cemetery. Many of my friends found it creepy, but I saw it as a place to rest my animal friends that gave me so much love and compassion. As I stand quietly, I notice a small spider, black as night, making its way up the tiny cross. The small broken cross stands above our family bird. Gordon fell to his death from his own fake tree branch in his golden cage. With white and black speckled throughout his wings, his bright blue chest always puffed out proudly.

Next to Gordon lay a small chiseled rock. This rock marked the grave of three cottontail baby rabbits. I remember the afternoon my dad stumbled upon a family of three baby rabbits that lay abandoned by their mother. The cottontails looked starved and in need of TLC. The love that I possessed for animals made me quickly retrieve my veterinarian book to try to figure out what I could do to help them. I woke up early for school, so I could check on them and feed them.

I bottle-fed them for three days straight. I did all I could for Huey, Dewy, and Louie (yes, I named them), but they needed more than I could give them.

With the autumn breeze crisp and sharp, goose bumps trickle down my freckled arms and onto my neck. I wrap my arms around my body and try to keep warm. Standing here, I recall the day we buried our beloved Miniature Schnauzer.

Chalky and I grew up together—inseparable during my toddler years. As Chalky began to age, her once charcoal-colored coat began to silver. Her whiskers went from black to white. She began to lose her sight in her right eye, then slowly her left. We put Chalky to sleep when I reached the age of 13.

“Girl’s best friend, our beloved Chalky,” stares at me with long, engraved letters. The marked cross begins to blur as tears form in my eyes. Once again, I lose myself in the past. I see myself standing next to my dad holding an umbrella. Rain poured down on us as my dad slowly placed the cherry oak casket that my grandpa made three feet under the earth. I remember the solid cherry oak shimmered in the rain.

“This dog deserves the best, Jilly,” I recall my grandpa saying to me as he put the finishing touches on Chalky’s casket.

“Your grandma got some of that silky, cream colored material to line this with. This doggie will rest in peace in style,” I recall my grandpa saying the day before we buried her.

I cried after my dad put the soaked dirt onto the shiny casket. Tears of love and loss ran down my cheeks. I clutched onto the collar that once made a jingle noise when Chalky walked around the kitchen. I let go of my dad’s embrace and ran to the barn. When I reached my safe place, I threw my arms around my horse’s big, broad chest, her muscular body warm and comforting as my cold cheek pressed against her solid neck.

I open my eyes and notice the sun’s light lessening. I turn around and find myself staring at the big red shed that we put up over 15 years ago.

I hear the leaves crunch beneath my feet, as I walk briskly over to the big white sliding door. As I open the door, I remember how much work my grandpa put into making this barn possible. It was as if he plucked the dream from my brain and put it into paper. The barn had a typical red exterior with a tin white roof and a deep brown weather vane perched at the highest point. As the door opens, it squeaks so loudly that I grab my right ear to confine the noise. The gravel crunches beneath my feet. Cobwebs greet me from all corners, as I make my way into the barn. I flip the old dimmer switch only to realize the bulb has burned out.

I walk over to where my tack room used to sit. The smell of hay and dust makes my cold nose itch. I look in the north corner to see a dust-covered orange chainsaw where my worn saddle used to lean against the wall. I turn around and peek in the old, green bucket. I used to haul that bucket back and forth from the barn to my horse's rusty green water tank. Now I see screws, nuts, and rusty bolts. I see an old checkered horse blanket lying neatly in the corner. I slowly walk over and bring it close to my nose. The wonderful smell of horse overcomes me—an unwelcome scent to most, but a euphoric one to me. I feel a lump make its way up my neck as I break into tears.

Standing in this room, I remember all the conversations I had with my grandpa. He would lean against the door in his black workpants that saw a wash only once a week. He proudly wore his black boots that looked dirty and worn but stood strong and solid like the man I saw him as. In the summer months, he wore only a white tank top that would display stains of coffee by the afternoon and stains of supper by the evening. This barn heard so many conversations over the years. We talked about the weather, upcoming horse shows, or sometimes, we talked about our day.

I wipe away my tears and take the blanket with me as I exit the tack room. I glance over my shoulder one last time and take a deep breath. I close my eyes and welcome the aromas of horse, saddles, old brushes, and stinky blankets.

Slowly, I exit the side barn door. I trip on the same cylinder block I placed here many years ago to prevent the door from swinging open in the summer wind. I decide to sit and take a moment to gather myself. I lay the blanket on my lap and notice the initials that engrave the concrete beneath my feet: "JB & BB." I laugh; I remember using a small stick from the old pine tree that stood next to the barn to write those initials. I always thought it was neat that my name and my horse's name both had the letter "B" in them. Jill Bruce & Blondie Bruce stares back at me as I trace the initials with my index finger. Memories flood my brain like a gully washer on an unsuspecting day. As I look across the pasture, I see the old green shed.

I quickly walk across the pasture, still holding onto the blanket of memories. The sun has set, and the briskness of fall has begun to set in.

I pass the mound of dirt that sits directly beside the old mint-colored shed. That same mound of dirt once used to help "boost" me onto Blondie in the early years. My horse would stand patiently, as I would attempt to swing my nine-year-old body onto her backside over and over again. Each time I missed, I would fall into the pit of dirt. Each week, I improved. After

six months of practice, I finally accomplished the task of mounting Blondie without a bunch of dirt showing the means of my route.

I stroll into the shed, and the smell of manure still lingers in the broken wood panels that line the bottom of the shed. I stand here, flashing back to the numerous times I scooped poop out of here. I remember after being away on vacation, I would come back to a mound of manure so high it took me a full day to scoop it out.

I used the old metal wheelbarrow that my grandpa painted yellow to shovel the manure. That one-wheeled machine would make an annoying ticking noise as it rolled along. My grandpa used to sit my sister and me in that sardine can and make our way up to the post office. I remember hearing that “tick, tick, tick, tick,” as we crossed the old broken railroad tracks. I remember that over the years, it became a welcoming noise. It became a noise of happiness and fun memories with my grandpa.

I lean against the side of the shed and look out to the pasture. Weeds now stand where I used to exercise my horse daily. I rode my horse so much that we worked the grass right off the ground, making a perfect, engraved circle stamped into the earth.

I walk over to that path and bend down. I take my cold hand and touch the dirt that lies below the dead, brown grass. I bring it close to my face and rub my hands together to smell the riches of Mother Earth. I wipe my hands on my worn jeans and glance toward my grandparents’ house. I remember so many times they would come and bring green and white lawn chairs and cold Pepsis and watch me ride my horse.

I close my eyes and see them both as clear as day sitting under the shade of the tall cottonwood that stood strategically along the trampoline. An old, worn rope hangs from the extended arm of the tree, and we had swung from it many times. I see my grandma wearing the same black “house pants,” as she called them, with her floral button-up blouse. While one hand perches on one of the arms of her green and white woven lawn chair, the other hand embraces her Diet Pepsi. I see her hair, white as a cloud with speckles of silver that glisten in the sunshine. She sits with her feet crossed neatly across one another with her shoelaces neatly tucked in the tongue of her tennis shoe.

Next to her, I see my grandpa. He sits wearing those same black pants with black boots. I used to think he strived to resemble Johnny Cash, but his white tank top breaks that notion. His arms are dark from many summer days spent outside. With shoulders big and broad, he helps show the world a man who believes in doing the labor himself rather than hiring out. His hair

is neatly cut but thinning each year as he ages. His black cap sits on his torn knee with his scarred hand holding a warm Pepsi.


Beneath both of their feet, tucked away under their chairs, lies our dog Turbo. Her long narrow snout smells little bugs that cross her path. Her small but mighty paws stretch out as she takes quick and short breaths on a hot summer day.

I take that mental picture and open my eyes. I walk through the rusty gate and brush my hand on the broken latch—the same latch I opened and closed numerous times throughout my teenage years.

I walk over and place my hands on top of the old, weathered railroad tie we used as a hitching post. I push against the post to test its stability, remembering when I helped my grandpa put this in the ground so many years ago. I remember him handing me tall posthole diggers and telling me, “Dig down about two feet, and come and get me when you are done.”

I remember standing there for about five minutes trying to figure out how to even use the diggers. After about an hour, I had achieved only half of what he had asked. I recall my arms aching from pushing those diggers into the ground.

I turn and walk back toward the gate. My fingernails run along the rust, which falls off like crumbs on burnt toast. I don't mind the rust; to me it shows that the gate has served its purpose in life. It stands used and worn like this pasture.

I sit atop the gate and put my shivering hands in my coat pockets. I think of how this place has aged over the last 15 years. I understand that when my grandpa dies, this land will no longer allow me to sit and relish in my thoughts and memories. The house sits too old and worn to sell. All of the other children have already decided to sell their portion of the land. I will not get to sit on this old gate and soak up the sun's light and ponder all that has happened here; this place will one day belong to someone else. Yet, I have a memory that I will take with me forever. I close my eyes and see my amazing picture. I see my grandparents sitting quietly, watching me ride Blondie. I will forever hold onto that picture. 

GOODBYE

ALLISON NEUJAHN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

A childhood empties into flames. Plumes of smoke rise, a reluctant offering. I look around me. Emotion distorts their faces. White cloth-like paper dissolves in fisted hands. Even salt water can't quench the thirsty blaze. A selfish comment kills the eerie silence. I detach myself from what's about to happen, and I let myself be hypnotized by the famished flames. Memories pulsate through my veins, popping the stitches on my heart. It begins to bleed. Fiery words exchange; the fight escalates while the fire rages on. I can hear her voice in the wind that kisses my cheek and makes my hair flair. Blissful flashbacks waft in the air like a butterfly about to land, as Mother Nature slowly takes back what once belonged to her. This is how we say goodbye.

DAYDREAMER

ELIZABETH ANNE MOORE • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



MAKING A SNOWBALL

THOMAS JOYCE • BUSINESS/ACCOUNTING FOCUS

Howling like an unseen wolf, the wind makes its presence known, pawing at the suddenly insufficient layers of clothing while the snowflakes paradoxically caress like the lover who is no longer there. A single tear bravely tracks its way down the stubble-covered cheek and onto the brown leather jacket, congealing into just another snowflake. “Can the heart freeze like my stupid toes are starting to?” the lone figure asks himself, adding, “And can my inner dialogue get any more dramatic?” Still, drama aside, it’s been a rough, raw kind of day—rough enough that the frozen feet the aforementioned frozen toes are attached to walk themselves to the span of Adams Street, which becomes a bridge across Interstate 180. The whirl of cars passing underneath is like the whirl of steel hummingbirds, while the occasional truck rumbles and shakes the asphalt and chain link as the tread of giants might. “This,” he sighs, “is a freakin’ stupid idea.” He climbs down from the fence that some engineer thought was proof against drunks and jumpers. The last swig of Jack Daniels (Old #7 Tennessee Whiskey, Lem Motlow, proprietor) disappears as does the bottle (into some bushes). Then, as the traffic thins and the silence grows, he bends over, squats in the snow, and begins to make a snowball. At least he knows how to do that.

He remembers a day, decades past. He was running around with his brothers and sisters, ecstatic that school was cancelled—the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception having deemed the day too raw for even those hardened by rulers across knuckles. He’s bent over, squatting in the snow, muttering under his breath. “Why don’t I know how to make a stupid snowball?” he whines. The double layers of wool that wrap his feet like Brillo pads, disguised cleverly as socks, keep his feet as warm as Mom intended. He remembers getting dressed, each layer of clothes like the armor of some medieval knight, specially fitted for Arctic adventures. The green knit cap that Aunt Sissy made him for Christmas absorbed some of the sweat earned by chasing his brother Mike around the yard. And suddenly, there’s Dad, just home from work, tucking his service revolver into the garage and ready to join in.

“So, son, let’s make some snowballs,” Dad growls, not letting on that he knows his boy doesn’t have the slightest idea how to construct this simplest of snow creations.

His dad was a city cop. Rosedale was a cop neighborhood. The city had a rule then that a cop had to live within city limits, so the neighborhoods on the border of the city, as far from the dirty, nasty center as possible but still within the city, were cop neighborhoods. Every booth at the church bazaar was manned by a guy with a gun. School kids shared the bus ride to school with men who read newspapers and carried brown bag lunches and had guns strapped to their ankles. That was his dad. He was also the guy who umpired Little League and coached his kids' hockey team and went to church every day. His dad spent three hours a day, an hour and a half in the morning and an hour and a half in the evening, commuting by bus and train. That was his dad. He was also the guy who made a point of putting his gun and badge away when he got home to spend time with his five kids.

Even though there was always a pack of kids running around, siblings and cousins and neighbors and school pals, it was as if there was no one else there but father and son. Crunching snow echoed as Dad walked across the yard and picked up a handful of snow; he motioned for his son to do the same. Having recently graduated from colorful, hard-to-lose-in-the-snow mittens to gloves—fleece on the inside, suede on the outside, and leather on the palms—the boy held the loosely cohering snow in his cupped hands and followed along with Dad. He slowly and methodically applied pressure to the not-wet-enough snow, pushing and pressing, smoothing and molding, until Dad had a perfect ivory sphere, and the boy had a lumpy mass that resembled a rogue asteroid.

“Take your gloves off, son” he was instructed. And miming the apparent expert motions, he used the heat from his bare hands to slightly melt the crust of his little globe, working magic he never thought he could until he, too, had a perfect ivory sphere.

“Dad, I did it!” he yelled, a little embarrassed at the girlish squeak in his voice.

“It’s perfect,” Dad chuckled. “So now we need to make a hundred more, so we can ambush your Uncle Richie and your cousins!”

Memory skipped forward a generation to a day when he was the dad, and it was his kids running around the yard off from school—except that he didn’t feel like a dad, not like Dad was a dad. In a thousand ways, he felt he didn’t measure up. He didn’t have a job that defined him like his father’s did; he didn’t have the seemingly effortless ability to do the right thing, but today he was going to try.

“The perfect ivory sphere, that’s what Grandpa’s snowballs looked like,” he found himself reminiscing to his son.

“So, what do your snowballs look like, Dad?” smirked the son.

“Look, wise guy, you take those foo-foo mittens off and get some gloves on if you’re going to make snowballs.”

Not surprisingly, his son didn’t need as much instruction as he did at that age, and it certainly helped that the snow was wetter and easier to pack than that day when the nuns cancelled classes; it required little pressure to shape the crystalline whiteness into those ivory spheres. An hour later, before each of them lay a pyramid of ivory spheres, or maybe rogue asteroids, but each one hand-crafted and ready to leave off being admired and put into action. The basketball hoop stood at the end of the driveway, a likely target; the garage door was also inviting, but in the end, snowballs were meant to be thrown by their makers at other makers of snowballs. The first snowball hit him square in the face, the icy sting as stunning as the blow itself, exacerbated by the sudden foggiest that accompanied loss of glasses by the nearsighted. But revenge was cold, cold as a snowball. After an hour, all the son could say to him was, “Perfect ivory spheres, Dad, perfect ivory spheres,” laughing as he said it.

“Memory seems to be dragging me to snowy days,” he thinks, as the sights and sounds of those two days, one as the son, the student of snowball-ology, and another as the father, the teacher, faded away. “Today, now today was not so fun-filled,” floated to the top of his consciousness. He could see his children’s faces as they looked out the living room window—some angry, some sad, some defiant, all confused about what was happening. She stood in front of him, a cigarette between her fingers. She darted it like a wasp to her lips and back to her side, punctuating her sentences, doing everything but extinguishing it in his eye. While she stood almost a foot shorter and a hundred pounds lighter, she seemed to tower over him, dominating, crushing with words and more. She invoked her God; she quoted from her Holy Book, her voice sing-song like a televangelist, and she intoned the list of his sins. He was cast out, cast out from their marriage and from his children. The fog from the cold and the cigarette smoke mingled together, like a veil separating him from all that he loved. He slunk away, got in his car, and drove, watching his life dwindle in the rearview mirror.

“Geez, how maudlin do I have to be before somebody just stamps ‘cliché’ on my forehead?” he says, fully back in the present, unfolding his six-foot, 240-pound frame as he stands up, holding in his hand a perfect, ivory sphere. He leans through a ragged hole in the chain-link fence where he had climbed earlier and, in lieu of his previous plan, he lets the snowball make the leap, watching it fall, glinting in the streetlights, turning, turning, turning—that

one spot he hadn't quite smoothed out indicating each revolution. Time seems to slow as his creation grows closer to the surface, but finally it hits, flattening and expanding, shattering and dissolving, and it is no more. "Better you than me, snowball," he croaks, and he begins the long walk home.

Despite the rubber-soled, fleece-lined boots and two pairs of socks, there is a fuzzy numbness where his feet ought to be. Aunt Sissy's green knit cap has survived the decades and still keeps the heat in better than any other hat he's owned. Giving the frost giants a heartfelt middle finger, he walks across the street to the playground to the snow-drifted basketball court where he begins to make snowballs. The snow is drier than he likes it, but the man he is now finds himself more apt than the boy he was to apply sufficient pressure, smoothing out the grooves as he readies himself to hurl his creation at the backboard. He stops. Gingerly, handling the snowball like a Fabergé egg, he sets it down and begins another and another, depleting the snow down to the dead brown grass as his arsenal grows larger and larger. He moves over to the children's slide and swings, scooping up handfuls of snow as if mutually assured snowball destruction awaits anyone who defies him. "I can do this. I can do it. This is something that I can do," he chants. Sweat pours down his neck from under the knit cap and soaks his shirt. Even his feet begin to feel warm. The furnace of his tenacity burns fiercely.

He is about spent when with a thump, something hits him in the face, knocking off his glasses and causing a painful iciness to take up residence where his face should be. Before he can retrieve his glasses, he hears the words, "Perfect ivory sphere, Dad, perfect ivory sphere," and he knows that he still is "Dad." His fingers are clumsy due to the thick gloves, but he replaces his eyewear, the world shifting from smeared watercolor to digital photograph as he does so, and he sees the smirking face of his son. "You didn't think I believed all that crap, did you, Dad?" he asks as he hefts another snowball. "You're the best dad in the world—even if you're wearing that foo-foo hat." ❧

PROMENADE

NIGINA RAKHMATULLAEVA • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Every night when he comes home
He tunes his old and rusty gramophone
Uncorks a bottle of Chardonnay
Sways to the tunes of Chevalier
Sets his oak table on the porch
Fixes a portion of Quiche Lorraine
But there is something he forgets
That dusty, metal photo frame
Where his noble son and beauty daughter
Enjoy the shimmering la tour Eiffel
Nibbling on crisp chocolate croissants
On a midnight stroll by river Seine.

ORANGE DAHLIA

KELLY JOHNSON • COPY MACHINE OPERATOR



SISTER

MYSTERY HARWOOD • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE POETRY AWARD

Your little feet danced when i whisper-sang
silly songs to you from outside the crib-bars.
sister-giggles spreading, pooling in
the hallway's weak light.
no sign in our cloudless skies
of the crack set to spool from shared earth.

beyond the glow of letterman's glare
your blame fell heavy on my adolescent skin.
i punished your love of boy-bands.
you raged against my rumplestilzkin glee.
you fought in a shrieking high-kick frenzy that
spilled blood i couldn't get back.
i walked for hours after.

you glittered, your tongue a crusted jewel
of menace when you flung the shocking
silence to shatter on my hardwood floor
your last words spoken in venom and vitriol.
you said his fingers played piano on your spine
but no one listened then. and now it's late. you're
tired of telling tales of closets.

all my words boomerang back to whiz
around clocks and flit into memory.
i can't forget the stale smell
of hospital, of your crazy.
pierced in flesh you hang, martyred.
a pair of nice legs with nowhere to run.

LEARNING WITHOUT TEACHERS

JANE COX • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I first dropped out of school in 1995 when I was 13 years old and halfway through seventh grade at Irving Middle School in Lincoln, Nebraska. The first semester of that school year, I was a dedicated student, as I had been all through elementary school. I made Honor Roll for the first half of the year and was given a white ribbon with gold letters stating this accomplishment. At the beginning of the second semester at Irving, something happened to me, something I still haven't been able to identify, and I felt like I could not go to school any longer. So I didn't.

My first few absences from school were due to a pain in my abdomen that was nearly debilitating. When the pain didn't go away after several days, I was told that I would have to go back to school. I went back for one period, and after class, I caught the city bus home. The rest of the year went on like this. I wouldn't show up to school, and someone from the school would call my mother, who worked dayshift at a local factory called Square D where she built circuit breakers. She would come home, pick me up, and drop me off at Irving, and I would leave and go home as soon as I could get away. After a couple of weeks of truancy, the guidance counselor began showing up at my home and pounding on my door, sometimes with police officers in tow. I would be as quiet as I could until they went away. Sometimes, I would stand silently, looking out the peep-hole of the door to my apartment, watching Ms. Frederickson, my guidance counselor, whose blonde curly hair reminded me of a toy poodle. The police officers usually looked bored. I always expected them to force entry, but they never did.

After about a month of this, my mother stopped trying to get me back in school. Her reasoning for giving in to me was that she could not continue leaving work to make me go to school when I wouldn't go on my own. She did not want her job to be in jeopardy. The fact that she was getting phone calls every day from my school had already become a problem. But it seems to me that, more than just trying to protect her job, the reason she didn't try harder was that she didn't know how to be the adult in the situation. As far back as I can remember, my mother never asked questions about me or my life, even on a day-to-day basis, so it wasn't much of a surprise that she didn't seem affected when I began to act differently. She showed lack of concern when I was caught

shoplifting and when she discovered I was smoking nearly a pack of cigarettes every day. She didn't seem to notice that the bottle of cheap vodka she kept on top of the refrigerator would get lower even when she hadn't consumed any, which she rarely did. When the bottle was empty, she would replace it, and I would drink it. It was almost like an unspoken agreement. She would enable my behavior, and we wouldn't verbally acknowledge this fact. When I dyed my hair from blonde to dark auburn and started wearing a fake nose ring, she raved about how beautiful I looked. All of these actions preceded my truancy from school, and a better parent may have seen them as warning signs indicating a deeper problem. Looking back, I feel like it must have been obvious that I was experiencing the onset of depression that required intervention, but my mother was either oblivious or in denial.

I remember one event during my truancy from Irving when I went in for a CAT scan to diagnose my stomach pain. I was instructed to fast the night before the appointment, which was easy for me because the pain that I felt made eating difficult. In the morning, I had to drink a container of barium. It was supposed to taste like something palatable, maybe chocolate, but all it tasted like to me was chalk. As I lay on the padded, but still hard, surface of the CAT scan machine, someone administered an IV filled with a blue dye, so the technician could see the contents of my stomach and GI tract and pinpoint visible abnormalities. As I tried to relax, I focused my attention on a red light on the upper portion of the machine. It was small, like a laser pointer. I used it as my focal point to avoid thinking of other things, and I lay staring at it for about 20 minutes before noticing a sign posted above it that directed, "Do not look directly at red light." My adolescent mind went into overdrive with paranoid thoughts about what kind of damage I may have done to my brain or eyes. I barely noticed the rest of the procedure, so focused was I on the possible damage done by that silly red light.

I was shocked when my doctor called to tell my mother that there was nothing physically wrong with me. I knew what I was feeling was real, or I wouldn't have been wasting my time at home doing nothing. I was not enjoying my time at home. I did not like feeling useless. I didn't use my time away from school to do the things you might expect a kid skipping school to do. I stayed in a tent in the living room most of the day—lying on the floor, holding my stomach, and crying—and wondered what was wrong with me and why I was a defect who couldn't be normal. I rarely had the television on because I didn't want anyone to hear anything through the door if they came to get me. Likewise, the lights were off, and the blinds were shut.

We had moved into Country Club Apartments the year before so that we would live in the Irving School District, which my mother thought was a better place for me than Park. She had let me have the master bedroom with my own private bathroom in our two-bedroom apartment, but I used my room mostly for storage and showers. The rare times that I slept in my bedroom, I preferred to sleep on a full-size mattress that I had moved inside of my walk-in closet, which was also where I chain-smoked cigarettes in the evenings while listening to music or reading. But the majority of my time was spent in a tent that was permanently set up almost directly in front of the television. The tent-dwelling was inspired by a character named Claudia from the television drama *Party of Five*, which was one of my favorite shows at the time. I saw Claudia living in her tent, and my first thought was, "Now why didn't I think of that?"

My stomach problems disappeared around 3:00 in the afternoon and on weekends. When school was not in session, I felt physically well and tried to spend my evenings hanging out with my friends, who mostly went to other middle schools. But they were meeting new friends at their own schools, and I had moved out of the neighborhood we all grew up in together, so it usually wasn't possible to hang out unless it was a weekend. And even then, they were seeing me less often, and we were growing distant. So toward the end of the school year, when my mom randomly suggested a fresh start for the two of us in Chicago, it only took a few hours of looking through the travel guidebooks that she'd brought home about the city before I said, "Yes, Mom, let's do it!" We took a trip to Chicago and found an apartment on our first day looking. We waited for my school year to officially end, and the day after I failed seventh grade, we left Lincoln in a Ryder truck. My stomach ailment was gone and never returned.

The city was my first love, and my summer there brought me back to life. We lived in a neighborhood called Lakeview. Lakeview was north of downtown and still very urban. Our one-bedroom apartment was on Melrose Street, near the intersection of a main street called Broadway. Our neighborhood was ultra-trendy, clean, and generally safe. There were two Baskin Robbins within a block of us, and we lived right around the corner from Unabridged Bookstore, where I was lucky enough to meet Anne Rice at a book signing, where she autographed my copy of *Memnoch the Devil*. Only a few blocks east of our apartment was Belmont Harbor on Lake Michigan. The short walk to the lake was beautiful, filled with brownstone buildings and shade trees.

The summer of 1995 passed quickly, and in August, I attended my first day at Nettlehorst School to repeat the seventh grade. I immediately felt the school

was not going to work out for me. The teachers seemed cold, and the kids were intimidating. When I was in the girls' bathroom between classes, the girls bragged about which gangs they "rolled with." I was unable to relate to them, and they thought I was a hick. I went home that first day with no intention of going back to school. To my knowledge, the school never noticed my absence. There were no phone calls, guidance counselors, or police officers this time, and my mother didn't seem surprised that I went only one day.

A few weeks after I quit Nettlehorst, I was sexually assaulted by an 18-year-old homeless guy that I met at the lake, drank Boone's Farm with, and naively allowed to walk me home and come up to my apartment. I never told my mother about this, but I felt like I was broken. Once, my mother and I were in line at KFC, and I saw him. I froze and kept my head down, hoping he wouldn't see me.

Fall was bleak and boring. Chicago no longer felt like an awesome summer vacation. We were broke most of the time because my mom's factory job didn't pay much, and the cost of living in Chicago was outrageous for us. I was attending Barbizon School of Modeling, which had tuition of over \$250 due every two weeks. My mom did a good job of hiding her financial trouble from me, so for a while, I had no idea our money situation was so dire. On Halloween, I found an eviction notice on the door to our apartment, and then my mom came home and told me she had been laid off from her job. I was dumbfounded to find that she had been paying my modeling school tuition and buying me the clothes and supplies I needed instead of paying rent.

We were able to stay at the Melrose Street apartment until my mom found a new job and a new place. Shortly after Christmas, we moved to an apartment in an area called Logan Square, which was further west. Our new home was a duplex. We had the entire ground floor, and the landlord and his family lived above us. I spent most of my time in the apartment because I didn't feel comfortable in the new neighborhood. My mother was working at another factory and was in a relationship with a podiatrist that she met from a telephone dating service. Both the job and the boyfriend were in the suburbs, so she deduced that it would make sense for her to stay with him most nights and leave me alone in the city. She showed up periodically to make sure I had money for groceries, and she made sure that the bills were paid. My bedroom window faced another building, and people would gather in the space between the buildings and get drunk and loud, sometimes even fighting. They would be there most of the night, almost every night, so I slept in the living room on the couch, and always kept a knife either under my cushion or in my hand.

In January, I graduated from Barbizon with my modeling school diploma and turned 14 a few days after. Now that Barbizon was over, I had no purpose whatsoever. I felt abandoned. I had various plumbing problems in the apartment, and the landlord didn't do much to try to fix them. The kitchen pipes were frozen, so the landlord put a space heater between the walls, which could have easily set the whole place on fire.

In the spring, the toilet broke and became nonfunctional, and the bathroom flooded with sewage. The toilet didn't have water in it, so there was no way to flush it. I had no adult around, and the slumlord gave me a bad vibe, so I didn't want to deal with him; I just left things the way they were. I often used the public bathroom at the Wendy's a few blocks away. Due to the state of my bathroom, I didn't shower often, either, and my hygiene went to hell. I have since seen episodes of the television show *Hoarders* where the bathrooms remind me of how I once lived.

In May, I confronted my mom about never being around. She acted cold and unconcerned. I cried and told her I needed her.

She said, "You're the one that thinks you're so grown up, quitting school! I gave you everything I had, and you still want more."

"Mom, I can't do this anymore. I need you here sometimes. Do you see how I'm living? How could you do this to me?" I was reaching out to her, and I suddenly felt five years old. I had never wanted, or needed, a parent so much.

She responded, "You ungrateful little bitch!" For the first time in my life, she slapped me across the face. I cried, and she left.


I wrote my older brother Julian a letter, telling him everything that had gone on in the past year. Julian was eleven years older than I was and had a big hand in helping raise me until I was eleven or twelve, and he had moved out for good. Soon after I mailed the letter, I received a letter in response and a one-way plane ticket back to Lincoln. Julian's letter instructed me to stay as far from Mom as I could while I remained in the city. That wasn't hard since she was never around. Julian also suggested I shouldn't tell Mom I was leaving until the day before I left, so my situation was less likely to get worse. I had only a week to keep this secret, but I couldn't. Instead, the next time I saw Mom, I blurted out, "Julian sent me a plane ticket, and I'm leaving in a week and never coming back." She didn't act sad or regretful but rather behaved as if I had betrayed her, and she was the victim in the situation.

She spent a couple of nights at home with me and then went back to her boyfriend Mark's house. The day before I was leaving, I assumed she would be spending the night with me and taking the El to O'Hare with me. But even

after pleading with her, I spent my last night in Chicago alone with a knife beside me for protection. She met me in the airport terminal in the morning and was so emotional. Maybe that was the moment she realized what she was losing. She tried to give me a hug right before I boarded, and I refused. She told me she loved me, and I said nothing. I turned my back to her and ignored her until I was able to board my flight and fly home.

I didn't stay with Julian long. I was sent to Dickinson, North Dakota, to live with my father, stepmother, Jen, and my younger half-siblings, Bruce and Kylie. My dad explained my situation to the principal of the high school, and I was allowed to begin the next school year in the ninth grade, the grade I would have been in originally. The condition was that I had to get C's and above in all of my classes for the first quarter. If I didn't, I would be sent back to the eighth grade. But no matter what happened, I would not have to attempt seventh grade for a third time. I managed to get mostly A's and B's, and one C, and officially remained a freshman. Socialization was a challenge, but I did well academically and had nearly perfect attendance, aside from a two-week stay in the psychiatric ward for depression during the end of my freshman year. I dropped out of high school immediately following my sophomore year, and my family moved to Lincoln again. I immediately got my GED through Southeast Community College and began attending SCC as an undeclared student shortly before I turned 17. But then life happened, and I decided I was too young for college.

I did not maintain much contact with my mother during the years I lived with my father. I received a letter from her shortly after I moved telling me that the week after I left, there was a drive-by shooting on our street, and a teenage girl a block away from the apartment I'd lived in had been hit with a bullet through her apartment window. I wondered why she even told me, or if she realized how easily it could have been me that was shot, lying on the couch in front of the living room window with a knife under my couch cushion and wondering if my mother was coming home.

My adolescence was by no means the most difficult period of my life, but I believe it shaped me into a different person than I would have been if I had come from a loving, nurturing, and safe environment. Ultimately, I harbor no regrets and know that these experiences gave me the strength and perspective to get through other harsh obstacles I would face in adulthood. Now, at age 30, I am attending SCC again and have made Dean's List both quarters since beginning the Academic Transfer program. I am grateful for a chance for a real education, an opportunity I will never again take for granted. 

CHRISTMAS 1973

TERESA BISSEGGER • CONTINUING EDUCATION

You never shopped at all—
Not one gift before
For wife, children, or me.
You fell ill, mostly in the head,
The hospital now your home.
But you were coming home—just for the day.
Billfold in tow, to the gift shop you went.
Something for all, you said,
As you purchased trinkets for us grandkids.
Twelve years old at the time,
I didn't understand
The childish mittens I unwrapped.
The pretty plastic mirror, though—
I used it for years and years,
Even when the handle broke.
Those red mittens
Packed in a box
Still touch my heart.
The blue vinyl-covered mirror,
Long ago lost,
Lives as a memory of you.

UNTITLED DRAPE MOLD

SHELBY URKOSKI • UNDECLARED



BESIDE HER BED

MARY ANN PARTIN • CRIMINAL JUSTICE/ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

Beside her bed, I sit and listen.

On occasion I try again, but I know I won't succeed.

I really was a good girl; she insists otherwise.

I never drank, did drugs, or slept around

As others did. I tried my best to survive.

I fought to not give in and take those pills

Or step in to the bus, or run the car off the hill

On those sharp turns.

Took College Prep in school,

French, Latin, Algebra—

All the things to prepare me for college after high school,

But she knows I never wanted that; I was too in love with boys.

So I married young; what else was I to do?

I had to get away.

As I grew older, the house grew darker,

And I would lose my soul if I stayed there.

Beside her bed, I sit and listen.

He was such a saint, so brilliant, kind, and good.

God never made a better man.

And I remember weekends ruined 'cause he got drunk and

Stalled the engine of the boat he spent all day working on,

Drinking beer and getting mad.

But we should hold our tongues and not upset that

Very perfect man.

Beside her bed, I try to think of other things

And not the nights when she was working,

And I was left, with him where she should be,

And the dark hours when he would think me sleeping,

But I was too afraid to go to sleep

And fantasized escape and being rescued

By a knight in shining armor, but there was me...only me.
I sit and listen, knowing that I must forget,
 but 60 years, and I cannot forget.
As he was dying, and I was there because I lived the closest,
 Beside his chair I sat
 And listened to the angry, hateful words, the ugly things,
 And moments later, the endearments,
 Pledges of unending love, devotion so repentant both,
And I sat.
My mind as blank as possible,
For to remember would have killed us all.

Beside her bed, I hold my tongue.
 It isn't in my nature to do harm,
 To strike, to watch the blood, to leave the scars,
 To devastate, destroy, when I know all too well
 It wouldn't matter anyway.
She has a knack with history,
 And perhaps it's best.
 I only wish I could forget what others can't remember.

Beside her bed I sit
 And wonder when my mind will let things go
 So I can start to live a different life,
 One where someone else
Sits beside the bed,
And I cannot remember.

THE LANCASTER COUNTY REDEMPTION

ERIC DOWNING • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

My first cell mate was a meth dealer by the name of Jason. Jason was an all right guy. He looked to be in his early twenties and was friendly enough. Ending up in this cell had soured my mood, to say the least, but this smiling drug dealer was at least able to make me feel a little better about a bad situation and feel as “at home” as possible. Jason was facing some serious time. He was federally indicted for pushing large quantities of methamphetamine on small town Lincoln, Nebraska.

“You’ll be all right, man.” Jason looked up at me from his yellow legal pad and grinned. “You look like you just got a death sentence! Thought you said you’d only be here a week or so?” I forced a weak smile and leaned back against the cold stone wall that my bed was pushed up against.

“How long have you been here for?” I asked.

“Oh, almost three months now. Lookin’ at ten, fifteen years, though.”

“Jesus, man.”

“I know, right. I’d hate to think I’m just wasting time writing these letters.” He looked down at the letter in front of him and began to stare through it for a second then shook his head and looked up to see if I had noticed. “No way she’d wait ten years for me. I suppose I wouldn’t expect her to.” He took a medium-sized manila envelope out from under his mat and pulled out a stack of folded letters and a couple of pictures. “She’s a great girl, man,” he said, handing her smiling picture over to me, “and I’m afraid I’m gonna lose her.”

Jason told me a lot of stories while I was bunked with him, most of them about doing or selling meth. On one occasion, shortly before being arrested, Jason and some buddies found out they were being followed by agents of some sort—I’m guessing D.E.A., or at least local law. So, a few days later he had to make a big drug pickup but was understandably worried about being caught. He wasn’t worried enough, apparently, because he decided to enlist the help of four other friends, so he could leave the pickup location in five separate cars with only one car holding the dope—just like in the movies. Well, it didn’t work out like in the movies. All the stories ended the same—Jason, sitting in prison, telling stories.

After about a week or so had passed, a correctional officer appeared at the thin rectangular window of our cell door. The door buzzed open, and Jason sat up.

“How can I help ya, sir?” he asked the guard, a tad too cheerily.

“Got some paperwork for ya. Looks like you’re getting transferred.” He handed a small stack of papers to Jason and walked out of the cell.

“Thank God. I’m finally getting outta this hell hole.” Apparently getting his case together was taking longer than planned, so Jason had to be transferred elsewhere, which was just fine with him. You could pay for a TV in your cell there. He had also heard something about snack machines. You learn to appreciate the little things. “Looks like I’m leaving first thing tomorrow morning,” he said quietly, his eyes still moving quickly over the pages. After a few more moments, he looked up at me. “Well, Eric, my stay here has finally come to an end!” Jason left early the next morning as planned. He shook my hand with a smile and wished me luck. As I watched him walking away towards the exit, I couldn’t help but feel sorry for the guy. I couldn’t help but think that soon I would be at home in my own bed, wearing my own clothes, free to move about the world. But his long stay was just beginning.

It’s been about seven years now since I bunked with Jason. Turns out Jason’s girlfriend and I knew a lot of the same people, so I ended up running into her later at a party. I found out Jason had eventually been sentenced to 15 years in federal prison. Talk about a short, awkward conversation.

“Oh, my God, that’s terrible.”

“I know!” She made a sad face and nodded her head up and down, keg cup in hand. I could tell she was already getting tired of talking about Jason.

So now I had the cell to myself. Time to myself. . . . “How the hell did I end up here?” I mumbled into the glass while staring blankly out at the empty common area. Then I had to laugh at myself. I suppose it was simple, really. Ignoring the laws I deemed not important enough to worry about had gotten me here. I led a busy lifestyle filled with excessive drinking and being hung over and such and could waste no time on court dates or paying fines.

Well, as you already know, it eventually caught up with me. Late one night I was leaving a party with a good friend of mine named Dom on a mission to get some Amigos. Unfortunately, we never completed that mission—or, at least I didn’t. Dom may have eaten soft tacos that night, but I got carted off to jail for outstanding bench warrants for unpaid fines.

“Damn it! I’m going to jail.” My heart began to speed up a little as I gripped the wheel and slowly pulled to the side of the road. Blue lights, then red, filled the cabin of my blue Ford Escort wagon. “Damn it.”

Dom paused briefly just before lighting his cigarette. “What—why? What do you mean?” He sparked his lighter and pulled hard.

"I'm going to jail," I said again, my wide eyes glued to my rearview. "I'm almost positive I've got a warrant for failure to appear."

"Shit. Well you know, I'm gonna get you out, bud. No worries." This all sounded great at the time. But it turned out I owed quite a bit more money than I thought, and they wanted it all before I was going anywhere. Unfortunately for me, none of my twentyish-year-old slacker friends had \$2,100 to spare, so there I sat.

A loud buzzing woke me—again. God, I hated that buzzing. When the guards remotely opened our cell doors, it would make that terrible sound for maybe five seconds, during which time you could open your door. Every morning before the sun rose, all the cells buzzed at once, and everyone did the zombie shuffle through the breakfast line. That morning, the buzzing sounded as always, but before I could get up to open the door, it clicked open, and in walked a large Indian man with long black hair carrying a pillowcase full of laundry.

My second cellmate's name was Lalo. He was quiet at first but friendly. He sat his pillowcase/bag on his mat and took a quick look around the cell. After mumbling a couple profanities under his breath, he turned toward me and held out his hand. "Hey, man. Lalo."

"Eric." I shook his hand. "Good to meet you." Damn it. I have to stop being so polite in here.

It didn't take long for me to find out what Lalo was in for; chatting was a great way to pass the time. To make a short story even shorter, Lalo killed a cat. He didn't just kill the cat, though, he brutalized the cat with multiple shots from a crossbow and a crack to the neck. According to my kind, large Indian friend, the cat got into his three-week-old child's crib and scratched the infant's face.

"Little cat was jealous, I guess. For all I know, he may lose his eye!" Lalo lay on his back with his hands crossed behind his head and glared at the ceiling. "My son could be blind in one eye!" He tilted his head back to make sure I was listening. "You know what I mean? What am I s'posed to do?" He fixed his gaze back onto the ceiling. "So I threw that son of a bitch out back and broke its neck. Then I shot it with my crossbow... a few times. Damn cat, anyways, right?"

So of course, I agreed with him. What else can you do but agree with a guy in that situation?

"Oh, I hear ya, man. I'd have done the same." I shot a quick sideways glance Lalo's way. Could he tell I was slightly disturbed by what he was saying? Nope, didn't look that way. He just lay on his mat, glaring at the ceiling.

Later that day, during a stimulating game of spades for pushups, I got some of the best news I can remember getting. An old friend of mine named Gary

stopped by my house and gave the money for my fines to my roommates. I would be out the next day.

When I look back on my relatively short stay at Lancaster County Correctional, the first thing I usually think of is the tiny cell I stayed in. I can still clearly picture the stainless steel toilet/sink combo in the corner, the plastic cot on the floor, and the metal one attached to the wall. I can see the smiling faces of my fellow inmates feigning interest in me and my “plight” in hopes of scoring a bag of Doritos or a Snickers bar. And for the life of me, I can’t get the image of Lalo’s unfortunate cat out of my head. But mostly, when I look back, I see Jason walking away from our cell towards his new life at whatever prison he was headed to. And I can’t help but think how much I prefer the view from where I am now. 🐍

SNAKES

JANET ZANKER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
 RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP POETRY AWARD

A match
 hisses to life,
 its fire flares
 when touching
 the coal black
 cylinder, acrid
 sulfur swirls
 the air.
 The snake
 sizzles and slithers,
 its birth and death
 only seconds
 apart, before
 wind scatters
 ashes leaving
 Dalmation-like
 spots on charred
 cement—the
 only evidence
 of its existence.

MY STRUGGLES

CINDY WILSON • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

My personal experience of reading and writing is a rough draft; I've struggled with both. I sit here and wonder if I can write three pages on these subjects! I found as a child, and then as an adult, that I didn't understand the basic foundation of these two important parts of a decent education. Choosing simple words that go into a sentence confuse me. Overcoming the important obstacles of reading and writing has haunted me for my entire life, but moving on in my life has helped me build confidence in this area.

Reading at home wasn't an important daily activity for my brothers, sisters, and me. I can remember a book called *See Spot Run* and another called *Dick and Jane*. All I can recall about these books is a dog with a red collar and the words being easy; maybe it was the visual color of red that stands out in my mind. Sitting through elementary school wasn't the hard part—it was the work. I couldn't grasp the important rules of sounding out a new word or the definition of a word, and those are the foundations for a life of reading successfully.

I was a freshman in high school when I fell in love with my first two books, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Outsiders*. These books were about trusting friends, loving others, and being different as a good thing. They kept my attention, and that made them an easy read for me. I don't recall ever completing a book before these two.

I can remember sitting in social studies class in high school and being asked, "Who is the President of the United States of America?" I was embarrassed because I didn't know the answer, and I still feel that sting as an adult. We did have a newspaper delivered every day at home, and I should have known that information. As a teenager, I did not have the support at home to get good grades in school, and when I didn't do the reading, I wouldn't have any consequences. Reading out loud made me very nervous and agitated. We had to read out loud in my high school English class, and looking back it still makes me want to vomit. I'm still struggling with how to comprehend the important rules others learned about reading during high school. There's a sad pattern of many children being overlooked throughout the school system; they have no voice. I need to find balance as an adult to forgive the struggles I had learning as a child. I now love reading when I have

free time; I enjoy reading the daily newspaper, a book about the Presidents of the United States, and learning how to pronounce a new word.

Writing for me is foreign and not very forgiving. It has never been one of my strongest subjects; I think I was skipped once again in this department. As strange as it sounds, it's hard for me to believe that someone would want to read what I've written.

I do remember that I could write and spell my full name before going to kindergarten. Having the last name Kollekowski, with its eleven letters, and learning to spell it was a big accomplishment. I don't have many memories of writing as a child, but I do remember being in the first grade twice and having the same teacher again in second grade. I really think all my troubles started there. I also remember having to practice writing letters on a paper, then taking my pencil and making scribble lines all over it. Sometimes, I feel like I am still stuck in those formative years of elementary school; it was awful, and I know where it all began.

My older sister would write my papers for me in high school; I didn't have any clue how to write a paper. I relied on others for getting me through those important times in high school. It was very wrong to have cheated, but at the time, I just wanted to be done. I hide when I write anything, so you'll never see me write openly in front of people. It's hard for me to be out of my comfort zone.

I find that writing a personal note or a letter is difficult for me. I want it to flow and make sense to the reader right away. It always takes many do-overs when I write anything. I think it's my spelling that throws me off. I remember my dad asking me if I would write a note to his sister because he had only a third grade education. Having a parent who struggled with writing was difficult, and now I understand how hard it was for him. I was a shy child and with eight siblings, I got lost in the system and did not know the valuable tools of reading and writing. Now I'm here in a writing class trying my hardest to be positive about reading and writing, but it's hard when I have only a few good memories about these subjects. I know this has kept me back from doing so many things in my life. This is a very personal subject for me. I am ashamed of not knowing something so important and having done nothing about it. I wish I could sit in my first grade class all over again and listen to the teacher read books and be able to retain all the information.

When my children started elementary school, I found it hard to write a note to their teachers. I thought if I wrote something dumb, it would reflect upon my children. Looking through my children's baby books is hard for me,

as well; I misspelled words, and that was 20 years ago. Even now, I still think I'm going to be judged by people.

As I get older, I find it has become important for me to become a better reader and writer. As an adult, it saddens me to watch children having the skills that I'm just grasping. Reading and writing makes getting an education easier, and education makes a person more likely to succeed. I am always going to struggle with my reading and writing, but I have to keep a positive attitude and strive for my personal achievements.

My three pages of history show how I've struggled and overcome some of my difficulties learning to read and write. Writing this essay shows that my education was lacking, and I struggled a lot. I've had many disappointments and years of drowning. I've learned that I can have success when I meet loving angels on Earth—friends who teach me about confidence and about never giving up. Also, the kind words of a teacher and a little patience can turn one into a good reader and writer. My draft is complete, and this paper has opened my eyes to see that little girl sitting in a pink and yellow dress who grew up to read and write. 🌸

CHILI PEPPERS

MICHELA IWANSKI • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PRIZE ARTWORK AWARD



RESISTANCE

JESSE BYRD • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

The poster claims wanted, dead or alive.
A photo displays my image as
I look upon the town.
The consuming fire I set blackens the
houses and fields. The fleshless eagles fly
overhead. Evil controls everything in this
realm. I have used fire, brimstone, and
plagues to destroy twelve towns.
My defiance with the leader of the world
is clear. The Four Horsemen are my
calling cards as the apocalypse rages on.

Everyone claims me as an enemy of the
state, but I know the truth. Skeletal horses
carry War, Famine, Pestilence, and Death to
the withering bodies of the followers to the
King of Lies. Wormwood falls from the sky
to poison the world water supply. Every
man carries a mark that shows his
allegiance to the king of the Earth.

Not me. I will never bow my
knee to a Liar, a Murderer, and a Thief. I
carry out my resistance in the shadows of
the night. Stars shine as the moon's rays
show me my path that I must follow.

Black and red scales of a dragon hidden by
the flesh of a man has taken control of the
kingdom. Submission is what he wants;
control is his need, domination all he knows.
I will stab my blood-covered blade into the
back of the dragon, I will run him through
until the hilt of my dagger hits his spine, and
he slides off with no resistance. The meat-bag
that slumps at my feet shows that I reign
victorious over the destroyer of worlds.
Blood-filled seas and lifeless lands are all
that I will inherit.

AN INTERVIEW WITH A POET

INTERVIEW WITH NEAL KIRCHNER • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR
QUESTIONS WRITTEN BY HILARY PLYBON • VISUAL PUBLICATIONS

Why poetry?

I can't say I know where it comes from, exactly, but the artistic urge is a deep one. I can recall my earliest “published” work—published by my nailing it to the roof of my father's garden shed—coming from a desire to express myself but feeling as though I lacked the voice to do so convincingly. I put on the old mask of meter and rhyme and wrote a very old-fashioned love poem on a piece of cardboard. I published it to the sky. Unfortunately, my brother saw me up there on the roof and climbed up to see what I was doing. He laughed his head off at my attempt at verse. (To be fair, it was pretty bad if I'm judging from my now-adult perspective.) But what stuck with me was not his laughter. What stuck with me was the way I felt at having accomplished this poem. In later years, through study and through trial and error, I have hopefully managed better verse than what found its way to that rooftop. Still, there is simply no feeling in the world quite like giving in to the urge to create and feeling that you've created something worthy of publishing to the sky.

How is writing meaningful for you?

By now it is an old chestnut to say that writing is about discovery—but it's true! At least, artistic writing is. I am leaving out the kind of writing that is done mainly to communicate—business letters, for example. In writing to communicate, we have to assume that we already know something, and now we just need to find the right words to express that knowledge, to transmit it to someone else.

The kind of writing act that is most meaningful to me is the writing act that takes me someplace I did not know I could or would go, and of course, when I get there, I find that I was “home” all along.

Do you do any other forms of writing?

I've published some book reviews—mainly poetry reviews, but at least one review of a historical work. I dabble—or have dabbled in—fiction, essays, plays, scriptwriting (for movies and TV), memoir, even polemic. I've done some songwriting, mostly humorous stuff. I once wrote a very funny “fan letter” to

Taco John's (corporate). They sent me back a nice note and a coupon for a free taco! Oh, and one fan letter was published in the letters column of Marvel comic *The Uncanny X-Men*. I will try just about anything.

Where do you look for inspiration?

Great writers of the past. The ones whose work I've been fortunate enough to encounter are a continual source of inspiration.

Science is a source of inspiration.

Careful observation of the world around me is a source of inspiration. There is poetry in the legs of a cricket, or the rough surface of a garden brick, or the hush of tall weeds.

What impact do you hope to have on your readers?

I hope only to be interesting enough on the page to propel anyone who reads me past the first line and right down through the last one. To paraphrase Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., as a writer, my job is to get complete strangers to spend time with just my words, and when those strangers are done reading my writing, let them come away feeling as though they have not wasted their time.

What advice would you give to aspiring poets?

First, never give advice to people about how to write their poetry. At least not for free. You ought to at least get a free taco out of the deal.

I mean, I'll always try to be polite, but in my experience, most people who ask advice about how to write their poetry are actually not as interested in improving their work as you might think. For me, a question that must be answered before I'll consent to talking about craft is, "Do you read any poetry, and what poetry would that be?" As a potential teacher, I am always suspicious of people who come to me with journals full of their poems, but who do not read any other poet but themselves.

On the other hand, if the person does read contemporary poetry—and can even name one or two contemporary poets, possibly even working in the mention of a poem or two—then I'm more than willing to have an earnest conversation on the topic.

So the advice would begin: read work being published now by contemporary poets of a literary type. Read lots of it.


In your work, try to look out with the eyes of a child—that is to say, eyes capable of amazement and wonder—at the world. But do not delve into childish language.

Learn to love language for its sound at least as much as, if not more than, for its meaning.

Avoid writing about great big ideas. Focus on small things, at least at first. Poet Richard Hugo says if you have a big mind, that will show itself anyway—in the details. Great big ideas have a way of overwhelming the poem and forcing and backing it into ever-receding corners of abstraction.

Avoid archaic expressions, clichéd language, and stale rhymes. Also, avoid old, outmoded forms unless you are already poet enough to somehow breathe new life into them. The forms are great as exercises for budding poets, but until you are far enough into your writing life that you no longer ask others for advice on how to write your poems, they're probably best left as that.

Do not be afraid to write badly just because, for example, your brother might laugh at you. Your brother is less concerned about poetry than you are, and he just enjoys the redness that rises in your cheeks when he knows he has gotten to you. Do show him the letter that you had published in the pages of *X-Men*.

If your brother, years later, wants to come to one or more of your poetry readings, be sure to tell him, "Absolutely. Please, come." Welcome him with open arms. 

FIRST STAR

AFTER RILKE AND A SONOGRAM

BY B. NEAL KIRCHNER

Strange little torso
 Shining white and light grays
 Like a minnow's side
 Between the belly's bulged walls—
 Such is your perfection, found
 In this sound that sees,
 Impossibly alive, and now
 A face with ripening eyes, your face
 Bursts forth like fishes
 Breaking waves.
 This is the end of wandering:
 To stumble on that happiness in form
 The world has always held
 And find our lives
 Now pleasurable bound
 To home. This face,
 This sleek-ribbed body,
 Our only saintly deed wrapped up
 In mystery. You will change our lives,
 Our act, the bearing of our hearts.

FRIENDSHIP

RACHEL GOULD • GRAPHIC DESIGN



MONKEY, DUST, AND DIRGES

MYSTERY HARWOOD, *ACADEMIC TRANSFER*
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE POETRY AWARD

I followed you. i thought
the gravel in my mouth would make
a bunker, clear me from your fallout.
the quarry! the quarry!
this is a place of fiction, i said.
this is a place that doesn't exist.

but you went there; you found bones
buried in the pits.
you sorted femurs from ulnas;
you sorted sockets from sponges.
the ivory trash held you, smelted you in zeal.
i was surprised you never noticed
you had two femurs of your own.

you were dancing in a jawbone.
i saw an old monkey in your shoe.
it came from a pinky bone, you said. we watched
its tongue, a snake that flickered over sand.

the monkey knew my name and followed me
even when you were gone and clapped
its cymbals in my ears, when i tried to forget
the rawness of the quarry dust
filling my nose and esophagus.

you have been gone for months.
monkey and i have been counting.
little stepping stones,
rocks that open with chocolate.
one for each calendar day.

ONE MAN'S TRASH

MADELYNE PENKAVA • HUMAN SERVICES
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE ARTWORK AWARD



THE SOUND OF SILENCE

CAITLYNN M. CHRISTENSEN • DUAL CREDIT

August 16th, 1984

My name is Anna Hart. I was born on a crisp autumn October day in the year 1968. Everything about that day must have seemed perfectly normal: leaves were jeweled with vibrant hues of red, orange, and yellow; the air was scented with nature's choice potpourri; and the sun was shining like iridescent liquid gold. Everything about that day was normal except for me. I was born deaf. I live in a world of complete and absolute silence. Enslaved to my deaf ears, I am engulfed by the suffocating sound of nothing. Oh how I long to hear one sound! To free myself from the chains that so readily enslave my ears, I need to break free. Therefore, I commence this journal in the reverie that someone will hear my story. Listen, for the world I live in is too quiet.

First Day at School, August 22nd, 1984

My parents urged me to attend the Georgia School for the Deaf in Cave Spring, Georgia. They thought it would be beneficial that I attend a school readily capable of providing me with an education calibrated to my specific needs. However, I do not wish to be treated as a special education student. All I want is to be normal. So against my parents' urging, I enrolled in a public high school. I document this day as the most horrid day in the chronicles of my life.

Being in high school, I thought I might acquire my first friend or possibly find a handsome young beau to accompany me to a school dance. However, these anticipations were proven erroneous when it came to my experiences today. Arriving at school promptly this morning, I made my way to the administration office. Apparently, my parents had phoned the school prior to my arrival and made special arrangements for a private tutor. The tutor identified me, hustled me out of the office, and coerced me out the door to a private building labeled Special Education. Being in the solitude of the small private building was tortuous. I yearned to study English, science, and arithmetic with the rest of my peers. When I returned to the "normal" school building at the end of the day, there was an ominous air about the students. Something was amiss. It was as if I had been labeled "Special Education—Do Not Interact." Contrary to what others believed, I could "hear" the scoffs and jeers of my classmates. Their sneers did not have to be audible for me to hear them. A person's supercilious glare and upturned nose speaks volumes louder than any word can. I knew that they knew I was different.

September 2nd, 1984

It seems that because I am deaf, I am an inferior being. Not one student will even glance in my direction. Why would one deign to such a low position? I am ostracized because of the way I am. My only escape can be found through the electrifying pulse of music. Though people may find it unorthodox for a deaf person to play music, I can still play. I am able to sense the slight vibrations through the ivories of the piano, which help me distinguish the correct notes. When I play the piano, I feel as if I am connected to the music. My reasoning for playing is that if Beethoven composed deaf, I can play deaf.

October 23rd, 1984

One of my classmates talked to me today! His name is Matthew Thompson. Apparently, he is familiar with sign language because his mother is also deaf. We talked for a considerable amount of time, but not in view of other students. We have to talk secretly because he does not want anyone to discover that he is talking with me. Although it may seem callous of him to only communicate with me in this manner, I can understand. If anyone uncovered our secret friendship, he would be an outcast, just like me. No matter the circumstance, I am so grateful to have a friend my age. In fact, I do not recall ever having a friend the same age as me. Come to think of it, all of my friends have been teachers. No one my age knows how to sign, but Matthew does. We talked about numerous subjects together throughout our conversation. Matthew shared his future plans with me. He aspires to be a Navy Seal in the armed services. My face must have turned stark white when he divulged this exclamation because he asked if I was feeling well. Of course I was not ill; however, I do not want to lose my only friend after just meeting him. Matthew proceeded to inquire about my plans for the future. I told him I wanted to be a pianist. Like most people, he was flabbergasted that I could even play music. Our conversation ended abruptly after that because there were people in sight. However, my brain continued to wander on the thought of becoming a pianist. If only I could hear what I was playing; maybe then I would have the skill to become a real pianist.

November 11, 1984

School is still absolutely horrendous. Nevertheless, my day is always uplifted by the thought of Matthew. Whenever I feel as if I am trudging through the depths of complete and utter solitude, I reflect upon our friendship. Knowing that even one person cares about my personhood is sufficient to help me survive the day. When the final bell rings, I escape from the Special Education classroom to meet him in the library. The library is our fortress from the disapproval of classmates. Every day at 3:45, we meet to talk. We talk about our

dreams, aspirations, and the unknown future. The greatest part about talking with Matthew is that he motivates me. He has dreams that far surpass the expectations anyone has set for him. Matthew inspires me to dream big and to never let someone tell me what I can and cannot do.

December 6th, 1984

Matthew and I were talking in the library again today. All of a sudden, he started talking about the upcoming Winter Ball. The question that he signed was highly unexpected. Matthew asked me to accompany him to the Winter Ball! Of course I said yes, but I am extremely nervous. I have never been to a dance before, let alone with a handsome young man! I am frightened. So many questions are racing through my mind. I suppose I will see where this leads and trust my only friend.

The Winter Ball, December 16th, 1984

Tonight is the Winter Ball. I am wearing my mother's gown—a sparkling red dress with intricate crystal beading. My coiffure of cascading curls is simple but elegant. For the first time in my life, my mother has told me I am beautiful. As I am writing this, my heart is pounding fiercely within my chest. I am very nervous about the upcoming events tonight. Farewell diary, I am off to the ball!



I thought that my first day at school was the worst day in the chronicles of my life, but I stand corrected—tonight was. I arrived at the ball only to be jilted by Matthew Thompson. I sauntered into the gymnasium inquiring where Matthew was. When I finally spotted him, he was with another girl. Every one of my classmates looked at me with disbelief as if to say, “Did you really think you could be his date?” I was being mocked. As tears welled up in my eyes, I left my first dance deeply hurt, humiliated, and brokenhearted.

January 3rd, 1985

After contemplating the preceding events, I demanded my parents to allow me to transfer to the Georgia School for the Deaf. Of course, they were elated to hear the news. My parents were so proud that I wanted to attend a school with people that had disabilities like mine. Although I am regressing back to my parents' wishes, I am glad to rid myself of a school that abhors me.

As of now, I am at a loss of friends. The only absolute objects I have left to confide in are this journal and piano. Lately, I have been playing Frederic Chopin's *Ballad Op. 23*. The composition, written in a minor key, expresses my true feelings about life—sad and depressing.

January 5th, 1985

I am so fed up with being deaf. I cannot take it. I want to be normal. I am going to be normal, no matter what the cost.

February 11th, 1985

I have been researching treatments for deafness for quite some time now. There are many treatment options available, but I have decided that a cochlear implant will free me from deaf slavery with the least amount of problems. I will undergo surgery and extensive therapy to acquire a sense of hearing. I have decided to keep my medical plans confidential for now because there is a huge debate in the deaf community on whether or not deaf people should strive to receive cochlear implants. Unfortunately, my parents are opposed to the implant. They believe that people are born exactly the way they are for a reason, and that a person should not alter herself to fit a social standard. My parents think I ought to live with this disability for the rest of my life. The fact is, if I am going to live, I am going to live without the colorful effect of sound.

March 23rd, 1985


Without my parents' knowledge or permission, I have been discussing the possibility of a cochlear implant with my doctor. The doctor believes I am a perfect candidate for the implant. My surgery is scheduled for April 2nd of this year. My parents know nothing of my surgery. Since I am a minor, I will forge their signatures on all legal documents allowing me to have this medical procedure. Receiving the cochlear implant has its risks, but as Peter Drucker once said, "There is the risk you cannot afford to take, and there is the risk you cannot afford not to take." To me, cochlear implants are a risk I cannot afford not to take.

April 2nd, 1985

Today is the day. In approximately seven hours I will be able to hear my first sound. It is very difficult to document my exact feelings because every emotion is pulsating through my body—fear, anticipation, and excitement. The next time I write in this journal, I will be able to hear the scratch of the pencil lead against the paper....

I am still feeling the effects of the anesthesia the doctors gave me for surgery. However, as I am writing this journal, I can hear the pencil scratching against the paper. I am finally free from the slavery of deafness.

April 3rd, 1985

It has been absolutely wonderful hearing the cacophony of sounds of everyday life: doors shutting, dogs barking, cars honking, and people conversing. I never realized how many sounds there were to hear! I could listen to a door opening and closing all day long. I feel as if I am a new person. I am in a state of complete euphoria. I played the piano today. Spreading my delicate hands across the pearly white ivories, I played Beethoven's *Piano Sonata No. 1* in F major. The music that resonated from the black grand piano was the most beautiful sound in the world—the sound I had never heard before. 

PAPER PLAYGROUND

SCOTT LEE HOWARD • COMPUTER AIDED DESIGN DRAFTING

Almost every summer weekend, most of the neighborhood kids would meet at the abandoned parking lot across the street from my home in Omaha. It was the pinnacle for a variety of activities, enabling us to arrive with the finest of our personal toys. The parking lot was a magnificently huge platform that sat on a hill between a forgotten church and a widowed hospital, as if it were an offering to the kids from the gods. That unnamed parking lot graced me with a lifetime of memories.

Besides the church and the hospital, my shrine provided many other memorable surroundings. The lot was surrounded by three hills and four huge trees that gave birth to thousands of humongous thorns. There was a light pole at the top of the hill that illuminated the front half of our concrete playground. The front edge of the blacktop lot was bordered by a small drop-off due to penurious masonry work. This was accompanied by miniature fault lines that randomly ran through abstract portions of our magnificent playground. It was uneven and sloped rear and to the right.

Looking back at what we considered to be a safe place to play, I realize it really wasn't safe at all. There were lots of rocks and glass. There was a small, fairly hidden drive that interrupted our space and was also often used by blind and inconsiderate drivers. Yet, I remember this place so well due to the freedom we had there. There were a lot of unsafe things, but the lot was located in an area well seen by the majority of our parents' homes. There was little chance of just anyone hanging around. Due to the hill, there was even less chance of our parents climbing up there. We had our own large, outdoor area that was adult-free, and decisions regarding our safety were left to us. So to us, the world was ours.

I was brutally upset when the city decided the property would be better suited for a residential neighborhood. After approximately 15 years of destroying the finest, most indestructible toy cars we had, riding bikes and Big Wheels, playing baseball, engaging in firework fights, and playing games of all sorts, including sledding in the winter, our shrine of freedom was inconsiderately uprooted, and new homes were glued to the ground. Today, when I see the rotten *màché* of neglected homes, I think of our playground, fruitful in culture and saturated with the voices of children. I think of all the

falls and all the scrapes that adhered to my body throughout the years. My heart bleeds at the mere thought of a mailbox standing where I once did to reel a kite back in from 1000 feet.

What bothers me more today is that I helped build those unappreciated structures instead of fighting to do something more with the property. It should have been a wonderful park or a simple playground. My mother approached the city a few times to get a playground in the neighborhood. Someone did make an attempt to restore the church to preserve the property, and service was held there for about a year. Nothing effectively stood, and the City of Omaha agreed that their decisions were more important than the people's wants. They balled it up and threw it away as if it were a paper playground.

Breathing or as a ghost, the parking lot and the thoughts of what it used to be still brings a faint smile to my face. The fun that was embraced 20 years ago has already been had. The days of elongated and uncontrollable laughter have already passed. Future memories have been planted for a new generation. I have had my fun, and these memories will fly me to the sunset of my last breath. 🌸

STRANDS

MICHELA IWANSKI • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PRIZE ARTWORK AWARD



ONE EYE FORWARD, ONE EYE BLACK

JANEY PATTERSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I kissed the supersized white envelope for good luck and slid it across the counter. The older postwoman picked up the packet of papers that was going to get me into vet school. She squinted through her glasses and held the envelope out in front of her.

“A&M, huh?” She eyed me critically.

“You betcha.”

“That’s a pretty competitive place you picked, isn’t it?”

“It’s the best.” I smiled. “I’ve spent the last four-and-a-half years filling up this envelope.”

“Well, then, I hope you have some good stuff in here.” She probably mistook my nostalgic smile for naivety.

My mind went to the letters of recommendation, now safely sealed and in the postwoman’s hands. There was one I would never get to read. It was folded into thirds and stapled shut with a photograph attached to the outside. Bill took the picture when I wasn’t looking. It was of me and Tucson, a 2000-pound dromedary camel. I was standing directly in front of him. His neck was craned forward, head resting on my shoulder. My left hand was curled over his massive snout while my right hand was poised a couple of inches away from his ear. My curious, intent stare had *veterinarian* written all over it. The photograph of the tender, almost intimate, pose filled my eyes and squeezed my chest. Tucson and I hadn’t always been that close; neither had vet school.

I can still remember that first summer after graduation when I worked for Bill. I had a biology teacher at Sandia High who set up work study programs for students at the Albuquerque zoo. I didn’t have the grades to qualify for that, but he liked me because I helped clean up once after our class dissected cats. My cat was pregnant when she died, and Mr. Campbell let me take out all the babies. He also got me my initial job at the zoo where I met Bill.

I started off selling tickets for the kids’ camel ride. After a couple of weeks watching me handle tickets and money, Bill promoted me to dung flinger. Next, I got bumped up to camel trainer. I’d say that was when I discovered my passion for animals, but there’s a bit more to that story.



Gravel flew as I skidded my mint-green electric scooter to a sliding stop in front of the BioPark Zoo's employee bike rack. I barely got my feet down in time to keep the imitation Vespa from falling over. That would have been the second time that morning, the first being at a four-way stop on Rio Grande Boulevard. I just forgot to put my feet down when I stopped; that isn't a crime. I must have looked desperate, a half drunk, 100-pound teenage girl fighting gravity and a 200-pound scooter in the hellish August heat. That man—I can't even remember what he looked like—pulled up beside the struggle in a SUV to see if he could “call someone” for me. I think I laughed, because really, who would I call?

I had only a week of practice riding the thing. After hauling three cardboard boxes from a taxi to my closet of a dorm room, I walked 20 blocks to Scooter-Roo. I traded \$600 for a scooter that could go only 35 miles per hour...downhill. That was part of the reason I was late for work. I'd lived in Albuquerque almost all of my life, but I'd never had to drive through neighborhoods to get around.

At least I wore my helmet, which was now a hulking nuisance to get off. I stopped struggling with the buckle and leaned forward to balance the handle bars while simultaneously swinging my right foot over the back of the vinyl seat.

The successful landing was followed by a violent head spin. I froze, trying to focus on the backside of the zoo's empty guard shack. My blood alcohol count had to be pretty high. I don't remember whose birthday it was, but shots were taken on her behalf past 3:00 a.m. My first semester at the University of New Mexico didn't start for a week, and my life already felt like one big vodka marathon. I didn't even have to use a glass anymore. My one-night stand friends were so proud of me.

I put the kickstand up and went back to work on my helmet, praying that boss man Bill wouldn't pull into the shaded parking lot. His workman's pick-up truck would've stopped my heart in that moment. This was my third time being late that week, and the second time being late and half drunk.

Bill, hard-ass cowboy, would have been a terrifying old man had I not stood an inch taller than he did. Leathery is often used to describe an older person's skin, but I think his cheek and Austin boots were about the same in texture and thickness; I'm sure he had them beat in age by at least five decades, however.

Bill's white beard was pure and pointy, never shaved. A handful of white hairs combed over his head were usually glued on with sweat. I can't say that I actually saw his bare head more than two or three times because he always wore a cowboy hat. He was Yosemite Sam brought to life. The charms of his authentic

Stetson, fancy belt buckle, and ironed button-down were stolen by his high-water jeans that he probably bought at Gap Kids. “Lord, help me get through this day.” My silent prayer would go unanswered, as surely as I was alone in that God-forsaken town full of Brooklyn cowboys and alcoholic teenagers.

Helmet conquered, I started down the gravel service road that backed up to the exhibits. The hum of the oversized water filters didn’t drown out the evidence of life in the zoo. Even in my foggy, behind-glass state, the beauty of a new morning at the zoo was unveiling. At that moment, it was the best place to be in the entire world.

The lion’s roaring, laced with impatience and hunger, was loudest in the morning and echoed off the fabricated stone exhibit walls. The seals barked in time with the powerful waterfalls. The public’s view of the zoo was fantastical and unreal—a trip to Narnia. A preschool class could take a field trip from the lush Amazon, thick with sweet mist, to the dry, barbaric Serengeti in less than an hour and end with a creamy soft-serve cone.

I was lucky enough to work the children’s camel ride. The hooved beasts were demonic at times. They flicked their tails while they peed, purposely swishing them back and forth like stinky, yellow sprinklers. The buggers even turned around to make sure they were misting their target—usually me.

A green Polaris zoomed past on my right side, stirring up dust that clumped in the corners of my eyes. I shifted my helmet in my hands to scratch at the grime. I passed the white-washed backsides of the Arctic tundra exhibits and immediately knew I was in for a show. The docents were attempting their usual Sunday morning llama capture. Half of me really wanted to go in and help the post-menopausal women. They were just so cute in their super safari vests and matching hats that took every animal in the kingdom and combined them into a collage closely resembling Halloween candy vomit. There was another half of me, the teenage bully half, that laughed candidly at the white-haired old birds, arms spread, attempting to corner a large, black, buck-toothed llama.

“I think he’s gonna spit!” The shorter woman’s voice was raspy and low.

I stumbled behind the tin saddle shed a few yards away, dropped my helmet in the dirt, and bit my fist, hunching over to laugh. It was then I realized I could smell vodka. I peeked around the shed into the camel yard. Even through the bamboo shades zip-tied over the chain-link fence, I could see that Cece, my co-camel trainer, had most of the dung raked—bless her work ethic. She could people-please all she wanted this morning.

I swung my backpack to one shoulder and reached around to open the front pocket and grab my cell phone. I blinked hard, swaying slightly onto my heels. The unlock code on the touch screen always took me several tries.

I was only about 35 minutes late. “Perfect,” I thought. “I still have about ten minutes before Bill gets here.” Flinging my JanSport backpack onto the rusty garden table next to the shed, I started for the hose. My intention was to wash my hands; surely that would get rid of the vodka smell.

“Crazy night?” Cece had stopped mid-scoop and pinned me with a stare, one penciled eyebrow raised. She was piling truffle-sized camel pellets into the wheel barrel. Sweat shadowed her armpits and coated her brown face. The humidity must have been 80%.

“Huh?” It took a minute for her words to register.

She cocked her head at me. “What’s on your face?”

I groped my forehead and cheeks, flinching when I reached my chin. I looked at my hand and, to my dismay, discovered blood and a couple chunks of asphalt. “Oh, yeah, I just tripped a little on my way in. Didn’t know I was bleeding!” I reached for the hose valve and cranked it on. She didn’t want to hear about my off-balance scooter. The pressure blasted water onto my worn white Dunks, and I grasped at the hose, now wet and covered in dirt. “I better get this crap off my face.”

“You have quite the relationship with the hose. You should probably give it a name.” Cece was smiling, clearly entertained by my bumbling.

“It’s called the hangover hose!” I shouted between gulps. Water dripped down my chin and the front of my throat.

After drinking a half gallon of the lukewarm water, I stuck the nozzle through the fence into the camels’ black rubber trough. Tucson, the 16-year-old male, looked up from his Timothy hay and glared. I did my best to avoid a staring contest. All three camels had black eyes, but his were different—blacker, maybe. He always seemed wild to me, and I guess in a way he was. After living his first six months in the Outback of Australia, he was captured and shipped to auction in Tucson, Arizona. That’s how he got his name. Bill had him cut and removed his fangs when he first bought him. The sharp white teeth sat on a shelf in the saddle shed. Sometimes I took them out of their jelly jar to look at them. Once I told Cece I thought they’d make a cool necklace. She said I was morbid, but what did she know? She was going to school to be a paralegal secretary or something.

The clear kitchen trash bag on the floor of the shed was bulging with soft camel wool. Cece had also taken care of the currying. I scooped Missy’s saddle pads and Persian rug off of the saw horse. The tough pads protected their humps from sharp metal edges on the steel saddle bars. They also felt like fiberglass and smelled like horse sweat. An ugly form of protection, yes; however, the thick chunks of foam kept the camels from feeling any pain. The

Persian rug was a false front, thrown on last over all of the equipment. I suppose it added a certain Saharan something to the ride's atmosphere, but form always follows function.

I walked from the crunchy gravel around the pen onto the soft sand of the enclosure. The dull ache in my head was creeping down into my calves. "Dude, I need more water."

Cece was busy saddling Aladdin, a giant white movie star of a camel. I walked around Tucson, way around him, and made my way over to good ol' Missy's right side. She'd had more screaming children put on her back than a pediatrician's examination table—no way a drunk camel trainer would faze her.

A large handful of Emerald grass hung limply from one side of Missy's soft lips. She chewed with an open mouth, dropping pieces into the dirt. I stepped in front of her and pointed to the ground.

"Cush, Missy," It came out louder than I intended. She flicked one ear, swished her tail and chewed. "Missy, cush." I dragged out each syllable and changed my tone, like an impatient mother counting to three. She must not have seen or heard me because she was now searching the dust for rogue hay. I exhaled through my teeth and closed my eyes.

I had crippling dehydration and an empty tank of patience. Missy's saddle can just wait, I thought, turning on my heel and abandoning the camel and her matching equipment.

I left the yard and headed back to the hose. When I rounded the corner, the trough was full and overflowing, creating a muddy pond that the camels would enthusiastically stomp dry. I ran up to the hose and yanked it out of the gate then reached for the faucet. The sound of flowing water stopped, and it was quiet.

I took a couple of deep breaths in a feeble attempt to center myself. I stared at my muddy shoes, almost collected but nowhere near calm. "Kat! Are you takin' a dirt inventory?" I jumped high at the sound of Bill's raspy shout. My heart thumped hard and fast, pumping toxic blood through my tired veins.

Bill was standing on the opposite side of the yard. His shadowy outline was ominous through the panels of chain-link fence and bamboo. Eyes on my heavy feet, I dragged myself around the corner and past the shed without looking up once. My hands were unstable, shaking from my hangover, so I shoved them into my pockets. I looked up and hurried the last few steps. Bill was shaking an unfiltered Parliament into his hand. He gave me a quick onceover, wrinkling his forehead at my slightly mangled chin and muddy clothes.

"What the hell happened to you?" The question lacked genuine interest. "And why the hell does my camel yard look like some goddamn mud wallow?" I heard a hint of concern that time.

“It was an accident.” I avoided eye contact and glanced into the yard. Missy was lying down, and Cece had started on her saddle. Damn it. I owed her a drink or something.

“Get in there and unhook Tuce.” He nodded toward Tucson, bringing his cigarette and lighter to his thick white mustache.

“Um, okay...” I knew this wasn’t going to work for many different reasons; mainly, Tucson scared the heck out of me—especially on that morning. I knew he could smell my anxiety the moment I even started thinking about him. And if he could smell my fear, I’d bet money he smelled my blood alcohol content.

I walked through Bill’s cloud of secondhand smoke and into the yard. Tucson swung his head around to give me another good glare. He added a no-nonsense tail flick and rocked on his feet before breaking eye contact. I scanned the dirt for hay, a treat, something—anything to distract the beast. There was nothing.

“Cowboy up, girl!” Bill’s obnoxious prompt spurred me into action. My fight or flight instinct was screaming “fight!” as I stalked past the eight-foot mongrel. His lead was attached to a rusty horseshoe welded to the gate. I released the limp slipknot with a firm jerk. After looping the giant leash around my arm, I turned to check Bill’s expression. I was faced instead with Tucson’s massive head cocked about a foot away. Before I could blink, he swiped his head, catching my face in one fluid motion that said, “Get the hell out of here.” I tripped backward into the fence, slamming into loose chain-link. The metal clanked as I slid into the dirt. I winced and tried to blink away dancing spots of black and white.

I reached up to where he struck me and discovered immediate swelling. It hurt to touch; the tender apple of my cheekbone had been slammed. My eyes stung, and I crinkled my upper lip.

“Omigod, Kat, are you okay?” Cece was right there; she knelt in front of me.

I looked past her to Tucson. He was sniffing around the other side of the yard and chewing his cud. His tattered lead hung from his halter like a dead snake being dragged through the dirt.

“Crap,” I whispered. Tears were coming, and I couldn’t stop them. Paralyzed and confused, I stared at the dirt.


Then Bill’s boots were in front of my face, and he was telling me to leave. His voice was a dull roar. He said something about sobriety and spanking in the school systems. Cece pulled me to my feet, and Bill gave me a manly thump on the back. Then they were both laughing, and I tried to find my backpack.

I walked to the front of the zoo through the public area. It was too early for field trips, so I wasn’t embarrassed about the mud or the scrapes or the tears or the swollen eye. I pushed through the revolving bars and said goodbye to the zoo.

I thought Bill had fired me that day. I was such a messy wreck when I left that I forgot my helmet. That mistake resulted in an uncomfortable 45-minute bus ride home on the dirty Redline next to an old woman who clung to her Walmart bags and shook her head at me like a disappointed grandmother.

The next day when I went back for my helmet and scooter, Bill assumed I was there to work; I was sober, and he was either desperate or crazy. He tossed me a curry and complimented my shiner. Apparently, every decent trainer that worked with Tucson received free tips from the camel himself.



I left the post office grinning. It was hard to believe it had been more than four years since my forceful awakening. Cece was long gone, working for a Distract Attorney in southern California. We still met up when she was in town for the holidays. She was proud of me. Once I started taking the camel business seriously, a lot of doors opened up at the zoo. Mr. Campbell, my old high school teacher, was able to get me a coveted work study job in the zoo's vet clinic after my second summer working the ride. Now I'm eternally grateful to the cowboy and the camel that helped me grow up. 

TRACTOR BABY

CASEY BYRD • VISUAL PUBLICATIONS



THE WALK

KRYSTY BEARUP • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Sassafras, whom we call Sassy, is my 18-month-old Shetland Sheepdog, more commonly known as a Sheltie. Her coloring is sable, a reddish-brown, along with white markings on her feet, neck, and chest. The white on her chest continues unbroken around her neck, as if she is wearing a scarf. From her “scarf” extends a white mark that curves around her left ear in the shape of a crescent moon. The hair around her neck and on her chest is much longer than the rest of her coat and stands out to give the look of a lion’s mane.

Shelties are very intelligent and were originally bred and used to herd and protect a farmer’s flock and home. Today’s Shelties are able to adapt to many different living situations, but they appreciate exercise, both physical and mental, or having a job to do for their family. In my household, Sassy’s “job” provides her with needed exercise by being my walking companion. Or, more likely, our roles have reversed, and I have now become her walking companion as she has gotten older and better trained.

Today is a gorgeous day, especially for April in Nebraska. The sun is shining high in a sky free of clouds. There’s a bit more than a slight breeze blowing—not quite a wind—, keeping the sun from becoming too warm on my skin. On this spring day, my youngest daughter, ten-year-old Trynity, and our puppy Xavior, a twelve-week-old Australian Cattle Dog, commonly known as a Blue Heeler, decide to join Sassy and me on our walk. We head north on a gravel-covered dirt road leading away from the Village of Staplehurst. To me, on days like this, peace is the sound of my daughter laughing and the feel of gravel crunching beneath my tennis shoes. As we begin our walk, Sassy is connected to her leash and walking at my left side. She walks like she has a purpose—prancing gait, head held high, mouth slightly open, ears up and alert, tail down and relaxed.

With just a casual glance at the landscape, I don’t see anything worth noticing but shades of brown, what has died out over the winter—the stalks in the fields that are left of last year’s corn, the long, dry, dead grass in the ditches, the barren branches of the deciduous trees. But after taking a more careful look at our surroundings, I notice the signs of new life. New green

grass along the road is almost hidden beneath last year's old growth. Red-purple buds that will one day soon become green leaves are forming on the trees. I can also hear the sound of birds chirping in the trees, announcing the long awaited arrival of spring.

As we are walking, we hear a distant train whistle warning of its impending arrival. At the sound, Sassy attempts to locate the noise by swiveling her ears from side to side and looking left and right. The train sounds its whistle three times, and each time, Sassy shows she is aware and trying to locate the source of the noise until the train comes through the trees and into the clearing where it is now close enough to be visible. Once she sees the train and realizes where the loud sound is coming from, she quits looking.

After we've walked a quarter mile or so past village limits, I take the leash off Sassy so she can explore as we walk. Trynity does the same with Xavior, and they begin to romp in the old cornfield. I tell Sassy to go play with Trynity. She hesitates and looks at me as though she's saying, "Are you sure?"

To this I repeat, "Go play," and off she goes in a relaxed jog easily vaulting over obstacles in the ditch until she arrives in the field and begins running with Trynity and Xavior. She never goes far, nor is she unaware of my exact location walking on the side of the road. Every few minutes she looks back to see where I am, and occasionally she runs back to me as though she is checking in before she goes off to play some more.


I turn on my iPod to listen to my favorite music while I continue walking and loving the sight of my daughter and dogs thoroughly enjoying themselves. They are so much fun to watch, each running circles around the others, hopping over tree branches and small water run-offs—or "little streams" as Trynity calls them—and generally making the most of this beautiful day.

Even with my iPod on loud, I am forewarned of vehicles approaching from behind. Sassy hears any vehicle coming long before it's visible to the naked eye. Once she hears an oncoming vehicle, she stops playing with the other two and runs straight back to me. She stands on her hind legs, hits me with her front feet, and then walks beside me while glancing behind her every couple of seconds until the vehicle passes. Once the perceived danger is gone, she takes off through the ditch and back into the field to continue playing with Trynity and Xavior.

At about the point when we are ready to turn around and head back toward the house, Trynity makes a discovery in the field; the dogs are more

than happy to explore this newly found thing with her. So I climb down one side of the ditch then up the other side to enter the field and see what all the excitement is about. This fantastic discovery turns out to be the head and front legs of some animal. As I soon learn, it takes a bit more time to figure out what type of animal we are looking at without a body to complete the visual. After some observation and discussion regarding the attributes the animal still retains, we determine it was the front third of an opossum. Its mouth is hanging open, and all the teeth on the left side appear intact. The lower half of the right jaw also looks intact except for the canine tooth that is broken in half. All of its teeth are missing on the top right side. Its eye sockets are empty holes, the tongue shriveled and dehydrated looking like a fat worm left out in the sun to bake and dry. Right where the body has been removed/cut/eaten is its short little front legs with extremely long nails. One would think that its long nails and sharp teeth would have been a great defense mechanism to prevent it from being ripped apart. It has obviously been dead quite a while, as there is no noticeable smell that I can detect, and neither Sassy nor Xavior has much interest in it. Sassy walks around it, gives it a few glances, then jogs away from us and back, as if to say, "Let's get walking; there's nothing of interest here."

Once we are done observing and discussing the fate of the poor dead animal, it is time to start working our way back home. We cross to the other side of the road to begin the mile-and-a-half trek back. On this side of the road, there are numerous beer cans and a sun-faded McDonald's cup for Sassy to investigate, but she gives them little more than a quick glance and continues down through the ditch and up to the other side where—on the train tracks—Trynity and Xavior are waiting.

We finally arrive back home. I empty out the bits of gravel that at the beginning of the walk had felt like "peace" crunching beneath my feet but have now found their way into my tennis shoes. My walking companion has completed her "job" for the day, and Sassy gets a much needed long drink of cool water. Another perfectly enjoyable and relaxing walk with my wonderful Sheltie, Sassafra, ends. 

QUIET SUNSET

TERESA BISSEGGGER • CONTINUING EDUCATION

Ever notice the quietness of a sunset?
Even the wind stills as color abounds the sky.
Time slows at the end of the day
As shadows fall, and light fades into darkness.
Trees hush their rustling leaves at night,
Their trunks dark in front of fading sunlight.
Birds nest in nearby trees waiting the morning light.
Deer, always silent, prance through fields at sunset.
Wild creatures lie in wait for night
‘til blackness fills the sky.
Cattle and sheep settle into the darkness,
Resting in wait for another day.
The setting sun signals the end of the day.
The ocean’s wake, now calm, shimmers softly in the moonlight.
The once babbling brook now whispers in the darkness.
Prairie fields of grass still in the gentle breeze of the sunset.
Exploding colors caress the mountaintops high in the sky
While dancing on the water below, almost night.
The tired old barn moans softly in the still of the night.
The farm house creaks—sounds unheard in the busyness of day.
A windmill, now unmoving, silhouettes the sky.
The hundred-year-old brick silo reaches for the light
Into the clouds that slowly move across the sunset.
A few lights at the farmstead twinkle in the darkness.
Big city lights sparkle, lighting up the darkness.
The city, alive and roaring at night,
Is quiet as a whisper during the transition of sunset.
The hustle and bustle of the workman’s day
Quiets with the fading sunlight,

And bursts of orange fill the sky.
A couple walks hand in hand looking upward at the sky
As the light of day changes into darkness,
And the sky begins to shine with the moonlight.
Their first kiss on this perfect night.
Twenty years into time, looking back at this day,
They will never forget the time they spent at sunset.
Standing on the bridge of time between night and day,
As darkness falls and sunlight fades, as color fills the sky,
“Listen” to the quiet of the sunset.

BAILEY JEAN

MEKAYLA GRANT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Spencer Ahrens is a hard worker who enjoys technology and writing. A student in the Business Administration program, Spencer's family and pets are everything to him.

Krysty Bearup finds walking her dogs a great way to unwind and become "centered" again, so she can concentrate on schoolwork and family. Krysty credits English instructor Kate Loden for encouraging her to submit her writing to *Illuminations*.

Jaci Benson is a farm girl from central Nebraska who moved to Lincoln seven years ago to attend UNL. With one degree in journalism, she is currently pursuing a teaching certificate. Jaci wrote her engaging short stories, "Finally Got Robbed" and "They Say I'm a Liar," in her Fiction Writing class. Jaci says the class "was a blast!" Instructor Mike Smith encouraged her to submit her writing to *Illuminations*, which Jaci says was humbling. "The thought of complete strangers reading a story I made up is quite an odd feeling," she adds, "but also kind of exciting."

Teresa Bissegger is an SCC Continuing Education student who loves writing, reading, bicycling, and working in the yard. "Photography has become a recent passion," she says, "and I find it very relaxing." Her poem, "Christmas 1973," was inspired by memories of her grandpa, while her poem, "Quiet Sunset," was inspired by a walk with a friend.

Kayla Brhel is 18 and loves to dance. Her parents split up when she was twelve, and she feels that because of the divorce, she has become a stronger person. Kayla wrote her poignant story, "The Final Cut," as a way of revealing to her parents that she was a cutter.

Stephanie Brownell says she's "just a small town girl and always will be." She credits SCC Art Instructor Carol Pralle with encouraging her to submit her vivid drawing, "Untitled," which was completed in her Drawing II class.

Rebecca Burt enjoys taking outdoor photographs with the basic, fixed-lens Kodak digital camera she's owned for about six years. In addition to teaching life sciences courses at the Beatrice campus, Rebecca enjoys reading and bicycling.

Casey Byrd is a student in SCC's Visual Publications program. Her hobbies include photography, crafting, traveling, and cheering on the Huskers. She enjoys spending time with her fiancé, Brad, and their three dogs—Lucky, Bella, and Cooper. Casey hopes to pursue her love of photography after graduating from SCC.

Jesse Byrd, an Academic Transfer student, is a former truck driver, a gambler, a writer, and, in his own words, "a know-it-all, a loner, and a weirdo." Jesse credits poetry instructor Neal Kirchner for the encouragement in submitting his poems to *Illuminations*.

Caitlynn M. Christensen calls herself a quiet, crazy, adventurous, and creative person. She loves playing the piano, specifically composing Christian contemporary music. An SCC dual credit student, Caitlynn wrote her moving story, "The Sound of Silence," for her Composition I class through Milford High School.

Jane Cox plans to transfer to UNL for a degree in English. She has a slight obsession with 19th century Russian literature and a fascination with all things from the 1920s through the 1960s. She hopes to start a collection of vintage restaurant menus and memorabilia. She loves road trips, diners, and small town bowling alleys, and her favorite movie is *Buffalo '66*.

Harmony L. Culp loves photography and graphic design, and she's eager to begin showing off some of her work. Her inspiration? "The world always looks a little more beautiful when you're in love," she says. Named after the Elton John song, Harmony loves music and calls herself a "total geek and art buff."

Hannah L. Dennick was born in Augsburg, Germany, where her father was stationed in the Army. She lived there for three months before returning to the U.S. with her family and settling in Ceresco, NE. She did a semester abroad in Germany her junior year of high school and fell in love with it. Hannah says she's always had great English teachers, but two stood out and passed their love of writing and literature to her. Hannah says, "Between Ms. Sydik, Mr. Rezac, and my semester abroad, I decided to become a high school teacher of both English and German." Hannah constructed her story, "The Breakup," in her Fiction Writing class.

Eric Downing wrote his wry narrative, "The Lancaster County Redemption," for his Composition II class. Currently attending SCC full-time and working part-time, Eric plans to major in either biology or chemistry.

Yancy Dittmer is father to two children, and he and his wife just celebrated their eleventh wedding anniversary. Yancy says he's a jokester and enjoys making people laugh. He also enjoys working on old cars and spending time at the lake with his family.

Jill Englehart, a student in the Academic Transfer program, wrote her moving essay, "My Amazing Picture," for a Composition I assignment. Jill says she is motivated, self-confident, and always willing to work hard for what she wants.

Dan Everhart, a foundational English instructor, says he is a disturbed individual who fancies himself a poet (if only in his mind). He claims to also like chain cigar smoking, heavy gambling, underground fighting, and taking the wings off baby flies. *Dan wasn't really this fierce, but we miss his sense of humor. He died in a car accident on December 21, 2012.*

Kimberly Fangman teaches writing and literature at SCC and is the editor for *Illuminations*. She loves photography, Victorian literature, 1930s and 40s horror films, her crazy cat, and her two nearly-adult kids – a son who has already sprung the nest and a daughter who's stretching her wings.

Brittany Fraser was inspired to put images together after seeing a book in her art class. The result is her intriguing collage, "Social." Brittany grew up as an Army brat, so she's seen a lot of things, but she's also content living in the country.

Rachel Gould is a freelance photographer aspiring to become a graphic designer. She also values her Christian faith. "My faith is fundamental; it is what makes me who I am!" she says.

Carey Graham is retired Army and enjoys working with a mixture of wood, metal, rocks, and other materials. His detailed "Collage of Stone" is a pencil drawing.

Mekayla Grant has always loved taking photographs of just about everything—from her sisters to old barns. "I love capturing moments that will last a lifetime," she says. "My work is very important to me, and I want to show people my capabilities."

Mark Gudgel teaches literature and composition at SCC and Lincoln Southwest High School. He first travelled to Rwanda in 2008 and has since founded a non-profit organization to conduct teacher training in Rwanda as well as other nations affected by genocide and crimes against humanity. In 2013, Mark will travel to the United Kingdom on a Fulbright grant to conduct research in Holocaust education. He is presently pursuing doctoral studies in Character Education. To relax, Mark enjoys running and writing poetry.

Mystery Harwood loves to learn, discuss, write, and read to “an almost psychotic degree.” She is obsessed with Rifftrax and MST3K because she loves to laugh and prefers bad movies to good ones. She proudly calls herself a nerd—“and a relatively big nerd at that.”

Brenda Hoffman, a student in our Human Services program, wrote her moving narrative, “The Business Card,” when asked to write about someone important to her. Brenda is creative, she loves things that sparkle (especially gemstones), she loves to read, and now, she says, she’s learning to write.

Kristyna Holz will have earned her Associate of Applied Science degree in Human Services and her Associate of Arts and Science degree from SCC before transferring to Wesleyan University to major in social work. Kristyna has two children who inspire her in everything she does. “My creativity lives through them,” she says.

Jerilyn Hopper is back in school after a 25-year hiatus to raise a family. She loves to bake and has recently perfected a recipe for cinnamon rolls. She is quiet and mostly secluded, but she has a vivid imagination. Jerilyn credits “tough teacher” Mrs. Trainin for inspiring her to write.

Samuel Huff moved to Nebraska from Colorado where, as others have pointed out to him, he learned to figure math problems backwards and to write his numbers horribly wrong. As evidenced by his provocative essay, “Echoes,” family and music are two important components in Samuel’s life. He loves listening to and playing music; even writing about music and its opportunity to inspire others motivates him.

Scott Lee Howard had been writing creatively for 23 years before he shared his work with anyone. “I was terrified of others knowing what I think and feel,” Scott says. Six years ago, however, he started letting his work be seen—and now he’s published! Scott is a student in our Computer Aided Design Drafting program.

Michela Iwanski works with individuals with developmental disabilities and loves being around people. She enjoys both poetry writing and photography. She says she grew up with art and music all around her and is “really artsy.” In the future, she’d like to work for a magazine doing layout, photography, or writing.

Jeanine Jewell, an SCC English instructor, wrote “Second Life” with her Composition I students in a freewrite modeled after the poem, “What I Did,” by Lincoln poet Twyla Hansen. Jeanine is well known for misplacing her glasses in class, tripping over students’ backpacks, and failing to operate audio/visual systems successfully.

Kelly Johnson enjoys gardening and started photographing her flowers so she could enjoy them year-round. Her garden began with one cherry tomato plant, and now her garden consumes her entire backyard—which is where you’ll find her when she’s not at work. Kelly also loves chocolate, Stephen King novels, and spending time with her four dogs.

Thomas Joyce was born in New York City but has been “exiled” in Nebraska for the past 32 years. He has a large number of children, including stepchildren, adopted children, and the “regular” kind, all of whom have made it safely to adulthood. While not a musician, he has a passion for music and does his best to support local Lincoln musicians. In addition to his nine-to-five job, Thomas and his wife are wedding officiants and have presided at well over 200 weddings.

Neal Kirchner grew up in a small-town Kansas motel, a circumstance that provided much practice in the proper folding of towels. He reports that in some ways, writing a poem is like folding a towel—one that is fresh and still very hot from the dryer. “The secret has to do with finding the seams and corners with your fingers, so you don’t have to look at what you are doing.” He often writes with his eyes closed.

Rosalva Martinez is the second oldest of six kids, and family and friends make up most of her life. She loves to dance and to be outside, and she hopes to travel the world one day. Her captivating photo, “La Mariposa de Mikayla,” features her little sister with a Monarch butterfly she found at the zoo.

Cameron Maxwell calls himself “an aspiring writer.” He wrote his poem, “Those Dead Trees,” after taking a walk through trees and closely observing them.

Elizabeth Anne Moore is a quiet person, who can get along with anyone. She loves drawing and running and is a student in SCC’s Academic Transfer program.

Anthony Muhle is a student in the Academic Transfer program. He enjoys drawing, listening to music, and playing the guitar.

Kendra Nelson wrote her engaging narrative, “The Boogiemans’s Revenge,” for a class assignment. When asked what she’s made of, she says simply, “DNA, life, and lack of money.”

Allison Neujahr credits her poetry class with introducing her to *Illuminations*. An Academic Transfer student, Allison hopes to declare a future major in mass communications/journalism.

Christal Outz is a mother of three and has been a nurse for 13 years. She found her passion as a hospice nurse but is now back in school to earn a Bachelor’s in nursing. Christal recently opened her own small photography studio and is loving the opportunity to express her creativity. The enchanting illustrations in her children’s book, *Bedtime Blues*, were recreations in Photoshop of photos she had taken of her son.

Mary Ann Parlin started writing at the age of 13 and continues to write as a way of understanding the world around her. In regard to her moving poem, “Beside Her Bed,” Mary Ann says, “Forgiveness and moving forward are lessons I continue to work on, but the anger is gone.” Her second poem, “Mothers and Daughters,” was prompted by a simple conversation with her daughter and the feeling that there was so much left unsaid.

Janey Patterson appreciates a good pun and loves the outdoors. As the inside knowledge in her short story, “One Eye Forward, One Eye Black,” indicates, she has worked with elephants at the ABQ Biopark—and yes, she really did spend summers wrangling camels. Janey loved her family so much that she followed them to Nebraska, even though she hates winter and is allergic to corn.

Madelyne Penkava loves painting, writing, and photographing beautiful and unique things. She says, “I like to make people think. Too often, people take for granted the beauty right under their noses. I hope that through my works, I can help open people’s eyes to the beauty of this wonderful, beautiful, and sometimes crazy life.”

Jenny Poley is a wife, mother to six, home school teacher, and administrative assistant at a church; she also enjoys photography, writing, and reading. Jenny noticed and loved the contrast of colors between a bee and a sweet pea flower, and the result was her striking photo, “Contrast.”

Troy Poole calls himself “random” but says he’s always thinking with a creative edge. “At times I take myself seriously,” Troy says, “but mostly, I always seem to have a dramatic play going on in my head. If people could read my mind, one of those plays would win an Oscar.” Troy is a student in the Physical Therapy Assistant program.

Nigina Rakhmatullaeva is an international student from Uzbekistan. She loves playing tennis and traveling the world. She knows several foreign languages, like Spanish and French, and speaks Russian and Uzbek fluently. She plans to major in agribusiness when she transfers to UNL. Nigina wrote her poem, “Promenade,” in her poetry class.

Lori Robison says she was inspired to write her poem, “Who Am I?,” by her clinical nursing instructor, Martha Howe. “She motivated me to move beyond my personal limitations to become a better nurse, a better person,” Lori says. “She is a compassionate, caring instructor and nurse.” Lori collects famous quotes, rocks, and ocean fossils. She adds, “I am not a traditional student, and that is fine by me! Having marked out 50 years of living, I feel I don’t have to impress anyone.”

Randian A. Naves Spencer enjoys photographing beautiful “found objects” on her farm. A student in the Business Administration program, Randian says she can always laugh at herself and wishes she could have been alive for each decade of the 20th century.

Josh Urbach is an animal loving, UFC-watching tattoo enthusiast. A student in SCC’s Energy Generation Operations program, Josh wrote his apologetic for the Pit Bull in his English class.

Erin Urbank loves reading and has written plenty of unfinished stories. Erin says she spends too much time creating enormous chalk drawings on her front sidewalk, and she loves to sing—although she bets other people wish she didn’t.

Shelby Urkoski likes to think of herself as an outgoing, fun person. She’s always had an interest in art, and she’s glad she finally did something about it by enrolling in a ceramics class. “I wanted to better my pottery skills,” Shelby says, “and this project [her beautiful “Untitled Drape Mold”] turned out better than I had expected.”

Melodi Wheeler loves to cook, garden, socialize, and play games. She also, strangely, really likes teeth! As a consequence, she is taking classes in pursuit of her dream to become a dentist. She has lived in Nebraska for only a year, has been married for four years, and has two furry children—her dogs, Moxie and Nola.

Cindy Wilson wrote her inspirational essay, “My Struggles,” in her SCC writing class. She is in the process of earning her Associate of Arts degree.

Janet Zanker has been a “closet writer” for years, and her poetry class allowed her the opportunity to grow in her abilities. Her best friend describes her as “eclectic” and “creative.” Janet loves to learn and thoroughly enjoys the experience of going to college as a nontraditional student. She is also empathetic and intuitive and a practitioner of natural healing.



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The water receded from the shore like an aging man's hairline, and in its place, trees began to grow. Thousands of small cottonwood trees, all from seed, had grown to over ten feet tall.... The lake was full this year, full of dark greenish-brown water that smelled like fish and lapped the shore with a steady rhythm.

*Yancy Dittmer,
"A Day at the Lake"*



Momma says I've always had a sweet tooth, even as a baby. Says I would try to eat sugar straight out of the bowl. I don't remember, of course, but that's what Jack's like to me. The kind of sweet where your tongue burns, but in a good way, and you feel that little zing going all through your body. That's what Jack's like. A sweetness that burns.

*Mystery Harwood,
"Everything's Perfect"*

There was a stranger standing in my kitchen.

"I knocked on the door." The stranger looked at me as if it was no big deal that he was standing five feet away.

"Who are you?" I gasped and held my breath for a few seconds out of shock.

"Don't even think about calling no one or making some big scene. Just give me all your cash, and I'm gonna take some of your stuff." I couldn't tell if he was making a statement or asking my permission.

*Jaci Benson,
"Finally Got Robbed"*

She stood in front of him, a cigarette between her fingers. She darted it like a wasp to her lips and back to her side, punctuating her sentences, doing everything but extinguishing it in his eye. While she stood almost a foot shorter and a hundred pounds lighter, she seemed to tower over him, dominating, crushing with words and more. She invoked her God; she quoted from her Holy Book, her voice sing-song like a televangelist, and she intoned the list of his sins. He was cast out, cast out from their marriage and from his children. The fog from the cold and the cigarette smoke mingled together, like a veil separating him from all that he loved. He slunk away, got in his car, and drove, watching his life dwindle in the rearview mirror.

*Thomas Joyce,
"Making a Snowball"*

Zeus has a strong presence to him; he exudes a quiet confidence and a desire to please.... His chest protrudes with gladiator-like muscle that is more fitting for a bear than a dog. His massive head is supported by shoulders that ripple and bulge while in motion. Short, powerful legs support a barrel-chested torso that widens to Olympic sprinter thighs. A whip-shaped tail wags constantly, knocking down any object that isn't bolted down. Covering his body is a platinum black coat of short, coarse hair that is interrupted by a single white patch on his chest and white on all of his feet. He has the indents of teeth from another Pit Bull—that did not share Zeus's carefree demeanor—on his forehead. Zeus, by my definition, is a perfect dog.

*Josh Urbach,
"A Walk with an American Enemy"*

The lion's roaring, laced with impatience and hunger, was loudest in the morning and echoed off the fabricated stone exhibit walls. The seals barked in time with the powerful waterfalls. The public's view of the zoo was fantastical and unreal—a trip to Narnia. A preschool class could take a field trip from the lush Amazon, thick with sweet mist, to the dry, barbaric Serengeti in less than an hour and end with a creamy soft-serve cone.

*Janey Patterson,
"One Eye Forward, One Eye Back"*