

illuminations

Volume 13 • 2012



lluminations

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

Volume 13
2012

“In art as in love,
instinct is enough.”

Anatole France

 Southeast community college



CREATIVITY LIVES HERE.

2009

Cameron Koll, "Baby Girl"

Winner of the CCHA Merit Award in Fiction

2010

Illuminations

3rd place winner of Best Literary Magazine,
CCHA, Central Division

2011

Katrina Bennett, "Brown Walls"

Winner of the CCHA 1st place Non-Fiction Award

2011

Illuminations

1st place winner of Best Literary Magazine,
CCHA, Central Division

Front cover image, "Color Whirl," by Deborah Hull and
back cover image, "Feeling at Home," by Emilio Franso

ILLUMINATIONS VOLUME 13

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

Illuminations is published in the spring of each year. Submissions are accepted year-round from SCC students, faculty, and staff. Submission forms and guidelines can be found at thehub.southeast.edu (search for “*Illuminations*”) or in campus LRCs. Submissions or questions should be directed to:

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PRIZE WINNERS

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

PROSE WINNERS

Grand Prize: Anna Loden, Collection (“Catching Corbie,” “Herding My Thoughts”): “Wow—these are great!” was the simple, but enthusiastic response of one team member on reading Anna’s “Journal Entries.” “As a reader, I felt insight into a very different world in these entries,” she continued. Team members enjoyed the pastoral setting and original voice of narration in Anna’s writing. Of “Catching Corbie,” another team member wrote, “Clear point; critical thinking; creativity; writing toward an audience; clear voice and purpose; fresh word choice; interesting situation—this one was good from beginning to end.”



Runner-Up: Nichole Reynolds, “Copenhagen”

Nichole’s narrative, “Copenhagen,” engaged Editorial Team members with its humor, smooth narrative, and skillful characterization. “This one made me laugh and put me smack dab in the moment,” one team member wrote. Another team member commented, “Nichole’s story put me in mind of a country song that works. You have everything here – the excellent writing, the characters that breathe, and the bit of irreverence in the narrator’s voice that ties it all together. Love it!”

POETRY WINNERS

Grand Prize: Mary Ann Partin, Collection (“Blinding Fire,” “John’s Pass Boardwalk”): Editorial Team members described Mary Ann’s poems as “knowing,” “intuitive,” and “wise—the mature creation of a thoughtful mind.” One member wrote of “John’s Pass Boardwalk,” “I like the imagery...the way that memories, nostalgia, yearning are grounded in concrete actions and observations. I also like the language, the unexpected sound and rhythm combinations.”



Runner-Up: Kristyna Holz, “Grandma’s Dishes”
Kristyna’s prose poem challenged and unsettled members of the Editorial Team, and for that, they were gratified. “It’s not often that a student poem disarms me with its honesty and stark imagery,” one team member wrote. “Kristyna’s poem forced me to slow down, to bathe in her words, and to accept the ultimate emotional frustration of the poet. Great work.”

ARTWORK WINNERS

Grand Prize: Deborah Hull, Collection (“Color Whirl,” “Interlude,” “The Mating Dance,” “Passage”): Deb’s striking collection of color and black and white photographs impressed the Editorial Team as both artistically fresh and compositionally perfect. One team member wrote of her dazzling cover photo, “Color Whirl,” “I appreciate the risk taken to play with the movement in the background while focusing on the feet. There seems to be a message here—reflection and stillness among chaos.”



Runner-Up: Melissa Buckbee, Collection (“Julia,” “One Cool Dude,” “Still Life,” “The Workers Are Few”): Editorial Team members were impressed with Melissa’s eclectic use of technique and media, including acrylic on canvas, graphite on Bristol board, and pastels to create her stunning artwork. “Not only is each piece skillfully done,” one team member wrote, “but there’s a saturation of heart and spirituality; each one has a soul.”



CATCHING CORBIE

ANNA LODEN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE PROSE AWARD

When I was prompted to write about Ernest Hemingway's definition of courage as "grace under pressure," I had trouble thinking of examples in my life. Grace, let alone grace "under pressure," is not an everyday quality. Then I remembered Corbie's great escape. Just this April, I was home alone on the three acres at Cortland's eastern edge I share with my parents and two of my brothers. I was trying to get my homework done before making dinner when our chest-high, black Angus heifer, Corbie, got loose and headed for Highway 77, three blocks from our house. I snatched up a bucket of corn and my mud-boots and ran. I was the youngest of the dozen people—everyone on the east side of Cortland not at work or school—trying to catch her, but Corbie is our cow; I was responsible.

Corbie trotted mischievously across lawns, through gardens, over a sand volleyball court, and finally a waste field just before the highway at a pace quick enough to stay ahead of everyone. I could hear the traffic on 77 as I jogged along behind, weighed down by my heavy boots. Diane, the aging trucker's tiny wife, followed at a distance, carrying a white gallon bucket of cracked corn—futilely, as Corbie turned up her nose at the bribe and trotted off again. The village handyman, Norv—recently recovered from a heart attack—, did his best to herd her using his big white pickup, and the middle-aged woman in the velvet lounge pants who'd told me Corbie was loose walked behind, barefoot.

For six blocks, we worked frantically to keep her away from the highway, but when she made a break for it, she got ahead of us. I scrambled to head her off. No luck. I could only watch when she stepped onto the shoulder, contemplating the other side. A car whizzed past her nose—I could feel the draft—on her blind side, startling her enough that she backed away from the highway. That was the worst moment (imagining how Corbie might look after being hit by a car, imagining telling Dad what had happened), but not the only bad one.

The moment after I tried to loop a dog's leash around her neck, she confirmed my doubts by taking off again. I hit the ground with a jarring thud, and she dragged me on my back along the gravel bike path (Corbie, while small for her age, weighs four times what I do) until I lost my grip on the leash and

had to let go. The moment we had her almost past the last house on the south edge of town and headed safely for home, she eluded me once again and turned into a back lot full of farm junk. She was tired and thirsty by then, though, and we surrounded her in the front yard. The handyman drove off to his handyman's lair for a good sturdy rope. I began worrying about getting water for her.

Corbie was now hot, tired, thirsty, and beginning to limp, and she wanted to know what I was going to do about it. My neighbors kept her in while I began to hunt through the back for a water spigot. A cobbled-together coop contained some well-kept chickens—was there a hose to them, or did their keeper carry water in a bucket? The faucet, when I found it, ran dry. Norv returned with his rope, a good, sturdy noose, and I abandoned the question of water to begin stalking my heifer, assisted by the barefoot woman, whose name turned out to be Pat. Her grown son had shown up in support, adding his sedan to my squad of vehicular cavalry.

In the end, the question of watering Corbie was solved simultaneously with the question of catching her. She had reached the next yard over and lurked in the shade while I assessed the situation. This homeowner was home, but on the other hand, Mr. Kohout was someone I knew; he would probably let us get away with a lot in his back yard. Diane, the tiny woman, had gone home and returned with her trucker husband and his pickup in tow, adding to my cavalry. So, Mr. Kohout sent his son out with a lovely bucket of water for Corbie. I tied Norv's rope securely to a tree and set the noose out flat on the ground. Then I coaxed Corbie with the water, allowing her just enough to sharpen her thirst until I set the bucket down inside the noose. This time when she came to drink, I slipped the rope easily over her head. She fought the rope, pulling against it, which was why I'd tied it to such a sturdy young tree. Corbie was ours!

Through all that, through terror and frustration and exhausted despair, I didn't break down. I failed, I fell, I hurt, but I stood back up and smiled and kept going, and I never cried. On the way home, I took a survey on everyone's favorite kind of cookie. Afterwards, when Corbie was home safe, and after I finished my homework, and after Dad and my brothers constructed the new maximum-security cow pen, after absolutely everything was over, I made cookies for everyone who helped. I delivered them myself, grateful for the assistance of my neighbors and for the grace I was granted in the time of my need. 

JOHN'S PASS BOARDWALK

MARY ANN PARTIN • CRIMINAL JUSTICE
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE POETRY AWARD

Listen to the seagulls
and watch the chartered
fishing boats go out.
Morning people fixing coffee,
only half aware the day has dawned.
 Sleepy morning village,
 sights and sounds are new,
 yet I am old and know you
 from a time so long ago.
 The air is brisk;
 I walk with hands stuffed
 in my pockets,
 hearing echoed footsteps on the boards,
 and they are mine.

The sun that comes and goes,
the damp, the spray,
the aftermath, the fantasy...
of fires cooling
in their stoves and rainy days
and waves that are the violent
partners in a war
that I can only witness.

 Sky so dark, so blue, so clear,
 marked by the stars
 that old men of the sea
 depended on.

 And the chowder cooking in their pots
 and lobsters steaming on their traps
 and shops with doors unopened
 'til the season starts.

Oh, sleepy morning village,
what you bring to me
is more than here and now
and more than yesterday;
it's some tomorrow I have yet to know
when I can visit Provincetown again.

HOLMES LAKE RISING

EMILIO FRANSO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



FOUND

MELISSA BUCKBEE • ASSOCIATE DEGREE NURSING

Once on top of time, God saw his face and knit him together,
formed perfect for His purpose,
history written in color-box fingerprint stains on the wall.
A tiny heart sees his Savior.
A tiny mouth sings His name.
Moments meet years; a boy now young man
greet the world with a smile.
She shows him a cross with her fingers crossed,
and he sticks salvation in his pocket for another time—
his mind running fast on a cold jail floor.
A war overseas breaks a path through the weeds,
and the young man becomes a soldier.
In rain-soaked boots on crimson-stained earth,
his head begins to hurt—
a diagnosis cancer,
and he reaches for his pocket.
Shades of God's promise rise from the end
of a cigarette he's too weak to smoke.
"Am I too far? If you're still there,
God, please save me."
A life given for his country now given to the Lord,
and the soldier meets his Savior.
Back home, sitting in the back row singing,
a girl with golden hair meets his eyes.
A mirror to his soul, he sees himself a man complete,
and history is written in stained-glass shadows on the wall.
Lover takes Beloved,
and the soldier becomes a husband.
Cadmium yellow shines over the sunrise;
he becomes a father—a garden planted
by the Creator and watered by His grace.
All he ever needed found
in a kitchen table prayer.
Strokes of paint cover time's canvas
in hues of red and Paine's grey.
A bandage is changed, and a prayer is softly made.
"Lord, let me live to see the girls grow

into the women You've created them to be.”

Thirty years and an answered prayer later,
Truth speaks to him through autumn leaves
of a spring morning when he will rise
to his Savior to a day of forever.

His purpose fulfilled,
a life lived for Christ.

One hand in the hand of his Savior,
the other holding tight to his Beloved, his angel.
Her tear-stained lips whisper permission to let go.
His spirit exhales and blinks in shining light.

Every Hope and Faith realized
in the time it takes to smile.

No more pain. No more fear.

No more disease. No more death.

He stands before his Lord—his Savior, King, and Friend—
and worships tall and strong in his Father's open arms.

Creator God speaks of his life's talent continued,
and in his hands he finds a gift:

a palette of nine colors of the fruit of God's Spirit
with which to paint Eternity's skies.

Paint brush in his hand—

Praise to his Lord forever.



ONE COOL DUDE

MELISSA BUCKBEE
ASSOCIATE DEGREE NURSING
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP
ARTWORK AWARD

HERDING MY THOUGHTS

JOURNAL ENTRIES

ANNA LODEN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE PROSE AWARD

MY CHOICE

I've never had much choice in what I wear. According to the family dress code, "Ladies dress modestly." That means long skirts and high necklines, and that was that. I never really minded being unable to wear a miniskirt or a tube top (it's probably for the best), but I always wanted to wear pants.

Don't get me wrong—I like skirts. In summer, a skirt is cool and comfortable, swishing around my legs. I can flap my skirt at recalcitrant sheep or carry the morning's eggs in it. A good skirt is comfortable, useful, and pretty.

However, trousers have their own advantages. Pants are warmer in winter; I like to layer knit pants under my garage-sale Army pants, and if Dad's not around, I don't have to wear a skirt over them. Pants don't get in the way when I want to climb a fence or chase a sheep, and I like the big pockets on my Army pants—though they snag on things like a skirt, sometimes.

I want to be able to choose which I wear. Skirts and pants each have disadvantages, and I'd hate to be limited to one or the other. Skirts are cold in winter; pants are hot in summer. Skirts snag on things and get in the way, but pants don't give the extra fabric for holding kittens, hiding a puppy, or tenting over my feet when mosquitoes come around. Skirts rarely have pockets, but things slide out of pants pockets if I sit the wrong way. I feel pretty, feminine, and respectable in a skirt, but in trousers I am an adventurer, prepared to climb a tree, battle a berserk billy goat, or forge a trail through the wilderness—or at least the south pasture.

The dress code has gradually relaxed in the past year or two. My family still doesn't like it when I wear pants, but it's been a while since anyone harassed me about them. My choices are still somewhat restricted, but I'm on my way to freedom. Someday, my choice of clothes will be entirely up to me.

IT'S COMPLICATED

Define “boyfriend.”

Her male friend? Male friend with romantic potential? Male friend who seems interested, and she’s interested in him, but they’re trying to get to know each other slowly before saying anything? Male friend who’s been emailing her every day for five months? Will he qualify as a boyfriend when she gets up the courage to type “Love” before she signs her name? Maybe when she decides to go ahead and send that *hug* even though she knows he won’t be sure how to react?

“Boyfriend” is commonly defined as someone one is dating...but then, what does “dating” mean? Trying to visit the same church whenever possible just to see each other? Arranging for him to drive down sometime and help her shear her sheep? Emailing her helpful links to utterly ridiculous cars for sale just to make her laugh? Or is it going out for dinner and a movie? Wouldn’t that disqualify Internet dating? Is it Internet dating—all those emails, but never seeing each other—if the couple originally met face-to-face? Maybe “dating” just means “hanging out as boyfriend and girlfriend.”

But, thus extended, the meaning becomes even trickier to pin down. Is a boyfriend someone who returns romantic interest, sharing an understanding that both parties are interested? “I like you, you like me, so we’re dating.” Is a statement required to seal the deal? What if two people like each other and consider themselves a couple...but never state the relationship? It doesn’t invalidate the relationship.

But how far can tacit understanding go before it becomes silent misunderstanding? Maybe he really is only interested in being friends. Maybe he only wants someone to discuss sheep with. And cars. And work, and school. Building fences, and shearing, and lambing, and whether she’ll be at his church this week...or next...or ever?

HERDING

Herding sheep is tedious at best, requiring much attention but little thought. I refer, of course, not to the process of sending sheep where one wants them to go, but to moving the flock to supervised grazing in an open pasture.

Depending on the nature of the pasture, the activity may be either demanding or relaxing; if the flock is grazing, say, the backyard, well away from the street, the neighbor’s cornfield, and Mom’s vegetable garden, the shepherd

and her dog may sit quietly and watch her ewes grazing peacefully. If, on the other hand, the tempting patch of lush grass being grazed is by the street, with a clear view across the street to the neighbor's latest attempt at a vegetable garden—that requires unblinking vigilance from a strategic position.

Ideal conditions are good grass with a barrier between the sheep and any young fruit trees, tender pea plants, ripening cornfields, or anything else that may tempt that one ornery old ewe. Mother of half the flock and leader of them all, if she goes to investigate Mom's newly-planted tomato seedlings, the entire flock will follow, and anything not eaten will be trampled in the process of getting the sheep away again. In other words, the best place to herd is the pasture that's already half-fenced anyway. Otherwise, herding will be an hour of frantic running one way and another, heading the flock away from first the orchard, then the road, wishing all the while for a dog with more sheep-sense than Lark, and no time to think about anything else.

LARK

Lark, my Australian Shepherd, was supposed to be trained as a sheepdog. Instead, she is the most pampered pet I have ever possessed. Almost three years old, she has been sharing my bed since I bought her in August of '08. To see her is to worship her; her cuteness, transmuted by maturity to beauty, makes slaves of all who see her. Her markings follow the “black tricolor” pattern: black body, with white feet, chest, and muzzle, with tan patches on the borders between the black areas and most of the white. If, therefore, I imagine that her base color is white, Lark looks as though she's wearing a black coat with brown cuffs and hems. The hood, however, is more like a mask: a trail of white travels up between her eyes and over her head, ending in a streak across the side of her neck that looks as though someone slashed her with a paintbrush. The analogy breaks down pretty thoroughly around her head, really. She has tan eyebrows and freckles below her eyes with a black spot smack on the bridge of her muzzle. Her lips are also black, but the pink of her skin shows through between her black lips and white muzzle, so she looks very feminine.

With all the attention she gets, one would expect her to be horribly spoiled, but it's not so. Lark comes when I call her and usually stays; she'll stay off the bed until I'm finished changing the sheets because she knows that's what I want; she does her undisciplined best to help with the sheep and has mastered such basic ideas as “Goats Do Not Belong in the Garden.” She protects me enthusiastically from the billy goat on the far side of the fence and will probably figure out eventually that I want her close by when I take feed through the

ram's pasture. Lark knows the names of everyone in the family. If I tell her, "Go to Owen," she obeys and slinks over to my brother. She tends to interpret it as a punishment, though, much like staying and lying down on command. I have no idea why, but her hangdog look is adorable and elicits quantities of petting, reassurance, and praise.

Lark isn't all sweetness, though. She likes to play rough, and when I first wear long sleeves in the fall, she's overjoyed: she can play rougher! She knows she can bite harder when I'm wearing gloves, and Lark takes full advantage of this when she's in a fierce mood. If I get too rough, or if Lark doesn't feel like playing anymore, her ears and tail drop, and she twines between my knees for petting. If she's really worried about something (if I'm angry or Dad is yelling), she comes and asks to be picked up, rising on her hind legs until I put down an arm. She'll plant her forefeet on my arm, brace her head under my chin, and pull herself up until I can get my other arm around her hindquarters. She's near 50 pounds, and I can't hold her for very long, but it makes Lark feel better—although sometimes she just wants a lift over the fence. Most of the time she gets herself over, however. Before she was a year old, she was sailing over three-foot fences, and now and then she'll take something taller. I'm glad we don't need to fence Lark in because we've taught her all the ways of getting past a fence!

Before she learned about gates and gaps, over and under, she learned not to go in the street without a leash and that she wasn't supposed to go off to the ballpark without me. She does wander off into the cornfields behind us, and if she finds a 'possum, I have to go get her. She stands and barks at the things, as with cats, and hates to turn her back on such beasts. I never knew we had so many 'possums before Lark began to find them, and every single time she does, it's up to me to catch my agile little dog, by hook or by crook, and get her home again. I wouldn't mind if she killed the stupid things—'possums eat chicken happily—but no, she leaves that up to me, and I'm not going to go around killing dumb animals just because my dog thinks they don't belong within a mile of us.

Lark does need to learn to herd. I need her help, and it would give her a job to do. However, whether she's useful or just company, she's a wonderful dog. I'm glad to have her, and I've never regretted buying this so-called sheepdog.

BARNCATS

“Want a kitten?” I call it the cat-owner’s reflex, and it develops immediately after the first litter. They’re adorable, those kittens, but we know they can’t stay. If one litter stays, what happens next year? At least three litters of new kittens will need homes. Will they stay, too?

For nearly ten years, we have been completely unable to get rid of our kittens. Chloe, Cassie, Tiger, Lou, and Patricia: the mother cats—wild or tame—had at least one litter every year, and we could never get rid of any of them. The kittens were all the same color, usually orange or brown tabby-striped; they suffered from goopy eyes (pinkeye, Grandma says), and we tried to give them away—a tactic doomed to failure. It was impossible. The population of barn cats, most of them wild, was out of control.

But a few years ago, we had a breakthrough. Court and Amanda, calico sisters abandoned by their mother, produced beautiful kittens, mysteriously immune to goopy eyes. Some were still orange or striped, but others had pretty black patches, soft mousy gray coats, or vivid calico patterns. All we had to do was post pictures on Craigslist with a small “re-homing fee,” and responses poured in. At last—we could keep the population down!

Last year, we slipped, though. Minerva and Miss Quote, a second pair of beautiful sisters, did not go to new homes. Now we have four mothers—and we have yet to spay any of them. In the meantime...want a kitten?

ADVERTISEMENT

For sale	(Please take them!)
Two Saanen wether kids.	(Two utterly useless white goats)
Bottle kids, just weaned.	(They think they’re humans and will nibble or suck on anything and everyone.)
Very friendly!	(Will follow you around, getting in the way and accidentally jabbing you with their horns.)
Pretty smart.	(Can escape any enclosure, up to and including a high-security prison.)
Very cute.	(If all else fails, they’ll charm the guards.)
Would make great pets.	(Your kids will never let you get rid of them.)
Fifty bucks apiece.	(I haven’t been advertising them very long.) 

A FRENCH FRY & TATOR TOTS

TERESA BISSEGGER • CONTINUING EDUCATION

A grammy's little boy,
my French Fry he is called,
my one and only
so I told him
when the brothers came along.

The twins, they were born.
Two more little boys
to fill this Grammy's heart so full.
No baby French Fries—
I promised I would not.
Two little Tator Tots—
that's what I got.



TINY SKATES

KRISTYNA HOLZ
HUMAN SERVICES/
PHYSICAL THERAPY
ASSISTANT

BITTERLY MISSING HOME

ANNIE BOHLING • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

This isn't home—
this is a house.
Our home is sold and separate,
remaining standing where it's been,
familiar but confused,
occupied with new residents
that entered with deservance
and spread like anxious ants,
mowing away all the flowers,
painting my bedroom red,
revealing wooden floors
as we regrettably never did;
our hopes—impeded by busy procrastination—
became their practical ambitions.

I wiggled with curiosity,
envisioning new changes made.
I fidgeted impatiently,
knowing our presence faded.
Only living are the memories,
plenty to make me sad;
created are a new family's stories,
enough to make me mad.

Creeping, I drive slowly
to peer and observe,
allow myself disapproval
to keep my jealousy in reserve.
Fighting, angry words,
knowing judging isn't fair;
stopping thoughts of tears—
admitting the home is theirs.
I'm sure they'll treat it warmly;
I'll leave this monotonous drone.
I simply feel uncomfortable
in the missing of my home.

COPENHAGEN

NICHOLE REYNOLDS • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PROSE AWARD

My palms were sweaty; my knees were weak. My heart was racing, and I had butterflies in the pit of my stomach. He packed that golden and green tin perfectly before handing the tin over to me. The bittersweet scent of wintergreen and tobacco filled the air, and I knew right then that this was the beginning of a long and passionate love affair.

I took my first dip of chewing tobacco when I was 15 years old. My best friend Jenny (also 15), her older brother Micah, and I were sitting on the tailgate of Micah's navy blue 1986 F150 XLT just off of County Road 224—a red dirt road in the middle of Georgia that led nowhere. The summer air was balmy and breezy, and the cicadas sang their summer songs. This day was a perfect late August day. There I was, sun-bleached hair and knobby knees, with my best friend in our matching Waylon Jennings tank tops and cut of Levi jeans, feeling like the world was at our fingertips. Until this day, I never thought twice about dipping. My mama always told me dip would rot my teeth out, and my daddy liked to remind me, often, that I “would never find a boy if I chewed tobacco.” Dipping was filthy, smelly, ugly, and unbecoming of a lady, but I fell for the stuff anyway.

Jenny was my best friend from Eagle Ridge Elementary School. She knew me from top to bottom, inside and out. She was my favorite person to be around and the one person I could share all of my deep, dark secrets with; we were inseparable. Then there was her older brother, Micah. Micah was two years older than I was, and at 17, he seemed so perfect. Micah was rough and tough—a hard-working, all-American boy. He was the type to stand up for kin, a “good ol’ boy.” Micah was a true country boy. My young heart was in love with everything about him, from his shaggy hair to his summer farmer's tan, from his steel blue eyes down to his worn-out Tony Lama boots. He worked on a farm and always smelled of livestock and freshly cut grass, two smells that still make me smile to this day. I would use any excuse I could think of to drag Micah along with Jenny and me when we would make plans. That particular summer night wasn't planned, but that evening would always hold a spot in my heart, would always be my favorite night.

Jenny's family owned a massive amount of land with a pond on the south side of their property. As often as we could, Jenny and I would be out at that pond catching perch and causing trouble. Neither of us was old enough to drive at the time, but we did anyway. One day, Jenny had a brilliant idea. We were going to drive down to the pond by ourselves for the first time. We had everything planned out perfectly. Jenny would sneak into the kitchen from the back porch and grab her father's truck keys from the kitchen counter; we would take off before her folks realized we were gone. She snuck in, snatched the keys to her father's full-size pickup (cleverly named Ol' Red for the fire engine-red paint job and the significant amount of rust along the sides), and tossed the keys my way—we were off.

The thrill of us sneaking was indescribable. Add that to borrowing Ol' Red and driving alone, and we felt unstoppable. I chugged down her winding gravel driveway gingerly at first, a little afraid of the heavy machine I had under my power. Soon enough we were flying down that old dirt road with the windows down and the wind blowing through our hair. We felt so free, so alive.

Jenny screamed, "Faster! Go faster!" I was a speed demon by nature, so I went faster. We were going about 70 miles an hour, having a blast, and singing to the radio when a sudden jerk threw us into a spin. My heart lurched from my chest to my throat instantly, and I swear I felt like we were going to die. We spun around once and halfway around again, ending up partially in a ditch before slowing down. The truck shuddered, sputtered, and finally came to a complete halt. After we realized what had happened, we climbed out, nearly falling to the ground. We stood there looking at each other for quite some time.

With tears in her eyes, Jenny yelled, "What the heck just happened?! What are we gonna do? I'm gonna get in so much trouble, Nicci! You broke my daddy's truck!"

"No I did not! It musta' already been broken! That is not my fault!"

"Course it is! You were the one driving. You drove, so it's all your fault!"

I was irritated with Jenny. How dare she blame me for breaking the truck? I yelled back, "Well, it was your idea to go to the pond. You was the one who stole the keys! Don't be blamin' me for anything—it's your fault!"

We argued for a moment longer about what we were going to do and how we were going to tell her father that we stole the truck and broke down. About ready to cry, I plopped down on the tailgate of that beat-up old Ford when a cloud of dust appeared in the distance. Someone was coming

down the road toward us. We were both so relieved, we felt like screaming “Hallelujah!” Of course, neither of us actually yelled that.

We could hear the music before we could see the truck. Chris Ledoux’s “Dirt and Sweat Cowboy” was blaring from the stereo, and the driver was flying down the road like a bat out of hell. We knew instantly who the driver was. The dust cleared, and I spotted his navy blue F150 XLT, complete with the lift kit, missing left headlight, and dented-up passenger door.

Micah was driving toward us. He slowed to a stop once he recognized Ol’ Red and pulled off in front of our truck. That 370 engine whined and clicked shutting down, and Micah stepped out onto the dirt. The red dust from the road covered his Tony Llamas, and watching him step out of his truck was like watching God appear in a dream. His sandy blond hair covered his forehead underneath an Atlanta Braves ball cap, and he was wearing a green plaid shirt cut off at the sleeves with a pair of worn Wrangler jeans. Those jeans fit him perfectly.

The sun glistened off of his farmer’s tan making him irresistible. “What in the hell are ya’ll doin’ out here? What are ya doin’ so late in the day? Why is Dad’s truck out here? Who was even driving?” He rambled off questions so fast, like an auctioneer.

Jenny explained, “Well, Nicci and me was just driving down to the pond when she broke the truck, and we been sittin’ here ever since. God, you ain’t tellin’ dad, are ya?” Her face grew worried. Micah was silent. He shuffled up to Ol’ Red and popped the hood. Within a few moments, Micah was shaking his head and grinning.

“Ya’ll are foolish! Ya ran out of gas. It ain’t broke down—it just don’t have any fuel in it!”

My mouth dropped open so wide a horsefly could have flown right in. I felt my cheeks heat up, and Jenny just stared at her feet, shuffling them on the ground.

Micah continued, “I can’t believe you stole the truck, ran her dry, and then didn’t even tell me where ya’ll were goin’. I oughtta tell him what you did.”

Jenny was about to plead and beg Micah to keep quiet, but before she could say anything, Micah finished up by saying, “I’ll tell you what, though. This is funny as hell. I ain’t gonna tell dad what you did, but I won’t ever forget this, either. It’s just too damn funny! Besides, you don’t think I never done anything like this before, do you?” and he shook his head.

Micah slammed the hood and walked back to his truck. He reached through the driver's side window, cranked up the stereo, and walked to the back of his truck. He pulled down the tailgate and propped himself on one side of the bed. Micah patted the other side of the bed, inviting us to join him. Jenny and I hopped up next to him. I had to get a running start just to be able to reach. Knowing how much I liked her brother, Jenny let me sit next to Micah.

Time passed as we sat facing west, taking in what daylight was left. The stereo was loud, and we sang along to every song we knew—especially when Hank Williams, Jr., came on (he was our favorite). The sun had almost reached the horizon when Micah reached into his left back pocket and pulled out a tin of Wintergreen Long Cut Copenhagen. Watching him pack the tin, I realized how impressed I was. He held the tin effortlessly with his right thumb and middle finger along the sides and tapped the lid with his index finger with such precision. No one I knew of could snap that can quite like he could. The sound of his fingertips tapping the can played along harmoniously with the ballad playing on the radio. I believe the song was Patsy Cline.

“Ya want some?” was all Micah said to me. He smiled that sweet, sweet country smile, and I just couldn't say no. I had no idea what I was doing as I forced the lid off the can. I tried to imitate the way he had dipped, using my forefinger and my thumb to pinch up the tobacco, but all I got was a few messy flakes that went everywhere. Embarrassed, I looked away.

“Here, let me show ya how to pinch a dip. You take your pointer finger and your thumb like this. Just pinch ‘em together when you pull up, kinda like you're picking up dirt off the ground.”

He handed the can back to me, and I tried again. The second time around was much easier. I had gotten a good pinch. The tobacco between my fingers was moist and dark, and it felt like shredded, wet grass clippings. I turned toward Jenny as I placed the tobacco on my tongue down in-between my lip and gum. Part of me wanted to show Jenny how cool I thought I was, but a larger part of me wanted to hide that messy “I got dip in my teeth and all over my lips because this is my first time dipping” look from Micah.

He tapped me on the shoulder. “Let me see, kiddo.”

I turned to him, and without thinking, I grinned a wide, toothy smile.

Micah smirked, melting my heart, and whispered in my ear, “I sure do like that Copenhagen smile you got there, Nic.”

Micah pecked a kiss on my cheek, and my face burned up.

I don't know if the butterflies that came next were a result of the nicotine overload or that kiss and the words that were whispered in my ear, but I'll never forget that moment. My first real crush introduced me to my first real love: Copenhagen. ✨

DANCER

EMILIO FRANSO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



BLINDING FIRE

MARY ANN PARTIN • CRIMINAL JUSTICE
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE POETRY AWARD

Somewhere,
so deep
I can't find it when I search,
there lives a place of rage,
of fire and fury of blinding light
and searing pain, the place of "wish it were."

Just a weekly visit
to check his vital signs,
temperature and pulse,
his appetite, his mood.
He smiled and told me,
"Suicide is not an option anymore."
Today he wants to savor every minute
and says he'd gladly bargain for more time;
he even wants to taste the dying.
I thought I understood, as if his certainty
could carry me along, and I could feel
his joy in living, his faith in what's to come.
I sat there smiling,
reacting to his mood.

Later,
I struggled with a headache
and knew a restlessness I could not ease.
I'd put aside our talk as if it hadn't happened,
out of sight out of mind,
until I sat to write.
Just a note, and I find I'm crying,
the words blurred by tears
I haven't time to wipe away.

I want to scream; I want the wash of
anger and of hate for things I cannot touch
that continue touching me.
I choke on words unspoken,
mouth wide, but the sounds won't come,
and the fury and the rage erupt until
I'm flying off, a thousand little pieces
in a thousand little corners of a thousand tiny worlds.

And I'm tired,
so very tired,
much too tired to ever sleep.

GROW

ELIZABETH SCHREIBER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



COLOR WHIRL

DEBORAH HULL • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE ARTWORK AWARD



GRANDMA'S DISHES

KRISTYNA HOLZ • HUMAN SERVICES/PHYSICAL THERAPIST ASSISTANT
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP POETRY AWARD

Her arm intertwined with mine as I pulled her inside. The only thing that was keeping me from having her fall was the moon's twinkle that came in through the small window imbedded in the wall above our old dryer.

The boxes on the floor masked a maze for the drunken deflection of her face—boxes of baseball cards from Grandpa, memories of fogged glasses and moldy, covered china.

“It's priceless china.” If it shatters, the memories would be lost forever. My mother was adamant about what Great Grandma used to say—the way every breath was infected with the blue flowers that covered their edges.

Great Grandma used to tell me, “They used to call me Taylor.”
A boy's name, a name that made a mark on her chest.

The night of retrieval—the beard that offered the warmth of a blanket and food after that black Friday—was a moment of hope. The tall dark beard scared her feminine security of weakness and purity.

In return of her bastard baby and a night of warm blankets, the smell of dirty clothes cocooned themselves around each delicate piece of freshly stolen china. Hope of the price tag that marked each plate was one step further to food and clothes. “No rich man could give up money for china, for no guest poor enough would be able to use china for the food they didn't have.”

As the gold glitter rose, the shuffled air still felt like icicles on my skin. The unpaid bill still could not keep me from watching as my mother scrambled up the remaining pieces of the painted blue flowers. The alcohol's spell could not convey the slur of her walking and eventual fall. I watched as the sweat dribbled down her face, along with the neglected glance on numerous rehab pamphlets resting neatly next to the empty bottle of proof.

THE PUMP

ROBERT KLUGE • CAREER COUNSELOR/ASSESSMENT

I shiver.

The morning sun peeks over the hill
and causes me to squint.

The frost clings to my back,
a new, shiny coat on my worn and
weathered iron skeleton.

A duck waddles by, stops, and kisses a
frozen drop of water from my lips.

The farmer's wife struggles across the yard—
slippers clinging to her feet, her hair in rollers.

I chuckle.

Her hand clutches her robe against her breast.

Her warm hand touches my handle;
we both shiver.

My insides work up and down furiously.
An explosion of water spills from my mouth
into the grey pail.

Her smile warms me again
as she toddles back to the house.

CAMPBELL'S CANNIBALS

JACQUELINE PARKS • GRAPHIC DESIGN



MARTIN'S FAULT

PHIL HARRIS • COMPUTER INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The rusty old Frigidaire is great for chilling beers, but it requires both hands to close. Martin finds a spot for his brew on a cluttered workbench and then performs the tricky maneuver. He gives the door a tug, a lift, and a quick pop from his hip. A hollow clunk is proof of success.

A graceful collection of stainless steel rods and plates stands in the center of the shop. He grabs his beer and a rag, kneels down in front of his creation, and gently polishes the nameplate, which reads "Prairie Winds by Martin Pender."

Standing, he sucks in a deep breath and blows hard. The gentle breeze catches some of the plates and bangs them against silvery rods, creating an eerie chorus of rings and chimes.

He is a tall, thin man. Long, dark hair pulled back in a ponytail gives balance to his straight features. His closely trimmed, salt and pepper beard needs some edge work. Wire rims, tarnished and riding low on the bridge of his nose, complete the outfit.

Martin's starving artist look is misleading since he has three or four commissions waiting on deck at all times. This piece is destined for the lobby of a Nebraska bank. He's not rich by modern standards, but he has earned more than enough to buy a cottage in the hills outside of Los Angeles.

Martin lived well on the acreage with his wife Julia and daughter Stacie. It was peaceful there, set back deep in a canyon and nestled behind old pines. The ambiance of the place reminded them of where they had met, ten years earlier.

Both were starving artists, living and working in Aspen. Julia was hawking caricatures in front of a cheese shop. Martin did piano wire figurines at a tourist trap next door. One morning, through the window of the shop, he noticed her as she worked. A gentle breeze playfully tossed her long blond hair. The sunlight framed her in a halo of golden brilliance.

It was an angelic vision, too potent for Martin to resist. He sat transfixed, heart melting into a puddle of love. Suddenly inspired, he began to twist and solder, ignoring the handful of tourists surrounding his bench. He worked feverishly, talent oozing from his soul as never before.

When finished, he walked hesitantly to the sidewalk where she was working.

Meekly, he asked her to draw his caricature. While she worked, he quietly slipped the figurine onto her table. It was of a man and woman, facing each other, hand in hand. A sphere of silvery wires rising from the base encased them. He had delicately tipped each strand with a tiny heart that danced above their heads.

The beauty of the object stunned her for a moment. With a slight blush in her cheeks, she looked into his eyes and smiled shyly. Continuing his caricature, she worked quickly, her eyes darting between the drawing and Martin's face.

She finished the sketch and turned it for him to see. He saw the exaggerated head of a caricature, his features masterfully included. Then he noticed her response. In the reflection of his glasses, she had faintly drawn her own image, blowing him a kiss. They married before the summer ended.

Martin sips his beer as he walks to the shop door. He leans against the jam, deep in thought, gazing absently at his cottage. Normally, finishing a sculpture gives his spirit a lift. If his spirit is uplifted today, he cannot tell. Not many days are good since Julia and Stacie have been gone.

Martin's life changed a year ago on a beautiful morning in the canyon. Julia and Stacie had gone to the mailbox. She stood there for a moment, flipping through the letters, handing each in turn for Stacie to hold.

An old blue VW Bug was approaching from the left. As it passed, a young fox darted from the brush onto the road. The startled driver swerved to his left, unaware that an oncoming delivery truck was rounding the curve. Seeing the VW, the truck driver swerved hard to his left to avoid a head-on collision. The fox survived; Julia and Stacie did not.

Martin pulls the shop door closed and heads for the cottage. Before he has gone ten steps, he hears the unmistakable chiming of his sculpture in the shop. He stops dead, listening, searching his mind for a reason.

Then he feels it. The ground is moving, flowing under his feet as if he was standing in a rowboat on a choppy lake. Martin drops his beer and stands like a Sumo Wrestler, trying to maintain his balance.

He watches wide-eyed, as a dark path forms in the dirt. It runs a crooked line from behind the shop up past the cottage to the right. Fear grips him as he envisions a deep chasm opening and swallowing him alive. Martin thinks about running for the road when he notices something odd.

The other side of the fault somehow looks different. The light seems brighter, and there is something else. He can see his cottage there, offset slightly. The right side of the cottage is visible on his side of the fault, but then he can see the right side of the cottage again, on the other side. Then he sees her. A woman is there,

walking toward the cottage on the far side of the fault. A chill runs up his spine and explodes in the hairs on the back of his neck. It cannot be.

“Hey,” he calls timidly, his voice choked by unbelief. Getting no response, he tries again, louder this time. “JULIA!”

The woman stops and looks back toward him. Now it is obvious. It is Julia, beautiful as ever, and she is looking at him with a stunned expression on her face.

“Martin?” she asks hesitantly. “Martin... is it really you?”

His heart pounds as he staggers toward her. The earth is still moving, but finding his sea legs, he breaks into an unsteady run. He is nearly to the fault line and can already imagine her in his arms.

Martin slams face-first into something. He bounces backward with a painful jolt and lands flat on his back. His nose throbs, and he can feel blood trickling down his upper lip.

“No... NO!” he cries out as he struggles back to his feet. “Julia...”

“Martin... what happened? Are you all right?”

He staggers back to the fault line, reaching out with both hands. It is like a glass between them. He knows instantly that he can no more enter her world than could he step into one of her paintings. His heart sinks hard into his gut as the joy and hope shrivel away.

“I can’t get to you!” he cries. “Dear God... Julia, I can’t get to you.”

The tremors begin to subside, and as Martin notices this, he can see Julia’s image growing fainter. He catches a glimpse of his daughter running in the distance toward her mother. Martin pounds on the invisible wall between them.

Julia sees that Martin’s image is growing dim. She has been holding a basket of oranges. In her despair, she drops it. Oranges scatter across the ground, and then she is gone.

Martin falls to his knees, face in his hands, sobbing with renewed agony. Could his mind play such a cruel hoax? He has grieved unmercifully since he lost her just a year ago. Now she was back, only to be ripped from him once again.

He remains there, motionless on his knees for nearly an hour, weeping pitifully into his hands. Martin reaches down to claw at the grass. His left hand bumps something that is smooth and cool. He dares not look, for he knows in the pit of his stomach that it is an orange, spilled from Julia’s basket as she faded away, and that Julia and Stacie could have returned to him as well. ❧

PHOTO COLLECTION

DEBORAH HULL • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE ARTWORK AWARD

PASSAGE



INTERLUDE



THE MATING
DANCE



MY ANSWERED PRAYER

STEPHANIE BRONZYNSKI • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

It was a cold, wintery night, and the fog was settling in early. The house was calm; only the sound of logs crackling in the wood-burning stove was faintly heard, and the hot fire cast a red glow upon the walls. My husband Michael was fast asleep in the recliner where he would normally fall asleep after a long day of work. The kids were sound asleep as well, so I stayed up for a while longer enjoying the quiet serenity of the evening. After a while, it was time for bed; I did the normal routine of turning out the lights, locking the door, and waking Michael to go to bed. I approached him slowly then reached and touched his shoulder. I must have startled him, I thought, after seeing the wide-eyed expression on his face. Later, I would realize that his expression could have meant more than just a startled awakening.

I calmly said, “Wake up! Let’s go to bed.” He rose from the chair and threw a few logs on the fire. I headed to the bathroom to ready for bed. As I was washing up, Michael came into the bathroom. All of a sudden, I heard the sound of a wooden cabinet bang against the wall with all its contents rattling within it. Quickly, I turned. Michael was leaning against the cabinet with his hands at his sides. Puzzled, I rushed over to his side and pulled him away from the wall. I looked directly into his eyes, and instantly, the fear of God came over me. Something was wrong, seriously wrong. His eyes began to drift, and the color of his face appeared ghostly. I asked him, “What’s wrong? What can I do? Look at me, honey!” as his eyes floated freely.

Adrenaline flowed quickly through my body, as the weight of his six-foot-three stature towered over me. With all my strength, I guided him to the floor. He was unconscious, and thankfully, still breathing. The next few minutes seemed like a lifetime. My hands trembled with fright, and my breath seemed stolen from me as if I was being smothered. “What do I do?” I asked myself. “Stay calm, Steph—breathe!” Not knowing exactly what was wrong, I tried to wake him by rubbing my knuckles across his sternum. After a few minutes, he came around.

I asked, “Do you know what happened?”

He said, “No, I don’t remember anything after I put a few logs on the fire.” My heart pounded as if I had just run a ten-mile marathon; a disturbing

warmth filled my face and chest. I felt the blood rush to my head, and I had an instant urge to cry. The tears welled up in my eyes so quickly I barely had time to turn my face away from him when they began streaming down my cheeks. I tried my hardest not to let Michael see me cry as I walked him into the bedroom. I glanced at his face and noticed the color was still gone from his cheeks; his skin had a clammy feel.

He said, "I just don't feel right."

"Do you want to go to the hospital?" I asked.

In the back of my mind, I knew he hated to go to the doctor (typical stubborn man).

"I don't know," he said.

I saw his carotid artery was sinking in and out very rapidly as if a creature was under his skin, viciously trying to escape. Unnoticed by him, I took hold of his right hand with mine, gently placed the other hand on his wrist, and rubbed his skin back and forth with my thumb while I tried to take his pulse with two of my fingers. It was so rapid and out of rhythm I had trouble getting an accurate count. A few minutes later, I took it again without him noticing what I was doing, and the rhythm was still off-beat and very rapid. I looked at him and said, "We're going to the hospital."

Within minutes, Matt, a friend of Michael's, arrived to stay with the kids, and we were on our way to the hospital. The ten miles to the Ainsworth Community Hospital felt like an eternity. I had every intention to break the speed limit on the way there, but the fog was so dense I couldn't go over 45 miles per hour. My eyes were glued to the road, as I anxiously watched for a deer to appear in front of me.

Then Michael sarcastically said, "Do you want me to drive?"

I looked at him, shook my head, and said, "I don't think so."

For the rest of the drive, questions harnessed my mind. Why was this happening? What was wrong with him? Was I going to lose my husband? Why? Why? Why?

We arrived at the hospital, and the doctor and nurses immediately began analyzing his situation. I sat in the corner of the room as they poked and prodded his body with needles, hooked up monitors to his chest, and took five vials of blood. As I sat there, all I could hear was the heart monitor, "Beep, beep, beep." Then the alarm would sound, and the tears welled up in my eyes. His heartbeat was so fast and sporadic that he could have gone into cardiac arrest if the doctors and nurses didn't get it under control.

The doctor motioned to the nurse and said, "I am going to administer a dose

of medicine to slow his heart rate. I need you to get the crash cart ready, just in case.”

What? Crash cart? Holy crap! Michael and I instantly caught each other’s eye, and the tears really began to fall. I felt the warmth in my face and chest return, and I knew there was no holding back; I was scared, and he was, too. I closed my eyes and began to pray.

“God, please don’t take my husband from me. It’s too soon. I love him so much, and I don’t want to lose him. We just got married last year and haven’t even started our life together. Please, God! Please!”

After a few hours and another dose of medicine to slow his heart, his heartbeat regained a normal rhythm. The diagnosis was atrial fibrillation, or fluttering of the heart. The doctor needed to monitor Michael’s heart rhythm for the next twelve hours. He was given a room of his own and told to get some rest. I sat with him for a long moment, holding his soft, warm hand, which earlier had a clammy feel to it. We talked about what had happened. He then smiled at me, and I couldn’t help but stare when I noticed the glow of his skin was back to normal. That moment brought a peace to my heart, and I realized then how lucky I was that God had answered my prayer. I kissed him gently and whispered into his ear, “I will be here in the morning when you wake. I love you, honey!”

As I was heading back to Long Pine, a huge question came across my mind. Did I cause this to happen when I woke him up? I remembered his wide-eyed expression, as if he had seen a ghost. Was it my fault, or did something else trigger it to happen?

Even after several tests, the cardiologist never did find out what caused Michael’s heart to react like it did. He told Michael at his last visit that it was just a fluke. To this day, I still fear it will happen again. Every night, I lay my head on his chest and listen to his heartbeat. I know he realizes what I am doing, but he has never said anything to me. He knew that moment was scary for both of us and doesn’t like to discuss how close he was to dying. His family history is filled with heart-related deaths, and it scares us both to think about something happening to him at such a young age. I thank God every day for giving me the opportunity to let my husband know how much I love him and how thankful I am that my prayer was answered that night. 

STILL LIFE

MELISSA BUCKBEE • ASSOCIATE DEGREE NURSING
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP ARTWORK AWARD



JULIA

MELISSA BUCKBEE

THE LAKE

ALYSON KENNY • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I can already feel the tug of a smile forming on my lips as I walk the three blocks to Keuka Lake. The first warm days of spring have finally chased the last of the winter snow away in Hammondsport, NY. I increase my pace along the tree-lined streets, eager to reach the lake shore. I've only walked this path a handful of times before, but my feet have no trouble remembering the way.

I can hear the faint lapping of water against the dock's wooden supports as I pass the Town Center. The Center boasts a small-town atmosphere with its white-washed gazebo and cozy park benches surrounded by fragrant green spruce trees and ancient mighty oaks.

I walk through the Center and pass by the memorial bench set up in honor of my cousin, Beth, who was killed by a drunk driver four years ago. I blow the bench a faithful kiss and place my hand on the gold lettering of her name before continuing on to my destination.

As I round the last remaining block that separates me from the beach, a gust of wind blows an intoxicating aroma of fresh, clean water into my face. I can see the icy blue water laid out in front of me, the sun reflecting off the bouncing waves. My smile deepens as I break into a sprint for the shore.

I arrive, panting slightly, to the beach. The sound of squawking gulls fills the air, and I shade my eyes from the sun's powerful rays as I glance skyward towards them. The wind ruffles their smooth white feathers, flecked with charcoal grey, as they glide overhead. I quickly plop down on the cream-colored sand to remove my shoes and socks and bury my wiggling pink toes into the soft sand.

I sit contently for several moments and take in the stunning view of the lake. While the turquoise lake is always beautiful, spring definitely brings out the water's full glory. Spring awakens the lake from the dead of winter; the water smells fresh and clean. The warm sun lights up the water like a million shining stars.

Spring also brings with it the return of wildlife, and as I sit, a family of Mallard ducks swim by. I stare silently as a beautiful mother duck teaches her three downy ducklings how to paddle their orange webbed feet against the

water's gentle current. A patch of bright purple feathers on the underside of the mother duck's light brown body sparkles in the sunlight. The ducklings sport a combination plumage of dirty brown and bright yellow. A brown streak surrounds their small black eyes.

As I sit, the pitter-patter of bare feet running on the dock's worn wooden planks catches my attention. Turning my head towards the dock, I watch as two boys in red and black swimming trucks race to the water. The boys' undersized, bared chests are tinted pink and blue from the cold air. Their pale, scrawny legs flash in the sun as they dash towards the lake.

"Cannonball!" the boy in red shouts as he leaps from the dock's edge and curls his body into a tight ball.

"Woo-hoo!" screams the boy in black as he, too, hops into the lake.

Lifting myself from the ground and brushing the loose sand from my blue jeans, I step to the water's edge. I plunge an experimental toe into the water and let out an involuntary "EEK!" as I quickly leap back from the surf. While the shining sun has warmed the spring air, the water is still too frigid for me.

The Mallard family starts up the unmistakable loud melody of, "Quack, quack, quack." It almost sounds like laughter. They laugh at my intolerance of the cold water, unlike those small boys. They definitely have thicker skin than I. It'll be more than a month before I can leap into the deep, refreshing water.

I happily stroll back to the warm sand to collect my socks and shoes before seeking out a new spot to watch the lake.

I cross through Keuka's wooded sitting area. The new green grass feels silky under my feet, and I spy a bench surrounded by two gorgeous, pea-green Weeping Willows and one portly fir tree.

I can't help but grin as I settle down onto the sturdy bench. The sun shines down and spreads its warmth, and the breeze rustles through the trees. The soft creaking of swaying branches and the crinkle of blowing leaves create a symphony of sound. The gentle lapping waves add their own special soundtrack to the mix. The day is perfect, and I'm lucky enough to be enjoying it from this perfect spot on Keuka Lake. 

WONDERING

LISA BOOTON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



BOMBAY BEAUTY

JENA NICOLE LAMBERT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

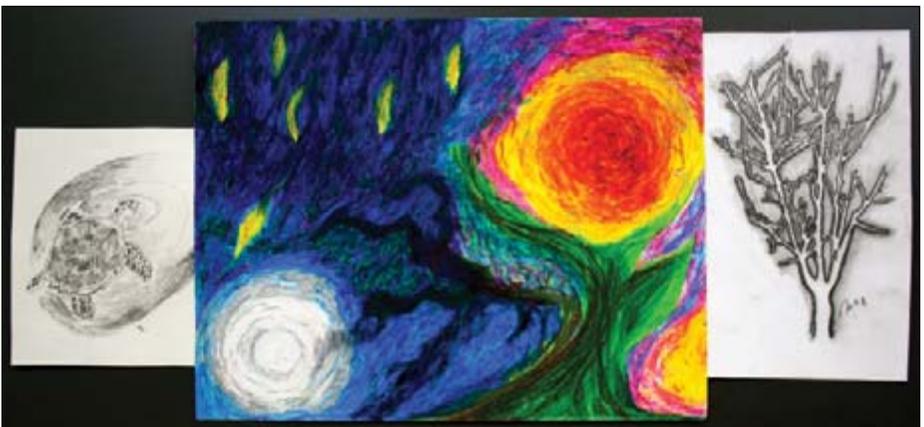
The hipsters and the melancholy
appear from the woodwork
to receive the invigorating prana.

Color, sound, and emotions blend—
a collective melting pot of senses
rising from her finger tips,
naked feet tapping along,
woven scarf to shield her,
hair plaited at her side,
reminiscent of faddish rock
yet many years its elder—
living history woven for our ears.

The Tell Tale Heart would stop its beat
to listen to this Bombay beauty
strumming her sitar in tune.

LIFE

JOSH ESSAY • FOOD SERVICE/HOSPITALITY PROGRAM



SAYING GOODBYE

TAMMIE VACEK • HUMAN SERVICES

My mother was 43 years old in the fall of 1998, and she had been ill for several months. At the age of 25, I was doing my best to fill her shoes; I wanted to make her feel as comfortable as I could, so she could focus on getting well. For months, I had been cooking, cleaning, taking her to chemotherapy appointments, taking care of my brother and sister, and trying to keep my own life going, too. I was exhausted and overwhelmed, but I did my best to not let anyone see it. I had to find the strength to keep going; everyone was depending on me. I could not let them see me cry or let them think that I was falling apart. So I sucked it up and played the hand I was dealt.

The two-story house that was always so open and full of life was now full of anxiety and fear. The air was stale and empty, and there was overwhelming sadness. I could feel it embrace me as soon as I walked into the house. There were people scattered throughout the living room, dining room, and kitchen. Everyone was trying to hide how they truly felt but not doing it well. My little sister Courtney, who was eight years old, looked around at all the grown-ups and seemed incredibly confused. Everyone was hugging her, telling her that she would be just fine. Her eyes seemed to say, “Why will I be fine? What’s wrong?” My brother, Dustin, who was thirteen years old, was always very close to Mom. He understood what was going on but was not mature enough to see any other way than from a little boy’s perspective. I could see the anger and fear in his eyes.

My grandmother, Mary, who lived 400 miles away, was there. She was a wonderful little woman, always full of spunk. To see her sadness was hard for me to bear. She had come to spend the last days with her daughter. Numerous other people were coming in and out that evening, including my mom’s brother and my father. Close family friends, long-lost friends, and family that we had not seen in a long time came to let her know that she was loved and to say goodbye. She wanted to make time for everyone that was there to see her, but I could see how it drained her, so I was allowing only one or two people into her room at a time.

As she lay in her bed covered by only a sheet and looking incredibly frail and brittle, I knew the end was near. She was bald and so thin. Her cheeks and eyes were sunk in, and her flesh seemed to hang from her bones. The tumor in her

abdomen had deformed her body as if she was pregnant. There was a small clear tube that penetrated her chest on the left side right above her heart. She had a morphine drip that allowed her to administer her own pain medicine. At times, she was lucid, but then there were moments when you could see in her eyes that she wasn't really there. We tried to bring a portable commode into her room.

"Get that fucking thing out!" she said.

She seemed to accept the inevitable and had made her peace with God. She continued to speak to everyone that was there to see her that night. She was calm and even tried to help them accept what was happening.

At one point, my mother needed to use the restroom, and even though the bathroom was the next room down the hall, it felt like miles away. I assisted her to the restroom, and while we were there, I could see the energy drain from her body like sand from an hourglass. I put my arms around her to help give her support to get back to her room, but her knees kept buckling. My stepfather, Mark, was walking in front of her and was really just in my way. We were about to her bed, and her knees buckled again. This time, she landed on her knees. She was so weak that as I tried to lift her, she was no help.

"What can I do?" Mark said frantically.

"Get the fuck out of the way!" I commanded.

I then did the only thing I could do. I wrapped my arms around her torso and lifted her up onto the bed. Of course, this put pressure on her abdomen, and I saw the excruciating pain on her face. I could not bear the fact that I hurt her so badly. I repositioned her frail nude body on the bed and covered her with a sheet. I then gave her a dose of her morphine to help with the pain. To my relief, the pain melted from her features like an ice cube on a hot summer's day. At this point, the guilt of hurting my mother so was building up inside me.

After all of our company left, Mark laid some blankets on the floor next to my mother's bed. He wanted to be close to her, but he was in denial of the inevitable outcome. Mary told us all good-night and went upstairs. The kids, Dustin and Courtney, wanted to be close to mom, but I wanted to protect them, so they stayed in the living room with me. I turned on the TV; with it being so close to Halloween, there were plenty of horror movies on. I set up the baby monitor, as usual, and sat on the couch. As I tried to hide my emotions and hang out with the kids, I kept an ear on the baby monitor. Courtney fell asleep and looked so peaceful—no sign of confusion—even if it was only for a short time. Dustin stayed up watching movies. He was trying to be a little man, but really, he was a little boy scared of what was happening in the other room. Around 2:00 a.m., as I listened to the baby monitor, I noticed my mom seemed

agitated and restless. She was rambling, but none of it made sense. I walked into her bedroom to check in on her.

“This has been getting worse,” Mark said.

“I will give her another dose of morphine and see if that calms her down,” I whispered.

I reached down next to her frail body and pushed the button on her drip. I repositioned her and lay next to her. I wanted her to know that she was not alone and that I was there.

I whispered in her ear, “It is going to be OK. I am here.”

Then I gently rubbed her back, hoping that would help sooth her agitation while the morphine kicked in. I needed her to know that I would do whatever it took to make her more comfortable. She seemed to start calming down, and I went back into the living room to check on my brother and sister.

Dustin asked, “What’s going on? Is Mom OK?”

I replied, “She was very uncomfortable. She is OK now; don’t worry.”

I knew that was not true, but what else could I say?

Courtney was still asleep, and I was thankful for that. Dustin and I went back to watching movies. I knew that I was not going to get any sleep; I knew something was wrong, but I did not know exactly what. I went back to listening to the baby monitor, and Dustin started to dose off. The room was dark with only the glare of the TV. I heard mom talking and anxious again. I turned the volume down on the monitor in hopes of not disturbing Dustin. As I listened, I realized that my mom was reliving her life.

I thought, “Wow, your life really does flash before your eyes.”

I knew what this had to mean but continued to listen to her. It was cool to hear her talk about happier times in her life. She had been so sad, exhausted, and wiped out for so long. The bits and pieces of her rambling were familiar to me.

All of a sudden, she blurted out, “Let’s blow this pop stand!” I laughed and realized she was talking about times she had as a teenager.

As time went on, she spoke about me as a baby. “Isn’t she beautiful? I can’t believe we did that,” she said.

She continued to talk and ramble. And then she said, “My boy.” I knew she was talking about my little brother. She was so happy when he was born. She loved being a mom.

“My little girl, I get a second chance,” she whispered. Then I knew she was talking about my little sister and the second chance she got since I grew up with my dad after the divorce.

The agitation continued to grow, and I could not make sense of much more. I went into her room and gave her another dose of morphine.

My grandma came down the stairs and said, "What is going on?"

"She has been like this since about 2:00 a.m. Call the hospice nurse," I said.

My grandmother walked into the dining room to get the phone and call the nurse. That was when I heard it. "She's dying! She's dying!" Mark yelled.

I realized that the baby monitor was still on, and my brother and sister had heard. My grandma stayed with them, but I ran into the bedroom. I was not prepared for what I saw. My stepdad was sitting on the cedar chest next to the bed holding a big yellow bowl that mom used if she got sick. Mom was leaning over the side of the bed, and she was vomiting. I rushed in and realized she was vomiting blood. A fear of what was to come rushed over my body. After she was done getting sick, I crawled up onto the bed and rolled mom over so her head was in my lap. She opened her hazel eyes and looked directly at me.

I kissed her forehead and said, "It's OK, Mom. It's your turn."

She looked at me with what I thought was an attempted smile and took her last breath. In disbelief, I watched the life drain from her body. Did she really just die in my arms? How would I tell everyone? What would I do now? I looked at the clock on her night stand, and the exact time was 3:33 a.m. As I turned back to look at her face, her eyes were so empty and dark. I attempted to close them, but it wasn't as easy as one might think. Several tears rolled down my cheeks as I laid her head back on her pillow. I covered her with a sheet in hopes that my brother and sister wouldn't come running in. I slowly walked to the dining room, and my grandmother was still on the phone with the nurse. I looked at her, and she knew by the look on my face that her baby was gone. She handed me the phone, and I told the nurse, "My mother just took her last breath. I believe she is gone."

I then handed the phone back to someone—I don't even know who. I was dazed and couldn't look at anyone directly. I was scared the kids would see my emotions, and I was not ready for that. I did not know what to say. I walked to the kitchen to call my uncle and my dad, and that's when I heard Dustin sobbing.

"MOM, NO!"

I ran back into the bedroom, and my siblings were sitting with Mom, crying. Dustin was so upset he could not function. I was so worried they would end up looking into their dead mother's eyes. My grandmother and their father were in the room with them, and so I walked into the kitchen. It was about 3:40 a.m., and I called my dad.

“Dad, she’s gone.”

“I’m on my way,” he said.



My grandma made coffee as we were waiting for family and the funeral home to pick up my mother’s body. I was standing in the kitchen feeling crowded, and the light felt bright, like there was a spotlight shining in my face. Then I felt like a dam had just broken on my emotions. I fell to the floor sobbing uncontrollably. I began hyperventilating, and my body went numb. My uncle wrapped his arms around me and held me up since I could not stand by myself.

He said, “It is going to be OK.”

“No, it’s not!” I said. “I helped kill my mother.”

My grandma wrapped her arms around me and exclaimed, “No, you didn’t!”

“But when her knees buckled, I put pressure on her stomach,” I protested.

Instead of arguing with me, my grandmother went for the hospice nurse.

“Explain to my granddaughter what happened,” she demanded.

The nurse explained, “It was not your fault. The tumor had grown into a main artery, and she internally bled to death. It would have happened no matter what.”

I continued to feel guilty, and I still did not believe I didn’t contribute to my mother’s death. The house continued to fill with more people. They were trying to be supportive and understanding, but I did not care. I felt crowded, sad, alone, and even a little relieved. I guess that was what bothered me most.

I thought, “I am relieved my mom is dead? What the hell is wrong with me? How could I be relieved but sad and missing her at the same time?”

It did not make sense to me. I felt like I had blinders on. I knew people were around me, but I didn’t know who; I lost myself in my own thoughts. I had tons of questions running through my head.

I was crying inside, “Why her? Why now? What did she do to deserve this? It is not fair, but is death ever really fair? I know it was my fault. I killed her!”

It took me a while, but I finally figured out why I was relieved. She was no longer suffering, and the people I loved did not have to watch her suffer. I had a chance to repair some of the damage I did to our relationship in the past few years. I could have missed that chance, and I would have lived with a lot of regrets for a very long time. I was able to make a difference to my family, whether they knew it or not.

You can never really be prepared to lose someone, even if you know the end is near. I was able to prove to myself that I had strength I never knew I had. Saying goodbye is never easy, but sometimes it can make all the difference. 

LOVE NATURE

DAWN AMUNDSON • MEDICAL LABORATORY TECHNOLOGY



RAINDROPS ON LILIES

DAWN AMUNDSON



UNTITLED

NATHAN KATHOL • *ACADEMIC TRANSFER*



LIVING THE WRITE WAY

NATHAN STEVEN WORM • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I was on the road with Kerouac,
Jumped a conscience with Joyce—
Yelled with Bellow only to hear my voice;
With Twain I grabbed a gunny sack.
I deciphered with Graves,
I sat back on a Mississippi moon with Faulkner;
I listened to Nabokov and Humbert, Humbert's daughter.
I sat with Dostoevsky while we prayed.
I laughed in Nature with the one and only Whitman;
I got into bar fights with Hemingway
And laughed with Wilde in a giddy way.
I read every book with Mirandola—in fact I could list them.
Now I'll write my story.

ONE LONELY WINDMILL

ALISHA BUCHANAN • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS



MY REQUIEM FOR REALITY

ROSA R. CHURCH • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

There is a place in my mind that I don't like to go. It's a place of complete despair. Sometimes it feels like standing in an open field, the chilly wind swirling around and almost through me in the loneliness of it all. Sometimes it feels like being in the middle of the mosh pit at a concert, strangers' flying sweat and elbows filling the air and occasionally connecting with my unaware face. Things can be beautiful and painful at the same time. This place is full of anger, sadness, desperation, and no feeling at all. This is the place I go when I drink.

I spend all day waiting for the sun to go down, so I can have my vodka uninterrupted and then spend the night wishing it was morning again, so I could go buy more. I spend all day hugging the plastic bottle of UV to my chest. I rarely get up from my couch—just to change the CD I'm half listening to or the movie I'm drifting in and out of. I spend hours there that turn into months. The only time I'm not hiding from the world is when I go to buy more alcohol or cigarettes.

Since I lost my job, I spend more time searching my house for dropped change. I often go to the liquor store with a handful of dimes and nickels (quarters, if I'm lucky). My need to get my hands on that liquid outweighs any embarrassment I would feel if I were sober. I don't feel any shame, either, because I'm already drunk.

I'm surprised the clerks will sell to me when I'm sure I smell like I bathed in Skol, but they all know me by now, and maybe they just feel sorry for me. Maybe they know I would cry if they refused. Or perhaps it's one of those ego things, when you think everyone is looking at you and in truth, no one is. I never ask; I don't think I want to know.

As pathetic as I may seem, I'm comfortable enough in this state for a time. I have no time to worry about all the things that bother me when I'm sober because I'm too busy getting drunk. I tuck my concerns into the dark closet in my mind, under all those holiday decorations, hoping I will accidentally lose them forever. But of course, if I even come close to being sober, they all resurface with a fury.

I started seeing a therapist every other week because my parents thought something was seriously wrong with me. I go and lie to her and them. I say therapy helps, and I'm quitting. But it doesn't, and I'm not. My parents have started dropping by at random times, so I hide my bottles—in my sock drawer, under the kitchen sink, in my linen closet, between my mattresses, under the couch, and so on. It makes me feel ashamed to lie to them, so as soon as they leave, I'm back at it, trying to drink that feeling away.

I am a mess, and it takes me a long time to realize it. I depend so much on that bottle that every time I go somewhere, I try to drink enough before I leave to last me until I get back. Often, I just take the bottle with me in case I stay longer than I intended. I don't care in this part of my brain if I ever end this state or not. But in my heart, I do. ↪

BOOT CAMP

BERNADETTE KORSLUND • CONTINUING EDUCATION



CALABAZA

DANUL PATTERSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Imagine this:

A boy and a girl. He rich; she poor. Then again, that's how it always is.

They didn't have to have that party. There was no need for it. A moonlit walk would have been ample staging.

Sometimes, there's a Fairy Godmother. A flick of her magic stick could change a yellow-orange pumpkin into a carriage of gold. Other times, she is not there. In those tales, there is no magic at all. This is one of those stories.

She crawled away, bruised and violated. Blood on what was left of her gown. She knew that there would be no footmen at the door come morning. A slipper of gold and moleskin in hand. She was by no means stupid.

Sometimes, there is not a round-faced child with all the father's features, but, his eyes. You should know by now that that is not the case. ↪

LIFE AFTER THE RECESSION

ALISHA BUCHANAN • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS



FEELING AT HOME

EMILIO FRANSO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



THREE MINUTES

CATHERINE LEBER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER/RADIOLOGIC TECHNOLOGY

Elizabeth Meyers paced across her bedroom floor. It was almost 7:40 a.m., and Allie wasn't there yet. The ties of Liz's bathrobe fluttered behind her in the artificial breeze her fast pace created. Underneath the robe, she still wore her Hello Kitty pajamas from the night before. Just as she was about to give up hope that Allie would show, there was a knock at her window.

Instead of relief, Liz's stomach clenched as she pushed the light gossamer curtains aside. Her bedroom faced the backyard, where Allie, her best friend since fourth grade, stood waiting on the lawn. Opening the window, Liz snapped, "What took you so long? School starts in less than half an hour!"

"Sorry." Allie held out her hand containing a small rectangular box. "I didn't know which one to get."

Liz hesitated before she reached out to grab the contents from Allie's hand. "Sorry, I didn't mean to snap at you, I'm just...."

"Nervous? Ya, I get it." Allie squeezed Liz's hand around the package. "Good luck!" She turned to leave but quickly spun back around. "Here, I almost forgot!" She took a neon green slap bracelet off her wrist and slapped it onto Liz's, just like they'd done for years. "For good luck and negative results." She paused. "Do you want me to stay? I mean, if you need someone...."

Liz's answer was quick. "No. No—go ahead, Al."

"OK. See you at school, I guess." With a forced smile, Allie turned and walked across the lawn. Liz was left standing alone in her bedroom, clutching in her hands a test that wouldn't make or break simply her high school career but potentially her entire future.

Taking a deep breath, Liz snuck out her bedroom door and checked the hallway before she darted across to the bathroom she shared with her younger brother. As the door clicked shut behind her, she reached to turn the lock.

This was it. Do or die.

One minute and an empty bladder later, Liz stood in front of the bathroom mirror, her long brown hair curling around her fair cheeks speckled with freckles. She searched her eyes, as blue as the sky but not quite as clear—especially now. She stood, facing the reflection of the girl in the mirror, trying desperately to discern who exactly was looking back at her. She didn't recognize

herself—couldn't recognize herself as the carefree, innocent young pastor's daughter she once was. She took a breath, holding it in her lungs for a moment before using it to say, "Hello, my name is Elizabeth Michelle Meyers. I'm five-four, 15 years old, and a sophomore at John Carver High." She paused, focusing again on her eyes reflected in the polished glass in front of her. "And, I'm pregnant...maybe."

Tick...tock...tick...tock....

Bang! Bang! Bang! The loud raps on the bathroom door jolted Liz away from the mirror. "What?" she hollered through the closed door.

"Liiiiiz, are you almost done in there? You're not the only one who has to get ready for school, you know." It was her ten-year-old brother Peter, his voice sounding muffled through the door.

Liz glanced at the clock on the bathroom counter, then to the small piece of white drugstore plastic lying next to it. The back of the box said she'd have results three minutes after taking the test. It had been roughly thirty seconds since she'd laid the test out to dry on a piece of toilet paper. "Pete, I'll be out in like, three minutes," she called through the door.

"Hurry up! It's already 7:45 a.m., and Mom has breakfast ready."

"I said I'd be out in a couple—now get outta here!" Liz yelled. "God, he can be so annoying!" she thought as she walked across the plush white rug in the center of the room. It felt soft and squishy beneath her bare feet. She paused, pushing her bright pink manicured toes into the fluff beneath them. She threw her head back, letting her hair cascade down her shoulders. Her dad always complimented her on her hair, dark brown just like her mother's. He was always complimenting his baby girl.

"Baby girl," Liz scoffed, picking up her feet as she began to pace back and forth across the rug. "I won't be his baby girl for long."

Tick...tock...tick...tock....

Liz looked again at the clock and couldn't believe the second-hand could really be moving that slowly—not that she wanted it to move faster. Every second brought her closer to knowing the answer—knowing for sure. She suspected it a few weeks back when she realized she was late. Whatever—she'd been late before. She'd only reached puberty the year before, so it wasn't that strange that her period was a bit off schedule, right? "I also wasn't having sex last year," Liz reminded herself.

She stopped pacing in front of the mirror and once again took in her reflection. Liz scrunched up her nose, despising the freckles scattered around it and her cheeks. When she was younger, she used to stand in front of this same

mirror with a washcloth, scrubbing away at the marks, trying to wash them away. One day her mother caught her, took the washcloth from her hand, and explained to her that the freckles were the spots where the angels had kissed her before she was born. Bleh! That was sappy—even for a pastor’s kid.

Liz studied her freckles now, wondering if the potential child inside her would have them, too. Or would it look like Bobby?

Tick...tock...tick...tock....

With an angry sigh, Liz continued her pacing, relishing the normalcy of tile and carpet underneath her feet. How long would anything feel normal? She doubted her parents would understand. How could they? Not only would her life change, but what if her dad faced an inspection by the church leaders? If he couldn’t keep even his daughter from the clutches of sin, how could he lead an entire congregation?

Her stomach clenched as the weight of her decision to sleep with Bobby came cascading down. It flowed from every corner of the room to settle on her small shoulders. Shoulders that hadn’t even fully developed were now required to carry the load of adulthood.

Her parents had talked to her about sex, but all they’d said was to wait for marriage. Abstinence was the only way to go. Liz recalled the day her mom sat her down to talk about sex. She was twelve, and the topic was beginning to come up in school. Her mom, a sweet but obviously naïve woman when it came to kids’ attitudes about sex in modern day America, explained that her virginity was like a rose. Every time she kissed a boy or did something sexual, it was like pulling a petal off the rose. Her mom, in all seriousness, then asked if on her wedding night, she wanted to present her new husband with a rose or an empty stem.

“Well, looks like I’m giving him a stem,” Liz realized as she stopped pacing, “and maybe a screaming baby to go along with it.” Automatically, Liz’s hands reached down to clutch at her flat abdomen. Her fingers raked across the soft fabric of her nightshirt. The action reminded her of the night Bobby’s hands slipped underneath her clothes, and she made a decision that would potentially change her entire life.

Tick...tock...tick...tock....

Liz remembered the walk up the short brick pathway leading to her front door the night she had sex with Bobby. The moment she stepped out of his mom’s car and the door slammed shut behind her, the euphoric feelings were gone. She was no longer entwined in Bobby’s arms atop his twin bed. She couldn’t feel his breath on her neck as he whispered, “I love you,” and “I’ve

wanted this so long.” No, now she was alone, no longer a virgin, and about to face her parents. She hesitated at the large wooden door. Would they be able to tell? Was there something about the way she talked or looked that would shout out, “I’m not a virgin anymore!”?

The thought terrified her.

It wasn’t like she’d been forced to sleep with Bobby. It was something she wanted, but her parents would never see it that way. Taking a deep breath, she had grasped the metal knob and opened the door.

Her mother was sitting in the living room directly to the right of the entryway. She had a book in her lap and a cup of coffee sitting on the end table next to her. She glanced up from her latest biographical obsession and met Liz’s eyes with her own, her characteristic loving expression on them.

“Hi sweetie.” She glanced at the delicate gold watch upon her wrist, a gift from Liz’s father. “Right on time,” she smiled. “How’s Bobby?”

Liz hesitated, her mind racing with a thousand different thoughts. How was she supposed to answer without giving it away? “He’s good,” was all she came up with.

“Good. You kids have fun?”

“Yes.”

“All right. Well, you’d better get to bed. School tomorrow, you know?”

“I know, Mom. Good night.”

“Good night, sweetheart. I love you.”

“You, too.” At that, Liz turned and raced to the safety of her bedroom just down the hall. It worked! She couldn’t tell! A sigh of relief escaped her lips as the door closed behind her.

She took in another calming breath, and a gentle, pleasant odor caressed her senses.

The roses were fresh, pink, and beautiful sitting on top of her nightstand. Liz knew it was spring whenever roses started showing up in random places around the house. Her mother loved her rose garden and tended it with care. Fresh-cut, fragrant roses filled the home as they began to bloom outdoors. Liz walked towards them, lifting her hand to touch the soft silk of the bright petals. She plucked one of the petals from the whole, rubbing it between her fingers. Even though she found her mother’s comparison to sex ridiculous at the time, she wondered if she had indeed lost all her petals that day.

Tick...tock...tick...tock....

Now, Liz faced the sink, her hands grasping the edges of the white porcelain as she tried to steady herself, Allie’s green bracelet looking out of place against all the

white. The clock continued ticking, and she didn't know if she was ready for the answer. She had no answers to give either way. If she was pregnant, she faced her parents' rejection and social disgrace. Would Bobby stick around? He was only 15, too, and in no way any more prepared than she was to take care of a baby.

If she wasn't pregnant, she had to change some things, anyway. No more sex. Well, no more sex until she was ready to consider the possibility that she could get pregnant. Would Bobby understand? How could she explain it to him without turning him away? Sure, he didn't want a baby, but he did want sex; and at this point, she didn't know if she was willing to give it to him. What if he left her?

Fear began to rise within the cavern of her chest, closing off air to her lungs. Liz compensated by taking faster breaths, trying to get oxygen to fill her closing airway. Her eyes lifted once again to face the girl in the mirror; her blue reflected eyes glossy with un-spilled tears.

Liz's whole body began to shake as the fear turned into panic, and the panic turned into an even tighter grip on her chest. Despite her greatest effort, her fast breaths turned into audible sobs, and the tears breached the dam and spilled onto her flushed cheeks. Liz let go of the sink with one of her hands, instead closing it over her mouth, willing her sobs to remain undetected.

She wasn't ready to face it yet. Wasn't ready to face her mother, father, and her younger brother and tell them that she made a decision that would disgrace the entire family. Wasn't ready for her mother's eyes to look at her with anything less than love. Wasn't ready for Pete to be told by her father that his older sister wasn't someone to look up to.

A muffled scream managed to pass between her fingers just as the timer on the counter let out a loud "Beep! Beep! Beep! Beep! Beep! Beep!"

Time was up, whether she was ready or not.

The alarm continued to sound, and with a shaking reach, Liz silenced the noise with the touch of a button. Lying next to the alarm was a small, unassuming piece of plastic that held the answer. Her fingers fumbled for a moment with the cylindrical stick as she removed it from the counter. Without a single breath, she brought the viewing window to her eyes. There it was—the answer.

Gathering a large swatch of toilet paper from the dispenser, Liz encased the test in a layer of wrapping. Then, she unlocked the bathroom door and stepped into the hallway.

"Finally!" Completely unaware that for the last three minutes the room had been to Liz a prison of doubt and secrets, Peter sounded aggravated as he darted past her into the newly vacant bathroom.

She moved across the hall into her bedroom; she barely sensed the familiar surroundings. Stepping into the safety of her room, she leaned against the brightly painted door, letting the weight of her body shut her in. Her eyes closed as the door clicked shut. Allowing herself to breathe, Liz finally let in a large breath of air. It filled her lungs and reached deep within her, pulling with it as she exhaled all of the emotion she'd kept pent up over the last few terrifying weeks.

Her body shook as the feelings cascaded around her.

“Liz...?”

Liz's eyes flew open at the sound of the voice. Allie was sitting on her unmade bed.

“I didn't leave.”

Liz remained by the door as Allie stood, crossed the room, and embraced her. “I'm here, Liz. No matter what it said, I'm here.”

Liz hugged her back, the wrapped pregnancy test still held tightly in her fist. “I'll be OK,” Liz thought to herself as she let her best friend hold her close. “I'll be OK.” ✨

SAGE

JENNIFER CRELLER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



POWER OF TOYS

LEILANI DAY • OFFICE PROFESSIONAL

Toys are different shapes, colors, and textures; some are soft, and some are hard. They wear different labels, yet they play nicely with one another.

Tonka, for example, doesn't refuse to play with Matchbox; in fact, Chuck and Stinky make clean-up fast and fun. Legos make a great foundation for a Lincoln Log bridge. Working together without looking at a label first is something I want to engrave in my two-year-old son's mind. Toys are helping me make this idea possible. With toys, there are no "only the blue ones get to come to my birthday party," or "the pink toys cry too much." Nope, in Toyland, the pink ones play with the green ones, the green ones play with the blue ones, and, well, I hope the pattern is clear.

Toys bring out one's imagination and creativity. Toys like Play-Doh create an amusement park out of a ball of soft clay. When thinking of rice, some would say it's a nice filler food; I, on the other hand, think it's a perfect pretend cake-maker or pretend dirt for toy equipment trucks when one's stuck inside. It also works great as sand for Barbie's beach party. Taking a simple item and making it into a massive structure or the background of an awesome party is an activity I hold in high regard.

Toys also teach. They have taught me patience, like the patience I need waiting for the Spin and Sing to stop (only to hear the same letter I heard the last three times). Crayons also teach patience, and no, it's not simply about staying within the lines. If everyone stayed in the lines and drew perfectly neat pictures, abstract artwork would not exist. However, when coloring super fast across a piece of paper, the paper almost always crinkles up. So, I try to keep the "crinkle effect" in mind when I run to the grocery store, pet shop, and gas station, and, oh, yeah, forget to buy toilet paper. Keeping "coloring time" in mind by spreading errands, activities, and work out evenly helps keep stress low and the "paper" in my mind from crinkling.

Toys are the diversity we see every day. Toys are more than objects to keep our children busy; they are a foundation for how our children will treat others. Toys show labels aren't a big deal; they let the mind make something out of very little. Toys show compassion—they're happy being played with, and it doesn't matter by whom. ✨

THE NEWBORN

NATHAN STEVEN WORM • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

The new calf still keeps its eyes closed
as I pull it into this world
from a womb so warm to a ground so cold.
The calf flops onto the ground,
the cold grass, still cold from snow I scooped away.
The mother turns, letting me know I can leave.
The calf is licked and is shivering,
opens its eyes to this new pasture,
this new land, on this new earth—
because with every birth
the world is born again.

EVERETT LEWIS SKINNER

CYNTHIA KREPS • SURGICAL TECHNOLOGY INSTRUCTOR



WALKING IN HEAVEN'S LIGHT

BARBARA J. SCHMIDT • HUMAN SERVICES

Her name is Barb; she is a broken-down woman, beat down so far in the world of darkness, where the only things that exist are pain, fear, and desperation. Barb lives in an alley between Hell's Door and Heaven's Light. She sleeps inside a dumpster behind the local bar with her plastic bag wrapped around her for protection. Barb's hair is long and full of garbage and is usually covered with a stained, stinky wide-brimmed hat decorated with faded flowers. She always carries a large yellow duffel bag packed with who knows what. She's usually wearing two or three shirts and a couple pairs of pants. Somehow, she's scored some new sky blue high-top Converse.

At night, she searches endlessly for anything that will numb her mind, body, and spirit. Barb walks the streets begging for money for food, but the money will be spent on drugs or alcohol. She has very good luck when the weather is warm and the downtown is bustling with football fans and college kids.

One night as Barb is walking home to rest, salty tears begin to spill down her cheeks as she remembers better days. Her heart aches for the daughter who died suddenly ten years ago; she knows that's when her life changed. She cries at the injustice of it all. Barb looks up and realizes she has one block to go, and then she can cry herself to sleep as she often does. As she approaches the corner of Heaven's Light, she sees a familiar woman handing out pamphlets. The woman smiles at Barb as she hands her some pamphlets.

Barb wakes early the next morning, her stomach growling with hunger. She pulls the plastic garbage bag from her body and looks around the dumpster for food. Upon seeing nothing to eat, she decides to go to Winchell's to look for discarded rolls from the day before. It looks like it will be a good day when she opens a big, greasy bag and finds a couple dozen cake and glazed donuts. She eagerly puts them in the duffel bag and starts her normal morning walk to her favorite bench in Spencer Park, where she used to take her daughter for play. She looks around her in the early morning, still peaceful and quiet; the sun is breaking on the horizon with shades of gold and red. Her excitement grows as she crosses the street and sees her wooden bench. She then remembers how hungry she is by the loud growling in her stomach. She sits down and opens the bag of donuts, accidentally spilling the pamphlets onto the grass. She picks

them up and decides to read as she has her breakfast: "Narcotics Anonymous, You are Never Alone." As she reads, the pamphlet tells her of hope, faith and freedom. It says there's help and that she'll never be alone again. It says these people have meetings at the church at 8th and Heaven's Light. It says there's a meeting at 7:00 tonight. At that moment, something moves inside her; she knows she has to go to that meeting.

So she goes about the day as normal, first to the Goodwill. They have a bin in back where they let her pick from the clothes they couldn't sell. As she makes her way through the store to the back, she sees her reflection in a mirror. She suddenly remembers the remarks, the sneers that she's often given as she begs. She sees herself as others have seen her. With her shoulders drooping, she makes her way to the bin and begins to search for something special, something that would make her feel acceptable for the meeting tonight.

It's 11:00, time to get in line for lunch. The Kitchen is still a thirty minute walk, so she starts down the street pulling the duffel bag now packed with her new items. She hopes she can get to the mission before the line gets really long.

She's out of breath; her head itches, so she takes her hat off. Her feet hurt as she joins the line, already four wide and twenty long. She begins looking at the people surrounding her. She sees groups of people trying to make their way through the door, all races and all ages. Someone lets a mom and her three kids into the front of the line. The oldest of the three kids is a girl who reminds Barb of her daughter. She has to sign the log on the desk as she enters. The smells of roast beef and apple pie are in the air inside the mission as she makes her way down the tray line and to the table. Today she gets to eat a small piece of roast beef, mashed potatoes, and a small piece of apple pie. She has to pick soft foods because her teeth hurt as she chews. She washes it down with a carton of milk.

With her stomach full, she makes her way outside, remembering she has enough change to stop by George's liquor store on the way home. Boone's Strawberry Hill is on sale. She grabs a bottle, asks for it to be put in a brown bag, and walks outside. She has to leave her duffel bag at the door; the owner yells at her to leave, afraid she will shoplift. So she swiftly sticks the bottle in the dirty duffel bag and is excited by the fact that she'll have a drink soon.

Walking into the first alley that she sees, she sits down, scratches her head, opens the bag, and guzzles some wine. She's feeling really good, happy, and lighthearted. She decides that she needs to freshen up a little bit, but it's been so long that at first she isn't sure where to go. The last time she cleaned up at Gas and Shop, they told her she wasn't allowed to go there anymore—the customers were complaining about her odor. But Bryan Memorial would

always let her use the public bathroom in the emergency room area. So that's where she'll go.

Walking just a few blocks, she enters the brightly lit bathroom. Luckily, no one else is in there, but it smells like vomit. One look in the mirror, and she decides to throw away the hat. She gets out her new clothes and sets them on the counter before washing her face with the foamy soap and paper towels. She takes her shirts off, washes her armpits, and sticks the wet paper towel down her pants to clean there. She changes into the new brown cotton shirt and blue jeans with only one hole. The clothes she had on she throws away. The new sweater can stay in the bag because it's such a warm evening. Just about ready for the meeting, she starts sweating again and pulls the Boone's Farm out for another swig.

She sees the church ahead of her. There are a couple guys out there smoking. She stops, looks around, finds a doorway where she can get another drink for courage. She makes her way to the church, past the guys who smile at her, but she looks away. She can hear voices and moves toward the door where everyone is sitting. Barb walks into that room, almost invisible with her head low, her shoulders rounded, almost dragging that big yellow duffel bag. As she enters, she can barely see through the cloud of smoke, but the coffee smells inviting. She shyly looks around to see where to get the coffee and where to find a seat away from the others. She manages to get a cup of coffee; it feels warm in her hand and going down her scratchy throat. Barb spies a seat near the door and takes it, thinking she might need to make a quick escape.

As the room fills up, no one takes the seats next to Barb. Unknown to her, the stench of her unwashed hair and the visible crawly bugs keep people away. She sees several people looking her way. Barb looks straight ahead and sees a familiar face, and she recognizes the lady who gave her the pamphlets. Nancy starts the meeting promptly at 7:30; she then gets everyone quiet and asks if there are any newcomers who would like to share their names so everyone can get to know them. A couple people offer their names, but not Barb. Nancy reads the greetings and the announcements and asks if anyone has a topic to share. One of the old-timers wants to talk about being accepted and belonging. Nancy lets people know that they can share, but they don't have to. Several people decide to share that night, but there is one person Nancy will never forget. She stands and says, "My name is Barb. I hope I don't offend anyone; this is the best I have looked in a long time." As she starts to share her life's story, she begins shaking. By the time she gets done, there isn't a dry eye in the place. When the meeting is over, several of the old-timers offer their help.

Barb is scared at first and backs away, but as she searches Nancy's eyes for signs of goodness, her expression softens. That night, Barb's life changes. With the help of some of the old-timers, Barb is admitted into a treatment center; after six weeks, she graduates and goes on to Fresh Start Home, a place where broken down women live while getting their lives put back together.

It's been six months since that meeting, which miraculously changed one woman's life. Today, Nancy sees Barb walk into the room; her brownish grey hair is clean and shiny, her head is held high, and she looks confident. With the grace and beauty of a swan, she approaches the stage. Every eye is on her. As Nancy looks around, she can tell that people want to know Barb. Nancy can feel the support and excitement from the crowd as Barb stands in front of the podium. Barb smiles radiantly and begins to tell her story once more. She talks of where she's been, how she got there, and what saved her life. Her name is Barb; she's a strong, vibrant woman who has defeated the darkness of Hell's Door and now walks in Heaven's Light. ✨

SQUARE ONE

JASON LUBKEN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



SHADOW CATCHER

CLAUDIA REINHARDT • WRITING TUTOR

Hiking on a summer afternoon along a canyon trail,
I waded into waves of heat and peeling layers of shale
then rested in the cool of an overhanging stone.

I kneeled down to tie my boots and noticed
my shadow was gone.

Surrounded by towering, hungry rocks,
I suddenly felt alone.

In the mountains, dark is like a stencil,
carved by the sun's razor blade.

Night and day, dusk and dawn, never blend or fade.

I feared the chill of forces coiled beneath the peaks.

Had my shadow spirit vanished, or was it playing hide-and-seek?

Someone stepped into the light on the twisted path ahead.

No longer content to drift behind, my shadow had instead
invisibly slipped around or through, leaving me to follow
and wonder aloud to no one, "Have I ever truly led?"

WHAT LIES UNDER THE HEART

KARA GALL • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

*Not flesh of my flesh
Nor bone of my bone,
But still miraculously my own.
Never forget for a single minute,
You didn't grow under my heart,
But in it.*

This poem, known as The Adoption Creed, was engraved on a wooden plaque that hung throughout my childhood on my parents' bedroom wall. I was the “you” in the poem, the adoptee, the girl who had been relinquished by her biological mother right after her birth, placed temporarily in foster care, and adopted not too long after into a loving family. As a young girl, I was obsessed with this poem. It was the “under my heart” part that grabbed my attention. The phrase held a shimmering, fleeting glamour that I couldn't quite unlock until one day, decades later, my own three-year-old daughter discovered the key.

It happened on a rainy November afternoon. I had left work a few minutes early so that I could swing by the local market before picking up Lydia from preschool. She lingered at the doorway, giggling with her friend Amy while I chatted with Amy's pregnant mother, due to give birth any day. On the drive home, Lydia prattled away in the back seat about baby brothers until suddenly there was a pause in her high-pitched chatter. “Where he come from, Mommy?”

It's the question every parent knows is coming, the one we pray comes later rather than sooner. I told Lydia a condensed version of what it meant to be pregnant, mainly that Amy's mother had a baby in her belly. “You used to be in my belly,” I added, hoping to distract her from asking how the baby got into the belly in the first place. “You loved it. It was cozy and quiet and warm. You were floating in there, listening to my heartbeat, ka-thump ka-thump ka-thump.” The windshield wipers kept rhythm with my voice as we stopped at a traffic light. She seemed to quietly accept my diversion, but just before the light changed, I glanced in the rearview mirror to catch her furrowing her

brow. She frowned and said with determination, “I go in your tummy again. I wanna go back. I go back now!”

Damn. I made the womb look too attractive.

I parked the car, then unbuckled her from her car seat. “Honey, you can’t go back, not in this lifetime,” I said, my karmic humor lost on her. I set her down in the driveway and gathered all the grocery sacks in my arms, hoping to get upstairs in one trip. “Besides, you’re too big now.”

“I’m not too big. I’m little!” she wailed, fists clutched and feet stomping in place. Her raincoat, still a size too big, made it look like she was wearing shoulder pads. The overall effect of her tantrum was something akin to a quick-feet football drill performed by a powder puff toddler team. She sobbed and shook all the way up the stairs to our apartment, lunging one short leg at a time with a hand on each knee. At the top, she stopped to rub both rain and tears from her eyes while I snaked one hand into my coat pocket to find the house keys.

“I am little,” she whimpered, tugging on the plastic sacks that were cutting into my wrists. I winced, praying for patience, wishing as I frequently found myself doing that toddler meltdowns could be more conveniently scheduled for hands-free moments. Once inside, I disentangled my arms, threw off my coat, flopped onto the couch, and pulled her onto my lap. “My sweet bunny, you are little, but look at Mommy’s tummy.” I pulled up my blouse. Granted, there was a measurable amount of excess flesh there, but not enough (in my opinion) to hold a three-year-old. “You don’t fit in there anymore.”

She pushed the blouse up toward my neck. Tears streamed down her face as she studied my belly. “I doooooo fit in there.”

This assessment didn’t do anything for my body image.

“No, sweetie, you don’t. I’m sorry.”

I was sorry. I had no answer she wanted to hear. Suddenly, though, her tears stopped. She looked up at me, clear-eyed and confident. She leaned in close to my face, put her hands on my cheeks, and, in a turn of logic that seemed quite reasonable to a three-year-old’s way of thinking, said, “Eat me, mommy. I be in your tummy again.”

Choking back a laugh, I said, “I can’t eat you, honey. It doesn’t work that way.”

Her fleeting composure was replaced by panic. She dug her chubby little fingers into my mouth, trying to pry open my lips. “Try, Mommy! Try!”

If I could have popped her into my mouth right then and there like a little chocolate toddler malt ball, I would have. Nobody had warned me that, at some point in motherhood, I would seriously consider eating my child. The finality of being out of the womb in the world forever was heartbreaking. There

was no way back. She heaved her face into my chest. I wiggled my blouse back down over my belly, mostly to catch the tears. Then, after about ten minutes of crying, she sat up on my lap, rubbed her fists in her eyes and whimpered, “I want some juice.”

That was the end of it for her.

For me, it was only the beginning. That afternoon became the turning point in the story of my adoption. Standing in the kitchen, the rain slapping stray oak leaves onto the sliding glass door to our deck, I realized I wanted my mamma to eat me, too. I wanted back into the belly of that mysterious woman who was my biological mother. The phrase from the Adoption Creed that so captivated me as a child—you didn’t grow under my heart—was suddenly turned on its head. No, I didn’t grow under my adopted mother’s heart, but I did grow beneath someone’s heart. My own words to Lydia taunted me. You loved it. It was cozy and quiet and warm. You were floating in there, listening to my heartbeat, ka-thump ka-thump ka-thump. The poem suddenly seemed like a curse. Never forget. Never forget. Never forget. I understood the intent of the message—I was to never forget I was fully loved—but in an instant it took on a sinister tone. I could never forget that I did not truly belong, that I was missing something that had to do with flesh, bone, and belly.

I had tried my entire life to pretend I didn’t need such a corporeal connection. Growing up, I had viewed myself as a kind of poster child for adoption. To friends and strangers alike, I proclaimed, “Adoption is wonderful! I’m adopted. It was such a great experience,” as if I were providing a testimonial for a vacation in the Caribbean.

“Some poster child...,” I muttered, trying to hold back the tears, aware of Lydia chattering away in her room with her dolls, “...more like poser child.” For the first three decades of my life, I had lived with an unidentified pain, an invisible wound that I wasn’t even aware of. I felt the mask of my adoption shattering around me. Memories flooded my mind, cracks in the veneer of my pretense. I saw myself at age four, waking from a recurring nightmare in which I had been abducted or my parents killed in house fires and natural disasters; at age six, overhearing my parents discuss my teacher’s frustration at my constant crying; age nine, asking my mother if it was possible that I had a twin somewhere who had been adopted by another family; age twelve, filled with guilt after responding to a saleslady observation that I looked just like my mother with a curt, “No I don’t. I’m adopted;” age fourteen, racking my brains trying to respond to an English assignment prompt that asked me to tell the story of my birth; age fifteen, paralyzed by the recessive/dominant gene

trait worksheet my Biology teacher had assigned. I was a tongue-roller with a widow's peak and free ear lobes (dominant) and had light hair with reddish tints (recessive), but none of my physical combinations aligned with the family I grew up with like my classmates' did.

I saw myself in a hospital bed at age seventeen, stunned by my doctor's pronouncement that I would most likely never have children. I was trapped in a biological bubble, never to be connected genetically to another human being.

I remembered the gut-wrenching shame I felt at age twenty-one when I miraculously (if inconveniently) found myself pregnant, and my parents accused me of trying to connect to my biological mother by getting pregnant.

Every doctor I had no medical history for, every question about my origin that had no answer, every family photo that seemed to be missing something, every birthday that came and went with petit or grand mal acts of sabotage, every insinuation that I should feel lucky to have been adopted into such a nice family weighed me down until I found myself slumped that day upon the kitchen floor among the sacks of broccoli, pasta, Goldfish, and cheese. My daughter's outlandish request had unleashed an incredible feeling of loss. What lay beneath my own heart was a loss that had no outlet, an anger that felt like a betrayal to my adoptive parents.

I couldn't pretend any longer. I understood my daughter's yearning on a gut level. It was primal. I never imagined I could ache so viscerally for a person I didn't even remember. I wasn't sure which I hated more—the fact that I couldn't have her, or the fact that I wanted her so very badly. The stark truth that my daughter discovered that afternoon rolled over me like a wave of nausea. There was no way back. I could ignore my feelings all I wanted, but that wasn't going to change anything. There was no way to get back that sweet union. I felt as hopeless, as desperate, as Lydia had been, sobbing into my chest that rainy afternoon.

Years later, I would realize that my daughter's request had been a deeply insightful gift. It wouldn't feel like it immediately. In fact, for years it would feel like anything but a gift. What I discovered that afternoon would cause me to doubt myself and my own feelings for years to come. It would carve a small canyon in my relationship with my adoptive family. It would further hamper my ability to connect with friends and lovers before it ever helped me connect on a deeper, more authentic, level with anyone. But eventually, I would look back on it as a turning point. Eventually, just like my daughter, I would accept that I could never have that particular connection back. Some days, I forget I have accepted this and have to accept it all over again.

I would eventually meet and forge relationships with both of my birth families and slowly heal the rifts with my adoptive family. I would find solace in a spiritual tradition in which ancestors of both blood and spirit are highly revered. “They know you, even if you don’t know who they are,” one of my teachers told me, and I came to see all my families, living and passed, as one. In doing so, I would become more secure in my identity as someone who has ties to her nature, her nurture, and that indefinable nuance of self that makes each of us someone completely unique.

I volunteered for a brief time as a support group facilitator for a group of teens who were adopted through the foster care system. It was good work, healing work. In those young people’s eyes I recognized a flickering hunger of loss and grief that shined like a desire to be consumed. We can’t forget. Not for a single minute. If we’re lucky, we find a nice lap, one big enough to hold all the pain that lies beneath our hearts until we’re ready to let it go. ♡

INTO THE DEEP

NANA ADABIE • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



A TRIP BACK IN TIME

ASHLEY SHEA • BUSINESS

Ancient brick fronts of buildings with 1950s-style signs line the streets. These signs look faded from the bright colors they used to hold with bold, painted shapes. No streetlights differentiate the cross streets—only stop signs and friendly waves from strangers. An unexpected sign, “Dollar General,” emerges across the street from the Wigwam Café. A mother walks hand in hand with her daughter down the sidewalk. A father swoops his young son off the ground into the café. They seem so optimistic of what the day will bring although clouds loom above, and a chill lingers in the air.

The small, dark, brick building is unremarkable with an oversized silver window cover to protect walkers from the rain. A worn-out white sign with red lettering hangs above and pronounces “Wahoo Bakery.” The entrance holds a regular white screen door found in most homes, not businesses, with three newspaper carriers to the right: *The Lincoln Journal Star*, *USA Today*, and the *Wahoo Newspaper*. The store window overflows with freshly baked bread—rye, white, wheat, and cinnamon raisin. The window holds no fancy artwork or sale signs enticing passersby to enter; only the food they are selling is on display.

“Good morning!” an unfamiliar female voice calls, as the screen door slams shut.

“Good morning!” I say with enthusiasm.

A snow-white haired woman in a crisp apron greets me as I enter the bakery. Her giggle sounds like the heckling of crows. She exudes a happiness not seen in many working people nowadays. A wave of freshly baked, warm, yeasty breads, a slight smell of cinnamon, and a subtle dark chocolate engulf the air upon entering. This interwoven mixture of smells gives the sensation of walking into Grandma’s house.

Although the floor of the bakery spaciouly leaves room for guests to enter, no tables or chairs invite them to sit and relax. Patrons expect to pick up their orders and be on their way. It would look nice to have some round bistro tables set up outside when the weather permits, but today I am not so lucky to have this luxury. I wonder if they have tables out when the sun shines.

Older-style glass counters with faded white edges cover the racks of assorted baked goods. Each tray of goodies is labeled in the familiar Comic Sans font on white printer paper. Some of the labels include smiley faces next to the price

to indicate sales. Glazed donuts, raspberry-filled donuts, chocolate rabbit cakes with coconut grass, and unusually large cinnamon rolls piled high with creamy frosting line the racks under the counter.

The Wahoo Bakery has been known for years for its kolaches. Steeped in Czech tradition, kolaches include soft, flaky dough shaped in circles with a variety of different fruit fillings. Unlike the donut, kolaches have no dough on top of the filling, only fruit. Along with fruit fillings, kolaches can have poppy seed, cream cheese, and even pumpkin fillings. The only kinds they have left today include a few raspberry and cream cheese flavors.

Behind the counter, the kitchen's open floor plan appears larger than the customers' area in front. Two men work furiously to keep the goodies on the rack. The same signature crisp aprons adorn them, as well. Their bodies move quickly and with purpose in the kitchen. The anticipation rises as new treats fill the trays; I wonder what can be left to bake. New donuts and festive Easter treats are set out with each bunny eye and whisker in place from the men in back.

Approaching the counter is a boy who can't be more than 16. His light brown hair is long and swoops to one side in a hippie fashion. He has on long tan shorts with a Led Zeppelin t-shirt and black and white Converse shoes. He looks out of place in this throwback kitchen. Waiting to be helped, he awkwardly lingers at the counter.

"What can I get ya?" the woman asks with a wide grin.

"My mom called. Her name's Barb," the teen replies.

"Ah yes, the donuts!" she proclaims as she hurries to the back to retrieve a large cardboard box.

"\$14.35," the older woman asserts.

As the teenage boy hands over the money, he longingly looks at the box of donuts. After paying, he saunters out as only a teenager can. He slinks from side to side in a sway as though dancing to a song no one else can hear. The wind hits him as he walks outside but never breaks the rhythm he has down pat.

As the clock ticks closer to closing time, fewer patrons are pulling in front of the store, as they know all the tasty treats were taken early this morning. The woman starts taking the trays to the back. The smell still lingers, but with the racks emptying and the front window turning bare, the bakery looks more like a vacant shop.

As I leave the emptying racks and head back onto the street, I take one last look back at the Wahoo Bakery. All the good-looking bread has been taken from the window; the "OPEN" sign has been shut off. I know if I come back Monday morning, the smells will hang in the air. 

EARTH ANGEL

ANNIE WILLS • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



THE LESSON I KEEP LEARNING

AMANDA DAUGHERTY • ACADEMIC TRANSFER/
RADIOLOGIC TECHNOLOGY

A light fall breeze gently tosses the multi-hued leaves aimlessly across the yard, as my five-year-old son sporadically runs to and fro in a dance that can only be called “play.” The musky, papery scent of the fallen leaves, combined with the fresh scent of the light wind, assails my senses while I try to keep track of every nuance that catches my carefree son’s attention. Gently ruffling from the breeze, the application for my mother’s Medicaid re-certification rests on my lap.

A rust-colored squirrel, still bloated from the preparatory seasonal gorge, scampers across the yard, thickly littered with crunchy leaves. One eye warily tracks the actions of my jovial son, while he pauses to search gingerly through the layers for a mid-day snack. Preston halts his play to avidly assess the squirrel; his eyes are as round as on Christmas morning. I watch as his expression changes from unbelieving awe and curiosity to exultation and pride at the discovery. “Mom, MOM! Look at that squirrel! I’m going to get it!” I smile in encouragement while a thousand fears race through my head...Does it have rabies? Do they bite? Is it filthy?

Preston hunches his shoulders in what is no doubt his invisible stealth mode and takes a few quietly restrained steps toward the rodent. In the true fashion of a five-year-old, the attempt at patience cannot override the impending urgency in the matter, and he lunges at it on limbs that have grown faster than he has been able to master them. Subsequently, he falls into a crouch a good six feet away from the intended target. The squirrel hops up from its snack and scampers up the nearest tree to the lowest out-of-reach branch; it keeps one eye on its meal and the other on the obstacle—a mischievous little boy. Preston shrugs, displaying a healthy amount of good sportsmanship at the failed attempt, and returns to the pile of leaves he has been attempting to arrange into an army fort/garage for his Transformer robots.

As I take this in, I cannot help a smile that slowly stretches my lips. I silently think back to the days in my childhood, few and far between, when life was so extraordinarily carefree. On days when my stepfather Bob was in a relatively “good” mood, my two older sisters and I would lug our wagon, full of

partially nude Barbie and Ken dolls, out to the scorching hot sidewalk to play in our make-believe world of unrealistic adult life. We had found that though the yard was a forested world of cool shade, we dared not play closer to the house so as to not disturb our stepfather and prolong the generally short-lived “good mood.” For those tidbits of time, we could hold our shoulders back and laugh good-naturedly, though softly, trying to capture what semblance of childhood we could. The freedom of the moments was something well cherished amongst my siblings and me, and we tried hard not to shatter the illusion of normalcy. When the winter months would roll in and the temperature outside dipped below zero degrees, forcing us to stay inside, we would try our best to stay invisible to the scrutinizing eyes of Bob, who undoubtedly would find us a mundane chore that was meaningless but meant to keep us “out of trouble.” On most occasions, that chore would be for one of us to stand at the foot of his and my mom’s bed and await instructions to fetch whatever he decided he needed.

One particularly cold winter day will remain etched on the window of my childhood memories forever.

The brisk wind outside bellows through the cracks and crevices worn into the small, two-bedroom, cottage-style house while the bright winter sun shines proudly into my sister’s and my cramped bedroom. A chill seeps up from the cellar through the scratched and knobby wood floors, as my sister Jennifer and I rouse from our shared twin bed; we throw aside the rough homemade afghans used to hibernate under through the cold night. My oldest sister Kristi is still asleep, wisps of red curls peeking out from under the brown wool quilt covering her head. My flannel Strawberry Shortcake pajamas, wrinkled from the night-long war for blankets and bed space, ride up on one side giving me an obscurely disheveled look that only freshly risen four-year-olds can pull off with finesse. I push my pillow-styled hair off my brow as I struggle to keep up with Jen; we race for our wagon of dolls, hoping to get in playtime before HE wakes up. While we spill out the wagon, she beats me to my favorite Barbie with long mahogany tresses and an emerald green ball gown worthy of a fairy tale. I put on my best pouty and hurt expression in hopes of wresting my prize from her—to no avail. She begins removing the magnificent dress from my Barbie! With impatience and disregard, I yell, “You’re ruining her!” As the outburst echoes off the plain white walls, I quickly cup my palm to my mouth in hopes that it will erase the uninhibited loss of control as though it never occurred. Kristi slowly moves the blanket off of her head and looks at us in astonishment, her mouth partially open in reprimand. Deciding against this, her mouth snaps shut while she awaits the verdict on whether or not we were

heard. We wait patiently, holding our breaths until our cheeks flush, hoping that making no noise will atone for my monumental slip-up. It starts slowly, a rustling down the hall, and the door opens.

“What are you girls doing, waking me the fuck up?! Trashing your bedroom like little babies? Do I have to tell you for the thousandth time to pick up after yourself and not leave your shit lying around like this?” Inch by inch, we slowly tuck in our shoulders to appear smaller from his towering vantage and to show him that we understand what is expected, hoping that the tongue lashing would be the only type of lashing. Unappeased, he painfully pulls us up by our arms. Leaning down from his massive six-foot height, he pants heavily as though from some marathonic exertion. His breath is unwashed, smelling of stale Pabst Blue Ribbon, remnants from his nightly ritual of drinking himself to sleep. His menacing stare remains locked to ours as though in challenge, daring us to blink. My chest starts to burn from holding in my breath as though in preparation for flinching in pain; my sister is no doubt suffering the same affliction while we await the punishment. Through no reason I could ever fathom, even well into my adult years, Bob decides we need to be taught a lesson, and he knows just the one to get the job done. Slowly, his weathered face cracks into a smile at his genius idea. I grow more uneasy at this unpredictable behavior and try desperately not to fidget while in the grasp of his bear-like paw.

Belligerently, he throws us to the side of the room while he makes quick work of dismantling our twin bed. He throws the mattress off as though it's made of feathers; it makes a dull thud as though attempting to be silent so as not to draw more attention from the vortex destroying our bedroom. The bed does not have a box spring but has instead a rusty frame with springs woven into the sides. Bob picks this up and carries it to the dining room then returns and does the same with Kristi's bed. Standing there quietly, I look over at Jen. Her bangs are in her eyes; she is stunned into silence by what is going on and bewildered by the extremity by which our stepfather is acting. It seems like a million years before he finally returns, but with no explanation, only an impatient wave of his beefy arm. We quickly walk forward at his beckoning, leaving the disheveled room behind, and follow him into the dining room. Before us is a looming structure concocted of the metal frames and the dining table that was pushed against the wall. With a grunt, he motions Jen and me toward the monstrosity. Cautiously, we approach it and crawl under the back of the table to get inside the metal confines. Dumbfounded and still unsure of the situation, my sister and I stare up at him through the wire rectangles, interlocked across the metal rails.

Then comes a gruff voice underlined with an excited quality: “If you girls are going to act like babies, then you’ll live like babies.” He pauses as he strokes the grizzly hair that covers his lower jaw while thinking through the final stages of his lesson. “You have to stay in that crib all day. You can’t have food, and you cannot use the restroom. If you’re thirsty, suck your thumb, and if you’re not still in there when I get home from work...well, you can just wish you were never born.” At this, he storms into the bathroom to prepare for work. Kristi comes around the corner from the living room and leans against the wall while surveying the latest mess that Jen and I have gotten into. Shaking her head, she whispers, “You know better.”

As I strain to hear Bob’s car back out of the driveway, I start to crawl back out of the “crib.” Hearing the soft jingle of the thin metal rectangles, Kristi comes into the dining room and shakes her head upon seeing my attempt at escape. “I’m not getting in trouble for you getting out, so you need to stay in there. Mom will be home in a couple of minutes. You can ask her if you need something.” Slowly, I crawl back into the crib and cringe from the pain of my distended bladder, as I have not yet had time that morning to relieve myself.

Minutes later, I hear the salvation of a car pulling up outside of the house. I shake my foot incessantly while sitting in the Indian position to alleviate the pressure on my young belly and hope my mother will not stop to grab the mail. I hear the keys rattle in the door and feel relief so intense that in my four-year-old mind, it is like winning a shopping spree at the Barbie doll outlet store. Mom warily trudges inside the house and shakes the snow off the bottom of her shoes onto the braided rug by the front door. Dressed in a white nurse’s pantsuit, she walks fully into the dining room and takes in the sight of Jen and me in the “crib.” Sighing morosely, she says, “What have you guys done now? Can’t I come home and not have to deal with this shit? You two really need to quit pissing your father off.” Arms crossed and dark circles all but threatening to swallow her eyes, she sighs again. “Have you even had breakfast yet?”

I sit there staring up at her, my foot still twitching. “Mom, can I go to the bathroom?” I wait a heartbeat as my mom processes this information.

“For heaven sakes, YES, go to the bathroom. You know it’s not healthy to hold it in!”

Quickly, I scurry out of the cage and race to the bathroom; I barely make it without soiling myself. I slowly walk back into the kitchen where my mom is sitting at the nook; a blank expression of exhaustion transforms her young face to look as though it was 50 instead of 29. I approach her and lay my hand on her leg, making her jump as though being roused from a trance or a daydream.

I ask if Jen and I can have some food. She assesses me as though trying to memorize every plateau of my youthful face, searching for signs that I am affected by the life I live. Jerking away as though what she sees haunts her, she ambles to the cupboard to get a box of crackers out. Handing me a wrapped tower with the instructions to share with Jen and make them last all day, she shoos me back to the crib and watches as I crawl back inside. Numb, I situate myself into a comfortable position while Jen enthusiastically grabs the crackers from my grasp.

I keep my gaze on mom who stands on the outside of the crib, her silhouette interrupted by the wire rectangles interlocked within the frame. She looks down at the scuffed toes of her white work shoes as though unable to bear my eyes; she informs us we must stay in the crib all day. We may not leave for any reason, even to use the restroom or for a drink, and that we must not tell our father that she let us out or gave us food. She slowly nods her head and turns away in resignation, walks to her bedroom, and closes the door.

Leaning back against the gritty, faded red brick wall of my apartment building, I notice that the sun has moved considerably across the pale sky. A bubbly laugh draws my attentions to where my son has completed his monumental task of building an army fort/garage for his Transformer robots. His expression is filled with a relief overcast by youthful ego as he eases his bumblebee car into the garage, as though he has no qualms regarding the dimensions ever being wrong. I languidly stretch, taking in the last few moments of nature, and tuck the Medicaid application under my arm before I walk over to him to inspect his creation. Preston shows off what each room of leaves are supposed to be as though this proof of creativity is the only speck that matters in the world—before he quickly loses interest by placing his hands upon each hip with a crease of his brow to inform me that dinner is late. I ruffle his hair as he groans, trying to escape from my motherly attention while we turn and walk into our apartment. As I try to think up a quick gourmet meal that will probably turn out to be Hamburger Helper with canned green beans, my mind continues to wander back to my early years and the difference between my upbringing and Preston's. Has Preston had a good life? Do I make the right decisions? How will he remember his childhood?

It's the summer of 1990; Jen and I are jamming out to a New Kids on the Block cassette tape, blaring from the speakers of our two-foot long boom box. I can see the neighbors through my bedroom window filling a plastic swimming pool printed with happy fish and smiling whales. I hold the hairbrush up to my mouth as I belt out the words for "Popsicle Girl," throwing my other arm in

the air to make my performance more extraordinary. Jen leans in to duet with me on my makeshift microphone as mom walks in behind us, patting my shoulder in reassurance. I turn and give her my best rock star face as the final words tumble from my lips and the music fades, signaling the end of the song. Jen turns the boom box off as Mom surveys my room. She has her hands on her hips and an attempted stern look on her face. "Are you gonna clean your room? It's a pig-sty in here!" I give her my best look of patience as I firmly tell her that I don't feel like it, but I might get to it later. Shrugging her shoulders, she walks back to the living room/bedroom to catch some sleep on the couch before her shift at the hospital.

Jen goes to her bedroom as I wade through my messy room to fall back on my own bed and stare at the ceiling. The exuberance of freedom I felt when my mom left Bob has long since faded, replaced by an aimlessly driven egotism. I chomp on my apple-flavored Bubble Yum bubble gum, as I twirl a lock of strawberry blonde hair around my index finger and ignore the stack of papers and spilled markers spread out across my bed. Quickly sitting up, I remember my friend Darcy and her family is going to the zoo today and invited me along. I flounce out of bed, my attention now fully focused on my imminent trip, and walk out to the living room. Mom is softly snoring on the couch as I impatiently shake her shoulder. She jolts awake, looking around for the cause of the interruption. Smacking a big green bubble while letting her acclimate to being awake, I pull on a sweet innocent look as I implore her of my need for cash to fund my trip with Darcy. Sitting up, she looks at the floor between her bare toes and explains that all the money that remains after bills is needed for gas to get to work. I pat her shoulder and walk over to her purse strung across the back of a dining room chair. Reaching in, I make a big show of extracting a ten while deftly palming another five. I shove the cash in my pocket while reassuring her that she'll get the money she needs and that maybe she should work some more over-time. The sun streaks through the curtain-less living room; it illuminates how dull her brown hair is as she lays back down on the couch while I bound toward the door. Pulling the blanket up around her body, she glances at the front door as it slams shut without a good-bye.

Standing over the stove, I rub the burn from my eyes caused by staring at the wall too long. As the timer dings, I click off the burner and stir the congealed noodles and meat. Preston peaks his head around the corner wanting an update for his growling tummy. I giggle at his impatient seriousness and ask him to get out the silverware. He grudgingly walks over to the drawer and helps me while hiding a secret smile at being Mom's big boy. Dinner is a relatively

uneventful affair with my usual eager attempt to compel him to eat his green beans, reiterating that they're "big green bean muscle machines." Reassured that vegetables will make him a superhero, he enthusiastically shoves a heap into his mouth. His ruddy cheeks bounce up and down as he hurriedly tries to swallow while lifting one edge of his sleeve to see if the muscle machines have done their job.

The phone rings, pulling me away from this nightly tradition. I pick it up and see that it is the assisted living facility that my mother is living at. Curious, I answer it. Mary, the charge nurse, is on the other end and explains that my mother has been taken to the hospital. The cause is an intentional overdose of Tylenol. It was a failed attempt, but they are going to give her charcoal to make her vomit the remaining pills. After getting the hospital and room information, I hang up and ask Preston to wash up and get his coat on. Confused, he wants to know what's wrong with Grandma. I tell him, "Everything is fine; Grandma is just a bit sick, so the doctor is seeing her."

He crinkles up his nose and says, "Does she have to get a shot? Cuz those suck!" I tell him I am not sure.

I call my sister Kristi and explain the situation. She says she cannot go to the hospital because she is still at work and won't have time after work. Sighing, I hang up and phone Jen. She says she cannot make it to the hospital to check on Mom, but she happily agrees to watch Preston, so I can make the trek up there to see her and speak to the doctors. After dropping Preston off with Jen and her daughter Fantasia, I start the drive back across town to the hospital where my mother lays in mental and physical pain. The sky is a dusty gray with a light drizzle falling, as if Mother Nature is attuned to my thoughts. The rear lights of the various cars of traffic blend as my mind starts to process what is happening. My mother is in the hospital again for the third time for an attempted suicide. Two years have passed since she had the stroke, and her speech has still not returned. I rub my chest hoping to ease the ache of frustration at not being able to snap my fingers and make her happy, make her able to talk again. The weight of a million words pulsates in my throat, begging to be proclaimed. Five minutes of coherent conversation is all I want, my only wish in this world.

Radiohead silently strums through my speakers, giving a theme song for my mental monologue, as I pull into the shiny wet parking lot of the hospital. Parking my truck, I lean back and take a few moments to compose myself. Mustering all of my courage, I dreadfully reach for the handle and open my door. As I get out and straighten my clothes, I decide I will not be scared of this and square my shoulders as I make the walk to the main doors. The calm

monotone of the elevator music is alarmingly incongruent with my attempt at courage and threatens to break my resolve. Thankfully, the ride ends, and I exit the box with my bearings intact. I reach the door of her room.

Mom is lying in the bed looking as though she is a frail child. My heart breaks as she opens her eyes, a million words displayed in that one expression, as a heavy tear escapes down her cheek. I sit in the chair by her bed grasping her hand as though she were my lifeline and not the other way around. Trying to hide the destruction of my demeanor, I lay my head on her shoulder and softly cry. For so many people, forgiveness is a difficult feat. I just want to tell her I forgive her and implore her to forgive herself. I want her to know that she deserves to live. I want to say everything that had been left unsaid. Words that are generally lodged in my throat come out: "I forgive you, Mom." She lays there quietly, giving no sign that she comprehends my words. Then a gentle hand softly strokes my hair. I grasp onto this as my sign that she knows. I whisper a prayer that she will try to live and not continue to punish herself. I pray that she can move on. I pray that though she had a stroke, she will try to live and rebuild the self-esteem that was lost so many years ago. I pray that she will be my mother.

Hours later, I am pulling away from Jen's. Preston is asleep in his booster seat with his head lolling from side to side from the steady rhythm of tires on asphalt. As I arrive home, I retrieve Preston and lock up my car. The sun has long since passed below the horizon, as I wearily stumble into our meager apartment with my son draped over one shoulder. As I prepare him for bed, I gently clothe him in his favorite footie dinosaur pajamas amongst half-hearted and limp protests. Situating him in bed, I pause to brush a lock of hair off his forehead. Drawing the blanket around his narrow frame, I tuck Piggy into the crook of his arm. Walking slowly to the door, I grab the handle and turn back for a last look. Content for the moment that his life is good, I walk out, leaving the door open. 

PRIDE

JENNIFER CRELLER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



LIFTED CURTAIN

DON STEIN • FIRE PROTECTION TECHNOLOGY

This finite life
Has struck me,
Rampaging through
Every bit of my mind.
How do I now live?
I am a man ruined.

Undone from my vein-riddled
feet right up to
my ever-so-quickly
aging face that I once
fancied, but now I fear.
A dark cloud, rain-soaked
with tears upon tears, has taken
the place where the sun,
beach, and sky once were.

A playful lad's face
is never shaken
by the cares of the day.
But now,
they have all at once caught me,
those I once outran.

WHAT REMAINS

KATLIN EVANS • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Childhood can be an endless labyrinth for many. When people look back, a jumble of emotions can come out. For some, their childhood is like a peacock feather, light and beautiful, and for others, a crow's quill, dark and somber. Mine was a little of both, a childhood that kept me grounded, but at times, also gave me the hope that I could soar.

My fellow classmates and I escaped the oven that was St. Margret's Catholic School and rushed into the cool church basement that served as our cafeteria. We splintered off into our respective social groups, and my friends and I sat down to our table with our trays.

"You know, Chloe's dad moved out," Anne said, casting a glance toward the popular girls' table, their flippant, high-pitched laughter echoing throughout the brown, bare room.

I felt the mushy chicken nugget catch in my throat, and I grabbed my cardboard pint of chocolate milk to wash it down. I swallowed it in one big gulp. My friends continued to talk with their half-formed, nine-year-old voices, not realizing what had just been said. I looked down as heat unwonted raced up my neck to my cheeks. I was going to tell them, someday, when it felt right. My brain scoffed at me, "Yeah, never." My best friend, Allie, gave me a quick look, a knowing one. Fire flooded my cheeks, and the room's air seemed to be sucked out. I was going to pass out, and then I was going to go to the principal's office and have to explain to him what was going on. I figured my friends wouldn't as quickly morally condemn my parents as my loud-mouthed, red-faced principal would.

"They're getting a divorce. My parents are," I said in one whooshed breath. My friends stared at me.

"Really? When?" Allie asked. She was the most morally upright of all of us and was uncomfortable with any color seeping into her black and white view, especially this close to home. I hesitated.

"I don't know," I told her. "Soon."

They looked at me. Try as I might, I couldn't quell the four years of religion class pounding in my ears. I wondered if my friends were thinking the same thing. It was wrong. Divorce was against God's law, and the people who defied

Him went.... “No!” I thought. My parents were the greatest people I knew, and anything bad happening to them was inconceivable. God would forgive them— He had to. My stunned friends didn’t help with reassuring me. The lunch bell saved me from their slack-jawed faces, and I was the first one up to empty my tray.

I lined up, staring at the ground. As the rest of the students joined, my friends still probably emptying their trays, I felt the bodies around me. I was melting into the crowd, and for maybe the first time in my life, I was grateful for it.

As the months swept by and temperatures dropped, I knew I was going to have to have a talk with Him. The cold December wind blew, and I looked outside the window at the steel wool gray sky. I wanted to get out. The snow blanketed the ground in glittering white heaps. Mom insisted if I was to go out, I better be properly dressed. My outfit consisted of black Adidas sweat pants, two pairs of white socks, new tan Columbia snow boots, a new purple snowsuit, a long-sleeved shirt, my thick Columbia winter jacket, chunky purple snow gloves, an itchy green cap with my name stitched across it, and a blue scarf with a moose on it. I waddled outside like a penguin and wondered how on earth I was supposed to play when I could barely walk.

The snow crunched beneath my feet, and I felt bad for defiling the perfect virgin snow. I walked to our backyard, where the most snow had fallen. The snow was almost to my waist, and I loved it. I kicked it around, white powder falling all around me. I stuck my tongue out to see if I could catch the newly falling snow flakes. The icy drops sparkled on my tongue, and I smiled. The sky was dark and ominous. More snow would surely fall tonight. I laughed to myself thinking that maybe the weatherman would get it right after all. My fun didn’t last too long before my bad thoughts took revenge and, once again, banished my blissful thinking away. My dad was gone. Well, he was still in town, but those three miles felt like a thousand miles away from me. My eyes teared up. My mind rummaged for a logical conclusion as to why this had befallen me. I was a good kid, decent in school. My manners were impeccable to most kids around me. I prayed my prayers at night. Then why did God allow this to happen? Why would He want to undermine my family and my very faith?

In a bitter, defiant voice, I told God I hated Him. I had never hated anyone in my life. Mom said you could never really hate anyone; it’s too strong a word. But at that moment, I did. My own bold feelings scared me. I backed off almost immediately, stepping back slightly in the snow. It troubled me that I had told God I hated Him. To clear my head of my now growing guilt, I went back inside. The warm smell of hot cocoa greeted my nose. Mom was putting too many marshmallows in again.

I opened my mouth to tell her, “Enough,” but it was too late. She turned to me and smiled, as my cup overflowed with a small mountain of white fluff. Her red lips turned up to reveal her pearly white teeth. I had always wanted her teeth; her dentist patted himself on his back every time he saw her. They were perfect and always made me slightly jealous with my jagged, gaped grin. Her radiant smile always lifted me up regardless, and especially now, she was trying very hard. That smile desperately wanted to set things right again, to straighten out our messy lives, and above all, to lift me up so one day I could soar.

I sat down, my steaming cocoa not cool enough to drink yet, and Mom sat down next to me. Her warm green eyes looked into the same green eyes, and I wondered if she had seen me outside? I didn’t think she had, but then again, she was my mom. She was always able to see the unseen.

Many people leave life up to chance. What childhood a person receives, I believe, is mostly up to chance. However, what a person does with what she is given, that is something else entirely. I could choose to stay bitter about the hand dealt to me, but I won’t. My childhood experience has given me courage and one thing I’ll always be grateful for—hope that one day I will be able to fly off toward that hazy sunset called my future. ∞

DAISY

DAWN AMUNDSON • MEDICAL LABORATORY TECHNOLOGY



WINTER WITHOUT THE MESS

ANDY DARNELL • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

If my wish came true,
It would mean the end for the coal-eyed and the carrot-nosed.
There would be no winged imprints on the yard,
And nobody would have any balls.

And I'm no Scrooge, by the way,
So don't you bah-humbug me.

Indeed, if my wish came true,
Sleds would sit idle,
And all our shovels would go unmanned.

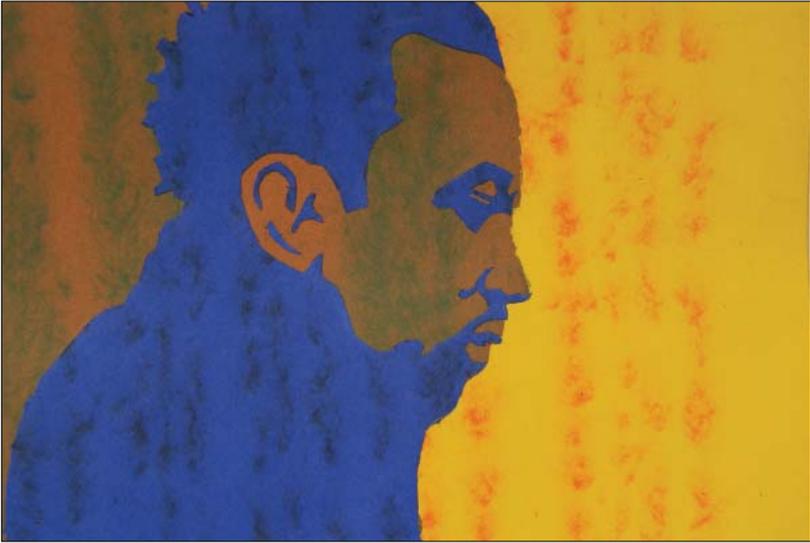
OVER HERE!

EMILIO FRANSO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



JOHN LEGEND

DYLAN BAUMANN • GRAPHIC DESIGN



UNTITLED

JANE COX • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

h
aunting inferno
light breath, death wink, death sigh
diamondback glitter eyes
the thought of the day
patriotic masochism
accompanied by piano
and bass and guns
and cigarette burns
the couch is on fire
the house is on water
when we get to the top
will we fall back down
or slide on through
to the next tier of
twinkling oblivion?

FAR FROM PERFECT

DANEILA TROYER • DUAL CREDIT/ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Growing up, I always knew the world was not a perfect place. I had been given a respectable life, but places existed in the world that held hurt, disappointed, and hopeless people—places I had never been before. I did not know how close these seemingly distant places were until I had the chance to experience a scene I had only imagined.

I was seated in one of the two 15-passenger vans, which were filled with expectant, excited, and restless teenagers. A week-long mission trip in Denver, Colorado, sounded like a meaningful way to end the summer. The vans drove down Hooker Street and parked side-by-side in the parking lot of a church known as Tha Myx. I hopped out, ready to stretch my legs after the nine-hour van ride. Taking in a breath of clean air, I saw a man rushing out of the church toward the group. With a smile plastered to his face, the man, who stood no taller than five-foot seven, ushered us inside quickly. The smell of strong Mexican spices burned my nostrils as we walked down a grey cement hallway with doors scattered on each side. Turning into a room, our group was greeted by various people seated at a table. The room was filled with uneasy tension from the visiting group. The people gathered around the table waited, smiling up at us with expectant faces. Everyone was instructed to grab a chair and sit down at the table. I did as I was told, and the introductions began.

Bryan was the man who had practically shoved us through the doors of the church. He had no hair and was wearing jeans and a t-shirt with a pair of well-used tennis shoes. I assumed he was the cook because of the Mexican spices I smelled. His wife, Tina, sat with their son, Junior, and a man named Peter sat beside them. Tina had long, black hair that fell far beneath her shoulders. A t-shirt and jeans also covered her small frame. I noticed Peter, a quiet African-American man, was dressed stylishly in all black. Bryan informed us that Age, the pastor, would be in soon. While we waited, my youth pastor, Brad, introduced our group. Age, a bald man wearing obvious name-brand clothing, carried a shiny iPhone in his hand as he finally shuffled into the room, apologized for his tardiness, and greeted us with a lazy smile.

After the second round of introductions concluded, Age jumped right in, informing us where we would be eating, telling us what time each meal would

be provided, and pointing out other menial details. After saying grace, Age instructed us to form a line in front of the kitchen to receive our supper. My plate, piled high with rice and enchiladas, was handed to me with steam rolling off the top. The food smelled delicious and spicy. We began chatting, mostly about our new surroundings. As I took my last bite of food, Age stood.

“The guys will be sleeping in the church sanctuary. The girls are sleeping in the house across the parking lot. The church owns this house, but there are a few rules. A girl must always be with a guy if she needs to walk to or from the house after 5:00 in the evening. I don’t mean to scare you all, but this isn’t like the neighborhoods you are used to at home. The church is surrounded by people selling and doing drugs. Houses around the block are filled with gangs, and the projects are just down the street. We have also had drive-bys recently. Everyone needs to be extra careful and aware of their surroundings at all times.” Age continued by explaining upcoming activities for the week. My heart sped up, and I spaced out, wondering what I was doing there. Gangs and shootings were not common occurrences around home. I felt out of place and more scared than ever before.

As I glanced around the room, I saw other faces filled with the same uncertainty and fright I was feeling. I took a deep breath, willing my brain back into the conversation. “...handing out food and hygiene packages in the Civic Center Park and going door-to-door, inviting neighbors to the local barbeque held here at the church. We have much more planned, but these are a few of the activities that come to mind.” Age finished with a smile, excused himself, and left the room. Anxiousness filled the room, and my lungs seemed at a loss for air. “Going door-to-door” was the phrase that stuck in my mind. Gang members and drug dealers occupied these homes. This was my summer. Why was I here risking my life to invite people to a barbeque? The thought only intensified my nerves.

I was volunteered to be the first person on kitchen duty. Bryan and I cleaned up the kitchen, washed the dishes, and stored the leftovers. Through the open door, I heard my friends explain the same feelings I had: fear, doubts about why we were there, and plain curiosity about this new place. When the kitchen was clean, everyone headed to their designated sleeping areas.

Opening the door to the house, I was hit with a horrid odor. Rotten food and an unknown smell overwhelmed me. Dragging my luggage into the house, I found the two rooms that belonged to our group. Everyone was blowing up air mattresses and trying to ignore the smell. After preparing for bed, I tried to sleep and forget all the awful things that could be happening right outside the window.

My 7:00 alarm rang the next morning, jolting me and everyone else awake. Taking our turns in the one small bathroom, we were soon ready for breakfast. Stepping out the door, we hurried to the church, frightened of the neighborhood even in daylight. Breakfast was quick, and we awaited our instructions for the day.

Age arrived, late again, and explained the task for the day. “We are heading over to Civic Center Park to hand out food to the needy,” he informed us. “We need bread, meat, plastic baggies, chips, cookies, and brown paper sacks.” A group of five headed to Wal-Mart to pick up the needed supplies while the others stayed behind to work at the church.

More than a hundred lunches were made and packed in brown sacks along with hygiene bags. We loaded the lunches into the two vans and pulled out of the lot. As we traveled through town, I noticed people walking alongside the streets with shopping carts piled high with seemingly useless items. Not knowing what to expect at the park, I sat back in my seat and waited while we searched for a place to park. Jumping out of the van, I was ready to go. I believed handing out lunches could not be that straining.

Age gathered us into a large group and broke people off into smaller groups of four. Armed with lunches, we were given instructions: “Walk through the park, hand out the sack lunches, and try to share The Gospel with anyone who will listen to you.” Crossing the street with our box full of brown sack lunches, my group headed into the park.

Groups of people were lying under trees, arms crossed over their chests, sleeping. Their clothes were filthy, and most had a bag filled with unknown items under their heads. Sadness took control of me, and I felt pity for these strangers. I had always had a place to go home to every night. I never worried about food or a place to sleep; I knew all my necessities and many of my wants would be provided. Seeing people having to live this way, I began to understand the reason I came on this trip. I approached a group and gently laid a sack lunch by the side of a sleeping man. The others in my group did the same, pity clearly displayed across their faces. Moving on to the next waiting group in the park, we were surprisingly greeted with heartfelt smiles. I wondered how these people, who were living in the park without possessions, could have something to smile about.

As I greeted this group, a middle-aged woman smiled at me as she reached for the sack in my hand. The woman had unclean brown hair that was pushed back from her face. Except for the end of her hair, which was thin and slightly curled up, the rest lay straight along her back. Underneath her eyes lay dark

blue-black circles. Bloodshot and weary eyes stared up at me. Even with the heat of the day, she wore a dark green jacket and many layers beneath. Baggy grey sweat pants and brown work boots completed her outfit. "I knew today was gonna be the day that something good would happen!" she said. Peeking in the bag, her smile seemed to grow as she realized what was inside. "I'm gonna be clean and full tonight." Yellowed teeth with empty spaces in-between constructed her wide smile. I could not help but smile back. This lady was so happy for necessities that were always in reach for most people. I squatted down beside her, trying not to crinkle my nose at the smell that rolled off her breath. The strong smell of alcohol was almost too much for my stomach to handle. Regardless of the stench, I forged on. Starting with my name, I explained why I was there and where I was from. She smiled and nodded her head casually like she had heard this information before.

"Would you mind if we prayed for you?" the leader of my group, Andy, spoke up from behind.

"If you want to, then I ain't gonna be the one to stop you," she answered in a voice clearly stating her beliefs on prayer.

Andy began praying for the lady and the group of friends surrounding her. My head was bowed for the entire prayer, but my eyes stayed open. Age had told us to never close our eyes. We did not know what could happen at any given time and needed to be aware of the people around us. Andy prayed for the women gathered in the circle: he prayed for safety and for God to work in each of their hearts and lives.

As I lifted my head, I found that the woman's head was down, and she seemed to be sleeping. Glancing around the circle, her friends eyed us with amused looks. With our smiles still intact, we stood up and began moving onto the next group. A voice from behind stopped us short.

"If those words change anything, I'll be sure to come and hunt you down just to thank you for passing them along." Circling around, I glanced back to find the women looking over toward us. Her face displayed a look of sarcasm, and her voice was full of humor. Her eyes seemed to know that people were there, but they did not seem to see the actual people.

"I sincerely hope that prayer does help you. I don't know in what way it will change things around for you, but I believe that it will. Praying to God always changes things, maybe not at the time or way we wanted to be changed, but always some way. I'll continue praying for you and your friends." I do not know where those words came from, but they spilled from my mouth.

The lady looked at me, slightly raised her eyebrows, nodded, and said, "If you

wanna believe in something so foolish, I'm gonna let you. You don't live the life I live, ain't seen the things I have. This God sure has made your life a lot easier than he's made mine, so you go ahead and thank him and believe in him all you want. Like I said before, if those words change something around here for me, I'll come and thank you myself."

Having nothing else to say, I turned and continued through the park. The memory of that lady stuck in my mind for a long time. She was right. I had never experienced living the way that she was forced to live. She was so hurt and alone; she seemed broken beyond repair. Her eyes held no hope for the future, and she did not seem to believe in anything. My heart ached for her.

Living in my bubble was so much easier than having to see all the hurting and hopeless people. I had always thought that type of people was supposed to be in other countries, not so close to the easy life I lived. Going on this trip opened a whole new world to me. Hurting and hopeless people were everywhere; I had just never taken the time to look before. Those places I thought were so far away were actually surrounding me daily.

The world holds people in all different walks of life. I do not know why I was given a life that is easier to live than others, but I do know that the world has never been, and will never be, a perfect place. Through experiences like this one, I now know that I want to help make the world closer to perfect by keeping my eyes open and helping others in need. ↻

SIDEWALK ARTISTES

JENNIFER CRELLER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



THE WORKERS ARE FEW

MELISSA BUCKBEE • ASSOCIATE DEGREE NURSING
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP ARTWORK AWARD



RIPE FOR THE PICKIN'

MARIE ROBINSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



GARLIC

KARA GALL • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

We have met in battle before,
On marble, on butcher block,
on eco-friendly Poly-flax cutting boards.

Your plump firm bulbs, roots still intact,
promise a pungent parliament of savory siege,
a fracas of flavor sheathed in bellicose husk.

I am not fooled by your heart-shaped armor.
I see only spoils: the sizzle in the pan,
the tang upon bread. I know the stakes.

Your allies have fallen
—onions, leeks, shallots, chives—
each of them a lost white flag beneath my knife.

Empty paper skins flutter to the floor.
Beneath my feet, the clove corpses whisper:
War is always a hunger.

THE BACHELOR'S BATHROOM

JULIE NGUYEN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

The end of December marks a special time for me, a time when my dear boyfriend Andy's lease expires at his current apartment. No longer will I have to use his disgusting, smelly bathroom. All the charm and character rented with the apartment was quickly replaced with overall disappointment the first time I saw the bathroom.

The tiny shack of a bathroom houses a toilet that is uncomfortable to sit on with the door closed. The idiot who designed the bathroom didn't think to leave any leg space. The sink in the middle of the bathroom is free-standing with rusty pipes exposed underneath, but the overhead shelving above the toilet makes up for the lack of sink cabinets. A cramped shower draped in green completes the amenities of the bathroom. It is my theory that the same idiot placed the sink next to the shower with no gaps—making the shower difficult to enter.

Along with Andy's bathroom being poorly designed, he sure did break it in...the bachelor's way. His wastebasket has never been emptied. Q-tips, bare toilet paper rolls, clothing tags, and empty cigarette packs protrude over the top. Four more cardboard pieces are strewn across the floor.

Shampoo and conditioner bottles, used hair dye packets, and a disposable razor litter the floor of the shower due to the absence of a shower caddy. I often wonder how Andy doesn't slip and trip over these hazardous furnishings—the razor, especially. Two other razors sit on the ledge of the porcelain sink; the one in his shower could easily be moved to the same location.

It's obvious that the sink is Andy's shaving station. Blunt, dark hairs are sprinkled around the sink and desperately need to be wiped up. A tube of Crest toothpaste squeezed and sculpted into an odd shape lies on top of the sink. Why is there yet another cardboard toilet paper roll on top of his overhead shelf? Why has it not landed in the wastebasket? Why is the wastebasket still not emptied? These are all questions I think of when I am using Andy's gross bathroom.

When I think of these questions, I often hold my breath. Andy's bathroom reeks of mildew. He doesn't notice it, and I think he's crazy. A pungent odor in a small, cramped area is never pleasant. Though Andy can't smell what I can, he has been kind enough to buy lavender-scented air fresheners to mask the odor. But what does that give us? Lavender mildew.

I have had enough of Andy's horrible bathroom. Every time I need to use it, I dread the walk to the "less than marvelous" room to do my even more "less than marvelous" activity. I often catch myself daydreaming of his future bathroom. December can't come soon enough.

I have self-assigned myself the position of bathroom inspector when Andy moves into a new apartment. I am looking forward to turning his bachelor's bathroom into more of an "unmarried, but involved" bathroom where it will be at least a little more sanitary for the sake of his awesome significant other. I understand there needs to be compromise in any relationship, and maybe I should be less demanding and help him clean up every now and then. Better bathroom, better cleaning. Deal. 

BAUMANN

MICHAEL LIEDTKE • GRAPHIC DESIGN



A TALL TALE?

TOBY TRIPLETT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Hot and humid, hiding under a towel from
the hammering heat of the sun,
half the time spent keeping cool, the
other half watching my fishing pole.

An old man from down the way came
to me at the end of the day. He schooled
me from all his experience; he recalled the largest
fish he ever caught with all of his good sense.

“The fish was a fighter,” was how the old man explained it.
“I used liver as bait” – which was interesting to me.
“I fought it for hours with no rest in-between and
landed it on shore and took pictures for friends to see.”

We talked for an hour, and I learned a lot from him—
helping me later to catch the big lunker I served
on a platter. The last thing he said leaving me
that day was, “Set the hook hard, or it will get away.”

The old man walked away after his lesson.
It was a wonderful experience for me; after that,
I hooked up some liver and threw it in the water
and waited and waited while talking to my father.

Four hours in with nothing to show until jerk, jerk,
jerk went my fishing pole. I snagged my pole, gave a
hard yank, set the hook hard; to my astonishment
the fish felt as though it was big as a tank, and when....

“Wooooo, that’s not how it happened!” my father exclaimed.
“You spent all four hours in your chair nappen.”
“I do remember the fish you caught; it might have been as
large as a twig, but I really don’t remember it being that big.”

“You can remember it how you want,” I said.
“I’m telling the true story of our trip
and the whopper in the lake. I will continue
my story, the one that you say I fake.”)

As I battled the giant—he gave a firm pull—
I gathered my strength; my muscles burned.
I brought it closer and closer to shore, a champion of the water;
still, he turned into a meal for me and my father

“That was a mighty fine meal,” recalls my father.
“Fish and chips on the side,
a fish you caught on your reel.”
Don’t underestimate the taste of a fish
you catch on your own and cook on the grill.

STARING CONTEST

JAMIE MINCHOW • OFFICE PROFESSIONAL



TAKEN BY DEATH

ESTHER SLOH • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Many people have suffered the pain of losing a loved one. Growing up, I saw many more dead bodies than the standard pre-teen child could say; the dead people reek from old to middle-aged to the young. But I didn't expect that my own mother was going to be taken by death; I thought she was going to live long enough to be there for my siblings and me through our lives.

That dream was shattered into a thousand pieces that summer of 2003 in Ivory Coast, Africa; my whole life transformed that summer. It started when I woke early one morning because of an infant crying. I heard a voice shouting in my parents' language, "Lay her down! She is going to fall and hurt herself." I thought I was dreaming because no one in my family household had a baby. I tried going back to sleep, but the commotion kept getting louder.

I got up to investigate. When I arrived in the living room and saw the state my mother was in, I knew I wasn't dreaming. My mom was sitting in the middle of a circle with my father and almost all our neighbors surrounding her the way people do when they are performing an exorcism on someone possessed. She looked dead beat and disoriented. The end of her dress was dirty and stained with blood, and she was disoriented from giving birth to a baby. I was ashamed and disappointed in myself that I slept through my mother's suffering and that I wasn't there to help loosen her pain; I feared my mom was not going to survive this time around because she went through the same before when she was pregnant with my little brother Nathaniel.

It looked as if someone had cursed her with incurable sickness that grew especially worse during her last two pregnancies; she went through a lot of pain and suffering during those times. Her hands, feet, and face were swollen to twice their size. She lost some of her vision because her eyes were almost swollen shut, and she couldn't walk long distances; her body resembled people's bodies that become engorged when they eat something they are allergic to. My father went to a spiritual woman to get help for my mom; when he came home, he told us the women told him that Mom was poison.

Mom wasn't her normal self during those crucial times; she used to go in the woodland, on the farm, and in the gardens she loved so much. My family

owned two farms and gardens that we went to a few times a week. We also went in the forest almost every day to gather dry and fresh sticks; we sold and cooked with the dry branches. Mom loved to dig out the grass among the vegetables and the fruits by using the little gardening tools my family had; my big brother and I used to assist her at noon after we came from school and during the weekend. We used to cut the greens and dig the vegetables to take home because we ate those vegetables and the fruit.

Mom was not able to do all of those things when she began suffering from the pain that the sickness and the pregnancy caused. She was bedridden some of the time, and I was the one who had to help her most of the time. Sometimes she sat in a chair near the kitchen and supervised me when I was cooking and doing the house chores.

Now my mom lost consciousness, and my father called a taxicab to take her to the hospital; the baby was not healthy, so he died before the taxicab arrived. Ivory Coast wasn't like America where people have the luxury of 911 and other numbers to call when people get injured or need to go to the hospital. The taxicab was a few minutes late; my mom had to be carried to the cab, and my father went with her to the hospital. My siblings and I had to stay home to clean and get the house in order. Mom was hospitalized for one-and-a-half months; some of our relatives came from different towns to visit her. My father, my siblings, and I visited her in the hospital during that time, and it was depressing to watch her go through the agony. We took food, but she didn't want to eat. She just lay there and stared around the room as if she didn't know where she was or why she was there; she was like some people who have amnesia.

The hospital was like most hospitals in the United States—the walls were white, and the ceiling had fluorescent lights. The doctors wore the same white coats over their clothes. However, the hospital didn't have separate rooms for patients like hospitals in the U.S. do. All the patients were kept in the same area that looked like a vast living room. The nurses looked different from nurses here because the Ivoirians' nurses wore white dresses and white hats with blood red crosses in the center.

Mom wasn't healed from the birth; she had vaginal bleeding through her whole treatment. The doctor had an IV attached to her arm and under her nose because the doctor said she didn't have enough blood and water in her system. I saw her precious life fading from day to day, night to night; her skin had that gray undertone that most sick people have. "God, please help my mother to get well," I prayed almost every morning. But God didn't respond to my prayers. He ignored them and let things transpire.

He ignored an eleven-year-old's plea, and He let death take an innocent woman who was 38 years old and too young to die. I started questioning the existence of God because He didn't want to help my mom, who was practically a saint; she was soft-hearted, and she aided a homeless family who needed a place to live when nobody else wanted to. She gave assistance to an orphan whose aunt had emotionally and physically abused him. Mom did anything she could to help out people who needed it. She was a healthy and soft-spoken woman who believed in fairness; she went to church every Sunday. She woke early mornings to go to the farm, the forest, or the gardens. She would prepare breakfast for all family members and clean the kitchen and in front of the house.

My mom and I had some things in common; we both had asthma and endured it constantly. She was the one I went to when I had questions because I trusted her. She believed I could do anything I set my mind on. My mom and I used to do mother and daughter actives like cooking, gardening, and doing crafts. She taught me how to cook and take care of children. I was eight years old when I started cooking and taking care of my little brother and some of our neighbors' children. I was close to her then because she understood me more than anybody else.

Some people in the community that my family lived in were superstitious. They believed in witchcraft and mythological creatures, such as demons, witches, wizards, and other creatures of the night. When Mom's condition got worse, the people alleged that she was poisoned by the woman whose family she had assisted. I believed what the people were saying because I believed that there were things in this world that couldn't be explained. A lot of strange things used to happen in the community.

There was a lady in our community that said she was a spiritualist. She believed that God had sent her to earth to enlighten and warn people about the danger and the sinners. Some people said she was born with a Bible and a cross; they also said she had a twin sister who lived in Liberia. Our community was like an entertainment center because people from different communities in the town came to see her perform for free. She made objects like drugs, food, and other items come out of people's bodies.

Mom didn't survive; her condition grew worse and worse until her life faded into the nothingness. The death took a lot out of our family. We cried every day during the three-week memorial. It was our tradition to have long memorials because it gave the family of the dead time to mourn the loved one. Our house was always packed with people, like relatives and neighbors coming to pay their dues.

Our house was full with different kinds of food that people brought. The funeral was the same way, people dressed in their finest clothes to attend. I was miserable and cried my eyes out; I was losing my mom and the best friend I ever had.

I learned a valuable lesson through this grief-full experience, and that lesson was I should still go on with my life because that was what Mom would have wanted me to do. I know in my heart that I won't forget her no matter what; she will always be with me in spirit. ✨



WICKED WOMAN

ERIN URBANK • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

THIS ONE'S FOR ME

CHERICE POLICKY • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Shame on you.

It won't happen again,

I promise.

Only fools travel that road.

Poor mother—

your manipulative tongue

always finds you innocent.

Don't worry; I'll save you.

At least, I'll try.

Then there are the masked offenders—

such a waste of time

after you see

who they really are.

Change will never come.

I know this.

But ignorance is bliss, right?

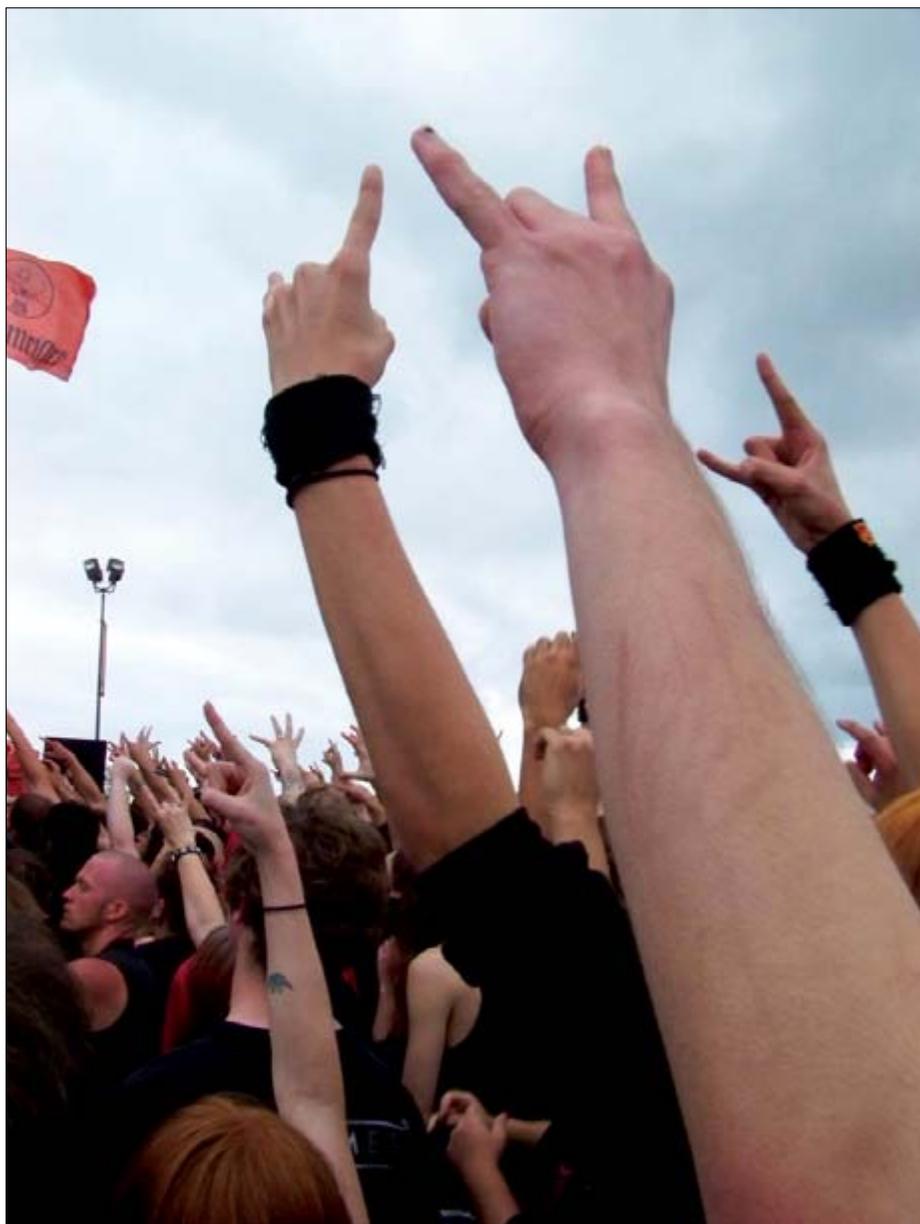
Hell, for now I'll be ignorant.

So ya know what?

This one's for me.

ROCK ON

JENNIFER CRELLER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



HALF-ASS HERO

CAITLIN OSSIAN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

The corner of Raven Oaks Drive and Cloud Point Circle, 2:00 a.m.,
August 3rd.

Erin had decided at a young age that there were two types of heroes—the heroes that got idolized in the wild, rampant children’s comics and the unspoken, real heroes that put their lives on the line, like the person who took a bullet for a pregnant woman or the guy who dragged a kid out of a fire. There was no in-between hero. People weren’t allowed to be half-ass heroes, but that’s exactly how Erin felt. She silently watched the firemen being real heroes, battling sword and shield against the licking flames trying to spill into the street. Erin didn’t feel confident or proud; the prevailing emotion she felt was guilt. She idly wondered if it was the guilt or the poison smoke making her stomach roll into sick knots.

Thinking back, Erin decided that if yesterday had never happened, she wouldn’t be sitting in a stranger’s yard at the end of Raven Oaks Drive holding the sobbing mass of girl that used to be her nemesis. For a second, she considered pushing Valerie off her lap, but the movement reminded Erin of the bleeding gash that went diagonally from her right hip up her ribcage. In the distance, she could hear the squeal of ambulance sirens and quickly thanked God she wasn’t going to bleed to death. She waited, finally wondering how shit went so completely wrong. Staring down at Valerie’s hair, she remembered perfectly—the pin-point moment that sent her world spiraling.

North Thomas Lied High School, 12:50 p.m., August 2nd.

Erin Vorbil’s head was so deep in her hands she was hoping to be stuck in the hollow, dark comfort forever. The angry voices of the riot mob were so close, and the thought of joining them was getting more appealing by the second. Her head was heavy with the weight of despair. Staring into the inky-black screen that demonized her reflection, she dropped her head in her hands again. Not thirty seconds ago had the screen been so vibrant and alive with over half her midterm paper. Erin looked up again, but this time her eyes found Valerie Reed—standing there, Erin noted, with her perfectly manicured hand on her hip as if she hadn’t just tripped over the cord that turned off every computer in the lab. She was standing there with

her perfectly blown-out blond hair and \$300 jeans as if she hadn't just set Erin back two weeks, four hours, and 37 minutes of work on her mid-term. But she had, and Valerie didn't look the least bit sorry or fazed by the people screaming at her.

Erin waged the prices of war against Valerie and decided no matter how sweet the victory, it wouldn't bring her term paper back. Convinced, she put her head back into her hands and thought hard on anything she could do. After minutes of hopeless brainstorming, Erin gave her attention back to the shouting, not intending to participate until Valerie nonchalantly replied that it wasn't a big deal, and she hadn't been paying attention. Erin tried and failed to keep the venom of her real feelings from pouring out into the conversation.

"Not a big deal? I just lost half my fucking term paper thanks to you not paying attention. The least you could do is be a bit sorry."

Erin decided within seconds that it wasn't Valerie's sarcastic comeback or bitchy attitude that had ignited her into a frenzy of hate. It was her smile—her sick, mocking, and perfect-all-teeth smile—as she said, "Weeeelllllll, that's whatch'a get for not saving!"

The room was silent for the whole three seconds Erin took to process what Valerie had said until she flung herself out of the chair, sending it with a crash to the desk behind her. Even though Erin wasn't unusually shy, she found that her actions had surprised her a little. Erin didn't let people boss her around, but that was mostly because she ignored them, not because she overtly stood up for herself. Like lightening had passed between them, Erin noticed Valerie's eyes get wide and her confidence disappear as the chair slammed to the ground, but before anything could be said or done, Valerie not-so-gracefully spun on her toes and vanished out the door.

Erin held still for a good thirty seconds contemplating the fear she could have sworn she saw in Valerie's eyes, but the anger came back full force, and she stomped on her contemplations. Erin heard the other students cheering in the background. They all screamed to go after her; obviously the riot mob was still hungry for vengeance at the loss of their homework. After a few seconds, Erin decided so was she. Gathering up her things, Erin was determined to stick up for herself—if not to make herself better than to at least gain a few more friends.

Erin hadn't decided whether screaming at Valerie would be enough to make her apologize or if a confrontation would resort to boxing Valerie's ears and those diamond earrings. She didn't necessarily want to fight, but she'd heard of Valerie pushing people around. Throwing herself into a seat, she found

that depression over her lost paper set in again, and the thought of having to rewrite it shattered her decision to try and not get violent. Erin let out a long stressed-soaked sigh and watched as Valerie walked in the door with friends in tow. Erin was going to make the choice of ignoring her for now—that was until Valerie looked up, saw Erin, and gave her the most disgust-filled sneer anyone had ever seen.

Erin felt the fire come back raging and howling inside her, like a demon clawing against her insides, telling her to wipe the sneer off Valerie's goddamn perfect face. Erin didn't need to try to give Valerie the most hate-filled look she'd ever had. Erin wasn't paying attention to the class; instead, she was strategizing her plan for Valerie. All of Valerie's friends would stick up for her, and while Erin had friends, she didn't want to pull them into unnecessary trouble. She'd have to get Valerie alone; luckily, riding the same bus as Valerie for five years, Erin knew her stop. Raven Oaks Drive.

The bell rang, and Erin's focus was on the enemy. On the bus, she watched Valerie get off two stops too early. Getting off with several of her friends, Valerie turned, and made eye contact with Erin one last time. Erin hoped Valerie could read the soul-burning hate she was directing at her. Erin went home and waited till the sun was lowering itself along the Glenwood Valley. Erin only lived six blocks from Valerie's house, which was, of course, in the better part of town where the houses actually had space between them. Erin walked and let the chill in the air take away from the fire in her heart. She asked herself why she was doing this. Erin shook her head and stopped; she had to keep her resolve up and teach Valerie that you couldn't be so cruel to people; otherwise, it comes back at you. Erin started walking again, and once in sight of Raven Oaks, she sat down on a picnic bench under the shade of a tree. From her little camped-out spot, she could see Valerie's house without being directly in front of it.

Erin, content to sit and wait until 8:00, a good time after dinner, decided to watch Valerie's neighbors. The only one she saw was the old Hallway librarian taking his trash out with not so much of a glance upward. Looking at her watch, Erin saw she had been sitting on the bench for twenty minutes after the sun had gone down, and the valley was getting colder by the minute. Holding close to her resolve, Erin stood up just in time to watch Valerie running full-speed from the other end of the block toward her house. Erin planted her feet on the ground and watched as Valerie flew across the pavement and skidded into her own front lawn, fumbled with the key, and finally threw the door open and slammed it shut.

Erin looked left and right but couldn't see anyone in pursuit. She made herself not care and uprooted her feet to the ground once again heading to Valerie's house. Getting closer, Erin decided Valerie had one of the nicest houses in the neighborhood. There seemed to be more space between it and the other houses, as it seemed to stand alone just to the left in the cul-de-sac. Erin heard the quiet roar of the engine before it passed her; she stopped her feet's progress again, and she watched the car turn into the drive and the garage. Valerie's dad was home. Erin had heard about him and that he was a good business man of some sort of sales.

Erin stood almost next to the house now. She watched the garage door closing and listened as the car shut off. Waiting out of window-sight in case Valerie saw her, Erin looked for any sign of movement in the utterly quiet house. Even though it was dark and past 8:30 now, the house still had only one light on. Erin felt the hair on the back of her arms prickle; it was strange to have only one light on, especially since two people had just come home. Erin crept closer to the house and was determined to knock on the door, if only just to see what the hell was going on. Crouching in the tiny tree and perfectly trimmed bushes next to Valerie's porch, she heard it—the crash that had sounded identical to the chair that afternoon, except Erin could tell this was not a chair. The second crash made Erin lose her footing; she could swear a table was going through a wall.

Sprawled still out of sight on the yard, Erin waited. She asked herself what in God's name was going on and went to sit up. Erin's blood froze, and for a second it felt like time, as well as her heart, had stopped. She'd heard it. It had not been in her imagination—she had heard Valerie scream. Erin looked left and right then back again; there was no movement in any of the houses. She doubted anyone else had heard. Another crashing sound had Erin scrambling to her feet. Her hatred forgotten, she moved to run, but a yelp of pain made her stop. Erin stood on Valerie's porch at war with herself. She couldn't go in there. She asked herself what she could do, and moving one foot towards the door, she stopped when she saw the door visibly shake with the sound of something crashing into it. Erin turned back towards the safety and security of her home. The wind whipped her hair, and it felt like her feet were flying above the pavement. Erin threw herself in the back door of her own home and landed in an ungraceful heap on the kitchen floor, panting and crying out of fear or frustration. Erin's mom called down from upstairs, and Erin tried her best to even out her breathing and respond normally that she was fine and had tripped. Erin sat in the kitchen unmoving for a long time. She was disgusted

with herself. She had run and not even called the cops. The sick feeling in her stomach didn't go away, and finally, around 10:00, after sitting for more than an hour, Erin crawled to bed.

August 3rd, 1:00 a.m., Raven Oaks Park.

Erin was on the picnic bench again. She hadn't gone to school or spoken all day. Why she'd come back was a mystery to her. She told herself it was to prove that she had been imagining things out of anger and that Valerie's dad was a good guy, but he still wasn't home. She'd sat on the bench for hours just waiting for him. The one light was on and was the only one that had been on all night. Erin thought maybe the reason he wasn't coming home was because Valerie's mom had called the cops and he'd been taken to jail, but she dispelled the idea quickly knowing it would have been all over town. Like last night, Erin heard the roar of the engine before she saw it, and deep in her gut, the sickening feeling took over again, and she knew it was him.

She watched as he turned into the garage just like the night before, and she ran as stealthily as she could under the bushes by the porch. This time, none of the other houses was awake. She knew that nobody knew what was happening except her, and it scared her even more. Erin crouched and prayed that maybe the house would stay silent, but God did not answer, and she heard the sound of something crashing against the door. If possible, it sounded more furious and menacing than the night before, and Erin put her hands over her ears in a pathetic attempt to shield herself. Erin crouched, horrified. Last night had been nothing compared to the symphony of screams and smashing furniture she was hearing now.

Erin threw herself out of the bushes and into the main yard. She would run again, but this time she would at least call someone or tell her mom. Erin looked back one more time, but she froze. Valerie was in the window. Lit by the backdrop, Valerie was as visible to Erin as Erin was to her. Erin stopped because the look in Valerie's eyes begged her to. The look in her eyes promised Erin that there wasn't enough time for her to get her mom or the police. Erin's blood was no longer frozen; instead, it raced through her veins, calling to her every anthem she'd ever heard. She wouldn't run away this time. She looked into Valerie's eyes and gave her an encouraging head nod like they did in movies.

Erin ran to the back door. It was broken and smashed, obviously from being abused. Walking into what seemed to be a laundry room and then to the kitchen, Erin saw the house was a battlefield of wood chips and furniture. She heard him. He was screaming, and someone was sobbing. Erin followed the long hallway as it opened to the living room. He was a big man, and Erin

understood why it was so easy for him to hurl furniture around. Even in his white button-up, he looked devilish. The bottle of alcohol in his hand spoke volumes to his drunken state. He had Valerie trapped in a corner and was screaming profanities and waving his arms. It was then Erin noticed that the light was a single row of eight candles lighting up her mother's picture frame. Valerie gasped and ran full force at Erin as she pushed her father out of the way.

Erin held Valerie behind her and, as if in slow motion, watched as Valerie's father threw the bottle right towards her. His aim was off, and the bottle smashed into the candles sending fire that spread rapidly across the wall. He picked up another bottle and threw it, which caused the fire to grow. He then turned to Erin and charged; he looked like a beast from the darkest pits of hell. The fire behind him and the madness in his eyes made Erin grab the closest bookshelf and push it to try and slow him. She grabbed Valerie and tried to go back the way she came. Erin screamed when he gripped her hair and tossed her like a rag doll.

Erin landed amongst the broken glass bottles and immediately felt fire tear up her side. She'd been cut and was bleeding badly, but Valerie's screaming and the adrenaline spurred her to action. She stood and charged the man—pushing him down the stairs that led from the front door to the living room. She grabbed Valerie's hand and ran over his motionless form and out the door. She continued running until Valerie collapsed. Sprawled on the ground, she noticed that Valerie was still clinging to her like she would to a lifeline. In the distance, Erin could hear sirens, and she thanked God.

Erin still felt sick from the pain or guilt—she wasn't sure which. She had guilt because this whole time she had hated Valerie for having a perfect life. Valerie shifted in Erin's arms and looked up sobbing with one eye black and blue. Erin flinched and looked away. Trying to slowly shift Valerie out of her arms, she felt Valerie hold even tighter and heard her whisper, "Please don't leave."

It was then that Erin thought of herself as some half-ass hero. She hadn't even wanted to save Valerie, and even now she didn't feel any sort of righteousness. Just cold. The cold 2:00 a.m. air. 

WRITER'S BLOCK

DANUL PATTERSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

The page lay before the eyes clear as a crystal brook—
Perches dance across the feet, and spiny fins find their marks.
The waters lick clean the wounds, and their remains stick out;
Red Coats amongst Colonists.

The stink of ink would have stung the nostrils
And pierced the soul like a screaming infant—
Her aguey tentacles cutting the air like lightning and
Her cries rolling like thunder as she searched, searched, searched
For her mother of pearl and marble.

The words once dripped from the page—
Rain clawing against the window of a bedridden invalid.
They now trickle by as sand caught in the hands
Or float in the air like Isadora Sacves, the never-catch under the wheel.

LAMENT

JASON LUBKEN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



WHO SAYS WATER CAN'T BE SEXY?

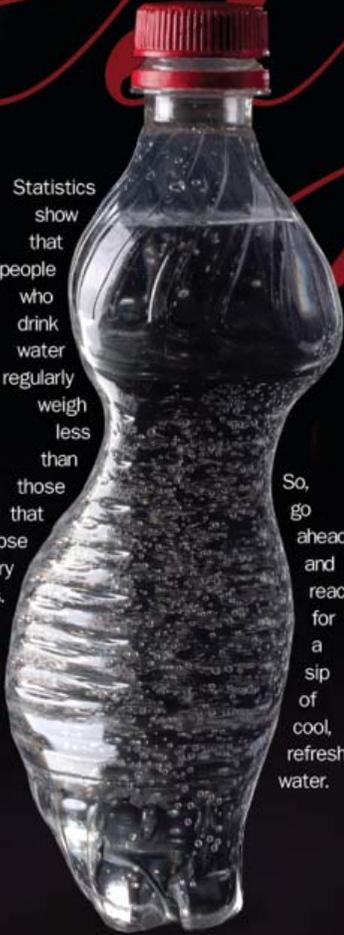
BRITNI WOLFF • GRAPHIC DESIGN

Who says water can't be

Sexy

Statistics show that people who drink water regularly weigh less than those that choose sugary drinks.

So, go ahead and reach for a sip of cool, refreshing water.



CATCH-AND-RELEASE FISHING: THE KEY TO CATCHING BIGGER AND MORE FISH

DOUG EFFLE • UNDECLARED

I have enjoyed fishing for as long as I can remember. The night before a fishing trip, I find it hard to sleep, usually because my head swims with excitement. As I was growing up, my dad and I always kept the fish we caught to eat. As I grew older, however, the accomplishment of catching more and bigger fish started to outweigh the fact of just catching something to eat. I realized if I wanted to catch bigger fish, I needed to do my part and practice catch-and-release fishing. The key to catching bigger fish and more fish is to obey fishing regulations and to not only practice catch-and-release fishing, but to learn the proper way to handle the fish that are released.

Fishing is enjoyed around the world. According to Michael Parfit, in 2001, in the United States alone, “Nearly 35 million people—more than twice the number that hunt—spent \$36 billion on sport fishing” (26). Fishing is a major hobby in this country, and therefore, the decision to practice catch-and-release fishing or to harvest the fish that are caught has a major effect on any particular body of water’s ability to produce high populations of fish—and high populations of big fish.

In the state of Nebraska, there are catch-and-release regulations placed on all public waters. Most of those regulations are bag and possession limits and minimum and slot length limits. Bag and possession limits limit the quantity of fish anglers can harvest per day and the total quantity of fish they can keep in their freezer. There are two types of length limits on fish caught in Nebraska: minimum length limit and protected slot limit. According to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, “A fish must be equal to or longer than the defined length to be legally harvested” (10). A protected slot limit is “a range of lengths of a particular species that may not be harvested legally. For instance, a 28- to 34-inch protected slot limit on Northern Pike means that only Northern Pike less than 28 inches in length or greater than 34 inches in length may be harvested” (10).

A minimum length limit regulation example would be the statewide 40-inch minimum for Muskellunge and Tiger Muskie, while a protected slot limit

regulation example is the 28-inch to 34-inch protected slot length limit for Northern Pike at Box Butte Reservoir and Goose Lake in western Nebraska (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission 11). On some bodies of water in Nebraska, there are complete catch-and-release regulations, which mean that all fish, or all of a certain species of fish caught in that particular body of water, need to be released. For example, at Fort Kearney SRA No. 2 and Wildwood Lake, all Blue Catfish must be released (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission 12).

Fish are a renewable resource, and in bodies of water where it is permitted, harvesting fish will be practiced by some anglers. The concept of catch-and-release fishing was popularized in the middle part of the 20th century by fishing legends Zane Grey and Lee Wulff but was embraced worldwide as a concept of conservation and used as a fishery's management tool (Reiss). Amazonian fishing guide Paul Reiss writes, "The core concept of catch-and-release fishing is that by releasing fish caught via controlled sport fishing, these fish will continue to be available for natural purposes, breeding, predation, and provision of food to other species, as well as available for others to catch again." In order to encourage more fish and bigger fish in Nebraska, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission puts catch-and-release regulations on public bodies of water. In Daryl Bauer's blog, "Barbs and Backlashes," he writes that the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's mission statement is to "provide outdoor recreation opportunities; manage wildlife resources for the maximum benefit of the people; and attempt to help Nebraskans appreciate their role in the natural world" (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission 8). Many anglers take the initiative to go beyond some of the regulations placed on certain bodies of water and catch-and-release all of the fish they catch, especially the big fish.

In order for fisheries to increase the number of big fish they produce, anglers do indeed need to catch-and-release all of the fish they catch. Daryl Bauer, the Fisheries Outreach Program Manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, says the percentage of anglers that practice voluntary catch-and-release depends on the body of water and what species of fish the anglers are fishing for. He says that in some parts of the state, "less than 20% of the anglers practice voluntary catch-and-release." Meanwhile, in other parts of the state and for other species of fish, "a much higher percentage of anglers practice voluntary catch-and-release, as many as 80% of the anglers" (Bauer). These statistics show that some parts of the state are realizing the benefits of catch-and-release fishing while other parts lack the knowledge of these benefits.

Catch-and-release fishing is not a subject exclusive to Nebraska, or even the United States, for that matter. A good example of the results of

catch-and-release fishing in other parts of the world is found in Brazil. In Brazil, the Peacock Bass sport fishing is very popular, and up until 1998, in the Igago Acu Region, an angler could expect his or her catch per day to be less than 20 fish, and the largest fish probably wouldn't be more than 18 pounds. The citizens of the region were given the opportunity in 1998 to close fisheries in the region to all fishing except catch-and-release sport fishing. This eliminated outsiders from uncontrolled fish killing and commercial netters from harvesting fish for economic purposes. Because of this change in fishing policy, without any apparent natural factors, average numbers of fish have escalated to over 30 fish per day, and anglers have begun catching fish up to 22 pounds (Reiss). This is obviously a good thing; making this region a catch-and-release sport fishing only region allows more fish and bigger fish to be caught.

Another example of the result of catch-and-release fishing in Brazil is found in the Xeriuini Region. For many years, this area had been passed up as a hot spot for sport fisherman. In 1990, the river became a catch-and-release only fishery, and things changed. The river's Peacock Bass population increased rapidly, and the popularity of the region began to increase. In 2002, 39% of all Peacock Bass that were caught were over ten pounds, and with the area's restoration, it began to see economic benefits from the increased population of big fish and the popularity of the river as a hot spot for sport fisherman (Reiss). While we may not see the same economic benefits in the United States, we could see the same increase in the number of fish and the number of big fish caught.

An example of the effect of not practicing catch-and-release fishing or implementing catch-and-release regulations is found on the Amazon River in Venezuela. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, the upper Orinoco watershed region of the Amazon was difficult to access for commercial anglers. This region, as a result, was known to have a relatively untouched Peacock Bass and Payara fish population. As a result, neither the local government nor the residents ever addressed the possibility of this region and its aquatic resources needing protection. The residents didn't view the resource as having any economic benefit outside of the fish that they, themselves, caught. As the years passed, better boats and fishing tackle were invented to help anglers access parts of the fishery that were inaccessible before. New access roads were also built to allow automobile access to all parts of the fishery. The fishery quickly became a popular place for anglers, and as a result, the fish were rapidly depleted. Now the fishery has again become unattractive to tourist anglers, and any economic benefit that the anglers had previously benefited from is gone. According to Paul Reiss, "Today, it is uncommon in most of these fisheries to encounter a

Peacock Bass larger than 10 pounds.” According to Reiss, this region could still benefit from the implementation of catch-and-release regulations. He believes it would take several years to recover, but the region could once again benefit from the added tourism and the economic benefits that accompany it.

Although it is vital to practice catch-and-release fishing to ensure a body of water’s ability to produce more and bigger fish, if an angler doesn’t handle and release fish correctly, the fish will not survive the catch-and-release process, and the angler’s efforts will go to waste. If an angler releases the fish because of mandatory regulations or by choice, he or she should use handling techniques that gives the fish its best chance to survive. When speaking about the proper handling techniques to increase a fish’s survival, Jeff Blaser, a fisheries biologist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, says, “The key thing is to get it back into the water as soon as you can with the least amount of handling.” There are other factors for an angler to keep in mind, such as wetting his or her hands prior to handling a fish to be released. Fish have a protective thin film on their bodies that helps protect them from infections. Handling a fish with wet hands will prevent the removal of much of this protective film. Holding the fish the proper way as the hook is removed prior to releasing it back in the water is also important. Other ways to properly handle fish include leaving them in a landing net and leaving them in the water as the hook is removed. When talking about the proper way to handle fish, Joe Duggan says, “Lip the fish with the thumb and forefinger. Don’t wrench the jaw to hold the fish horizontally. Keep the jaw vertical with the fish’s body by allowing it to hang, or support the fish with your other hand if you hold it horizontally.” Duggan adds this when talking about how to handle fish with teeth: “Wet your hand and clasp the fish firmly behind the head and gill plates. Be careful not to touch the gills.”

Landing a fish as quickly as possible using the proper tackle is also important to a fish’s survival. Craig Condello, holder of several North American catch-and-release line class records, says, “Long fights make great fishing stories, but they’re hard on fish. Land fish as quickly as possible by using appropriate tackle.” If an angler plans on catching a ten-pound fish, that angler should use a fishing reel with line designed to land a fish that weighs ten pounds. An angler shouldn’t use line that is designed to land a four-pound fish just to increase the enjoyment of fighting a ten-pound fish with lighter designed line. Condello adds, “When played too long, lactic acid builds in the fish’s muscles, which may [ultimately] prevent post-release recover.”

Along with proper handling of fish, conservationists have been looking at the kind of hooks that fishermen use. Most sport fishermen use a traditional

“J” hook. Lately, however, circle hooks have become more popular in the sport fishing world because of their effectiveness in increasing the survival of post-released fish. Circle hooks look like circles that are unfinished. Because of the circle hook’s shape, less tissue damage occurs to a fish’s mouth when it is caught and released. A circle hook is smooth, and its shape allows for removing the hook easier. Using a circle hook also results in less foul hooking, or not hooking in the jaw, of a fish. When a fish is foul hooked, there tends to be more tissue trauma and more bleeding.

In a study done regarding recreationally-caught White Marlin, 20 fish were caught, tagged, and released using a standard “J” hook, and 20 fish were caught, tagged, and released using a circle hook. All 20 of the fish caught on the circle hook were jaw-hooked and survived the catch-and-release process. Of the 20 fish that were caught with the standard “J” hook, only 13 of those fish survived the catch-and-release process. Five of the fish that did not survive were foul hooked, while the other two fatalities were jaw-hooked but still did not survive (Cramer).

Some anglers who do not practice catch-and-release use factors such as teaching their children the accomplishment of documenting that big catch, or the satisfaction of eating fresh fish on a hot summer night with a cold beer, as excuses for harvesting fish rather than releasing them. Another reason an angler would not practice catch-and-release fishing would be to receive Master Angler Awards. A Master Angler Award is a certificate of documentation of an outstanding catch. While it might be hard to argue with a person about the taste of fresh fish with an ice cold beer, in Nebraska, a person can now obtain a Master Angler Award for a fish that is caught-and-released if that fish is photographed being measured and meets the minimum length requirements for the Master Angler Award. In order to ensure the fish’s survival, it should be photographed and returned to the water as quickly as possible. In addition to the Master Angler Award, a person also receives a Catch-and-Release Master Angler pin. Anglers are limited to one Master Angler Award per species of fish per year when using the weight criteria. However, anglers can receive an unlimited number of Master Angler Awards per species per fish if they use the length criteria and practice catch-and-release. With the evolution of digital photography, anglers can now teach their kids that taking a picture of that big catch is just as satisfying as taking that fish home and cleaning it. In my opinion, a beautiful backdrop of the lake or pond that I caught a master angler fish in is better than the backdrop of the kitchen curtains.

If you are an angler like me and would like the body of water that you fish to produce not only more fish but larger fish, you should obey fishing regulations

and not only practice catch-and-release fishing, but also learn the proper way to handle the fish you release. As for not enjoying that fresh fish with a cold beer on a hot summer night...they sell fish at the store. I would much rather fry up some store-bought fish and know that the next time I head out to fish my favorite lake or pond, I might have a chance at catching a fish to remember. ∞

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ROSIE

DAWN AMUNDSON • MEDICAL LABORATORY TECHNOLOGY



PHOTO COLLECTION

DAN FOGELL • SCIENCE INSTRUCTOR

I'M LOOKING AT YOU



BABY TURTLE



SCARFACE



TEXAS HORNED LIZARD



OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Nana Adabie (“Into the Deep”): Nana says most people think she lives in the present moment all the time, but she thinks deep into the future, too. She created her self-portrait, “Into the Deep,” to reflect this. Originally from Ghana, Nana has been in the U.S. for over five years and says her time here has been a great adventure. She has four little brothers, a baby sister, and “the world’s most amazing partner.”

Dawn Amundson (“Daisy,” “Love Nature,” “Raindrops on Lilies,” “Rosie”): Dawn calls herself a “goofball extraordinaire” with the bizarre talent of wiggling her ears. She is currently trying to make sense of microbiology but takes frequent breaks to indulge her artistic inclinations. “Daisy” and “Raindrops on Lilies” were images captured during a walk after a May rainstorm. “Love Nature” shows Dawn’s mom with a little bird that was stunned after flying into the family’s French doors. “We went out to protect the bird from our four prowling cats,” Dawn says. “The little bird was content to sit with us as he regained his breath before flying away.” Dawn’s final photo, “Rosie,” is of the family dog. “She’s utterly photogenic – and she knows it!” Dawn says. “She’s a complete ham for the camera.”

Dylan Baumann (“John Legend”): A student in the Graphic Design program, Dylan often listens to music while working. “I thought it would be fitting to finally create a piece about John Legend since I listen to his music often,” Dylan says. “He’s an amazing R&B artist.”

Teresa Bissegger (“A Frenchfry & Tator Tots”): Teresa declares, “I’m an almost 50-year-old woman who is trying new adventures in life.” She will be riding the BRAN (Bike Ride Across Nebraska) and has applied to be on the reality TV show *Survivor*. “I hope I make it,” Teresa says. “There’s no better diet plan than 39 days on *Survivor*!”

Annie Bohling (“Bitterly Missing Home”): Annie wrote her poem, “Bitterly Missing Home,” about moving away from a childhood home. She thinks many readers of her poem will be able to relate. Annie says most people would call her “nice” or “sweet,” but she’s timid and enjoys talking in more intimate settings. In her free time, she enjoys searching the Internet, cooking, reading, being with friends and family, and spending time outdoors. Spring is her favorite season.

Lisa Booton (“Wondering”): An Academic Transfer student, Lisa was motivated to submit her drawing “Vampire’s Agony,” after seeing a copy of *Illuminations*. “I thought it would be neat to have something of mine in a book for a lot of people to see,” she says.

Stephanie Bronzynski (“My Answered Prayer”): Stephanie is a 33-year-old mother of three wonderfully ornery children. She loves to love and laugh and have fun with her family and co-workers. She says, “I take life day-by-day and live it to the absolute fullest.”

Alisha Buchanan (“Life After the Recession,” “One Lonely Windmill”): Alisha has been married for a little over a year and has an amazing one-year-old son named Liam. She loves to sing, draw, scrapbook, and photograph whatever is in front of her. She also loves ranch dressing and peanut butter (“but not together,” she adds). Someday, she hopes to own a photography business that specializes in providing affordable photos for all families. “I don’t think having quality photos of family should break your pocketbook,” she says. For now, Alisha lives by her motto: “Life is too short to be anything less than happy.”

Melissa Buckbee (“Found,” “Julia,” “One Cool Dude,” “Still Life,” “The Workers Are Few”): Melissa says she grew up with a family of artists and has had a paintbrush in her hand as long as she can remember. Most of her artistic ideas stem from her faith in Jesus Christ. Melissa says, “I see creation through His eyes; I look around the world and see design, and it makes me want to imitate it. When I am painting, drawing, or writing poetry, I feel the most free.” One of her drawings, “One Cool Dude,” is of her dad, who died in 2010. Her poem, “Found,” is also a reflection on her dad’s life. “He taught me how to draw and taught me how to live,” Melissa says. “I miss you, Dudey.”

Rosa R. Church (“My Requiem for Reality”): Rosa was motivated to write her powerful essay, “My Requiem for Reality,” by her past struggles with alcohol, stemming from her depression. “I’ve never honestly shared about my troubles with alcohol before,” Rosa says, “and writing and sharing this lifted a burden off my shoulders. I only hope it will show others how it truly feels.” Rosa has a three-year-old daughter and a nearly one-year-old son. Rosa adds, “I took a couple of days off for my son’s birth and then finished winter quarter. I really enjoyed the Composition I class I took because of all the stories I got to share.”

Jane Cox (“Untitled” [poem]): Jane has lived in 44 homes in her 29 years. She’s lived in a variety of cities, small towns, and rural areas, and she even lived homeless on the streets of Haight Ashbury when she was 17. She spent a short time in the military and a shorter time in jail. She’s happily married, the birth mother of three wonderful kids who were put up for adoption, and a mom to “the most awesome toddler girl in the world.” She’s also been published four times in the (now defunct) \$pread Magazine, which was written by and for people in the adult industry. Jane says, “I used to be a dancer, which qualified me. My wild days are behind me, but I am hoping that my writing days are just beginning.”

Jennifer Creller (“Pride,” “Rock On,” “Sage,” “Sidewalk Artistes”): Jennifer loves photography, and candid photography is her favorite. After graduating from SCC, she plans to transfer to UNL to begin work on her bachelor’s degree in English. She hopes to teach high school English and literature when she’s finished. In her free time, Jennifer enjoys playing live trivia with her girlfriends every week and spending time with her daughters, Lily, 7, and Sage, 4½.

Andy Darnell (“Winter Without the Mess”): As evidenced by his delightful poem, “Winter Without the Mess,” Andy calls himself “a tastefully geeky guy who hates the snow.” A student in the Academic Transfer program, Andy credits instructor Neal Kirchner for motivating him to submit his work.

Amanda Daugherty (“The Lesson I Keep Learning”): Amanda says she’s what’s considered a non-traditional student, but “in this day and age, who isn’t?” She has a wonderful son who is six, but tells everyone he is seven, and a pet gerbil named Blackie. Amanda’s guilty pleasure is reading. In fact, she keeps away from the library and bookstores when she has assignments due to avoid choosing reading over doing homework. During school breaks, she’s been known to read five books a week.

Leilani Day (“Power of Toys”): Leilani is five feet tall and can spend two or more hours giving herself a pedicure. She has a three-year-old son, Korben, with a three-inch mohawk. Most of her writing centers around him or her two dogs. Her creative essay, “Power of Toys,” is evidence of this.

Doug Effle (“Catch-and-Release Fishing: The Key to Catching Bigger and More Fish”): Doug is 32 years old, has a drafting degree from SCC, and is taking classes that transfer to UNL for a Mechanical Engineering degree. Doug enjoys fishing in his spare time, has been married for three years, and welcomed his first child in November.

Josh Essay (“Life”): A student in our Food Service/Hospitality program, Josh says he’s been enjoying his time at SCC. “It’s an affordable college, and I’m starting to realize how many amenities SCC offers,” he explains. “I work out in the fitness center, have great relationships with my instructors and fellow students, and now I find that we have an art and literature publication. I appreciate all of this!” He’s glad that SCC has been accepting of his occasional bad jokes and his apparent need to comment on anything and everything. “SCC is a great college for a guy who likes to meet new people and explore new hobbies,” Josh adds.

Katlin Evans (“What Remains”): A student in our Academic Transfer program, Katlin says her childhood had a major impact on shaping who she is today: “I love to look back and pick out moments that, while they may seem unimportant, have had a great influence on my life.” Katlin calls herself a survivor, a sister, a daughter, a believer, and, most importantly, a future *New York Times* bestselling author.

Dan Fogell (“Baby Turtle,” “I’m Lookin’ at You!,” “Scarface,” “Texas Horned Lizard”): A science instructor on the Lincoln campus, Dan had a great appreciation for reptiles and amphibians, so he became a herpetologist. “I am passionate about getting students jazzed about the biological sciences... including taking them out to see animals in wild scenarios,” Dan says. “Wildlife photography is a hobby I have pursued for 30 years, and when I photograph small creatures, I like getting down on the ground with them and moving as close as possible, so the viewer can see their true expressions.” An example of this is one of Dan’s four published photos, “Scarface,” which portrays a gray tree frog. “The frog was sitting in a tree branch and seemed to have a story to tell,” Dan says.

Emilio Franso (“Dancer,” “Feeling at Home,” “Holmes Lake Rising,” “Over Here”): Emilio says photography is a hobby at the moment, but it may turn into a career. He’s currently interested in teaching either English or algebra with leanings toward photojournalism. Some of his work can be viewed at facebook.com/efransophoto.

Kara Gall (“Garlic,” “What Lies Under the Heart”): English instructor Kara Gall learned how to peel, chop, and cook garlic in Oakland, CA, at the tender age of 22 under the culinary tutelage of six Brown University graduates. Nearly 20 years later, her taste for garlic has not waned, nor have her hopes for a day when the hunger for war is finally sated. Kara’s writing has appeared in the books *Why We Ride: Women Writers on the Horses in Their Lives*, *Women Who Eat, Breeder: Stories from the New Generation of Mothers*, and *ReGeneration*. She is a volunteer for Right Turn Nebraska, a new collaborative program between Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska and Nebraska Children’s Home Society that provides help to families who have adopted or entered into a guardianship.

Phil Harris (“Martin’s Fault”): Phil calls himself “one of those old dudes that have been haunting the Lincoln campus hallways.” A self-educated software developer of many years, Phil found himself unable to compete in the current job market, so he returned to school for a degree in Computer Information Technology. Phil loves to write, especially fiction.

Kristyna Holz (“Grandma’s Dishes,” “Tiny Skates”): Kristyna says she has two children who are her “everything.” When she was in high school, she was given the opportunity to perform one of her poems at the Pershing Center in Lincoln, and since then, poetry has been her hobby. Once she grew to love photography, she found herself combining the two hobbies, often using her photos as motivation for her poetry. Kristyna also enjoys yoga and the serenity of life.

Deborah Hull (“Color Whirl,” “Interlude,” “The Mating Dance,” “Passage”): Deb moved to Nebraska from Washington State in 2006 when she met a man who changed the way she looked at love and life. With his support and that of friends and family, Deb says she is rediscovering creativity she thought was lost to her youth. At 42, she’s never felt more alive. Deb says, “I’ve been interested in photography for more than seven years, but only recently have I been confident enough to share and sell my photos.” After graduation from SCC, Deb hopes to promote her photography through her own business, which she’ll call D*Kay VisualArts.

Nathan Kathol (“Untitled” [Photo]): Nathan is 20 years old and originally from Hartington, NE, where he grew up on a small town farm. He’s planning on becoming a police officer in Lincoln and loves taking pictures and getting feedback from others.

Alyson Kenny (“The Lake”): Alyson was born in small town Missouri and calls herself a country girl at heart. She was raised in Arizona and lived in Newcastle upon Tyne, England, for three years (where she snagged an English husband) before returning to the U.S. Alyson and her husband now live in New York State. A student in SCC’s Academic Transfer program, Alyson loves reading, writing, and traveling.

Robert Kluge (“The Pump”): Bob works in Career Counseling/Assessment on SCC’s Beatrice campus. He enjoys writing creatively and developing photos of farm life. He also became involved in acting for the Fairbury Community Theater when SCC instructor Dee Heney “pushed” him into it.

Bernadette Korslund (“Boot Camp”): Bernadette says she likes to drive around the countryside with her camera. “I always discover simple things, and I can see beauty in all,” she adds. Who would have guessed that discarded old boots could bring visual pleasure? In reference to her compelling photo, “Boot Camp,” Bernadette asks, “Is it a lesson of thriftiness? of creativity? or just plain humor? The farmer did not tell me, but these boots certainly attracted my attention.” After retiring from a high school teaching career, Bernadette took two photography classes at SCC Beatrice for pure enjoyment and has found a new love and passion.

Cynthia Kreps (“Everett Lewis Skinner”): An instructor in SCC’s Surgical Technology program, Cynthia loves taking photos of people with a concentration on their faces. “Good thing I have grandchildren now,” Cynthia says, “so my girls can have a break from the lens!” Cynthia’s guilty pleasures include gardening and buying flowers; not surprisingly, spring is her favorite time of year.

Jena Nicole Lambert (“Bombay Beauty”): Jena was attending a live performance of a sitar player on a warm fall afternoon in Muncie, IN, when she found herself nurturing the beginnings of “Bombay Beauty.” “I left the performance with the majority of this poem finished, playing on repeat in my head,” she says. Jena is an Internet addict, fashionista, and bug collector. She makes her own ice cream, tends to an ever-growing population of orchids in her kitchen, reads voraciously, and can’t imagine a world without her young daughter, Olivia Minet, or her incredible husband, Seth.

Catherine Leber (“Three Minutes”): Catherine says she was motivated by the popular MTV show, *16 and Pregnant*, to write her story, “Three Minutes”: “I began to wonder what it would be like to discover at such a young age that you were responsible for the life of someone else. What kind of support would you have? Would the father stick around? I decided to create a character facing those terrifying questions.” Catherine says she’s creative to the core, and her high school motto was, “Only dead fish swim with the stream.” She hopes to have a published novel by the time she’s 30—only five short years away. She’s appreciative of the encouragement of her parents, who stood by her as she switched her major from meteorology to writing, and of her boyfriend, who she says “never ceases to encourage me to pursue my dreams.”

Michael Liedtke (“Baumann”): With a desire to explore more black and white photography, Mike recently began a short series of black and white photographic portraits of people. Mike says, “I grew up with almost no real artistic background and no interest in art until the last three to four years. I believe I owe all my talents to my Savior Jesus.” Mike is in SCC’s Graphic Design program.

Anna Loden (“Catching Corbie,” “Herding My Thoughts”): Anna has four brothers. She loves reading and is pretty good at handling livestock. Although she’s interested in many different careers, she hopes someday to be a writer. She loves to read books, but she’s also interested in webcomics and manga. “If I were any good at drawing, I’d probably try to imitate them, as well as Tolkien and Georgette Heyer,” she says. Anna credits instructor Mike Smith with encouraging her to submit her work to *Illuminations*.

Jason Lubken (“Lament,” “Square One”): Jason spent the last year living in southern California, where he’s been working closely with artists and various wedding and commercial photographers. A self-taught guitar player and hobby enthusiast, Jason gets bored without a project to focus on. He has special passion for art, music, and movies. Jason plans to continue his education at UNL and firmly believes that “everyone has an artist inside of them—it doesn’t matter what their occupation is.”

Jamie Minchow (“Staring Contest”): When asked about the motivation for her compelling photo, “Staring Contest,” Jamie replies, “Nature! Native American folklore says it’s bad luck to make eye contact with owls, but who could help it being that close?” In her free time, Jamie enjoys picking up Native American artifacts, camping, swimming, and taking photographs.

Julie Nguyen (“The Bachelor’s Bathroom”): Julie is a 29-year-old college student and synchronized swimming coach by day, bartender by night. She calls herself a creative extrovert who secretly likes power ballads and has an Amazon.com shopping addiction. She dreams of opening her own bar, but because she is a fickle entrepreneur, she imagines herself developing more than one career.

Caitlin Ossian (“Half-Ass Hero”): Caitlin enjoys visiting her old teachers. She also loves being artistic. “I enjoy any kind of pottery, such as coils,” Caitlin says, “but I mostly prefer wheel throwing!” Caitlin is a student in SCC’s Academic Transfer program.

Jacqueline Parks (“Campbell’s Cannibals”): Jacqueline’s creative image, “Campbell’s Cannibals,” was created in response to a class assignment to produce a parody package. “After looking at many products, I stumbled onto Campbell’s soup and realized how close the name was to ‘cannibals,’” she says. Jacqueline claims to be a very quiet person who can always find the positive in any bad situation.

Mary Ann Partin (“Blinding Fire,” “John’s Pass Boardwalk”): Mary Ann says she often needs a way to release powerful feelings, and writing helps her do that. “Blinding Fire” is a reflection of her work as a hospice nurse with an AIDS patient. “He touched me with his zest for life; his commitment to make the best of his situation was powerful,” Mary Ann says. Her second poem, “John’s Pass Boardwalk,” was a memory stirred by smells and sounds. “Words can be better than photographs,” she thoughtfully states. “I am empathetic and emotional and sentimental in this poem.” Mary Ann is currently in the Criminal Justice program at SCC.

Danul Patterson (“Calabaza,” “Writer’s Block”): Danul says some would classify his work as Gothic, since it seems to focus on the macabre or darker sides of life. However, Danul says, “I am merely a somniloquist who has the profound pleasure of having people listen when I speak.” His poem, “Writer’s Block,” was inspired by “a sense of inertia, of profound helplessness—Pandora after the jar had been opened and before the discovery of hope.” His fictional piece “Calabaza” was written during a sleepless night peppered with thunder and lightning.

Cherice Policky (“This One’s For Me”): A student in the Academic Transfer program, Cherice said that although she wrote her poem, “This One’s For Me,” for class, the assignment “brought out parts of me.” She adds that she’s a new writer, but she recommends it to anyone and everyone. Cherice’s favorite holiday is Halloween.

Claudia Reinhardt (“Shadow Catcher”): Claudia has lived in Illinois, Colorado, Boston, and Iowa while earning academic degrees and working in writing and communications. Her poetry has appeared in several literary journals and magazines and in *The Untidy Season: An Anthology of Nebraska Women Poets*. “Most of my nature poetry is free verse and serious in tone,” she says. “Working on ‘Shadow Catcher,’ I found out writing with humor and rhyme was a challenge.” Claudia is a tutor in the Lincoln campus Writing Center.

Nichole Reynolds (“Copenhagen”): Nichole is an Academic Transfer student who plans to major in Geosciences upon entering UNL. She was raised in a small farming community just south of Milledgeville, GA. She is the oldest of six children, ranging from ages 23 (herself) to 6. Aside from writing, Nichole enjoys camping, hiking, hunting, and fishing. She currently works in the automotive industry servicing diesel trucks. Nichole says, “I am your run-of-the-mill college student, looking to be recognized while making a difference in others’ lives.”

Marie Robinson (“Ripe for the Pickin’”): An Academic Transfer student, Marie enjoys summer and loves venturing outside to take photos of what she’s missed throughout winter. Her colorful photo, “Ripe for the Pickin’,” is one of the results. She also enjoys spending time with her friends and family.

Elizabeth Schreiber (“Grow”): Elizabeth was sitting outside her house when she saw the plant that is the focus of her beautiful photo, “Grow.” She grabbed her camera, set it towards the sun, and snapped. Back inside her house, Elizabeth has a pet ferret who chases her around her room. She loves motorcycle rides and lazy nights at home watching movies. She also loves making cookies, but she usually eats all the cookie dough before the cookies are made.

Barbara J. Schmidt (“Walking in Heaven’s Light”): Barb says she lives her life one day at a time, and she’s grateful to be alive—with three children and six grandkids, no less. Barb wrote her powerful essay, “Walking in Heaven’s Light,” for her Composition I class, and she credits Dr. Jewell for encouraging her to submit it to *Illuminations*.

Ashley Shea (“A Trip Back in Time”): A pro at descriptive writing, Ashley is a student in the Business program at SCC.

Esther Sloh (“Taken by Death”): Esther and her family came to the U.S. from the Ivory Coast in 2004. “It was always my dream to get a better education, so I am thankful because part of my dream came true when I graduated from Lincoln High School,” Esther says. She is now a student in SCC’s Academic Transfer program. Esther loves to read, especially mysteries, romances, paranormal literature, and comedies. She calls herself a quiet person, but she fantasizes about going to exotic places.

Don Stein (“Lifted Curtain”): A member of our Fire Technology program, Don says he’s quite strong, even though he hasn’t worked out for some time. His poem, “Lifted Curtain,” reflects a severe realization that one day, life will in fact end.

Toby Triplett (“A Tall Tale?”): Toby is a Lincoln native. He enjoys sports and camping and loves Boston Terriers. He wrote his adventurous poem, “A Tall Tale?,” for a class assignment.

Daneila Troyer (“Far From Perfect”): Daneila was a dual-credit student at Milford High School (and SCC) when she wrote her moving essay, “Far From Perfect,” for a class assignment. She enjoys watching sports, and high school basketball is her favorite.

Erin Urbank (“Wicked Woman”): Erin’s clever drawing, “Wicked Woman,” began as a doodle during class and evolved from there. “It was drawn with a mechanical pencil and a lot of free time,” Erin adds. Although she hopes to go into nursing, Erin says that if she had no obligations, she would spend all her time reading. She also enjoys music, writing, rollerblading, biking, swimming, and playing *Call of Duty*. She loves drawing with sidewalk chalk, and she’s always dreamed of going skydiving.

Tammie Vacek (“Saying Goodbye”): Tammie’s touching essay, “Saying Goodbye,” presents a personal record of her mother’s death. “I wanted to show an accurate account of my experiences that night,” Tammie says. “It seemed to be therapeutic, as well.” Tammie says no matter how many times life punches her in the stomach, she picks herself up and keeps moving forward. “I’m living proof that it is never too late to get it right,” she adds. In downtime, Tammie loves black-and-white movies from the 30’s and 40’s and music from the 80’s.

Annie Wills (“Earth Angel”): Annie says she’s had a rough year and needed to create inspirational art. Her painting reminds her that humans need to care for their planet. “The Earth Angel is posed as if to say to whatever higher power is out there, ‘I got this,’” Annie says. In addition to painting, Annie says she has “an extreme amount of curiosity for absolutely everything,” and insists that everything about life intrigues her.

Brittini Wolff (“Who Says Water Can’t Be Sexy?”): A student in SCC’s Graphic Design program, Brittini had a desire to create an ad campaign that would go beyond the health benefits into the sensuality of water. Thus was born her intriguing design, “Who Says Water Can’t Be Sexy?”

Nathan Steven Worm (“The Newborn,” “Living the Write Way”): Nathan says, “I write as if I have lived for 92 years, and I live as if I have been writing for 92 years.” He cites Walt Whitman, Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, Robert Frost, Robert Bresson, the Beat writers, and the Beatles as influences on his poetry. Nathan is in the Academic Transfer program.



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