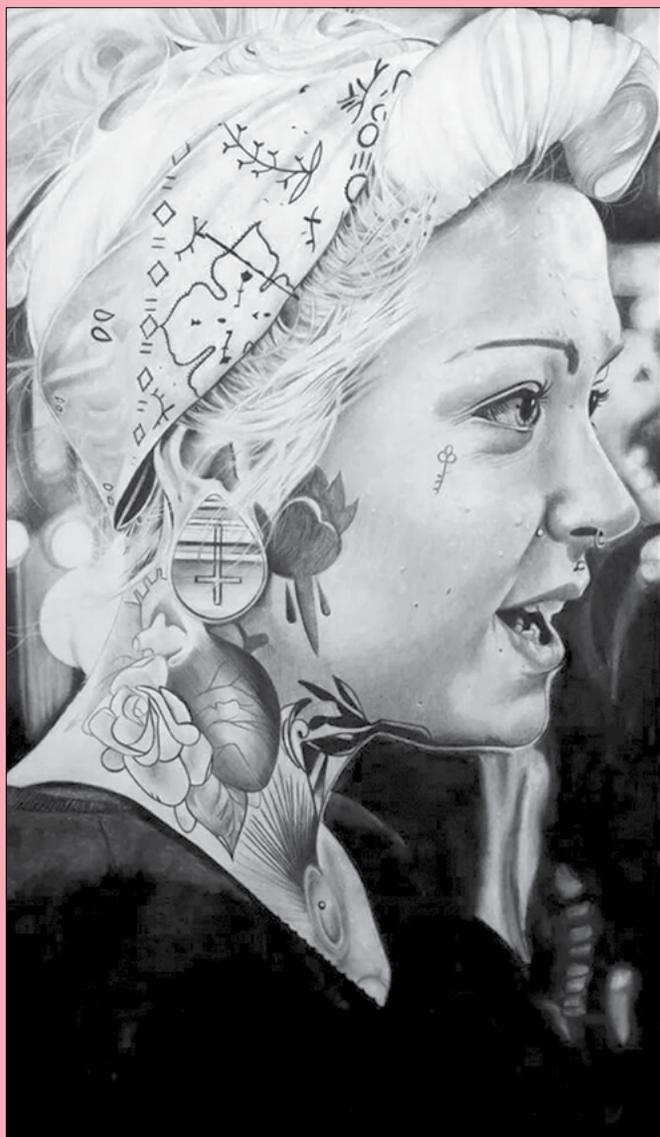


# iIlluminations

Volume 17 • 2016



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# lluminations

A magazine of creative expression  
by students, faculty,  
and staff at  
Southeast Community College  
Beatrice/Lincoln/Milford, NE

Volume 17  
2016

“We have to continually be jumping off cliffs  
and developing our wings on the way down.”

*Kurt Vonnegut*

# CREATIVITY LIVES HERE

These awards have been bestowed on *Illuminations* and its contributors by the  
Community College Humanities Association.

**2009**

Cameron Koll, “Baby Girl”  
Merit Award in Fiction

**2010**

*Illuminations*  
3rd Place Literary Magazine, Central Division

**2011**

Katrina Bennett, “Brown Walls”  
1st Place Nonfiction  
*Illuminations*  
1st Place Literary Magazine, Central Division

**2014**

Mystery Harwood, “Nebraska in My 30s”  
1st Place Poetry  
Alanna Johnson, “Descendants”  
2nd Place Poetry  
Cameron Maxwell, “The City’s Outstretched Hand”  
3rd Place Poetry  
Shannon White, “Black Violas”  
3rd Place Fiction  
Ashley Cornelsen, “Homeless Dreams”  
Honorable Mention Fiction  
Thomas Joyce, “The Hovel”  
2nd Place Nonfiction  
Stephen Kaminski, “Number 9”  
3rd Place Nonfiction  
Casey Lowe, *Eyes of Innocence*  
3rd Place Art  
Derrick Brinkmeier, *Not on This Night*  
Honorable Mention Performance  
*Illuminations*  
1st Place Literary Magazine, Central Division

**2015**

Samuel Huff, “Snowflakes in Summer”  
1st Place Song, 1st Place Performance, Central Division  
*Illuminations*  
1st Place Literary Magazine, Central Division, Small Colleges

# ILLUMINATIONS VOLUME 17

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

*Illuminations* is published in March of each year. Submissions are accepted year-round from SCC students, faculty, and staff. Email submissions to Editor Kimberly Fangman, [kfangman@southeast.edu](mailto:kfangman@southeast.edu), with the following information:

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

Written work is accepted as .rtf or Word files. Submit artwork images or photographs as .tif or .jpg files. (We can photograph or scan artwork for you if needed.) Video files of dramatic, musical, or other creative performances of ten minutes or less can be submitted as MPG4, MPG2, MPG3, AVI, MOV, FLV files. **The deadline for Volume 18 submissions is June 3, 2016.**

Contributors should be aware that submitted work may be used in promotional materials, featured on the *Illuminations* Facebook page or the SCC website, or submitted to literary magazine contests. Contributors retain copyright of submitted and published material.

“Like” our Facebook page for updates, creative challenges, news, contributor spotlights, and more. [www.facebook.com/illuminationsscc](http://www.facebook.com/illuminationsscc)

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The content of this magazine does not necessarily reflect the views of the Editorial Team, the Arts and Sciences Division, or anyone associated with Southeast Community College.

*Still for Dan – much missed*

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Front cover image, “The Girl,” by Lanny Tunks; back cover image, “Crayon Masked,” by Sonia Arellano

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# ILLUMINATIONS VOLUME 17

## PRIZE WINNERS

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

### PROSE WINNERS



*Grand Prize:* **Tayden Bundy**, “Linger”: Tayden’s moving narrative about his grandfather’s struggle with leaving the war behind impressed the Editorial Team with its layered simplicity and descriptive prose. “This writer masterfully unpacks this story,” one member wrote. “By the end, you realize that all blame has been dissipated, even though the situation is still undeniably complex.” Another team member wrote, “The writer’s use of descriptive language shows great talent and skill; this writer certainly knows how to move the reader emotionally.” A third team member had this comment: “‘Linger’ *lingered* with me for several days after I read the story. If a writer can do that to you, you know you’ve found a winner.”

*Runner-Up:* **Jim Baker**, “Close to the Heart”: Jim’s recollection of leaving his parents behind as he crossed country to attend college struck a chord with many members on the Editorial Team. “Is there anyone who can’t relate to this?” one team member wrote. “Leaving home is always a complex act, much more than packing a car and saying goodbye. The writer illustrates this point very well.” Another team member described Jim’s eloquent style: “This writer knows how to tell a story simply but vividly. And that ending line had my heart in pieces. Good job!”



### POETRY WINNERS

*Grand Prize:* **Teresa Burt**, Collection: The imagery and strong relatability of Teresa’s poems were qualities frequently cited by Editorial Team members. The variety in topic and style of Teresa’s collection of poems is also impressive. Of “Tattoos,” one team member wrote, “I love the movement conveyed in this poem as the lines take life on the body.” Another wrote, “Great imagery in this poem; I felt like I was in the tattoo parlor with its sights and sounds around me.” Of “No One Cared,” another team member wrote, “What a sad, biting poem!” “Memories of Mom” elicited this reaction: “I can remember my parents going out and my mom getting



dressed up. I could picture the scene and how the mother was gone, even before I read that she was.” Finally, of “Sacred Soil,” a team member maintained, “This poem’s scattered presentation makes it fun to read. The beating of drums and the relation to ancestors brings the poem to life as you’re able to physically feel the words. Connection to one’s bloodline evokes a powerful emotional and spiritual stimulation, which is instilled here. The eagle’s cry and the buffalo’s stomp strengthened the relationship between author and heritage while presenting the shared emotion between the people and sacred animals. Well done!”

*Runner-Up:* **Erez Trainin**, “All Intellectuals Are Atheists”: Erez’s slam poem immediately captivated the members of the Editorial Team, and several commented on the intricate rhyme and rhythm and the revelation that the poem’s attitude veers from its title. One team member wrote, “What a unique and creative philosophical and commentary poem! This is a great rant and ‘stand up for what you believe’ poem.” Another team member stated, “What a fun, intricate trip this was! In this case, the journey was as rewarding as the destination.”



## ARTWORK WINNERS

*Grand Prize:* **Lanny Tunks**, Collection: Lanny’s collection of representational artwork dazzled Editorial Team members with its detail and realism. Of “The Girl,” one team member wrote, “It looks so real! There’s so much for the eye to see here. I love the look and feel of the girl—so much detail.” Another team member commented on “how tough she looks” and yet “the kindness of her eyes.” Lanny’s “Untitled” drawing also struck many team members. “The eyes speak, and the emotion is captured,” one team member wrote. “This picture made me *feel* her. The detail was fantastic.” “Life-like perfection” is how another team member described the same portrait. Of “Eye,” a team member wrote, “Such realistic detail and absolutely amazing gradation.” “Some Burgers, Some Beers, A Few Laughs” also caught the eye of team members. One wrote, “This one is dead on, and I love the placement—it pops! Comic book style on a great movie. Shading and lines are fantastic.” Lanny’s other drawings received equivalent praise and determined his grand prize status.



*Runner-Up:* **Sonia Arellano**, Collection: Sonia presented the Editorial Team with an eclectic collection of artwork, ranging from 3-D acrylic paintings and Paper Mache mask work to photography. Of the captivating “Crayon Masked,” one team member wrote, “What an interesting painting with vivid colors and good depth!” Another team member wrote of “Three Views of Spring,” “There are layers to this painting, and each of them has an interesting story to tell. Love this one!” Of “Pretty as a Picture,” a team member commented, “A precious moment captured at the perfect time. What more is there to say?”

# LINGER

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TAYDEN BUNDY • ACADEMIC TRANSFER  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR PROSE

I watched my grandfather wither into a man undistinguishable to my own eyes. He had collapsed under the burden of truths that he let linger around his heart and settle into his descending bones. My eyes had not changed. They remained the same eyes that had gazed upon him with constant admiration year after year, week after week, day after day, hour after hour, throughout the course of my time with him. His eyes continued to change and grow tired. I watched him wither before my eyes, as he held strong to a life worth keeping secret, a life riddled with bullets containing scenes no man should ever have to endure.

I didn't hug him when I left my grandparents' house the day before he died. He was lying on the couch at noon, already drunk beyond recognition. My grandmother asked him a question, and he only managed to mumble something unintelligible. He just lay there throughout my visit. I was angry—angry for what he was putting my grandma through. She was in the process of enduring chemotherapy treatments for the third time. The cancer had formed two spots in her lungs. My grandfather couldn't deal with the cancer again, and he had become a man I didn't know. In the five years before his death, I didn't know him anymore. He was crushed by the weight of a life that he held within him, and he was struggling to open the wound to release some of the burden.

I knew him as the man that sat across from me at the kitchen table telling jokes and stories. His laugh will forever remain in my memory. He was a construction worker for most of his life. His yellow hardhat was covered in proud stickers for the union. He operated the crane, and he built structures that will stand for centuries. My grandfather was a man. He was an avid hunter and outdoorsman. He would sit outside alone for hours beneath the looming oak tree in his yard laughing at squirrels and taking in the sunshine, but he was also the most loving man I have known. He was the kind of man that told us that he loved us and hugged us every time we stepped into the room. He was the kind of man that had rough hands and a soft soul. He was the kind of man that I strive to be.

Before he turned into his own father and drank his life away, he was a charismatic and sensible man. He loved us. He loved all of us beyond limits, but he carried a weight in his chest that was much greater than any man should have to bear. He had been thrown into a war that he was drafted into. He waited for his birthday to be drawn from a hat, and for the first time, there was no celebration in order.

In small intervals across the kitchen table, he shared the mayhem of that time spent overseas, revealing sounds that echoed through the night and images of an astonishing orange glow that burst in the sky so close that he could taste the heat when he opened his mouth to speak. He described the repetitious whizzing past his ears, like flies that pricked his skin and shot a sting of pain from the surface of his sunburnt neck down into the nerves that jolted his consciousness into awakening. The smell of death lingered in the fields and wafted up from the sticky breeze that weaved through the trees. The constant loitering fear of stepping into the wrong spot, making a noise audible to the wrong person, or making a mistaken decision loomed over him. He achieved no rest lying in a shallow trench. His eyes never fully fell shut. He kept them alert. He kept them alive. *He* stayed alive.

He watched men suffer. He watched men scream out to him, their arms stretched to an invisible dream that had once floated in the space that lingered before them, as they became starry-eyed and spoke of hope—a dream that would soon fade into the darkness behind their eyes. He watched men he knew die, men he had shared jokes with and stories about Lexington. He watched those men's dreams disappear.

He told me a story once about his leader who was walking up a steep hill to retrieve supplies. My grandfather and the rest of the platoon stood silently at the bottom. Sweat smothered their skins and soaked their clothes. A chopper drooped down to land, and his leader turned to give them orders, but when he turned, the blade lifted the leader's head from his shoulders. They had no time to consider options. My grandfather gave commands to the other men, and they moved on.

My mother was born while he was there. He wasn't able to be in the hospital room to hold my grandmother's hand as she gave birth to their first child. He wouldn't meet my mother until she was nine months old and on the verge of walking for the first time. He was stripped of those moments with his first child.

He had met my grandmother in Lexington, Nebraska, one afternoon when she was walking home from school. He rode up next to her on his bicycle and asked if she wanted a ride, and she told him yes. For the two of them, that moment was the beginning of their life together, a life they spent 47 years creating. That day created all the moments they shared together and all the lives that followed. They fell in love, and through that love, they created a world I call home. My grandfather told me he carried my grandmother with him as he silently walked through the jungle. He carried her smile and her love. She kept him alive.

He told me the story about how he nearly lost his life. He jumped into a trench and emerged alone, bleeding, a bullet through his shoulder; a second grazed the side of his head and left a scar half an inch from death permanently raised above his left ear. The others in the trench weren't so lucky. He sprang upon them. Their backs were to him, so he took the shot. He squeezed the trigger, pelting them in their backs, piercing tanned, sticky skin. He took all

twelve out, allowing only one to fire two bullets that nearly stole his existence.

Those twelve men lingered within him. They lingered around his heart. He carried the lives that they lost. He carried his leader. He carried his own men. He lived at the cost of his own sanity that dwindled at each setting sun. He carried that year and a half of suffrage thrown at his 18-year-old feet that climbed up his pant legs and through the fabric of his shirt and dug a hole deep in the workings of his heart. He died in Vietnam. His chest continued to rise. His hands continued to speak. His eyes continued to love. But he lost himself in the jungle. His youth was stolen from him, his truth, his innocence; his life was ripped from his soft hands.

When he arrived home, he stood proud. He was handed a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star that gleamed beneath the American sun, but when the sun fell past the line of sight, darkness became that jungle. The bottles were emptied and tossed to the floor, his heart alleviated temporarily from pain. For decades, he held onto that year and a half, and he slowly killed the burden that he held inside. He drank the jungle away, and I watched him wither and drown. His laughter faded into the night. He lived to tell me stories, but he died struggling to extinguish the burden that still lingered in his heart. ✦

## SOULS CARRIED AWAY

---

TONYA SCHROEDER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# NO ONE CARED

---

TERESA BURT • CONTINUING EDUCATION  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR POETRY

Found dead beside an alley dumpster,  
left to rot like wasted food,  
a woman. Barely. Eighteen, maybe  
a penny more. Take a look

back inside her life of trash. Raped at eight  
by the man next door. "Get used to it,"  
her mama said. "Iffen he didn't, someone else  
soon would. It's our world, girl."

Trashed by Mama's boozed up  
lovers, bruised, discarded  
with the empty cans and bottles. Left  
that scene before sixteen, sleeping

on the streets, soon prowling for the johns.  
Just as well get paid for it. Survived  
a while, then friendly pimp took her in. Shot  
her up with her new best friend,

heroin. Crawlin' in her skin.  
She scratched and clawed her  
way down, down, no way out again.  
What is life? Rape to sex for a dime.

Born trash, white. Traded garbage for  
dumpster diving. No one cared. Blew her  
brains out amongst the rubbish.  
Still no one cared. Died trash, grey matter.

# ARTWORK COLLECTION

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LANNY TUNKS • ELECTRICAL & ELECTROMECHANICAL TECHNOLOGY

RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR ARTWORK

## THE GIRL

---



# HOTROD



## SOME BURGERS, SOME BEERS, A FEW LAUGHS



# ALL INTELLECTUALS ARE ATHEISTS

---

EREZ TRAININ • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PRIZE FOR POETRY

It started when I parted home to downtown to sit down  
with an intellectual crowd for chow.  
Immediately I guessed which guest was the most proud  
based solely on him spouting his side of how the world spins and runs  
that all intellectuals are atheists  
and those who say otherwise are dumb.  
I wanted to haul his ass down the hall,  
stand his small speck of a life before the full moon  
and harpoon his hot air balloon immune to reason  
but, I understood that it would be indecent.  
So I did as I should and stood my ground;  
he asked as a profound believer what I thought of his sound theory.  
Nearly bursting,  
I smiled insincerely.

As I sat, I tried to combat, and I fought and fought  
not to explain to him what I obviously ought;  
I stalled and said after dinner mints, we'll mince words,  
but when they came,  
he came back to his lines, and they were downright absurd.  
"As an intellectual, which of course means atheist," he said in the laziest tone.  
I picked at my steak bone rather than pick a bone with him  
and let out a groan, but only from within.  
He narrated a preposterous prose that he takes precedence  
'cause his presence is a present to the present presidents of every nation  
and also to the greater dictators and their traitor rebellious organizations.  
Deja moo 'cause I've heard this bull before;  
this guy was some sort of intellectual whore.  
I try to ignore, I grit my teeth,  
but he implores me saying  
go for it—please.

So I obliged, carelessly cut this plagiarizing gigolo's jugular, which was enjoyable,  
crucifying his cause because, if you recall, he was particularly secular in perception.  
He missed in the mist of his clouded judgment an assortment of important facts,

so begrudgingly, I began to make a slight adjustment tracing his tracks.  
I started.

First, I don't give a damn about curses, or your dam of stupidity,  
which I will flood with verses  
versus the ideas you've only discussed in disgust, that God perhaps, is like one of us.  
Second, I don't care for churches seeking only to enlarge their purses  
based on blind trust  
that spirituality and faith is something interior, and to pretend to be superior  
really just makes you inferior.  
He replied that I must see God as others see God for all to be encompassed;  
I couldn't eat my meat even though it was scrumptious.

I tried to alter his desecrated altar for God as an omnipotent  
ever present being that he didn't even believe in.  
I told him that believing doesn't need seeing and it's about percievin'.  
Buuuuuuut—  
He tried to cut me off, and I told him he couldn't be a proper doctor.  
He asked why, I replied,  
“Because you don't have the patients.”  
He laughs and then lets me finish my explanations.

The king of everything amazing but also the baron of a barren land,  
Maybe what's happened wasn't his plan, or perhaps  
he's just abandoned global tragedies?  
Maybe he's homicidal, or maybe he's just as idle as the idols attributed to his holiness.  
The explosiveness outburst caused looks of horridness,  
So I stopped.

But of course, he coerced the rest with coarse methods  
of irrelevant insults and senseless stabs at my spirituality.

I took a deep breath,  
and I began again,  
this time to finish  
until the end.

Maybe God preys on praises and celebrations and kneels and prays  
to something else that he'll profit off of his prophets just helping himself.  
It's disguise, guys, he didn't mean it all.  
He'd heeded the warnings, but he still didn't stall;  
the pull of power was too strong, as God realized  
That time's passing hours were ours unless he trivialized

the important things and focused on the frivolous.  
 My frenemy sitting furthest away was listening now,  
 no longer thinking I was ridiculous.

I continued, not faltering, maybe it wasn't his fault.  
 What if the throne was thrown down to him by default,  
 but he was so vain his veins ran with something grim?  
 He thought of and brought visions that sought to dim;  
 He whored his horde of lies to the hoards of people  
 Stuck on his word as law and he as the lord of every steeple.  
 I gave my heart into the ideas of which I was the owner;  
 after all, my license does say I'm an organ donor.  
 There's always evidence that his nature is corrupted by sin  
 because while I put my heart out, this God goes within.  
 He pries open his insides to find pride his prize,  
 the only thing left from his tangle of lies as he dies;  
 he dyes the ground red with his tries  
 to live forever in the minds of the masses

I stopped  
 to wipe my dirty glasses.  
 He could daze you for days; you'll be amazed that he can  
 elicit such illicit behaviors,  
 cause a craze of explicit actions of every nature.  
 You see he has the insight to incite beliefs in others,  
 take away the power of mothers and turn brothers against brothers.  
 My quote played before me as he lashed back in spite  
 despite my attempts to stay polite.  
 I knew the new news he laid out before me,  
 new upcoming proof in research, and frankly, it bored me.

"But science disproves God,"  
 and I stopped him there.  
 The ideas of science and God can honestly share  
 the same mind without contradicting.  
 This is assuming that you are actually thinking  
 God is a collection of answers  
 to questions that can never be mastered

We mentally dueled with dual daggers of wit late into the night,  
 yet instead of arguing at the end, he finally did something right.  
 He stopped with his aggression,  
 and he started asking questions.

We went back and forth, now talking, not enraged,  
both of us equally and fully engaged.

We came to the conclusion that life is full of unanswered questions,  
and more of them is better—not to lessen was the lesson.

We now enjoyed each thinking with his own mind  
rather than quoting someone else from another time

Time for talk had gone and passed, and the bill was passed onto me  
as I had earlier agreed to pay, but instead he took it with glee,  
an act which I thought was quite funny,  
but he explained that the dialogue was worth much more than money.

We decided to split as we had with the thoughts,  
and we shook hands, and this time, sincerely smiled a lot.

Then we packed up after that pact on our debate turned discussion,  
and that was the best dinner I've had minus the time  
I had a drinking contest with a Russian.

## THREE VIEWS OF SPRING

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SONIA ARELLANO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER  
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



# SIERRA

---

LANNY TUNKS • ELECTRICAL & ELECTROMECHANICAL TECHNOLOGY  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



# MEMORIES OF MOM

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TERESA BURT • CONTINUING EDUCATION  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR POETRY

Closeted clothes  
pretty dresses  
hung quietly  
waiting for awakening

carefully chosen  
full-skirted floral print dress  
hanging just below the knees  
red high heels  
and a handbag to match

get all dolled up  
Saturday night out on the town  
with face from a bottle  
and lips from a tube

Mom and me dancing  
'round the living room  
Engelbert Humperdinck  
33 record spinning  
on hi-fi stereo

wave goodbye  
kisses smear pretty faces

remembering special moments  
Here's to you, Mom!  
Save a Heavenly dance for me.

# THE FALL

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HOPE ROSE • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

*One month from leaving my marriage*

Warm sun shines through all the colors of leaves, all in various states of translucencies. They move on the branches, and the colors spin as if they come from the tube of a kaleidoscope.

Their beautiful colors speak of changes that are to come. The fall is the thank you note to summer, just as if it were words on beautiful paper. It thanks the summer for sharing the blue, warm skies and for sharing the warm summer breezes. It thanks the summer for sounds of laughter it has heard, as well as the silent tears it has witnessed.

The change of season is a struggle, each season wanting to hold on as long as it can, and each season knowing there is nothing it can do to stop the changes from occurring.

Along with the beautiful changes of season come feelings of dread. Feelings of being alone in the cold, still winter. Feelings of being alive and ready for adventure are replaced with sadness that matches the gray, overcast winter skies.

The large, wonderful world of spring, summer, and fall are replaced with a small, closed-in world. The adventure from day to day has gone, just as the beautiful colors have faded away.

I look for the key to open this small, closed world. I search for the adventures that lay within this colorless season. Maybe the truth is this season of quietness is supposed to be just this way. Maybe the main goal of the stillness is self-analysis, self-awareness, and healing that happens within us when the world slows down, and we can really hear what our hearts are saying.

As we snuggle under warm blankets and our world is cold outside, may we hear the life lessons speaking within us. And may we be brave enough to take them into the new season.

# ON THE CUSP OF WINTER

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LAUREN GREENWOOD • INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER



# A LONELY AUTUMN AT RAINBOW LAKE

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NATHAN MOSIER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Trees that cease to live on through so many years are yawning left and right in the turbine-like wind. The wind has a sting that numbs my ears and a sound that buzzes like a nearby fan. The chill of the wind hypnotizes anyone standing alone in warmth. Beside the trees, a cabin sits. This cabin, in Fremont, Nebraska, owns many loving 4<sup>th</sup> of Julys and other happy memories, and it sits joyfully on Rainbow Lake. Across the small area of beach, the sand melts away into the crystal lake, which spans out to meet the shore on the other side. Amber and gold leaves fall from shedding trees like the wings of a wilting bird. Some of them fall into the half-frozen, glazed lake that moves so subtly.

The boarding on the cabin is soaked with a fresh, brick-red paint that sticks out among the tanned sand and brown and green cottonwoods. The cabin is small compared to the rest of the houses and cabins that are set like stones on the sand that stretches around the lake. Laughs, memories, and nostalgia have been made within the cabin's walls. The cabin has heard and seen the family that every year comes to drink beer and celebrate the summer. The thin glass windows show the patio, where old butts of cigars and cigarettes lay in a small, sickly white bowl. Thousands of grains of sand scratch the thin glass, and the sound is mesmerizing and relaxing. The concrete deck leaves the patio door and supports an enormous red picnic table covered with coal-colored scorns from carelessly left firework punks. The cement continues to drop off and greet the sand.

The tiny microscopic pebbles spread to make a rough, yet soft surface for bare feet to run and walk carelessly across. Sand spiders, red ants, and dirt dabbers play along the hills of grain. Sunlight irradiates the beach with its UV light, cooking the pebbles and heating them in the bitter cold. The beach is warm; it burns, yet soothes my freezing toes. Somehow in this sand, small green plants sprout. Some are grass, some are sticker bushes, and others are of an unknown species. The plants crawl over the edge of the beach up to the hill that sits off to the side of the cabin.

A single tree sleeps on this hill surrounded by a small, white picnic table, greenery, and a deep, stone-walled fire pit. The tree blows in the wind and remembers that the cold will someday fade away, and it will soon again feel the

heat. Some heat comes from fires that roar within the pit laying 15 feet away. The flames warm the tree's branches and illuminate its bark with a soft, orange glow that flickers and wicks the air. For now, the pit holds only old, dead wood and dark coal with a few bits of cardboard from used, burnt fireworks. A slight scent of sulfur salts the back of my tongue.

The island that floats on the left side of the still glass lake is warmed by the trees that sing atop it in the breeze. Blue herrings fly like large, prehistoric pterodactyls in the fogged, smoky, sky. They swoop down every so often to snag a stray bluegill or bass. Kingfishers skip from branch to branch to feed their young. Below, the parts of a brown, useless rowboat rust in the sand like a filthy burden of the lake surrounded by poison ivy and oak.

The other island that bobs on the right side of the water is like a smooth, bare mountain. A light and easy color of tan sand showers over its high, steep slopes that perilously sink into the water. Only a few green trees dance on its surface, providing a small umbrella of shade from the brutally radiant sun. The only company this island receives are geese, which play on its bare, open sand where they make eggs and bear hatchlings. The geese are only a temporary enjoyment, for they fly away for the South leaving only web-footed prints in the damp sand.

Rainbow Lake is guarded by ancient, loyal trees that refuse to die unless chopped down. Their bark is thicker than a cement block. Their branches stretch like old, aching limbs and reflect on the surface of the water. They reach for the sky and provide homes for woodpeckers, red-tailed hawks, and barn owls that watch the dark with their pitch black observing stares. The woods, although harmless at night, become shaded and unnerving at the setting of the sun. The moon's light cannot reach past the trees' branches and provides a good place for coyotes to live.

Nighttime, back on the beach in front of the brick-red cabin, the sand turns cold and smooth. Bumpy, wart-backed toads hop happily across the hills of dirt. Joyful frogs from the swamp far out in the woods belch their songs in the wind like children with kazoos. The toads hunt crickets and do not move unless approached. Beach lights, with no sunlight to keep them from doing so, turn on and light up the edge of the sand. The water brushes the shore slightly with every small wave strike, releasing the noise of bath water on the exposed roots from under the soft earth. Moths fly back and forth, passing the lamps and reacting to the light by knocking their tender, yet hardy heads against the thin plastic. Some are eaten as snacks by frogs that hide in the grass and burp with happy sighs of full stomachs.

The night turns bitterly still and chilled, frozen until the next sun comes up. The moon now illuminates the night sky in a half-crescent fashion. The sky turns clear, and every star or planet becomes visible in the mirror-like sky over the lake. The water slows a little more than it did the day before and prepares to freeze over completely. The red cabin waits through many days like this, some worse than others. Eventually, there will be almost no animals, just fish in the lake that cannot be touched. But soon, life will revert back to social gathering for another summer at Rainbow Lake. ❖

## RADIANCE

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LAURA MADELINE WISEMAN • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

The lake that was an ocean. The can, the backseat chrome, the hours of sun on road, the flooded trees, nude of bark, shimmered. The back of her head silver-blonde, the back of hers red-chocolate, my kid sister's big eyes, the way of unraveling plastic dolls from star-sprinkled clothes, dark self from bright others, one country's sunrise from another's sunset. Where are the painted lines, rhythmic and steady, interstate's reflectors to cross border, sheen of lake, parting mists, speckled kid at lip who sips, doe who watches. The glossy frog to catch by hands stow in bucket beneath bed, follow the hop at dawn along cabin's polished floors in hope no sound of amphibian or footsteps wakes. The aluminum rental boat across the lake, the storm that stirred the waters, how he turned the keel into the toss to return by nightfall, but didn't, children huddled, gripped, engine churning. I wasn't there. I didn't see. I was an unthought glimmer of water, smooth pebbles, wet sand, sunset waves, stippled dress damp with play in lands of no return.

# FIREWORKS

KENT REINHARD • PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY INSTRUCTOR



# ARTWORK COLLECTION

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REBECCA BURT • LIFE SCIENCES INSTRUCTOR

## EVERYTHING GROWS ON MAUI

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MAUI SHADY PATH

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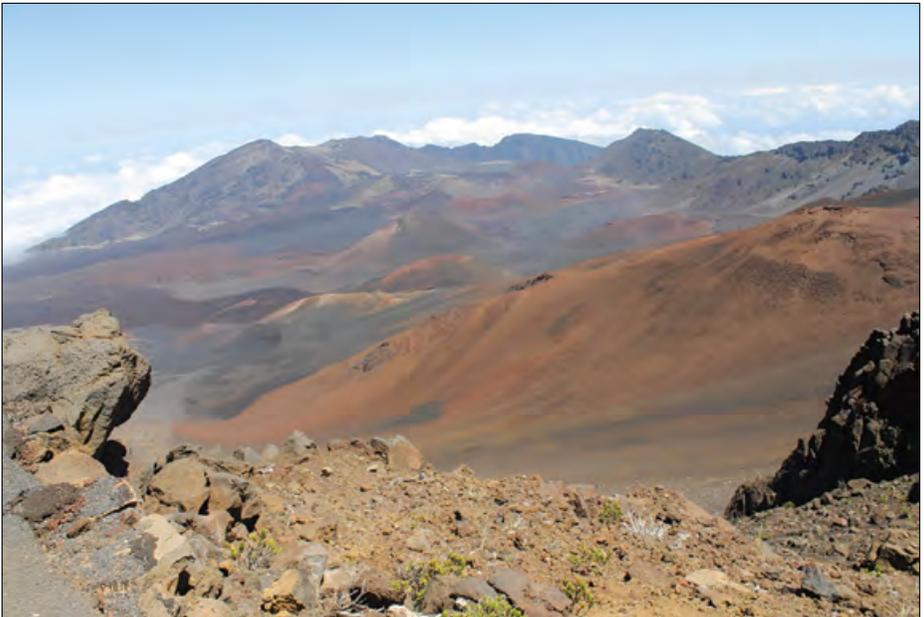
## MAUI SPONGE ROCK

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## MAUI VOLCANO TOP

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# THIS, I BELIEVE, IS LOVE

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MARIE RIEF • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

**M**y husband has an alarm that goes off at 5:30 every morning. He gets up to snooze it, rolls over, and we cuddle. We cuddle for those few minutes in the morning while our newborn snoozes in her bassinet by our bed. When he finally gets out of bed, he doesn't turn on lights but dresses in the dark. My husband chooses to do this, so I don't have to face the light quite yet; he knows our newborn was up half the night. After he dresses, he makes his way to the kitchen and packs his lunch for the day. Before leaving for work, he makes one last stop in our room to kiss me goodbye and says, "I love you. Go back to sleep, and I hope you have a great day." He turns off all the lights before he exits the house and shuts the door softly behind him.

This, I believe, is love.

Growing up, I lived in a full house. Noise, clutter, and people were never absent. I was the youngest of seven children, and everything was a competition. Everyone wanted the focus on him or herself. So each year for our birthdays, our parents would let us pick what we wanted to do for the day. We were allowed to stay home from school if we wished and to pick what we wanted for our special lunch or dinner. For one day, our parents tried to make our day strictly ours. Even by having the day focused on one person, my parents still managed to keep the peace and have everyone feel involved.

Through the years growing up, I frequently asked my mother who her favorite was. She would reply with, "Who do you think?" with a chuckle.

Of course, I responded with, "Me." She would laugh and smile at my response. She would then explain to me that she loved us all the same, and I didn't understand why. Some of my siblings were worse than others; some had problems bigger than others, but she loved us all the same? I didn't understand how she could love them when they did things that hurt her. This October, though, something changed. At 7:12 in the morning on October 1<sup>st</sup>, my husband and I had our first baby, a daughter.

Our daughter wakes me constantly. Each time she wakes up, I shush her, hold her in my arms, and feed her. Sometimes she wants to be held after eating, and other times she wants to nap. I realize now, though, why my mother loves us all the same. This little baby needs everything from me. She has no one else to depend on, no one else to protect her, and no one else to love her the way a

mother can love a child. I can't pick and choose to give this baby more love or caring than my future children; I just do everything I can for her and I hope—I hope it's enough. When she grows up, it won't matter what she does. I realize I will always love her.

I hope my daughter can find someone like my husband when she grows older. Someone who turns off the lights in the house so she can sleep a little more. Someone who always says goodnight and “I love you” before bed. Someone who will pick up dinner because she doesn't want to cook. Most of all, someone who will spend five minutes in the morning cuddling in plain silence because now, I know this is love. ❖

## WATER FUN

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JODI NELSON • INSTRUCTOR ADN PROGRAM



# I COME FROM

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DOMINIQUE L. RICHARDS • OFFICE PROFESSIONAL

I come from March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1987, from Lawana Fuller and James Avery, two older brothers, and being spoiled rotten.

From being the only girl to having two younger sisters and becoming the middle child.

I come from fried chicken, spaghetti, and corn bread, the North Omaha projects and playing Nintendo.

From wearing braids, ponytails, and perms to wearing extensions, cuts, and curls.

I come from pain, the struggle, and hard times to constantly moving back and forth to Lincoln and Omaha.

From Monroe, Benson, and Lincoln High

to reading Triple Crown Productions, Urban, and nonfiction books:

*The Coldest Winter Ever, Flyy Girl, Tales From The Hood, Supreme Cliental, A Hustler's Wife, The Cartel Series*, and lots of others.

I come from creativity, organization, and confidence to accepting the things I can't change, forgiving never forgetting, only the strong survive, and the almighty GOD.

From making mistakes, bad experiences, and still maintaining.

Wearing jeans, tank tops, and Reeboks, to fashion color coordinating and my own style, listening to hip-hop, R&B, rap, and gospel music.

I come from my older relatives, my siblings, and close friends.

Joining the Partnership program, getting mentored and challenged to staying on track so I could get my GED through hard work and motivation, to actually finishing my tests and graduating.

I come from playing the fool to getting my heart broken

to being in love, having a handsome son, and getting promised forever.

From stress, problems, lies, to being stress free.

From babysitting and taking care of kids to having my own.

I come from peach cobbler, brownies, oatmeal crème pies, honey buns, and cookies.

Hand-me-downs, borrowing clothes, now giving away.

I come from *Malcolm in the Middle*, *Sister Sister*, *Saved by the Bell*, to gangster movies.  
From being a tomboy, to a lady, now becoming a woman.  
Having to go to church to wanting to be in church.  
I come from being hardheaded, not wanting anything out of life,  
to becoming somebody.  
I come from dropping out of school to taking college courses.  
From living in shelters, poverty, now having nice things.  
From being a kid being told what to do, now giving advice  
to the younger generations.

I come from biting my tongue to saying what's on my mind, now outspoken,  
not sticking to the same old, same old, and trying new things.  
From fairy tales, pretending, playing house, to having a family life.  
I come from a crush to getting together, struggling together,  
making it through our problems, now 'til death do us part.

From never making the same mistake twice  
to this made me who I am today,  
and I wouldn't change any of this for nothing else in the world.

## A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

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DAWN CLOVER • ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, BUSINESS



# TATTOOS

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TERESA BURT • CONTINUING EDUCATION  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR POETRY

In fascination, I watch them  
squiggle and writhe; the tattoos  
as they dance on the flesh  
of their attached body parts.

I hear the buzz of the tattoo gun  
like the drill of the dentist  
working on a tooth. I smell the fear  
along with blood of some, sense the thrill  
of others; excitement of what and where  
will next be forever inked into their skin.

Obsessed, I stare at the inked stars  
where eyebrows used to be and appreciate  
the body art of balletic butterflies and dazzling  
flowers. I ponder the boldness  
of graffitied sleeves; skulls and snakes  
and naked ladies collaged.

Memories lacing veins.

# FRANKENSTEIN

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LANNY TUNKS • ELECTRICAL & ELECTROMECHANICAL TECHNOLOGY  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



# ON QUIET

CHRISTEL WIGGAN • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS, ACADEMIC TRANSFER

*I* hate the word “quiet.” I hate the way it tastes on my tongue—the way that everyone I come in contact with seems to believe it fits me so perfectly. Well, guess what? None of you actually *knows* me. People may think they do, but they’re just trying to sub-categorize the whole world, to understand their surroundings and make things as simple as possible for their daily navigation. Too bad. I feel for you—I do—but not enough to let you do this to me again.

You only deem me a mere miracle, as if I were the mute girl, because you made me this way. You needed somewhere to put me, and despite the fact that at times, I’ve shown you something different, you left me there. You left me in the easiest place because it was too hard or would take too long to look closer and realize that one word cannot define someone for an entire lifetime. I have grown up and, frankly, out of this box you’ve placed me in. This box that said, “Oh! So you *can* talk.” Yes. Yes, I can. I can actually talk a lot and about a multitude of things. I have been talking for a while now. You just drowned my words out because they were too soft and too few, so you thought of them as whispers. They’re not; they’re selective. Because I know if I were to say every single word on my mind at all times the way you all seem to, you would probably dislike me; *I* would dislike me because, like all people, I have thoughts that aren’t always that perfect or lovely or even *nice*. And these thoughts? I have a good feeling they would freak you out. Some of you might be able to take them; others might dismiss them. Tell me—I don’t know what I’m saying, thinking. But I am aware—at least of how my words sound. And because of this awareness, I keep my mouth wired. Shut.

But no, I’m not being a fake; I’m being practical and considerate. And careful for myself. Because I don’t need people to come and swirl my words about so they say what everyone wants them to say. I’m wording them in the truest way to me. Isn’t that good enough? And while I realize I could just change this, I could delete “quiet” from my vocabulary—if only I would just talk more or increase my volume—why do I need to scream over every single person to be heard? I don’t. However, I do wonder when someone will be willing to listen to my opinions. You know, the ones that don’t always co-agree with everyone else’s? The ones that also say something, just a different something. The potentially unpopular opinion. And I’m staring into silence. And I’m talking to no one. So many words, and they’re still not enough. Because no one will hear them. *I hate the word “quiet.” ❖*

# UNTITLED

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JORDYN RIHA • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

It was dark and cold in the small metal room. The floor was wet, the walls were moldy, and rats scurried about. I was tucked away in my corner accompanied by my two newest friends, exhaustion and shivering. I honestly had no idea how big or small the room was, nor if it was really metal. I liked to think it was a metal box keeping me safe, glistening in all the glory of clean, sun-heated shine. I liked to think a lot of things. I had no idea if it was day or night or how long I had been there. I did know I was hungry and alone and possibly dying. But it didn't matter. It never really mattered.

Another shiver climbed up my spine, making my teeth and bones rattle like a dancing skeleton. I had to look like death after so much...nothing. I had to look like....

"Can you see me?" I croaked, cringing at the forks in my throat.

"I don't need to see you," the blackness whispered with its gentle hiss.

"I know, but I'm curious."

"Very well." The dark air before me swirled in a mixture of shadows. "I can see inside you, but I choose not to look shallowly at what lies on the outside." The box danced in shadows. I frowned.

"Why?" A familiar chill slithered around my feet, creeping up my leg.

"Beauty lies within. I prefer beauty."

"Hmm." I considered the words as the chills worked their way up to wrap around my body.

"You are still curious," they lulled.

"Yes, I usually am."

"But you do not ask the questions that pester your mind. Why?" A tendril of the dark caressed my cheek. I welcomed the cold touch, welcomed the shivers that racked my withering self.

"Sometimes, things are best left unknown and in the dark."

"Well thought through." The misty caresses began to unravel themselves and retreat back into the walls. My chest ached despite the heat my body began to regain.

"Why must you leave me?" I whimpered emptily, like a wounded child.

"I cannot stay long. You know this."

“But why not?”

“Some things are best left unknown.” The hiss swirled through the air as all loneliness returned, and then it was gone. I was alone in my metal box, in my darkness.

“Please!” I called out so all the rats could hear. “I don’t regret anything. Never. I did it all for you. And I love you. I’ve always loved you.” My head hit the wall with a sickening thud. A fit of coughs gasped out of me as I spit filth on the wet floor. “I hope you remember me.” I moaned. “I hope....” ❧

## THE SECRET ALLEYWAY

HEATHER SMITH • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# CLOSE TO THE HEART

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JIM BAKER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PRIZE FOR PROSE

In June of 2008, just over a month before my 21st birthday, I packed my most prized possessions into boxes, crates, and plastic tubs, loaded them all into my car, and left my life behind. The morning of my departure from my parents' house was a typical Southern California summer day: warm, sunny, the air slightly hazy with Los Angeles's ever-present smog. I took a last look out over the valley that had been my home for all but one of the years of my life, and I soaked up the sight: the cell towers and power lines barely visible on the crests of the far hills; the silver ribbon of the 210 Freeway—choked with cars even on a weekend—running out of those same hills like some modern artist's impression of a glacier; the barely visible glitter of the spires of downtown far to the south, monoliths of glass and steel reflecting the sun.

Where I was bound, I wouldn't see any of those things.

I thought briefly about things I couldn't see at that moment. Did not seeing them make them less painful to think about? Just down the hill was the junior high school I had attended for half a year. It had been hell. Rumors, teasing, bullying, an almost-fight in the corridor; it had ended only when my mother, fed up with being called to pick me up from school because I "didn't feel good" personally investigated. She wound up screaming at the counselor and the principal before finding me a new place to go to school. I wouldn't regret never having to see that place again, but the mere fact of not seeing it didn't make it less real.

I turned around, slowly. My car, a white, stick-shift Toyota Corolla as old as I was, rested on the street and was loaded down so heavily with clothes, books, and childhood toys that the rear bumper sagged nearly to the pavement. The trunk was full of boxes and totes packed with clothing. The back seat was full of containers of books, my oldest and most faithful friends. My bookshelf, an old Ikea construction that looked like maple, had been disassembled and packed as neatly as possible into the rear footwells. The front passenger seat held a plastic chest of drawers full of assorted tools and supplies; the footwell before it had a cooler stocked with water and snack foods. Only the driver's seat, leaning uncomfortably forward to make room for the bookshelf parts behind it, remained open.

Clinging together and looking small and forlorn, my parents stood in the center of the driveway. They had said goodbye to me like this once before when they had dropped me off at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo to begin my life as a college student. That farewell had been one of tearful joy and blustering, my mother so proud and my father with just the slightest waver to his hearty laugh; I had hidden vague amusement behind solid hugs and empty promises of phone calls.

But that idyllic image came crashing down. After one quarter of relative success, my career at Cal Poly took a nosedive and never recovered. I spent all of high school feeling like I didn't belong, telling myself that all I had to do was make it to college and then I would be free, and it would be better. Instead, I found myself taking classes I hated, failing them, and feeling estranged, isolated, unsure. The only place I felt right was in the world of gamers, so I dove headlong into the *World of Warcraft*, hiding from my academic failures in a world of magic and adventure. After two straight quarters of Ds and Fs, Cal Poly told me I was done. I went back home without protest.

Back home to my parents—to whom I had promised when I left for Cal Poly that I wouldn't install any computer games on my laptop. (*Hah!* I'd thought flippantly as I perjured myself. *As if.*) Back home to my parents, who were outraged at my lies and failures, who took me in but treated me with (deserved) mistrust and uncertainty. Back home to face my little brother, now a senior in high school, still confident, still successful, still everything I wanted to be but wasn't and could never be again. Back home and away from the few friends I'd made at Cal Poly with the life cut out from under me. The only world that still made sense was not the real one.

I got a summer job. When it ended, I couldn't face the thought of going back to school, so I got a year-round gig. After about a year of slow, grinding, minimum-wage work, I took a few classes at the local community college. In my first quarter there, I made new friends, kids about my age with whom I could (and did) sit and talk for hours about everything and nothing.

But my parents and I weren't getting along. My mother, convinced I was addicted to gaming, strong-armed me into seeing a counselor. The counselor was nice and helpful and treated me with a respect I wasn't used to receiving from people much older than I was; the counselor couldn't break me of the desire to spend time in a world where everything played by certain rules, however, and I had the skills to be successful. My parents refused to respect my identity as a gamer, and my respect for them deteriorated, my child's love overwhelmed by confusion, anger, and a desire for freedom. When they started pulling the modem out of the network at night so I couldn't go online, I decided I was done. Some of my *World of Warcraft* friends were students at

UNL, and they told me I could room with them in Nebraska if I wanted to get away. Having no better options locally, I agreed.

And so there we were on that sunny June day, a lost boy who wasn't a child anymore—determined to be lost on his own rather than lost in his parents' shadow—, and two parents, helpless, hopeless, watching their child—so bright as a boy, so happy, so driven—slip away further into the grasp of something they didn't—couldn't—understand.

I tried to smile. It probably came out closer to a grimace.

My mother smiled, too, though it could not disguise the tears glistening in her eyes. “Your brother got this for you,” she said, holding out an envelope. I peeked inside: it held a pre-loaded gas card, good at any Shell station. On a drive from California to Nebraska, I was going to need it.

That time, I actually smiled a little. “Tell him I said thanks.” He was at work that morning, but he'd thought to get a farewell gift for me, despite how much of an ass I'd been to him over the last year. I folded the envelope meticulously and pocketed it carefully, drawing out the moment.

I glanced up at the second story window to the bedroom my brother and I had shared as boys and in which I had roomed by myself for six or eight years; I let memories wash over me. I glanced down at the sliding glass door that led to the room I'd been given on my return from Cal Poly, and I sighed.

I turned back to my parents. “Time to go,” I said softly.

They stepped forward each in turn and hugged me tightly. Mom was first. “Be good and drive safe,” she cautioned as she pulled back from the hug. She looked like she wanted to throw a bullet-pointed list of warnings and cautions at me, but she settled for, “I love you.”

“Love you, too,” I murmured.

Then it was Dad's turn, and Mom was turning away, hiding her face, not looking at me or at my car. My father wrapped me in a crushing hug that to this day I don't have the strength to match and whispered, “*We* love you. No matter what. OK?”

I nodded, my face pressed against his chest. What do you say to that?

“Love you, too,” I managed to repeat. It seemed woefully inadequate, but it was all I had.

And almost before my father let go, there was my mother again, wrapping me in another fierce hug. “Call me when you stop for gas, OK?”

I nodded. “Will do.”

My father pried me loose and pushed me, gently, toward my car. “Go on. You've got a schedule to keep.”

I took a deep breath, marched over to my car (*chin up, no tears*), and fished my keys out of my pocket. With a last falsely jaunty wave to my parents, who

stood waving and trying to smile at the end of the driveway, I slipped into the driver's seat and started the engine. The car rumbled to life, and I pulled away from the curb and started down the street. I reached the bend in Willow Haven Drive and took it at speed.

The last I saw of my parents for three years was them standing, arms still raised and waving, silhouetted against the cerulean sky, and underneath them the stenciled words, *Objects in mirror are closer than they appear.* ❖

## FROM WHERE WE'VE COME

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ASHLEY HECKMAN • MEDICAL ASSISTING



# WHILE YOU WERE GONE

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CAT LEVERETT • ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT/SECRETARY,  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP CENTER

*Dedicated to Tim Mittan, former Director of the Entrepreneurship Center,  
for the pleasure and privilege of his mentorship for three years*

Hey, Boss...you will be proud to know we didn't miss a beat...  
Even though we felt the heat, we handled it!  
We're cool on either side of the building.  
The ceilings are not falling;  
The elevators are not stalling  
For brave hearts pushing buttons to follow their calling.

We answered the phone,  
Said you weren't home, but out beyond ideas of right and wrong  
Where roads are even more than fifteen counties long.  
Problems appeared out of nowhere  
While we wondered how the heck  
They got there.

We did what we usually do when we take our cues from you,  
"Prepare for the probable,  
As well as the impossible."  
It was calm and not out of control—  
Bless my soul—for at least an hour!  
We watered the plants,  
Growing in Cans from Can'ts,  
Startups spilling way outside the box,  
Predicting profits in spite of tick-tocks.

We protected the grapes from turning sour  
By keeping fruit as the focus rather than power.  
Papers were stapled, piles were sorted,  
Rents have been paid,  
The running toilet, reported.  
We unlocked doors,  
Without keys, only clues,  
While doing our best to fill your shoes.

We sealed a big deal with a risky spin of the wheel,  
Creating win-win-win once again,  
For the TEAM along for the ride in the bargain we are licensed to drive.  
Yes...so glad to have you back, back where you belong,  
Where we hit it with our best shot  
Like the old P. Benatar song.

BTW—it is quite a trip to stay  
While you are nearly far away.  
Sipping coffee I cooked myself from a cup that's turning blue,  
I miss the warm welcome scent of the dark-bitter brew  
Prepared punctually and properly  
Most mornings by you.

## COFFEE SET III

NANCY HAGLER-VUJOVIC • ART INSTRUCTOR



# 11/22/63: STEPHEN KING'S THIRD OPUS

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CLIFTON SMITH • OFFICE PROFESSIONAL, LEGAL OFFICE FOCUS

Although he is most often marketed as the undisputed master of modern horror, Stephen King occupies a unique niche in American literature. Many readers avoid King with false assumptions that everything he writes abounds with the gory or horrific. Nonetheless, King arguably has the largest dedicated fan base of all maestros d' macabre. With over 50 worldwide bestsellers under his belt, King has begun to receive recognition of his work which refutes the majority of anti-King critique. What are the elements of King's writing that enable him to be so proliferate at a time when the market for printed fiction is rapidly shrinking?

Fans and reviewers have argued for some time whether *The Stand* or *It* deserves the honorific of Stephen King's magnum opus; I would add a third title as a heavy contender. King's *11/23/63* delivers a variation on the John F. Kennedy assassination that is epic in scope. Contrary to the belief of those who stereotype King as a blood and gore hack, his works often span multiple genres. This novel demonstrates precisely why King has such diverse and loyal fans. I believe *11/22/63* is worth reading, has something to offer every reader, and will stand the test of time as a literary classic.

The main character of *11/22/63* is Jake Epping, a high school English teacher who is presented with an opportunity to travel back in time and thwart the JFK assassination. Jake also teaches GED classes on the side. When he asks his students to write essays about events that changed their lives, one student details a gruesome assault in which his father murdered his mother, brother, and sister with a sledgehammer. The student, Harry Dunning, suffered severe head injuries in that attack. Dunning's essay compels Jake to accept the challenges of time travel and alteration of the past.

However, this is no straightforward time travel action story; the mechanics of temporal travel in this story are peculiar. A hidden portal leads to a day in the late summer of 1958; every trip there leads to September 9, 1958, 11:58 a.m., as a starting point. Every return trip leads back to the present two minutes after the time of departure. Although the interim spent in the past affects the current time in the present by only two minutes, it affects the body of the time traveler

normally. In other words, a traveler spending 20 years in the past would return two minutes after leaving but 20 years older.

One comes to expect shocking descriptions from King whenever tragedy strikes in his narratives. Throughout *11/22/63*, this signature style can be seen, especially in King's handling of the fates of the Dunning family. Detractors often refer to his graphic violence when attempting to pigeonhole King's writing as popular horror trash unworthy of literary note. Failing to look beyond the visceral only results in missing the richness of King's storytelling prowess.

*The Stand* chronicles the demise of the end of 98.5% of the world's population and the eternal struggle between good and evil amongst the survivors. The novel *It* spins a similar good vs. evil epic told from the perspective of childhood. Both novels contain scary and disturbing material; however, the underlying themes of these stories elevate them above the status of mere spook tales. The interactions of the characters and the personal relationships they build, as well as the deep moral and spiritual truths, take center stage in these tales. The same can be said of the novel *11/22/63*.

Contrast this with King's earlier works, such as *The Shining* and *Salem's Lot*; one is the penultimate haunted house story and the other a modern vampire classic. These are pure and simple horror regardless of any internal messages or themes. *Misery*, *The Dark Half*, *Desperation*, and many more King novels are bloodbaths wrapped around psychological terror. Good reads in their own right, such novels do not rise to the level that *11/22/63* attains.

At the core of *11/22/63* beats the heart of a poignant love story, which creates more conflict for Jake than the atrocity he is attempting to prevent. He falls in love with Sadie Dunhill, the librarian at the school where he works, while plotting to prevent Lee Harvey Oswald from assassinating JFK. When Jake's actions in the past result in devastating consequences for his own original timeline, his love for Sadie nearly prevents him from doing the right thing. The last few chapters of this book are arguably the most terrifying.

Epping and several supporting characters engage in numerous philosophical conversations about politics, time travel, and the consequences of action or inaction for both. King manages to craft such a comparison between the JFK assassination and other supposedly lesser deaths in the narrative that the nature of the fabric of our universe is called into question. The Butterfly Effect turns even the simplest of problems into a Gordian Knot.

The novel's ending proves that while Stephen King's meat and potatoes may well be horror, he is capable of adeptly stepping outside that repertoire. Complexity and surprise turns make *11/22/63* a compelling page turner, nearly impossible to put down. Does Jake avert JFK's assassination? Do Sadie Dunhill,

the Dunning family, and others become fortunate survivors or unavoidable sacrifices? The answers are nestled within the pages, eagerly waiting to be known.

Foundationally, *11/22/63* is a time travel story and, thus, science fiction. The main plotline of the JFK assassination would make this a work of the suspense thriller stripe. As the supporting plotline unfolds, stringing together a terrible accident and several disturbing homicidal acts, King neatly, if not cleanly, drags us into the dark world of horror. The twists and turns near the end are enough to make this novel a cult classic like George Orwell's *1984*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. The alternate future created by Jake's saving of JFK actually makes a reader consider whether any tragedy can be deemed a bad thing without understanding every repercussion attached to it.

Structurally, *11/22/63* is a prime example of King's abilities as a storyteller. His characters are well developed and easy to like or—when appropriate—hate. We cannot help but sympathize with Jake Epping and Sadie Dunhill or the unfortunate Dunning family. King uses language which carries readers away and envelops them in the world he is crafting. By use of popular cultural references, King makes that world come alive, whether past, present, or future. While he does use profanity and sex, he never does so at the cost of diminishing his narrative. When not writing outright horror, King even manages to prevent necessary graphic violence from diminishing his story.

The subject matter alone of *11/22/63* proves King intended this novel to be an epic tale and not just an everyday yarn. The sheer volume of intricate details regarding Oswald and the circumstances surrounding the JFK assassination would make this book worth reading even if it was no more than a nonfiction summation of those events. King deftly weaves his otherworldly material into this pre-existing framework with the skill of a neurosurgeon.

Perhaps most revealing is King's six-page afterword, in which he details some of his research into the JFK assassination and the people involved in surrounding circumstances. King discusses some of his opinions regarding the various conspiracy theories as well as his reasons for writing *11/22/63*.

The fine literary touches do not end with the story. The original Simon and Schuster hardcover incorporates two versions of a mock newspaper article covering the JFK assassination. The front cover shows a picture of the infamous motorcade through Dallas with a close-up of the President and First Lady; the accompanying article details the shooting, Lyndon B. Johnson being sworn in as President, and the capture of Lee Harvey Oswald. The back cover shows a photo of the President and First Lady and details the narrow escape of that assassination attempt. Creative marketing at its best, this jacket illustrates the extremes to which the roller coaster ride within can go.

*11/22/63* was named a Top Ten Book of 2011 by the *New York Times Book Review*, and it won the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for Mystery/Thriller as well as the Best Hardcover Novel Award from the International Thriller Writers. Critical acclaim like the aforementioned does not come easily; in fact, such notice eluded Stephen King for much of his early career. That King could earn such accolades with material as sensitive as the assassination of John F. Kennedy is a tribute to his talents as an author.

Stephen King's writing might have taproots reaching into the darkest depths of the traditional horror genre, but books like *11/22/63* show he has evolved into something greater than a gore-splattered trickster. The implications of *11/22/63* are earthshaking and mind numbing. King's delivery is exquisite, as always. Clearly, this novel deserves at least a contender's space for the title of Stephen King's "opus" work. Any reader evaluating whether or not to indulge in King's work ought to pick up a copy of *11/22/63* and make that discovery for him or herself. ❖

## CLOUDS, TOO

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RICHARD HADLEY • SPEECH INSTRUCTOR



# THE ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE TO NEW ORLEANS

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RYAN HARRINGTON • COMPUTER INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

We disembark our Boeing 747 and move up the gangway leading into the Louis Armstrong International Airport terminal in New Orleans, LA. It is a common airport, and like most airports in the U.S., it is complete with its share of side stores, like the infamous Hudson News with its dancing plethora of magazines and books. The scents from the foods available to airport campers—such as the overly sweet and heavily intoxicating Cinnabon—permeate the air. I swear they pipe that tantalizing smell of sugary cinnamon “no, really, this is *good* for your body” smell into the air ducts to beckon us their way.

We continue walking further into the terminal on our way to baggage claim. A faint yet ripe scent of Parmesan cheese foot wafts by us as we pass by security lines with future passengers anxiously waiting in line, struggling to “get it right” to comply with TSA officials. The ultimate prize is passing through that metallic detecting door of freedom to peacefully make their ways to their destinations.

As my wife and I discover baggage claim, I ask her, “So what do you think you want to do once we get to the Quarter?” The Quarter I am referring to is the French Quarter. The original settlement of New Orleans is set alongside the mighty Mississippi River. When you look on the map of New Orleans, the Quarter sits on a suspiciously crooked crescent-shaped bend that has pointed the main part of the city in an inappropriate compass setting—hence, its nickname as “The Crescent City.” This makes it difficult to give directions. You must learn quickly if something is downriver, upriver, lakeside, or riverside.

My wonderfully 5' 2" short (excuse me...*tall*) wife Tonia peers at me with her ocean blue eyes from under her A-line styled cut and this month's hair color choice, a brazen red highlighted with a few subtle blond streaks. Using her cheesiest of grins, she declares, “We are going to our condo to get changed out of these airport clothes and then heading out to Bourbon Street for a night of drunken festivities!”

I smile slyly and say, “Oh, really? Is that all we are here to do? To go out and party like it's 1999?”

Her reply is simply, “Yes. We are on vacation, and we are here in a city built on good music, great people, amazing food, and heavily poured, affordable alcoholic beverages!” Man, I love this woman!

We retrieve our baggage and walk briskly, our red bags rolling fiercely behind us, to our first actual steps outside. We have been making this annual pilgrimage for the last 13 years, and a long year has passed since we have been here. However, nothing prepares me for the wall of sopping wet humidity that hits me upon entering this glorious city. It’s the kind of moist, hot air that makes me wonder, “Why did I bother showering?” I can always spot the first-time travelers to New Orleans; they come through the doors with their well-groomed selves—long-sleeved pima cotton polo shirts, twill pants, and jackets. Suddenly, they are performing impromptu versions of the Hulk by ripping off cumbersome layers of clothing—as if that helps.

The busyness of the airport is replaced by the congestion of the I-10 freeway, winding us out of what is actually the municipal town of Kenner and through the suburban city of Metairie. This is where we get our first glimpse of one of the macabre, above-ground graveyards, the Metairie Cemetery. This is one of the larger graveyards in the area, and if we look closely, we can witness many different shapes and sizes of crypts. Some are plain, walled with white marble and non-descript etched writing, while others are grand delights featuring Grecian columns, statues, and hand-carved filigree with deeply chiseled script and family crests at the doorways. Regardless of how fancy the tombs are, they all have one thing in common: they house generations of families that span over two centuries. New Orleans wouldn’t be New Orleans without these final resting places for loved ones, so it’s important to gaze upon them with respect and learn a story or two behind them.

The heart of New Orleans is around the bend from these tombs of death. The sights have changed immensely through the years, as we have watched the area go through the growing pains of surviving Hurricane Katrina. Our first trip back immediately after the hurricane was filled with great sadness. It wasn’t just empathy for the people who had remained there during and right after the hurricane—it was sadness because we thought of New Orleans as our second home. We have participated in so many events and become so accustomed to its cultural beliefs that this town gives us a self-proclaimed, adopted kinship. Because of Katrina, in some of the parishes (Louisiana’s version of counties), houses were moved clean off their cement pads and relocated elsewhere as if they were never there to begin with. Whole neighborhoods, including churches and schools, were devastated to the point that even if they managed to stay

erect, it was not worth the effort and money to fix them. The mold damage was remarkable; there was so much awful damage that it was hard to imagine this magical place coming back from such devastation.

All of this had a profound impact on our feelings for NOLA. My wife had softly cried the first trip out after the hurricane. I can admit that I was misty eyed, as well. It hurt our hearts immensely to see what had happened. The events taking place on TV did not hold a candle to seeing in person what a catastrophic disaster this hurricane was.

Alas, this trip is now the third year after the devastation, and NOLA has survived. We are noticing more of her true colors flowing once again! The people here are resilient and excited for life. The now newly conditioned and elevated I-10 has finally led us to our beloved sister city. We can tell by the unmistakable sight of the Mercedes-Benz Superdome, Home of the 2010 Super Bowl Champion Saints, and the next door Smoothie King Arena for the NBA Hornets. Just beyond the arenas is the skyline of the tall city buildings that make up the CBD (Central Business District, or Downtown, if you prefer), including the oddly sprocket-shaped World Trade Center at the Port of New Orleans.

After exiting the freeway at the CBD, we are instantly given a look at how monstrous the Superdome is at street level. It, too, had suffered great damage to its structure from the hurricane, and it was the sight of an undeserved suffering that I hope this country never forgets. The Superdome was a staging area for people who had stayed to wait out Katrina; what it became, though, was something horrific and unjustified. In remembrance of this and with a look of remorse on her face, Tonia says quietly, “It still saddens me knowing that so many people died and suffered here.”

In a similar tone of voice, I say, “I know. We just have to hope that we learned from this and can avoid similar future situations.”

As we head further down Canal Street, the main drag of the CBD, our humdrum moment is quickly remedied when we come upon the French Quarter. Some people would say the Quarter is a tourist trap. However, I can tell you from experience and knowing many people in this amazing city that it most certainly is not—it is a way of life.

We turn downriver (left) off Canal onto Bourbon Street and officially arrive in the French Quarter. Instantly, we see street performers and musicians—from kids with bottle caps under their tennis shoes tap dancing and drumming five-gallon plastic buckets to straight ensemble bands that perhaps had met just that day. Music fills the Quarter and reverberates off the 19th century buildings; most of them have maintained their charm from a different time long since

passed. The architecture of these homes is impressively majestic with wrought ironwork embellished onto every upper story balcony. A few of these homes are single family, but even more of these old townhomes have been split into apartments and storefronts for artists or antiques. Each building has its own set of rules for how many plants and flowers will be maintained as they cascade down the front side of the building's facade. The smell of jasmine evokes a spirit of calmness; jasmine grows wild in most of the upper deck gardens, even within the cracks of the old brick.

The music continues throughout the quarter, but most famously in front of St. Louis Cathedral in Jackson Square. We turn riverside (right) down Toulouse Street and head to the riverfront, which is only four blocks away, and then downriver (left) on Decatur Street until we are front and center at Jackson Square. If the French Quarter framework was thought of as containing veins and arteries, then Jackson Square would be the heart and soul of New Orleans. Music, dancing, Tarot card readers, horse and carriage rides, performers of all kinds, and most likely some kind of festival involving food takes place here in Jackson Square.

Our olfactory senses have now hit the mother lode! The smell of everything NOLA has to offer is intoxicating us like the pleasures at an all-night college frat party. One second we are beckoned by the sugary sweet beignets and the warm aroma of chicory coffee at the world renowned Café Du Monde, and the next we are slowly pulled in with the scent of heaven that is the creamy Cajun crawfish étouffée served on a bed of dirty rice. If you have never experienced either of these New Orleans treats, then you won't fully understand, but these couple of tasty delights are just that—ONLY a couple of what can be offered at this mecca of pure gluttony. We continue slowly down Decatur; we know we don't have to take this route through the Quarter to get to our home away from home for the week, but we do it because it is our tradition. The Quarter is what we want to see first after having been away for so long, and it is always a welcome sight.

After our tour downriver on Decatur, we make it to Esplanade Avenue and walk lakeside (left) until we reach Royal Street. Our place is one block from the French Quarter on Royal; the neighborhood is at the very edge of the Faubourg Marigny.

We park in front of our place, but only long enough to unload, and then I re-park the car in our usual spot about six to eight blocks away. Parking is a premium luxury in these parts. Residents with permits park their cars as little as two inches from each other's bumpers to maximize as much street parking as possible. It is not uncommon to see a car rub and bump to get in or

out of a space. City parking enforcement is *very* strict about this and will not tolerate people parking where they shouldn't. Tow trucks and parking boots are commonplace in the Quarter and the Marigny. I imagine this is a grand source of income for the city, as we witness many parking enforcement officers and trucks trolling the streets to make that unpopular tow.

Our building is modest on the outside—not as elegant or intricate as the homes directly inside the Quarter. But upon entering through the gated carriage entrance and into the courtyard itself, we are welcomed by lush tropical vegetation and a babbling fountain with a pond filled with fish. We walk up to our humble, upstairs two-bedroom abode. We walk through the door and onto the refinished 200 and some odd years old oak floors and gaze upon the haunting twelve-foot ceilings that go on and on. The place is equivalent to a full apartment with a complete kitchen, full bathroom, large living room area, and two bedrooms positioned at opposite ends of the condo.

We finish settling in and finally change out of our comfortable airport clothes with a new goal in mind. Going to Bourbon Street will wait. We decide to walk back down to Jackson Square and join the festivities. Upon returning to the Square, we immediately enjoy the aromas that target our senses, and we now marry them with our salivating palettes. Red beans and rice with Andouille sausage, warm butter and cheese grits, mudbugs, and that wonderful crawfish étouffée.... All the while, we hear the pulsating Zydeco music coming from every corner of the square as it bounces off the face of the mighty, gleaming white cathedral and its towering, unencumbered steeples. As we wind down from our post-coital marriage of food into our bellies, we make it across the Square to Café Du Monde, commandeer a table in the 24-hour patio, and order chicory and beignets. We then gaze upon the square and soak everything in.

The ambiance is alive and well in our sister city. We adore this place; it will always be in our hearts, and we have always felt welcome. New Orleans is not for everyone, but if you're lucky, it is a city you experience at least once in your lifetime. ❧

# CHARMS TO FASHION A MAGIC HOUSE

AMELANCHIER ALNIFOLIA

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Laura Madeline Wiseman • English Instructor

For every house there's a tree  
bearing, fruiting the lane's  
tract line. If I could bake a muffin  
for every hand not open  
in the wave of hello

I would never tell how our nieces  
would knock on each neighboring door  
for a cup of brown sugar, an egg,  
a pinch of soda to borrow  
from strange cupboards everything

they lacked, when the berries  
for a pie and the cash required for buying  
desserts burned faster than his smokes,  
where here, among the flailing middle class  
chocolate puddings are instant, fruit juices

are ten percent, and pie crusts come in plastic.  
There are no knights, no fairies, no cures,  
just part-timers, the job line, the disability check  
and songbirds are all common—robins,  
blackbirds, finches, doves, but still

I savor the small dark yard apple,  
juicy as early summer, the fruit,  
that edible purple, from the flower  
of shrub trees, star-shaped  
white clusters in the thousands.

Every current of sweetness, each mouthful  
sustains, overflowing these crinkled paper cups.

When our nieces brought back the vanilla  
or sugar, they stirred the ingredients  
borrowed, no movement from his chair  
only the muffin tops rising, fogged the glass,  
hot to the touch, but cooking, still time left.

## UNTITLED 2

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LANNY TUNKS • ELECTRICAL & ELECTROMECHANICAL TECHNOLOGY  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



# SHE CHANGED ME

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TIFFANY WENDLAND • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

It all started on April 4, 1988, when Sarah was born. She was the last of three daughters, the baby, and her chances of survival were slim. The womb wasn't a healthy place for Sarah because our mother wasn't in the best state of mind during her pregnancy. Sarah had many problems growing up. She had to wear braces on her feet for many years; she couldn't walk right, and at night, her shoelaces were tied together.

At the age of four, Sarah was pinned down and attacked by a brown Chow dog. I was there with her and couldn't stop it. We had gone across the alley of our babysitter to play with the neighbor girl. I remember Sarah feeding the dog red berries off the tree when all of a sudden, she was on the ground under the dog. No one really knew what happened or why the Chow attacked her. The right side of her face was ripped to pieces, and she was rushed into surgery. The scars slowly faded, but they were always there.

Sarah was boney and often had bruises everywhere. She was so tiny as a child, yet she was full of energy. By the age of ten, she was being prescribed some kind of medicine by doctors, counselors, and anyone with a degree. A pill to calm down, a pill to get up in the morning, a pill to sleep, and a pill to help her eat. She wasn't allowed to eat salt because it hyped her up like sugar would most kids. This girl was bouncing off the walls over a kid's meal order of fries. Sarah never stopped. She didn't let anything keep her from doing what she wanted when she wanted.

At the beginning of December 2006, Sarah was living at a family friend's house. She had just turned 18 and had been granted \$18,000 from a lawsuit over the Chow attacking her. She bought a new car, and she helped my mother with debt. She loaned our older sister about \$3,000, and when I asked for a little bit of money, this girl gave me \$15. The week of December 10, 2006, something happened with the friend she was staying with, and something happened with Sarah. It wasn't drugs or alcohol—not anything illegal or insane—but she had a breakdown and decided she wanted to leave town, take her new car, and travel. She was living with friends, and living day-by-day was starting to get to her. She wasn't working; she wasn't going to school. She felt it was time to go somewhere and try to do something. Sarah grew up wanting to travel, study animals, and live in Australia.

I remember the day she left. There was a giant pine tree behind us as we hugged. She was still much smaller than I was. She stood almost an inch shorter and

weighed barely 100 pounds. Her hair was darker than mine, a mixture of auburn and dark brown. Unlike mine, her hair didn't grow; it never got past her chin.

We both cried until she finished her goodbyes, but she cried harder. She was driving a newer, grey Monte Carlo. Aiden, our two-year-old blonde nephew, was the one she was saddest to say goodbye to. When she left, it was dark outside. It was cold all around us, and I could see the smoke from the exhaust on the brake lights as she drove off.

As children, we spent most of our life back and forth from one home to the other, one parent to the other. No matter where we were sent, Sarah and I ended up at the same place. I always thought my older sister Pamela was lucky; I thought she was spoiled when we were gone. I realize now I was the lucky one because I spent more time with Sarah than anyone.

On December 19, 2006, she called me at 9:30 a.m., but I didn't answer. I was sleeping with no need to get up early since I didn't work until 4:00 p.m. Christmas was right around the corner, and the more hours I worked, the more money I had. I bought a lot of presents that year. I bought my older sister pants and a matching sweater. I gave Sarah a necklace with matching earrings in the letter "S." I wrapped the box with white paper covered in green and red lettering and put a gold bow on top.

I tried to call Sarah back while delivering a pizza for work at about 6:30 that evening. She didn't answer, and I finished my shift and returned home at about 10:00 to relax before eating dinner. I was in the living room when my boyfriend Ryan's phone rang; it was my grandma calling. I answered, confused as to why she was calling his phone and why she was calling so late.

"Tiffany, is Ryan there? I need to talk to him." I could sense something, but I wasn't sure what.

"No, Grandma, it's fine. I'm right here. What's going on?" I could feel the pain and heartache in her voice.

"There's been an accident, honey. Sarah was in an accident."

Frantically, I said, "What? Oh, no! What happened? Is she OK?"

The next sentence could have been said in another language. She told me, "No," and that's all I heard.

I didn't know death; I'd never dealt with it. I didn't know anyone, not a single soul, that had died, but at the age of 20, I lost my baby sister Sarah in such a traumatic way that I've never been the same since. I don't treat people like I used to, and I don't allow love to enter my life as often to protect myself from pain. The death of my sister completely changed me.

After I hung up the phone, Ryan and I went to his car. I called the family member Sarah had been living with down south. I told her what had happened, what I knew. I didn't know exactly what had happened to Sarah except that she

was gone. We drove straight east on A Street, the longest drive, but only 15 blocks.

When we approached my mother's house, I saw firetrucks, an ambulance, and my grandparents. Shortly after, I went to see my mother, Pamela, and Aunt Lori, and we all hugged. I didn't know what I was feeling, why I felt the need to instantly hug, and why Sarah wasn't there. I looked at my mom; she couldn't breathe, and she couldn't talk. She was dying because of the news that her daughter had died. I don't remember much about the rest of that night, but at some point, Pamela, Ryan, and I got into his car and drove around town while we cried, laughed, and sat in silence.

The next day was probably worse than the night. It was colder and raining, and my eyes hurt so badly that they were burning red and swollen from the tears. The weather screamed death, and my heart screamed, "Why?!" The next couple of days were blurry, and I spent them in shock, not fully realizing what had happened. Sometimes I still thought, "No, it can't be." Crying and sleeping. Sleeping and crying. We finally had to go to the funeral home to start the planning—what to do with her ashes, what kind of music, the pictures, who was family, who was on the obituary—all of this in a blur. My mother was there physically, but not so much mentally or emotionally. Because she was a mess, Pamela and I were left to decide everything for our baby sister in her death; neither of us was prepared for that.

Her funeral brought together so many people. Some I remembered from our childhood, and some I didn't know at all. Sarah's friends from near and far came. One guy she knew even brought a giant gorilla for her. He sat it by her flowers in the front. There were some old friends from Dad's side of the family that we had gone to school with as children.

When she had heard that Mom wanted to be cremated, Sara had decided she would be cremated, also. Her urn was up front next to about 20 flower arrangements. I still have a couple of boxes filled with some of those flowers. I keep the box glued shut, and it will remain that way forever, covered with cross stickers and quotes. I tried to keep everything, hoping it would bring her back to me.

It's been eight years since that fateful day. No matter the amount of time that passes, I still feel the same pain and those uncontrollable tears that come and go when they want to. Every year, we celebrate her birthday by sending a balloon into the sky. I pray she pops each one before it floats by. Christmas will never be the same. I still have her present, still wrapped the same, but I have now taped a round, gold ornament to it from the Christmas tree the present was under. I still feel sad when the anniversary date of her accident comes. We all gather at Sunken Gardens, rain, snow, or sleet, and stand around a brick with her name on it. We tell her we love her, we cry, and we send her balloons.

If it's too cold, the balloons struggle to fly. If it's too windy, they get stuck in a tree. The last couple of times we have let balloons go, there was always one that spun for about five minutes before it took off—up, up, and away.

Before she left town, before she hugged me goodbye that one last time, before she even bought that new, shiny, silver Monte Carlo, we had an argument. My mom was moving about a block from one house to another. Sarah was too busy with her friends and wouldn't help with the move. She was growing up and becoming social after spending two or three years in Boys Town. Once she came home, she took care of our mother and she babysat for our sister and she was tired. She had spent the last year caretaking as our mom went through chemo for her hepatitis. Sarah wanted a life and was always busy living it. I remember standing in my mom's yard as she drove off in my grandpa's old rusty jeep. I yelled at her for not helping. I yelled at her friends for being in the way. On the way home from moving Mom, I called Sarah and said some horrible things. I told her she didn't deserve to have our mother if she wasn't willing to be there. She knew I didn't mean it. At least, I'm sure she knows now. What hurts the most is I never got to officially apologize. I never said she was OK to want freedom in life after all the years of medicine and the places she had been sent due to behavior. I didn't realize until it was too late that I would say things I couldn't take back. The nasty words or actions someone may say or do aren't always fixable. I can't undo what I said; I can believe she knows I loved her, but I'll never be able to hug her and say I'm sorry.

Her death opened a wound, but I also grew from it. I became a more caring person. I treat people I know and people I don't know completely differently now. I cherish the time I have with anyone and the memories I make with my own child. I am a protective mother. I've learned you can't stop death—it's coming when the time is right. Why it had to be her, her time, my sister, my first lesson in loss of a loved one—I'll never know that answer.

Sarah's death was a devastating loss to our family, even if it has brought us closer, even if we realized we loved each other more than we thought we did. From the moment Sarah was born, everyone who met her received a lesson, message, or gift. We each learned from her, gained something from her, and in her was a piece of each and every one of us. Her death taught me a lot, but her life taught me even more. Sarah came into the world without a chance. At the age of 18, she had encountered more than most people would in their lifetimes. Even with everything she endured, she changed lives for the better. I learned death is real, and people won't last forever; never take a moment for granted. ❀

# PORTRAIT OF OUR SOULS

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TONYA SCHROEDER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# THE AWAKENMENT OF MRS. HENRY OWENS (OR THE STORY OF THE RECLAMATION OF SELF)

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DANUL PATTERSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Mrs. Owens knew he wouldn't be in until well after 5:00. She knew because she'd rung up Henry, Sr.'s mobile at 2:00 that very afternoon like she'd done for the past six months, and for the past six months (at least she thought it was that long, and if it wasn't, she wouldn't have cared in the least), Henry, Sr., had taken to running at least three hours late. She knew, was glad even, that Henry, Sr., had found another girl foolish enough to fall for his smoke and mirror personality and to trust him with the budding lotus of her youth. She had loved Henry, Sr., dearly once upon a time. Now, most days, she liked him rather in the same way an alcoholic likes coffee. Often, she could not stand him.

June and Henry, Jr., were in their cots in the crèche tucked, as they were, in their respective dreamlands. She loathed those screaming infants with their shrill cries piercing the air like the smoke that rose from Henry, Sr.'s pipe—their febrile tendrils splitting the air, sharp as guillotine blades, severing heart from mind.

Mrs. Owens had seen to it that they would be taken care of. The quilt under the door frame should suffice to damn the crystal waters of her demise. Soon, they would be roused to the world of flesh. For Henry, Jr., it would be the need for sustenance that brought it about. For June, it would be Henry, Jr.'s fury and a need for a new nappy.

She made the sign of the cross and said a prayer in the hopes that God, whose existence she held in highest doubt, should find her in good standing. She didn't know why she felt compelled to pray. She was not known for being particularly religious. She was of the *no-one-asked-you-to-be-happy-get-to-work* school, and most days her schedule was so full to bursting that she rarely had time for a crisis, let alone time set aside for unseen paterfamilias.

Her mind wound back to the previous morning. She had awoken at half past seven to a heaviness in her chest, as though some phantasm had taken hold of her heart and proceeded to press it into submission. She remembered, as though she were regarding a bluff wall through a willow-the-wisp like fog, that she'd had Margo, the nanny that Henry, Sr., had flown in from Dublin, who—at 72, was twice the age of Mrs. Owens—to put on coffee instead of tea.

Mrs. Owens had no intentions of keeping the old bird on. In fact, she had planned to give her the boot soon, as Mrs. Owens herself had prepared breakfast. The way she'd figured it, if you're going to turn someone out on their arse in the dead of winter, you should at least have the decency to send her off with a full belly.

Mrs. Owens set the old bird free and regretted the decision not five minutes later. It was 12:20 by the time she'd finished the dishes, bathed and dressed herself and the children, bathed and changed Henry, Jr., a second time (because the little blighter had soiled his nappy in such a way as to ruin his entire outfit), put together a grocery list for the party she'd been planning for the partners at the firm where Henry, Sr., worked as a barrister, changed June's nappy, and grabbed her purse. All this she did after first ringing up a carriage.

Somehow, remembering the icy slap of the winter's wind on her naked wrists brought her back to the present. She bloody hated this winter most of all. The lights, and worse still, the heating died off at unannounced intervals. Just the previous week, the lights went as the heat, which had been out for well over a day and a half, kicked to life with a vengeance. Mrs. Owens had been in the process of fixing supper at the time, and had she not had the presence of mind to shut off the oven, they may well have been strumming harps with the Erotes.

That morning, she turned on the tap to make tea; she usually used cold water for this, and she found that the pipes were little more than copper fingers of ice. She turned on the hot water, and it came out as chilled as the unrelenting breath of death. Everything in the flat was frigid cold and had the doleful destitution the eye of a tornado must have among the chaos. Fortunately, she had had the presence of mind to leave on the stove so it might spread its mists of heat about.

She'd awoken that morning to a sinus infection and chided herself for not popping by the pharmacy on her way home yesterday. Instead, she'd come home, put the children down for the night, and prepared supper for the stuffy barristers in their overly starched suits. That night, the party was nearly unbearable. Mrs. Owens felt so paper thin that all she could cope with was water and music and brandy—so much brandy, for which she'd recently acquired a taste.

Now, her mind poured out thoughts—thoughts that rushed the like waters over Victory Falls, where Henry, Sr., had taken her for their honeymoon ten years prior. Her nose burned with the indelible scent of an extinguished pilot light. And then, the sweet nothingness of death overtook her.



It was not Henry, Sr., as the late Mrs. Owens had planned it, who found the body. It was Marcy Hughes, from the next flat over, and Lester Monroe, Marcy's anything-but-gentleman gentleman caller, who did the finding. Marcy knew the news had to be broken to Henry, Sr., with great care on account of his condition. She knew that his condition, a string of words that only those medical folks could ever pronounce, had something to do with his heart not beating the way it should and something to do with bleeding.

At half past 5:00, Henry, Sr., arrived home to find Marcy waiting for him with a glass of the cheap sherry (the one he usually reserved for when his family was in town), which she quickly handed him before ushering him in and sitting him down on the sofa.

Confound it all! Henry, Sr., was hungry and worried, but, mostly hungry. It was Friday—meatloaf day. “Where is that bloody daft woman?” he thought. She knew how much he loved his meatloaf, how he looked forward to it all week. She, not this bawdy charvette, should have met him at the door—a light warm peck on the cheek and an extra dry martini with three olives in hand before leading him to the dining room and feeding him his supper. The kiss he could do without, but—his supper. This was simply inexcusable. He would have to have a firm talk with her about this later.

“Henry, sir. Mr. Owens—,” Marcy started to say in her mousy soprano before her words were cut off by Henry, Sr.’s curt remark.

“Well, go on, child, spit it out!” he shot at her as he fumbled in his pockets for his pipe and a match. Finding what he was looking for, he lit his pipe and exhaled a plume of ash-grey smoke that hung heavily overhead, a fastened lid on the boiling pot of words yet unsaid.

“Well, you see, sir, it’s your wife....”

“Where in the bloody hell is that daft woman?”

“Well, you see, sir....”

“No, I don’t *see*.”

Marcy was for a moment dazed by the sheer force of Henry, Sr.’s words. She brought her hand to her face in shocked silence as though his words had been a slap to the face. “To hell with formalities,” she reasoned with herself. “Why should I play nice with the bloody bastard if he won’t be nice to me?”

Any reservations she had were dispelled with Henry, Sr.’s next statement. “For fuck’s sake, you daft tart. Where the hell is my fucking wife? She should have given me supper by now!”

“Go look in the next room.” Marcy’s words were so full of icy loathing that they made that winter seem like the most torrid of summers. Realizing he wasn’t going to get anything more from her, Henry, Sr., sat his untouched glass

of sherry down on the coffee table, rolled away from the sofa, and went into the other room.



She was crestfallen and possessed of an awakened quality altogether new to her. The late Mrs. Owens was not late at all; in fact, she was very much alive and of a mind so clear as to be completely at one with herself for the first time since she'd married Henry, Sr. He had been a fresh-faced youth of 19 at the time, deadly brilliant, and she had just crossed over onto the other edge of 17.

She'd felt Henry, Sr., come into the house before she heard him. His voice was a rude burst of lightning compared to the warm and soft breeze that was Marcy. She would not let him find her—not now. Not until he knew what she had done. So she hid in the closet as Henry, Sr., came into the room. She had it in her mind to go down the servant stairway and come in the front door when the time was right. Through the blinds in the door, she saw him enter, look about, and mutter a curse under his breath before exiting the room.

In the living room, Henry, Sr., confronted Marcy. “You bloody daft tart!” he muttered with enough force to make Marcy back away, even though he was three meters away and made no move toward her. Marcy was not exactly afraid of Henry, Sr., so much as she was afraid *for* him, and were it not for the delicate situation in which she found herself, Marcy would have no qualms about telling him just what she thought of the bloody arse. As things were, Marcy sighed and composed herself before she answered.

“Mr. Owens, sir. She’s not here among us anymore.” Marcy waited a spell to see if he was understanding her, and when she saw that he did not, Marcy continued with, “She’s not with us, we the living.”

“No,” Henry, Sr., muttered simply. Then realizing the implications of Marcy’s statement, he muttered, “When? How?” as he fell into the sofa. “How could she do this to me?” he thought. Henry, Sr., took the glass of sherry and downed it.

Marcy grabbed the bottle of sherry and refilled his drink. “You don’t have to worry about the children. I’ll see to them.”

“How...?” he muttered in a shrill voice that pierced the air like the dissonant cries of an out of tune piano.

“The stove went out, and she made no attempt to turn it off,” Marcy said in a voice as light as the gentle caress of dew on the face of a blade of grass.

“I need to lay down for a spell,” Henry, Sr., muttered in a distant voice as he rose—as if possessed by an unseen puppeteer—and went up the stairs to the room he used to share with her. Henry, Sr., latched fast the door behind him, and there he stood, facing the shut window and the roomy, open-armed reclining chair. Henry, Sr., looked out the cold, aloof pane of glass without

seeing what lay beyond—the steel-grey clouds that hung overhead like the fastened lid of a boiling pot; the flurry of blowing snow that fell in heavy flakes that would not last; the hive of activity buzzing in and out of the pub across the street, coatless lads already pissed off, their trolleys milling about—all went unseen by Henry, Sr.

Henry, Sr., did not hear Marcy's story as many lovesick lovers would have heard the same tale, in an ill and doleful air of noesis, an inability to accept its magnitude. Henry, Sr., puled. Henry, Sr., wept almost at once and with a sudden and delirious abandonment altogether new to him—a lightning storm on the stoic sea of his calm demeanor.

Once the tempest of his sorrow had consumed itself, Henry, Sr., fell into the warm embrace of the chair, pressed down and held firm by a kind of atrophic physical exhaustion, a phantasm that vexed Henry, Sr.'s body and seemed to possess his very soul.

Henry, Sr., sat with his head thrown back lethargically upon the overly plush cushion of the chair; he was immobile and un-bemused, except for the occasional rattle of a mewling sob that escaped from his throat and set his body atremble—like a little child (woken in the night by a terror) who keeps sniffing in his sleep after having quietly sobbed himself back into the lands of slumber.

Henry, Sr., sat, cried out and empty, and regarded the world outside the window as a man born with lame eyes contemplating color. Henry, Sr., rose up from the rocky safe haven of his grief and went to the window. Outside, a rainbow of golden light escaped from behind its mask of dark weighted clouds and Henry, Sr., was suddenly overcome by a queer youthful fancy, a rosiness in his peripheral vision that possessed him with a sudden whimsy to run in wide, big-hipped dancing steps instead of walking, to toss a brightly colored ball or a sharp stick—anything at all—up, up, up into the air and to catch it in wide opened clumsy hands. Henry, Sr., wanted most of all to laugh wide-mouthed, as the Cheshire Cat, at fat white clouds and a warm rocking breeze—to laugh at nothing, nothing at all.

Henry, Sr., was free and he knew that come the next morning he would awake promptly at half past 6:00 and drink a cup of triple brewed coffee and be out of the house by 15 after. He'd do this out of sheer force of habit. He was free of the fetters of marriage, free to dance gaily in the streets at 5:00, to dance in the rain, to dance where he damned well pleased, though he was never the dancing sort. He was free to party like the 30-something that he was free to date—free to pursue a woman like a lion after a zebra. Henry, Sr., was free to believe in something not of his own fashioning, should he wish it. He was free.

Yes, Henry, Sr., was free, open, available, even, to date that pretty 20-something skirt—Bailey was her name—that worked as a secretary at the firm. Henry, Sr., was free, and the prospects made him drunk with possibilities. He laughed. It started as a low croaking in the nether regions of his throat and became a roar that shook him, body and soul.

The warm golden light of the sun hid its face behind a mass of cow heavy cumulonimbus clouds that were an angry shade of pewter. They pressed down on the snow-capped earth like a fastened lid on the pressure cooker of life. The mistral wind beat against the glass and metal of the window like a leadened fist. Henry, Sr., had cried himself empty and had laughed so much that the agony in his heart had become a numb ache, and the ravenous hunger in his soul was, for the moment, sated. Henry, Sr., was ready to face what lay ahead.



“Henry, I’m home!” Her voice rang out like the chime of the bells at Westminster; it rose in the silence of the room like a multitude of balloons let loose. She entered the house and set her keys on the dish in the nook next to the door.

“Lindita...?” Henry, Sr., muttered her name as though it were a curse and collapsed. Dead. Henry, Sr., was dead and Lindita, his wife, laughed. She laughed at the absurdity of the whole thing. She laughed wildly and recklessly at his last word: *LINDITA*. ❖

## CORMORANTS

LAUREN GREENWOOD • INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER



# AND THE WORDS CAME TUMBLIN' DOWN (A TRIBUTE TO MAYA ANGELOU)

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TERESA BURT • CONTINUING EDUCATION  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR POETRY

...and she sang a little  
rhythm  
...and she danced a little  
blues

a teacher, a mother,  
a sister to all who knew her  
and a freedom rights mover

...and she had troubles  
...and she had pain  
...and she got low down  
so  
l  
o  
w  
just like we all do

there was laughter and there was spirit,  
greatness, wisdom and faith  
and there were words

...and the words came tumblin' down  
like rain  
and splashed unto the paper  
into poetry

...and the words came tumblin' down

# WHY WE MUST ENCOURAGE WOMEN TO LEAD

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INGRID HOLMQUIST • UNDECLARED

“Women are not making it to the top of any profession anywhere in the world,” according to Chief Operating Officer of Facebook and activist Sheryl Sandberg. She states in her TED Talk, *Why We Have Too Few Women Leaders*, that of the 190 heads of state internationally, only nine of them are female. Along with this blatantly unequal statistic, only 13% of all parliaments are female. Clearly, women are being outnumbered in government and big business internationally. Surprisingly, the United States doesn’t rank high in regard to its parity of women in leadership roles. In fact, according to *The Global Gender Gap Report 2014* by the World Economic Forum, the United States is ranked 20<sup>th</sup>—a number that is still considered a feat, as the U.S. hasn’t surpassed the top 20 countries in years. In 2014, the United States did, in fact, have progress, as an approximated 75% of the gender gap was closed, but some say 20<sup>th</sup> just isn’t good enough. This improved ranking resulted from a higher number of women in “ministerial positions.” Unsurprisingly, the Nordic countries take the cake for equality of gender in leadership positions.

But why is this important? Outside of competing for a ranking on a website, why should women be considered for leadership roles more often? The benefits surpass the bleeding hearts’ empathetic need for equality (although this is a value that should be considered on a humanistic level) and could benefit the economy. The World Economic Forum asserts, “Companies that include more women at the top levels of leadership tend to outperform those that don’t.”

When countries work at gender equality, there are vast economic improvements and development returns. The International Monetary Fund’s article, “Empowering Women Is Smart Economics,” lays out three reasons why encouraging women in leadership positions will bring about economic enhancements.

First, women make up over half of university students internationally and 40% of the labor force. If the abilities of these women were honed in and tested, overall productivity of society would increase, and the best of the best would take over the highest seats of government and business. The article states, “Elimination of barriers against women working in certain sectors or occupations could increase output by raising women’s participation and

labor productivity by as much as 25 percent in some countries through better allocation of their skills and talent” (Revenga and Sudhir).

Second, women who financially can run their households end up benefitting children more often, leading to the betterment of an overall society. When women are financially independent or contribute to the financial bucket in their household, statistics show that more money is spent on food and education (Revenga and Sudhir).

Finally, diversity is key to a well-functioning society. With women in political, economic, and social leadership roles, policies benefitting women and their goals and issues pass in government. For example, “In India, giving power to women at the local level led to greater provision of public goods, such as water and sanitation, which mattered more to women” (Revenga and Sudhir).

These jarring statistics point to an issue that, if fixed, could lead to societal improvements past the mere goal of overall equality. But how can we encourage women to step up to the plate and, as Sheryl Sandberg’s book title states, *Lean In* to their professional goals?

Let us use the Nebraska State Senate as an example. The 49-member Unicameral currently, since January 7, 2015, seats eleven women, making 22% of the Unicameral female. This is a fairly average number nationally, as most state legislators are around 25%. In an interview, former State Senator Amanda McGill told me that in the mid ‘90s, there were as many as 13 female Senators.

It’s important to have parity in the Legislature for a number of reasons. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Willa Cather Professor of Political Science Elizabeth Theiss-Morse told me in an interview that it’s important for women to be equal in politics because women bring a different set of issue interests into politics and make decisions different from most men. “Their issue area tends to be more focused on things dealing with family, children, [and] the elderly. They’re more focused on things dealing with human services,” Theiss-Morse said. “When women are in office, those issues are put on the table more often.” She goes on to say that yes, men can introduce these subjects, and they do in some instances, but women are far more likely to gravitate toward these issue areas. In our interview, Amanda McGill asserted that the afore-mentioned issue areas are important to women and are often brought up by more women than men. However, Amanda thinks that women should also lend their diverse voices in the typically male-dominated issue areas: “While women need to bring up the issues about their children, the elderly, and education, it’s important that they get involved in the economic issues as well because their diverse input is incredibly valuable” (McGill).

Professor Theiss-Morse says the second reason it's so important for women to enter the legislature is because women "tend to push for decision-making processes that [are] less conflict-ridden and more about trying to find consensus." Senator McGill agrees that the diverse issues of women need to be brought up by more female senators and agrees with Theiss-Morse that overall, women make decisions through a different lens than men. "Women tend to be very solution oriented," Senator McGill says. "[Women] don't really care as much about getting the credit. [They care more about] just trying to get to the bottom of a problem and fixing it."

However, the lack of female Senators in the Unicameral is not necessarily because of blatant sexism or the inability of women to win. Rather, women are less likely to run for office. Both Professor Theiss-Morse and Senator McGill believe the reason for this has to do with women being less confident in their abilities to pass policies as well as the fact that women typically need to be recruited or mentored more than men. Theiss-Morse says, "If you get asked, you're much more likely [to run]. Women are asked less, so they don't do it as much." Senator McGill adds that women are more prone to look at an ad for a job, look at all of the qualifications, and be deterred by one bullet point that they cannot do, whereas men are more likely to look through a list, and if they see one bullet point out of a number that they cannot do, they will still feel competent enough to apply. According to these two women, encouraging women, mentoring women, and giving women the confidence to succeed in leadership is a major factor that could increase women's equality. Similarly, Sheryl Sandburg asserts that women often underestimate their professional abilities. "If you ask a group of men and women to estimate their GPAs, women estimate too low; men estimate too high." Agreeing with the notion that women need mentors more than men, she says, "Men are more likely to negotiate salaries. Men are [also more] likely to attribute success to themselves, and women are more likely to attribute success to an external source" (Sandburg).

Senator McGill also blames negative attack advertisements as a deterrent to female government hopefuls. "And there's evidence that the press can be sexist toward women, but that doesn't affect a woman's ability to win," says Senator McGill. "And if there is sexism in politics, women still win *when* they run."

According to Professor Theiss-Morse, another reason women may be less likely to run for office is because women tend to enter politics at a later age on average compared to men. "Women tend to want their children out of the house before they decide to run for politics," she says.

Where does this idea that children should be out of the house before women can enter into leadership positions stem? Why do these internal naggings bypass male minds? The traditional and patriarchal view that women are supposed to run the private sphere while their male counterparts lead in the public sector keeps women from pursuing their professional goals and working up the ladder in the workforce. Sheryl Sandburg says that “women are dropping out” and states that “the three steps to helping women succeed in the workforce are, 1. Sit at the table. 2. Make your partner a real partner. 3. Don’t leave before you leave.”

Sandburg’s first piece of advice is “sit at the table.” This advice stems primarily from the idea that women must assert themselves, believe in themselves, and avoid the passive woman facade. Confidence is key.

The second tip is to “make your partner a real partner.” Partners share duties. They share domestic chores—such as cooking, cleaning, raising children. Many family dynamics still believe these chores should belong primarily to the female gender role. How can women succeed in business, politics, or the social sphere if they are doing the work of two people at home? Choosing a partner is more of a professional decision than ever before. Partners make sacrifices for each other, share duties, and encourage each other. If men in relationships with women with the goal of public leadership in mind don’t take on more responsibilities at home and accept their partners as partners, women will have a harder time reaching professional goals (Sandburg).

Sandburg’s last tip is “don’t leave before you leave.” This piece of advice from Sandburg’s book stems from a conversation that Sandburg had with a young woman while she was working at Google. The young woman was worried she wouldn’t be able to find professional success and personal success as well. However, this young woman had no children, no husband, and no potential for either in the near future. Sandburg asserted to the woman, “Don’t leave before you leave.” The young woman had no plan that would keep her from climbing up the corporate ladder, yet she doubted her professional abilities based off of her personal goals that hadn’t manifested themselves into an issue yet. Sandburg says that many people “lean back” not only when they have children, but when they even begin to have the idea to start having children.

The main issue I find in Sandburg’s argument is the fact that it primarily targets cis-gendered, heterosexual, professional, Caucasian, middle to upper class women with very similar goals. This can be constraining for those who fall outside this distinct mold. That being said, for those that the book targets,

there is a plentitude of valuable information and advice from a woman who herself thrived from “leaning in.”

While historic suffragettes and modern-day feminists have made progress, the path for women leaders is not completely paved. It is time to fill the mortar in the cracks and clear a path that is more equal to male counterparts. Next time, get me started on the decrepit and tarnished pavement that black women, gay women, or black, gay women strut on. It’s time to even out the scores.

“My sense is that there will be change,” says Professor Theiss-Morse about the parity of women in politics. “More and more women are going in to law school, and many people who run for politics have a law degree.”

“We need to help women believe in themselves enough because they are important,” Senator Amanda McGill says. “Even if they haven’t owned a business or graduated college, that doesn’t mean their opinions aren’t important. All of our opinions are important, and we need that diversity represented.”

Asking for more women to lead in politics and business seems like a skipped step in some ways. Many women across the world still suffer from genital mutilation, prostitution, forced marriages, gender-based abortions, and higher poverty than men. However, if more women lead, these issues will undoubtedly be touched sooner and with a harder fist. ♡

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# CRANES IN FLIGHT

LAUREN GREENWOOD • INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER



# ARTWORK COLLECTION

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SKYLAR WHITMORE • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

## BIRDBATH I

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## BIRDBATH II

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TIPSY GOBLET

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CERAMIC PLATES

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# EMPTY BUILDING, EMPTY SOUL

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BRANDON JAMES POPPERT • MANUFACTURING ENGINEERING

**A**s we pulled up in Nate's beautiful V70R, I heard him complain again. "Really? You want to do this again? We have been up there like a thousand times. It's so boring."

"I love the place, and it's only boring if you make it that way."

As I climbed out of his pristine sports car, I gazed at my favorite place in the world. In the sunlight, the place looked sad and lonely. The silos had a gravity that pulled me toward them. I had come here more and more hoping against doubt that my friend would make the time and join me. Today was the first time we had hung out in weeks—months. And as usual, I was the spontaneous one. We had been friends since my freshman year in high school, and our favorite pastimes had always been talking and exploring. There were once times when we hung out every day from sunrise to sunset, times when we had more in common than just cars and abandoned buildings—times long gone. Now, since our first abandoned building had been torn down, we came to the second one, my beautiful silos. I wanted to climb the silos once more before my friend left for college.

The tall silos were imposing and timeworn with exposed rebar and rust stains that reminded me of open wounds. I craned my neck and looked up. The top of the silos was our destination. I saw the ladder we first used to get up top. It was on the outside—one long ladder that stopped abruptly ten feet from the ground. The ragged cuts from the torch used to cut off the bottom were clear to anyone who cared to look. As time wore on, we became callused to that sight that first gave me shivers. The silos had been abandoned since before I ever thought of getting on top. The silos were silent guardians that had seen the city grow. There were five ways to get on top; all had varying degrees of safety and security. Safety and security both were polar opposites in this place.

I ducked as I got to the splintered plywood. So many people came here, but the bum still lived here; this was his home. In the home we had invaded, his stench filled the air. We could smell his unwashed body and the puke from his drunken bouts. We could hear the creak of the building, the way it sighed like it had lost something. We picked our way through the minefield of puke. It reeked of booze and decaying food. I often wondered what would make a man drink himself stupid only to pass out in his puke. We saw him lying in his mess, and in silent agreement, we passed him as quietly as we could.

I was worried about my friend, so I was thinking of a way to tell him that that I felt like we were growing apart. With my head elsewhere, I didn't pay attention to where we were until we got to the elevator shaft—one tall room with the shattered elevator, broken and useless, sitting in the basement. I looked up to see only light peeking through the cracks at the top. And there was the first ladder. We could barely see the top. The hardest part for newcomers was the little silver stepstool used to hop up onto the main ladder.

We were climbing in the old elevator shaft. If I imagined the noise that once filled this small space, it would scare me, but now the shaft stood silently. It was almost too quiet. I remembered the long climb that after the first time didn't seem so bad. Looking around, I saw the place as it was 50 years ago—the shiny new equipment, the clean floor, windows in every pane. Now the room was way past its prime. Time kills buildings as much as it kills people. The shattered windows and the empty space felt crowded. Even years later, it smelled of hard work and sweat. Light came in every crack and hole like water in a sinking ship. I loved the way the light played in the room. I preferred to come to the silos during the day. I loved the way the place looked, almost sad and broken and empty inside, but beautiful in all its mysterious ways. I often thought maybe people could be that way, too.

As I climbed, I thought of the wonderful times I had had in this place with Nate. The first time we came here, we had no clue about the elevator shaft. Fully exposed to whomever cared to look, we had climbed the external ladder. Halfway up, I had started to shake. The adrenalin had pumped into my veins like liquid fire. That liquid fire was the only thing that got me to the top that day.

Soon after, we had found the elevator shaft late one night. The first time we had explored those ladders, we kept a constant chatter going if only to assure one another that we were not alone. Climbing that ladder the first time, I could have sworn someone had tied a cloth over my eyes it was so black. This time, however, there was not small talk, only labored breathing. Every attempt I made to talk to my friend received a stony response.

Whenever I emerged into the first room, I noticed the big double doors swinging in the wind. There was a small ledge that lead to a long drop. Someone thinking ahead placed ladders bridging the gap between floors. I had never tried them, but they were useful for a quick escape. Granted, it was a sheer drop of nearly 200 feet from the top ledge. Up there, we were in our own world, a cocoon of time. The world outside moved faster and faster every day. Yet in here, it moved slowly, like cold honey and just as sweet. The frozen machinery and the abandoned tools were the only clues that this place once had served a purpose.

I looked down the elevator shaft to see my friend only halfway up. *Great. He is always so slow.* I was thinking of good ways to bring up how we had changed as I milled about the room looking for something to keep my interest. Just as I was studying a weird piece of graffiti, I noticed that something did not feel right.

Nate De Vivo was my best friend, or so I thought. He was tall with an '80s afro—big, round, and poufy. He worried about his clothing, and he was the whitest black guy you would ever meet. Now I don't mean that to be racist, but that was who he was—plain and simple. He was a photographer with the equipment to come with it. He could be smart. He was kindhearted, and for the longest time, I thought he was being used by his friends. He was always pestered for rides, always put down, and I hated the way they disrespected him. But he somehow put up with that. There had never been a time that I didn't remember him taking photos of the crazy stuff we had done. Today was no exception. He was taking pictures of me and of the way the light played with my face while constantly reminding me that he needed to take photos of everything to remember it. Often, I was so used to the camera that I didn't notice it, but today I had a lot on my mind. He snapped picture after picture, and soon my mind began to wander. One photo he took just as I realized how far we had grown apart.

"Hey, Brandon, can you stand next to the window for me?" Nate inquired.

"Like this?"

"No, a little more to the left. Riiiiiiiiight... there, perfect."

I look at the photo now and I realize I look much older. My eyes tell it all, really—the sour expression on my face. Normally, I have light brown eyes and a smile on the verge of breaking out, but he caught me in a half shadow that turned my eyes black and cold like steel. He said that I had changed, and maybe I had. Something was missing.

"I'm going to miss this place, mate," Nate bitterly mumbled.

"Don't worry—I will, too. But let's get up top. I want a cigarette."

Silently, we moved on to the next ladder. This one was not as long as the first, but it was held on by only some bolts and crappy welds. We climbed up as the ladder shook, passed the third level, and headed straight to the top, where I saw more frozen machinery and the gaping black holes that lead to the actual silos themselves. A conveyer belt ran the length of the building, and it was the main thing in the one long room that connected all the silos. Graffiti covered the walls, some of it great big street art murals and some of it done by "artists." Spray paint and latex paint were locked in an epic battle that never seemed to end. For days on end, I would go up there to see the wonderful creations trying to outdo each another. The place smelled lightly of good times. Weed and cigarette smoke

hung in the air, and beer cans littered the floor, but it was not unpleasant. The drunken bum refused to go up there, so there was no puke to deal with.

We sat in our usual spot looking out at the city of Lincoln and all her beauty, for what it was worth. Down below us was the cop station. I loved to watch the cops as they milled around like ants, always coming and going but never once looking up.

As we sat atop the silos, we talked more than we had in a long time. Most of the time, we moved in silent succession, like a team hardly ever talking but always communicating. Sitting up there, we talked about the golden days when we did anything anytime and hung out for days at a time. We talked about how life had been, what girls we were messing around with, and if I still was with my girl, Breanna (yes, two years now). The conversation turned to cars, as it always did with us. We had had great debates for weeks on end about what car was better suited for what situation.

“So you’re saying that if I wanted to, you could help me work on a Miata?” he inquired.

“Sure, man. You need to stop getting the most expensive car you can because you can’t afford to send it to the shop daily. Especially with the way you drive it.”

“Alright, alright, I’ll think about it. But I still want a MINI Cooper.”

“How well did that work out last time?”

“Good point, mate.”

In a low point in the conversation, I lit a cigar—one of my favorite pastimes—with the added challenge of not smashing it as I climbed.

“Brandnio....” (I hate the nickname he gave me, even now, years later—but I’m too polite to say so, or maybe too timid.) “Do you mind if Kylee comes over?”

Deflated, I said, “Yeah, sure.” Nate had never been one to pick up on subtle hints. We sat in the uncomfortable silence that slowly killed my friendship. This was not about him chasing a girl. That I could deal with. No, this was him losing interest in me. That was what hurt. The great places I found and showed my best friend were no longer ours. He brought anyone and everyone there now.

His friend just showed up. As she poked her head through to the top floor and yelled, Nate dropped everything and ran to talk to her. It wasn’t like we were doing anything, anyway. The way he greeted her and the way he changed was like turning on a light. With me, we employed harebrained schemes that seemed genius at the time. We had been in every abandoned building we could. We have travelled to other states and cities just for that. But with her and his other friends, I felt like a stranger, an outsider. In the 30 seconds that he walked up with Kylee, I saw that we had changed too much to continue the way things were. Nate had become what I for so long had hated, the perfect rich kid—the

one who had all the money and time to do whatever, whenever. Me? I still had to work for my money, and being out of a job, I could see their annoyance that I had no money. After all the time I spent with Nate, only now did I see the true side of him.

They wanted to leave for the movies, but I did not have the money for a ticket, so they wanted to go to McDonald's. Still having no money, I opted to stay at the silos. It was there in the peace and serenity of the silos that I saw what had become of our friendship; it was there that I saw what made me love the silos so much. My life had once been noisy and chaotic like the building I was in, but then, I was empty inside, just like my favorite place in the world. ❀

## OUR SPECIES

MARIA SANCHEZ CASTILLO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# MUSINGS

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SUNDOS ELIAS • ESL/ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

## *Brave New World Helplessness*

When I am alone, I think of the bad experiences I had in Iraq. I feel tired and upset about all of these things, and teardrops run down my face. When I think, I remember living with my family in Turkey and in Iraq in places where we had no electricity or good food. When I remember, I feel pain—the pain of remembering that we didn’t have much money. My mind spins, thinking about my parents who were getting sick. How would we pay for basic needs? How could we pay the bills? The government gave us some vegetables and fruit. That food was good enough to feed our tummies.

My name is Sundos Elias. I have been living in my new country of the United States for four years. I was born in Iraq between Baghdad and Mosul. I came here with my amazing family. It wasn’t easy leaving my friends and the familiar things behind. It was difficult for me to learn a second language. Everyone told me that English would be hard to learn, but I refused to believe them. I had learned to speak Kurdish, and it was a hard language. I didn’t think English could be harder, but soon I learned that it was. The first letters I learned were *S*, *C*, and *H*. I learned that *Ch* sounds like “CH” and *Sh* sounds like “SH.” Then there were the silent letters, like *K* in the word *know*. The hardest words for me were *knife*, *strong*, *chimney sweep*, *kitchen*, *chicken*, *sap*, *soap*, and *exaggeration*. Those words I had a hard time understanding. Those words made me embarrassed because they were hard to say in front of people. *Soap*, especially, embarrassed me to say at school.

In English, one letter can make many different sounds; for example, take the letters *C*, *K*, *I*, *G*, and sometimes *Z*. I told my siblings and my teacher, “Why would you want two letters to make the same sounds?” When my teacher told me to read, I was embarrassed because it was so difficult. I told my lovely parents that I didn’t want to go to school because I struggled with English words. I wanted to drop out of high school, but my parents did not let me.

When I was in the ELL program, my lovely teacher Ms. Okery gave me vocabulary words like *who*, *when*, *where*, and *what*. I asked for her help with these words because I didn’t know anything about them. The next day, she brought a volunteer to help me learn how to use these basic words. On Friday, we took a test over these words, and I passed it. Then I told my parents that I

didn't want to drop out of high school because I knew how to say and use the words every day.

I thank my beloved teachers for motivating me to be expressive. They are the ones who understand us the most. School is the right place to learn; we have to learn as much as we can when we are young because things get tougher and busier once we get older.

### *Changing Places*

My life was so difficult three years ago; my life has been full of struggle since I came to the U.S., but there have been good times in my life this year.

When I came to the U.S., it was hard to understand English and how to speak with other people. And it was difficult to make an appointment somewhere, especially with a client. I would get upset and ask myself, "What could I do?" I used a dictionary when I went somewhere, or I translated on my phone. If nobody understood me, I gave them spelling check. High School helped me learn how to speak, how to talk with other students, and how to make friends and relationships. In my old country, I never wrote an essay for class—not even a paragraph. I struggled, struggled, and struggled when I wrote papers. It was hard to make even a sentence. I appreciated and practiced the vocabulary my teacher gave me. Then I learned how to speak English. Eventually, I dropped out of the ELL program because of my dream to graduate from high school and have a good education in the future.

A good life is when I have as much control as possible over my life so that I can change anything I don't like into something I am happy with. English gives me a life forever because someday if I go out of the United States, I can speak English. My life would be easy with English. What I want in order to achieve a good life is that I be successful in my chosen career. I want to be involved with a person who loves me back and makes a good difference in the world, even if it is a minor difference. I also want people around me, such as friends and family, that I can rely on whenever I need them. It is important to have this in order to have a good life. I want to be helpful for anybody. I am a volunteer at Bryan Hospital and at Lincoln Literacy. I have many responsibilities and experiences, and I am a hard worker.

After college, hopefully I will help people who don't speak English. I am responsible for people who need help from me; I always assist them. My big dream when I have a good education is to donate to people who have cancer and to help society. Especially, I will help people in poverty and give good advice or lessons for them. Who can't offer herself? I promise myself I will do everything for them. I also decided to work with the Navy and with child education. I will be a school counselor to make the world different for people

who have struggles with their lives, especially immigrant people who came to the U.S. When I came to the United States, I had to struggle a lot for everything. I have helped people and will help them as much as I can because I know the feeling when somebody doesn't know anything or doesn't have anything. If someone does not stand for somebody else in this world, that person won't become strong enough.

*Secret of Life with a Tree*

Who has a beautiful tree? I do. When I was back in my country, I had a beautiful tree in my backyard. My tree was tall, about ten feet, with different colored leaves, but it was green. My lovely tree always smelled good because I cleaned around it, and every day I poured water on the ground. When I cleaned and mowed the grass around it, I felt more comfortable. This tree is very important for the rest of my life, no matter what happens with it.

One day I told my lovely grandmother Noor, "Would you please help me clean the yard because it has too many leaves?"

So we cleaned it. I told her, "I wish I had the best place to study there."

My grandmother asked me, "Why?"

I answered, "Because my younger brother and I argue all the time."

So my grandmother told me, "Sundos, close your eyes."

"Why?" I asked.

"I will make the best surprise for you. You can reach a tall tree!" she told me.

"My grandmother, I can't reach because I'm too short for it," I told her.

She brought a ladder. I told her, "Why are you a too funny girl with me?"

"Because," she told me, "You are my youngest kid, and you're a kind person."

I was dying with laughter when she told me, "Sundos keep going and going and going until I tell you stop in there."

When I stopped in the tree, I saw a bird in the tree and the bird nest. Then I told her, "Mrs. Noor, I don't like you because the bird nest is on top of my head."

"It is OK," she told me.

By the way, she held my right hand to step by the ladder. I told her, "I am so nervous. What are you doing to me, Mrs. Noor?"

"Just relax until you reach it," she told me.

When I reached it, it was a beautiful tree. I gave a big hug to her. I told her, "I appreciate everything you have done for me."

Noor told me, "Don't worry about it anymore. When you are bored, you may come to your tree and talk with it."

Then I started to cry because she made a big surprise for me. I will never forget about her surprise.

My tree and my grandmother are very important to me. When I was at school, I still thought of my lovely tree. I made a round tree swing just for me. I had too much fun with my tree. Always and always, I went to my yard. When I felt pain, I went to stop by the tree to talk or sing with it. When I was around it, the tree helped me forget my experiences. I even slept with my tree and stayed for a couple hours to study.

My siblings called me, “Sundos, where are you?”

“I am somewhere in my backyard,” I said.

“Where?” they asked.

“In my backyard,” I told them.

Then they asked me “Do you have something in the backyard?”

“No,” I said.

“Are you 100 percent sure?” everyone asked me.

I said, “Maybe, not sure. But if you ask my grandmother, maybe she will explain it to you.”

Then I asked Noor, “Would you please explain to my parents where I go after school?”

Then she explained my secret place. My younger sibling asked me, “Where is your secret place?”

“In my backyard. It is a tree,” I said.

Then everyone came to look at it. I told them, “I think you are jealous.”

My younger sister replied, “Of course I’m jealous of your sacred place.”

“May I come with you when you go there?” my sister asked.

“Of course, but you can’t make it messy around there,” I said.

All day and all night, I was so proud of my grandmother that she gave me a life for a tree.

When I grew older, I still remembered my experience with my tree. When I sat in the tree swing, I told my grandma, “Would you please push me?”

She said, “OK.”

I told her, “If you are not alive, I will still think of you because you gave me a gift with a beautiful tree.” She really liked me so much.

One night my dad told me, “Sundos, would you please gather your sister to come to the living room?”

I said, “OK, Dad.”

My parents made a plan to go to the United States. I said, “What? That is not fair because I worry about my tree!”

I started to cry so much. At a midnight conversation with my tree, I told it, “I feel, tree, that I am going to leave you very soon.”

I started to get sick because I loved so much my backyard. I knew trees didn't talk, but my tree gave me knowledge and helped me forget my mood. My lovely tree motivated me. All day I was sitting with my tree and sharing my experience with her. I made a big heart to put my name and my grandmother's name in so I could remember forever. Then I made a poem:

*Soon you will not see us  
in the forest if you look.  
The library is where we'll be,  
inside a picture book.  
Then you will be my 100 years alive tree.*

I feel that the tree of my life is very personal in its direction with me. When I look at a United States tree, I remember back in my country. I am planning to find a tree, but it's hard for me because it is not my tree. I have my own tree. When I stayed with my tree, I told it, "I left my heart with you, so I can't feel pain anymore because I always was with you. But now I am one with you until I come back with you. I can't live without you because I miss you so much."

Eventually I had to leave my lovely tree, but I made a promise to myself. When I married, I would go back to my country, and I would have a big wedding with my tree. ❀



*The author, Sundos Elias*

# DECIPHERING “POEM FOR NOEM”

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RICHARD M. HADLEY • SPEECH INSTRUCTOR

Being saddled with the confines of not knowing well writing and English good, my mind often drifts to the lone window of the often hot, often cold, never just write<sup>1</sup> classroom in the 100-year-old now historical landmark building that housed my English Composition II class.

I usually tried to sit next to the girl with the dazzling blue eyes, and I often wondered if they were colored contacts or just naturally blue, but as an unsure and introverted freshmen, I kept to myself. At that time in my life, the wonderment was enough. I should have asked her. Is it a great regret in my life? No, but I should have asked. After a few weeks, I found out she had an inappropriate rendezvous with a dorm mate who lived a few doors down, and the illusion of our children with the beautiful eyes was discarded along the road of disappointments, and my future unrequited affections turned elsewhere.

I still had the window. The window was my savior, and I was its Sisyphus.<sup>2</sup> Forever longing and wishing I was someplace else, anyplace else, any place besides the back row, the second desk over from the window, stage right,<sup>3</sup> of the classroom. As winter turned to spring, the views from my window turned from cold to enlightenment.

Today was a beautiful Friday afternoon. The sun was shining, the birds were singing, nothing could go wrong.<sup>4</sup> A Friday afternoon that should not be wasted sitting in a classroom that had become increasingly uncomfortably hot. Nineteen of my classmates agreed with my assessment of the day and had decided enjoying the beauty of the day was more important than enjoying the beauty of our poetry analysis assignment. *Write a poem and then critique the poem we had written.* What the heck? Why?

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1 In submitting this I'm not sure if the editors will keep in the clever misuse of the word *write*. There is always the very distinct possibility the rest of my diatribe will be so poorly written I won't have that opportunity, as the grammarians will find my story insignificant and reject it outright.

2 The dude in Greek mythology who was sentenced to push a rock up a hill for all eternity—according to Wikipedia.

3 In this case, left and right are really relative, and using actors' directional cues seems appropriate.

4 A phrase stolen from my old driver's education instructor.

My window was my inspiration for my poem—not the window itself, but the view I had of the fifth hole of the Frisbee golf course the University had set up for students to regale in the beauty of the day instead of sitting, sweating in class. We were given time in class to craft our poem, so I was methodically watching the Frisbee golfers, finishing hole five and heading off to hole six. The three guys who normally sat in the row in front of me were the latest to finish one chapter of their adventure and head off in a different direction. Much to my disappointment, none of my friends were big into the Frisbee golf scene, so I watched my fellow classmates with envy and disdain as my pencil refused to write even the simplest of sonnets. It was in this moment of despair, ass<sup>5</sup> the Frisbees soared off with great majesty, true inspiration came to me as I turned to deep-seated inner conflict, and I was able to create, in true free verse poetry style,<sup>6</sup> four simple, yet brilliant<sup>7</sup> lines of prose.

### Poem for Noem

My son can't throw a Frisbee.  
 So I taught him a few tricks.  
 Then he threw it on the roof.  
 I wonder who taught him that?

I had never become the athlete my father thought he was or the athlete he thought I should be. My academic pursuits were vested in the in-depth study and application of saving Princess Peach from Goombas, Koopa Troopas, and Bowser,<sup>8</sup> and my father saw no redeeming qualities to my pseudo interactive intellectual growth. It was the disgust more than the disappointment that increased my desire to be good at sports, while at the same time the same disgust prevented me from trying. The underlying question still haunted me; is Frisbee throwing really a sport, and how in the grand scheme of things does knowing how to throw a Frisbee help me save Princess Peach?

My mom had lowered her standards so was not as often disappointed. At my mom's first ever parent-teacher conference with my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Thompson told my mother I puzzled her more than any student she'd ever had.

"He's always just looking out the window," she explained. "Sometimes when I call on him, he knows exactly what we are talking about and is engaged in the

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5 Just a funny typo.

6 Poetry for those without rhythm or rhyme.

7 At the time I was really pleased with myself, but in the course of time comes reflection, and I would have to classify it now as *not brilliant*.

8 Mario Brothers reference.

class, while other times I can call on him, and he's just looking out the window, engulfed in his own world."<sup>9</sup>

My tenure in kindergarten was only a few years past when Mrs. Thompson had her nervous breakdown. It was also around that time when she stopped giving me the private piano lessons my mom had signed me up for.<sup>10</sup>

Four lines of poetry that summed up my youth with bitter disdain in a voice that added clarity, conviction, and focus as if standing in a fog of a winter's dream vaguely able to make out the smoky shaded images in the distance.<sup>11</sup>

*In looking at the poem, "Poem for Noem," we quickly see the Frisbee as the antagonist, as our protagonist, the son, struggles against not only the confines of his will, the forces of nature, and the material properties surrounding the situation, but additionally to the internal conflict of confused turmoil of childhood insecurities and longing for acceptance.*

*Upon deeper inspection, we find the real antagonist is the narrator of the poem, as he is trying in vain to train his son as a zookeeper trains a lion or a dog trainer teaches his always dependable and faithful bitch<sup>12</sup> "a few tricks." The Frisbee, in its defiance, refuses to comply with the norms and standards by the physical bounds that shackle the rest of us.<sup>13</sup>*

The instructor walked around the room looking at the class's feeble attempts to pull something meaningful out of the thin air of our minds; I slid my hand over my ever becoming less brilliant poem and analysis to hide the shame of the words I'd penciled.

"You've got anything?" she asked.

I pondered my options at this point<sup>14 15 16</sup>, but moved my hand to reveal my *Ulysses*.<sup>17</sup>

9 One of my mom's favorite stories to tell about me, which continually changes with time as she ages.

10 Really, this whole kindergarten tangent has nothing to do with the story.

11 Ooooooh—deep.

12 Fun word to use at this point as it conveys multiple meanings in the story, including the possibility of eliciting an emotional response.

13 I have become bored with the analysis of my poem.

14 Option 1: Faking a heart attack.

15 Option 2: Start erasing like crazy.

16 Option 3: Stand up, announce to the class I have diarrhea, and rush out.

17 Famous book by James Joyce, which I'm not sure anybody has ever read.

“Hmmm, OK,” she said and walked off. My mind questioned the ever-increasing cost of tuition for higher education.

The assignment was not due until next class period, and I’d accomplished more than I ever thought I would. I put my pencil down. The window smiled at me. It knew. I loved my window, but I feared it would betray me one day with inappropriate behavior with one of my dorm mates due to my inability to reach across a different plain to acknowledge its pain.<sup>18</sup>

I rolled my pencil back and forth across my desk trying to think of something profound to write, but I must not have had anything to say, as no words came to me. I was emotionally spent, and all I could muster was a bad doodle of a dog chasing a Frisbee.<sup>19</sup> I felt as if this was the end.



I was always taught that you should never end a story with the words “The End.” If the audience doesn’t know the story has ended, then you have not provided closure.<sup>20</sup> ❀

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18 Using the word *pain* in this context as personification, but the standard window pane, pane.

19 My real dog is too indifferent to play Frisbee, and if I throw the Frisbee in her direction, she looks at me quizzically before wandering off to find some discarded garbage to eat.

20 The End.

# FOSTERING: A LIFE-CHANGING EVENT

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DARREN CROTEAU • SURGICAL TECHNOLOGY

Five years ago, just a few weeks after completing foster parent training and certification, we received the call. The foster agency had two children that needed placement right away—a girl, Claudia, four, and a boy, João, three. They were currently living in a temporary emergency shelter home, and because it was a temporary placement, their time limit for being there was soon to expire. “Really? So soon?” we thought. “Is this really it? We are going to be taking care of these children?” We set up the meet and greet within a couple of days of making the decision to care for the children.

Burger King was chosen for the meeting as a neutral place where the children would feel at ease. We fell in love with the two adorable children immediately. João was overwhelmingly shy and hardly said a word, and what he did say was unintelligible. (Much later, we learned he would need speech classes, which I’m glad to say were a success.) Even though we couldn’t make out what João was trying to say, his older sister Claudia, the mighty protector of her little brother, had no problem translating. Claudia, with a tight, downward brow, was standoffish and had a huge wall built up—but who could blame her? She was old enough to remember a lot more of the experiences they’d had in the system, which in turn caused her to fear trusting anyone.

As enjoyable as it was for us to interact with these two, sadly, their appearances made it apparent they were not getting the care they needed. Their little ears were in serious need of Q-tips. Their fingernails were dirty and so overgrown that they were starting to curl under and into their tiny fingers. My heart was sad; this did not sit well with me. It was obvious that the loud print Muumuu-wearing woman, who was in charge at the shelter and over its children, was not in that line of work for the love of kids.

We were moved and requested that the normal wait period for the move from shelter to our home be pushed up. It was, and five days later, each with a trash bag containing what little clothes and old, dirty toys they had, the children arrived. We welcomed them in and tried to make them feel as comfortable as possible. We showed them to their new rooms with a stuffed animal lovingly placed on each of their brand new beds. One of the stuffed

animals, a kitten later named Kitty, is the one my oldest daughter still sleeps with today. It took some time, but after a few days, the kids started to loosen up and smile, play, and laugh.

It was a great adventure getting to know the kids even though we had some unexpected surprises. We didn't know Claudia was allergic to strawberries until we found out the hard way. Luckily, it was nothing serious— a nasty rash on her face, which went away quickly with medicine. Other scary episodes involved João's temper tantrums. When he didn't want to do something, he let us know it. More than once, I had to lift him over my shoulder and carry him kicking and screaming. Oh, the joy of parenthood! We were still learning as much as they were.

Not long ago, their biological mother gave birth to a little girl, their sister Cynthia. Unfortunately, Cynthia went missing for several weeks. The mother was not approved to leave the hospital with the baby because of her history of drug abuse and her lack of care for the other two children, and a warrant for her arrest was issued. It wasn't long before a red flag alerted the staff at an Orange County welfare office to call the authorities to arrest the mother and to place the baby in a safe environment. Later that day, our phone rang.

"Hello, this is Susan with ABC Foster Family Agency; we located Claudia and João's two-month-old baby sister Cynthia. What time should we bring her over?" a voice asked.

I replied, "Ummm...what?" So of course, we accepted the new child, and she arrived within a few hours. After a brief introduction, the most perfect baby in the world was placed in our arms for us to protect and care for her needs.

Within one month after the kids' arrival, we were notified that due to failure to comply with reunification programs, the biological parents' rights were being terminated. The Orange County Courts of California were putting Claudia and João up for adoption—and the baby, too, shortly after that. After a lot of thought, prayer, and a deep felt "yes," we started the adoption process.

One year to the day after Claudia and João came to live with us, the adoption was finalized. There was no turning back then—the children were ours! Part of the adoption process involved obtaining new birth certificates, and we could choose the names that appeared on them. *Claudia Unique*. As cool as the middle name was and as unique as Claudia was, her middle name became Jean. The name Jean came from a relative on my ex-wife's side. We had a fond liking for the initials *CJ*, as well.

The baby's name, Cynthia Rose, never sat well with us, as we thought it sounded like a country western singer's name. We called her Theia from the

beginning. We just took off the *Cyn* and added the *e*. So, *Cynthia* Rose became *Theia Lynn*. The middle name, *Lynn*, also came from a relative on my ex-wife's side. The cool thing about giving her that name, without us initially realizing it, was that her initials came out to be TLC, *Tender Loving Care*.

As far as my son's name, no one in the foster care system, or even relatives that the children were passed around to, could figure out how to pronounce *João* (pronounced *Zhɔwau*). Many people just called him Joe, when in fact, João does not even translate to Joe/Joseph; it translates to *John*. I gave him *Todd* for his middle name. The name John Todd is what I had picked out years ago to name my firstborn child, long before meeting João. This choice of name meant a lot to me. For the first name, I chose *John* for John the Baptist from the Bible. John the Baptist was of strong character and was not afraid to speak out against injustices and to stand by his convictions even though King Herod's wife, Herodias, threatened to kill him for speaking publicly of their improper behavior. That righteous character was how I wanted to be—not better than thou, but of truth and honor. I wanted that, as well, for my son. *Todd* was chosen because of my first cousin. Growing up, I had three sisters, a mom, and no dad; I was surrounded by nothing but females. So having another boy around to hang out with was a big deal. My cousin Todd was born six weeks before I was, and we were interested in the same things. He meant a lot to me. All my childhood memories that were worth remembering were of the fun we had together.

My son's name is a confirmation that João was meant to be my son. John the Baptist was thought of by the Jewish people as the Old Testament prophet Elijah returning to them. Before I changed it to *Todd*, João's middle name was *Elijah*.

Armed with new names, new birth certificates, and new social security numbers, my children finally had a new life. The original plan of just fostering some children temporarily morphed into a life-changing event for us, as well. ❀

# PRETTY AS A PICTURE

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SONIA ARELLANO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER  
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



# FREEDOM FINLEY

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TAYDEN BUNDY • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Freedom Finley fastened the ends of the cape securely around his neck, lifted the bottom, and let the fabric flutter down and rest on his back.

He admired the lightness and the brilliant colors that filled his eyes with beauty, and he spun around to allow the cape to lift up once more. He ran his soft fingertips across the cardboard box sitting on the nightstand, the box having been the resting place of the cape until he had retrieved it from his front porch. The knock had bellowed throughout the house, and the postman had skittered away before Freedom had reached the door. There had been no name, no return address, and no note.

He peered out his bedroom window, keeping an eye on the remaining beams of light that clung to the silent time between day and night. He lingered there, allowing his imagination to run rampant until the light disappeared. When the thin line between earth and sky faded away, he shot down the stairs, darkened the house to invisibility, and burst through the front door into the quiet open darkness. He lifted off onto his tiptoes and flew through the night, gliding across freshly cut grass. Fireflies illuminated his path as he silently swept through deserted streets, isolated alleyways, and sleeping backyards. His nightly mission to protect his town was underway. He was their hero. He saved all of them. He saved them in his imagination.

Bennett North rocked deep in the shadows of her front porch beneath the naked dead bulb hanging above her head. The smoke from an unfiltered cigarette rested between her fingers, sifted up into the stale air, and disappeared into the distance before her. A flash of white burst past as she gazed toward the stars. She knew that Freedom was flying through the night, and she let him drift away to save the day again.

Freedom was as pale as powder; he was born that way. His father had laughed when he saw the white hair on top of Freedom's head as he rested in his mother's arms for the first time; then his father's face had taken a sour shape, and he had left them alone together. He had never once touched Freedom as a child because he had been afraid of him, but his mother had cherished him and locked him away inside the dark house. The curtains had always been secure without a gap or crease to let the light shine through. They had kept him from sunlight to keep the sun from scorching his skin. When he was older, they had

allowed him more access to the outdoors as long as he remained covered, but when he was ten, a group of boys had tied him up inside a burlap flour sack and dropped him off on his front porch after ringing the bell several times. His father had laughed awkwardly as his mother struggled to untie the timber hitch knot the boys had recently mastered at camp. He hadn't cried out as he waited for her to save him. He had learned to be patient through the loneliness that lingered within the simple confines of his life. He had obtained a quiet sense of wonder that kept his eyes keenly delving into the continuous beauty of the world that he longed to grasp within his hands and encase in a display to peer upon whenever he felt the urge to do so. His mother couldn't contain his urge to discover. His mind was in a constant state of dreaming. He had never lost his lust for the true essence of what life had to offer him, and his unwavering attempt to uncover the truth and his unfaltering love for beauty would save a girl three years after the flour sack incident.

He was idling alone, twisting a twig between his gloved hands as he sat beneath an enormous violet umbrella at the edge of a manmade beach. His mother had begged him to stay home until the sun fell past the rooftops and disappeared beneath the streets, but he had refused. The summer was nearly over, and he wanted to watch the surface of the water sparkle one last time before the school bell rang again. The sun was murderous that afternoon, and Freedom was covered from head to toe beneath the blazing sun. Sweat poured down around his eyes, soaked through the layers of clothes, and left pools around his feet. He gazed at the people in the water with quiet envy. Three boys swooned over a girl in a yellow striped bathing suit, which hugged her body like the smooth skin that encased her organs. She was radiant. Her auburn hair flipped up and spread across her ruby lips, clinging to the wet surface. Freedom couldn't avert his eyes from her, and he chuckled at the boys who attempted to win her over. He watched her from his spot of solitude as the sun crept across the sky.

A few hours passed. Freedom watched as the girl splashed around farther out than she had been all day and then disappeared beneath the surface of the water. He waited a few moments to be certain she was not fooling the others around her, but when she did not emerge, Freedom quickly removed the layers of clothing guarding his sensitive skin and dashed to the water's edge. When his feet hit the water, a rush of strength like he had never known surged through him. He felt invincible! He searched the area where he had last seen the girl and dove down to find her. He popped back up to the surface emptyhanded after the first dive, but then felt silk across his ankle and quickly submerged again. Beneath the water, he frantically swung his arms down toward the deep

sandy floor. He reached down as far as he could, and her hair tangled around his fingers. He grasped her hair, pulled her up into his arms, and then brought her to the surface. A crowd had formed on the beach, their mouths agape as they watched bubbles erupt just before Freedom burst through to safety. He drew in a deep breath, and the crowd let out a cheer when the girl was seen in his arms. The three admirers swam out to them, ripped her from Freedom, and took her to shore. As Freedom floated to the beach, struggling to regain his composure, he heard the girl cry out as water spewed from her lips. The admirers held her in their arms as she cried out in happiness, and her heroes hugged her.

The crowd ignored Freedom as he dashed past them to get back into his clothes. Some of them eyed him as he went by, but their fear kept their mouths from uttering a word. A little girl ran after him, but her mother clutched her arm and forced her back toward the crowd before she was near enough to Freedom to inform him of her admiration. He dried off quickly, dressed himself, and stood alone as the crowd continued to revel in the event. He stared at the towel he had just used, and a gleam of hope cast across his eyes as he held the towel up in front of him. He took the two corners at the ends and tied them around his neck, tucked the umbrella and his bag under his arm, and flew home for the first time.

He continued alone through the darkness, letting his mind indulge in the wild imagination he had created. He saved them all as he passed their silent homes, as he kept his ears open for desperate cries from damsels. As the night neared an end, Freedom flew back to his home. As he passed Bennett North, he lifted his hand and waved to her, and Bennett waved back. She smiled at the cape that fluttered in the wind and thought about his arms around her as he saved her life. She had wondered if the cape would be long enough and felt a warm hum run across the surface of her skin as she watched him fly away into the depths of the solitude with which only he had become familiar. ✨

# A PACIFIC SUNSET

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LYNDA HEIDEN • ADMINISTRATIVE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT, LINCOLN



# HAWAIIAN PARADISE

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DAWN CLOVER • ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, BUSINESS



# WIZARDRY

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JIM BAKER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

In the great apprenticeship

Of life  
I strive always to divine  
Answers  
To the arcane mysteries  
Of Love  
And Happiness.

I illuminate the familiar  
And elucidate the bizarre  
Seeking that sage  
Wisdom,  
Invoking that radiant  
Power,  
Joy.

Thrill at the brilliant conjuration of  
Laughter in close hearts;  
Delight evokes friendship.

Ecstasy in the sorcerous transformation of  
Strangers into bedfellows;  
Love makes alchemists of us all.

Enchantment at the ensorcelling closure of  
Tiny fingers 'round your own;  
The glamour of that moment  
E'en desecrated diapers can't dispel.

The true measure of wizardry  
Is the sum  
Of Love  
And Happiness  
One's apprentice can produce.

# RE-ENACTING ROXABOXEN

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RACHEL HOLLENBECK • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

In the summer of 2004 when I was eleven years old, I spent several days in Maine. Another family invited us to stay with them at their grandparents' beach house. While there, we played a game called Roxaboxen, based on a book by Alice McLerran. My little sister Sarah and I played it on the beach with our friends Nicholas, Margaret, and Caroline. Unreserved and free to enjoy ourselves, we let our imaginations run wild as we played Roxaboxen.

In the book, the kids play in the desert and, using their imaginations and some leftover wooden crates and desert glass, create their own town. We played our version of Roxaboxen wearing sweatshirts over our swimsuits, as the cool air blew in from the ocean. At low tide, we climbed down into a cove to scrounge for sea glass. We found many pretty pieces in an array of colors and used the glass as money. With the money we bought “meals” from the restaurants my sister and one of the other girls owned. Seashells served as plates, and seaweed and sand were our delicious repast. I distinctly remember one of us being a real estate agent selling properties. We climbed upon the rocks that covered one side of the small bay, moving higher and higher as the tide came in, and claimed spots for our shops. Each of us girls took turns sitting still on a rock, letting Nicholas artistically put up our hair in fancy buns using sticks with leaves and long seashells for adornment. We played for hours and were excited when the moms came up to “try” our food! Digging on the sandy beach, we outlined our houses and dug a fort.

I loved Roxaboxen! There were no awkward moments, no times of uncertainty, and no worrying about what the other kids would think because we were all in it together. Soon after this experience, my family moved, and I transitioned into another stage of life, but playing Roxaboxen was one of the last memories of my friends before we moved. Our time imagining Roxaboxen remains for me a picture of one of the best things about childhood: the easy embrace of imagination. There is an innocence in childhood that allows children to not be circumspect or inhibited in their activities. They excitedly participate with their friends, not looking back over their shoulders to see who's watching. That was why I enlisted the help of my other younger sister, Leah, to re-enact Roxaboxen with me for a school assignment.

Once I chose to do over Roxaboxen for my assignment, I wondered if I'd be able to enjoy it. Adults are conditioned to not be comfortable with some things,

and using their imaginations for more than creative writing assignments is one of them. Having a five-year-old sister helps, but I wondered if I could taste the uninhibitedness of childhood again. I knew when I decided to do this that I would have to intentionally put myself into the Roxaboxen world, or it wouldn't be fun for me or my sister. Putting all my focus on her, I decided to make it fun!

One obvious difference in the game was that we now lived in Nebraska. There was no sea glass for money, no sea shells for hair decorations or plates, and no sand to dig in to outline houses. However, there were leaves, grass, sticks, and tree branches to help us start our own Roxaboxen. My sister Leah and I put on our tennis shoes and jackets before walking behind our house on a moderate October day. Using willow tree branches, we outlined our Roxaboxen homes, and in front of my "house," I placed a stick that we used as a door when we passed in and out. We used sticks and leaves to elaborately do each other's hair. Feasting upon corn on the cob (yellow leaves) and rice (grass), we relished our meal together, and Leah invited herself to have a sleepover at my house. We lay down in my small house with our heads going down the hill. While sleeping (and at the same time whispering), we lay in the prickly grass before Leah got up and told me she would wake me in a minute. Once I woke up, we ate more corn on the cob and rice, compliments of Leah, and she gave me tickets (willow tree leaves) to see the movie *Frozen*. Sitting farther up on our hill, we sang along as we watched the movie. Leah found phones for both of us (curved sticks), and we migrated into our own houses as we talked to each other.

I had read *Roxaboxen* to Leah for several years before we played it. Although I guided the process, it was Leah who found many of the natural props and who suggested we watch a movie and get phones (things we didn't even consider when I played originally). Choosing to be creative and using the resources that surrounded us was fun! It was definitely a challenge for me. I can't remember the last time I *played* like that—and Leah loved it! I am the sister that enjoys reading to her and doing concrete, quiet, sit-down activities, so it was good to break out of my comfort zone again. During our Roxaboxen adventure, the neighbors came out, and I had the choice of continuing with my sister or shrinking back inside. I decided to smile and wave but kept singing with her—definitely a rewarding choice when she looked up at me and smiled proudly. Our neighbors were an older couple from Russia who couldn't speak English and who thought Leah was adorable. Their eight-year-old granddaughter came out, too, to join them on a walk. She looked at us curiously and yelled hello before we went back to playing.

One thing I learned during my do-over is that it's hard for me as an adult to focus on something that's not intellectually stimulating. That said, it doesn't mean I can't do it with some effort. One of my goals in this game was to make

happy memories with my sister. We played for about an hour before it was time to have supper, and she was sad that we had to stop, so I think I succeeded! Looking back at the Maine Roxaboxen, I see that one of the reasons it was such a great game was that there was no wrong way to play it. Seashells could be any number of items because the game was based on what we could make out of them using our imaginations. Hair decorations, hats, plates, spoons, house ornaments, doorknobs, and the list went on. *Why not?* This question is asked far more commonly by children than adults.

Roxaboxen was a satisfying choice for my school project. While it wasn't as fun now that ten years have passed, I loved the feelings of freedom that came along with it and the concentration it took. The simplicity and innocence were still a part of the game, a remnant of childhood. Sweet memories of my past experience flooded over me and connected with my new experience. Leah and I bonded as we played and stretched our imaginations. We spent an hour outside enjoying the fall weather, and Leah told me before bed that it was *really* fun playing Roxaboxen! Choosing to use my imagination and to be uninhibited in doing so was definitely worth the time spent back in Roxaboxen. ♡

## CRAYON MASKED

SONIA ARELLANO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# WHAT DOES ONE DO?

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JORDYN RIHA • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

What does one do  
when lost and alone  
in a world all their own,  
no help to be found,  
not one single sound?

What does one do  
when the beast finally comes  
and the end prayer drums?  
For when the beast comes near,  
your end is from fear.

What does one do  
when the prison is inside  
where they cannot hide  
with no way out,  
unable to shout?

What does one do  
when lost in their mind  
with no way to find  
how they became trapped,  
as all their energy is sapped?

What does one do  
as they slowly fade away  
from the place they thought safe  
with the beast closing in,  
excited for the end?

What does one do  
when the beast is of their own  
creation,  
set loose in their head  
as they slowly drift towards the light,  
no reason left to fight?  
What does one do?

# ASIAN STYLED HOUSE

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KASANDRA THOMPSON • GRAPHIC DESIGN/MEDIA ARTS



# SCARS FROM THE WAR

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TRANG TRAN • ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS TECHNOLOGY

When I was 13 years old, my country of Vietnam was on the end of a civil war. My family had to move to the farmland where my grandmother had grown up. That was a grandmother's repatriation, but that was our journey to the new, stranger land-field.

There were seven members in my family: my grandmother, my mother, and five siblings, including me. I was the oldest child of all. My father, the man who could handle the heavy jobs, was in prison because he was a soldier of the opposition side to the current government; my father's side had lost the war.

We, two women and five children, along with two pieces of luggage, were carried by a type of transportation looking like a pulled-motor. That was a motorbike, model Honda 1967, pulling a triangle body made of wood and metal with two tires. Because it had no hood, I could see the whole sky in my eyes while riding. We left the small town behind and drove to the new land. Crossing fields of rice paddies, I could see the whole green view like large green velvet that widened into the horizon. The smell of rice and water-drenched mud combined to make a comforting smell.

We passed through a small town and went to the aisles between two sides of a bamboo tree. Through the long range of the tree, I saw the view of another larger field with dying grass. Next to the last branch of bamboo, there was a big, lonesome mango tree; it looked old and rough. We turned on the right side of the road toward the tree. That was our destination.

Under the tree, people were waiting for us; they were our relatives and neighbors. My grandma explained, "This is a region between the two fighting sides of enemies. One side over there, farther off the field, is a small forest, which is temporarily occupied." She waved toward the southwest, where I could see the high level of trees up to the unused field where we were standing. "And our side is over here," she continued. When she used the word "they," she implied the current government because we were the side that lost. The mango tree was shot by both sides of the war, so I saw the multiple small craters printed on the surface of its trunk and a big hole able to fit a soccer ball. At that time, I understood why my grandma left there to move to the town.

The loud men's voices pulled me back out of my mind. "One, two, three!" they were loudly shouting. They were standing the big log into the ground to make

pillars; they were building a new house for us. Under the mango tree, my mother, who was of a short shape with a chignon hairdo and who wore a dark green shirt and conical hat, was stirring the large pot of rice to even out the cooking. The “stove” that was cooking the rice was made out of three mere clay bricks. She and a few other women were cooking rice for lunch. I could feel the steam coming from the rice pots around me, and there was a large sound of boiling rice in the air. The house had twelve pillars holding up the roof made by palm leaves. The walls were made by sod, created by mixing mud and rice straws. The house was made by the rudimentary materials, but it looked new and interesting to me.

We began a new life there since having peace in my country. The property that we had was one kilometer square of farm and one mango tree. The main job that supported my family was working on our rice paddies. My grandma managed that because she had known what to do. She was about 60 years old. Her hair was gray with half black and half white. Her shape was tall, and her shoulders were wide; her mouth had no teeth. Her skin was dark from sunburn, and her face was covered in wrinkles. When June came, big rains hit. My grandma sowed rice seeds into the small paddy. The new rice plants grew up in under 45 days. We distributed those seedlings into 20 other large paddies. She then told us to pluck them and tie them into bundles. These were the steps that prepared us for the next stage: replanting the seedlings.

I was delighted to step down into the flooded field of water; with mud from my shin to my knees, I felt like I was in a spa. I held the bundle of seedlings in my left hand; my right hand drew two or three seedlings and replanted them in the mud. The mud cooled my fingers as I planted the seedlings down, and it was gray, soft, and smooth, like a cake batter. My hands dug down the mud and kneaded it. “Hurry up! Babies don’t play in the mud anymore. We need to replant these seedlings. We have to get this field done as soon as possible—before noon, or we’ll be burned!” my grandma said. We obeyed her and tried to work hard. Linh, my younger sister, and I understood that we had to work hard to earn our living, or we would starve to death.

Kha, my younger brother, was also having fun; he was jumping in the mud. He enjoyed copying us as we replanted the rice seedlings. He did whatever he pleased since he was still too small. Suddenly, he shouted, “Oi, oi, oi!” He stomped the mud, and it splattered all over his body.

Grandma asked, “What are you doing, baby?”

He was still stomping the ground and shouted, “What’s this creature?!”

Grandma smiled and said, “Don’t be scared, honey! That’s a leech!”

Curious, I went over and observed it. It was shiny black, soft as mud, one-quarter inch wide and two inches long, and it had two or three small gold stripes along its long body. Both ends of it were tightening on the back of

my brother's left shin, and its body was wriggling. I felt disgusted and had goosebumps on my skin. My grandma grabbed the leech, forcefully ripped it out, and threw it to the nearby paddy. I would have felt sick if I were touching it by hand. "Eek, grandma!" I blurted. "I am hurt!"

"Weep, weep, weep," Kha cried. The tears flowed and filled my poor brother's face.

"Don't cry. It's all right, baby," my grandma said to reassure him.

Later when I was replanting, I felt pain in the front of my right lower leg. I raised my leg and was startled to see a big black leech, wide as my thumb and long as my middle finger, biting me. I used a cluster of seeding to scrub it off, but it was tightly biting me, and I felt more pain. I grabbed it and tried pulling it out, but it stretched like a rubber band, his mouth still attached to my leg. The thing had two heads, and I tried to pull off one head. I then pulled the other end out, but the other end bit me again on my middle-finger. It felt worse, and I shook my hand violently to try and release it, but it was still dandling on my hand. "Grandma!" I was panicked, and I called and ran to her. She grabbed the leech and quickly ripped it off and threw it to the next paddy.

"You have to quickly grab it before it bites again," she said with experience. Meanwhile, I looked down my leg and saw blood flowing from the point that it bit me.

"Blood!" I shouted.

My grandma said, "Don't worry, girl. Go up, go on land, and press this onto the injury for a while to stop the bleeding." She gave me a fiber of tobacco leaf that she used to clean her teeth while betel-nut chewing.

When I went home, I clearly saw the wound on my leg. It had three lines about a quarter of an inch long that clustered together, one end in the middle and three other ends pointed like a "Y" letter. My grandma said, "That was a three-teeth leech."

I stepped down into the water-field almost every day in the summer each year in my childhood. I had no more interest in touching mud water because of the leeches. Wherever there was mud water, there were leeches as well. Teeth marks of leeches filled my leg. I didn't pay attention to the teeth marks anymore. The teeth marks made sores on my legs, and the sores attracted the leeches whenever I stepped down into the water-field. The leeches attacked at my sores and ulcerated them during the replant season.

Those sores printed scars all over my legs. Each year, the new scars cascaded the old scars. I thought, "If there wasn't war in my country, I might not have come to this field, and I might not have these scars." I related my scars to the scars of the mango tree next to my house; the mango tree's scars were made in the war time, but my scars were made after the war time. ❀

# PHOTO COLLECTION

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KENT REINHARD • PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY INSTRUCTOR

## MARCH SUNRISE

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## SUNDOGS AND SUN PILLAR

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## THUNDERHEAD BARN

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## WINDMILL AND STARS

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# FROM SISTER TO MOTHER

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LEAH WEBER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I don't remember much about my mom. I was only seven months old when she took ill and died, but my sister Baileigh remembers; she was 13 at the time.

She has done so much for me over the years that I cannot even begin to repay her. I don't know what I would do without her. My name is Austin Samuel Lucas, and this is the story of how Baileigh went from sister to mother.

*May 13, 1915*

The early morning sun wandered wearily into the small house on the Missouri riverside. The infant beams of day gently woke Helena Lucas. Newly widowed and heavily pregnant with her second child and first son, Helena took her mornings in stride. She rose slowly and sat on the edge of her bed with a hand on her large, swollen belly. Looking up, she came face to face with a picture of her late husband just before he left for Europe to defend our home; she hadn't known then that he would never return—alive, at least.

"Mom?" a soft voice whispered, snapping Helena out of her memory.

"Baileigh?" Helena murmured, reaching for her 13-year-old daughter.

"Are you all right?" Baileigh asked, walking over to her mother and taking her hand.

"Of course, dear," Helena said, gently moving a wisp of light brown hair from Baileigh's light brown eyes. "Come now, let's have some breakfast."

As Helena rose slowly from her bed, a sharp pain overwhelmed her, knocking her down.

"Mom!" Baileigh cried, at her mother's side in a fraction of a blink with her eyes full of concern.

"Oh..." Helena moaned. "Don't worry; I'm all right," she said, pulling a swath of dark hair from her face and meeting her daughter's gaze.

Baileigh nodded and helped her mother back to her feet. Slowly, both women made their way to the kitchen. Despite her mother's assurances, my sister refused to let her cook breakfast; Baileigh insisted she sit down and rest.

"Sweetheart, really, I'm all right," Helena insisted. "Let me do this."

"No," Baileigh said, only half turning. "You just rest. I've got it."

Helena sunk back into her chair and smiled. She simply could not believe how much like a woman her daughter had become at barely 13. In the midst of her realization, Helena's sharp pains returned with a violent vengeance.

“Oh!” Helena cried, gripping her abdomen and fighting for breath. Just before she hit her knees, Helena felt Baileigh catch and balance her.

“Let’s get you back to bed,” Baileigh soothed her mother. “I’ll send for the doctor.” She helped our mother ease into bed and lay down. About 45 minutes later, Helena’s pain had reached an extreme level. The doctor spoke calmly when he declared Helena ready to deliver. Although she was afraid, Helena dared not let Baileigh know.

“It’s all right,” Baileigh soothed in as calm of a voice as she could manage. “You are almost there.” Another ten minutes passed before Helena’s screams were replaced by those of her newborn son’s. “Mom,” Baileigh whispered as she held me, her baby brother, for the first time, “you did it!”

“He looks just like his father,” Helena said; my sister nodded.

*December 13, 1915—seven months later*

The winter snow fell quietly that crisp December morn, but Baileigh was not watching. She instead put her baby brother down for a nap and tended to her ailing mother, who over the past few days had spiked a fever. Although she dared not show it, Baileigh was concerned that Mom had contracted pneumonia. It was not uncommon for Helena to contract the disease at least once a year, but this time was different. The doctor could not figure out why our mother had deteriorated so quickly or why she did not seem to want to recover.

“Oh, what’s happening?!” Baileigh demanded of the doctor. “Why won’t she heal?”

“I am sorry, miss, truly,” said the doctor. “I cannot say why.” He gently squeezed my sister’s shoulder as he packed his things and left.

Although outside she tried to stay strong, inside, Baileigh was breaking.

“Sweetheart,” Helena rasped, reaching for her daughter with what waning strength she had.

“I’m here, Mom,” Baileigh said, fighting back tears.

“Sweetheart,” Helena repeated softly, “I need you to do something for me.”

“What? I’ll do anything, get you anything you need,” Baileigh choked, both knowing and dreading the request.

“Look after your brother, my sweet Baileigh. Keep him close. Keep me close, as well.”

“Mom, I...I can’t. I couldn’t possibly! I mean—I...I’m still a child,” Baileigh stammered, tears blinding her, forcing her to blink.

“Sweetheart,” Helena whispered, her life fading, “you can. I believe in you. You are more like a woman than you realize.”

“But, Mom,” Baileigh began, “I need you.”

“Oh, I won’t be far away, dear,” Helena said. “Just remember all I taught you.”

To this, my sister could not respond.

My mom found the strength for one last message.

“Pass it to him.”

These were Helena Lucas’s last whispered words before she left the world and walked into the horizon where Dad was waiting for her.



Baileigh sat in stunned disbelief while her mother was taken away by the burial service. She sat so silently that one would have thought she was a statue. It was my—her brother’s—cries that temporarily brought her out of her despair.

“There, there, little one,” Baileigh murmured as she rocked me in her arms. “It will be all right. I will take care of you,” she vowed.

*December 20, 1915—seven days later*

Baileigh sat quietly, lost in her own thoughts at the dinner table. She still could not believe that our mother was gone. Although she and the baby were still living in their home, they were by no means alone. Laura Conrad, Helena’s sister, had come to take care of both Baileigh and me—although Baileigh did most if not all the work. Baileigh had begun working long hours at a teddy bear factory to save money, so she and I could be on our own. When she was not working, she tended to my needs.

“Baileigh?” Laura asked, snapping Baileigh back to the present.

“Hm?” my sister replied.

“Will you be all right when I leave?” Laura asked. “You know that you are more than welcome to come with me.”

“Don’t worry,” Baileigh said. “We’ll be fine.”

Two days later, Laura returned to Michigan leaving Baileigh alone with her baby brother. That night, after putting me to bed, Baileigh found paper and a pen and wrote.

**Even in Death** ~ *by Baileigh Lucas*

You left one day, never to return,  
 But I had nothing to learn.  
 You taught me everything I know,  
 Gave me everything I would need to survive.  
 We will thrive, for even in death, you watch us;  
 You are near us. Even in death, you are near.  
 We do not know fear.

Although the poem remained incomplete, those words could not have been more true.

*March 10, 1920—five years later*

“Come on, sis!” I yelled happily, challenging my sister to catch me.

“Ok!” Baileigh laughed. “Here I come!” She took off sprinting in my direction. As I ran, I noticed that something or someone stole her attention, however.

“Tyler,” Baileigh said. “What are you doing here?”

“Happy Birthday!” Tyler said, presenting Baileigh with a bouquet of roses. “Hey, little man!” he called to me.

“Hi, Tyler,” I said. “You stealing my sister again?”

“Nah. I’m taking both of you!” he said. Baileigh and I smiled.

“Where to?” Baileigh asked.

“To the park,” was the reply, “for a little family fun.” Baileigh froze.

“Babe, you all right?” Tyler asked.

“You...called us a family,” Baileigh whispered. Tyler smiled.

“Yeah, so I did,” he said. “When we get to the park, I have a surprise for you.”

Tyler Matthews was Baileigh’s boyfriend of three years. Baileigh was 18, and Tyler was 21. Tyler had big dreams to be a doctor someday, and Baileigh wanted to teach. I had heard people talk about the two of them getting married, but they didn’t know how right they were. When we arrived at the park, Tyler gave me a ball to kick around while he and my sister sat on a bench and talked.

“You want to know something, Bails?” Tyler said.

“What?” Baileigh asked.

“I think that either God or your mom had something to do with us being together,” he said. Baileigh laughed out loud.

“What?” Tyler said. “It’s true!”

“I know,” Baileigh said. “But what makes you so sure it’s my mom?”

Tyler merely shook his head and rose.

“I have something for you,” he said. “Close your eyes.” Baileigh did as Tyler instructed, unaware of the gift he was about to give her.

“Okay. Open them,” he said.

“Tyler!” my sister gasped, seeing him down on one knee and holding a stunning diamond ring. “Yes,” she whispered.

*April 25, 1931*

It’s been about seven years since Baileigh married Tyler. They have two children—Damian, seven, and Sylvia, four, but I came to realize that I was just as much a son as a brother to Baileigh. She literally *raised* me; she was more than my sister—she was my *mother*. But now I felt like I was losing my mother all over again. Baileigh was sick, and no doctor could tell us why—until now.

“I’m afraid that Baileigh has cancer,” said the doctor, much to our dismay. We had hoped that the diagnosis would be different, but Baileigh knew just by knowing her body and discovering the changes. The discovery had come too late.

“I’m so sorry, but it has spread,” said the doctor.

“Is there anything you can do?” I asked. The doctor shook his head.

“I’m afraid not. We found it too late. I’ll give you some time—find me if you need me.” We nodded.

I inched closer to my sister’s bedside; she smiled when she saw me.

“Hey,” she rasped. “Don’t look so sad.”

“You have to stay,” I said, trying not to cry. “You can’t go.”

“Oh, Austin,” Baileigh said, “that’s not for you to decide, now is it?” I shook my head.

“But Mommy,” little Sylvia said, “we need you.” My sister laughed.

“What could you possibly find funny?” Tyler asked.

“Déjà vu,” said Baileigh. “That’s the exact same thing I said to my mom just before she died.”

“Mommy,” Sylvia asked, “where will you go?”

“Sweetheart,” Baileigh whispered, “I won’t be far. I’ll be with your grandma and grandpa in Heaven. I’ll be watching every day.”

Damian, who had been silent up until then, said, “We’ll miss you, Mom.” He choked, and Baileigh ruffled his hair.

“Bail...Mom,” I said. “Please.”

“Austin,” Baileigh said, “I’m not your mother. I’m your sister.”

“NO!” I cried “You’re my mom. You’re my mom and my sister!” I screamed. “I won’t let you go!”

“Austin,” she repeated, “I won’t be far away, dear. Just remember all I’ve taught you. One more thing,” she said. Her words sounded familiar somehow.

“What?” I whispered.

“Look after Damian and Sylvia, my brave Austin,” she said. “Remember all that I have taught you.”

Then it hit me. It wasn’t Baileigh talking in that moment; it was Helena, our mother. With her dying breath, Baileigh whispered, “Pass it to them.” And she was gone.

*One year later*

It’s been about a year since Baileigh died, and things have returned to a new normal. I was going through her belongings the other day and came across her poem that ended with the lines, “You are near us/Even in death, you are near/ We do not know fear.”

I realized that the poem was incomplete, so I added some lines of my own.

**Even in Death** (continued) ~ *by Austin Lucas*

I see now a world crystal clear, but I’m still sad.

You’re gone—away with Mom and Dad.

But from you I learned that even in death, you are here.

You watch me every hour of every day.

Your lessons, I will never forget; teachings live on.

We miss you every day.

Even in death, you continue to teach.

You left one day, never to return,

And my heart will never mend.  
For now we are apart, but we will see each other again.

*Epilogue*

Nobody knew it then, but the last line of Austin's writing was a grim prophecy. For since his sister's passing, his grief was unfathomable and never-ending. No one could give him comfort or ease his pain. The family tried taking Austin to the doctor for medication; it did not help.

It had been nearly three days, and nobody had seen Austin. Concerned, Tyler sent his son Damian to find him. Within minutes, Damian cried out in misery.

"Dad! I found him!" he cried. "Come quickly!"

Tyler sprinted up the stairs, his mind reeling, although when he entered the bedroom, the scene before him was innocent enough. Austin was lying in bed, seemingly asleep.

"He's sleeping. He has to be," Tyler said, more to himself than to the world.

He knew, however, that he was wrong. Austin was not sleeping—not a living sleep, anyway. The heart-wrenching truth was revealed in the form of the empty prescription pill bottle on the table by the bed. He was gone; he was with his family—even in death. ❀

## ENGLISH SERENITY

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LYNDA HEIDEN • ADMINISTRATIVE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT, LINCOLN



# LOST IN TIME

TONYA SCHROEDER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# GLORIOUS

GENNIFUR PEARCE • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I pulled the heavy wooden doors open and was greeted with the familiar, musty smell of the old library. I walked up and down the aisles and occasionally pulled out a book, opening it to read the first couple of pages only to slide the book back into its slot. Nothing seemed to interest me. I longed for a story that meant something to me—one that would stand out immediately.

The rhythmic motion of grabbing a book, opening it, and then putting it back continued for almost an hour. I was about to give up hope when a small book with a torn and ratty spine caught my eye. I gently pulled the book from its home. I blew the dust off the cover and watched it fall open in my hands. Something fell out of the pages onto the blue carpet. I carefully knelt and reached to pick up the small object, careful not to let the book fall apart in my other hand. I flipped the item over to reveal a photograph.

The person in the picture resembled me slightly, yet she was older—around my grandmother’s age. Grey hair silhouetted her face; her skin had small wrinkles around her eyes and mouth, yet she looked beautiful. There was a spark in her eyes—she was happy in the picture. Then I saw it, a mole just above her right temple; the mole was almost a square instead of a circle. Goosebumps pricked my arms, causing the hair on the back of my neck to stand up. My curiosity about the woman in the picture grew with each second.

I opened the book to the first page where a date was scrawled across the top—my birthday. Below was the story my parents would tell about the day of my birth. Throughout the pages of the strange book were numerous stories about my life. Reliving my childhood, I found myself lost in the book. An hour later, I was sitting with my back against the dusty bookshelf. I pried my eyes away from the tragic story of falling out of a tree and breaking my arm to glance at the picture on the ground next to me. *If this book was true about my childhood,* I thought, *I wonder if it will tell me how I die.*

I closed the book, took a deep breath, and stared at the high ceiling; I slowly flipped the book to the back cover and opened it to the last page. Nothing. I furiously flipped backwards through blank pages, heart pounding in my chest as my anticipation grew; my hand shook. Finally, I reached a page that contained one sentence sitting in the middle of the page: “She lived a long, glorious life.”

A smile stretched across my face, my heartbeat steadied, and I was overcome with joy. *A long glorious life,* I thought, chuckling softly. I felt like a child who had

been given everything she could ever dream. Happy tears filled my eyes. It didn't matter how I died; to know I had a "glorious" life ahead of me was enough.

I was so lost in my own world that I didn't heard the footsteps approaching the aisle where I sat. A man spoke in a low octave as he calmly said, "Drop the book and get your hands where I can see them."

I looked up, startled, at the man before me. He had on tattered jeans and a worn sweatshirt; he was shaking slightly, but the gun in his hand remained fixed on me. I waited a few beats, shook my head, and wondered if this was a dream or not. He nodded his head toward me in a silent command. I slowly set the book down and placed my hands on top of my head while smiling at the remembrance of what I had just read.

"What are you smiling for? Ain't you never seen a gun pointed at you before?" he spat in a frustrated, harsh tone.

"I haven't," I shrugged. "But I know you won't shoot me. I don't die today," I said matter-of-factly, a grin still gracing my face.

The man looked from me to the book, than back at me, and his grin began to match mine. "Oh, really?" he announced.

A loud crack filled the library, and I was thrown to the ground with great force. My head smacked the carpet with a loud thud. I reached up to my chest where the pain I felt was overwhelming. I let out a cry when I touched the wound. Blood began to pool in the back of my throat, and I choked. I heard the man chuckle ominously as he walked over to where I had fallen. He knelt down and picked up the discarded book that lay next to me. He brought his face an inch away from mine. I choked again, swallowing the thick liquid that formed in my throat.

"You know," he paused, bringing the book into my line of sight, "you really shouldn't believe everything you read." At that, he winked and slowly stood up. The sound of sirens filled the air along with the sound of his footsteps beating across the carpet as he ran.

I brought my hand up from the wound in my chest and hissed at the pain it brought. I could feel the thick liquid begin to pool around my head. My line of vision wavered, causing spots before my eyes. It wouldn't be long now. I could hear people shouting and talking, but I couldn't make out what they were saying.

I used the strength I had left to reach for the photograph with my blood-covered hand. Shaking, I flipped the object over, as the woman in the picture began to get younger. The woman now staring back at me was my age; she looked just as I did when I left the house. I choked a few more times, feeling tears sting my eyes. This time, they were not happy tears. Nothing was happy. Nothing was "glorious." I looked up at the ceiling one last time, allowing myself to sob quietly at the pain. Everything began to slowly fade until the spots invading my vision grew larger. Then there was just blackness. ❖

# CENOTAPH

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CLIFTON SMITH • OFFICE PROFESSIONAL, LEGAL OFFICE FOCUS

Polished marble on a hill,  
by unknown hands placed there.  
An unexpected eulogy  
engraved with loving care.

It stands a lonely vigil,  
white square on endless green.  
Nobody ever comes here, so  
its farewell remains unseen.

Words of warning carved in stone  
so time will not erase  
the legacy of foolishness...

“Here Lies the Human Race.”

# BIRD

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DESTINY WORTHEY • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS



# HERE AGAIN?

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WAYNE REA • MOTORCYCLE TECHNOLOGY

“Whyyy!” I screamed as I awoke in a sweat covered panic; I looked around the dark room and wiped the sleep from my eyes to make sure I was awake. “Why?” I shook my head in disbelief. It seemed as if I was recently here, but in reality, it had been six months and three weeks. Six months ago, I had escaped from this dreadful house—this house and that life.

I am living in a rundown 1920s house. It was once green, but the paint has dried up, cracked, and fallen away. Cracked windows, missing screens, and chipping paint are the least of the house’s problems, however. It also boasts a rotted porch the paper boy has fallen through, no gas for heat, and running water from only the garden hose outside. This house had once belonged to my good friend’s grandma. She has long since passed away, but I swear she still walks the old, creaking wood floors upstairs.

Six months ago, I left here and said I’d never return. Then, I was unemployed and an addict without a nickel or a hope to cling to. Now my life is different, so why am I here again? I took all the steps necessary to not return, but life has a way of kicking me back down when I’m finding it hard to even stand.

I had been staying sober and strong. I had a few possessions but was staying in a small, one-bedroom, second-floor apartment and was working and moving forward. Not many had faith in me anymore, but I had a faith inside me, a faith that I was created for much bigger and better. At the time, I had no car. All my transportation took place on my ‘80s specialized mountain bike. It was pieced together, but with some trick parts off more expensive models. I rode it everywhere. It was light and fast. I rode it to work and to the library; sometimes, I even wrapped three or four bags of groceries around the handlebars.

One day on my way home from work, I stopped at the store to get pastrami, cheese, and bread to make my favorite sandwich next to a cheese steak. My legs were tired as I pedaled up the cracked and potholed street to my apartment. “You got this. You’re almost there,” I told myself as the road seemed to incline steeper and steeper. I finally made it, but the challenge wasn’t over. I unlocked the door and used my bike to hold the old, heavy wood and beveled glass door open. It was always two trips if I brought anything home. I looked up to what seemed like 100 steps stretching to the heavens. I took a deep breath and

muttered, “Here I go!” Carrying bags of food, I ran up the stairs, skipping every other one. Unlocking my apartment with one hand, I tossed the bags of food on the couch.

I then ran down the stairs as quickly as possible before thieves stole my bike. It wasn’t any easier going down. Super steep, the stairs seemed to overlap, reducing the area a person could step. It was a long way down if I missed just one step. I saw my bike was still there, so I slung it over my shoulder and climbed back up, going only one step at a time. This was tricky, as the front wheel was bouncing off the extreme angle of the steps. Ten more, seven more, two more. Finally, the “push myself” workout was over, and I could relax. I put my bike in the secured hallway closet.

In the apartment, I put the food away in the rusty old refrigerator—you know, the kind with the big pull lever and three inches of ice in the freezer. It was period for the apartment, which also had asbestos floor tiles and pushbutton light switches. It wasn’t the fanciest place, but it was a warm, dry place to crash, eat, clean up, and, most importantly, sleep. I slept on a couch of my grandma’s. It was a dry, scratchy, gold 1950s piece she had donated to my cause. To tell you the truth, by the time I finally laid down and fell asleep, the old couch felt like a pillow made of cotton balls.

Now with my boots off, sweatpants on, and a big bowl of Fruity Pebbles in my hand, I sat on the couch. No radio, no television—only nice, peaceful silence except for the crunch of my cereal. I loved the smell of fruity milk. Every pause in chewing was a task to stay awake. Eyes rolled up in my head, as I drifted into little three-minute naps. Only my quick reflexes kept my face from falling into my bowl of cereal. I instantly woke up. I put my bowl of fruit-speckled milk on the table and let myself settle back into the couch and fall asleep.

Pure heaven—nothing could ruin it. Motionless, I slept like a hibernating bear. I begin dreaming of a girl from my past. It was a vivid dream; we laughed and talked as if we were still kids. I had always loved listening to her talk—and she had a smile that made other people smile when they saw hers. As I listened to her in my dream, I heard a faint buzzing sound. It was a weird, mechanical buzzing sound that I’d heard before but couldn’t place. It was almost like an alarm....

That was the fire alarm! I sprang up wide awake and looked around the room. No fire, but the alarm was sounding—it happened often. We had been having many false alarms. The company in charge of the alarm system had worked on it several times in the last month and every time had told us it was fixed. Damn. That alarm just ripped me away from heaven for nothing. What could I do? With four-and-a-half hours left before I had to wake up, I tried laying back down and re-finding my piece of heaven. I quickly drifted back to sleep.

It seemed like mere minutes before I heard a truck backing up. “Beep, beep, beep.” A pause, and then, “Beep, beep, beep.” I opened my eyes and struggled to lift my head off the pillow. Then I could hear it clearly. “Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep!” That wasn’t a truck; that was the smoke detector.

I sat up slowly and tried to process what was going on. I decided I’d better force myself to get up and investigate. As I peeked around the corner and looked into the kitchen, I was surprised to see billowing gray smoke coming from the stove. What could that be? “Maybe the stove shorted out the electrical wires,” I thought. “Great. Just what I need to deal with now.” As I walked into the kitchen, my plan was to simply unplug the stove and return to bed. I pulled the stove out six inches with one powerful pull when I saw that the smoke was coming up from between the floor boards. “This can’t be good!” I thought. I decided to go downstairs where the owners ran a business to see what the heck was going on.

Not bothering to tighten or tie the laces, I pulled my boots on. I opened my door and saw no hallway and no stairs. The hallway was completely filled with thick, black, nose-burning smoke, and I couldn’t see even two inches into it. The smoke had engulfed the entire hallway and was now rolling into the apartment. My heart jumped out of my chest. I quickly closed the door and turned back to the kitchen. “What do I do?” I thought to myself.

In perfect time, I heard the crack of glass breaking and a man saying, “Is anyone in here? If you’re in here, come to the window!” Not wasting a second, I crouched as low as possible and moved faster than I ever had before. I could make out only the light shining around the figure behind the broken window, but I knew that was where I needed to be. Scrambling through the thick black smoke, I didn’t stop until I saw daylight. I didn’t even mind the broken glass—I just wanted out.

I don’t remember the face of the man who found me, but he was huge, and he probably saved my life. We ran across the tar roof and jumped maybe six feet down to a lower roof and down a frigid metal ladder that was so cold it burned my hands. At that point, I began to realize my surroundings again. I heard the piercing sirens and saw the blinding, flashing lights of six fire trucks. When we stepped down to street level, I saw fire trucks strategically parked around the building. I was immediately taken over to an ambulance where two EMTs were anxiously waiting to hit me with a barrage of questions. “I’m OK!” I yelled. I looked back at the building with smoke spewing out of all its cracks and seams. “How am I going to get all that smoke out of my belongings?” I asked myself.

The firefighters decided to vent the place, and a 40-foot ball of flames shot out of the front of the building and into the street. Firefighters scrambled to pull their trucks back out of the flames. Ice and slush were as high as the curb,

and the firefighters' hoses began to freeze. My feet were wet and cold, and I was in awe and shock. The fire was amazing to watch, but devastating to realize. I watched the firefighters battle the flames for two hours. Just as the flames would die down, they would fire up in another spot, and every time I heard a crack of glass or wood, another part of the building would crumble away. I heard the glass windows breaking from the intense heat and smelled the thick scent of burnt wood. It was then that I realized I had lost everything. I didn't even have a pair of socks on.

The Red Cross was there and tried to help. As I stared down at my wet boots, I answered a few questions. Realizing the sting of my frozen toes and the loss of all my belongings, I had little patience for questions. I turned back and looked at what was left of my apartment. It now looked like a bombed building in Europe in one of those old WWII movies. On one corner of the building stood a lone pillar of brick.

I was defeated, and with only one place to go, I walked away. And that's how I ended up here again—but I'm not staying. Not this time. ❧

## SCOTTISH RUINS

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LYNDA HEIDEN • ADMINISTRATIVE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT, LINCOLN



# LEADERSHIP BY EXAMPLE

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TREVOR GRAY • UNDECLARED

In a world that has fallen to the dark side of filth, one man will rise up a hero and lead a group toward the betterment of mankind and a cleaner bathroom. Having taken Ms. Trentini's amazing leadership class, I have learned that in every group there will be a leader. Even the smallest of situations is an opportunity to lead.

My favorite example is one that I live with every day. I currently live in a dorm setting where 112 grown men use the same bathroom. The damage created is pretty bad—from toilet paper thrown about like that time I TTP-ed my neighbor's yard (sorry, Jim) to hair from guys cutting their hair and beards all over the floors and sinks. I won't even get started about what's stuck on the walls. You would think that out of 112 guys, there would be at least a few guys that would hold themselves to a higher standard.

Instead, this is where I see poor leadership skills. The guys with the power to lead do not use it to better the dorm as a whole. Instead, possibly due to hard feelings about the situation we're in, they tend to be destructive leaders. They are against the place we're in, and in their attempt to damage the organization, they don't care about how they hurt the followers. It's a crash and burn mentality, and it's contagious. People tend to follow the norm and the destructive leaders in all their lies.

I couldn't live like that. I had to use the same bathroom as everyone else, and I would really hate it if I got MRSA or something. So I decided it was time for a change. I am the type of person that leads best by example, so I did the only thing I could think of to change the conditions of our bathroom. I put on some rubber gloves and started cleaning. Gross? Yes. Did I enjoy it? Not really. But I learned some valuable lessons about leadership along the way.

The first time I cleaned, no one helped, but a couple of guys saw me and stopped to ask if cleaning the bathroom was my job. I told them no and kept cleaning. The next time I cleaned, another guy grabbed the mop as I swept. By the fourth day, I had a whole team of guys helping me clean the bathroom every day. I noticed a huge change in the conditions of the whole dorm. Every day, less and less toilet paper was thrown about, and more hair made it in the trash rather than on the floor. As for the destructive leaders? They had a fall from grace. It turned out people want to follow good leaders.

My example of leadership may not be a serious one, but it shows what a little awareness and knowledge of good leadership can achieve. Every situation is an opportunity to lead. There will always be those that are willing to follow. If all there are to lead are destructive leaders, then more damage is caused than good. Most people want to do the right thing, but some lack the courage to go at it alone. It's up to us as leaders to be aware of those moments when we are called upon to lead by example. And we might just be saving someone from getting MRSA. ♡

## JAMES HETFIELD

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LANNY TUNKS • ELECTRICAL & ELECTROMECHANICAL TECHNOLOGY  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



# THE LEATHER-BOUND JOURNAL: A RESPONSE TO “THE STORY OF AN HOUR,” BY KATE CHOPIN

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ERICA HOLTRY • MEDICAL ASSISTING

**B**rently is due home today. I should not be writing this, much less keeping it where he could ever find it. If he saw the things I said here in private about him and our life together, he would be hurt. I know he loves me. I repeat that to myself constantly, like a mantra. “He loves me, he loves me,” as if I need a reminder that he is not a monster, that I could be doing far worse. The people around us smile at what a happy couple we are and ask when children will be coming along. If Brently had his say, I would have come home from the honeymoon with a child in my womb. In his quest for procreation, he has me nightly, waiting for the day when I glow with pregnancy. But that is not my dream—just his.

He believes me to be a dim-witted woman. They all do—Brently, our friends, even my sister. I live in my head and create worlds of wonderment within my mind. I write these thoughts and imaginings here in my journal, and then I do not share them with the world. So, no, I am not interested in the railroad or what is going on with the town or the market or the neighbors. I do not want to gossip about petty little things. I want to talk about important things. I want to talk about things that can change a life—about love and religion and Heaven and Hell, and which books are great and why Shakespeare is a legend. But I do not know anyone interested in these things.

So I keep my thoughts to myself. This allows other people to see me as they wish—the daft little girl with the pretty face and her head in the clouds. Why, just the other night before Brently left for his trip, he mentioned it to me. This was our conversation over supper.

“Honey, I just do not understand why you will not at least try to be more social? Go to tea with the girls? When I get back, I could even take you to one of those dances. You could get your hair done, wear a fancy dress. Come on, honey, what do you say? Make me look good for the railroad bosses.”

I let out a long sigh after he asked me that. It was the third time in a month he had implored me to help him look good for his bosses. Who were these boss men? Why was he not able to make himself look good on his own? Between

my ailing and troubled heart and the tendency to daydream, I do not make for good company at balls or social gatherings or railroad picnics. I do not say any of these things, though.

Instead, I shrug mildly and say, “Oh, Brently, dear, you knew when you married me I was not likely to ever be a society girl. I just do not know what to say or do around women like that. What do we have in common?”

I suppose he probably answered me after that. I do not know, as I faded out into a different world, as I often do when Brently, or anyone else, is speaking.

I wonder if he will ever know how content I am when he is gone, how I savor this time to myself, to let my mind do as it wishes and wander where it will. He never understands how I can sit and look out the window. He does not realize I am escaping this world and writing it all to memory, so I can later write it all in verse. He does not realize I am essentially doing the same thing during his nightly visits for procreation. I know he wants a legacy to leave his father and mother. I want to leave a legacy, too. That is why I commit these thoughts and memories to this leather-bound journal.

His mother understands me. She tried to subtly warn me before we wed, telling me that Brently was not “the kind of boy who frequented libraries.” Well, what did she expect me to do with that? The ceremony was planned, the relatives were in town, and that gold ring already glistened on my finger. The day of the wedding, she whispered in my ear, “I understand, sweet girl,” as she pressed this journal into my hand. Then she smiled blankly at her daft husband and without a word, took his arm.

In that moment, I realized that I would be her in a few years. I would be the lonely woman married to a man who did not understand me. I would be sticking a worn, unused journal into the hands of my son’s bride, or, worse still, I would not be sticking the journal into the hands of my dim daughter as she married some equally dim man.

So, no, I do not “suffer so,” as my sister thinks, when Brently is gone. I miss him, of course. There is solace in human touch, in a man that adores you, even if you loathe when he opens his mouth or comes for you at night. That is the only time I feel truly whole, truly myself. At last I can feel total freedom coursing through my veins. Mind and matter, body and soul—free at last!

I must wrap up now. I can hear Josephine and Richards making a ruckus at the door. ❧

# PHOTO COLLECTION

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DAWN CLOVER • ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, BUSINESS

## SNOWBALL IN JULY

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## PATHWAY TO THE FALLS

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# SPARKS WATERFALL

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# THE LOSING SIDE OF YOUTH SPORTS

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AMBER GAMEZ • UNDECLARED

Youth sports today are drastically different from what they were even ten years ago. We live in a society where there are no longer designated seasons for a particular sport, where young kids are being pushed physically and mentally beyond a healthy limit, and where parents and coaches are losing perspective on what the true goal of youth sports should be. As a parent of highly active kids, I have seen firsthand the sobering effects of this ego-driven, winning-obsessed phenomenon we call youth sports. This destructive mentality is everywhere—the baseball and soccer fields, basketball courts, and backyards across the nation. Not only are there immediate consequences, but also serious, long-term physical and psychological repercussions to this overly aggressive approach to athletic development. Youth sports should be about the development of the whole child and not about winning, early sport specialization, or the recruitment of early developers.

In the United States, approximately 27 million kids between the age of six and 18 participate in a team sport of some kind. That statistic does not include kids who participate in individual sports, such as tennis and gymnastics. All sports combined, nearly 60 million kids under the age of 18 are involved in some type of organized sport, and 44 million of these kids are considered multi-sport athletes (DiFiori, et al). These numbers are fantastic, considering the obesity rate in the United States has more than doubled in children and more than quadrupled in adolescents over the past 30 years (CDC).

Aside from the health benefits, there are a multitude of reasons why being involved in athletics is beneficial. Athletics teach kids about respect, teamwork, the importance of hard work and perseverance, and how to win and lose gracefully. These are values that are important throughout life, not just in childhood. Additionally, many wonderful memories and friendships can be made along the way. Some of my best childhood memories are rooted in playing organized sports with people I still consider my best friends 20 years later. Involvement in organized sports can provide a much needed outlet and a way to stay out of trouble for at-risk kids. For some, playing sports is the way to learn how to set goals and to work hard to achieve them. So why are so many kids being robbed of the meaningful opportunities sports provides? And how can

parents and coaches be better informed on how damaging certain philosophies can be? As a society, we need to adjust our perspective.

In sports at every level, winning is important. Winning is fun and exhilarating and can be an amazing boost to anyone's self-esteem—parents and coaches included. However, there is a scary trend in youth sports today—parents and coaches who place too much emphasis on winning rather than on developing the whole child. What does this mean, and how does this mentality hinder so many of our youth? Coaches and parents who are driven by their own egos and agendas often emphasize short-term results over long-term development. They deny kids athletic education and set them up for long-term failure. John O'Sullivan, founder of the Changing the Game Project, believes we have created a system that is so results orientated that it does not support long-term personal or team player development. Adults who focus on winning lose sight of how significant the learning process is. Winning is nice, but kids need to know that it's OK to lose because the reality is they will never "win" every "game" in life. How kids learn to handle a loss and fight back is where the true learning takes place. Building character and learning to persevere are two significant reasons why focusing on the development of the whole child, rather than on just winning, is crucial for development. According to O'Sullivan, a focus on development leads to long-term success and more well-rounded athletes in the long run. The stress of being expected to win eliminates the fun of being involved in athletics. The pressure to perform can be debilitating to young kids and can lead to burnout, depression, resentment, and severe anxiety.

I have seen the pressure to perform firsthand, but I was oblivious to the ugliness of the recruitment process in youth sports until I had children of my own involved. The day my eight-year-old daughter was asked to not come back to "open gym" basketball practice after her first session was the day I realized how damaging the trend of early talent selection is. O'Sullivan defines talent *selection* as "the culling of players with the current ability to participate and be successful in events taking place in the near future." The term talent *identification* is defined as "the prediction of future performance based upon an evaluation of current physical, technical, tactical, and psychological qualities" (O'Sullivan). There is a direct link between the emphasis on winning and the process of talent selection. Ego-driven parents and coaches who crave instant gratification and immediate success practice talent selection, rather than talent identification. Naturally, those coaches will choose the fastest, biggest, strongest, most "athletic-looking" players, and the rest are cut or will receive minimal playing time. The unfortunate result: 70% of these kids will quit the sport

altogether before reaching the age of 13 (O’Sullivan). What is overlooked all too often is whether a child is coachable and willing to learn. Those who are, if coached well, can become elite players themselves.

This ridiculous selection process is seen everywhere in youth sports today. There is not a single sport that does not have club, select, or elite teams running rampant—so much so that the terms *select* and *elite* hold little weight today in comparison to what they did 20 years ago. Many of these organizations will cherry pick kids as early as six years of age based on their talent selection process. Ironically, per the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine, motor, cognitive, and social skills progress at different rates and vary greatly from one child to the next. Anyone looking long-term will realize quickly that early bloomers are not necessarily the only children who can and will develop into great athletes. There is an injustice being done in our country, as many highly capable children are being left out or are receiving sub-par coaching.

Not only are there negative consequences for those children who are cut, but also for those who are selected. When a parent or coach lacks knowledge of normal childhood development, this lack can lead to unrealistic expectations being placed on very young kids, resulting in high anxiety, low self-esteem, and loss of interest for the activity altogether (Brenner). Ironically, only 25% of “star athletes” in elementary school will still be “star athletes” in high school (De Lench). If we can collectively teach coaches to be patient with all children, more kids would have the opportunity to develop and grow, and schools would have a larger pool of highly qualified candidates to select from, resulting in more competitive teams in the long run.

Along with the heightened emphasis on winning and the misconception behind the need for early recruitment is the fallacy that early, singular sport specialization is a sure way to speed up the development process and ensure high accolades and a college athletic scholarship. As defined by the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine, sports specialization is “intensive, year-round training in a single sport at the exclusion of other sports” (DiFiori, et al). Specialization in a singular sport began to make significant strides in the mid-’90s. Today, it is all too common. Aggressive parents have taken the stance that if their children are to be the best at a particular sport, they should play exclusively, aggressively, year-round. There are soccer organizations in Lincoln, NE, that insist children as young as ten commit to being single sport athletes within their specific organizations and demand that the children practice three days a week and play games on two. Many young gymnasts will practice for four hours a night and compete on weekends. How does this seem healthy?

Daniel Coyle, blogger for [thetalentcode.com](http://thetalentcode.com), has noted several reasons why specialization at an early age carries negative consequences for the majority of young athletes. First and foremost, as also identified by the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine, specialization increases the chances of overuse injuries. Overuse injuries are more likely to occur during adolescent growth spurts, particularly when kids are overscheduled and practice repetitive activities for multiple consecutive days. Second, early specialization can ultimately result in kids *not* participating in their identified sports as adults. Burnout is a significant concern among singular athletes. Factor in the risk of overuse injuries, and it seems plausible that many of these athletes will not maintain participation. Lastly, early specialization eliminates many highly capable potential athletes from participating in other sports.

On the flip side, there is an increasingly significant amount of research being produced on the benefits of being a multi-sport athlete. A multi-sport athlete is one who participates in more than one sport and is not exclusive to one sport year-round. While there is the rare case where a child is a singular athlete and develops into a world class phenomenon, the multi-sport athletes have many advantages. First, they are allowed the possibility to develop whole body skills that include balance, quickness, and core strength. These three skills are beneficial to many sports, not just one. It's no surprise that until he was twelve, Kobe Bryant played soccer, where he developed speed, endurance, and intricate footwork. Multi-sport athletes also are more adaptable; a baseball player may prove to be an excellent football player in that he or she has excellent arm strength and precise hand-eye coordination. The American Medical Society for Sports Medicine suggests that diversified athletes are potentially more effective in developing high-level athletic abilities because their skills transfer from one sport to the next (DiFiori, et al).

Most importantly, the multi-sport athlete is likely to be more emotionally healthy than the singular athlete. There is less physical and mental burnout and less pressure to excel in just one selected activity. These athletes do not fear losing their identities or disappointing their parents if success in one particular sport doesn't pan out. A healthy, child-centered approach to specialization would be to wait as long as possible to be singular. Let kids enjoy different activities at least until the early teenage years. Second, diversify. Kids should take advantage of all possibilities and develop skills that can overlap from one sport to another. Lastly, parents should look for other families and organizations who share a similar philosophy of raising well-rounded, multi-sport athletes and should distance themselves from those who differ in their approach. The parent and coach who

is fixated on producing a scholarship-worthy athlete is potentially damaging the child physically and emotionally in the long run (Coyle).

Some will argue that parents and coaches who foster the desire to win, who believe in the recruitment of early developers, and who foster early sport specialization are in some way ensuring success for their children or team. What their position lacks, however, is not only scientific, well-researched data, but also a conscience. If you have never looked into the sad eyes of an eight-year-old child who has been told she was not good enough and could not continue to play with her “elite” friends, this stance may not make sense. You may not have the emotional response that I do. However, how does one think singling out a handful of eager, willing participants—regardless of experience—seems OK? I find irony in that many of these so-called “coaches” are designated leaders within our communities and teachers and administrators within our schools. I have played competitive sports all my life and have taken on coaching my kids’ teams in my spare time. But who am I to determine which children will be “elite” athletes when they are only eight years old? How is it fair to exclude children from activities based on their lack of experience or delayed development? There is no evidence supporting the emphasis of short-term success, or “winning,” over the importance of long-term development. Nor is there any merit to the philosophy that a child who is athletically inclined at the age of seven will be a prodigy when he or she is 18. And there is no validity to the concept that forcing a child to specialize in a single sport at an early age will result in a scholarship-earning, world-class athlete. These are crazy, selfish, ego-driven fallacies bestowed upon our youth by the adults surrounding them—parents and coaches.

Looking for an outside perspective, I interviewed two parents of high school-aged children who are active in sports. My intention in interviewing these parents was to see how their children’s early athletic experiences hindered or helped them in excelling in sports. My first series of questions dealt with the level of involvement and intensity in a particular sport. Both kids of the parents interviewed were standout high school athletes, but their experiences were very different. One child began playing select softball at the age of nine and essentially played year-round. Softball was her only sport; therefore, she had chosen early specialization with a highly competitive team with an emphasis on winning. Sadly, this girl was a catcher who had two bad knees before her high school career was over. Per her mother, not only did she suffer burnout, but her injuries prevented her from continuing her career after high school. The second child was given the opportunity to play multiple sports, and while she was

competitive in three different sports, not one of them held more weight than the others. Interestingly enough, the parent of the second child said “she [the daughter] had no regrets and did not suffer burnout in any one sport because it was *fun*.” Of the two girls, the second was the one who received a college scholarship (Gamez).

When parents and coaches focus on the development of the whole child, long-term physical and emotional success and health is favorable. However, when parents and coaches let their egos and their fixation on winning guide their decisions and inhibit their decision-making skills, there is a huge problem, and children are put at risk. Not only do I want my kids to know the joys of being involved in organized sports, but I want to them to have a fair shot at being a part of something bigger, something that will teach them life skills that will make a positive difference as they grow into adults. We need to redefine what success in youth sports means: winning trophies in the short term or developing well-rounded athletes and humans for the long term. ♡

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# WORKED MYSELF OUT OF A JOB

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PHYLLIS L.M. ARTH • ACADEMIC TRANSFER ADJUNCT INSTRUCTOR

Adult child—an oxymoron.

Like Army Intelligence—but I know that's doable  
because my nephew is in Army Intelligence,  
and he has integrity.

But I've gorged on jumbo shrimp.

I do run slowly.

I nurture sad joys.

I've been required to use random order as a statistical tool.

So.

My children are adults.

Legally. For insurance purposes.

They usually search the Internet for advice before consulting me.

But at Christmas they are childlike, hinting and hoping for gifts,  
Unwrapping with the enthusiasm of children.

Magic cards are still welcome gifts. Childhood books are now treasures.

They still talk about Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles  
as if they lived in a nice sewer just up the street.

I so pridefully taught them as children to do things for themselves,

From toddler dressing to teen styling to washing and caring for clothes.

But adult children buy their own clothes.

Grateful adult children now shake their heads at the shirts I send as gifts,  
at my lack of knowledge of their sizes and fashion choices.

From aiming forks and spoons from food to mouth to cooking meals for friends.

Adult children earn the money to buy their own food  
and have opinions about Tupperware.

I helped structure their emotional self-care

so they could use intelligence to think about their emotions.

I see that as adult children, they choose their friends wisely,

But lovers are introduced before dinner and may not return for the next holiday.  
Adult children's decisions are too confidential.

My role is unclear.

Mother-as-history is praised and appreciated, but mothering is not.

They learned my most important lessons, well. I did a good job.

I know they like me; I'm heartily welcomed in their life events.

Criminey—my role is too clear, uncomfortable.

No longer their first choice as teacher, advisor, or confidant,

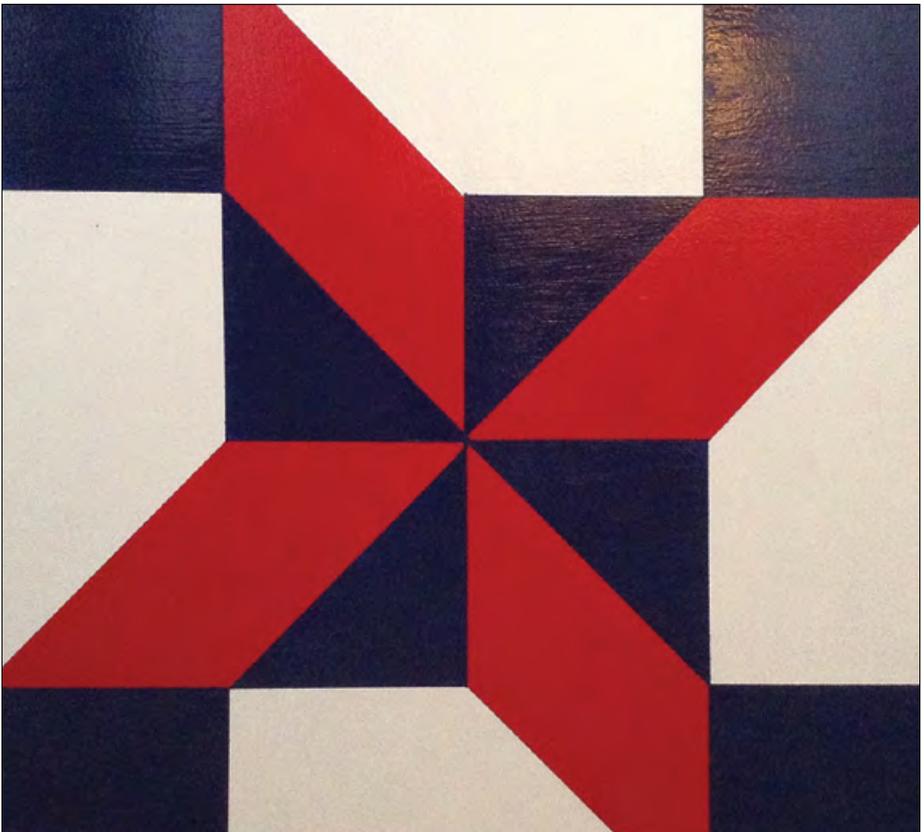
I'm to listen, to laugh, to partake, to attend, to observe, to enjoy, to love.

To be content a bit outside of their loop.

## CRYSTAL'S BARN QUILT

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CRYSTAL HIGGINS • PROGRAM CHAIR/FACULTY PRACTICAL NURSING PROGRAM



# A MAN REMEMBERED

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THOMAS SEE • AUTOMOTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Allen was one of my favorite people. He was my dad's older brother, and I was very close to him. When I was growing up, he lived with us off and on before my parents' divorce. I was too young to understand everything at the time, so I didn't know he was sick until two years before he died. To tell you the truth, I don't think I even knew he was gay until after he was gone.

Looking back at his life, I am glad nobody told me. I would like to think that I wouldn't have judged him had I known or felt any other way about him than I did. He was so *cool* in my eyes, and I envied him in a lot of ways. And what kid wouldn't? The man lived on a boat on the Mississippi River. He had the neatest pets. These were animals that most people don't get to see outside of a zoo or an exotic pet store. He had two macaw parrots, Bert and Ernie, a chameleon, a python named Katie, which I fed mice to, and even an octopus at one point.

Allen never had a wife to tie him down. I remember asking him, "Uncle Allen, why aren't you married?" He always got a kick out of me calling him *Uncle Allen*, and he would respond by calling me *Nephew Tommy*. He taught me a lot of valuable life lessons, especially patience. He also taught me that if I worked hard, I could have just about anything I wanted in life.

I don't think many people understood AIDS in the '90s. Having AIDS was something you didn't want people to know; people were misinformed about the disease and scared that it would become an epidemic. There wasn't a lot of education about AIDS, and people formed their own opinions; many thought the disease was going to jump from one person to the next if they happened to be near someone infected. I can't imagine what Allen went through with his diagnosis. I was told he would have lost his job at the Beatrice State Developmental Center had they found out why he was sick. That would have meant that he wouldn't have been able to use his insurance provided from work to pay for medications or treatment.

Allen seemed to be happy, pretty much did what he wanted to do, and made the most of his life. My dad told me that as children, he and Allen had saved their allowances for almost a year so they could buy a monkey. Apparently in

the late '60s, you could order monkeys from an ad in the back of a magazine. He never did get his monkey, though, as Grandma and Grandpa wouldn't allow it, so he and Allen took the money they had saved for so long and bought an owl from a guy down the street. Their owl lived secretly hidden away from their parents for about three weeks until one night it decided to escape when my Uncle Craig left a window open in the barn.

They say that AIDS isn't what kills you; it destroys your immune system to the point that something as minor as contracting a common cold could mean a death sentence. Allen didn't stand a chance from the beginning. He had lived most of his life with type two diabetes. He had to be careful about what he ate, had to check his blood sugar often, and had to give himself insulin shots on a regular basis. I remember being shocked and amazed at how sick he had gotten in so little time. By the end of his life, he was living under the care of hospice in a hospital bed in my grandparents' living room.

Allen's dying wish was to see the play *The Phantom of the Opera*. My grandma, dad, and Uncle Craig took one last trip with Allen to Des Moines in 1996 to experience his lifelong dream with him. He was conscious through only half the show and just long enough to get a few bites of his favorite meal at Red Lobster. These were his final experiences in life, as they were his last time awake.

Allen couldn't gain weight no matter what the doctors tried. Looking down on him in that hospital bed at the end of his life, I saw a shadow of the great man I once knew. Weighing in at just under 60 pounds by the end, Allen looked like a WWII documentary's Holocaust victim, starved to the point of every bone showing through his skin with no definitive features to make his skeleton look human; I couldn't believe that was what my uncle had become—a shell. I will never forget how there was no color in his lips or tongue; they were as pale as his face. The diabetes had destroyed his feet, and they were black as if frostbitten from going days without shoes while climbing Mt. Everest. I wondered over and over how God could do this to such a wonderful person. I wouldn't wish his fate on my worst enemy.

I was there the day he died—we all were. He had waited until the last of the family had arrived. With everyone that he loved gathered at his side, he was finally ready to let go. Now you go on and be as skeptical as you feel you need to be, but I was there. I was there in the room, no farther than eight feet from him. With my back turned to him as I played *Wheel of Fortune* with my cousin Nate, I swear to God that I felt him pass through me like an explosion. Both Nate and I turned around almost simultaneously; it was as if all the air had been sucked from the room, and noise did not exist. The world had come to an immediate halt. Allen was gone.

He had set aside \$10,000 from his life insurance policy for the sole purpose of sending the entire family on a once-in-a-lifetime vacation. There must have been 30 of us total, and we went that summer to South Padre Island, Texas, where my Uncle Craig hosted the first annual See Family Olympics. We rented condos in the most beautiful building on the Island. We managed to spend every cent of the money he had left us to make the most memorable vacation any of us had ever had. I have to say that he knew what he was doing when he planned that trip for us, as even in death he brought us all closer together as a family. 🌸

## BIRDS

RICHARD HADLEY • SPEECH INSTRUCTOR



# TRAINING—OR IS IT?

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SHANNON NIELSEN • UNDECLARED

“Whump, whump, whump, whump!” cried the eerie sound of the blades of a ranger helicopter as it rose behind me over the distant mountain tops. The sound was faint, but it grew louder in seconds as it came into sight. The tiny hairs on the back of my neck stood straight up, and my heart leapt in my chest from fright. I was relieved and excited we were going home.

It was a hot, dry August day in the mountains of Nevada. I was documenting an all-day training exercise with the Navy Seals Special Forces to recover a shot down pilot. I was an Audio Visual Production Documentation Specialist, a “combat cameraman.” At technical school for the military, I was taught to document training from classrooms to mission essential exercises. I was the only trained combat cameraman asked to videotape this exercise.

Dressed in camouflage from head to toe with battery packs strapped across my chest and back, I looked like Rambo in true form. I pondered if I brought batteries to power the camera for the duration of the exercise. I pulled my black-brown hair up tight under my cap and pulled the hat down tight over my eyebrows to catch the glaring sun. I heard the engines start to hum and smelled the distinctive smell of spent fuel of the C-130 the Seals and I were about to load. The C-130 was a four-engine, turbo-prop military transport aircraft and was an integral part in military response and recovery missions. It was capable of using unprepared runways for take-offs and landings, perfect for transport of troops and equipment. The bi-fold door and ramp were used to transport heavy equipment such as Humvees and large vehicles with ease.

I watched as the Seals swarmed around their equipment making last minute changes like bees surrounding their hive. One of them yelled, “Load ‘em up!”

The smell of gas fumes took over the inside of the aircraft. Three vehicles and two four-wheelers were chained to the floor. As I took my seat and raised my head, I felt like I was in a photography darkroom. The Seals were silent. No emotion crossed their sweating, camouflaged faces. I could feel only the whites of their eyes staring at me. With the sound of the engines roaring and a quick thrust sideways, we were finally taking off.

I repeated in my mind, “This is only an exercise.” I was overcome with anxiety, but this was what I had been training for—or was it?

After a small duration of flight, the Sergeant they called “Bear” grabbed my jacket and told me to stand at the rear of the aircraft. He was a tall, husky man. I could tell this wasn’t his first rodeo by his direct approach and his bolder style. The inset of his eyes was as deep as his voice. His team sat erect in their seats, anxiously awaiting command. All of the Seals were in place. As if they were wound-up robots with eternal master checklists, they did not miss a beat.

My insides did somersaults as the aircraft rapidly descended. The air pressure inside the cabin condensed, causing incredible pressure in my ears. The rear of the aircraft opened, blowing like a hurricane for a few seconds. Suddenly, a soft, warm breeze caressed my face, welcoming us to the mountains on a windy summer day.

I looked down at my feet near the edge of the open aircraft door. The wind picked up and howled past my face. My hair started to let loose as the aircraft hovered close to the ground. I looked down to ensure my video camera was latched to my hand, so it didn’t fly from my hand and become a foreign object near an operating aircraft. Just then, Bear screamed over the roar of the engine, “Five! Four! Three! Two!” The aircraft hit the ground with a thud, and dust rolled in from every direction. I could not even see out the rear of the plane. The propellers were in a short duration of reverse. I felt something tugging at my jacket. As I looked up, my eyes met Bear’s beady eyes. He yelled, “Roll!”

My mind started swirling. “What? The aircraft hasn’t stopped yet!” Before I knew it, I felt metal hitting my battery packs, securely strapped to my upper body, with a slight pain jabbing at my side. I felt like a rock in an avalanche. The dust engulfed my face, and the sun blinded me, but the warmth encircled me and gave a single moment of peace. I heard myself grunt. I had rolled and landed safely, and I regained my composure and my bearings. I quickly raised my camera to capture the action of the aircraft that was still moving on the dirt landing strip while the Seals launched their vehicles down the aircraft ramp. They were gone in a cloud of dust within seconds.

The Seal team was at the checkpoint to make sure the pilot received his instructions. Next, they made last minute corrections, and the training began. The Seal and the pilot took off on foot through the sandy terrain. The Seal explained where and how to step on plants to conceal movement from the enemy, as if he were to become a downed pilot in enemy territory. As the day went on, the Seal talked to the pilot about how to find food and water and about other survival techniques he would need to survive. He instructed the pilot on how to conceal himself so the enemy could not track where he had been. They even practiced hands-on training for self-aid and buddy care.

This went on for hours. My legs became weak after carrying 50 pounds of

equipment and walking through soft sand, which was harboring the heat from the noon-day sun. The bottoms of my combat boots baked; my arm muscles burned from holding the camera. I looked down and noticed the line the sun was making on my wrist where my jacket wasn't covering my hands.

Though the Seal concluded the training with the pilot for the day, our adventures were only beginning. It was time to shift to our movement back to base, which was hours away. This training included aircraft and helicopters playing some sort of *Top Gun* dog fighting game in the air. The pilot raised his eyebrow and gave me a perplexed look, as he shifted up one sleeve with his other hand allowing the sun to hit his forearm. He said, "We have a window. If the helicopter can't take off in the timeframe to come get us, we will have to drive back to base, which will take eight hours at least."

"What do we do now?" I asked.

The Seal looked at me with an Elvis smirk, laughed, and said, "We wait."

We sat up high on top of the mountain looking over the terrain we had just crossed. It was different than what I was used to. It was bare with little patches of brush and weeds grown in a bunch. The sun pounded down on the sand, making it even hotter than before. We kept ourselves cool with towels over our heads to keep the sun from draining us. It felt eerie having no civilization around us. I could see for miles, and the chatter of the two that were with me grew silent. I decided to take advantage of the time I had and videotape what I was seeing. As I raised the camera to my eye, I saw something moving. I could not decipher what kind of creature I was seeing, but it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

Dust flew behind the creature. Its coarse hair was blown and tossed in the wind as its sturdy, muscular legs pounded the hot sand. It was breathtaking, and I watched the wild mustangs run free. With my love for horses, the next few hours flew by as hundreds of these massive animals made their way through the peaks and valleys of the Nevada desert right in front of me.

I woke my two traveling companions, who had taken two-hour naps. Their faces were sun-kissed and lined from their sunglasses. The pilot said, "We have about five minutes left of our window for the helicopter to pick us up. Otherwise, we need to hike back the way we came and drive the eight hours back." Feelings came over me that I could not describe. I was upset for the reason that my father was flying in, and the only night I was going to be able to see him was that night. I was angry we were stuck out there for hours, and they had so much time to come pick us up.

"What were they doing? Why haven't they come to get us?" My mind swarmed with angry thoughts. Right in the middle of my thought, I heard

a strange noise coming up behind us. I couldn't make it out. Was it the wild mustangs coming up over the crest of the mountain behind us? "Whump, whump, whump, whump, whump!" cried the eerie sound behind me from the blades of a ranger helicopter as it rose over the distant mountain tops. It was faint but grew louder in seconds as it came into sight. The tiny hairs on the back of my neck stood straight up; my heart was leaping from my chest with fright. I was relieved and excited; we were going home.

When they landed, there were three Army soldiers dressed in green flight suits. They looked ragged and exhausted from the heat of the day. The older, highest ranking Sergeant approached the pilot, but he did not say a word. He handed the pilot a note and stared at him, waiting for a reaction.

"What is going on? Are we leaving?" my eyes silently asked. No one spoke. Then my heart skipped a beat. We were still in the exercise. We were not out of it yet. The Seal's brown eyes drew into the middle of his face. Raising his nose, he squinted hard and made eye contact with one of the soldiers hoping to get a facial expression back to confirm or deny it was part of the exercise.

The pilot that fell to the ground was screaming and grabbing his leg. I couldn't reach for my camera fast enough. The black leather handle of the camera was drawn inward from my anxious, sweating hands. The other two soldiers jumped out of the helicopter and assisted. As they grabbed for the white paper, they saw that it read: "\*\*\*EXERCISE\*\* You have broken your leg and have been bitten by a snake \*\*EXERCISE\*\*." Whew... now we all knew we were still playing war games.

After the team wrapped and bandaged his leg and took care of the snakebite, the call from the pilot in the helicopter was faint. The blades were still making a thumping sound from rotating, and debris from the sand was swirling. "We'd better go," the pilot said. "We are late, and they are not going to make their ride back if we don't get them to the aircraft." My eyes grew large, and my stomach lurched into my throat.

All I could think was, "You're not taking us all the way back? We have to make the C-130 again?" My equipment by this time was making permanent indents in my shoulders and rubbing the crease of my neck raw from my bag bouncing around all day. The pain seemed short of not making the ride back and still having a long drive home.

We loaded the helicopter, and the team leader made sure we were all strapped in and ready to go. He made eye contact with the pilot, nodded his head, raised his hand over his head, and whirled it around in circles as if he was ready to lasso a calf. Away we went.

It didn't seem so hot now. The cool evening air was refreshing for the moment, and everything seemed much calmer. I felt my body relax and enjoyed the terrain below me as I pointed out the amazing animals below us. The team leader glanced back at me and smiled. He asked me, "What are you doing with all that equipment and camera?"

I said, "I am combat camera, and I am here to document the training of the downed pilot and the Seal working together for escape and evade."

His next words were like an echo, "You haven't seen anything yet. Are you going to make it?" I just sat there. Although he was speaking clear English, I could not comprehend the words.

I asked, "What do you mean?"

He smiled and said "Ma'am, with all that equipment, are you going to make it to the C-130?" I squinted from the sun, starting to set over the ridge of the mountain. I was trying to understand the real question. He stated, "When we land, you have to get off this helicopter and run to the C-130. They have a window they have to make, and they are going to be moving. Are you going to make it with your equipment?" I was stunned. I had no energy left. We had been walking and sitting in the hot desert sun for hours with only so much to eat and just enough water. Things were happening quickly, and we were starting to descend.

"What if I don't make it? Can I do this?" I thought quickly. The soldier looked at me, looked down at his flight suit, and took off a patch that was attached with Velcro to the right side of his arm. He said, "Take this. You deserve it, and you will remember this trip. Good luck to you." His voice was calm, but just looking at me gave me the strength I needed. The air started getting warmer, but the sun was not shining anymore. We were descending down the other side of the mountain. The blades hummed above us. They started to make the whumping sound I recognized. Debris shifted upward, as we were almost to the ground. Before I could turn my head to ask the pilot and Seal to help with my equipment, we hit land. The team leader looked at me and yelled, "Run!" I looked past the helicopter and saw dust rise as the wheels on the C-130 started to move. The Seal and the pilot took off, and I had no time to ask them to help. It was all up to me. "Run!" was still echoing in my head as my legs below me moved faster than the rest of my body. I felt nothing. The soreness of the battery packs rubbing and the burn of my sun-kissed face were gone. All I could think was, "I have to make it."

I looked ahead and saw that the Seal and the pilot had made it to the aircraft. There were about 30 pairs of boots at the back end of the aircraft. The aircraft was starting to bounce as the wheels turned faster. I felt my heart beating out of my chest. My lungs were so full they burned. I heard myself

grunt and breathe as I chased after the aircraft. I glanced up to see the Seals that had been on the aircraft with me on the way there; they were laughing and taking bets to see if I was going to make it. My arms pumped as if I was on the last stretch for a homerun. I did not think I was going to get there.

The Seal that was with us all day took a step forward and screamed, “Jump!” I didn’t know what came over me; nothing was left. I was numb, but the last thing I wanted to do was ride another eight hours home. These were the tough guys. They were the ones that went through hell to get where they were in life. I was not going to be that person who didn’t make it.

I was carrying 50 pounds of equipment. They left me to carry it by myself, and with every last bit of energy I had in me, I felt my back foot dig into the ground as I leapt onto the back of the aircraft, which was now starting to come off the ground. The Seal reached his arm out to catch my hand. I caught his arm, and we connected like a bat connecting with a baseball on a homerun. I fell like I just hit 2 Gs in an aircraft the way I was pulled forward. The pain kicked in as the battery packs pounded my chest, and I slid down the back of the aircraft. It started to close, and I reached the crease of the aircraft, as I came to a halt.

“Are you kidding me? I made it?” I thought as I rolled over to see 15 men standing above me shaking their heads. All I could hear was the hum of the aircraft.

One of the men walked away and said, “She made it.”

The Seal I was with all day reached his hand out and helped me up, gave me a pat, and said, “Good job, kid.”

The ride back was quiet. As I scanned the aircraft, I could make out some of the men’s facial features, as the camouflage that covered their faces was mostly gone from sweat they endured that day. Their heads hung low as they tried to get the hour nap in before we arrived at base. But something had changed. I felt different.

Was this the end? The sun had set, and the orange and yellow morning light that shone through the window of the aircraft early that morning had now left the aircraft in darkness with only a soft light from the moon. The aches of my body had disappeared. I didn’t feel them anymore. I only felt the remnants of the sun that had kissed my cheeks and nose as we sat for hours on the mountain. The aircraft was cooler than expected, and my mind replayed events of the day like a broken record stuck on the tracks. I felt a small smirk come across my face as I thought of a quote: “Go ahead—tell me I’m not good enough. Tell me I can’t do it because I will show you over and over again that I can.” I did it! I endured a day in the hot desert mountains with a Seal teaching

a pilot. That was the easy part. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I was going to get picked up in an Army helicopter, have to run with 50 pounds of equipment while a C-130 aircraft was moving, and have to jump to catch it. Training was everything.

I am now a superintendent of a Public Affairs office, and not too many people know this story, but I have young Airmen that don't understand the reason behind all the training and exercises we perform. "Why are we doing this?" my Airmen ask. I tell them you have to practice in order to perform flawlessly. You train to learn, you train to teach, and you train so that it becomes second nature. Sometimes you receive training to help you think differently and get out of your box of normalcy. But in the end, I always say, "Let me tell you a story about training. It starts like this: *Whump, whump, whump...*" ❦

## SOLITAIRE

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ASHLEY HECKMAN • MEDICAL ASSISTING



# MINUS ONE STILL EQUALS A WHOLE

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SAMANTHA ELLIOTT • NURSING

It was April 22, 2014, and life as my family knew it was about to change. Sounding that it was 6:00 a.m., my alarm went off like a jackhammer next to my head. I rolled over and stared out the window as the deep oranges and bright yellows of the sun shone through. All I could think was, “How am I going to get through this horrendous day?” I crawled out of bed and threw on my rumpled clothes as quickly as I could and jogged down the stairs.

I saw my younger sister Cassie standing in the living room. She stared at me with tears in her eyes. She was like an awkward brick house, taller than an average girl, yet clumsier than a newborn calf learning to walk. I told her, “Everything will be okay.” She sauntered to the couch and sat with a huff.

As I walked through the house to the bathroom, I collided with my mom as she was running around, bumping into open drawers and trying to hurry and get ready. She was crying hysterically and could barely form words in-between sobs. My mom was not much taller than I was with golden blonde hair that she feathered back as if she was still in the ‘80s. She was wearing faded denim jeans and a plain t-shirt. I watched as she scrambled to get ready, and I realized that after today, she would be the one hurting the most out of all of us.

All I could do was walk away because I, too, was going to start crying. I stepped out the front door, and the cool brisk air stole my breath as I stared into the luminous sunrise. I then saw my dad running around the yard and kicking a soccer ball as our short, stubby dog Hercules ran after it. My dad was a tall man. What was left of his salt and pepper hair made the shape of a horseshoe on his head. He had his black, thick-framed glasses perched on his nose, and his big belly bounced as he jogged around the dewy grass. He glanced over and gave me a weary smile.

As the whole crew filed out of the house, I caught a glimpse of my younger, gangly, awkward brother Conner. After him, my older sister Amanda, with faded red hair, carried a crumpled pillow for the long drive. We all had dreary looks on our faces, as we knew what lay ahead. We packed into my mom’s black CRV. We had a long journey ahead of us, and the car started to gain speed. The silence during the first 15 minutes began to suffocate me. I glanced out the window as the fields of corn flew past and the sky brightened with hues of blue.

After a long bout of silence, we finally started talking. The feeling of closeness returned as we shared old family stories. Laughter filled the car as

we joked, and my dad's big-bellied laugh was all we could hear. As the car ride went on, my siblings and I began to bicker with one another like we had done when we were little. All we heard was, "Mom, tell her to stop!" and, "Girls, how old are you?!" We knew we were adults, but this behavior continued for most of the three-hour journey.

As our trip neared an end, we decided we should get food one last time as a whole family. After driving around the crowded town of Leavenworth, Kansas, we spotted the familiar restaurant, Applebee's, and decided that would be the place to go. As we walked into the brick building, we were greeted by cheerful hellos and happy smiles. The restaurant was deserted except for the few staff members running around getting ready for a busy day. We were escorted to the biggest leather booth they had in the building and a long, shiny oak table.

We were then greeted by an overly friendly waitress who went too far in-depth on the meals and wouldn't let a word in while she was squawking at us. I gave her a painful smile because at that moment, being happy wasn't on my mind. I looked around to see my family holding back tears as we tried to eat the food placed in front of us. Dad was holding my mom closely, as she wept about how today had come too quickly. Cassie, Conner, and Amanda sat and stared blankly at their food. Once we had attempted to stomach what was there, we piled back into the car for the last moments we had as a whole unit.

The rest of the drive went too quickly, flashing by like lightning in a storm. Before I knew it, we were pulling into the prison's main parking lot. All I could do was stare at the massive 1800s white brick building. The stairs running up the building went on for what looked like miles, and the yard was bare of any life. My mom slowly let the car roll to a stop, and we looked at one another like, "What do we do now?"

As we clambered out of the car one by one, we formed a line to say our goodbyes to Dad. Mom went first with a long hug and lots of tears. She whispered, "I love you, hon, and we'll see you soon!" Then Cassie was next; she was already crying and couldn't form words of goodbye, but she did manage a hug and kiss.

Conner gave Dad a big manly hug and told him, "We will see you soon." Amanda gave a quick hug and told him "not to worry too much." It was then my turn to say goodbye. I gave my dad what I hoped was the tightest hug I could and a kiss on his cheek. The tears ran down my face, and I realized I couldn't control them anymore. As Dad turned to walk up the stairs, all I could stammer out was, "Dad, don't go!"

He turned around with tears in his eyes as all of us ran to him for one last family hug. We stared as he made the rest of the final journey by himself up those long concrete stairs. All the memories of him teaching me to drive, throw

a punch, and love unconditionally came rushing back as I watched him leave us in silence. The guards brought him back outside and had him sit on a bench until the bus was ready to take him to the camp. We slowly climbed back into the car for our journey home with one less person for the ride. As we pulled away, I couldn't help but watch him with tears flowing out of my eyes. I knew life would be different from that day on.

Even though my dad is in prison, we still attempt to see him as much as possible. We are able to write letters and get phone calls often, which makes the situation a little easier to bear. I know this sounds crazy, but this life-altering event for my family has only made us stronger and closer. We strive every day to make the situation as good as we possibly can. We know one day that Dad will be walking out of that old, wretched place to make that long journey home with us once more. ❖

*Editor's Update: Samantha's father was released from prison and returned to his family on November 3, 2015.*

## PRAIRIE

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ASHLEY HECKMAN • MEDICAL ASSISTING



# THE SUMMER STORM

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HOPE ROSE • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

*Written four days after an episode with my husband*

Warm breezes waltz soft, billowy clouds around the blue sky. Birds sing to each other songs of praise, songs of joy, songs of family and friends. Smells of summer drift on the warm breezes, all unaware of a summer storm brewing.

It begins off in the distance; quietly, stealthily, it sucks the warm summer breezes into it. The changes are so subtle they are barely noticeable. The first that are aware are the warm comforting breezes; they are replaced with cool, then biting air.

The soft, billowy clouds are chased from the blue sky; they run as if they are fleeing to a safe place. As the air chills more, gone are the comforting sounds of birds that have filled the air with their songs.

The sweet smell of summer has now been replaced with a different smell, one of dampness—a heavy but sweet smell, one that warns of storms building.

The sky transforms from one of calm blue comfort to one of great heaviness. Intensely beautiful in its own right, overwhelming heaviness overpowers the beauty of the storm. Feelings of dread, fear, uncertainty accompany the colors of the storm. Blacks, grays, greens—all warn of what is to come. Fearful feelings of what will or might happen overwhelm. They chase away the wonderful memories of the past; they are trapping, stifling.

The sounds of faraway thunder start out slowly, rumbling from the distance. As the sounds move closer, they seem to move faster. They grow stronger, and they shake the soul. They amplify the heaviness of the storm—its uncertainty, its unknown direction. They warn of the potential danger of the storm.

Lightning is the thunder's companion. It makes its own path across the sky. Like painful memories flashing from the past, the sharp cracks of sound are the reminder of the storm that it has come through.

The ominous sky breaks open, drenching all that is trapped under the storm with rain, like tears full of pain. Will the storm take everything away?

Small cracks appear showing what lays beyond the storm; higher, deeper, the blue sky still remains. The memories and comfort, the friends and family. We soon begin to see they are our rainbow. They are our pillars, our strength. We can come through the summer storm better for having them in our lives. The summer storm was just our reminder. ❀

# MY KIDS

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KYLE BARNES • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

There are three of them: two cats and a dog. They are my furry children. My husband and I have not been lucky enough to have kids of our own, so we spoil these three and love them unconditionally. We give them our love, our time, our money—anything they need to make their lives more comfortable.

Phoenix is an older guy, but you wouldn't be able to tell that at first glance. People think he is much younger than his years because he has a puppy face, but if you look closely, you can see the gray starting to worm its way into his fur. It's that silvery gray that is handsome only on men that is working its way around the eyes and on his muzzle. When you look closely, you can see the way his dark brown eyes have faded to a milk chocolate, and the whites have that yellow and bloodshot look of a dog getting on in years.

He curls up next to me, and his heat is like a little furnace as he stretches out to spoon with me or lay along my side. He is a jealous protector and a through and through lover. His hair is the curly queue kink that poodles come by so naturally and causes envy even in one such as me, who has naturally curly hair. The hair itself is the golden color of honey with a touch of apricot. Each curl on his head is a slightly different color with natural highlights that look as if the sun has placed warm kisses all over his little body. He has the honey and sun color that so many women desire.

His face pulls into a classic doggy smile, and the look of love in his eyes is the same look I've seen in teenagers in the throes of puppy love. He excitedly barks when we come home from even short trips—as if those ten minutes that it took to run up the street was an overwhelming amount of time. I can hear the words in those barks: "I am so excited to see you! Where have you been? Why did you leave me? I missed you so much!" as he dances around the kitchen like a ballerina, spinning on his back feet, all the while telling us the wrongs of being left alone, even if for just ten minutes.

Sammy Doodles is the baby because she is the youngest. Her hair is short but soft—oh, so soft. It's like running your hands through rabbit fur, or maybe even chinchilla. The smell after she has been lying in the sun is warm and fragrant and totally her own. I bury my face in that fur and inhale deeply, smelling the warm scent of her after one of her many afternoon sun patch naps.

Her eyes are the soft green that only cats seem genetically capable of with flecks of gold and brown; they are luminescent and beautiful. The spot on her

head, the one that's so perfect for kissing, is a deep yet vibrant orange, almost the color of roasted pumpkin. She loves to talk but always sounds like she is whining. "No," she says when you ask her just about anything. She will wake from a nap and find herself alone. She gets scared, my Sammy Doodles, and comes cooing and talking through the house as her fat belly flops and flaps as she runs looking for her momma. She runs to my lap and stays with me, warming me and keeping me company until she decides she is done (as cats will do), and then she is off to do whatever she deems appropriate at the moment. I know you aren't supposed to have favorites, but she is mine.

Jack is burly, yet thin as a wisp—not someone you want to mess with. He has an iron streak in him that is hard and tough as nails. His long hair gives him the impression of being much bigger than he actually is, and I think he knows it. He saunters around in that slow hipshot way that only cats and juvenile delinquents are capable of, looking almost belligerently at everything with his lamp-like eyes that seem to glow from within. They are the color of a faded piece of seaweed that has been bleached by the sun after many long days since the high tide brought it in. The gray in his hair is becoming more and more prominent as the days pass, but nothing will ever take that hard streak out of this guy, not even the ravages of time and age.

The only human on this earth for our Jack is my husband. He has adopted Cory as his own. I have never seen a look of sublime and utter happiness on a cat's face that can hold a candle to how my Jack looks when he is with his "dad." It's like taking that first bite of a cheeseburger after weeks of dieting and working out—starving yourself of everything you love to lose a few pounds. Eyes half-lidded with satisfaction, almost moaning as the cheese oozes and the bacon crunches in your mouth—that's the look Jack gets when he is with Cory.

He slowly uncoils himself with the grace that cats are born with and the wiliness of a snake. He'll slowly work his way across the room, never taking his eyes off Cory. He will sit and stare, biding his time, seeming to soak in the sight of his dad. I know in my heart that he is savoring the moments before he goes where he truly wants to be. My husband says, "Come here, Jack," and he will leap up with the light-footed air of a gymnast to the arm of the recliner and work his way onto his dad's chest. He slowly folds his legs underneath him, one by one, positioning himself for maximum comfort, and head-butting capability. His eyes closed in half-lidded ecstasy, he looks at my husband with such love. He head-butts him over and over, loving on him. I can hear the words he would say if he could talk: "I love you so much, Dad."

These are the three that help fill our days with love and happiness. I would give my life for any one of them, and I know my husband feels the same. They are part of our hearts and our lives for as long as we are blessed to have them, and we will appreciate every second of it. ❀

# ARTWORK COLLECTION

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NANCY HAGLER-VUJOVIC • ART INSTRUCTOR

## COFFEE SET I

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## COFFEE SET II

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# ALLOW SMOKER FRIENDLY BUSINESSES

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CLIFTON SMITH • OFFICE PROFESSIONAL, LEGAL OFFICE FOCUS

**M**any states—and cities, first—have expanded public area smoking bans to include bars and coffee shops. I believe such legislation to be an unconstitutional and unjust infringement on both business proprietors and smoking customers. Business owners should have the option of catering to a smoking or a non-smoking client base rather than having that choice made for them by legislation favoring one client over another. Also, smokers should be able to go somewhere to enjoy their tobacco as long as this activity does not force the effects of same on others. Recent proposed legislation regarding cigar bars and shops supports my position. Designated LB118, introduced by Senator Tyson Larson, it also includes exceptions for guestrooms, suites, and tobacco retail outlets.

I submit that the law should allow for establishment of smoking venue businesses other than just cigar shops and bars as set forth in LB118. I would expand upon the bill to correct the overall problem. I would also retain the provisions for guestrooms, suites, and tobacco retail outlets. My reasoning would be similar to that for LB118, but more comprehensive.

Smoking venue businesses would be licensed as such. They would be required to sell tobacco as their primary product and not just cigarettes (i.e., cigars, pipe tobacco, specialty, and import cigarettes). This would distinguish the business from ones that currently exist where smoking is banned. Such an establishment would be allowed a liquor license and could sell other beverages such as coffee, tea, and soda.

As a longtime smoker, I personally understand the reasoning behind LB118. As stated in LB118, the Nebraska Legislature would be recognizing that such limited exceptions to the Nebraska Indoor Clean Air Act would not interfere with the original intent of that Act to protect the public from unwilling exposure to secondhand smoke. The Legislature would also be recognizing that the public should reasonably expect secondhand smoke exposure in such places, given the nature of the businesses, and could choose to avoid exposure (Larson, LB118, 4, lines 10-19; 5, lines 12-22). The bill discusses at length the varieties and components of cigar and pipe tobaccos, as well as the enjoyment factors of combining smoking, drinking, and a social setting (Larson, LB118, 4, lines 20-31; 5, lines 1-11).

However, I disagree with some of Senator Tyson Larson's assertions regarding cigarettes. I know cigarette smokers enjoy long, leisurely smoking combined with coffee or other drinks, including hard spirits. In the past, I've purchased expensive import cigarettes, cigarillos, and even cigars for this purpose. I must point out there are many varieties of cigarettes, just as there are with cigars and pipe tobaccos; some smokers enjoy cigarettes in the same manners as LB118 details. The misrepresentation of cigarettes as only a quick delivery system for nicotine is inaccurate. Also, there is a manifest difference between grabbing a quick smoke because one is forced to by anti-smoking laws or policies and engaging in social smoking (smokers do enjoy long, slow smokes over good conversation).

There are three considerable benefits to making this change in the applicable laws. This would restore to business owners their right to choose their clientele and the nature of their businesses. This right has been pre-empted by smoking bans. This has caused many businesses lost revenues when smoking customers ceased patronizing their businesses rather than stand outside to smoke.

Zach Pluhacek wrote in his article in the *Lincoln Journal Star* about cigar bars and LB118: "Lawyers for nine of the eleven cigar bars filed petitions in the Lancaster County District Court asking a judge to recognize the special licenses given to them to allow smoking and require the state to hold a hearing if regulators want to take them away" (Pluhacek). This demonstrates that there are smoker friendly business owners in Lincoln who support such an exception.

The second benefit is the restoration of equal rights to smokers while respecting the rights of non-smokers. It may seem no inconvenience to a smoker to require him or her to stand outside and smoke; this becomes much more difficult to justify in inclement weather. Imagine the discomfort of standing in a -15 degree wind chill snow flurry in January in order to have a smoke while at a coffee shop or bar. The original intent of the Nebraska Clean Indoor Air Act was to protect non-smokers from unwilling exposure to secondhand smoke, not to prohibit establishment of any business intended to give smokers an indoor venue to socialize and enjoy their smokes.

The third benefit is that smokers will once again be patronizing local businesses, which means an influx into the local economy. This would not just benefit the business owners who have lost such income; increased spending would also mean more tax revenues, along with license and registration fees. This will benefit smokers and non-smokers alike.

I understand the rationale behind the smoking ban in most public places, especially those where food is the primary product. There might be objections

that there will be secondhand smoke exposure to patrons and employees. This is easily addressed by providing clear, posted notice to potential patrons and by advising employees of that risk exactly as LB118 already proposes, but without barring cigarettes (Larson, LB118, 5, 26-31; 6, 1-5). Additionally, one might expect objections to collateral secondhand smoke exposure. This is also easily addressed by ensuring that adjacent non-smoking areas use adequate ventilation systems and barriers as LB118 already proposes (Larson, LB118, 7, 4-9). I do support non-smokers' rights, but the playing field needs to be leveled.

Amendment of applicable statutes to allow business owners to establish or declare a business as a smoking venue would do just that. There could be a license and registration fee, and the primary product of the business would need to be tobacco. By conspicuously posting notice to potential patrons that the premises is a smoking venue and advising potential employees of the secondhand smoke exposure, the intent of the Nebraska Clean Indoor Act is not violated. Smokers would then have places they could go in order to socialize while enjoying a drink and conversation. Non-smokers would continue to have the option to patronize bars and coffee shops that do not choose to market themselves directly to smokers, and the ban on smoking would still be in effect in such businesses.

As Pluhacek's article and Sen. Larson's LB118 demonstrate, there is a need for our community to adapt to accommodate the reasonable rights of those who want to smoke. This is a need for change supported by that portion of our community most adversely affected by the current smoking bans.

Is it ethical to allow one part of a consumer demographic to control the ability of another to enjoy a legal product? Is it right to ban smoking in a smoking-based business because a non-smoker might want to work or shop there? The needs and rights of non-smokers would not be disregarded by allowing business owners to become designated smoking venue businesses, but the same cannot be said of the current blanket ban's effect on the rights and needs of smokers. If businesses are allowed to specialize, then free market principles of supply and demand would determine the ratio of smoker to non-smoker venues rather than legislation taking away the rights of one group to protect those of another. I believe this to be the better way, with something for everyone. ♡

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# THE NECESSITY OF ONLINE EDUCATION

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CHELSEA TISDALE • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Professor Mark Edmundson is a well-educated, outspoken man who has many published works expressing his criticism of literary works and cultural fashions. Educated first at Bennington and later at Yale, Edmundson is currently teaching in the Department of English at the University of Virginia where his specialties include 19th century American and British literature, poetry, and Romanticism. His list of publications is extensive, and many of his articles and books regard the trends of the modern day educator.

In “The Trouble with Online Education,” published in July 2012 by *The New York Times*, Professor Edmundson illustrates his view that online education will always be lacking compared to classroom learning. His argument is supported by a few observations from his own experience as a professor of English: online learning consists mainly of monologue rather than dialogue, it does not readily allow the teacher to gauge student learning and comprehension, and it doesn’t provide an educational “collective” where students can learn from each other as well as the teacher.

For this informal narrative, Edmundson describes how the creeping growth of online education presents issues at the University of Virginia that he feels can be resolved only by open student-teacher communication. He questions whether online education will ever be on par with the education one is able to receive in a face-to-face environment that promotes creative, dynamic, group-based learning. Mostly, the author draws emotion from the reader with his use of imagery to persuade his audience that the educational experience is only at its full potential when presented in conjunction with face-to-face human interaction.

As a student of online education, I feel Professor Edmundson’s article invoked an internal dialogue regarding my own educational future. While I feel that Edmundson may be correct in proposing that classroom learning offers benefits to students that can’t easily be replicated in an Internet environment, I don’t think he’s addressing the issue of education through the eyes of contemporary America. Online education may not offer “face time,” but it does offer so much more to those who are striving for their education: set schedules, time management flexibility, and the end goal, a degree.

In Edmundson’s face-to-face course on Shakespearean literature, he finds himself managing his class time. If he feels that the class is struggling with certain material, he has the ability to bend the syllabus. He can give his students more time to focus on trouble areas. In online education, Edmundson argues,

each week is fairly set in stone. The instructor is able to provide quizzes and exams to gauge their students' comprehension, but there is very little that can be done aside from interpreting test scores. When it comes to bending the syllabus to help their students, online educators seem to be stuck with little wiggle room.

But is this necessarily a bad thing? Online education surely creates a “sink or swim” environment, but it also comes packaged with a moderately reliable schedule. Most of the individuals who opt for online education are people who are already involved in other essential day-to-day activities such as work and family responsibilities. This lifestyle can consist of fluctuating deadlines, unexpected calls from work, inconveniently sick children, and ill-timed diaper shortages. The prospect of a set schedule that they can trust to be accurate might be persuasion enough.

A memory from Professor Edmundson's time as a young student describes university lecturers—masters of storytelling who enthrall listeners and leave them on the edges of their seats. He claims that his instructors relied less on the outcome of test scores and more on the feeling they got about the attitude of the room. Edmundson suggests that large lecture classes which provide “riveting” lectures and peer-driven discussions grant each student an unforgettable learning experience. Certainly, the personal experience of such a captivating lecture is something that one can't get over the Internet. That said, I would argue that most people who utilize online learning aren't blessed with the free time at 10:00 in the morning to attend a lively lecture. Many students who are in online classes are completing their work during odd hours of the day or night because that's the only time they have. Online learning is based entirely around the student's daily schedule, which is not an option with classroom learning.

In response to a pre-recorded lecture for an online course, Edmundson says, “...there was nothing you could get from that course that you couldn't get from a good book on the subject.” With all due respect to Professor Edmundson, this is entirely incorrect. The one thing that a good book cannot provide is the one thing that online students across the nation are striving for: a degree.

Students from coast to coast are busting their tails for that piece of paper that means job security and enough income to support their families. It means not having to take out a second mortgage if the car breaks down again. It means being one more step away from the red and further into the black.

It also means giving their children the opportunity to attend colleges that provide class learning where the teachers are attentive, the lecturers are spellbinding, and students can be involved in a creative, dynamic, group-based environment. ❖

### Work Cited

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# UNTITLED

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LANNY TUNKS • ELECTRICAL & ELECTROMECHANICAL TECHNOLOGY  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



# MY COUNSELOR

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PHYLLIS L.M. ARTH • ACADEMIC TRANSFER ADJUNCT INSTRUCTOR

Comfort. Comfortable. Comforting.

She looks comfortable. Posture erect, more at ease than attention.  
Masculine posture, feminine motions.

Her clothes are not fitted. Layers of color skimming her body. A hint of cleavage; womanly, not a trick or trap for your attention. Slacks are snug against her butt, acquiring consideration when she exists.

Sitting, knees apart and feet planted, upright, symmetrical. Aimed at me.

Hair quirky, not mussed. Glasses trendy. Her facial expression is relaxed as if she just finished smiling. The lips should be in a lipstick commercial; today hers are unadorned.

She looks like a leader: expecting to be looked at, expecting to be consulted. Available for me to choose to follow her.

Her eye gaze connects while listening. Not a stare, not flirting, not aggression. Alert. She sees you. Not through you, but into you. You don't feel invaded. If eyes are the windows to a soul, her eyes say, "Glad to meet you. I like you already. I see strengths." Although welcoming, I expect she'll see more of my soul than I of hers.

Her voice is calm, low. She doesn't have a Southern accent, but the softness and pace is there. She often looks down when posing a challenge. The words hold the dare, our eyes neutralized. Quietly pushing me to think, to choose, to decide. That is the *me* she wants.

This woman is willing to lead me. Where? To a place I have not been. I'm not sure I can stay there. I'm not sure I'll know when I've arrived. A pioneer, I'm curious, not fully willing. Wanting to be delivered, but afraid of the journey.

# NIGHT INTO DAY

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BLAINE KINNAN • ENERGY GENERATION OPERATIONS

*“No one can tell what goes on in-between the person you were and the person you become. No one can chart that blue and lonely section of hell. There are no maps of the change. You just come out the other side. Or you don’t.”*

*Stephen King, The Stand*

The bloodcurdling screams still echo through my head to this day, reverberating sounds that come only from someone or something that is being severely tortured in the most inhumane way imaginable. I remember each chilling scream of terror along with the thunderous trample of footsteps racing throughout my childhood home. I never grew immune to this nightly ritual, no matter how old I was. I would find myself overcome with sheer, paralyzing fear. My body would become soaked entirely with sweat, and my heart would beat, racing and pounding at such an uncontrollable rate of speed that I thought it would explode out of my chest. Knowing what I know now, I realize that the terror I experienced each night as a youth was not normal; the events, I came to discover, were attributed to my father’s constant battle with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, brought on from his personal experiences in the Vietnam War.

Growing up with a father who possessed the symptoms of PTSD has been one of the most trying and difficult experiences I have faced. As a young boy, having to witness and experience the onslaught of my father’s horrifying night terrors—waking up the next morning to holes in the wall made by his fists or viewing the site of broken windows from the previous night’s events—was traumatizing. The toll it took on the family as a whole was taxing, as well. His angry outbursts at a moment’s notice were similar to that of a time bomb with no clock, only a short fuse. These moments of rage and anger carried over to the mental and physical abuse of my mother, which she endured.

My father’s PTSD contributed to the demise of my parent’s 20-year marriage. As the oldest sibling, I quickly became aware at an early age of how detrimental my father and his behavior was. Because I did not clearly understand the reasons for his uncontrollable outbursts, I automatically assumed my father was an evil and vicious person. The feelings I had in regard to my father were conflicting and would eventually lead to years of loathing and fear; I lacked the fortitude to confront him.

I became the man of the house to my two younger siblings almost overnight, and I felt protective of them and my mother at a young age. Through the years, I found myself facing my own personal bouts of anger, rage, and depression, which contributed to developing tension between my mother and me. I felt trapped among the ones I loved, and I found myself developing a rebellious attitude. Out of desperation and as a means for escaping the turmoil that had enveloped my family, I decided to join the military. It was apparent the walls of my sanity were closing in on me.

Over the course of my military service, I chose not to have contact with my father. During this time, I found out he had married for a third time, and I became distraught and overcome with resentment and jealousy. I could not understand how he was able to move on and start another family of his own when he already had one. This impacted my view of my father in the years to come—or so I thought.

Fortunately, my father never abused alcohol or drugs to battle his emotions and the demons imbedded in his psyche from the war. His drug of choice was hard work—investing his blood and sweat into a successful career in the grocery business. (Notice I didn't say "tears"—that was something I had never seen from my father.) If anything, my father was one of the hardest working individuals I had known; he had always displayed a generous and selfless attitude towards others, almost to the point of ignoring the needs and desperate pleas for attention from his own family.

Only recently, I realized that the hate and anger I'd held for my father for so long was not productive and was having a negative impact on my health. Due to the sense of exhaustion from feeling that way for so long, I decided to make an honest effort to learn more about my father and the experiences he faced during the Vietnam War. But where was I to begin without causing more harm? Did I ask him about his past? "Do I dare confront him?" was the question that kept resonating with me.

When the day came for us to reconcile and start talking again, he revealed that he had reconnected with some of his war brethren over the last couple of years and started organizing reunions with them. After I discovered this and was able to talk more with my father, I found him opening up to me about his experiences in Vietnam. He flooded me with stories about the numerous battles he had participated in, and he told them as if he had fought in them yesterday. As I tried to absorb and analyze the details, I listened in amazement and shock to the accounts of the horrifying campaigns. What he went through was something I could not comprehend.

By utilizing social media, I was able to locate a few of his “brothers” that he had recently connected with, and I made an honest effort to reach out to let them know my sincere intentions of learning about the Vietnam War so I could figure out who my father really was. I developed an intensifying urge that bordered on obsession to get inside my father’s head. I felt an uncontrollable desire to somehow witness firsthand what he had in as much detail as possible. I wanted to smell the air of the war-riddled jungle, feel the damp, barren soil, and scale the mountains he had with the same intense fear of death and the will to survive.

With some apprehension, I contacted his “brothers” and was immediately welcomed with open arms. They even invited me to be a member of their private Facebook page, where I could obtain the information I was so desperately seeking. After having had the opportunity to correspond with a few of the members of my father’s infantry division, read their stories, and view their photographs, I earned the trust of these valiant men, and they invited me to attend their next reunion in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. I didn’t know what to think of this generous offer, so I confronted my father and told him about their invitation, and we decided it would benefit us both if we went together.

To be honest, I did not know what to expect. The few veterans I had been corresponding with had told me about similar relationship struggles with their own kids. Immediately, I felt a sense of relief knowing that my siblings and I weren’t the only ones to experience the horrifying after-effects of the Vietnam War. My father prepared me for meeting these men, explaining that the majority were not only mentally scarred, but some were severely maimed, as well. Fortunately, my father was one of the lucky ones; for although he had fought in the same battles as these men, he had returned home physically unscathed.

The reunion was a weekend long event that consisted of a lot of tears and reminiscences about the past. However, I didn’t mind. I was honored to be a part of it. To finally put faces with the names I had heard my father mention in his stories and to finally meet them in person was valuable in its own right. I have met only one “hero” of mine in my life, but it did not compare to the men I met at this reunion. Knowing some of their stories and what they endured 50 plus years ago, I couldn’t help but feel inspired by their presence. It was there that it finally dawned on me—not only were all of these men heroes for what they had sacrificed, but there was another person I had known all my life who was just as courageous as they. That individual, I realized, was my father.

After the tumultuous environment I experienced growing up and my initiative in researching exactly what my father had gone through in Vietnam, I finally found it within myself to forgive him and to realize why he was the

person he was. I have finally accepted the faults and actions of my father and feel a sense of great respect for this man, my father. By coming to terms with our past, the turmoil I battled for years has finally succumbed to my preferred state of inner peace.

It is unfortunate that my father happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time during our country's history and that he had to do the inconceivable in protecting the interests of this great country. No longer do I hold any ill will toward my father. If anything, through this experience I chose to embark on, not only did I learn how to love my father for who he was, but I also discovered that there were many others like him who still struggled with the everlasting horrors caused by war. And with that notion, I hope others will realize the magnitude of PTSD and give veterans a second chance like the one I gave my father. Looking back on what transpired over the years between my father and me resembles that of a long, dark night evolving into day. ❖

## RED

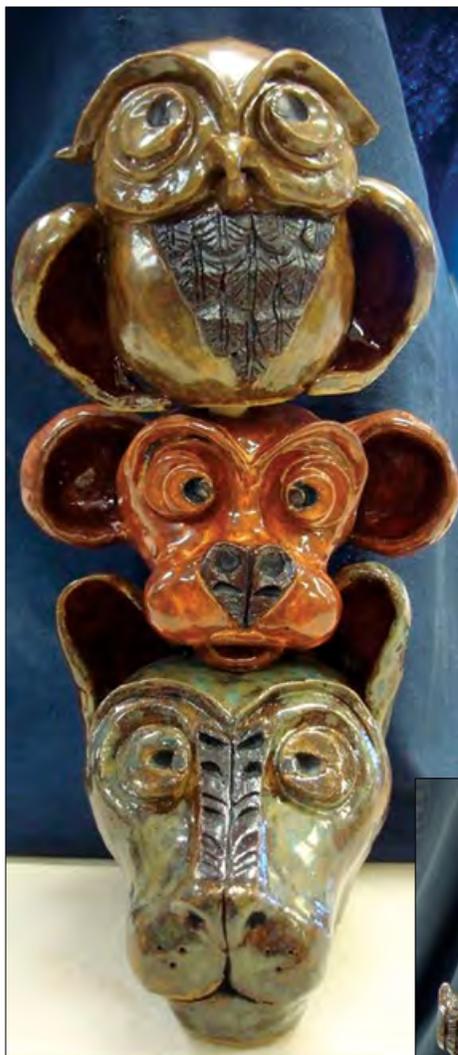
MAKENZIE LONDON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# ARTWORK COLLECTION

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JAMAICA WILSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



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TOTEM

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COFFEE URN

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# SACRED SOIL

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TERESA BURT • CONTINUING EDUCATION  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR POETRY

I sit on the earth  
of an ancient burial ground  
feeling the tribal drum  
within my own heartbeat  
Pum Pum pa Pum  
and dance  
in ceremonial rhythm  
looking upward  
I ask the gods  
to open the clouds  
to wet this sacred soil  
at the site  
where indigenous ancestors  
of mine  
walked the land  
I feel their spirit  
deep inside my soul  
I am  
one  
with them  
they are  
me  
my history  
I breathe  
because of them  
I hear the thunder  
of the hooves  
of hunted buffalo  
that stomped  
the ground where I stand  
I hear the cries  
of my Cherokee tribe  
as they  
die  
at the hands  
of the white man  
as I turn to leave  
they call my name  
through the shrill staccato  
cry of the eagle  
that I hear  
but with my eyes do not see  
sacred soil sets my spirit free

# AN AUTHOR'S DESIRE

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JORDYN RIHA • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Conceal in me the TRUTH, that a life of reality is all I will ever have.  
Burn me with the GRIEF and HORROR of fact.  
But a heart of HOPE you cannot touch;  
PASSION pounds through my veins,  
and with sleep comes the promise of sweet EVERLASTING dreams,  
and my DESIRE is ignited once again.

# COLLAGE

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KYLIE VOGLER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# STRENGTH TO START AGAIN

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ELIZABETH GEORGE • HUMAN SERVICES

When looking back over the last 13 months and replaying the events that led to my life today, I feel as if it has all been a dream. My life has changed so significantly that it scares me at times, thinking I will wake up and none of it will be real. A year and a half ago, I was homeless with my seven-year-old daughter Catalina; I was bouncing between people I knew would let us stay with them, and I was freshly sober. My other children were living in different places, and I had no hope of bringing us together again. This bad situation had been building and climaxing into a worse situation each day. June 30, 2013, became a day I would not forget. That was the day that everything changed, and my family began a life we never could have imagined.

June 30, 2013, was a scorcher; I stood on the sidewalk with my cell phone in hand while pacing, thinking, and praying. “There is nowhere left to go,” I kept thinking, and fear began to overtake me. I was so overwhelmed with anxiety that I felt my chest caving in, and I had horrible nausea. It was almost 3:00 a.m., and my boyfriend’s drinking had again spiraled out of control. I knew I had to make a choice I had been putting off for some time. I had lived in Council Bluffs, Iowa, for the last 18 years of my life, and looking back, the fear of going somewhere unknown or new stirred panic inside me. “I don’t want to put my children through this anymore!” raced through my mind over and over; it was time to make a choice.

I finally dialed the number of the only person I trusted at that point and, honestly, the only friend I had left, Sarah. I had burned so many people in my life that there weren’t many options for people to call. Sarah answered the phone despite the time, even though she had been dead asleep. “Sarah, I need your help,” were the only words I could utter, and these were the words she had been waiting so long to hear. Without hesitation, Sarah told me she was coming to get us. I went back into the house and gathered as much of Catalina’s stuff as I could along with whatever documents I knew we would need to start our new life. We anxiously and quietly hurried outside to await her arrival before he could wake up and stop me. I knew it wouldn’t take her long, and it didn’t—about 20 minutes—but it felt longer. I held my sleeping daughter in my arms while rushing to the car before anyone noticed we were gone. Sitting in the car as we drove away, I felt this weight being lifted, and I could breathe a little easier.

We drove back to her house as I frantically explained what had happened, and she patiently listened. When we arrived at her house, I was so exhausted that it took every last bit of strength to keep my eyes open. After bringing the little bit of stuff we owned inside, I fell asleep on the couch. With Catalina laying across my chest, I prayed for strength to just keep breathing. I woke the next day to Sarah's three boys playing with Catalina and the sounds of laughter filling the house; I felt hope for the first time in what seemed forever. I poured myself a cup of coffee and joined Sarah and her husband Bill at the dining room table as they asked me, "What's next?" I didn't know what to do and was completely open to suggestions. Instead, they offered me the best plan I could have asked for—pray about it and ask God.

Catalina and I became part of Sarah and Bill's family in the time we spent with them. It was a new and welcome experience. We went to church with them, helped prepare meals, and ate with them, and I learned to follow a schedule with Catalina. The time we spent with them helped me in many ways. I had known only chaos, pain, and dysfunction up to that point. Observing how they parented in a healthy and loving way helped me become a better parent. I had no relationship with God before then, and Sarah and Bill showed me what it was like to put their faith in God and to trust Him. I saw moments when they struggled as a couple, but I also saw the way they put love and forgiveness before resentments. I had lived a life that had been full of unhealthy and abusive relationships, and watching them gave me hope for a loving relationship in the future. That was a hope I had long ago given up on.

We started calling the shelters in Omaha and surrounding areas, but every place gave me the same answer—"We're full"—until The Lydia House suggested calling the People City Mission in Lincoln, Nebraska. I nervously called the Mission, and a kind man answered the phone and listened to my story and my plea for help. He gave me the kindest and most gentle response to head to Lincoln, and the Mission would save a spot for us. I was terrified, but I knew every door but this one had been closed, and it was the only option we had. The strength it took to leave that man's house that night compared to the strength I see in myself today pales in comparison. The woman that called for help that night was only a glimpse into the strong, kindhearted, forgiving, resilient, and persistent woman I am still becoming today. The path I was on the day we took a chance and went to The Mission was only part of the journey with so much more to come.

I stayed with Sarah and Bill for about two weeks before arriving at The Mission. There I found something I haven't felt in so long—peace. We lived at the shelter for about seven months, and in the time we were there, so much

changed. I worked for The Mission in its “work program” and discovered I was capable of being responsible and hardworking. We made many amazing and encouraging connections with the staff there. Graham, who volunteered at The Mission doing the youth program they called “Club EDEFY,” was one of those connections. One day, while Catalina and I were walking around downtown, we ran into him, and he invited us to church the next day. He played football for the Huskers, and Catalina loved the idea of going somewhere with a football player, so we went. That day, I was baptized while Graham supported me and showed me much kindness.

I didn’t know until recently that the man who answered the phone the day I called The Mission was Graham, and he remains an amazing friend and support system for my family today. We have made so many new friends here that we actually consider them family. We now have our own home and vehicle, and my children and I have been reunited and are still together. I am sober, and although it is sometimes a struggle, I look back at that night and draw strength from all that my family has experienced in the last year and a half. The Mission used me in a video for promotions for funding and volunteers, and Catalina is used in the commercial that airs on TV for Toss Boxes. I have been going to my church, Christ’s Place, for a year and a half and have found the family I had been praying for.

Recently I was given an amazing surprise by my church. The church did a series called *10,000 Reasons* about people’s stories and the way their stories impacted others. It was the start of a campaign to start new churches and to grow to a church of 10,000 members, all with stories we could share to encourage and relate to others. The church used my testimony in a book that was handed out to 2,500 church members; a caption and a picture were put onto a business-looking card called an “encouragement card,” part of my story was on the inside lid of every box that the book and card were in, and the biggest surprise was still to come. A few weeks after the series was underway, I received a call from the woman who handled the writing department as well as the testimonies. She asked if I would do an interview on camera that would be played on the last day to conclude the series. She also asked me to join the church’s writing team of storytellers.

I have also gone back to college, which I had completely given up on. I had tried going to college when I was younger, but I had dropped out numerous times and had nothing to show for it but a lot of defaulted student loans. I have recently gotten my loans out of default and have been able to get my financial aid back. I am in my third quarter of school compared to several attempts at college, but never getting past my third week. I lost my children to

the state when I was using drugs and landed my name on the abuse registry. I recently applied to have my name removed due to the progress and the changes I have made. I was approved in only three days, even though the wait time was generally 30–45 days to receive a response. Shortly after, I applied to the Human Services program at the college and was approved!

The strength I have developed stemmed from that one night, and I know now even in my hardest and darkest times that I can get through anything. I look back and reflect at what has changed in my life since that night, and I feel something I have not felt since I was a child—hope. I used to pray and beg God for death to make the pain I felt and the pain I caused others to stop. Today, I no longer feel that way. Today, I know I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength—even reach out for help when I feel like I'm drowning. ✨

## REFLECTION

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ASHLEY HECKMAN • MEDICAL ASSISTING



# THE SOUND OF FREEDOM

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JOHN PAGE • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I woke up startled and confused. I was in an unknown place, and “Welcome to the Jungle” by Guns and Roses was blaring louder than if I had put my ear to an amplifier at a rock concert. I glanced at the clock; it was 4:00 a.m., and I had slept for only two hours. Suddenly, the music cut off. “Get up, you fucking maggots! You are in my jungle, and I am the tiger that is going to kick your ass!” a man yelled. “Get up before you regret it! UP! UP! UP!” he shouted.

Remembering it was my first day of Air Force Basic Training in San Antonio, I sprang out of bed and dressed in the PT gear provided. We were rushed outside before we could think. After getting us into formation, the man started shouting again. “Welcome to Basic Training, peons! This will be your hell for multiple weeks, but you will be stronger and not such big dumbasses by the end! My name is Staff Sergeant Gibbs. I am your only saving grace in this place! Only by me will you continue on and graduate Basic Training! Fail, and you will be recycled to the beginning of Basic Training!”

All I could think was, “What have I gotten myself into?”

Staff Sergeant Gibbs was your classic drill instructor. He had a shaved head, a state trooper hat, a small moustache, and an “I am pissed at the world and hate all of you” attitude. Even though he was only 5’7,” he was terrifying.

The first day of Basic Training was pretty uneventful, even with all the yelling and marching. I had been in marching band, so I was good at marching. Some of the others felt Staff Sergeant Gibbs’s wrath and were punished with pushups. In a stroke of luck, I was in the middle of the flight and hoped to remain unnoticed. We marched to get our Military IDs. The drill instructors threw away anything that wasn’t personal (deodorant, shampoo, shaving cream, food) and made us get new stuff from the on-base minimart. They then threw away the rest of our personal belongings.

While marching to receive our boots and uniforms, I noticed something foul in the air. It took a little time for SSgt Gibbs to smell it, as well. He put it best when he yelled, “What smells like a bag of beaten assholes?!” After a pause, he added, “Speak up now or be beaten just like said assholes, maggots!” I knew it wasn’t me and stood as still at attention as possible. I was afraid he would yell at me anyway. He easily picked out the person shivering in fear and shame.

“Trainee, whoever the hell you are, get your ass up here now!” he shouted as he pointed at a scared trainee.

“I am sorry, sir...,” the trainee started to say, but he was cut off with a yell.

“I told you to address me, ‘Trainee *Blank* reports as ordered, sir!’” SSgt Gibbs shouted.

The trainee balked, stood at attention, and said, “Trainee Newhardt reports as ordered, sir!” After SSgt Gibbs asked him why he smelled, Trainee Newhardt responded, “Sir, I was too afraid to ask to go to the restroom and accidentally shit myself!” I was in tears trying to not laugh and keep my composure. I knew if I laughed, I would be in trouble, as well.

Trainee Newhardt was not a bad guy. He was my height, dark hair, pale skin and a round (but not fat) face. He looked like a skinnier Jack Black. I felt bad for the guy, so I started talking to him the next day when we had downtime before we were assigned duties for our flights. “Hi, I’m John. Where are you from?” I asked him politely.

He said, “My name is Chris, and I am from North Carolina. You are brave to talk to me—but thanks.”

Suddenly, SSgt Gibbs burst in. “Can it! I am giving you your duties, so listen for your name because I will not repeat myself, and these duties will be done!” he shouted in our dayroom, which made his voice echo like a big rock falling in an empty cave. I prayed I did not get the duty of chow runner, as I had heard horror stories about how if you messed it up, your flight missed that meal. I was only 108 pounds and had to get a waiver to join the military, so I was deathly afraid of missing meals. I already looked like a cornstalk and didn’t need to lose any more weight. A guy who couldn’t speak English got the job instead, which was even more terrifying. But, we missed only one meal in all, so he did well. Luckily, I was assigned fire monitor, which was a fancy way of saying I swept the floors and took out the trash. I had to know where the fire exits were, as well. The job was nice because I was able to go outside at night when it was quiet, and I could enjoy the evening for a minute. SSgt Gibbs really liked his fire monitors because their names were John Wayne and Rowdy Payne, and he repeated the names often. I was not happy about the attention his ribbing brought me and was somewhat terrified.

My second day of Basic Training was memorable because SSgt Gibbs noticed me for the first time. I mean this in a bad way—a very bad way. We started the morning with Reveille, which is what all military bases woke to. One trainee complained about the song, and another said, “That’s the sound of freedom right there—enjoy it!”

After Reveille, I was standing in formation waiting for chow when I saw SSgt Gibbs talking to some of the other drill instructors. A few minutes passed, and then I heard him shout, "I have John Wayne in my flight!" My heart skipped a beat. "John Wayne, get up here!" That was the first time I was being addressed, so I freaked out. Cursing my father for naming me, I made my way to the front. SSgt Gibbs turned to me and said, "Trainee, shout out your first and middle name!"

"Sir, Trainee Page reporting as, or..."

He cut me off and yelled, "What are you reporting? The weather!? Say it right, maggot!"

Panicked, I corrected myself. "Sir, Trainee Page reports as ordered! My first and middle name is John Wayne!" Laughing, the other drill instructors asked the same question each. After using my reporting statement and saying my name was John Wayne, I was able to go back into formation, where I realized that my hands were shaking because my nerves were going crazy.

The weeks passed quickly without much excitement—just mind games and fitness maneuvers. Drill instructors would come into the barracks and unbutton buttons and mess up clothes in the trainees' lockers, so they could yell at trainees for it the next morning. The dorm itself was not very exciting. It was a big room with rows of twin beds lining the center of the room. On the walls were our lockers. There were a total of four doors in the whole place: the door into the dorms, the door to the bathroom, the door to SSgt Gibbs's office, and the fire escape. Our dorm was on the third floor.

I remember one night, when I was on dorm guard duty; SSgt Gibbs had to leave early, and Trainee Newhardt decided to then go to bed early. William Rowdy Payne had the bunk above his. Trainee Payne was a stocky person of about 5'8" with blond hair. He had big, frog-like eyes, a lump in his nose, and a goofy smile that you saw often when SSgt Gibbs was not around. He was a bit of a rascal. Newhardt and Payne both talked in their sleep, which was humorous.

Trainee Payne decided to tie Trainee Newhardt's blanket and sheets across the mattress so that he was pinned to the mattress. I was laughing with some other trainees and joking about how his experience was going to be waking up and how, hopefully, he wouldn't have to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night. At about 2:30 in the morning, a different drill instructor paid us a visit. I saw him messing with a locker when someone screamed, "Yeah, baby, yeah!" I recognized Payne's voice immediately and laughed inwardly while watching from the dorm guard desk. The Tech Sergeant turned about faster than a spinning top.

“Who the fuck said that?!” he said quietly “You just signed your own death warrant because I will find you!” He knew it had come from Newhardt’s and Payne’s bunk, but he didn’t know which one had said it. He pointed his flashlight at Trainee Payne and asked, “Was it you?” but then he settled on Trainee Newhardt and shouted, “No, it was you!”

At that point, Trainee Newhardt said, “Go away, you bitch!” while he was still fast asleep. I could see that the drill instructor was furious; his face turned redder than an overripe tomato. The Tech Sgt tried to pull Newhardt out of bed while yelling words fouler than Newhardt’s smell the day of his accident. I was laughing loudly at this point, but the Tech Sergeant did not hear me, focusing instead on his anger at Newhardt. Instead of just pulling Trainee Newhardt out of bed, he pulled the whole mattress and everything else off, as well, since Newhardt was still tied tightly to it. A panicked Trainee Newhardt awakened and tried to move away from the furious drill instructor but couldn’t. The Tech Sergeant was at a loss of words. We actually received props from SSgt Gibbs the next day since he didn’t like the guy.

A lot of excitement happened toward the end of Basic. I was terrified of our physical training test. I had never “made time” in any of the run tests I’d attempted. I was running so fast during the test that I was gasping for air in the warm, southern Texas sun. Luckily for me, the runs were only practice, so they didn’t count, but the one coming up did. If I failed, I’d get recycled and restart Basic Training.

It was finally time for the run. It was 4:00 a.m. The air was frigid, and the fog was thick, and it was harder to breathe because of that. I thought how strange it was being so cool. The run was different than the practice runs because the drill instructors sectioned off part of the base instead of having the trainees run on a track. I looked around and saw about 75 other trainees as we waited to start. The looks on their faces ranged from strong determination to panic and doom. The race started, and I took off fast. I told myself that there was no way I was telling my family I had failed!

I started passing many trainees that were normally faster than I was. I glanced at them as they looked at me in confusion. One guy yelled out, “Damn, Page, you are cooking!” I gritted my teeth and fought through the fatigue I was feeling. It was so dark and foggy that I couldn’t see where I was in the race. All I could do was follow the markers and the highway. I was over halfway through the race but had no idea. I was alone by then; I could see no one in front or behind me. I was present with just my thoughts about failing racing through my head and the sound of my shoes hitting the concrete.

Suddenly, I saw people trying to stop me because I was at the end. I waited nervously for SSgt Gibbs to tell me my time, but he just smirked at me. The waiting felt like hours as my heart dropped. I failed; I could see it in his eyes. Finally, he shouted, “10:02! Good job, Trainee Page!” I did a little fist bump because I was so excited and quickly regained my composure before I got in trouble. I made it with two minutes to spare! It was a great relief to pass the final test. Now I just had to be “in the field” and then I would graduate!

Being out in the field was a dream come true. Our drill instructors didn’t come with us, and the people there were much nicer. I got to fire weapons, camp out, do the obstacle course, and eat more slowly (even though they were Meals Ready to Eat, or MREs). The showers there were colder than jumping into the snow nude. We endured this for days and were upset when we heard the women flights complaining about the water being too hot. I was having a great time until one of the other people in my flight tried to play a joke on me. I was leaning to the left to whisper to someone. I was chatting quietly since we weren’t supposed to be talking. We were getting away with it because there wasn’t a drill instructor nearby. Suddenly, the guy to my right said excitedly, “Page! Hey, Page!” So I jumped over quickly only to meet an M16 in my face. I woke up about ten minutes later. I had a headache but thought I was okay. Still, no drill instructors came by, so we went about our day. The guy didn’t mean to hit me in the face; he was trying to scare me when I looked his way, but I leaned over too quickly.

After that, Basic Training was smooth sailing—or smooth flying, I should say, since I was Air Force. We were issued our dress blues and had to wear them for our last week of Basic Training. I was on top of the world—nothing could stop me. SSgt Gibbs was more laid back and joked with us, and we were addressed as “Airmen” from then on. I just had to learn the march for graduation and when to salute properly while marching by the top brass. Throughout the week, I also received a few base liberties and one town pass. That meant we could do what we pleased on base and one day off base! I visited the Alamo and the River Walk, which were both cool. We had to be in uniform, so there were plenty of people trying to take our money. We all got through graduation with ease and cheered at the end. I even shook hands with SSgt Gibbs before I left.

I learned a lot about strength and determination through Basic and had a lot of love for my country, way more than when I went in. I loved serving, and I look back fondly at Basic Training; I will never forget the difficulty and the joys of serving in the military. ✧

# KITCHEN STUDIES

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LAURA MADELINE WISEMAN • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

How did they all choose to gather there,  
amid the smells, making something daily?

Those who worked behind the alarmed door,  
surrounded by counters and cooking ovens,

breathing in the steam from the washer  
that curled their ponytails and short bobs

inside hairnets—sneakers and nametags  
—women who claimed their corkboards

for meal plans with photos and prayers.  
Students and dropouts, widows and mothers,

all walks of life, walking out of their home life  
to mix and knead, to frost and top, and to serve,

aware of portions, of feeding a home full  
of the elderly. We worked there too, as students,

on weekends, and holidays, clearing tables,  
sweeping, and mopping, but clocking in with them.

We weren't paid extra to help them, but we always did,  
spreading wax paper between sheet pans

of cinnamon dusted coffee cake for the prep cook  
or bagging star sugar cookies by the pair.

Done with high school and onto studying other things,  
they corrected our errors, taught our hands work.

Where are they? What of Beulah with her bad hip  
who sent holiday checks and chocolates to her kids,

or Nancy, with hickies along her throat? Or Janice  
who never showed the swelling in her breast?

We remember their bodies in white aprons  
and green smocks: bodies heavy with food,  
twisted with scars, but whole.  
We thought of them today, as a family matriarch  
was moved into a retirement home—  
still unassisted—but all the meals she wants  
in a dining room bright with high windows.  
We think of all the kitchen aides who will serve her,  
in white hairnets, perfumed by frosting,  
how their hands will guide her to a table of Roses  
and Carls, cotton napkins, the music of nurses  
in blue smocks coming around to check in.

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## ADORING THE LIGHT

MIRANDA CARLSON • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS/SCIENCE



# UNTITLED VALUE STUDY

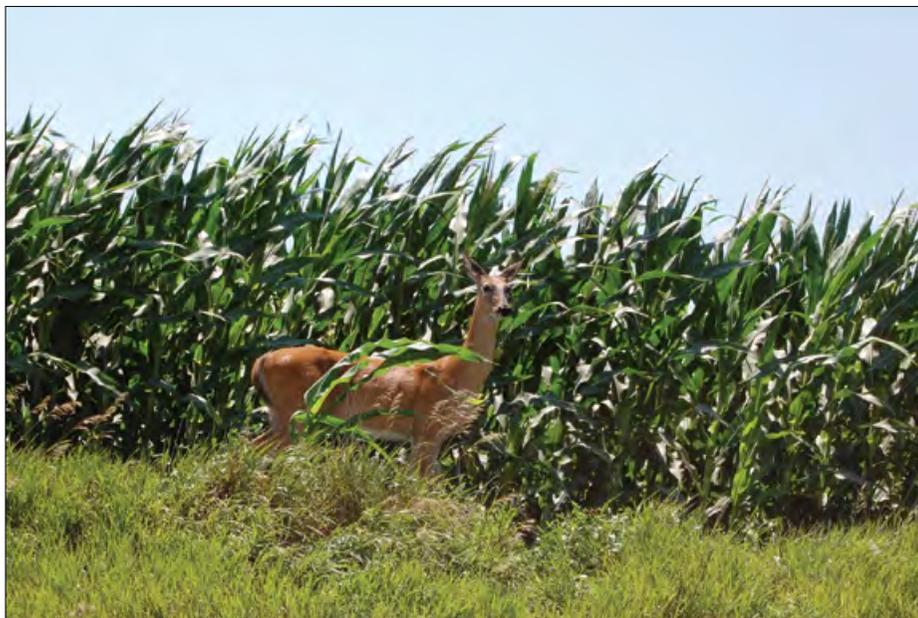
KASANDRA THOMPSON • GRAPHIC DESIGN/MEDIA ARTS



# LIVING LIFE

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JAMES BARNETT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# BEASTS OF GOLD

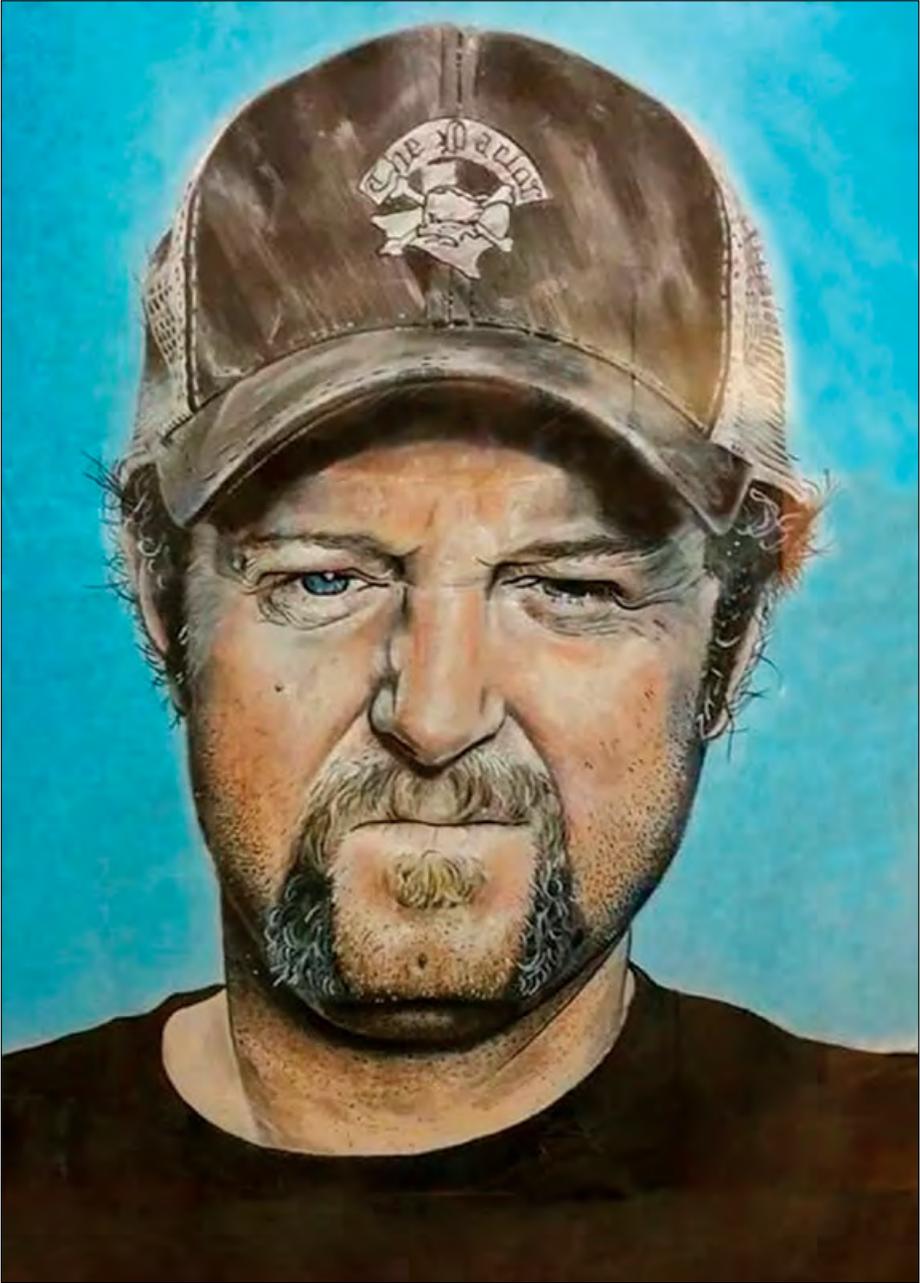
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TAYLOR BARTEL • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION/ACADEMIC TRANSFER

There I am, alone with no one to talk to,  
nobody to comfort me, and no one to listen.  
I live my life in monotony,  
awaiting food dropped down to me like food from heaven.  
I have fallen in love with a distant passerby;  
the light reflects off her like precious gems not yet discovered.  
I can feel her eyes burning through mine;  
her beauty grabs me and squeezes the breath out of my body.  
This small world I live in is kind of depressing—  
my castle is old and rotting, as well as that skeleton guarding his treasure chest;  
the colorful pebbles on the ground look like Mother Earth's eyes.  
This place I call a resting place is not fit to call a home.  
Our love seems new every few seconds, a million fresh starts a day,  
but all is in vain—she is in the next tank, out of reach,  
so in this tiny world of mine, I will die and then get flushed away  
as a beast of gold in a tiny bowl with all my thoughts stored away.

# SCOTT H. BIRAM

LANNY TUNKS • ELECTRICAL & ELECTROMECHANICAL TECHNOLOGY  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



# NOT ENOUGH

JIM BAKER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

All I wanted was to spend time alone with Jason—to talk and laugh together, to bask in the glow of his smile. I would have given almost anything, done almost anything, for a chance to get him alone.

Now it's too late.

Three weeks before spring break, aliens invaded the Sol System. Their fleet destroyed the observatory and research station orbiting Neptune, the orbital industrial complex hanging among Jupiter's moons, and many of the shipyards in Earth's orbit.

The Solar Alliance Starfleet mounted a valiant defense at Jupiter, fought a running retreat back to Earth, and then stood to die. Only the toughest, luckiest, and most cowardly human vessels made it out of that battle. With the Starfleet out of the way, the aliens launched a full-scale invasion of Earth by dropping wave after wave of troop transports to Earth's surface.

That cloudless April day marked the first weekend of spring break. Jason and I had planned to spend the afternoon at a water park eating pizza and funnel cake and enjoying the balmy California sun. Instead, we'd been diverted to a tiny high school in a far-flung suburb for evacuation to Edwards Air Force Base. As we piled out of my beat-up Toyota and sprinted for the evac helicopter (an even more battered museum relic of a Chinook), a soldier stepped in front of us and held out his hand. We skidded to a halt as he, bored, pronounced, "Sorry, sirs, but this flight is full. You'll have to wait for the next chopper out."

I gaped and bargained desperately with him as the helicopter's rotors whined toward full throttle. "We can ride standing," I offered. "Or hell, we can just cling to the landing gear. No one'll even notice we're there."

So sue me. Humor isn't easy in a war zone.

The soldier glared at me, pointedly flipped his assault rifle's safety off, and yelled over the whirling rotors, "Next! Chopper!"

It was Jason who remembered we both had useful skills. He led me to a nearby woman with the golden bar of a Second Lieutenant on her chest and the green orb on a blue and white field of the Solar Alliance stitched to her sleeve above the Stars and Stripes. "Excuse me, ma'am," he said with a brilliant smile while I watched the 'copter recede into the smoke-streaked sky, "but might we be of assistance?"

Since I knew my way around most firearms, I was assigned reloading duty. I sat in a dust-choked, partially collapsed hallway and reloaded semiautomatic

assault rifles. Through the gaps in the ceiling, I could see the shimmer of the shield dome that protected the building from bombardment. Staccato gunfire and shouted orders echoed down off the dome's interior, pierced by the whistling shrieks of mortar rounds and punctuated by thunderous explosions. Lockers along the walls, most open and empty, creaked and groaned in answer to each explosion's ear-popping pressure wave.

Jason crouched a few feet away, his dusty auburn hair hanging over his warm brown eyes as he helped a squad medic patch up wounded soldiers. The soldiers were thrilled to have a certified lifeguard and EMT-in-training to press into service.

I was just finishing what felt like my billionth reload when a bomb shrieked out of the sky and impacted on the energy shield overhead with an oddly sonorous *thump*. It detonated a split second later. The shield kept the worst of the bomb's fury at bay, but it did not stop the retina-searing burst of light or the thunderous concussion that shook plaster chips and rubble from the ceiling. The ground lurched beneath me and then hurled me into the wall. The soldiers manning the nearby barricaded door staggered and fell to their knees. Jason dropped to all fours, cringing as a sparking light fixture crashed to the floor not three feet from his head.

I blinked dust out of my eyes and sat up groaning as the broad swath of bruise that was my back complained at the mere *thought* of motion. I offered silent thanks to whoever put up a shield; we'd have been buried in the rubble otherwise.

The Lieutenant who had posted us there stumbled through the door with an armload of expended rifles. Her left leg was wrapped and splinted and her hip bandaged and leaking blood, but her face was a mask of steely determination. She offered me a grim nod, set the spent weapons down, grabbed up the pile of reloaded weapons I had managed to produce since her last trip, and hop-trotted back toward the front line.

Our evac center sat a bare 200 meters from a wide, scrub-choked runoff basin, which the enemy was using like a commercial airport. We'd heard at least ten of their enormous transports land and lift off again. The aliens were assaulting the building continuously, and the one company of Army infantry assigned to guard the place was rapidly running out of bullets to shoot them with.

Jason glanced over at me, dug into his med kit, and tossed me a pill. "Painkiller." The sweet sympathy sparkling in his eyes was far more effective than any drug, but better safe than sorry. I took a swig from the water bottle the Lieutenant had left me and quickly downed the pill.

All thoughts of pain died when something blotted out the sun. I gasped as I looked up and saw an alien landing craft hovering maybe 40 or 50 meters overhead, its four enormous engines pointed straight down at me. Jason looked up at my exhalation and followed my gaze but made no sound. The transport's

engines revved, and superheated exhaust cascaded down over the shield in waves. The shield wavered, stabilized, wavered again, and then another bomb exploded against it. There was a blinding flash, a loud explosive popping noise like an entire board of circuit breakers giving out at once, and a ghostly tremor in the floor.

The shield died.

The roar of those massive engines blotted out the world. The sound was a physical sensation, a trembling in the ground, a bone-rattling vibration that threatened to turn my body into human-flavored paste. The draft of heated air was immediate and overwhelming; it scalded my eyes and seared my lungs, and I felt more than heard Jason cry out in pain.

The ship overhead began lifting away. Its engines, impossibly, grew louder; a keening, earsplitting whistle joined the overwhelming roar. I clutched at my ears and staggered to the wall, which saved my life.

An alien in combat armor attempted, and mostly succeeded, to drop through a nearby hole in the roof. He was humanoid: two arms, two legs, a torso, and a head in the right places, although the size ratios of his limbs to torso were subtly off. He crashed to the floor in a three-point crouch, jets in the soles of his boots and the palms of his gloves providing counterthrust to keep him from splattering across the floor. His entry sent a large spider web of cracks cascading through the ceiling, and his impact brought half the hallway down on top of us. A chunk of rebar, piping, plywood, and plaster the size of a small car crashed to the floor where I'd been standing, missing me by perhaps four feet. It landed atop the squad medic and crushed him flatter than a nanofiber weave.

The guards by the door whirled, leveling their rifles. They were yelling something at me. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but given the threatening way they waved their weapons, I had a guess. I hit Jason with a diving tackle, driving him to the floor. "Stay down!" I shouted. The words echoed in my chest and sinuses, but my ears refused to acknowledge them.

The soldiers opened fire. Bullets winged overhead, all sound they might have made lost in the ambient roar. I glanced up just in time to watch bullets skip off the alien's armor like racquetballs.

Ricochets tore gaping puncture wounds in steel lockers, blasted craters into the ceiling, and shattered floor tiles wherever they bounced. I grabbed Jason and hauled him sideways, angling for a doorway, trying to get out of the line of fire.

The alien stood from its crouch, steadily regarded the two men shooting at it, then calmly drew a weapon and shot them both.

The weapon was a small thing, barely the size of a handgun, but it fired miniature suns—tiny pinpoints of brilliant light that flashed at bullet speeds across the hall, searing retinas and scorching eyebrows as they went.

Weaponized plasma. The fight was over in two shots. The hallway was suddenly, perceptibly warmer and reeked of burned flesh and melted plastic.

*And now it's too late. I'll never get to spend another quiet weekend with Jason. We're just dead, and that's the end of it.*

Any sane human would probably have curled up and cried and waited to die. Part of me certainly wanted to. My fear screamed at me to find a dark corner and sob until something shot me. But those instincts were consumed in the frustration-fed, helplessness-fueled inferno of my anger.

*No, I thought. No, screw this. I have HAD it with these asshats.*

I pushed myself to my feet. It hurt. Every muscle in my body screamed in agony. My skin itched horribly and stretched painfully thin; my eyelids felt both leaden and sandpapery. My lungs heaved, my heart lurched, my throat rasped, and my legs wavered, but I *stood*. I threw my arms out to either side, hands balled into fists, straightened my spine and stepped between Jason and the alien.

I gathered every scrap of courage I could find and snarled, “Do not even *think* about touching my boyfriend.”

“Wha...?” Jason mumbled from somewhere behind me.

The alien’s opaque helmet turned toward me. A single pinpoint of crimson light glowed dully at its crest. So far as I could tell, the helmet was made entirely of a matte black alloy. The armor was similarly flat and nondescript, sharpened and angular at the joints but relatively light-looking, made of thin layers of some metal I’d already seen deflect bullets at point-blank range. Lights blinked at his elbows and knees. In the smoke and dust-dimmed light of the half-wrecked hallway, I could make out a single symbol etched into the breastplate, a circle bisected by a stylized shape not unlike the Nike swoosh.

I considered reaching for a gun, but I knew that was pointless. I considered trying a hand-to-hand fight, but even if that armor didn’t have strength assists, it was still a combat-trained alien in a suit of super dense metal armor against unarmored, non-combat-trained me. I stood there, arms thrown protectively wide, staring at that alien and waiting to find out what one of those superheated projectiles would feel like burning its way through my midsection.

We stood like that for a long time. I didn’t have a clock handy, but it had to have been at least ten seconds—maybe as many as 30. *Suicide?* I wondered idly. But, *No weapons. Heroic charge?* I almost snorted. *Stupid. Ignoble retreat?* I glanced around. *Nowhere to run. I could scream for help, but there’s no way they’d get here in time. What if...* And then, finally, the creature twitched.

Its weapon clattered to the debris-strewn ground. There was another interminable pause during which Jason and I just stared, I at the weapon and he at the alien. Was the weapon a one-shot wonder, now worthless? Was the alien waiting for a

challenge? Was it throwing down a gauntlet? I had no idea how to respond.

Jason lay stunned behind me. I didn't actually turn around to face him, but I could *feel* his curiosity and wonderment snaking around me, threading between my legs like ground fog to swirl up around the alien.

That should have been a warning sign. I'd never *felt* someone else's thoughts or emotions before.

Slowly, like a timid child, the alien reached both hands up to his helmet. They curled about the helmet's lower lip and pressed something. There was a brief hiss of escaping air, the click of a disengaging lock, and then the creature lifted its helmet.

THAT was when I should have gone for the gun. One quick headshot and it would have been all over.

The alien had a flat face. Where humans have a sloped, rounded forehead, it had the closest thing organic life can produce to a triangular prism. It had no discernible hair. Instead of a nose, it had two long, flared slits running vertically down its face. Its eyes glowed catlike in the yellow light. It had no mouth.

Those glowing golden eyes stared at us, unblinking, unmoving, for far too long.

Finally, Jason scrambled to his feet. As soon as he had his balance, he took a tentative step forward, attempting to slide under my arm.

Incredulity and outrage bubbled up inside me. "Jason!" I snapped, lowering my arm to block his path, not taking my eyes off the alien. "What are you doing?"

Jason didn't even glance at me. His eyes were fixed on the alien's face. "I don't think it wants to hurt us," he replied softly. "I think it wants to talk."

"Without a mouth?" I asked, caustic sarcasm sliding into place around me like armor. "That'll be a trick."

Jason put a hand on my shoulder. "Can't you feel it?"

Jason's always been the more emotionally sensitive one in the relationship, more perceptive and stronger of will. At first I thought he was just being figurative, but then I looked the alien up and down again.

Its hands twitched every couple of seconds as though fighting some uncontrollable urge. Its body quaked with effort. Its eyes... *its eyes*... I could practically *see* the thoughts and emotions swirling behind them, terrifying twin whirlpools leading to the core of a tortured soul.

Jason stepped quickly around me and held out his right hand, palm uppermost. The alien took one jerky, halting step forward and then fell to a knee. His forehead landed almost perfectly on Jason's palm.

Jason let out a sharp bark, as though scalded, but did not withdraw his hand. I blinked out of my stupor and stepped forward to wrench him away, but his left hand came up between us, palm facing me in an obvious holding gesture.

Jason's eyes were open wide, unblinking, unseeing. He trembled mightily, quaking in fear or trembling with effort, or some combination of the two. His mouth formed a perfect "O" of astonishment. Only his two hands, one facing me, one on the alien's forehead, remained steady and motionless.

I scowled. *I* was supposed to be the one inducing that look, dammit. I put a hand on Jason's shoulder and tried to yank him back. Biggest mistake I ever made. Thoughts flooded my mind. Images, sensations, scents, tastes, sounds, memories not my own, each with a distinct flavor of *otherness*. I tried to widen my eyes, flare my nostrils, and still myself to take in more, but it didn't help. I was washed away on a tsunami of other people's thoughts, perceptions, and memories.

I jerked my hand back like a child touching a hot stove. The tide receded, but now I could practically *see* the thoughts pouring from the alien's mind, cascading up Jason's arm in wave upon wave, settling into his eyes, pouring into his ears, wafting before his nose.

That level of communication made me uncomfortable.

Sensing my hesitation, Jason moved his left hand to join his right on the alien's forehead. The communication heightened, and scenes began flowing in both directions. Jason was thinking *back*.

I shook my head and the suggestive wisps of thought-smoke vanished; I saw only my boyfriend standing with both hands rested lightly upon the bared forehead of a kneeling, battle-armored alien soldier, both their bodies silently straining. I wanted to find a way to stop it, but I didn't dare touch either of them directly, and prying them apart with a gun seemed injurious, loaded or no. I spent a moment searching for other possible tools but gave up when I realized that if this thing decided it liked Jason, we'd probably live longer.

In the stillness of the hallway, gunfire, shouts, screams, crashes, and explosions from outside echoed in an eerie symphony with the creaking of bullet-riddled lockers and half-destroyed plumbing. I stood a silent, nervous vigil, jumping at any sound from the doors, the roof, the shadow of the interior hall.

Eventually, their contact broke. Jason rocked back on his heels and into my arms. I caught him, and he sagged against me, his breath escaping in a ragged sob. "No," he murmured. "No, no, not like this." The alien looked up at the two of us, then fixed its limpid eyes on Jason.

I didn't need to hear its thoughts to see the pleading in that expression.

"Jason?" I asked softly. "What just happened?"

He started, jumping in my embrace, but then settling back into it, pressing his temple and a soft, wavy auburn lock into my cheek.

I felt a void inside him. His emotional strength, the core of the happy smile I loved so much, had been drained. He had been *sapped*.

I responded the only way I could: hollow reassurances. “It’s okay, baby. I’m here,” I murmured as I crouched down, curling him into my lap, bringing my hand up to stroke his cheek and neck. “It’s OK. Everything will be all right. Nothing will hurt you while I’m here.”

Only somehow, my words weren’t as hollow as I’d thought. I *felt* something pouring from me into Jason, an essence that cost me nothing but the effort of forming the words, but which pooled in that empty space and *shined*.

Jason groaned, whirled to face me, and kissed me fiercely, ferociously, hungrily. I leaned into the embrace, responding in kind, closing my eyes against his sudden glow, hoping it would go on forever.

It lasted maybe three seconds.

“I want you to remember that I love you,” he murmured, his lips brushing gently against my cheek, his breath a warm whisper that sent shivers down my neck. “I have to do something dangerously stupid now, so...” He gave a soft smile, a small, sad laugh. “Just remember that I love you.”

I sat nonplussed as Jason pushed himself off me and began searching the ground around us for something. “What are you talking about?” I managed after a moment. “What’s going on? What are you looking for?”

“No time,” Jason murmured.

I looked to the alien. “What is he looking for?”

The alien looked much calmer than it had a moment ago. Its body still struggled, a tense mass of muscle surging against itself, but its eyes seemed relaxed, calm, almost serene. It glanced over at me and blinked slowly.

A vision of its helmet appeared in my mind. Oddly, it was my own vision. It was as though someone had flicked through my recent memories with an image-search function and flagged all the thoughts related to or containing its helmet. I saw through my own eyes its dimensions, its crest, its matte-black material, and the moment at which the alien dropped it: during his step forward to meet Jason for their mind-meld-embrace-thing.

The helmet had bounced oddly and rolled in a strange direction. It was right next to my feet. Jason was rooting in deeper rubble near the alien’s feet, unaware of its current location. He hadn’t seen it fall.

I picked up the helmet and stood staring at it. The exterior looked utterly unremarkable. The dull red glow at the crest had ceased. The interior was lined with a light padding and contained no obvious electronics. *What the hell does he want with it?*

“Jason?” I asked. “What do you need it for?”

Jason didn’t seem to notice anything odd about the question. “I might be able to stop the fighting. All of it. Not just here but everywhere. The whole galaxy.”

I blinked and turned to gaze at the alien, eyebrows raised. “For real?” I murmured.

The alien nodded. It looked like a clunky, odd, unfamiliar gesture, but it was obviously an affirmative nod. I wondered fleetingly how much Jason had taught him about us. Then the alien caught my eye, and an image flashed before me. I saw Jason lower the helmet over his head. Behind him, dozens, hundreds, thousands of armored aliens appeared, each linked to Jason by a shaft of light that extended from their helmet to his. Then the perspective shifted, and I saw Jason, hands held out to the sides much as my own had been moments ago, standing protectively between that crowd of aliens and an approaching, undefined malevolence. I blinked, and the image vanished.

I glanced down at the helmet and wanted to cry with frustration. *They* needed *our* help? How was *that* fair?

I glared up at the alien. *Fine*, I thought angrily. *You owe me. You owe US.*

It nodded again.

“Jason,” I said, putting some iron in my voice. He looked up and saw the helmet in my hands. I held it out to him. “I love you, too.” I swallowed nervously, fighting tears, pretty sure that if I handed him this thing, it was going to be the last time I saw him alive. “Come back to me?” I whispered.

Jason stood, stepped to me, and took the helmet reverently. Then he looked up, stared me right in the eye, and smiled. “Always.” He raised the helmet and slid it on, obscuring his face.

It was the worst accessory I’d ever seen. It clashed horribly with his pair of khaki shorts, red T-shirt, and white tennis shoes and socks, especially when the crest of the helm lit up a brilliant, glowing cerulean.

The alien immediately went slack, collapsing into a heap on the floor. The shouting outside intensified, but oddly, the gunfire tapered off.

Jason was silent for the longest time. If the helmet enabled the same sort of mind-to-mind communication over long distances, how many aliens was he talking to now, I wondered? What were they like? What was he supposed to be protecting them from?

Jason’s hand fluttered, as though he was reaching for something he thought should be just under his hand. I frowned, looked him up and down, and noticed the light in the helmet was a swirling violet, shifting toward magenta as I watched.

“Jason?” I asked warily.

His head whirled toward me, and the light shifted up to indigo again before beginning a steady descent back toward violet.

I glanced at the alien, but he was no help. Still breathing, but totally unconscious.

“Jason,” I began again, “I don’t know what you’re doing, I don’t know what you’re fighting, but if it helps, I’m here for you. If I can do anything for you, just let me know.”

The light wavered—magenta, violet, magenta, indigo, and back again. Jason's hand fluttered vaguely toward me, jerked backward, then reached achingly out again.

Unsure, afraid, anxious, I reached back.

When our fingertips touched, I felt the pressure closing around Jason's mind. Unlike the flood of memories the alien had dumped on him, which I had perceived as a wave of fog rolling into his mind, this pressure was like a mudslide, trying to bury his consciousness and identity under a murky maliciousness.

This was an attack.

My eyes narrowed. *No one attacks my boyfriend.*

I grabbed Jason and drew him bodily to me, wrapping my arms around him, setting his head on my shoulder and my head on his. I let my anger, my bristling defiance, surge inside me, and growled low: "Do not let go, Jason. I've got you!" My hand found the base of his spine, and I pressed our bodies tightly together. "Just hang on! Everything will be OK. I'm right here, and I won't leave you. I won't let anything hurt you. Stay with me, baby!"

Jason latched onto that bravado and *fought*. I had no idea what he was actually facing, but my hand grasped his, and he clung tightly in return, and for me, that was enough.

"Thank you," Jason murmured after a time.

The light was back to blue.

I lifted the helmet, tossed it aside. His hair was a mess, sweaty and plastered to his face. I kissed him anyway, then stepped back to arm's length. "What just happened?"

He opened his mouth to respond, but the Lieutenant chose that moment to barge through the door. "You two are still alive?" The concept seemed to shock her.

I broke our embrace but let Jason keep leaning on me. "Yeah," I grumbled, covering my frayed nerves with gruff bluster as I turned to face her.

"The fight's gone out of them for some reason," she informed us brusquely.

I glanced at Jason, who smiled wanly. "Only the ones in the local area," he informed her. I gave him a questioning glance, but he shook his head.

She blinked, then glared at us suspiciously. "How do you know that?" she asked.

Jason met her gaze calmly. "I stood them down."

She caught sight of the alien lying in a crumpled heap on the floor behind us and just stared. "How?" she finally asked.

Jason laughed bitterly. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you," he said flatly.

Her eyes narrowed dangerously. "Try anyway."

He sighed, gestured back at the unconscious alien. "They were mind controlled."

"What?" the Lieutenant asked flatly at the same time as I demanded, "How?"

Jason shrugged nervously. "I have no idea."

“So someone made them attack us?” the Lieutenant asked skeptically.

He nodded sadly, waved a hand at the ceiling. “And he’s still up there, in orbit. I was able to free only the ones in our immediate vicinity.”

I bristled. “What the hell does he have against Earth?”

Jason sighed, hanging his head and radiating dejection. He looked, suddenly, like a man who had seen far too much. “Nothing personal, I think. He belongs to a different alien race, which is at war with these.” He flicked his head toward the alien’s prone form. “The fleet in the skies was sent to negotiate a treaty, to either bring humanity into the war on their side or to secure our neutrality. He was sent to make sure a war broke out.” He gave a dejected shrug. “Simple politics.”

I blinked. “How do you know all this?” I asked softly, brushing my hand tenderly across his brow. “How much did he tell you?”

Jason closed his eyes, his face drawn with the pain of memories not his own. “Too much.”

I drew him silently into a hug, let him collapse against me, and just held him up. We stood like that for perhaps five seconds before the Lieutenant burst out laughing.

“You know, kid,” she began, between wheezing guffaws, “I’ve heard some crazy stories in my day, but that one is just....”

Jason’s arm lifted from my shoulder to point vaguely in her direction.

She stopped midsentence. Her eyes did that same terrified whirling I’d seen Jason’s do when he first touched the alien’s mind. After a moment she snapped back to reality and looked at Jason with wide-eyed, slack-jawed awe. “Oh,” she managed dully.

“No shit,” I muttered.

“If you can touch their minds,” she asked slowly, hopefully, “can you shut him out of their fleet? Convince them to stand down?”

Jason shook his head. “I barely had the power to free the ones here.”

She leaned forward in anticipation, almost hungrily. “But you know where he is?”

Jason thought about it for a moment. “I can identify his mental signature. I don’t have coordinates, but I could lead you to him.”

The soldier had a hard glint in her eyes. “And if we can get you there and back you up, do you think you could stun him long enough for a strike team to finish the job?”

Jason hesitated a moment. “Probably?”

She smiled like a well-fed predator. “That’s a better answer than anyone in my command chain had ten seconds ago. Come with me. We have one last orbit-capable transport on-site. You tell us where the bad guy is, we’ll get you to him.” She keyed her radio. “Jenkins! Get the Condor prepped. We might have something here.”

Jason glanced at me with panic in his eyes.

I did not want to go into orbit to face down an alien fleet and its mind-controlling puppet master. Just thinking about it made my gut swirl and turned my legs to gelatin. But after all I'd been through today, I *knew* I was not going to let Jason face that alone.

I squeezed his hand and felt his rush of gratitude as he squeezed back.

Jason turned to face me, catching both my hands in his and holding them up between us. "Are you sure about this?" he asked.

I snorted. "Never more sure about anything in my life." The sarcasm reflex always triggers at the absolute *worst* times.

Something exploded outside, and for a moment, Jason's smiling, sweat-streaked face had a radiant golden halo. "You don't have to do this," he told me. "I don't want you to die for me."

I gave him a wry smile of my own. "Who said anything about dying?"

The Lieutenant poked her head back through the door. "You two coming?" she asked impatiently.

I reached down, grabbed an empty assault rifle and some clips, and reloaded the weapon. Then I checked the safety, slung the gun over my shoulder, and gestured to Jason with what I hoped was a confident grin. "After you." ❧

## CRAZY DAISY

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SONIA ARELLANO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER  
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



# I SEE YOU

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VICTOR THOMPSON • CONTINUING EDUCATION/ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

They see but a flower  
Swaying in the breeze;  
I see a torn soul  
Praying on its knees,  
Ready to give it all up,  
Ready to check out,  
Sitting totally silent  
But needing to cry out.  
It can't be fixed;  
It can't be mended—  
All too broken,  
Wishing to be ended.  
But it sits, and it sways,  
Leaning with the breeze.  
There it sits and stays,  
Praying on its knees.

# THE EYE

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LANNY TUNKS • ELECTRICAL & ELECTROMECHANICAL TECHNOLOGY  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



# PERSPECTIVES

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ELIZABETH WILLIAMS • MEDICAL ASSISTING

I had just graduated from high school, and as I anticipated my summer mission trip working with impoverished children from New York City, I thought about the life I had lived and how perfect I was for this job. I thought how easily I would be able to relate to the children. After all, I had grown up in New York City, and my parents had never had much money because my dad was a pastor in a small church that did not pay him much. Also, in spite of being a pastor, he was an abusive man—sometimes physically, sometimes verbally and emotionally—always distant and never there when I needed him. Indeed, I could see that I hadn't gone through these trials for nothing. God had given me these trials so He could use me to minister to these children.

But from the first day I was there, I realized that nothing could have prepared me for what I was going to face that summer. The children we served lived in a “Welfare Hotel.” New York put the homeless in these hotels and paid hotel owners for their use. These hotels then served as homeless shelters. From the outside, this particular 16-story building looked like a typical rundown apartment building—a common scene for Manhattan. However, the moment I stepped inside, I felt as if I had entered a different country.

It was a country that resembled a third world nation. The stench that greeted me when I walked in was so putrid that I tried to hold my breath for the entire time I was in the building. It made me double check to see if a sewer pipe had backed up into the building. As I passed the people, I put a smile on my face and tried to ignore the smell of body odor emanating from them. As we entered the elevator off the main lobby, I was glad that my supervisor had insisted we enter the building in groups of two or three and that each group needed at least one male. With their steroid enhanced muscles, huge knuckle rings, and sneers on their faces, many of these people looked as if they would kill us if we looked at them the wrong way, and I could see others cowering in their presence. Being in a group offered a sense of protection. There was strength in numbers.

As we walked down the poorly lit hallways, the stench grew like a thick, dark cloud obscuring our view of the poverty in the rooms. Entire families were packed into small hotel rooms. Often as many as 10-15 people lived in a

tiny space. It reminded me of the way cattle are packed into railroad cars to be shipped across country. The only problem was that most of these people never reached their destination.

Our job was simple but never easy: rescue these children from their environment for eight hours every Monday through Friday for the summer. We were to walk with them the ten long blocks to the church where the day camp was set up. The pavement was always either hot or wet, and sometimes both, but the children never complained. In fact, our excitement of the day to come would propel us forward at a speed known only to the best city walkers. They knew they were going to a place where they would be loved and cared for, and they would find the nourishment they so desperately needed for their bodies and souls. Then, at the end of every day, we walked these children back to the prison that their home was and left them with the promise that we would be back the next day. We were not always successful in getting out all the children on our list every day, but we tried our best.

The children were so tough and yet so vulnerable. The younger ones would often hold my hand as we journeyed down the city blocks, but not the older ones. They would stay back a bit as if they did not trust me or anyone else. They needed to prove that they were self-sufficient. But if one were to observe the scene from the other side of the street, one would see them trying to get closer to us without us knowing just to hear the words we spoke to the younger ones. If we caught them appearing interested, they would scamper away like squirrels. There was a look in their eyes that defied their tough exterior: a look that I saw only if I was careful enough not to let them know that I was watching. It would transform their faces from those of warriors to those of fun-loving children. They were like diamonds fresh out of the mine. Each one was rough and dirty. Our challenge was to use God's love to smooth the rough edges and polish them until they shined. But it was an uphill battle because every night when they went back home, they picked up more dirt than I had left them with the day before. Extreme patience was needed to accomplish our task.

Amid this sea of dark and dirty faces with eyes that held such sorrow and pain, one child touched me more than any other. Nekkia put her hair in braids instead of the corn rows like most of the girls did. It seemed almost to be an act of defiance to separate herself from the cultural norms. Her spunky attitude did much to confirm that defiance. Nekkia did not get along well with the group leader for her age group, so she asked if she could be in my group with her cousin. She was allowed to do that with the understanding that she had to behave well in my group.

Now when one works with children every day for a whole summer, it is likely that the bond with the children will grow. They have a way of nestling themselves into one's heart and staying there. Nekkia had worked herself into a deeper spot in my heart than any other child that summer, and when neither of us was looking, a bond formed between our hearts that was stronger than Super Glue.

It wasn't until the last day of summer camp that either of us took the time to look at that bond. It was the day when all of us realized that we would be saying goodbye for the last time that summer and, very likely, forever. The chance of staying in touch with these children was always slim, and at the end of that year, the Martinique hotel where they were staying was set to close. No one knew where these families would be, and our only way to find them had been by entering the hotel and going to their rooms. It was a day that none of us wanted to face.

For most of the day we were able to ignore that reality, and we tried to have the best day ever, but on the final walk back to the hotel, there was no more pretending. Any tough exteriors that were left were removed on that trip as the kids shuffled along with their slumped shoulders. While I was reflecting on all that had happened that summer, the children straggled behind. I might have been lost in my thoughts forever if it were not for my partner yelling at the children to keep up. He had been with us for only the past week and was unaware of the devastation that was awaiting the children. I turned quickly and told him that he was not to yell at the children for the rest of the journey. I called the children to come walk with me, and we put our arms around each other and decided we could make the trip only if we leaned on each other for strength.

It was at this point that Nekkia could hold back no longer.

"Could you take me home with you?" she pleaded.

Her eyes were hopeful as she looked at me. My jaw dropped to the ground.

"I can't do that, Nekkia. I have to go home to my mom and dad," I replied when I regained my voice.

"Your mom and dad live together? And why can't I come home with you?" she asked again.

The fact that she was shocked that my parents lived together made me realize how blessed I was to have grown up in my "dysfunctional" family.

"Yes, my mom and dad live together. But you can't come home with me. What would your mom say?" I replied, thinking for sure this would bring her back to her senses. I mean after all, what child would want to be separated from the one who gave birth to her and was supposed to love her more than life?

“But what if my mom says yes?”

With one look at her face, I could tell that she seriously thought this might be a possibility. It was at that moment that my heart shattered like a building hit by a giant wrecking ball. The glue that bound us together was tearing us apart and searing our souls as it did. I wanted to take this child in my arms and promise her that I would take her home with me and give her a life that was better than the one she had, the life that she and every other child deserved. I wanted to cling to her forever and never let her go. I didn't care if I was only 17. There were a lot of other teenage moms out there who had survived, weren't there? I could put off college for a while until Nekkia was old enough to be on her own.

But there was a voice deep inside me that told me that even if all of that was possible, I was not the person who would be able to give her the life she truly needed. I was only 17, and I had a lot to learn. I had no parenting skills and no money to support myself, let alone a child. I also had no skills with which to go out and get a job. How could I think I could do better than her own mother?

It was that voice of reason that gave me the strength to do what seemed impossible at the moment. Drawing on a strength that came directly from God, I explained to her that I could not take her even though I wanted to with all of my heart. I told her that she would always have a special place in my heart and that I would always be in hers if she would allow me. I told her that no matter what happened and even if we never saw each other again, I loved her. And then we finished the long journey home.

It was with a heavy heart that I said goodbye to my little friend Nekkia that day. She was a friend that I had enjoyed getting to know so much, one that had changed my life forever. Knowing I would never see her again, at least not in this life, I prayed that God would protect her in the rough years that lay ahead. I closed my eyes and tried to wake from the nightmare that would not go away, the nightmare that threatened to spread a dark shadow on the rest of my life. As I opened my eyes, a bright light shone through that darkness. For there was Nekkia—running back to give me a bear hug and to tell me that she loved me forever. ❖

# ORDERS FROM ABOVE

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ANNA LODEN • NURSING



# THE POWER WITHIN

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MIRANDA CARLSON • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS/SCIENCE

**C**ourage. The definition of courage can be summed up as having the strength to overcome great fear, danger, or difficulty. All you need is to be strong, and you can be courageous. *Why is it so hard to accomplish this when it sounds so simple on paper? Other people make it look effortless; they just do what needs to be done.* These thoughts played over in my head like a song on repeat, getting only worse after I witnessed my father respond to a terrible car accident. *If I am this scared just watching my dad be courageous, how will I ever be able to do what needs to be done?*

My mind frequently travels back to a day 14 years ago. I was eleven, and my dad had taken my brother and me to visit my great grandma in the hospital. She had recently been diagnosed with cancer and wasn't going to be with us much longer, so my mother spent most of her time at the hospital keeping her company. There are few things that I remember about that particular visit, but the memories that I do have are still vivid. I still remember the overpowering scent of clean—not the lemon fresh scent that usually accompanies cleaning, but the scent of everything being sterile, almost like I was breathing special air that existed just for hospitals. I remember Granny staring at the ceiling with an expression of pure joy on her face and telling everyone that she could see her brother. I tried staring at the ceiling with her for a long time but was never able to see what she did. She hadn't been her normal, coherent self for a few days. I remember leaving sooner than I wanted to and begging my parents to stay. I didn't win that battle.

Sitting in the backseat as my father pulled out of the parking lot, I wasn't aware of my surroundings. I was lost in my own mind, fighting my way through a sea of thoughts and overanalyzing everything I had experienced at the hospital, good and bad. It wasn't until I heard the sound of tires screeching to a halt and felt the force of the seatbelt pressing against my chest that I was pulled back to reality. I looked up in time to see a car speeding through a red light and smashing into another. Faintly in the background, I heard my younger brother yell at my father in an accusing voice, "Dad! You made me spill my Cheetos!" My father didn't utter a word—from distraction or irrelevance, I'm not sure. I watched as the car spiraled through the air in slow motion like an ice skater daring to test her limits. What likely took seconds seemed like an eternity through my eyes. Everything was still except for the car, which caught the gaze

of onlookers awaiting the worst. The car finally landed upside down, signaling to the world that it was time to react. I watched as people rushed out of their cars, and then no one moved; it was as if they were all paralyzed by fear.

New thoughts flooded my head. *Are they all afraid and confused like I am? Why is no one helping?* No sooner than I could think these thoughts, I was pulled away by a slamming car door accompanied by my father's voice: "Stay in the car and don't move, no matter what happens!" He rushed to the back of our car and grabbed something too fast for me to see then ran toward the accident. At that moment, my father transformed in front of my eyes from a little girl's picture of a hero to a real life superhero. I saw a woman standing on the corner wearing nurse's scrubs and could see her mouth moving. I watched as others dug through purses and pockets to pull out cell phones to call 911. Suddenly, I felt my brother tapping on my shoulder and realized he had been doing this for some time. "What?!" I responded, annoyed by the distraction.

In an excited voice, he asked, "Can I roll down my window, so I can see everything better?"

"I don't care!" I exclaimed, still annoyed from the interruption. As my brother Billy rolled down his window, we were struck by a wave of commotion. I was finally able to put a voice with the nurse on the corner. She was talking fast and sounded panicked. "There is gas coming from the car!" At that moment, I realized what I had been smelling. I returned my attention to the car and could see the steady stream of gas running from underneath. It wasn't until then that I noticed the woman in the car. Upside down, she was being held in the driver's seat by her seatbelt. I could see the panicked, worried look on her face. Among all of the noises, I heard my father's voice yell, "Cover your face and lean away from the window!" I then saw what he had grabbed out of the car; it was a drill. In one fast motion he swung the drill and smashed it into the window, making it shatter. I watched in admiration as he pulled the woman out of the car and carried her to the sidewalk where the nurse took care of her until the ambulance arrived.

Driving home, I could hear my brother chattering in the background. "That was so cool! Did you see the car fly through the air? Did you see Dad break the window? Did you see how fast the ambulance was going? Dad, I'm hungry!" He was barely coming up for air. I was once again lost in a world of thoughts. *My dad is so brave. I could never do something like that. What if I couldn't save someone's life? How did he know what to do? I wouldn't know what to do.* This thought finally pushed its way through the train wreck of questions taking over my mind, leading me to break my silence. "Dad?" A quiet, squeaky voice emerged that didn't sound like it came from me.

"Yes?" he asked, interested and relieved to get a break from my brother's never-ending monologue.

“Why didn’t you just kick the window to break it?” I asked, intending to learn everything I needed to know to be able to do such a thing myself.

Without hesitation, my father started into his explanation. “Well, I know that glass used to make car windows is designed so that it doesn’t break easily when hit by big things. So to be able to break it, you have to make the impact have a smaller area. That is why I grabbed the drill. If I had kicked the window, the force would have spread out and I would have just bounced off. The drill has a small end, so the force didn’t spread out and could easily break the window.”

“Oh,” I said, slipping back into thought. My father’s answers always seemed very involved when I was younger, so I left the rest of my questions to be answered another time and allowed my brother to return to his former state of enthusiasm.

I will skip forward eleven years during which my doubts of my own courage had yet to be quieted. I was driving along the Purple Heart Highway to meet a friend of mine in Airpark. There were no cars in sight; I had the stretch all to myself. As I reached the set of lights to turn into Airpark, there was a car waiting in the turn lane. I pulled up behind, waiting my turn until the light finally turned green. The driver of the car in front of me started to pull out mindlessly, as if not seeing the car speeding towards the intersection. My heart started to race and stop at the same time, as I saw the two cars collide in my mind before actually meeting. It was a horrific feeling knowing what was about to happen and not being able to stop it. I honked my horn repeatedly knowing my attempts were futile, but I had to do something; I couldn’t just sit there! The second car didn’t have a chance; everything happened so fast that the driver didn’t have time to push the brake. I watched as the two cars collided. The second car flipped over the first and continued to roll until landing upright about 60 feet away from where they collided. The first car was badly smashed and had slid to the other side of the highway. I pulled off of the highway, and intense panic set in. I realized there wasn’t movement in either car, and then I realized that I was the only person there; it was up to me to help. Suddenly, it was like I was a new person. I grabbed the phone and called 911 as I ran toward the car that was still on the highway. Forgetting that I had the phone in my hand, I heard the operator say, “911, what’s your emergency?” *Thank god, I am not alone!* I thought, as I prayed the operator would stay on the phone.

Regaining the ability to talk, I responded, “There’s been an accident on the intersection of Purple Heart Highway and Northwest 48<sup>th</sup> Street.”

“Has anyone been injured?”

*What kind of question is that?* I wondered to myself. *Doesn’t she hear the panic in my voice?* I had reached the car; the driver was unconscious.

“I think so.” I forced out words as I tried to open the door. “The doors are locked, and the guy isn’t moving.”

“Stay there—I’m sending help now. Was there anyone else involved?” the operator asked calmly. *Yes! How could I have forgotten about the other car already?* I looked in the direction of the other car, discovering that during this time, a man had pulled up and begun helping the people out of the other car.

“Yes, there is someone helping them, and they seem to be OK,” I said with relief taking over my voice. *I have help. This will be over soon.* I turned back to the car realizing that gas had started to flow from underneath, and I could smell the faint scent of burning. With panic reclaiming me, I informed the operator, “There is gas flowing from under the car. It is still running, and there is smoke coming from the hood.”

“Can you hear the sirens yet?” The operator sounded hopeful. “Do you see any flames?”

“There are no flames that I can see. No, I cannot hear the sirens.” I sighed with concern.

“I need you to try to find a way to get in the car and shut it off,” the operator said sounding confident that I could accomplish this.

“I will try,” I managed to mutter as my panic began to set in deeper, and I tried to think of what to do. *The other guy is too far away to help me, but I can’t do this by myself.* Suddenly, I remembered the words my father had spoken eleven years ago as if he was standing next to me repeating them. *I need to find something small and pointy!* I ran to my car, opened the trunk, and prayed there was something I could use. *A tire iron!* I ran back and went to the passenger side. Using all of my strength I hit the window with the tire iron, shattering it instantly. *It worked! It really worked!* I reached through the window, turned the keys, and pulled them from the ignition. By that point, the man helping the others had started running towards me, and relief once again started to shine through my panic.

“Were you able to get in the car, ma’am?” the operator’s voice broke through.

“Yes, I broke the window and shut the car off,” I said breathing a little easier.

“OK, is the driver awake? Can you move him?” the operator inquired.

“No, but there is a man on his way to help me,” I said, relieved.

Once the gentleman reached us, he helped me pull the man from the car and move him to the ditch. Shortly after moving the man to the curb, I heard the sirens and saw the flashing lights. *It was over. I had really done it!*

Looking back on these events never fails to be as rewarding as when I first experienced them. They help me remember that even when I feel helpless and afraid, I, too, can do what needs to be done. I could have never known that once faced with a terrifying situation, my thoughts of weakness would diminish, and I would prove to myself that I, too, could be courageous. I can be the hero that my father is to me. ❖

# WWI REMEMBRANCE: POPPIES AT THE TOWER OF LONDON

LYNDA HEIDEN • ADMINISTRATIVE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT, LINCOLN



# PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE WORKFORCE

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ROBYN M. GRAIVER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

**A**re college students prepared for the workforce after graduation? There are some graduates who feel they are ready to take on anything the world gives them, while others are not as confident and are unsure of what a job in America's workforce will entail. Colleges and universities should make it their primary mission to make sure students are prepared for the workforce upon graduation by providing more experience in the field to strengthen students' knowledge and confidence and to ensure future success.

Upon declaring a major, students are given a syllabus of classes that must be taken. Students are then to pick the classes they need and are expected to have them finished before doing an internship or preceptorship before graduation. Unfortunately, many students feel that some of the required classes are unnecessary and will not provide them with the information and tools needed to be successful once out in the workplace environment. Universities and colleges actively recruit students during their high school years, but they inevitably could leave new college grads in debt searching the marketplace in a highly competitive job market.

According to Sarah Toland, author of, "The Ill-Prepared Workforce," "A 2006 survey of business leaders found that among those new hires with a recent college degree, employers say only 24 percent have an 'excellent' grasp of basic knowledge and applied skills. What they lack, say employers, are basic skills such as reading comprehension, writing, and math, as well as applied skills such as work ethics and professionalism." So some employers feel that the new people they are interviewing and hiring for their companies are ill prepared when coming into the job. Most of the new hires lack simple social skills—largely, professionalism, which is pertinent in any job.

This relates to my personal experience, and it's one of the reasons why I am back in school ten years after receiving my undergraduate degree in recreation therapy. I went through all the prerequisites that I was required to take, as well as all the classes required for my major. When I reached the point of an internship, I had no idea what to expect, but I found a recreation therapist to work with for my eight-week internship. I came out of my internship happy, as I was one step closer to graduation and felt that I had learned a lot from the therapist I

had followed through the summer. After graduation, I found job-seeking to be harder than I thought it would be. I wasn't prepared for the interviews that I went through, nor was I qualified for the jobs I was applying for. I felt ill-prepared for the workforce and ended up working full-time in a retail store while continuing to send applications elsewhere. The university I attended could have better prepped me, as well as other grads, on what the workforce would be like.

For example, all schools in universities and colleges should have the same prerequisites before entering their programs. These prerequisites should be limited to a minimum, however, so students can get into their program of study sooner and focus on the classes and experience they will need once they graduate from college. Classes on professionalism, interviewing, leadership, and personal conduct should also be included in the program of study, so graduates will know how to be more professional and will learn how to properly conduct themselves during the interview process and throughout their work lives.

Once students begin their field of study, it is important that they be given the opportunity to shadow someone in that field. This will give students a good idea of what the job demands will be once they begin working in the field. This will also give a student and advisor a chance to learn if that path is the right one for the student. If not given this opportunity, the student may not realize what he or she has gotten into and have the chance to change his or her major. In the long run, this practice would save students money by preventing them from taking classes they didn't need.

More than one internship or preceptorship should also be required for students. This will give students the opportunity to work hands-on in the work environment, giving them the opportunity to learn and grow in the field while they are still taking classes. Students will also benefit from being able to learn with more than one person and have the opportunity to choose to work in different areas of their fields if they choose. One internship or preceptorship doesn't offer enough time to take in all the information that the student can learn. Many students are nervous and overwhelmed by the idea at first; giving them the opportunities for second internships or preceptorships will benefit their confidence as well as their ability to succeed in the field of study. Everyone learns differently, but getting more hands-on experience will give students a better chance of being successful once they have graduated.

Current curriculums for colleges and universities seem to be the same, especially for those who are just starting their college careers. Making the prerequisites the same for every program of student would be beneficial and would get the students into their programs of study sooner. It is important that program chairs emphasize the importance of getting experience in the students' anticipated

fields of study, so encouraging students to work as closely as they can in their fields will benefit not only the student, but the teacher, as well. Students will have better knowledge in classes, making it easier on the teachers. This way, students can get the most out of their college experience without having to pay so much.

Students have to pay to get an education, so adjusting class schedules and giving the students hands-on experience will help them enter their fields sooner. After all, employers are looking for grads that have the skills, knowledge, work ethic, and professionalism to be successful in today's workforce. ❀

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# AUTUMN SKY IN AIR PARK

DYLAN LYNESS • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# THE PRICKLY PAIR

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ELLEN KRATZER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

**H**ave you ever had a moment when you felt as if you were gazing into a crystal ball? A moment when you could see your future so clearly it was as if you were already living it? In one such instance, on the day I received a new pet, my morbid brain jumped to the day that she would die, predicting almost perfectly what that day would hold. What I didn't realize, however, was that this new companion would have a powerful life lesson to teach me.

At the age of eleven, I had my heart set on one thing and one thing alone: a pet gerbil. I had friends who owned gerbils, and they were the *in* thing. My gerbil would be sleek and black with soft, round ears like a mouse and a twitchy pink nose. I had scouted the pet stores and knew exactly what I would need in order to purchase a gerbil. I had tried explaining to my dad how cool it would be to own a gerbil, but my father was not impressed with the idea of owning something so dangerously close to a mouse. It was OK, though, my desperation told me; he would come around. Unbeknownst to me, however, my dad was plotting something that would put an end to all my scheming.

It was a gloomy day toward the end of March, and I woke to the sound of rain as it tapped its melancholy rhythm in the gutters. I rolled off the bottom bunk of the bed I shared with my sister, waded through our cluttered bedroom, and made my way downstairs for breakfast. However, when I reached the open dinette, I didn't turn left to enter the inherently cluttered kitchen. Instead, I gravitated to the right where a strange new object had appeared in our mostly bare family room overnight.

"Um, Dad, what's this?" I asked, the seeds of suspicion already sprouting in my mind.

My dad looked up from where he was reading in his recliner. "It's a cage!" he said cheerfully, as if that part wasn't obvious.

I surveyed the cage with a sinking feeling. It wasn't an impressive cage like the multicolored, plastic cage with twisting tunnels that my gerbil would live in. Instead, it was made of bare, chalky gray wire, and the front side was bowed out. The door was poorly constructed with an odd latch made from a twisted piece of the same gray wire. The inside of the cage wasn't any more impressive. A tray of kitty litter sat in the far right corner, and right in front of it was a mysterious,

tiny blue sleeping bag. There was a running wheel in the main section of the cage, a bowl of food, and a little water bottle.

I gritted my teeth and asked the question that needed to be posed. “What *lives* in the cage?”

It turned out to be a hand-me-down hedgehog named Stella. My dad had already looked up a picture of a hedgehog in the encyclopedia, and I looked at it with a certain level of criticism. There was no way I would get a gerbil now! I surveyed the cage again, knowing that the creature that had just ruined my life was sleeping peacefully inside her fuzzy blue sleeping bag. I tried to not let my disappointment show until I went back to my bedroom. I curled up in my bed and sobbed all my selfish tears. I didn’t want Stella! I hated Stella! She was stupid! What did she even do? She slept in a little blue bag all day long. She wasn’t even awake except at night. Who wanted a pet like that? I hoped she would die so I could get my much anticipated gerbil. I tried to scold myself. It was then that I knew what would happen: I would eventually grow to like the boring hedgehog and then she would die, and I would look back on this miserable day and hate myself for wishing such a horrible thing! Still, I couldn’t bring myself to care right then. She could die, and I would be perfectly happy!

Nearly a week had passed before I got tired of feeding an animal I had never seen, so I worked up the courage to remove the sleeping bag from the cage and dump the unwilling occupant onto the floor. Stella was not happy to be woken in the middle of the day! She was about the size and shape of an orange with half inch prickles sticking out in all directions. She didn’t appear to have a head or legs, and she was huffing angrily, making her entire little body pulsate. After a little while, her curiosity overcame her fear, and she decided to come out and see her new home. She uncurled and poked her head out, then her legs, and then she let all her prickles go down flat. Right then, I knew I was in love. She had a pointy face with blue eyes and a round, wet, black nose. Her legs were tiny and stubby, causing her to move with a waddle as she wandered around, sniffing things curiously. The fur around her nose was brown and then faded to a cream color that spread to the rest of her face and down under her belly. Her prickles were dark brown at the roots and faded to ivory at the tips.

It wasn’t until a few days later that I found the courage to try and hold Stella. After all, she was basically a ball of spikes. As I picked her up, she tucked her head under, stuck out her spikes and started making the huffing, hissing noise she would make when she was scared. I could feel the burning sting of her prickles: it was as if dozens of pins were being pushed into my hands. Perhaps this reaction wasn’t surprising, given her history.

Before Stella was my hedgehog, she had belonged to a family friend who had himself gotten her secondhand. It seemed that no one had time for her. As I researched hedgehogs, I found that they usually bonded when they were babies, and it was probable that Stella would never bond with me. It wasn't in me to give up, however. I was absolutely smitten with my new pet. I wanted to share my life with her!

One beautiful spring day, I decided to take Stella outside to explore my spacious backyard. She clearly didn't know what to think about this strange new world. The grass came up to her back and slightly impeded her movement. She must not have had any prior experience with the outdoors because every small noise scared her. An ant crawling across the ground caused her to curl up in fright and start hissing and puffing. When she decided that grass must be food, the startling taste exacted much the same response. She did grow to love the outdoors, though. The dark alcoves under bushes and the holes in fences especially appealed to her. Any safe, dark cover that resembled her sleeping bag was bound to get an enthusiastic reaction from Stella!

I will never forget the first time Stella ate a bug. In researching hedgehogs, I had found that in the wild, they eat insects. One summer evening while we were in the garage, my dad found a rare insect and put it in Stella's food dish while she was eating. My hedgehog carefully ate around the bug until it tried to crawl away. Indignant that her food would try to escape her, Stella quickly gobbled it up. Her reaction was adorable as she looked surprised, started hissing, and eventually returned to eating her food cautiously, hoping not to find any other unwelcome surprises.

It took time and patience, but Stella slowly started bonding with me. She stopped curling into her tight, prickly ball when I held her. Instead, she would sit comfortably in my hands and let all her prickles lay down. That was when I discovered that while her back was covered with toxic prickles that left my hands red and itchy, her belly had the softest fur, like that of a kitten's. Although Stella liked me, she still huffed if any of my family or friends tried to hold or touch her. I felt a warmth in my soul knowing that all the time I had spent with her had paid off: Stella liked me better than anyone else. Despite the improbability and the obstacles, Stella had bonded with me.

Stella and I had two summers that we were able to spend together basking in the sun and enjoying each other's company. Owning a hedgehog was a wonderful experience. It always made an interesting icebreaker at parties! One year, I entered her in the county fair where we had our picture in the newspaper and won reserve champion in Stella's division. However, this simple bliss couldn't continue forever, and the following spring, Stella got sick. I

found a vet in town that had experience treating hedgehogs for the local zoo. He diagnosed Stella with a cold and gave her medicine which seemed to help her, and she soon seemed as happy and healthy as ever. After a few months had passed, though, she started to worsen. It began when she lost a few of her prickles, which I noticed on the floor of her cage. It didn't take long before her prickles fell like rain. They speckled her cage and would show up all over the house, tracked in by my socks. Her legs didn't seem to work anymore, either. She limped around her cage with a great effort. As her illness progressed, I had to mash up her food and feed it to her by hand through a medicine syringe. I researched these symptoms and found that other hedgehogs were suffering from this mysterious disease, and it seemed incurable.

One October morning, ready to feed her, I went to Stella's cage, but she wouldn't wake up. I gently got her out of her sleeping bag and looked at her limp body with half her prickles up, half laying flat. She had died sometime in the night, and I hadn't been there for her. I felt a leaden weight in my chest and tasted the dry saltiness of unshed tears. My stomach grew tight with grief.

My dad and I buried Stella that evening in the backyard. We wrapped her in her favorite fuzzy, blue sleeping bag, the same one she had arrived in, and covered her with dirt. I placed a small rock on her grave to mark the importance of her life. Stella was dead now, but it hadn't come as a shock. She had been getting so weak and so pitiful. I missed her and spent many nights crying as I remembered my dear friend. However, I also felt a huge relief, as if a burden had been lifted from my shoulders. Stella wasn't suffering anymore—with nothing I could do to help her. I no longer had to watch her hobble painfully to try to eat her food. I could remember her the way she had been—full of life and curiosity.

I did remember the morning that Stella had arrived and how upset I had been that I wouldn't get a gerbil. I remembered wishing that she would die so I could go on with my own plan. I didn't look back on it and hate myself, though; I only thought how silly and petty I had been back then. It was absurd to want a gerbil over a hedgehog. Had I gotten what I had wanted, I would have never known the joy of owning Stella.

Sometimes in life, you're offered an experience that you don't think you want, but if you open your mind and heart to receive it, you find it far better than what you could have imagined. That was the lesson I was taught by Stella the hedgehog. ✨



*Stella*

# WILLIE NELSON

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LANNY TUNKS • ELECTRICAL & ELECTROMECHANICAL TECHNOLOGY  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



# THE PRISONER

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DONNA SALAS • COMPUTER INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

It was a beautiful October afternoon in my small home town of Scottsbluff, Nebraska. The weather was warm and inviting—as if fall had forgotten to be cold and gloomy, had an identity crisis, and wanted to be spring for a day. The trees had started their annual art crawl across the city, painting its neighborhoods with splashes of red, gold, orange, and yellow. Even the trees that had completely shed their leaves added a beautiful nakedness to the landscape. The seasons were on the cusp of that beautiful blending that happens as spring slides into fall. It was the time when the earth started to settle in for a long, cold nap, and Mother Nature started to slow life down. It was on this beautiful and perfect day that he decided to settle in, too. He couldn't have picked a more perfect day to die.

I woke up early in the small apartment in the basement of my parents' house. I showered quickly, threw on jeans and a t-shirt, and raced upstairs. My mom stood in the kitchen, her back to me, making tortillas. The smell filled my nostrils and woke my stomach, stirring it to growl. She turned toward the stove to flip a tortilla. I could tell she had been awake for hours already. "How's he doing this morning?" I asked my mom as I kissed her cheek. She looked tired and worn out. Her hair was pulled back in a loose ponytail; small frayed ends of hair framed her face and stood out like fragile wisps at her temples.

"He had a rough night. Didn't get much sleep," she said and turned back to the counter to start rolling another piece of masa. I poured myself a cup of coffee and headed out of the kitchen toward his bedroom at the front of the house. I suddenly wasn't hungry anymore.

His light was on, and the door was open. His TV was on the Spanish channel Telemundo, but the sound was turned down to a muted muffle. His oxygen tank breathed in and out in a raspy hiss like an aggravated cat by his bedside. The police scanner buzzed and beeped on the night stand; disembodied voices broke through speaking in code every now and then. His eyes lit up when I walked in the room.

"Good morning, Dad. How'd you sleep?"

He smiled and said in his most serious voice, "With my eyes closed."

We both giggled. This was a running joke we said every morning to each other. I kissed his cheek and sat in the big red recliner at the end of his bed.

We made small talk. *How's work? How's the truck running?* (I had been having belt issues with my truck, and he had walked me through changing the belts and setting the timing over the phone.) We talked about everything except his illness. I didn't ask how he was feeling because I could see how he was feeling. I knew he was in pain every waking second. His body had swelled to twice its normal size. He was an athletic man of 5'9" and about 250 pounds. I remember thinking, "My daddy is the toughest, strongest man alive. Nothing can defeat him." I could have never in my life believed that he'd be done in by a 12-ounce aluminum can of beer. Now here he sat, his body so swollen that he couldn't move or walk; he literally could not lift the weight of his own leg. All he could move were his arms and head.

We talked briefly about nothing special when I asked what time it was. I had to leave for work soon. He told me I had about ten minutes until I had to leave. He fell silent at those words. A melancholy fell on him, and he suddenly looked so sad. I pretended not to notice; I refilled his coffee and kissed his cheek. "OK, Dad, I gotta go. I love you, and I'll see you after work."

He looked straight ahead, a blank stare filling his eyes, and said, "OK. I love you, too, mija." He said these words to the nothingness outside the bedroom window, not making eye contact with me. I knew deep in my soul that something was wrong. He didn't say "I'll see you later" back.

I worked an uneventful eight-hour day. For some reason, I decided not to call home at lunch like I normally did. I know now I was scared that I would get bad news. I would call, and Mom would have to tell me that he had taken a turn for the worse, and I should get home *now!* I had told my mom that if she needed to get a hold of me during the day to call my boss's office phone, and she would come get me. But as my day progressed and Marilyn never came out of her office to get me, I began to think my fears of that morning were just paranoia. Maybe I was overreacting.

3:30 p.m.—I had made it! I'd worked all day and had no word from Mom. As I walked confidently through the parking lot toward my Toyota pickup, I thought about stopping by the grocery store to pick up a loaf of bread and other odds and ends to get me through the week. I had my hand on the handle of the truck door when Marilyn came running out of the building.

"Donna! Your mom just called. She said you need to get home *now!*" My stomach tightened, and my throat closed. For a moment, I just stood there trying to process her words. It was almost like they had been said to me in a foreign language that I knew only the curse words to. The ten-minute drive home seemed to take an hour. I don't remember much about the drive, but I remember thinking, *Please let it be something stupid, like, "Get home now! Your dog made a mess in the basement."*

When I finally pulled in the drive, I noticed my Aunt Cathy's car parked in the street. Nothing unusual there—she would often come and spend the whole day with my dad. My grandmother had moved in when dad got sick, so my aunt would come over and visit her, too. My aunt and my dad were as close as a brother and sister could be, and there was no place in the world she would rather be than with her baby brother. They shared a birthday, and twelve years later, just a week short of my dad, they also shared their final breath.

What *was* out of place was Andrea's old maroon Toyota Camry parked outside. Andrea was a good friend of the family, and I'd known her my whole life. She was also a hospice nurse and had been assigned to us when my dad was put on hospice two months ago. She had been to the house only a few times during the day to help Mom bathe Dad in his bed since he couldn't get out of it and to change a dressing on his leg when he came down with thrush. Most of the time, she was there as a friend. This was not good.

I ran into the house through the front door since that was closest to his room. He was laying in his bed, his arms folded on his chest; the fleece blanket Mom had made him a few years ago for Christmas covered his bloated body. We had bought him a hospital bed a few weeks ago, and it took up so much of the room that we had to put it in at an angle, covering up the closet door. My aunt stood on his left, my grandmother was at the foot of the bed, and my mom was standing on his right. I pushed my way into his cramped room and took my mom's place on his right. I took his hand; it felt cold and still. I scanned the room looking from face to face and saw that everyone looked worried. "I think it's time, mija," my mom said as she put her hand on my shoulder.

"Did anybody call Adrian?" I asked, just then noticing that my brother wasn't there. He would be crushed if he couldn't be there. He would never forgive us! Looking back now, I know that a small part of me didn't want him there. I felt that if he wasn't there, then Dad would not leave. It was a childish wish. My aunt nodded and said he was on his way. Dad's breathing was so shallow it was almost non-existent. We stood watching him sleep, nobody ready to cry just yet.

Adrian finally ran into the room and took up post on the left side where Cathy had been standing. He took Dad's other hand. We looked at each other, and a quiet understanding passed between us. We both leaned in at the same time and whispered in his ear, "It's OK, Dad. You can go now. We'll be OK." A silence fell over the room, like someone had sucked the air out of it and we stood in a vacuum. A clock ticked somewhere, and the angry cat hissed in and out on the nightstand. Then, like that, he was gone. We all just looked at each other. Andrea came into the room and checked his pulse and looked for a heartbeat.

She shook her head and said he had gone home. And just like that, on a beautiful fall day in October, my dad went to the clearing at the end of the path.

The most profound heaviness fell on me, and I ran out to the front porch and wailed. I cried like I had never cried before. The weight of my grief fell on me like a 20-ton cement block, and I collapsed to the floor. I felt paralyzed and numb from head to toe. My girlfriend scooped me into her arms and carried me into the living room. People all around me were in different stages of sorrow. My brother was in shock and just sat at the dining room table. My mother and Aunt Cathy were holding my grandmother. I went to her and hugged her. I began to cry again. I told her I was sorry that she had to see this. I was sorry she had to watch another son die. No mother wants to see her children suffer or feel sad, but deep down, all parents are selfish and hope to pass away before their children. In the end, nobody wants to lose someone they love and would do anything to not have to feel that pain.

Someone called hospice, someone called my Aunt Joanne, and someone called the rest of the family. I had moved to the back yard with my girlfriend and my brother. He had called his wife, and she was there, too. We began to tell stories about how funny Dad was, and we started to laugh. Our laughter floated into the house, and before I knew it, everybody was outside. One by one, we each told a story, and our tears of sorrow were replaced by tears of joy.

The funeral home had come to take Dad, and they waited with us for over an hour until the last of the family could see him. Family and friends came and went for the remainder of the evening, and by 9:00, we had said goodbye to the last of the visitors. It was just Mom, Grandma, my girlfriend, and me. We stripped his bed and cleared all his medication from his room. We cleaned that room until it was spotless. The hiss of his oxygen machine had been silenced. The TV had been shut off hours ago, along with his police scanner. There was a sense of peace now, like the weight of his sickness had made the room sick, too, and now it was healed.

It had been an exhausting day, and I was surprised to find myself yawning. We were all drained and needed a good night's sleep. I said goodnight to my mom and grandmother and went with my girlfriend down to the basement apartment. As we lay in bed, she asked me if I was OK. I laughed and said, "Not really—my dad just died," but I was going to be OK.

I rolled over and looked at her. "I never thought it would be like this. You prepare and prepare, but when the time comes to say goodbye, you're never really ready. It hurts like hell that he's gone. It hurts so deep in my soul that I am forever changed—forever. But I also feel this sense of relief that it's finally over. I've lived on edge for months now. I'm not afraid of the telephone ringing anymore. I don't have to worry about getting THAT call."

She stroked my arm. I could see the tears running down her face. “But you know what else I feel? I feel honored to have been there. I felt dignity come back to him. He isn’t this sick person that can’t take care of himself anymore. He is a whole man again. He’s not trapped in that body filled with disease and pain.”

I began to cry again, but these were tears of joy. My dad was free, and I didn’t have to worry about him anymore. He wasn’t in pain, and he wasn’t scared! Death had given him his pride back and taken him out of a world of pain and shame. The cell doors had been opened, and he was free from that prison of a body. Death had given him freedom, and because of that, I was happy to let him go. ❖

## LIVING SCULPTURE

LYNDA HEIDEN • ADMINISTRATIVE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT, LINCOLN



# OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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**Sonia Arellano** is lucky enough to come from a supportive and caring family. She is determined and ambitious and has many dreams and goals for her future. She also has a unique “motor”—her daughter—that keeps her going each day of her life. Her beautiful daughter is the subject of her photograph “Pretty as a Picture.”

**Phyllis Arth** has learned that parenting her children, now college students, involves standing back and being a lot quieter, and she finds it odd to be outside “The Loop” instead of creating and shaping it. She does wish her children would care for the cat, though, so she can travel the world with her new independence.

**Jim Baker** is a PC gamer, a webcomic nerd, and a D&D player (one of us! one of us!). Currently preparing for a B.A. in English, he spends most of his spare time playing computer games with roommates and friends, doing homework, or playing in tabletop RPG campaigns. He has loved the humanities since he was a child and enjoys singing, dancing, acting—and watching actual professionals sing, dance, and act.

**Kyle Barnes** loves to write, read, and sing and is a huge Stephen King fan. She is a dedicated mother to five fur babies—two of them arriving after she wrote “My Kids” for *Illuminations*. One of the new arrivals is a beautiful white cat with one blue eye and one yellow eye that she and her husband rescued from the street about a year ago; the other is a Goldendoodle that weighs easily 100 pounds at only 18 weeks.

**James Barnett** loves animals; in fact, he has an exotic pets license and can own anything but a big cat. He specializes in monkeys. James is also a photographer—go to <http://picsbyjames.blogspot.com> to see more of his work!

**Taylor Bartel** is from Kansas City, KS, and will be moving back there to continue his education after SCC. He loves playing guitar and watching the show *First 48*. An avid reader, he prefers a good book to a huge party with all his friends.

**Tayden Bundy** is currently on the path to obtain a degree in English and plans to transfer to Doane. An avid reader and writer, Tayden also enjoys camping and watching football.

**Rebecca Burt** is a Life Sciences instructor at the Beatrice Campus. She loves teaching SCC students and also enjoys traveling, bicycling, spending time in nature, and reading. Though she is an admitted “left brained” person, she strives to explore creativity through photography and, most recently, through ZenDoodling.

**Teresa Burt** says that curiosity and interest in human nature, as well as things in nature, inspire her creativity. In fact, one of her favorite pastimes is to simply “be” in nature.

**Miranda Carlson** is a returning student to SCC and plans to transfer to UNL for a degree in elementary education. She has two children, ages five and two, and she loves photography and reading. She used to hate writing until her composition instructor, Debra Johnson, helped her gain confidence; now she enjoys writing, as well! Miranda also loves being outdoors and spending time with her family.

**Maria Sanchez Castillo** has always loved art and enjoys making things with her hands; she is most fond of drawing.

**Dawn Clover** absolutely loves photography! She normally shoots wildlife and buildings, but she’s started to branch out to do maternity, family, and end-of-life shoots. Dawn is an Administrative Assistant I for the Business department.

**Darren Croteau** is a single dad trying to live in a land of no family or support structure. He’s in the Surgical Technology program at SCC.

**Sundos Elias** came to the U.S. as a refugee. She speaks Arabica, Kurdish, Turkish, and English and was eager to share her experiences with *Illuminations* readers.

**Samantha Elliott** is just a small-town girl attempting to be successful in life while not being afraid to try new things. She's a student in SCC's Nursing program.

**Amber Gamez** has three awesome kids who rock her world. After being a stay-at-home mom for eight years, she made the decision to return to school to work toward a degree in Early Childhood Education with the hopes of becoming a Special Education teacher. When she's not studying, Amber loves baking cupcakes and cinnamon rolls from scratch using her amazing grandma's recipes.

**Elizabeth George** is an outspoken and straight-to-the-point woman. A survivor for most of her life, she is grateful for every experience as a chance to learn. She enjoys writing, which helps her find her voice, and she loves God; church is her second home.

**Robyn Graiver** has been married for four years to her husband David, and they have two fur children, Shogun (a Golden Retriever) and Lyoto (a Siamese cat). Robyn's guilty pleasure is custard from Culver's, and she's attempting to learn self-control. She currently works as a home health aide and enjoys being able to socialize with people and make a difference in the community.

**Trevor Gray** wrote his essay, "Leadership by Example," for his SCC leadership class. He is currently an undeclared student.

**Lauren Greenwood** believes you are never alone when you have a camera in your hand. When she's not engaged in photography, she works as an Instructional Designer on the Lincoln campus.

**Richard Hadley** is a speech instructor on the Lincoln campus and enjoys the witty observations of life.

**Nancy Hagler-Vujovic** is a fan of pets, books, plants, and chocolate. She is an art instructor on the Beatrice campus.

**Ryan Harrington** met his wife when he was 16 and married her when he was 21. They have no children of the human persuasion, but they do have fur and feathered babies. Ryan used to be a chef, but he's now pursuing a new path in the information technology field. As a product of the '70s and '80s, he is a relentless Fanboy of the *Star Wars* saga.

**Ashley Heckman** believes that a picture is worth a thousand words, and that's why taking photos is a beautiful thing. She has enjoyed photography since she was 15, and she finds every angle to be a journey of capturing the excitement of life. Ashley is in the Medical Assisting program and wants to help others find their joy of living.

**Lynda Heiden** is the mother of three sons, two of whom attended SCC. She enjoys traveling, photography, scrapbooking, and genealogy. An Administrative Executive Assistant at SCC, she has worked at SCC for over 36 years.

**Crystal Higgins** has taught at SCC for 32 years in the Practical Nursing department. She has always loved the history of Nebraska, and quilts and crafts let her make a little history of her own. Her "Crystal's Barn Quilt" was created as part of the Homestead National Monument's "Quilt Discovery Experience." She chose red, white, and blue in honor of her son, John, who is in the Army. The quilt block hangs in her house—since she doesn't have a barn!

**Rachel Hollenbeck** loves cameras, family time, travel, lavender lemonade, any project that includes paper, the five wonderful children she nannies, old movies, and meaningful conversations. She is 22 years old and an avid reader and history lover, which leads her to regularly getting lost in books and coming up with her own stories. Rachel enjoys serving at her church where she teaches and sings with kids about Jesus. She is very thankful to have her two sisters, ages 18 and 6, who stretch her patience, encourage her to be herself, and make her laugh every day.

**Ingrid Holmquist** graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with her Bachelor's in Journalism. She majored in Broadcast and minored in Spanish and English. She is fascinated by the Spanish culture and language, gets fired up about human rights issues, and has a passion for multimedia storytelling. She hopes to eventually use her journalistic skills to create human interest pieces, investigative works, and human rights stories.

**Erica Holtry** is a single mother of two wonderfully imaginative and quirky boys. She's studying medical assisting, but at her core, she's a word nerd. Quirky herself, Erica is also the undisputed Queen of the Chuck Taylors.

**Blaine Kinnan's** most precious prize in life is his daughter, Harper, whom he named after his favorite writer, Harper Lee. He also loves Hershey's chocolate syrup in his coffee.

**Ellen Kratzer** enjoys baking, thrift shopping, and chocolate, in addition to writing. She was motivated to write her entertaining story, "The Prickly Pair," by a deadline in class.

**Cathy Leverett** graduated from SCC in December of 2010 and started working at the Entrepreneurship Center in October of 2010 as an Administrative Assistant/Secretary. Cat has written poetry and journals most of her life. When she least expects it, like a pop from a toaster, she is surprised by inspiration and must write it out. Transplanted from Little Rock, AR, she is proud of having been a non-traditional student and hopes to bring a touch of Southern charm to the SCC environment each day.

**Anna Loden** works as a nurse at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital and lives in Lincoln with her dog, her two cats, and her boyfriend Patrick, who makes life an adventure.

**Makenzie London** is funny, creative, and outgoing, and she loves to draw and play softball. "Red" was created as an assignment for her drawing class.

**Dylan Lyness** is an avid bicycling enthusiast, hiker, and nature lover. He also enjoys taking pictures whenever he goes on adventures.

**Nathan Mosier** is a fun, creative film student. He enjoys watching and making films, playing guitar, and listening to music like Nirvana and the Beatles. Nathan plans on majoring in film studies and minoring in either sociology or psychology at UNL.

**Jodi Nelson** is a registered nurse and is married with two boys, one dog, three cats, and any number of fish—depending on the day. Her guilty pleasure is buying and using new writing instruments.

**Shannon Nielsen** is 44 years old and just now going back to school. Shannon would choose Diet Coke over Pepsi and anything salty over chocolate. She loves outdoor activities, including running, shooting, hunting, and fishing. She also enjoys activities with her kids and particularly enjoys watching them play sports. Shannon has served in the military for 26 years and has nine more to go. She will try anything, but she must have caffeine and her mascara on.

**John Page** is a disabled veteran who is optimistic, fun-loving, and good-natured. He enjoys science fiction and video games.

**Danul Patterson** sees himself as an antiquated, hopelessly romantic, talented hack playing at writing, but he would give it up in an instant for the right to live moderately well and to love and be loved in return. "The Awakening of Mrs. Henry Owens" sprang from a reflection on Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour."

**Genni Pearce's** long-term goal is to own her own dinner theater and to stage performances of plays by students. Her dream, of course, is to work on Broadway on or off the stage. Ever since she can remember, writing has been a favorite pastime.

**Brandon James Poppert** loves to read. He also enjoys the outdoors and exploring. A member of the Manufacturing Engineering program, he is 18 years old and still has an active imagination.

**Wayne Rea** has dabbled in writing, drawing, and photography all his life, never focusing on one for long. His return to school has awakened his creative side again. Wayne is a student in the Motorcycle Technology program.

**Kent Reinhard** is an instructor of Physics and Astronomy at SCC who admits that spending a lot of time outside watching the sky treats him to some great artwork.

**Dominique L. Richards** is an uplifting spirit that draws people in. She takes pride in all she does and is a self-motivator who believes change starts within. According to those around her, Dominique is outspoken, dedicated, flamboyant, dynamic, enthusiastic, and outgoing. You can see her when she's coming because she shines like a light!

**Marie Rief** is the youngest of seven children. She enjoys reading when she has the time and loves going on walks with her Sheltie, Dante.

**Jordyn Riha** is above all and absolutely a writer, book lover, family girl, animal lover, and nerd. She works at the Lincoln Children's Zoo and plans to be a zookeeper someday. In fact, her heroes growing up were Steve Irwin and her mom. When she's not tending animals, Jordyn loves to camp, fish, explore, read, watch movies, hike, and spend entire days binging on TV series.

**Hope Rose** is a woman who loves to make art, write creatively, and work at building her homemade soap company.

**Donna Salas** was born and raised in Scottsbluff where her mom still lives. She has two older brothers, Adrian and Daniel, and a large extended family. She recently married her amazing wife after having been together for four years. They have two fur babies, Dexter, a yellow lab, and Armani, a Bishon. Donna is currently in the CIT program at SCC but has yet to narrow down a focus.

**Tonya Schroeder** loves to paint and write and is inspired by anything creative. She painted "Portrait of Our Souls" as a tribute to her changing family; "Lost in Time" was an imaginative plea for more time; and "Souls Carried Away" was inspired by the novel *The Things They Carried*.

**Thomas See** is a 32-year-old non-traditional student pursuing a degree in Automotive Technology. He hopes one day to restore a classic muscle car.

**Clifton Smith** considers himself a "Calibraskan," having spent the majority of his years in either California or Nebraska. He is a contract paralegal by trade and has been writing creatively since grade school. Apart from writing, his loves include reading and the natural world.

**Heather Smith** has loved art since she was a little girl, and she has always wanted to show others what she sees. After photographing an alleyway, she decided to draw it because of the interesting perspective – resulting in her detailed drawing, "The Secret Alleyway."

**Kasandra Thompson** would like to live in South Korea and practice graphic design. She is currently learning the Japanese and Korean languages and loves to draw and write.

**Victor Thompson** says that since he's been a kid, he's loved to write. In fact, when he was a little tyke, he tired of watching *Barney* and *Teletubbies* and would pop in *Hooked on Phonics* tapes instead. Victor currently has two books in the works: one book of poetry, which will have 125 poems when it is finished, and a novel currently standing at twelve chapters (and the plot still thickens). Victor looks forward to pursuing a career as an author and a reveler of epics.

**Chelsea Tisdale** is a LARPer—a Live Action Role Play-er. All across the world, thousands of people get together on the weekends with plate armor and swords to beat the devil out of their friends and acquaintances—and she is one of them. When she's not slaying dragons, Chelsea is a student in the Academic Transfer program.

**Erez Trainin** is West Tel-Aviv born and raised, but it was in California that he spent most of his days. He writes:

Some haikus are good  
Sometimes they are just a name  
I'm Erez Trainin

**Trang Tran** is from Vietnam and has been in the U.S. for six years. She loves college at SCC – particularly her math and science classes.

**Lanny Tunks** is an artist and dabbling guitarist who learned about *Illuminations* through a poster at SCC. When asked about his motivation for creating his beautifully detailed drawings, Lanny responds, “I’m an artist, and that’s kind of what artists do... create stuff.”

**Kylie Vogler** plays softball at SCC and loves drawing and painting. Her art instructor encouraged her to submit her intricate collage drawing to *Illuminations*.

**Christel Wiggan** has been in an identity crisis ever since she realized what one was. Still, she tends to live in a comfortable, melancholy fog. She does her best to be raw all the time and is sarcastic, overly analytical, artistic, and human. Everything she is comes from three words: love, art, and God.

**Leah Weber** is a passionate writer and dreamer. She likes to say that she has “ink in her veins.” She is going into the Medical Assisting program and is a dedicated member of SCC’s Student Senate.

**Tiffany Wendland** loves to write and take photographs, and her child is her world. He keeps her smiling and sorta fills that empty space left by her sister’s death.

**Skylar Whitmore** is in the Academic Transfer program and created her artwork for class.

**Elizabeth Williams** is the mother of one child and one dog and godmother to seven children in one family and two in another. Many people call her “Big Mama”! Elizabeth and her daughter attend SCC together. She has always wanted to be a writer, but she wasn’t sure she had it in her until she took the class for which she wrote her published essay.

**Jamaica Wilson** loves creating things with her hands and making something from nothing. Her ceramic totem represents her strongest qualities: wisdom (the owl), playfulness (the monkey), and strength (the mountain lion).

**Laura Madeline Wiseman** is the author of 20 books and chapbooks and the editor of *Women Write Resistance: Poets Resist Gender Violence*. Her recent books are *Drink, Wake, Some Fatal Effects of Curiosity and Disobedience*, *The Bottle Opener*, and the collaborative book *The Hunger of the Cheeky Sisters* with artist Lauren Rinaldi. Her work has also appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Margie*, *Mid-American Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *Calyx*.

**Destiny Worthey** is in the Business program at SCC and created her artwork for her art class.



Time kills buildings as much as it kills people. The shattered windows and the empty space felt crowded. Even years later, it smelled of hard work and sweat. Light came in every crack and hole like water in a sinking ship, and I loved the way the light played in the room. I preferred to come to the silos during the day; I loved the way the place looked, almost sad and broken and empty inside, but beautiful in all its mysterious ways. I often thought maybe people could be that way, too.

*Brandon James Poppert,  
"Empty Building, Empty Soul"*

In small intervals across the kitchen table, he shared the mayhem of that time spent overseas, revealing sounds that echoed through the night and images of an astonishing orange glow that burst in the sky so close that he could taste the heat when he opened his mouth to speak. He described the repetitious whizzing past his ears, like flies that pricked his skin and shot a sting of pain from the surface of his sunburnt neck down into the nerves that jolted his consciousness into awakening. The smell of death lingered in the fields and wafted up from the sticky breeze that weaved through the trees. The constant loitering fear of stepping into the wrong spot, making a noise audible to the wrong person, or making a mistaken decision loomed over him. He achieved no rest lying in a shallow trench. His eyes never fully fell shut. He kept them alert. He kept them alive. *He stayed alive*

*Tayden Bundy,  
"Linger"*



The alien's opaque helmet turned toward me. A single pinpoint of crimson light glowed dully at its crest. So far as I could tell, the helmet was made entirely of a matte black alloy. The armor was similarly flat and nondescript, sharpened and angular at the joints

but relatively light-looking, made of thin layers of some metal I'd already seen deflect bullets at point-blank range. Lights blinked at his elbows and knees. In the smoke and dust-dimmed light of the half-wrecked hallway, I could make out a single symbol etched into the breastplate, a circle bisected by a stylized shape not unlike the Nike swoosh. I considered reaching for a gun, but I knew that was pointless. I considered trying a hand-to-hand fight, but even if that armor didn't have strength assists, it was still a combat-trained alien in a suit of super dense metal armor against unarmored, non-combat-trained me. I stood there, arms thrown protectively wide, staring at that alien and waiting to find out what one of those superheated projectiles would feel like burning its way through my midsection.

*Jim Baker,  
"Not Enough"*

I savor the small dark yard apple, juicy as early summer, the fruit, that edible purple, from the flower of shrub trees, star-shaped white clusters in the thousands.

Every current of sweetness, each mouthful sustains, overflowing these crinkled paper cups.

*Laura Madeline Wiseman,  
"Charms to Fashion a Magic House"*

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