

Illuminations

Volume 11 | 2010



Illuminations

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

Volume 11

"How tired I am of stories, how tired I am of phrases that
come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground!
...What delights me...is the confusion, the height,
the indifference, and the fury."

Virginia Woolf

Southeast community college

2010

Illuminations Volume 11

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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, staff, and alumni. Submission forms and guidelines can be found at online.southeast.edu or in campus LRCs. Submissions or questions should be directed to:

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Front cover image, “Touch of Red” by Laura Drawbaugh, Visual Publications, and back cover image, “Fields of Rapeseed,” by Rita Thomas, Visual Publications. Cover design by Chad Walrod, Visual Publications.

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Prize Winners

Illuminations awards prizes for student submissions in three categories: prose, poetry, and artwork. Grand prize winners receive \$50, while runner-up winners receive \$25.

Prose Winners

Grand Prize: Osmin Hernandez, “Street Struck”

Members of the Editorial Team applauded Osmin’s gritty portrayal of a graffiti artist on the streets of inner-city Los Angeles. As one team member wrote, “This piece had me from the get-go. With an air of mystery, the author takes an obscure, negatively stigmatized topic and turns it into a work of art.”

Runner-Up: Samantha Cradick, “Silent Jiggs”

Samantha’s quiet, eloquent essay pays tribute to her grandfather and his abiding love, even when conflicts arose. Members of the Editorial Team found Samantha’s work moving without falling into pathos. “Interesting and heart-wrenching” is how one team member described the story.

Poetry Winners

Grand Prize: K. Caitlin Phelps, “Mermaid”

Caitlin’s poem, “Mermaid,” describes the self-questioning turmoil of a mother rushing her young daughter to the emergency room. Editorial team members were impressed with Caitlin’s use of inventive, apt imagery. One team member wrote, “The piece does not suffer from an overload of imagery, despite some almost surrealistic content. Brilliant work!”

Runner-Up: Michael Boden, “Artifacts”

Michael’s poem, “Artifacts,” was inspired by childhood memories of his grandfather’s shed and its contents. Michael uses simple but tactile language to create his poem. One team member wrote, “This piece has a great sense of rhythm, which moves the reader with it and engages the reader in the imagery of the poem.”

Artwork Winners

Grand Prize: Rita Thomas, “Fields of Rapeseed”

Rita’s gorgeous image of a field of rapeseed on the western coast of England captured the attention of the Editorial Team. One team member called it “haunting and dreamlike, with superb lighting.”

Runner-Up: Taryn Dorn, “Aderyn Ashleaf”

The Editorial Team felt that Taryn’s graphite drawing reflected tremendous talent and attention to detail. One team member wrote, “Accurate in its realism, the drawing also reflects the model’s mood, which connects directly with the viewer.”

Street Struck

Recipient of Grand Prize Prose Award

Osmin Hernandez • Academic Transfer

The fame. Everyone sees your name all over. Colors and letters under your mercy, and you're the one who decides how you're going to afflict them on a surface. You create your own language filled with abbreviations and names. Out of this world, some might say. Extraterrestrial life is created on the terrestrial walls. Overnight, pieces of artwork left glued without any art critic judging it. Just a city cleaning crew buffering it out.

Pitch-dark nights, with a little dim light shining from the street lights. Every second you turn back to be aware of your surroundings. Nights are your days, as you are sent on a mission to seek out and beautify. But before anything, a congregation is initiated in the hours of daylight, and plans are discussed. Members discuss new items and new products that will be used in the occupation. It's a battle out there, similar to what it was in Medellin. Nobody wins, and it's an everyday struggle in order to survive.

A black hoodie, jeans, and a Dodgers fitted is your uniform. A backpack full of utensils is your gear. You're a foot soldier in the city of eternal buffering. Many argue over whether you're sabotaging walls or making another one of Michelangelo's Sistene Chapels. But forget the argument; it's time for some work to be made.

Far ahead, you see in the distance an untamed surface emerge from the darkness. But before you cross the main street, make sure it isn't a trap. Undercover individuals may be on the lookout for creative writers. If you get caught, it's a cell full of political and unjust legal corruptions.

From your backpack you pull out a weapon. This weapon is of mass ruin on the walls. It is your voice represented by paint and the color spectrum. Fury of being underrepresented and not being helped out.

Adrenaline rushes through your body as the paint starts flowing out of the can. You can feel it on the tip of your fingers. You go by

a blueprint, and that is what you give life to the surface. Giving birth and creating your creature that will portray your message and share it with the racial minorities of the inner city.

As you create it, many angry thoughts and scared emotions go through your mind. And that is what inspires you. Those emotions are what you are building upon and taking out as you write. No time for no writer's cramp, time is valuable.

You debate whether you should take your time, but at the same time don't. The last thing you want to see is blue and red lights flashing. But you really don't want to rush your Pablo Picasso art piece, and the last thing you want to do is screw it up. Pressure is set on you, and every second is valuable.

Why not on canvas but a wall, you might ask? Where would people without money see your concept? You're not just vandalizing property but sending out a message, whether it's political or just your two cents on issues. You are expressing your right to freedom of speech. It's like an outdoor art museum, kind of like the overpriced, fancy Getty Museum of Art at Bel-Air.

But we are talking about inner-city Los Angeles here. No one has time or the money to go to an art museum. It's the ghetto, the slums, the hood. And it's not what you saw in *Colors* and *Boyz-n-da-Hood*. It's ill, it's real. The city of the Rodney King riots back in '92. That shows how much racial tensions and social struggles there are in L.A. All these issues add up; a way of expressing was built upon a lot of social issues, hip hop music included. Started back in 1983 when it came from New York. Started off as a way to just express yourself, like N.W.A said back in '89. Yeah, maybe I wasn't even born yet, but you get the point.

As you drive by on the 405, one of the most congested free-ways in the world, you see infinite amount of murals. We come at night and show how we feel. From nightfall 'til dawn, we're out. We consider ourselves nocturnal beings.

Literally, work is done on every surface: stop signs, stop lights, freeway overpasses—even freeway signs are considered our

canvases. Sad to say, but some even die from falls or just get run over. Don't know whether intentionally.

The pigs are always out to get us, and as time goes by, laws keep on getting stiffer and stiffer. Started off with just a ticket of vandalizing property, and now it's probably around, let's say, \$500 to a \$1,000 fine and jail time. But there are some who are pretty smart and never get detained. They are the ones that have been putting work for years and know what they are doing. Because a lot of these cats don't know. I will agree, some of the stuff for me is bullshit. When we get to the gang shit, it kills our image, and people can't tell the difference, they say. It murders our image and makes us look like a bunch of hoodlums running around spray painting anything. Well, for us it's like Democrats and Republicans—who knows who's right?

In view of the fact that there are tensions between writers and gangs, hiding your identity is a necessity. Not only from law enforcement agents, but now gangs. If they know you are a writer, you'll get popped right there and then. They don't like us, and there isn't no way to protect ourselves since we are not gang-affiliated.

People get it perplexed, though. Since there are graffiti crews that do exist, they consider crews the same as gangs. But there is a vast distinction between us. We don't sell drugs, kill, or terrorize neighborhoods. And a lot of innocent artists die in the hands of gangs. It's a simple way to die if you're in the wrong neighborhood.

Given the fact, I considered myself as a modern day Monet and Picasso combined. Because my work isn't just about going out to spray paint, but to show artwork to people. This stuff sells, but marketing companies don't understand our stuff and try to make our work look like some type of game.

You have to be really talented, or you're considered a toy. (Someone who doesn't have enough knowledge and skills to write). And yes, we call it writing, not tagging. Kind of like my composition class. We consider ourselves writers.

Sundown. The housing projects. Ghetto project cats creeping around the vicinity. We zoom in the camera on a small group congregated at the park in the housing projects. A group of three hiding away from the soft illumination over the park. (Little projects kids playing around in the distance.)

Three artists getting ready to venture out the ominous streets of Los Angeles. Who knows where a pair of shoes and bus fare might take them?

Zoom in their faces. One white boy rolling in the group. Kids at school tell him that he's in the wrong side of the city. But he's cool, goes by the name of "Irock." Crazy ass short white kid, 5'4, green-eyed kid, with real short blonde hair.

"Ay foo, you got the piece book?" Jetz says.

Jetz, a skinny Mexican kid, around 5'9, with a light-skin complexity, almost looks white; well, in a way he does. Has hazel eyes, which makes you think twice about that. Always wearing fitted caps, though. Wearing a Yankees cap this time. The funny thing is, he isn't a baseball fan but wears his hat like if he played. A ladies' man, and changes girlfriends more often than he changes shoes. A little crazy when it comes to mobbing (writing), and catches (writes) anything that is visible.

"Do you see it on me?" Siez replies.

Siez. Now this guy has a gift. Is a tan-colored kid. Around 5'6, a little chunky. Has a sharp look; in his eyes you can see all the fury and defiance he has against the mainstream society. Wearing a two-toned color San Diego Padres cap and a black hoodie covering it. But a real talented artist. I can compare him to being an early version of Van Gogh. Has a lot of abstract work done and leaves a lot of other artists in awe. Never has anyone else seen work like his. Irock and Jetz are trying to be distinguished artists, just like him.

The piece book. It is like the writer's bible. It has our blueprints of many pieces we've worked on. It is also a way of incriminating ourselves at schools and on the streets. It is something that we

have to conceal since law enforcement will ask and try to make us identify the artists' original names. Everything made in it was made with fervor. You knew what you were doing and were real passionate about your work.

"You got everything ready?" Marvel asks.

"You already know," Siez replies.

Three street artists with backpacks crammed with as much defacing things you can imagine. Streaks (solid paint markers), spray cans, shoe paint, drippers, magnum 44 markers, is just the tip of the iceberg.

It is still quite early to go out mobbing, around 8:30 p.m. a Friday night. You can smell the sea breeze coming from the not so distant Pacific Ocean. The three walk toward one of gate doors that lets you out of the projects.

All geared up and ready to destroy into the night. Walking through the doors, they walk by trash cans, trash outside the trash cans, old sofas, and furniture rotting with everything else. Poverty and crime fragrance the air.

There is a parking lot to their right side, and across was Braddock Drive and the gates that surround Stoner Avenue Elementary School. The three casually cross Braddock Drive and hop the gates of Stoner. It is a shortcut to go through the school then to go around it. Since they are headed to the Washington Blvd. bus stop.

"So how many spots we gonna catch?" Irock asks.

"More than yesterday," Siez replies, gazing at the faint starry night.

The crew walks down to other side of the campus and hops the gate. Now they are in a "quiet" neighborhood. Although crime doesn't stop from spreading, this area was a break from it...sometimes.

They head down the street to where they see a city light gleaming in the distance and turn right on Stoner Avenue. They walk two blocks, and they are on Washington Blvd. A real busy street and area, has a lot of traffic. They are at the bus stop, in front of some one-floor duplexes that look in a way something

that Fred Flintstone would live in, but modern.

“Ay, so what’s up with the bitches tomorrow?” Jetz asks.

“Well we got to take them down to Wilmington, to your dad’s house. Don’t expect them to be over at mine because my mom has her day off,” Irock answers.

Just to kill some time until the bus gets there, Irock hits up (writes) the pole with a streak.

In the distance, you can see the Culver City bus approaching with the enormous headlights. “44 Venice Blvd” read on the top sign.

“Always on time,” Siez says.

It is quite empty, and the only person inside it is some old Hispanic lady, looks around 49, looks like she has just come out of work. Cleaning filthy rich Mr. Washington’s house out in Malibu.

The three sit all the way in the back and try not to look suspicious in order not to get the pigs called. Siez takes off his hoodie and is staring out the window of the bus. Looking at the cars pass by and how many liquor stores there are on a block.

PING!

The sound of a stop requested awakes him from his daydreaming. The lady exists out the bus.

“So are we heading down to Venice then?” Siez asks.

“Why not? We can stop by Ronnie’s crib and crash there,” Jetz says.

The bus cruises down five more blocks, and the three depart. The bus speeds behind them, as if the bus driver didn’t want them in there, the first place.

Now they’re stranded on the corner of Venice Blvd. and Jefferson. Foot soldiers, not patrolling, but constructing their environment.

“Let’s go behind that pet shop in the alley,” Siez says.

They run across Venice Blvd. and walk two blocks down to the pet shop. An old torn-down building, looks like it has just recently closed down and was left abandoned. Jetz pulls out shoe paint from his backpack, carefully taking off the cap, and begins to work. “JETZ 310, THE HECTIC ERA,” is imprinted on the window. It slowly drips from the window.

“All right then, me and Irock are gonna catch the alley; you can go ahead and be the lookout,” Siez orders.

Jetz nods in agreement.

The alley dark and wet. It has the stench of piss in the air. How many bums have passed earlier on the day and urinated on the walls? Quickly, Irock and Siez take out a pair of Krylon paints from their backpack. They quickly take off the caps and start the occupation. “SIEZ, IROCK44, JETZ310, THEKREW” is sprayed on the alley trash can.

A hand grabs Siez from his shoulder. Turns around. A man with a shabby beard and torn clothes.

“What are you little fuckers doing in my alley?” he asks.

“Man, get the fuck away!” Irock yells.

“You little fuckers are always fucking up my goddamn place!” the shabby beard guy yells.

He pulls out a crowbar from behind the trash can.

“Oh, shit, ay foo, where’s Jetz?” Irock asks.

The shabby bearded guy starts swinging his crowbar hysterically. Irock and Siez rush out to the other side of the alley, throw their spray cans at him. They sprint down and make it to the other side of the alley.

A patrol car pulls up flashing his lights. An officer gets out of his car, and the hunt starts.

“I got a 312 in progress, on foot!” he shouts on his walkie talkie. “Back-up is needed; I repeat, back-up is needed.”

Both of them run across a residential street to a residential area. Three patrol cars spout out from the opposite side. Six officers get out of the car and throw both of them down.

* * *

Words and expressions could have you doing time. Many artists got caught, and few got away. It was a game and sometimes a show, something like Tom and Jerry between law enforcement and writers. Always trying to seize them and toss them into a jail cell.

But that never stopped the struggle to be heard, to have a voice, and to have everyone know what we think. We will be back

on the streets, on the freeways, in the tunnels, combating the corruptions and the injustice of society using non-violent motives.

Like dust in the wind, we are just a tiny speck in the immense city of Los Angeles. 🙏

Mermaid

Recipient of Grand Prize Poetry Award

K. Caitlin Phelps • Academic Transfer

On rushing her young daughter to the hospital

Her body was a block of ice
wrapped tightly within my arms
and I thought
if I dug my nails deeply enough
in the alien sheen that had become her skin
her black lashes might flutter
in acknowledgment of being a girl,
of breathing.
But there was a choking space
where she pressed her wet nose,
her crossed arms much too boneless,
and she like a furred baby thing
with translucent pink lids and red blind eyes beneath
attempted to crawl into my stomach.
Like being punched
wide-eyed
my throat windless and dry
as my cotton shirt continued to blossom
with moisture

with dark crimson flowers.
I might just also attempt
to revert, to gather her
and stuff it back inside,
like JFK's shaking wife
in the rear of the presidential convertible.
If only I had been more attentive
to the unexpected
I could have imprisoned my baby
behind her oak door
beneath her lacy pale blue canopy
amid her glossy covered books
with Star the plush rabbit, Star the tongue-lapping dog
and Star the red haired mermaid,
who lived in an underwater cave.
With the dust visible through streams of morning light
she would have remembered then
that she was a young girl
and I was watching.

Fields of Rapeseed

Photograph

Recipient of Grand Prize Artwork Award

Rita Thomas • Visual Publications



Silent Jiggs

Recipient of Runner-Up Prose Award
Samantha Cradick • Human Services

I miss my grandpa. He and I were once inseparable. When I was young, I was his shadow on steamy summer mornings and cold winter evenings. Of his nineteen grandchildren, I was the youngest and his favorite—although he would never admit to that.

Living in Utica, Nebraska, a village of only 700 people, was uninspiring for me. During summer break, most of my friends from Centennial Public went away for family vacations. I had few friends that lived in Utica, so I hung out at my grandparents' house. During the school year, my parents often sent me there to keep busy in the afternoon because they didn't want me roaming the small town streets alone. My grandparents lived eight blocks from us, an easy bike ride across the train tracks and north of Main Street. There were three stop signs between our house and theirs, so if I didn't have to wait for a train, the bike ride took all of ten minutes.

My grandpa was a quiet, hardworking, wise old man; I was a quiet and shy young girl. Relatives called us two peas in a pod. His name was George, but everyone called him Jiggs for some reason. My name is Samantha, but to him, I was Sammy.

Grandpa loved his gardens and took great pride in them. Every spring, he let me help him plant corn, spinach, potatoes, and other vegetables. I helped him clean up all the dead leaves that had blown through the yard over the winter. I climbed the giant oak trees in the yard and found the branches that didn't seem strong enough for summer storms while he chopped them down with a saw. We prepared the garden house for the summer by cleaning it, sharpening the mower blades, and unwinding the hoses. I loved getting dirty with him. Washing the potatoes and digging holes was fun for me.

On summer days when the garden didn't need much attention, my grandpa filled his brown, rusty, squeaky pickup truck bed

with three fishing poles (including an extra, in case his lucky pole broke), his tan and white tackle box, my Charlie Brown tackle box, a green blanket, his mangy mutt Toby, and a small cooler full of potato chips, chocolate chip cookies my grandma had made for us, a few Busch Light beers for him, and two Pepsis for me.

I loved those days dearly. Grandpa would never tell me where we were going fishing, but I didn't care. What mattered most to me was that we were on another fishing adventure together, the two peas in a pod. Some days we went to a small pond a few miles north of Utica on an acreage owned by a farmer that my grandpa knew. Other times we would drive for hours until we got to lakes and ponds in central Nebraska. Those fishing trips always lasted until the early evening when we would return in time for supper.

In the fall, I rushed across town after school to help Grandpa rototill the gardens, pull weeds and sometimes, clean the garage. After much hard work, he gave me two quarters that he always saved in his left front overall pocket. Then I ate saltine crackers and cheddar cheese while he, my grandma, dad, and uncles played Pitch at the kitchen table for an hour before the time came for us to go home for dinner.

Winter days went by at a snail's pace. My mom usually kept me home on afternoons instead of letting me walk through the snow to my grandparents' house. Some days, my dad got off work early, so he took me there to hang out. Grandpa often sat quietly in the living room in his tan recliner staring blankly at the snow falling outside.

As I reached my preteen years, friends became my priority over Grandpa Jiggs. He didn't say much about missing me, but I could tell he did. I helped with the gardens less in the spring, we went fishing less in the summer, and I swept his garage less. But there were always Pepsis in the refrigerator and quarters in his left front overall pocket.

Not long after I turned sixteen, I realized I was pregnant. I was shocked, scared, and excited, as was the rest of my family.

Grandpa Jiggs was none of those things. He was ashamed of me. He refused to speak to me, and he left the house when I came to visit. As I had been his favorite grandchild all of my life, this broke my heart. I cried to my grandma and confided in my boyfriend many times. No one could heal the wounds that were ripped into my heart by my grandpa's silence.

Years went by without a single word from him. I tried many times to talk to him, especially when I found out he had lung cancer and congestive heart failure. He continued to leave the room or the house when I visited. I wrote him letter after letter begging for a hug, a smile, some kind of emotion. Nothing worked.

One cold January evening, four years after having my son, my grandma called me. Her voice was shaky from old age, yet firm with definition. She said Grandpa Jiggs had passed away a few hours before. She had something for me that she thought I might appreciate.

Stunned, I rushed to Utica from my apartment in southwest Lincoln. The 40-minute drive seemed to take hours that time. When I arrived at the house, the entire family was there. Grandma hugged me firmly, took me to their bedroom, and sat me on the old squeaky bed. She reached into the closet and handed me a yellow piggy bank that was full of quarters. She told me that my grandpa had been saving the quarters for my son's future.

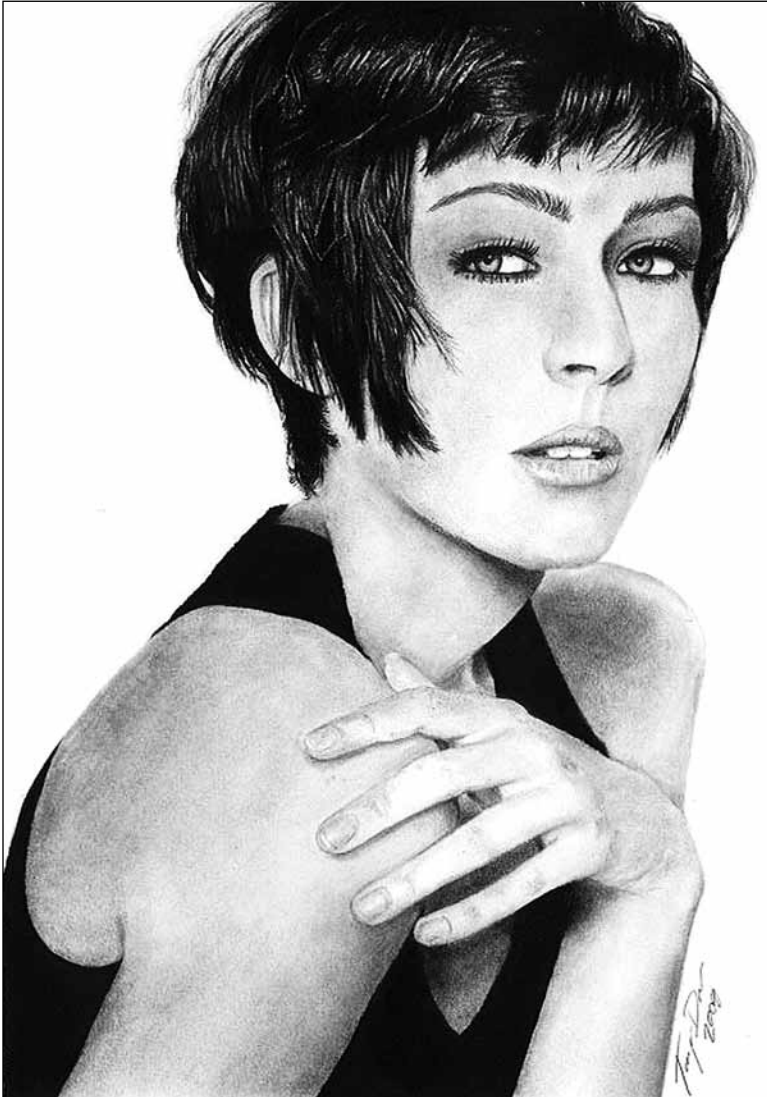
I miss my grandpa. I miss planting vegetables in his gardens with him; I miss our day-long fishing trips around Nebraska; I miss the quarters he saved for me after working hard with him. Even more so, I miss being his favorite grandchild, even if he would never admit to that. 🙏

Aderyn Ashleaf

Graphite Traditional

Recipient of Runner-Up Artwork Award

Taryn Dorn • Academic Transfer



Artifacts

Recipient of Runner-Up Poetry Award
Michael Boden • Academic Transfer

Rusty moths perforated the tin shed
so that over the years
thin shafts of light gave away small secrets.
Dust hung perpetually to circulating strings,
and you could imagine yourself travelling through it
immersed in a tunnel of light
surrounded by darkness.

In the summer I would go there
to sift over forgotten things left to die in the dirt.
As if by placing an object here
it would somehow disappear.
I wondered at the uses of many strange tools.
Pictures of people I didn't know
dressed in strange clothes and familiar surroundings.
Refrigerators which held no food.
Radios that would never speak again.
Presumably car parts
placed neatly, serenely alongside broken toys.
The hum of the hornets' nest reminded me it was time to go.
I never took anything away from there.
This ancient civilization had yet to be discovered.

Chillin'

Photograph

Laura Drawbaugh • Visual Publications



Roadside Exploit

Sloane M. Beckler • Practical Nursing Program

Click, click click—the mechanical gears sound off a musical rhythm in my ears. The whirr of the tires on pavement channels me into soothing ecstasy. This place is my escape. Movement is where I find comfort. As I travel out of my driveway and down the street I live on, cookie-cutter townhomes wave their farewells to me. I can't tell if it is a good riddance wave or a good luck wave. Taking a wide left turn up the corner, I enter in a shaded canopy of tall trees swaying in the Nebraska breeze like some hidden forest beckoning me closer with every sway of its foreboding limbs. Pumping my legs against the pedals, I work my way toward Superior Street. Dodging a car backing out of a driveway, I find refuge at the stop sign of Bel Ridge and Superior. The pungent odor of hot asphalt, gooey tar, and car exhaust hits me like a giant wall. Each scent screams and laughs in my face as it pulls all the precious oxygen from my lungs. I don't stop for long. I take off down the Superior bike trail. My destination: east.

I catch glimpses of weeds growing in the cracks of the cement, withering away under the scorching Nebraska sun to the lonely stages of its life. Cars slash by me to my left. I try to keep up with them, making it a game as to who can go the fastest. Usually, the drivers win in their rush of a never-ending race to ease and sleep before starting their workday the following morning. Stopping at the red light of 27th and Superior, I wait for my turn to cross. During this time, I encounter another biker. I wonder if she is out here on the trail for the same reasons I am; it's doubtful. She looks like she is on a mission; her frazzled red hair shoots out from under her helmet as if it's trying to escape from her sweaty scalp. I try to imagine what she is carrying in her backpack. Could her bag just be there for looks? Maybe it is full of books or groceries, a water bottle or two. "Why does it even matter what is in her book bag?" I think. Then I remember my mind likes to wander to every corner of my imaginative brain.

Green. I peddle as fast as I can over the crosswalk. Like millions of little bullets, I can feel the beady eyes of the drivers of cars drill into me behind the safety of their window shields. Tiny gusts of wind hit me with each passing car, bringing with them city stench flavored from the summer heat. Two bikers ahead of me are stopped on the trail. This is no place for chit chat. One of them is the redheaded biker I had an encounter with at the stop light. She had passed me several minutes ago. Politely, they allow me to twist through their road-block brigade. As I head towards 48th and Superior, the loud noise of a riding mower eating away the grass of an apartment lawn creeps into my ear. Beautiful summer time. The man driving the mower looks like he could use a break from the sun. His beet red skin blends in with his machine as if they are a continuous thing, one unit, chomping away at grass. The smell of the freshly cut green wafts into my nose, reminding me of home, a place that would take me days to bike to.

Still cycling east, I spot my friend. He comes barreling out of a parking lot with his literally brand-new, garage sale bike. Some people just have all the luck. We decided to meet at this place and ride on to wherever this path or sidewalk of our choice takes us. Stopping for a few extra moments, I reluctantly explain that I need rest. I am out of shape, that's for sure. With oxygen in my lungs and my legs feeling a little less like jelly, we take off on an unidentified mission. Still headed east, we cruise right at 48th and Superior. I take note of an old car that doesn't have a back window. Squinting to shield my eyes from the sun, I see a little girl in a softball uniform sitting in the backseat. The wind whips her locks in all different directions as if each piece of hair is doing its own little interpretive dance on her head.

As a bike rider, I take extra caution wherever I go. I observe so many people on their cell phones, eating, and even reading books while they are driving that something could happen at any minute to put me and my bike out of commission. That doesn't stop me. Risk comes with anything we do, and it is how you learn to minimize any risk that prolongs your survival. After choosing

our destination on a whim, Mahoney State Park, we ride to it for what seems like forever. Dodging big water puddles, jumping curbs, and nursing scrapes from the slip up on a pedal, I gasp with horror. Veering off into a restaurant parking lot, I narrowly escape from danger. Coming straight toward me is a woman walking her dog—not just any dog, but a Doberman Pinscher. My fear for these creatures is probably amplified with the media attention, but you will never find me snuggling up to one of them. I watch as the dog saunters by. Rippling through its body, muscles tense with every step of its agile legs. I feel as if I could make out my reflection in its shiny, ebony coat, adding to its more demonic aura. I wait until it is safely across the street before I make my getaway.

In a slow-moving, monotonous rhythm, my legs begin to push the pedals up the hill. I move almost as if I'm forcing my feet through cement-like sludge. Sweat feels like it is escaping through every pore of my body. It should be vaporizing off my skin for how hot it is out here. I tell myself if I could only peddle fast enough to create my own breeze, I would be back in business. Red light. I get off my bike like I've been defeated. My legs take tentative steps forward as if I am learning how to walk again. Shamefully, I push my two-wheeler by the cars idling at the light. Burrowing deeper than the first time, their beady eyes seem to follow me wherever I go. I enter into the haven of Mahoney State Park.

The song "Pieces" by RED echoes a mellow tune through my iPod. It drowns out the fatigue coursing through my body. The intense summer colors of the emerald grass and the denim blue sky pool together, intertwining like mixed paint on an artist's color palette. I hear the battle cries of slow pitch softball players, raising their fists at a play gone sour on the home front. We circle around the park, catching glimpses of fireflies blinking their message in Morse code as if to say, "Where are you?" The sky is fading into a blushing pink as we say our goodbyes to this peaceful sanctuary, a slice of sanity in this maddening town.

We make our way home amidst the screaming locusts, shouting out their obscenities to the world. With triumph we pull into my friend's driveway. Tonight I feel as if I have just climbed Mt. Everest. Close, I thought. With a healthy ache in our legs and a couple of blisters on our thumbs, we climb into his car. He offers to give me a ride back to the beginning of my journey. The acceleration and deceleration of the car lulls me into an emotionless state. I cannot feel the wind; I cannot smell the summer. I cannot see the details of life in this tomb. In this car, I am just another zombie like all the others who have stared me down with their empty eyes. Yearning to escape from the belly of this monster, we turn up the road of N. 18th street. The cookie-cutter townhomes sit silent, stone faced, and unmoving. There is no welcome home greeting. To everyone else I am just a silly girl with a bike, but to me, that silly bike is my world. 🚲

Dirty Golf Ball

Photograph

Micky J. Schumacher • Graphic Design



She Called Herself Bird

Emily Gilmore • Academic Transfer

She called herself Bird. I never knew why she called herself that, though, until it was too late. When most people think of a bird, they think of flight—flying high in the sky without a care in the world, basking in the warm sun, and congregating with other birds with the same lifestyle. I wanted to have that and be a bird, but I had a “broken wing.” And that broken wing was my lack of faith.

I met Bird when she was very young. I was very young as well. I don't remember what the age was exactly, maybe 4 or 5 years old, but I know that we were both young enough to not know common sense and how to practice it. My mom and I walked into a coffee shop, me holding the hand of my mother, so my mother could grab some warm coffee before heading off to work. Being a young girl, I was clumsy and off-balance. Stepping on a pool of water on the floor, I slipped and fell about two inches to the floor, but for me, that was like 100 feet. My mother was ordering her coffee and didn't see it happen, which made me a little sad knowing she didn't witness my trauma. I didn't cry, but I looked around to see if anyone had seen my fall, hoping to get some sympathetic looks.

As I looked, my eye caught a little girl with pigtails and a red shirt who was staring at me. She was so tiny, almost like a baby. But she got up, came over to me, knelt down, and looked me straight in the eye. Her eyes were a rich blue, the bluest eyes I'd ever seen. After staring into my eyes for what seemed like an eternity, she slowly got up and held out her hand. She didn't say anything; she didn't even smile. I grabbed her hand and examined my clothes to make sure no water got onto them. After passing an intense test of studying my wardrobe, I looked down at her again. I was certainly taller than she.

“Thank you for helping me up. I'm Emily. What's your name?” She gave me a puzzled look and opened her mouth slightly, as if wanting to say something.

“Um, my name is, um...Bird.”

I giggled. “What kind of a name is that?” She shyly looked down to the floor and blushed with embarrassment. Knowing that I had made a mistake in asking, I tried to save myself. “I’m sorry. I’ve just never heard that name before, or at least for a person. Hey, where are your mommy and daddy?” I asked, making an attempt to change the subject. She never looked up at me again. Her hands were folded behind her back and she was still blushing. By that time, my mother had come back over to get me.

“Come on, Emily. Let’s go. Grab Mommy’s hand,” she said to me in a motherly voice. I grabbed my mother’s hand, and as we walked out, I looked back at the little girl named Bird, but she was gone.

Speeding down the road to my babysitter’s house, my mother finally asked me the question I was waiting for her to ask. “So who was that girl you were standing next to, Emily?”

I grinned and replied, “I slipped on some water, and she helped me up. Wanna know what her name is? Bird! Isn’t that a funny name?” I laughed.

My mom looked at me through the rear-view mirror. “Really?” she questioned, “That is an interesting name, all right! Well, it was nice of her to help you up.” And the whole thing was dismissed and never talked about again.

Many years passed, and I eventually forgot about this girl named Bird. As people get older, they tend to forget their childhood in pieces. Some things are never forgotten, and some events are too mundane to keep in the memory. Life went on for me as usual. Then came my rebellious years. I was 16 years old and a sophomore in high school. Even though I said I was a Christian, my life did not reflect it. I was too independent, full of myself, and empty in faith. I was distant from my family, self-centered, and was only concerned about me and how bad my life was. But on an ordinary cold January day, my life would be emptied of myself and filled with a greater sense of faith than I had ever known before.

I got up for my morning run at 5:00 a.m. I dressed warmly, for it was five degrees outside. My run went along as normal until I got to the park. I was approaching the picnic tables where I normally stopped to rest, but today I just wanted to get home, so I decided not to stop. I passed by the second table when I heard, “Excuse me.” I began to slow down my speed and turned around to see where the voice was coming from. I saw a young girl with a pony tail and a red shirt sitting on the bench next to a trash can. She was the only one around me, so I figured it was she who said the words that stopped me in my tracks.

I walked over to the young girl with my hands on my hips, annoyed that someone would interrupt me in my daily rounds. As soon as I faced her, I nodded, as I was out of breath and couldn’t talk very well. I could see my breath as I exhaled. The young girl pursed her lips together and clasped her hands together. She wasn’t wearing a coat, just a red long-sleeve T-shirt and torn up jeans. I figured she clasped her hands together to try and stay warm. Finally, she spoke. “I don’t know if you remember me, but many years ago, I helped you up when you slid on that water at Starbucks,” she almost whispered. I just stood there, wondering why someone was asking me to recall such a memory. Although, truth be told, I hadn’t forgotten. I gave her a hand signal to go on. “Well, now I feel like I need to help you again,” the young girl stated.

I was now annoyed and smirked, “Look girl, I don’t need help—especially from a girl who is a total stranger to me!”

I turned to walk away when she said, “You’re drifting, Emily.” I was startled into stopping from walking away. My eyes got huge, and my mouth dropped slightly. I turned around, slowly.

“How do you know my name?” I asked.

The young girl smiled. “I remember your name because I found it to be quite odd.”

Three hours later, we were still talking. After she called me back over to sit next to her, I spilled my entire life story. Bird had that way about her. I could be free to be open with her and

transparent without fear of being judged. Three hours later, I was dabbing the tears away from my eyes as I finished “my story.” She nodded in understanding with each statement I made about my life and its cruelties. After about a five-minute gap of silence, Bird spoke.

“Your problem isn’t that you had a bad life. It’s that you don’t have the faith to get through a bad life.” I looked at her, and up until that moment I hadn’t seen it before, but I saw it now. There was a huge burn mark on her right cheek that had calloused over.

“What is that?” I asked, nodding my head to her mark. She looked down, turned red with embarrassment, and shrugged.

My mind flashed back years before to that moment when I looked at Bird’s face and remembered she had that same mark on her cheek. I said nothing back then because I was taught that pointing out someone’s physical flaws was not polite. The burn looked fresher and more raw back then when I saw her, like an iron had just touched her cheek.

As she flushed with humiliation, I quickly apologized. “I am so sorry. I didn’t mean to offend you by pointing that out.” She looked up at me with rich blue eyes. “I got this burn from a very bad man,” she whispered. This perked my interest.

“What bad man?”

Bird sighed with sadness and began her story. “My daddy was mean to my mom and me. He would hit my mom for a long time, and then he would come after me. Daddy also drank lots of liquor. One day I was making pancakes in the kitchen with my daddy’s brand new skillet. I was going to surprise Mom and Daddy to a special breakfast. Well, I accidentally chipped the black stuff off of the skillet. Daddy came in right as I did it. He saw the whole thing, and his face got all red. He charged towards me and grabbed my neck. He yelled, ‘You stupid brat! Who said you could use my new skillet?’ Then he forced my face into the hot skillet. I turned my head left to try and get away. But it was too late.” She trailed off and buried her hands into her face. I could hear her sobbing behind her hands. Nothing else was said. She

got up and walked away into the trees. I called out to her, but my words fell on deaf ears and just disappeared into the morning sky.

A couple of weeks later, my mom came into my room, holding a letter. "Emily, you got a letter."

I raised one eyebrow and questioned, "From who? No one ever sends me letters." I grabbed the letter from her hands and looked at the return address. All it said was "South Flyer." I ripped open the letter and started reading.

Dear Emily:

Since no one ever sends you a letter, I might as well be the first one. Emily, I have been watching you for several years, and I've watched you grow up into the self-centered person you are today. I watch you day after day jog in the park to vent your frustrations about life. It's true, life is frustrating, and not always fair. The good news is, you don't have to walk through life alone. You have an amazing power, Emily. The power to give up your power to the ultimate Power. Don't give up on life. Hang in there, and soon you will be flying south for the winter to enjoy paradise, too, just like me.

Sincerely, Bird

And, p.s., when you asked me where my mommy and daddy were many years ago, they were in Heaven with Jesus.

The greatest lesson Bird taught me was to give up faith in myself, for faith in myself turned me into a selfish, faithless girl. Bird gave me the greatest lesson of all time: to truly live is to die to self. 🐦

Playground Picasso

Photograph

Jennifer Creller • Academic Transfer/Journalism



Crossed Flight Paths

Claudia Reinhardt •
Writing Tutor, Multi-Academic Center

Brief as a blink,
a flame with wings flashed across the road;
its shadow, a dark afterthought, skimmed the ground.
My bike skidded, as I squinted in the summer sun,
wondering...where did he go?
In answer, a chuckling call tumbled through tangled branches,
like water trickling over stones.
On the warm breath of morning,
two creatures—one grounded, one free—crossed paths:
me, spinning over mounds of earth, scattering feathers of dust;
the oriole, soaring through pools of light, trailing a ribbon of song.
Quick as a gasp, he was gone;
like the distant glimpse of a former lover
disappearing into a thicket of people,
leaving only the memory of his smile.
No backward glance.
No answering call.
I cradled questions in a nest of empty hands,
searched the sky for a second chance,
and yearned to someday, fly.

Abandoned

Photograph

Mary Ann Rowe •
Developmental English Instructor



Welcome Home

Snera Riley •

Academic Transfer, Journalism/Broadcasting

The sky was a clean pure color of cobalt. I could tell it was spring. The city was bustling—mothers and their daughters shopping the cobblestone streets, while businessmen whistled and waved their hands for taxi cabs so aggressively it seemed they were selling stock on Wall Street. My ears filled with a song of trolley whistles and loons whooping their happy tunes. Robins were searching for their midmorning breakfast of earthworms and fat grubs within the earth. The ground was dusted with lilies, daisies, and bold sunflowers that danced and sang their praises to the sun. The further up the hill I drove, the quieter the air became until it was just the breeze murmuring through the blossomed willow trees. If the city only knew who it lost that day, perhaps it would cease what it was doing and take time to reflect.

After parking, I stepped out and walked to the other side of my Firebird to hug my younger sister, Kristina. Her face was kissed softly with freckles, and her cheeks were flushed from her crying. We stood there and looked out over the front of the hill and watched the city below us. “It’s beautiful isn’t it?” she whispered to me. Her eyes were full of tears. “He’s going to love it here.” I smiled back at her. Kristina had her arm within mine as if she relied on me to move her. She always seemed to crumble in moments like this.

Walking toward the chapel, I wasn’t sure what to expect. It was humbling in comparison to the old veterans’ hospital it was connected to. The hospital resembled a German castle with a soft gothic facade, the chapel quivering in the shadow of a mythical king. My mother was waiting for us at the front doors. My mother is a five-foot-three, retired Marine of 25 years, where most of her time served was as a drill instructor; needless to say, she showed little emotion in times such as the one we were about to face. With her freckled skin, blond hair, and emerald colored

eyes, she physically resembled a fragile porcelain doll. Her feminine appearance left most people confused on how she ever could have been a lifetime Marine. She believed, “God has a Master Plan,” and there were never any coincidences in life. Putting her arms around Kristina and me, bowing our heads, she spoke a short prayer of strength. Rising up, I could see my mother was withholding her tears. “We need to stay strong. No tears. We have to show strength to those who are weak,” she said as she kissed our foreheads and opened the door following her into the sanctuary. As we awkwardly stood in the threshold, my mother disappeared in the clusters of family members.

The exterior of the chapel was misleading to what the interior looked like. It had a contemporary design with chairs instead of pews; it was modest and simplistic. The robin egg blue walls blended seamlessly into the floor. It brought a spiritual sense of calming and happiness to my soul. Looking around, I noticed my mother walking to my Uncle Bob. I couldn’t hear her talking, but I could read what her lips were saying. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” she repeated after saying a few other words. My uncle was her younger brother. They had a close relationship growing up. She acted like a mother to him after my grandmother had passed away, long before I was born. She never would treat him like an adult, questioning how he ate his food, the clothes he wore, and even what he would watch on television. Most of this made my sister and I giggle because he would never say anything in his defense against her. He would take the verbal lashing and continue on what he was doing. My mother broke down with a heart-wrenching cry as she walked back to her chair within the congregation. This was the first time I had ever seen my mother cry.

“I think I’m ready.” My sister stood nervously from her seat, placed her hand on my shoulder, and I rose to follow her. The aisle seemed never-ending, but maybe I was so emotionally exhausted that I had no more energy to move. The casket was positioned in the center of the altar and framed between the Marine Corps flag and the United States flag. Kristina walked

up and quickly turned to me. “Snera! Do you see that?!” I leaned forward, peeking over my sister’s shoulder, and looked into the open casket; a smile was on this Marine’s face. I have heard of the human body twitching after a soul leaves it, but this was something different. I think he died with a smile on his face. He was at peace, satisfied with the result of his life.

Before walking away, Kristina turned and said, “I love you.” During the service, I kept thinking that the past had foreshadowed this moment. Our Marine was meant to come back to his family and say goodbye. It was God’s plan. After years of being away and traveling on the road, it was time for him to finally go home and take his place next to our Lord in Heaven.

Every member of our family stood and described memories of our fallen hero and shared how he touched our lives. “He was a simple man. Despite his large and ruffled appearance, his heart was pure and seemed uninfluenced by the outside world’s toxins of hate and violence,” one person said. “He was honest, selfless, and proud.”

Two days prior to this day, my uncle, a retired First Sergeant in the United States Marine Corps, was at his physical in the hospital. The doctor had declared him healthy. After leaving his doctor, he walked out to his rusty old ’88 Ford pickup truck. The security guard told my family he watched my uncle struggle to get in his truck. My uncle closed the door and then stared off into space. Without any notice, he slouched down into his seat. “It looked like he fell asleep,” the guard said. “But how does someone go to sleep that quickly?” The guard ran over to the vehicle, but it was too late. My uncle was pronounced dead on the scene. There was no autopsy done for him; his doctor said his heart had stopped, but not from a heart attack. His cause of death was determined to be of natural causes.

I do not believe a scientific cause of death is necessary to tell me why he died. I know in my heart it was his time to leave my world and return to his heavenly home. After retiring from the Marines, he became a semi-truck driver and traveled the

country. Before this past month I hadn't seen him in five years, only speaking to him on the occasional phone call. He proudly served in Desert Storm, stationed in four different countries on three different continents. With only a high school education, he taught me that it's not the amount of books you read but rather the life you gain by experience of spontaneity. At 48 years old, my Uncle Bob lived his life sacrificing himself for the betterment of his family and country.

After the remembrance, we moved to take our spots on the backside of the hill behind the chapel. The earth was covered in parallel rows and columns of named and nameless soldiers. A simple uniformed headstone with the engraving, "Not forgotten," headed each soldier's grave. We took our places alongside my uncle's casket, draped in our country's flag. My body trembled from the startling, thundering, twenty-one gun salutes, and then abruptly calmed hearing the wisps of the lonely trumpet's farewell filtering through the warm spring morning. A lone Marine in his dress blues with his white gloves handed the colors of our nation, folded into a precise triangle, to us with his words, "Accept this on behalf of the President of the United States and a grateful nation." It was then that I knew Uncle Bob was home. I visualized him standing proudly at the gates of heaven announcing, "Another Marine reporting, Lord, and ready to take my post." 🙏

Skulls and Bottles

Ink, Pastel, and Graphite

Danae Fuller • Associates of Arts



Untitled 1

Pastel and Charcoal

Liz Karre • Academic Transfer



Paca's Place

Photograph

Maggie Rose Gorgen • Academic Transfer



Time's Endless Love

Brandy Anderson • Academic Transfer, Nursing

As I approach the doorway, I hear him say, “My dear, it’s OK. I’m here.” I appear inside; I see a picture of the two of them that seems to be fairly recent. What a happy couple they make, their eyes gleaming with happiness. Their beds are neat and tidy with their matching floral comforters from home. Crocheted blankets of green, orange, red, and brown are draped neatly on the back of a rocking chair. A wheel chair and walker sit together in the corner. The closet is open, filled with both of their clothing, all arranged neatly in order by color; their shoes are lined up like soldiers.

The sun cascades through the huge window ahead of me. Its warmth blankets them as they watch *The Jeffersons*. Above the television is a large shelf that has a light enclosed underneath it. There are beautiful hand-carved fish, boats, and bird houses on the shelf, all perfectly arranged. Amongst them are family pictures, most of them in antique picture frames. Others are just leaning freely against the wall. Some of these pictures are yellowed and have torn edges. In one of these pictures, I see once again the two of them. They are embraced in a hug. She is in her wedding dress, and he is wearing a suit and tie. How absolutely stunning they look—what a beautiful moment in time captured.

To the left on the shelf is a beautiful hand-painted picture. It is a rose painted in a soft pink and ivory white color. The leaves and petals all have such intricate detail that I feel as if I can almost smell it. I notice the artist’s name at the bottom; it’s his name. This man has so many talents you wouldn’t be able to see by looking at him. I scan the room to see if there are any more of these beautiful treasures. Sure enough, just behind me I see another painting. This one has even more detail. It is a lake scene with a sunset in the background. The bank of the lake is lined with striking trees and flowers. He notices me admiring his art and proudly states, “That’s not all I can do. Come here; look at this.” Hanging by the bathroom door from the ceiling is a bird

house, but not the usual one you see outside. This one is painted to resemble a tiny version of their garden shed.

As I look around the room, something catches my eye. I walk over to check it out. In the trash, I find her hairbrush, a pair of shorts, one of her shirts, a toothbrush, and toothpaste. I ask why these things are in the trash. He looks up sorrowfully and says, “We are dying and won’t need those things anymore.”

She mutters to him, “Honey, I love you; we are OK. Don’t worry.”

He reaches over to hold her hand and says, “Look at her. She just lies there and can’t move. Doesn’t she look like she is dying to you?”

As tears begin to pour from her eyes, I embrace her hands. One hand is trembling; the other lays quiet and still from her stroke. The skin on her hands is very thin and fragile, yet to the touch, very comforting. I squeeze her hand and tell her everything is OK. She replies, “He doesn’t love me anymore. I’m a two-ton Tony that just sits here and does nothing.” I gently hug her and reassure her that this is not true.

As I wipe away her tears, she begins to smile. I can see that there have been many smiles before this one. The lines extending from her eyes are like dirt roads to that perfect country getaway. The sparkle in her eye is like the sun coming out for the first time on a cloudy day. Her smile is soft, as if she were remembering something. Then, to my left, I notice that he is standing there holding their wedding picture.

He begins to smile as well. Walking over with this photo, he sits down, taking her hand in his; he begins to tell me about their meeting. He tells me how they were both very good roller skaters—so good that he would take her arm in one hand and a leg in the other and skate around in circles. She then adds that he did this so well she could light a match on the floor. He explains to me with a twinkle in his eye how he knew that they would someday be married and live a long life together. As I sit and listen, I can see how they must have been in love in their youth. Their touch and smile give off a sort of explosion of warmth. At one time they were youthful and full of grace,

dreaming of children, grandchildren, and growing old together.

Now it seems as if life has played a trick on them and fast forwarded their lives—trying to hold on to the past but living in the present at the same time. Watching them there together, I can see in their eyes how young they still are inside. Yet their bodies are crooked, wrinkled, bruised, and in some ways, rendered useless. As their hands are entwined together, they shake.

I sit and watch these two wonderful people as he tells of their life together. For a moment, we are interrupted by a knock at the door; it's the nurse. She comes to let them know that they are leaving tomorrow to go to an appointment at the doctor's office. As the nurse leaves the room, he looks to his wife and says, "You see? This is all we have left. This small room, appointments, and each other. Everything we have left is all in this tiny room."

Once again there is a knock at the door. This time, it's one of the nurse's aides. It seems to be time for chapel. He looks to his wife and says, "Are you ready to go?"

"No, silly," she says with a warm smile. "I am still in bed."

As the aide helps her get ready to go, I notice how he seems to try to keep everything in perfect order; he restacks the papers on the bedside table, pours out the glasses of water into a plant on the floor. When he sees that she is out of the bed, he goes over to straighten it. When finished, he turns to her and says, "Ready?"

"Yes, let's go," she says happily. I offer to push her up to the chapel, and they accept. But he insists that he must stay behind us to ensure that she is OK.

As I walk them up to the chapel, I ponder to myself, "When I come to this point in my life, will I still feel this endless love? Happy and content only with each other's company?" I guess that cannot be answered for many years to come.

We reach the chapel, and I give him time to sit down. I push her up next to him. He reaches over and grabs her hand and says, "We made it, my dear." I watch them exchange loving smiles, and then I leave with a warm feeling in my heart. 🙏

Nil Carborundum Illegitemi

Photograph and Digital Imaging

Nicholas Muthersbaugh • Graphic Design



Meeting Grim

Joshua Daugherty • Associate of Arts

In the spring of 2007, I was 22 years old, three months removed from the Navy, and in hot pursuit of a new career, but I had no idea what. While I was so clueless, I found myself working as a security guard for Bryan Hospital. Now, I wanted a good career, but I only knew a few things: how to do what I was told, when I was told, and how to do what I was told right the first time. “What kind of civilian job needed someone like that?” I thought to myself. My first night on the job, a light finally flickered in my head.

I was working the night shift, and my job consisted of patrolling the hospital grounds, escorting patients and guests to their destinations throughout the premises, escorting staff and flight crew through the hospital to their destinations, locking and unlocking doors according to their scheduled times, and occasionally removing bodies.

During a three-day orientation, my supervisor Derek had taken me through every scenario that would take place during my shift. In those three days, I had been repeatedly taken through the body removal procedures but had yet to have an actual incident take place. On a Tuesday night in April around 2:30 a.m., the phone hanging from my belt rang.

“Bryan East security, this is Josh,” I answered anxiously.

A squeaky voice answered me. “This is Jim from the Fremont Funeral Home. Is this security?”

So I headed down to the basement toward the loading dock to let the man in. As I pulled open the door, to my surprise stood a short stumpy old man in a plaid suit and a wool golfer’s hat. He appeared to be a pleasant old man with cold, clammy, yet soft, hands, and the warm squeaky voice you’d expect to hear from a pastor. Off to his side sat a gurney with a blanket the brightest color of blue, made out of fuzzy material resembling what one would find on the dash of a Cadillac in the barrios of Los Angeles.

Being that I was trapped in a steel freight elevator with a gurney and a guy that worked on dead people, the journey up to the second floor had the potential to be the most uncomfortable moment of my life, and in my discomfort, I asked the most ridiculous question ever. “So, uh...how’s business?”

His reply was the response of the ages. “Well, it’s been dead lately.”

An outburst of chuckles came from Jim and me in reaction to his comment. However, the hilarity didn’t stop there. Out of curiosity, I asked Jim what the career of a mortician was like, and he replied yet again with an answer that I would never forget. “It’s a great job, it pays well, and my customers don’t bitch.”

Just as I finished wiping the snot from my nose from the excessive laughter, the steel door on the elevator slammed open, and we were on our way to the post-operation to pick up our “customer.”

In the fifty-foot walk to the room, my whole body went from happy jitters to a cold pale fear when I realized I was about to see my first corpse. Finally, the moment arrived, and we walked in the room. Jim threw back the curtain, and there lay a big burley man in his wake. The dead man looked as if he was sound asleep and nestled in for a warm winter’s nap. Anybody that would have walked by would have had to have taken a couple of looks to realize that he was actually dead. The pressure was off.

“This isn’t so bad,” I thought to myself.

Jim and I wrapped the body in a sheet, pulled the gurney up to the bed, then slid the body onto the gurney without any complication—or at least that’s what I thought. Just as I turned to walk out of the room, I heard the little old man roar in total fear. “Oh, shit!”

I turned to look and saw chaos unfolding before my eyes. The sheet we had wrapped the body in was completely drenched in blood, and the sheet had become so saturated that the blood was dripping all over the floor. Jim yelled at me like a Marine Corps drill sergeant. “Get a trash bag now! Hurry up!”

So I bolted into the operation-preparation room next door where I found a nurse sitting there with her feet on the desk,

talking on her cell phone and gossiping about some other nurse that apparently wasn't present.

In a subtle yet vigorous tone, I shouted, "I need a trash bag now!"

To my surprise, the nurse turned her head the other way, trying to ignore me. So I bellowed even louder, "Ma'am, I need a trash bag; I have an emergency!"

This time, she glanced up, rolled her eyes, and put her finger in her ear, as if she was trying to mute me out, and I came to figure that she wasn't going to be any help.

I saw an empty receptacle bin with a trash bag inside. I ripped the bag from the receptacle and sent the entire receptacle crashing to the floor. With no time to lose, I left the mess, and I dashed back to the post-operation room where Jim was impatiently waiting in blood pooling in a three-foot radius around the gurney. When I caught glance of Jim, he had a look on his face like I would expect to see on a hooker in church. Within seconds, the nurse came charging in behind me squealing, "What the hell do you think you're doing!"

But when the nurse caught a glance of our situation, she quickly shut up. As a matter of fact, she turned and dove out the door, holding her mouth as if she was trying to hold down her lunch. The mortician then snatched the bag out of my hand, spun around, and threw the bag over the body. I lifted the dead man's cold sweaty head so Jim could get the bag over the rest of the body. As soon as the bag was in place, Jim and I took a huge sigh of relief almost simultaneously.

A few seconds later, I worked up enough nerve to ask how something like that could have happened. Jim explained that the problem was due to what caused the man's death in the first place. The man died because his stomach had ruptured, which caused his major organs, mainly his stomach, to fill with blood. When we moved him from the operating table to the gurney, the movement released the leftover air in his body, along with all of his blood and bodily fluids, which spilled from every opening on his body. The problem was solved. Jim and I shook hands,

high-fived, and patted each other on the back like a couple of high school baseball teammates after a championship win.

The memory of this event would probably haunt most people for a long time, but this experience had the opposite effect on me. Two weeks after this event took place, I registered to take college classes and am now pursuing a degree in Mortuary Science. 🧠

Hilde

Graphite Traditional Art

Taryn Dorn • Academic Transfer



New Spurs

Photograph

Lacey Janak • Graphic Design



Baby Bottle Calf

Photograph

Amy Salisbury • Graphic Design



Faded Painting

Dale Leach • Micro-Computers

She wanted to believe the rain was over.
She wanted to believe that this world wasn't cold.
But in this feeling she's been wading
And in this silence she believes
In the starlight she is bleeding,
It all fades out.

A strange territory this city has become—
A faded painting left behind.
In her eyes it's always been
And always it's in her smile.
Her breath on my neck, I lie awake remembering—
Leaves blowing around my feet.
And upon azure skies, I'll blaze her emerald gaze—
Kiss the midnight stars for her—
and breathe the shimmering world away
To rise in satellite.

Her eyes flash radiant guise—
Casting shadows upon the pavement
Of my native Lincoln, Nebraska,
Where winds wash away her tears
To splash them upon my toes.

Hard to Say, Easy to Feel

Karen Azparrent • Academic Transfer

I knew Andrew since we were 14 or 15 years old, and since then, we've been in this friends-with-benefits relationship; he's had several girlfriends, and I've had some boyfriends myself, too, but there was always this "need" to spend time together. When we finished high school, we didn't hang out as often as we used to, but we were still "doing it." We're 23 now; time and some events could have affected our twisted connection, but they didn't. At least, that's what I thought.

A month ago, we were done chatting on MSN and agreed to meet at 1:30 at Kennedy Park, a well-known place to walk around, check stores, drink, and chat with friends in Lima, Peru, my hometown. The bus was fast, and I arrived at 1:10, so I decided to walk around to see if there were any new bracelets or fancy jackets at the "Do It" store.

1:34. I still remember the time. My pink cell phone rang. It was him. "Where are you? On your way?" he asked.

I replied, "No no... I'm a few blocks from you. I'll be there in one minute." He laughed and said OK.

I left the store; after several never achieved, "We're going out soon," finally, we were about to see each other again. While taking advantage of every mirror on the street to check if I looked decent, I wondered how he looked, if there had been any change I hadn't noticed in the pictures I saw on his MySpace profile. He was married. I knew it was going to happen when he told me that his stupid girlfriend was pregnant and didn't even think about doing an abortion. He wasn't wearing glasses; he broke them while cleaning them...or that's what he told me. And he didn't have a cell phone, which was a plus for us to not be interrupted.

It was *1:35* when I saw him standing 45 feet from me, smoking a Marlboro medium cigarette with that funny looking face he makes on every cigarette blow. I turned blue. I turned red. I turned purple—I was an ambulant rainbow. I was shaking like

the hand of a medical surgery student on his first intervention. I was praying he didn't turn around and see me in a situation like that with myself. I was watching the cars, the people, the noise, the sky—all in grayscale but him, like a never-released scene of the *Sin City* movie.

He was reading the headlines of the newspapers and magazines on a stand close to a public phone. I guess that's the public phone he called me from.

Why didn't he turn around? What kept him so focused that he didn't even look around to see if I was coming? Was he totally carefree about me showing or not? Was I giving too much importance to non-important questions like these? Was I being too dramatic? He was interested in the news. The headlines of the newspapers caught anybody's attention, even mine. No, he wasn't totally carefree about me showing or not because he called me. And yes, I was being too dramatic and giving too much importance to questions like those. Those were the answers that came with the speed of light right before it finally happened.

He turned around and smiled. I was petrified like a Greek soldier in the sight of Medusa. Different haircut, little bit taller, no glasses, with the Marlboro medium cigarette almost over and his left hand in his left-side jacket pocket—he was the cutest messy creature I'd ever seen. I could tell he didn't sleep; he was in final exams week, and he wasn't in the position to fail any subject. He had a family, and for a 23-year-old boy who still depended on his parents, passing every class at school was a must. We started walking around the park, which led to a beach that, instead of sand, had stones—tiny rounded stones that were almost white because of the burning sun. Before reaching the beach, we stopped at a nearby cliff where people, and even dogs, practiced paragliding for a not-so-affordable cost of \$70 for a 30-minute trip; when we found that out, we decided to go all the way down to the beach.

It was 2:46 when we reached the beach. We looked back to see the stairs we had walked down to get there, and it certainly

looked like a stairway to heaven! It had, at least, 250 steps. We didn't believe we had made it and didn't even want to think about the way back to the cliff. Walking along the shore, we were talking about me and my trip to the U.S. He asked, "Are you sure about what you're going to do there? What would happen if nothing goes the way you planned?"

I laughed and said, "Yep, I'm pretty sure about what I'm doing; I'll try to do my best to achieve every goal I have as hard as I can. I'm going to be OK." A huge lie, indeed. I wasn't totally sure about what I was about to do and was nervous to leave my hometown and be by myself for the first time; I didn't think I was going to achieve my objectives so easily and quickly, and no, I wasn't going to be OK. In that moment, I felt so eager to look him straight in the eye and yell, "It's up to you if I leave or not! Just say you don't want me to leave, and I won't do it! Say it! Just say it!" but neither of us, not me, not him, said a word about it.

We kept silent. Suddenly, he hugged me and whispered something I didn't hear, and the moment wasn't appropriate to say, "Hey, I didn't catch that... what you said?" He stopped the hug, smiled at me, and asked, "Wanna go to the movies?" Obviously, I said yes, knowing where it was going to end.

So we did. We bought tickets to see *Hulk*, but that doesn't mean we actually saw the movie. It was 4:05. The movie started with all the coming-soon advertisements and the say-no-to-piracy warning. He threw a single popcorn kernel at me and started a popcorn fight. The Hulk movie started, and I noticed we were the only people in the room, as he was laughing at my hair all covered with tiny pieces of pop corn. His laugh was over. 4:30. I heard the words I'd been longing to hear for years. "I missed you," he said with a smile that killed me in a glimpse.

"I missed you, too," I replied, and that was it. 4:31. We kissed. 4:32. We were still kissing. 4:50. We were hugging each other and saying how much we were thinking about being together again. He used that word: "together." I didn't say a word because I knew that "together" wasn't the "together" I wanted it to be. He

was married and had a daughter, two first-rate and important enough reasons to not think of a serious relationship with him in a close or even distant future.

So, what was I doing there? With somebody I don't even have a chance to build a future with? With somebody that was already forging one with someone else? Was I being totally wicked by having an affair with a married man? Was he a waste of time? Was he worth it? What if this returned three times to me like a Karma curse? And—what about me? Didn't I deserve to be pleased and have a superior time with the man I wanted? Did my feelings count in this story? Was I wrong by wanting someone forbidden? All these doubts were washed away with another kiss at 5:23.

6:00. Movie ended. Another kiss sealed the movie we didn't see and put us "together" again. His "together." We left the movie theater and kept walking in the direction of the cliff. The infinite stairs were waiting for us again, but in order to make it fast and funny, he decided to make a bet. "The first one to reach the cliff asks the other one to do whatever the winner wants, OK?" he said. I agreed with a head gesture, and for whatever, we meant it. One, two... three! Our silly competition started. He won. I reached the cliff three minutes later, and there he was, cracking up on the ground, and he said, "Well, well, I won, but only because you're leaving, I'm going to let you win. So tell me, what do you want me to do?"

"To leave me alone!" I screamed inside of me. I looked at him and his five-foot-six body, dark caramel skin, thin eyebrows, heart-shaped lips, and small, brownish black eyes, and I thanked God for such an amazing view.

Then I asked what would apparently confirm what he thought I had in mind, "Whatever, right?" He said yes. Again, the doubt storm came again. I had a chance to put an end to the situation because if I asked him to leave me alone, he would've done it, but did I actually want him to? I wasn't ready—not yet, but it was up to me.

7:20. My heart was about to collapse, and my hands were sweating coldly. It felt like I was going to kill somebody or

destroy something. And, actually, that was about to happen: I was about to destroy something I didn't want to; I was going to finish something that deserved to be finished but didn't have to be; I was going to let go of something simply because it wasn't right.

7:25. I approached him while I felt my tears almost dropping. I hugged him as if I was holding a lifesaver after falling into the sea. I placed my head on his left shoulder and said, "I don't want to let you go."

"I know," he said. He might have thought I was talking about my trip, the fact that I was leaving, and that somehow I was letting him go. I was covered in tears and still resting my head on his shoulder. He moved his head, saw me crying, and told me not to be sad, that it wasn't so terrible and that we were going to meet again in December. I didn't say a word. We were still holding each other. It was 7:42, and I kissed him. I kissed him like it was going to be the last kiss I was going to give in my life. I kissed him with all the happiness, sadness, and anger I felt. I kissed him by loving him. I loved him by kissing him. And he loved me, too.

"I'm tired and...hmm...I still have to do my bags," I said.

"That's OK because I have to be home at 10:00 anyway," he said with a face that didn't match the "OK" he was saying. At 8:20 we were at the bus stop. We weren't talking at all, not even to ask what time it was. It was annoying. I wondered if he noticed what was secretly going on with me. I guess he didn't. I hope he didn't.

I decided to take a taxi. It was getting late, and my neighborhood wasn't the safest in the city—or maybe it was an unconscious excuse to escape from a situation I didn't want to face. I still don't know. He finally talked; he asked me about my flight, what time it was, and which airline I was going to fly with. I was brief, and without looking at him, I said, "Avianca, and I don't remember the time." I stopped a taxi cab, told the driver where to go, and opened the door without looking at him. I didn't want to say goodbye, but he turned me around, face to face, and said,

“It’s been a nice day. I’ll see you soon.” I smiled. Again, I felt my tears about to drop. He told me he didn’t want me to travel, but it was my choice. Why did he say it right in that moment and not before? Was that on purpose? It was obvious there was nothing I could do about it at that time. I’ll never know, and I don’t want to.

11:34 and I was in my bedroom. I made up my mind about the whole situation. I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t say goodbye. I didn’t want to. I didn’t have to.

Today, it’s been *a month* since I arrived 20 minutes early to a special appointment. It’s been *a month* since I heard his voice on my pink cell phone. It’s been *a month* that I gave a man the loveliest, sweetest, and most heartfelt kiss ever, wishing it didn’t stop. It’s been *a month* from the moment he said, “It’s been a nice day. I’ll see you soon.” It’s been *a month* from me watching him stand at the bus stop while I was leaving in that 1992 white Toyota Corolla taxi cab. It’s been *a month* since we stopped talking. It’s been *two weeks* since I dreamt about him doing I don’t remember what. It’s been *four days* since one of my best friends told me he asked about me. And it’s been *thirty minutes* since I checked his MySpace profile and saved my favorite picture of him—with that funny-looking face holding a Marlboro medium cigarette. 🍷

The Escape

Creatively Altered Photograph

Laura Drawbough • Visual Publications



The Face of Freedom

Photograph

Alan L. Carter • Machine Tool Instructor, Milford



Just Another Day in Fallujah

Chris Berggren • Academic Transfer

This story is an emulation of Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried," modernized and blended with the writer's experiences in Iraq.

"... I shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness...." They said Psalm 91 every day and before every mission. They were not all Christian, nor were they all religious. It was a way to bolster their courage and morale. Almost everyone had bought a bandana from a PX (Post Exchange) in Kuwait with those words written on it. Some, like Corporal Terry Brooks, wore it as a bandana; others folded it up and put it in front of their SAPI (Small Arms Protective Inserts) plate inserts in their flak vests in the vain hope that the words themselves would stop a bullet from penetrating.

The prayer was not the only extra thing they carried. Lance Corporal Rudolph Pierre carried an eighteen-inch machete. Corporal Brooks carried three logs of Copenhagen and only three MRE (Meals Ready to Eat) main meals. "I'd rather be awake and hungry than dead with a face full of flies," he said. Lance Corporal Styves Exantus took every watch and necklace he found and wore them saying, "You know I can't go anywhere without my bling!" Lance Corporal Chris Doucette carried a picture of his fiancée, Alison. "As long as I can look at her face every night, I know I will sleep just fine."

They didn't just carry personal things; they carried the dirt and filth of weeks without a shower, though they never carried more than a day's growth of facial hair. They went so long without a shower that they couldn't remember why people took daily showers in the first place. Some, those lucky few whose four-year contracts were up in a few months, carried the assumption that Uncle Sam would not forget about them, that they would get to leave when they were supposed to and not give the big green

weenie one more chance to get them.

They carried the belief and ideals of the country they served. Corporal Nick Wilson was sure that this war was going to change the way the world viewed Americans. He was sure that once they had given the Iraqis a democratic government, the rest of the Middle East would want one, also.

The following story is a perfect microcosm of our deployment. The day started out like all the others had in December. We would get up before it was light, read Psalm 91, get our brief, and go burn some houses down. We hadn't always burned the houses after we searched them. We were not like third platoon, whose progress through the city could be tracked by the smoke they left behind. We, like third platoon, just began to get frustrated with the endless searching and researching of the same houses, the same briefs, and the same shit, different day, and we took that frustration out on the houses we had to repeatedly search.

Our platoon commander, Staff Sergeant Ralph Scott, began the day off right and told us, "Well, I've got good news. Battalion thought that we did such a good job of clearing blocks three, four, and five hundred yesterday that they want us to go clear them again today." It was the same set of houses we had already cleared twice before.

Everyone put on their gear and prepared to move out. We left our machine gunners and mortar men at our house. The house we were staying at was ours; possession is nine tenths of the law, right?

The first block went smoothly, and the second block took us next to our house. As we stood outside the other houses, we would wave or give the finger to the machine gunners on the roof. We were relaxed and confident; we had been in the city for over a month and were experts at clearing these houses. Our platoon was divided up into two squads. First squad was in the house to our west, and my squad, second, was in the house to the south of our house.

Suddenly, we heard Lance Corporal Exantus firing and shouting from the roof of the house we were searching. "I see the

motherfuckers. I see ‘em!” I could see shadows running in front of the windows on the stairs of the house to our south. My squad leader, Corporal Nick Misiano, called us to consolidate in the entrance of the house we were in, to get a head count, and then to run like hell to our house. There was only one problem with that plan. Our diligent machine gunners, who had flipped the bird right back at us, forgot which house we were in. And thanks to Murphy’s law, our nice new personal roll radios that allowed us to talk between squads quit working. We had discovered that the PRR’s were not worth the three dollars our thrifty Marine Corps had paid for them. It was not a big deal; we had an SOP for shifting fire. All we had to do was pop yellow smoke, and our machine gunners would know not to shoot there anymore. Unfortunately, all we had were green smoke grenades, which meant open fire.

By this time, we had pulled our security from the roof and were waiting to exit the house. Capitan America, better known to the rest of the world as Corporal Colby Williamson said, “I’ll just run out there and get their attention. If I get shot, I get shot.”

Corporal Misiano just rolled his eyes and said, “Shut up, Colby.” After several minutes of indecision (which felt like hours), our PRR’s magically worked again. We were able to tell our machine gunners to stop firing at the front of the house, and we prepared to leave the house.

Without warning, we heard “Allah Akbah!” shouted from the second story, and AK 47 bullets rained down from the ceiling searching for us. They had armor-piercing bullets that tore through the ceiling; with our puny 5.56 billets, we couldn’t return fire through the ceiling. Lance Corporal Campos turkey-peeked up the stairs and fired three rounds, hitting one of the insurgents. “I got him. Let’s go,” he said. Then a grenade flew over his head, bounced off the wall, and landed right in the middle of the squad. Before it had finished rolling, Corporal Steven Christenson jumped on it. No one moved. We all just stared at Stevo waiting for him to become a pink mist and a memory. Only nothing happened. For fifteen seconds, we stared.

Eventually, Christenson leaned to one side, pulled the grenade out, and threw it into the next room, shouting, “Run!” in his loud southern accent. We all ran outside and headed toward our house. There was no formation, just a normal Fallujah fun run. Everyone was filled with a sense of, “Well, if I just lived through that, nothing can touch me.” As we were running, I looked back over my shoulder toward the house. It appeared the ground around us was a haven for bullets. The dirt danced with each impact, though the ground was the only casualty from that fire. We all made it back to the house.

When I got to the entrance, I saw Corporal Misiano standing outside the door, counting heads as the squad ran in. Only after he had counted twelve heads did he go inside to the relative safety of our house.

“No evil shall befall me, Nor shall any plague come near my dwellings; for He shall give His angels charge over me, to keep me in all my ways.”

Although we carried many things then, I shall always carry the memories of that day and the other days that were just like that day. 🙏

SCC Ring

Photograph of a ring made with a CNC Mill

John Bockoven •
Machine Tool Instructor, Lincoln



Time

Kathy Samuelson • Academic Education Instructor

Still standing sentinel
the house gazes,
blank eyes pitted and cracked
by years of service.

Shutters slide uneven,
no longer protecting
her darkened panes.

Silhouette slumped,
grandeur departed,
She implodes above

Land indifferent and unchanged.

Home Sweet Home

Photograph

Laura Drawbaugh • Visual Publications



Whisper

Photograph

Jennifer Creller • Academic Transfer/Journalism



The Education and Adventures of a Young Jake Sullivan

Jake Sullivan • Academic Transfer

I have a deep sympathy for the children of today. Parents are so full of worry that they wrap their children in protective shrouds so tight that they cannot fall down and get hurt, even if they wanted to. Sensationalized fear runs rampant, so that absolutely all things must be approached with apprehension. Foods, bacteria, micro-organisms, germs, infections, rough play with neighborhood pals, being without adult supervision, abduction.... This has, without doubt, grown into a pandemic that keeps our culture in a constant state of terror.

Kids today often wind up being Cheeto-eating, video-game-playing couch potatoes that one day wake up and come to the realization that they have zero real world experience, were never allowed to go out and get their hands dirty, and have been covered in a blanket of sanitization, still dripping wet and permeated with the stench of their mother's placenta. If I were one day to wake to the realization that I was living in some fantasy land fabricated by society and my parents, I'd be pissed.

My parents were both teachers, and my grandfather was once a teacher, so they were forever trying to educate me on important life lessons and the ways of the world. They incessantly advocated my inquisitive and adventurous spirit in all things. I'm sure, at times, this was an exhausting job.

I grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska, on a treacherous four-lane arterial known as Normal Boulevard. Years later, I would find irony in this, as my life so far has been anything but our society's idea of "normal." Normal Boulevard was an extremely busy street with constant sirens, loud noises, and noxious fumes. Directly across this inner-city highway was a bike path. I used to play in my front yard and watch as all different kinds of people rode past. Every demographic was accounted for. There were fat guys in spandex, and little kids in DayGlo shades of green, orange, and

pink. No matter what their appearance, most of them were chattering and carrying on—goofy grins plastered onto their happy faces looking like they were having a great time. There was also the serious cyclist, looking formidable, gliding past at an incomprehensibly fantastic speed. Needless to say, being a free-spirited youngster, I was unimaginably intrigued and thought to myself, “I must have one of these astonishing pieces of poetry in motion.”

Without delay, I immediately threw myself into the task of acquiring one of these tremendous machines. Being only five years old, this involved many pointed conversations with reasons why I should have a bike. After discussing this with every-single grown-up within my own little microcosm, I finally came across a man with ideas.

That man was my grandpa. This would prove to be an educational experience, and one that would help to further forge a bond much like that of a father and son. He suggested that I start collecting aluminum cans to sell and earn the money for a bike myself. “Brilliant!” I thought. So I set out talking to all family members, friends, and neighbors. I told them of my plans and encouraged them to drink more soda. I was always on the prowl for aluminum. I remember riding around with my grandpa in his titanic land yacht of a car as he spotted cans on the street. He would quickly assess the situation on the road and then adeptly maneuver the car into position so that when he opened his door, he would only have to reach down and pick up the can. This performance was always a little scary yet at the same time awe-inspiring and exhilarating. He would say, “There you go, little buddy, another one to add to the stack.”

Whenever he called me that it made me feel special and loved. He rarely called me by name. This always made me think of *Gilligan's Island*. “Little Buddy” is what the Skipper called Gilligan. My grandpa even looked and acted like Skipper—lighthearted, merry, and gregarious, while I was innocent and mischievous like Gilligan.

The search for and collection of cans seemed to go on an infinitely

long time. I was, however, starting to amass a large amount of crushed aluminum. The cans were contained in large, black, plastic bags and were lined up in a corridor that was formed by a canopy of cedar trees, part of our aging cedar fence, and the side of the garage. It was the dead heat of summer, and the pungent bouquet of cedar, grass clippings, black plastic, and the sugary sweetness of caramelized soda-pop filled the air. The aroma was unforgettable. One thing is certain—the bees loved it. Well, so did I. It was not black plastic bags filled with cans that I saw; it was a gleaming, polished, chrome device of debonair debauchery with two black tires. A majestic and minimalistic, maniacal machine of such symbolic magnitude, it would turn out to alter the course of my life forever.

Impatience and a desire for instant gratification are two characteristics often found in a five-year-old, and I was no exception—I was starting to get squirrely. I wanted that bike, and I wanted it immediately. I was also getting curious as to how much money I had in aluminum. So the next time I saw my grandpa, I asked, “Can we take these cans in and see what I have?”

He of course replied, “Absolutely, little buddy.” So we loaded all the cans up into his truck, as he called it. He has been driving new Lincoln Town-cars for as long as I can remember, and he’s always referred to them as trucks.

Taking the cans into the recycler was as much of an adventure as acquiring the cans themselves. Upon arrival, the acrid smell of the infinitely vast amount of cans was especially potent, for there was the added scent of fermented and stale beer. The sea of cans filled an entire cargo-hold of a semi-truck trailer and seemed like an unfathomably large amount of cans, especially for a five-year-old.

After turning the cache over to an old and disheveled man, looking and smelling nearly as rancid as the rest of the pile, I watched as the shoddily dressed man weighed my precious cans and haphazardly threw my hard work onto a conveyor belt that took the cans up and into the gaping and hungry mouth of the semi-trailer. I think I was expecting him to do something magical to the cans, but I instead

received yet another experience in this cold, abrasive world of harsh realities. He paid out the cash, handing it over to my grandpa, and we were on our way.

Knowing there was a bike shop on 33rd and B, not far from my house, I asked if we could go. He happily replied, "You betcha, buddy." When we arrived, I saw rows of exquisite bikes, dripping dazzling colors and shiny components. I looked around and finally, my eyes landed on my new machine in all of its radiant beauty and diabolical glory; it was exactly as I had imagined. It was shiny, polished chrome-molybdenum steel, was built like a tank, and had beautiful, BMX racer decals. I exclaimed, "That's the one! That's the one I want!"

My grandpa looked at the price tag and exclaimed, "You don't have quite enough yet, little guy." After saying this to me, he went over to the salesman. Brief negotiations were made. He gave the man some of my hard-earned cash and said, "Put the bike on layaway, so my grandson can come down and get it in a month or so." I was, of course, disheartened to learn that my efforts were not enough, but I did not give up. I approached my work with a new fervor because I knew how close I was and had actually touched my new prize.

It was not long after that I had finally saved enough. Both my parents and grandparents took me down to the bike shop. They were so proud of me and my hard work, and they wanted to see me buy my new bike. When we arrived at the bike shop, I can remember the sun was starting to fall on the end of yet another beautiful summer night. My grandpa then put the cash into my hand. At this point, I knew that it was the most money I had ever held, and I felt grown up because of it. After brief communion with the salesman, saying only my name and my intentions, I handed the money over to the man. He took my bike off the rack and wheeled it over to me. Once the bike was in my hand, I inspected it again and noticed its unmistakable panache.

My mom put a steadying hand on my shoulder as I mounted my new steed. I shakily put my foot onto one of the pedals, and

being the fiercely independent and hardheaded child that I was, I shrugged her off. Despite my actions, she kept a hand on me—this bike had not been outfitted with training wheels. It was as if I was born to ride. All my mom did was give me a little shove, and I was off! Like a cowboy on his first cattle drive, I rode into the sunset, and I knew that my life would never be the same.

You can imagine the shock and amazement of the adults as I did this. I suspect that while they were amazed, they were not the least bit surprised. Riding without training wheels would turn out to be a constant theme in my life to come.

I was raised to not be afraid of this world but instead to be cautious and to see it for what it really was. Some may say that this approach is harsh; I disagree. It seems that kids today are raised on marshmallow streets with cotton-candy trees. It is important to understand that while I did have that facet of my childhood, my parents, grandparents, and the other elders in my family did not hide the reality of the world from me. I will always be indebted to them for that. I still have my first bike. I also have many others that I have acquired over the years, but not one of them will ever hold the significance of that first bike that I worked so hard for. 🍷



Chris

Photograph

Micaela Mota • Graphic Design



View from the Shop

Photograph

Micaela Mota • Graphic Design



Moondancer

Photograph

Rita Thomas • Visual Publications



If Americans Knew

Joe Harris • Academic Transfer

Due to the current economic situation here in the United States, our foreign policy has significantly taken a back seat in the media. Foreign policy deserves more attention than it receives because it affects our national security and involves taxes. Foreign policy stretches beyond just the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It also includes which nations America supports and the recipients of U.S. foreign assistance; the U.S. molds its image largely because of foreign assistance. A vital issue in this regard that has been overlooked by the American media for some time is the conflict between Israel and the Arabs. Ever since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Arab and Muslim attitudes toward the U.S. have been under a microscope. Arab and Muslim opinion about the U.S. has been shaped by other U.S. activities, such as Iran Contra and the first Gulf War. But their hatred for the U.S. had been brewing before either of those events, essentially because of the Israeli-Arab conflict, which has been raging for 42 years.

Why is this so important? Because the United States has such an intimate relationship with Israel. According to the Congressional Research Service, since 1976, Israel has been the largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid—annually, receiving \$3 billion in economic and military assistance. Including guaranteed loans, Israel is the largest recipient since World War II (“CRS Report for Congress”). That said, it is not only important that Americans are aware that their nation is giving Israel so much aid, but also what Israel does with that aid.

Popular belief depicts Israel as the fly versus the sledgehammer, and that without U.S. support, the Arab nations would “gang up” on Israel unprovoked. History says otherwise, with the exception of the 1948 war; only days after Israel came into existence, the surrounding Arab nations attacked on all sides. However, in the end, the Jewish State emerged victorious. Furthermore, Israel

attacked its neighbors in the war of 1956 and the ‘Six Day War’ of 1967 in which they notched quick and easy victories—all this before the U.S. began giving them large-scale aid. Since then, Israel has become the unprecedented military heavyweight in the Middle East and the only nuclear power in that region.

Another depiction is that Palestinians only attack Israel because “they hate Jews” or simply because “they’re terrorists.” These claims carry so much weight mainly because of the response that Americans have toward depictions of anti-Semitism and terrorism. What Americans need to realize is that the Arabs attacking Israel are the same people living under Israeli occupation. A common myth is that since Israel conquered these lands in the ‘67 war, as part of “the spoils of war,” those lands are now part of the State of Israel, and therefore, Israel can do whatever it wants with them. In truth, the Israelis *did* capture these lands during the Six Day War, but they never *incorporated* them into the State of Israel.

Occupation involves land being militarily controlled by a foreign nation. The United States currently occupies Iraq; does that mean Iraq is now part of the United States? No. In order to make them *state* lands—that is, make them part of the foreign nation that occupies them, the nation must grant the people living in said lands citizenship. To do otherwise would be a social policy known as apartheid. Citizenship carries the right to vote in that nation’s elections, apply for its healthcare system, etc.

This was the story for the 1948 war. Israel captured the majority of Palestine, with the exception of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. But following the war, both sides signed a Treaty in 1949 in which they acknowledged the other’s right to exist in the lands they captured; therefore, the lands that Israel had control of when the war ended were *incorporated* into the State of Israel, while the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem were occupied by its Arab neighbors (Asser).

By signing the 1949 Treaty, both sides also agreed that neither would invade nor occupy the other’s land. Israel violated these agreements in 1967 when it invaded the Gaza Strip, the

West Bank, East Jerusalem, Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, and Syria's Golan Heights. There was no treaty following the war, only U.N. Resolution 240, filed against Israel for violating the ceasefire, and Resolution 242, declaring the Israeli occupation of the newly conquered territories illegal and calling for its withdrawal from them ("Resolution 240, 242"). The U.S. voted for neither of these. Israel has since withdrawn from the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip but still violates U.N. Resolution 242 by continuing its military presence in the remaining territories.

Many believe that the Israelis continue their occupation because it is necessary for their safety. History shows that occupation is only successful in being an irritant: the Nazi German occupation of Greater Europe, the Soviet occupation of multiple nations, the U.S. occupation of Iraq, and Great Britain's control over the group of colonies that is now the United States. The military presence and quelling of independence only fuels the people's desire to fight their foreign rulers. Israel does not occupy because it's in danger, but rather, it's in danger because it occupies.

Upon further examination, the Israeli occupation appears to be a strategy of expansion instead of defense. Israel has colonized the West Bank and Golan Heights with Jewish settlements, which is illegal under international law. More than 430,000 settlers live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, alongside 2.5 million Palestinians. Settlements and the area they take up cover 40% of the West Bank. Twenty-thousand settlers live in the Golan Heights. Israel erected what it calls a "protection barrier" along its borders with the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Israeli government says its purpose is to keep suicide bombers from crossing into Israel and to prevent future attacks. But the barrier also makes deep en routes into the West Bank, sealing off 10% of Palestinian land from the rest of the West Bank. They also have set up about 500 checkpoints or roadblocks in the West Bank—a checkpoint/roadblock every two square miles (excluding land taken up by settlements and the wall)—further complicating the daily movement of Palestinians and choking

economic activity. More than 8,000 Arab prisoners are held in Israeli jails, many of them under the age of 18 (“Guide to the West Bank Barrier”). Under international law, it is illegal for a foreign government to abduct civilians (Geneva Conventions, Article 3, Section 1, Protocol B). There’s much controversy about Arabs being tortured in these prisons as well, which Israel usually denies. But then again, in 2000, the Israeli government did admit to torturing Arabs between the late ‘80’s and early ‘90’s, something it had previously denied (Asser).

In simplest terms, the Israelis are ethnically cleansing the Palestinians much the same way the European settlers did the Native Americans. Ethnic cleansing occurs in other parts of the world, such as Darfur, Rwanda and Congo, but the ethnic cleansing of Palestine is the only one fed by U.S. diplomatic and financial support.

It should also concern Americans that Israel uses U.S. military aid when perpetrating wars that are nothing short of onslaughts on the U.N. and the civilian population. The world witnessed this occur in the Gaza Strip siege of December 2008 through January 2009. Along with the atrocities committed during the war itself, one should be aware of the circumstances and events leading up to it.

Ever since Hamas’s election in June 2006, the Israelis have imposed an economic blockade on Gaza, sealing its shared borders with Gaza and allowing very little into the strip. It also imposed a naval blockade on Gaza by bringing its naval ships closer inland, allowing Palestinian fishermen less than six nautical miles out to sea, which makes it impossible for them to reach the large schools of fish necessary for their industry (McCarthy). Any fishermen desperate enough to travel farther out are fired upon by the Israeli gunboats; some fishermen are even killed (Johnston). They claim this is to strangle Hamas, whom they consider a threat to the security of Israel. However, this “defense” mechanism was imposed on all of Gaza, collectively suffocating its entire population.

Hamas re-seized control of the Gaza Strip in July 2007, breaking its unity with rival Fatah. Once again, Israel responded with an even heavier blockade on Gaza, claiming it was to prevent the smuggling of weapons that threaten Israel's security (Beaumont). If the goal was to halt weapons smuggling, one would have to wonder why Israel wouldn't just resort to naval and border checkpoints rather than an all-out isolation of Gaza.

Hamas, desperate to get the blockade lifted, agreed to an Egyptian-brokered truce with Israel in June 2008. The conditions were that Hamas must halt all rocket fire from Gaza and that Israel must lift the blockade and open border crossings to allow flow of aid and supplies—an agreement Israel never lived up to. Any hope of the ceasefire holding was shattered only three days into it when the Israeli army shot a Palestinian farmer working in his land, along with Israeli marine vessels firing on Palestinian fishermen who were trying to reach deeper waters. The shooting of the farmer was the first violation of the Gaza ceasefire. The incidents triggered vows of retaliation by Islamic Jihad, a radical militant organization in Gaza not affiliated with Hamas (“Islamic Jihad Vows to Respond to Israeli Ceasefire Violation”). By July 5th, eleven rockets and mortars had been fired at Israel since the truce took effect, and Hamas suspended prisoner swap negotiations, citing the Israeli violations (Frenkel). The truce at this point was precarious at best.

In December 2008, the Gaza Strip was showing signs of its slow death. As a result of the Israeli naval and border blockades, Palestinians were picking through garbage dumps for food, and 51.8% of Gaza's population was living below the poverty line (Beaumont). With the blockade still in place and Gazans starving, Hamas refused to renew the truce after its six-month expiration, blaming Israel for not respecting its terms, including lifting the blockade. Israel put the blame on Hamas, saying it halted a staged easing of the blockade because Hamas failed to end rocket fire and weapons smuggling. Israel claimed this in spite of the

fact that the wave of violence had been triggered by the shooting of the Palestinian farmer in June.

The ensuing Israeli offensive, codenamed Operation Cast Lead, began on December 27 and was supposedly aimed at curbing rocket fire as well as dethroning Hamas. When high civilian casualties mounted during the war, Israel deflected criticism with its familiar, oft-used catch phrase of the enemy, “Using human shields.” According to Israel, they were dropping leaflets warning Gazans to evacuate the area and taking the utmost care in sparing civilians, but Hamas and other armed militants were surrounding themselves with civilians and fighting from these positions. International law states that in wartime, the attacker must take every precaution and employ every method necessary to make sure civilians are not harmed (Geneva Conventions, Article 57). International law also states that Israel would *still* be obligated to take these necessary precautions even if the enemy was “using human shields” (Geneva Conventions, Article 51, Section 8). For example: two militants run into a residential building after firing at you. Do you respond by taking them out with a missile even though you’ll be killing many noncombatants as well? Or do you go in there with your troops and/or snipers to take them out? The latter would be the appropriate and *legal* method.

Americans quickly bought the “human shields” slogan, either unaware or ignorant of the demographics of Gaza. With a population of 1,551,859 crammed into a mere area of 140 square miles—11,084 people per square mile—the Gaza Strip is one of the most densely populated places on Earth. In an area that crowded, armed combatants will always be surrounded by civilians, no matter where they go. And even if Israel warned Gaza civilians to run for their lives, where were they supposed to go? Across the borders? Not with the Israeli blockade caging them in. So were they supposed to run into the sea and hide?

As Maxwell Gaylard, the U.N. Humanitarian Chief to the Palestinian territories, put it, “There is no safe space in the Gaza Strip—no safe haven, no bomb shelters, and the borders are

closed—making this one of the rare conflicts where civilians have no place to flee” (Kalman, Kennedy). Indeed. Firing missiles into such a contained crowd is like dropping grenades into a tank full of fish. If the goal is to kill the piranhas while refraining from killing the minnows that surround them, should you proceed with the grenades? Or should you use something more discriminating?

Homes, as well as U.N. vehicles and facilities, frequently came under Israeli attack. A U.N. truck was fired upon from an Israeli tank, in spite of the fact that the truck’s delivery had been coordinated with Israel and the vehicle was marked by the U.N. flag and insignia. Two U.N. workers died in the attack. The Israeli army also attacked a convoy of International Red Cross trucks. The incident occurred during what was *supposed* to be a three-hour pause in fighting agreed upon by both warring parties. The Red Cross was refused access to Gaza City’s Zeitoun neighborhood by the Israeli military for four days. When they were finally allowed in, they discovered dead families in bombed-out homes as well as children too weak to stand (Barzak, Weizman).

Three U.N. schools housing refugees were hit by Israeli artillery even though the military had been given precise details of the schools’ locations. The deadliest strike was on the Fakhura school in which approximately 40 Palestinians died. Israeli politicians and military officials aggressively charged that militants had fired from within the school. But when the U.N. called for an independent investigation, the Israelis changed their story, saying militants had fired from *near* the school and that upon retaliating, it was a “stray mortar” that hit the school (“Stray Mortar’ Hits U.N. Gaza School”).

Israel’s insistence that these air strikes on homes and facilities were “accidental” is appalling since Israel possesses state-of-the-art, precision-guided weapons courtesy of the U.S. The Israeli Air Force acknowledged that at least 80% of the air strikes on Gaza were precision-guided. It’s a war crime in itself to treat civilian areas as free-fire zones, but the evidence here says Israel’s actions

weren't just sloppy and careless; whenever a structure is hit by precision-guided weaponry, it means it was targeted.

Even more barbaric were the stories of an Israeli weapon “melting” Palestinians and causing “strange burns” that grew wider and deeper over time. Doctors said these burns were consistent with white phosphorus, a weapon that is illegal to use in heavily populated civilian areas—the Gaza Strip being no exception. Human Rights Watch and the U.N. reported observing weapons with all the earmarks of white phosphorus being employed by Israel and even found shells displaying “M825A1,” the U.S. designation for white phosphorus. After initially denying it, Israeli military officials later admitted to its use (Maqbool).

Israel also fired white phosphorus shells at the U.N. headquarters in Gaza. The incident came after a part of the U.N. compound housing 700 civilians had already been hit by Israeli artillery earlier that day. The U.N. contacted the Israelis and protested. An hour later, three white phosphorus rounds struck a corner of the compound, spawning flames that engulfed thousands of tons of food and medicine.

After all was said and done, Israel's morbid and heinous assault on Gaza left over 1,434 Palestinians dead, 960 of them civilians. Brain scans and autopsies revealed that many of the children that died were shot at close range by the Israelis (Fraser).

And if Israel and her supporters didn't already have a difficult time disputing the evidence stacked against them, their task got even more tedious when an Israeli military college published soldiers' testimonies of killing civilians and vandalism during the Gaza operations. Testimonies included a sniper killing a woman and her children at close range whom troops told to leave their home. Another claimed that he witnessed the “cold blooded murder” of an elderly woman when an Israeli commander ordered troops to take her out, despite the fact that she was easily identifiable and clearly not a threat. They also spoke of unnecessary destruction of Palestinian property (“Israeli Strike Kills Palestinian”).

Perhaps more interesting were the stories of high involvement

of rabbis supporting the war from a religious standpoint. They delivered pamphlets containing the message: “We are the people of Israel; we arrived in the country almost by miracle. Now we need to fight to uproot the gentiles who interfere with re-conquering the Holy Land” (“Israeli Strike Kills Palestinian”).

For now, a fragile truce between Israel and Hamas is in place. How long it will hold is questionable, as Israel is conducting targeted assassinations and air strikes on Gaza tunnels.

Whenever asked why the U.S. throws so much support behind Israel, many are quick to say, “Because they’re an ally,” without solid reasons as to how Israel is an ally. What does Israel do for the U.S. that makes it an ally? During the Cold War era, Israel provided useful intelligence on Soviet activities; but ever since the Soviet Union collapse, what has Israel done for the U.S.?

There is also the claim that Israel is a principal ally in the war on terror and that it shares a common foe with the U.S. This also doesn’t hold water because the Israelis aren’t fighting alongside U.S. in Afghanistan or Iraq, as Britain, Poland, and Canada are. Saudi Arabia is an ally since it is our number one oil source and allows U.S. to have military bases on its land. So, *how* is Israel an ally?

Furthermore, Israel doesn’t behave loyally like an ally should—often ignoring U.S. requests to stop building Jewish settlements in the occupied territories as well as erecting the “protection barrier.” On more than one occasion, Israel has sold sensitive military technology to U.S. rival China (Gordon). According to the United States General Accounting Office, Israel “conducts the most aggressive espionage operations against the U.S. of any ally.” Along with the Jonathan Pollard spy case of the 1980’s, a new case came to light in 2004, when the FBI caught a Pentagon official named Larry Franklin passing classified information to pro-Israel lobbyists (Locy). Even after all the assistance the U.S. gives it, why would a darling “ally” like Israel be so willing to spy?

The other two familiar defenses that the pro-Israel side would come up with aren’t really arguments at all. The first is a common reaction to whenever someone speaks critically of Israel: accusing

the critic of anti-Semitism. Although it may have no credible basis, it is very effective in ceasing debate. Anti-Semitism is frowned upon, so by calling someone an anti-Semite (often flamboyantly making a scene of it), the accuser is in fact intimidating the critic into dropping the subject.

In March 2006, two political professors, John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago, and Stephen Walt of Harvard, published an article in the *London Review of Books* critical of the U.S.'s unquestioned support of Israel due to the overwhelming influence that pro-Israel special interest groups have in Washington D.C. Ironically, their article addressed the issue of "anti-Semitism" accusations stifling debate on the matter; the reaction to the publication proved their point so well, it was almost comical.

"Liars! Bigots!" Alan Dershowitz spewed on news broadcasts. The Anti-Defamation League called it "conspiratorial," and Martin Indyk remarked that it "rose to the level of anti-Semitism." They obviously didn't read the article, or else they would have known that the professors made a point that the pro-Israel lobby was made up of Jews *and* Christians, and that they weren't singling out *all* Jews. Criticism of Israel is not an attack on all of the Jewish people, for it is criticism of a state. If I were to criticize China's policies, would that make me *racist* toward Asians?

The second defense commonly used by Americans on Israel's behalf involves a factor called sympathy. They say that they have a deep-seeded sympathy for the Jews after the atrocities committed against them in the Holocaust. Again, this is not an argument, but rather, they are implying that Israel deserves special treatment, even if Israel is oppressing others. The problem with this is it's not a justification, especially if the Israelis are abusing a group of people who played no role in the Holocaust.

We as Americans need to break open this taboo area of foreign policy because it concerns our tax dollars, our image, and our national security. It's about what's really in America's interest, not anti-Semitism. And what concerns America's interest should be discussed by Americans and not swept under the rug. 🙄

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Twins

Woodcarving

Tom Rathbun • Machine Tool Technology



Grandma's House

Photograph

Micaela Mota • Graphic Design



Journal Entries

Chuck Parker • Business Administration

Power Windows

As a kid, I yearned for a console television in our living room, a side-by-side refrigerator in our kitchen, and a car with power windows. An automobile with power windows seemed the ultimate status symbol in my 11-year-old world. Plus, all my cousins had cars with this modern luxury. Lincoln Continentals, Mercury Colony Park station wagons, Buick Electras—these were the vehicles my aunts and uncles carried my cousins back and forth to school in. How I loved to ride in those cars with fresh air at my finger's touch.

My parents did not see the need for such lavishness in a car. They drove sensible automobiles with sturdy cranks to raise and lower the glass. Each automotive trade throughout my adolescence left me disappointed. I recall a 1965 Olds Delta 88, powder blue, with tilt steering wheel my folks brought home new. Tilt wheel—we were just a step away from power windows! Surely, their next automotive purchase would be “loaded.” But, alas, it was not to be, as the next car not only did not have electric windows, it didn't even have a tilt wheel. Progress had taken a definite step in the wrong direction. Not until I was old enough to buy my own car was I able to quench my desire for this vehicular extravagance. Now, in my 44 years, I've owned an array of automobiles, but one thing they've all had in common—power windows.

Ironically, once I left home in 1980, all the cars my parents purchased had this same feature.

* * *

Used Vinyl

This past summer Saturday, I spent two pleasurable hours digging through stacks of used record albums at Kaneshville Collectibles in Council Bluffs, Iowa. I inherited this interest in out-of-the-ordinary music from my father.

As a child in the 1970's, I spent many hours listening to the music that my mother played on my parents' Zenith stereo. Mom regularly brought home new albums—Loretta Lynn, Merle Haggard, Charley Pride, Lynn Anderson—of popular country music that we first heard on the AM car radio.

In contrast, my father had a record collection that neither my mother, nor we kids, much fancied. Most of the artists in Dad's collection were rarely, if ever, heard on commercial radio. I recall one of his favorites, an album by Stuart Hamblen, whose popularity had faded sometime in the 1950's. The only song I remember from this disc centered on a team of sled dogs and involved Hamblen shouting, "Mush!" intermittently throughout the lyrics. Egged on by our mother, my brother, sister, and I would roll in laughter whenever Dad tried to play this, and many of his records.

Now I realize I've come full circle, as today I'm the guy shunning popular radio and, instead, scouring worn record bins searching for an elusive platter by an artist long forgotten.

* * *

Grandma Ella

My great grandmother, Ella Parker, was a formidable woman. In her early teens in the late 1800's, she had come across country by team and wagon with her father and older brother to claim a homestead along the Niobrara River south of Gordon, Nebraska—Old Jule's country. Ella was the youngest of six girls, and though each woman had her own distinct personality, all shared a tenacious character.

Ella's sister, Cal, was married to a gentleman, Uncle Let, with a handlebar mustache. When her spouse did something to displease Aunt Cal, she was known to grab a hold of his whiskers and give them a stout pull. Once, when the extended family was on an automobile trip, they stopped for gas, and after leaving the station did not realize until down the road a few miles that Cal was not in either of the cars. It took a fair amount of persuasion to convince Let they must go back for Cal—he knew he was in for a damn good yank.

My father boarded with Grandma Ella and Grandpa Roy while attending high school. During this time, Ella's sister, Meg, came for a visit. One night, as my father was reading in the other room, Dad overheard a conversation at the kitchen table between Ella and Meg. Meg had recently returned from a trip to California to visit her daughter and son-in-law. Aunt Meg was complaining to Grandma concerning her son-in-law.

"You know, he struck me once," Meg alleged.

"Oh no!" Grandma gasped. "What happened?"

"Well, I'd just hit him with the broom...."

My father, collapsed in a fit of the giggles, did not hear the rest of the story.

Another of Grandma's sisters, Puck, married a man named Bodenshotz, who operated a pony ring with a traveling carnival in the 1930's and 40's. I once questioned my father about this. Surely, I contemplated, this must have been a quality outfit, unlike the objectionable, smalltime carnivals of my childhood. Regrettably, my dad assured me, this was not the case.

Spouse abuse and carnies aside, Grandma Ella never vacillated in her support of family. In her later years, her grandchildren and great grandchildren received her unconditional love and boasting. No child was ever more accomplished than one of her own. As my dad always said, if Grandma had ever been forced into a game of one-upmanship, she'd have claimed her grandchildren could eat glass.

I can hear her now.

"Roy, get down the Blue Willow china!"

* * *

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving with the Beckers (my mother's side of the family) was always eventful, and 1973 proved no exception.

The holiday was hosted by my mom's brother and wife, Ed and Sally, which drew a fair amount of apprehension. Aunt Sally was "experimental" in the kitchen, and this was met with much disdain in a family that had been raised on the traditional meat and

potatoes. Recently, Sally had discovered a recipe that called for pouring a tomato-based concoction over roasted beef—a blasphemy amongst this group of Nebraska Sandhills cattle ranchers. Roast beef was meant to be eaten in its true form, without any fancy sauces. Who knew what culinary sacrilege Sally might inflict on the Thanksgiving turkey. Only the knowledge of an open bar (a given at any Becker event) helped the adult masses cope. A couple slugs of scotch, and you could stomach most anything.

When the guests began to arrive, the adults made their way to the wet bar. Mom, and each of my aunts, stole a furtive glance at the bird cooking in the electric roaster placed atop the washing machine. Reports concluded that, aside from a little salt and pepper, the turkey appeared unadorned—a bullet had been dodged.

As everyone began to settle in for the day, my Uncle Dick appeared in the doorway with a cassette tape recorder. These machines were in their infancy, and few of the guests had ever seen a cassette tape. Dick, in his usual boisterous manner, planned to tape family members and then play the voices back. This activity may have provided a few minutes of entertainment had the contraption not immediately malfunctioned and eaten the cassette tape, causing Uncle Dick to lose what little social composure he possessed. The episode ended with Dick, in the middle of the family room, stomping on the machine. This, in turn, prompted my Aunt Arlene (Dick's wife) to snap at Dick, "Stop acting like a horse's ass!"

In the meantime, the phone was ringing for the umpteenth time. Aunt Darlene was calling again to talk to her mother, my Grandma Becker. Darlene had refused to attend the affair, using the pretense that she had nothing to wear. All present knew this was a ruse—Darlene was still seething over a disparaging comment, concerning the color of her hair that one of her sisters had made during last year's meal. Not to be left out, Darlene would call periodically throughout the day to investigate who was at the dinner, and what was being talked about.

When both the turkey and the liquor had been exhausted, families began to file out into the cold night for the drive home over trail roads. In the back seat of a warm car, I drifted off to sleep listening to my parents laugh while retelling the details of the day. Another Becker family dinner had lived up to all expectations. ❧

Skyscrapers in Chicago: Stone Trees

Photograph

Olga Mun • Academic Transfer/Political Science



The First Hit

Michelle West •

Business Administration/Criminal Justice

“What are you doing here?” asks my dad as my sister and I sneak in to the Super Saver bakery—an intoxicating smell of cake donuts in the air. For a brief moment, I smile. The smell takes me back to when I was younger and we used to go to Samuelsen’s Bakery in Ceresco to get donuts on Sundays after delivering papers. All that seems so long ago now—where did those days go?

My sister’s voice snaps me back to reality. “That sorry excuse for a brother-in-law decided to smack Chelle around. We left and are staying here tonight. We can’t go back home.”

Dad looks at me. Why is he looking at me that way? What is that look? Does he think this black eye got there itself? Does he see the swelling of my right cheek or the scratch marks on my neck? He continues to flip his donuts in the fryer with the drumsticks. He goes back and forth, looking at me and then flipping the donuts.

“Well, aren’t you going to say anything, Dad? Look at her. Are you going to let him do this shit to your daughter?” The anger in my sister’s voice is scary. She has always been kind of a bitch, but I have never heard this tone in her voice.

My dad looks at her. “What do you want me to do? What the hell happened?”

“We came home from the Penalty Box and that a-hole was waiting in the dining room, drunk. He got up and started yelling at Chelle. He was asking her all these stupid questions. He was accusing her of cheating on him. She just looked at him and asked what his problem was, and he shoved her.” Her voice keeps getting louder as she explains to my dad what happened. I drift off in a trance, remembering.

* * *

I walk in the door and am surprised to see Chris sitting in the dining room. He is supposed to be out of town on a job. I ask him what he is doing home already, and he starts yelling at me. He asks me where I have been, who have I been with, did I know what time it was? All kinds of different, absurd questions. I can't for the life of me figure out what his deal is. I tell him I was out playing darts with the girls. It is Tuesday; I have league every Tuesday night. Did he forget?

The stupid, accusing questions keep coming. Is he really accusing me of cheating on him? Where in the world is all this coming from? When have I given him a reason to think I would do such a thing? I try to explain to him where I was and what I was doing. He just won't listen. The next thing I know, his hands shove hard into the front of my shoulders. I stumble backwards. I somehow maintain my balance and know I must have a dumb-founded look on my face.

What the hell? Why is he pushing me? He shoves me again. This time, I can't keep my feet on the ground. I fall onto the couch. I stand back up and push him back. He is taller than me. I am five-foot ten. He is six-foot four. He has a medium-muscle build. He is not small, but he is not large, either. His bald head glistens with sweat as he stares at me with absolute hatred in his eyes. He comes after me again; I side-step so he doesn't have full-on contact with his push. I trip over my own feet to get away. I yell at him to knock it off. I don't understand why he is doing this.

I scramble around on my knees trying to get away. My hair is in my eyes. Just as I attempt to move the wild strands from my face, SLAP! The back of his hand makes contact with the right side of my face. It hurts. My cheekbone is stinging. My hands are no longer worried about my hair. I cover the right side of my face. More questions swirl in the mess I have going on in my mind. I cannot believe this is happening. Am I dreaming? Where is my sister? Couldn't someone wake me up? What is going on? Where is my phone? I look around our apartment, which is starting to look like a war zone. When did the lamp get knocked

over? I finally find my phone next to my purse by the front door.

I reach for my cell phone to call my dad or the police—I can't remember who I wanted to call. He somehow gets over the top of me and takes my phone. I hear the sound of something breaking with a dead thud. He has thrown my phone through the wall. I scramble to get to the bedroom. I have no idea what I will do when I get in there. There won't be any place to go. There is no phone in there. I get on my feet and get ready to make the corner to go down the hall when I feel a hand grab the back of my neck. I feel the squeezing of his hand and his fingers getting tangled in my hair. I reach around on the sides of my head. I scratch at his hands trying to get him to let go of me. I end up coming face to face with him. The alcohol on his breath could make me intoxicated. Oh, my God. What did he drink?

The front of him presses me against the wall, his hands around my throat. As I am grasping for my breath, I feel my feet come off the floor. Where the hell is my sister? Why hasn't someone called the cops yet? I start kicking my feet into his shins. Maybe if I fight back hard enough, he will put me down and let go. The look on his face is horrible. I have no idea who this person even is. His grip is getting tighter on my throat. I feel lightheaded. I cannot breathe. Why won't he let go? Something isn't right. My body doesn't feel like kicking him anymore. It goes dark after that.

When I come to, my sister is standing above me with a large knife in her hands. I am on the floor in the hall between the bathroom and my sister's room. I look around her at the mess in the bathroom. On the floor is Chris, who looks like he is sleeping. He is against the wall and curled around the toilet. His right arm is wrapped up with our shower curtain (the rod is down also), his head slumped against his chest—the towel rack leaning against his head, resting on his left shoulder.

"What is going on?" I ask my sister.

"He will think twice before he touches you that way again. I will see to that." My sister is out of breath, breathing hard. She is ghost-white and shaking. She helps me up off the floor and tells

me to get my things. She says we have to go tell Dad. We can't call the cops, or we'll get kicked out. I manage to find my purse and my coat. She gets some pillows and blankets.

We rush down the stairs and out the front of the building. I shuffle through my purse to find my car keys. I can't find my phone. "Kiki, where is my phone?"

"Your phone is in the living room wall. Stupid threw it through the wall when you tried to call Dad. Do you remember anything that happened?"

I stop to think. It slowly comes back into my mind like a blurry movie. The pain in my cheek is coming back to me as well. My stomach hurts like I may throw up. I cannot get my head wrapped around the idea that I was just beaten by my husband. He has never hit me before. Why did he start now? What did I do to set him off? Why was he even home?

* * *

My dad pulls me out of my trance. He is looking over the side of my face. He tells my sister there is a compress in the first aid kit behind her. He just keeps looking at me with a strange look on his face. What is he thinking? Does he think we are making this up?

"Did you call the cops?" he asks.

"No, we came straight here after I knocked him off of Chelle. He was choking her, and she just quit moving. He had her off the ground. I got in between them so he would let her go. Once he let her go, I shoved him into our bathroom right into the wall. He grabbed the shower curtain, and it came down on top of him along with the towel rack. It sounded like he hit his head pretty hard. I ran to the kitchen and grabbed one of the knives, then I came back to make sure he would not go after her again. I got her up and told her to drive here. That's how we got here. What are you going to do?"

My dad just stands there for a few minutes. He turns around and goes back to his donuts. He never does say anything the rest of the time we are there.

Around 4:00 a.m., we leave and go to Bryan Hospital. Kiki has to work at 5:00. She tells me I can sit in the dining area. No one will be in there for a while.

That is where I stay for what seems like the longest time. I know people are walking by me all morning. They probably even stare at me and ask me what happened. I just remember the blurs moving in front and around me. I remember Kiki checking on me every so often. I remember being stunned and numb. Shock had me numb and emotionless. Somewhere in time, I got up and went to my own job.

In and out went the customers that day, all of them a blur as well. A lot of them ask what happened, and I just say, "Don't ask." I don't know what to tell people. I don't know what to tell myself. It was all a dream? It won't happen again? Will it? I don't know.

* * *

Sadly, it wasn't the last time. I put up with more abuse from him for almost two more years before I had enough strength to leave. I stopped paying the rent, and we were evicted. I had all my stuff out before he knew we got kicked out. All the money that was supposed to pay for rent, I hid in the tire compartment on my car. I used that to pay for the divorce, my freedom.

In the two years I was abused, I called the cops once. I can't remember why they didn't do anything to him or why they didn't talk to me when they finally came. I do remember Valentine's Day in 2005 when the judge looked me in the eye and told me he had heard enough. He was granting me the divorce. He felt I had been through more than enough at my young age. He advised me to get counseling. I never did. I was afraid counseling would mean defeat. I thought I had won with the divorce. He was never going to be anywhere near me again. I was moving on with my life, scars and all.

People always want to know why women don't leave when they are abused. I can't answer for everyone. For myself, I stayed because he had me believing I was damaged goods and no one would want me. That changed when I let Scott in. He taught me

how to love again and that it was OK to be loved. Everyone can get away; they just need to find the way out and never look back.

It sounds silly to say it was a blessing in disguise. Where I am now in my life, I am happy, I am loved, and I have a wonderful family. As much as it hurt, and I wish it would have never happened, if I had to do it all over again to get to where I am today, I would. 🙏

Queen's Walk

Photograph

Rita Thomas • Visual Publications



Hydraulics in E

Photograph

Nicholas Borer • Graphic Design



Thank You

Katie Ebert • Business Information Technology

When I was twenty-three years old, I was assigned to the 3rd U.S. Infantry (The Old Guard). The Old Guard performed various ceremonies throughout the nation's capitol. One of our most honored duties was the interment of the heroes from wars past with distinction and respect. However, we were also chosen for numerous military events throughout the United States. None of my training or experiences with hundreds of other ceremonial occasions could have prepared me for what was about to happen.

On Sunday, February 19, 1995, the day of the 50th anniversary of the Holocaust, I was with twenty-nine other soldiers in Southern Florida as part of a team to perform the day's ceremony. On this day, we were to present 27 flags. Each flag represented a division that took part in the liberation of the German concentration camps.

Outside the massive doors to the Grand Ballroom, we stood in a column according to height, tallest to lead. We wore sharply pressed, ceremonial blue uniforms. Our hats, the same shade of blue, were parallel to the ground with the brass eagle centered above a shiny black brim. The brass medals on our uniforms sparkled in the light. With white gloves covering our hands, we held nine-foot staffs that held the divisional flags. The lead soldier carried the U.S. Army Colors with its 172 Battle Streamers representing its role in the defense of freedom from Ticonderoga to the liberation and defense of Kuwait in 1991. In the rear of the procession, my platoon sergeant proudly carried the national colors.

As the U.S. Army Band, "Pershing's Own," began to play, the doors to the Grand Ballroom opened. The interior of the room had an enormous domed ceiling that was intricately painted and glittered with brightly lit crystal chandeliers. At a slow and respectful cadence, we entered, one by one, about five yards from each other. The path was marked by a long red carpet that led

from the doors to the front of the stage where the band played. I tightly gripped the oak staff that held my flag. The flag bore the crest of the 12th Armored Division (a triangle with a twelve at the top and a tank in the middle) which took part in the liberation of the Landsberg Work Camp, Germany.

I kept my back and shoulders straight and my head held even, just like I was trained. With my peripheral vision, I could see the room was filled to overflowing. The room seemed eerily silent even though I knew that thousands of people congregated here.

I could see young and old alike. This was a family event, part of history handed down through lineage. The Holocaust was a tragic and extremely violent part of our world history, and the younger generations would always know that freedom of choice had come at a huge cost. Slowly, I approached the crowd. I couldn't even see the soldier who was supposed to be in front of me.

The Holocaust survivors and their families gathered around us, not pushing and shoving, but almost reverently. On faces and in eyes were emotions and memories I would never be able to understand. Long ago, these same people had survived a deliberate extermination. The looks of disbelief and then recognition were not directed at me, though, but at other soldiers who, fifty years ago, had helped to give each one of these survivors a chance to live and the opportunity for freedom.

I continued my slow cadence until an older woman stepped from the crowd. She was slow in her movements but seemed certain of her intent. I came to a stop, as she drew up her full height in front of me. She reached up to touch the flag I carried. I tried to look straight ahead, unable to cope with the emotions that filled me. Her snow white hair contrasted sharply with the dark green dress she wore. When she looked up at me, her deep brown eyes, full of love and life, caught mine, as she said, "Thank you." My throat tight, I could feel a tear slide down my cheek. As she reached up to wipe my tear away, I could see the number on her wrist that would forever be a reminder of the monstrosities she had faced as a young woman—perhaps not much older than I was.

After a time, I was able to make my way to the stage and take my place next to the others in a semi-circle as we waited for the rest of our team. Pershing's Own played the first note of our national anthem, and every soldier saluted. Every civilian, survivor, and family member assembled in the ballroom covered their hearts in respect until the last note of both the "Star Spangled Banner" and the Israeli National Anthem had been played. 🇮🇱

N'Awlins Blue

Photograph

Jennifer Creller • Academic Transfer/Journalism



A Blanton/Foster Reunion

Vincent Foster • Academic Transfer

July 14, 1959: It was a warm and humid Sunday morning. My family and I drove our coal black Ford, which looked like one the gangsters drove in the movies. We left Falls City, Nebraska, and headed for Hiawatha, Kansas. We drove across some of the most beautiful country; it looked as though the blue sky was kissing the ground. I was about five years old and was aptly named “Vince the Menace” after “Dennis the Menace.” Nicknamed this by our neighbors, I always seemed to get into trouble without even trying.

We arrived in Hiawatha around 9:00 a.m. Hiawatha was a typical small town on a Sunday—the streets practically deserted except for kids playing in their yards before church. One thing, though, that made Hiawatha stand out of most towns was its rows of maple trees. The maple trees grew on every street, and even to this day it is referred to as “Hiawatha, the City of Beautiful Maples.”

While in Hiawatha, we proceeded to my Aunt Lucille’s. She and my Uncle Larry Craig owned and operated the A&W Drive-In restaurant. My Aunt Lucille and my mom were the youngest two of their family. Mom was about five-feet tall with long, flowing black hair and a smile that made a person feel warm and welcomed. Aunt Lucille was a little taller, though not by much, with hair just like Mom’s. A person could see the Indian heritage in their facial features. One thing about Aunt Lucille was that whenever family stopped by to visit her at the restaurant, she would let family order and then have the waitress tear up the ticket. She employed a lot of the high school students so they could earn money, but this was Reunion Sunday, and we just stopped by to see if there was anything she wanted us to take to the lake for her. She usually had us take some broasted chicken that she had made at the restaurant.

We would then get back in the car and head for the lake. When we pulled up, we could see all the shelters and the picnic areas. We had the windows down, and we could smell the newly cut grass. It had a distinct odor, indescribable, yet clean and fresh. Our shelter was the brand new one, the first fully enclosed shelter at the lake. We could see the lake really well, and to a five-year-old, it held possibilities of adventure; it was every boy's dream. As we pulled up to our shelter, all the cousins would come running, just like chickens who'd gotten out of the chicken coop—yelling, hollering, and pointing—wanting to know who was coming next. I was anxious to get out of the car, and when Dad stopped, I jumped out like the seat was spring-loaded. Then I stopped and looked at my dad to see if he or Mom wanted me to carry something—not really wanting to, but knowing I'd better find out. He looked at Mom, and with a little laugh and smile, he said, "Go and play. If I need you, I will holler." So off I went like I was shot out of a cannon.

I headed for the merry-go-round; it was a bright cherry red and canary yellow and a dark shade of blue. My cousin Marietta was there pushing it around and protecting us like a mother hen. She was also there to make sure we didn't fall off after we would holler, "Faster! Faster!" There were a couple times I thought I was a goner, but I stayed on. When I got off, I was walking like a guy who'd had too much to drink—staggering, falling down, then pretending to bump into people just for the fun of it.

Donny was Marietta's brother, and he was trying to goad Dad into a horseshoe game. Donny was the typical teenager with blue jeans cuffed at the ankles, white t-shirt, and sleeves rolled up to show what muscles he thought he had. He had a wide grin, bigger than the Grand Canyon, and he was ornery as the day was long.

Dad was a tall man, even if I wasn't five. He was well-built and very conceited; at least, that's what Mom said. She told how they met at a dance, and he walked up to her and said, "You'd like to dance with me, wouldn't you?" And Mom said, "Not really," so Dad spent the whole night trying to get her to dance anyway.

Dad also was wearing jeans with the cuffed legs and a T-shirt with the sleeves rolled up, but that was where he put his cigarette pack. He had served in Korea and had just gotten back from Alaska where he had been stationed by the Air Force; he would be leaving again for Germany.

Dad grabbed my Uncle Bob, which, by the way, was also my dad's name, to be his partner in horseshoes. Donny picked my Uncle George, and the four of them got ready to do battle.

My Uncle Bob was a rugged man, short, as was most of my mom's family. His face had a weathered look to it. He always wore blue bib overalls and a white shirt. Uncle George had on the same clothing that Dad and Donny wore, with his crew cut hair. They reminded me of those guys in the movies who belonged to a gang; they were quite mild, but I knew also that they could be fighters if the situation called for it. Uncle Bob had a nickname he called my dad, and he was the only one who could. I had always wondered how he came to call my dad "Bubbles," but Dad never told me, and I never asked.

They would toss the horseshoes at a metal pipe protruding from the ground that Uncle Bob had pounded in quite mercilessly. I loved to watch them, especially my dad, throw horseshoes. I was amazed how he could toss them, and they glided through the air so gently and then landed with a puff of dust near the pipes. When these four got together, anything could and would happen.

I remember one game when Donny tried to mess with Dad's throw by coughing, sneezing, and hollering at the right time, or he would get behind him and act like Dad had hit him while going back with his arm. Dad would act as if he was annoyed, but then they both would laugh. My dad asked me to get him a glass of water because he was thirsty; then, as Donny went into his back swing, Dad poured the water on him. Actually, he threw it at him. Then, of course, Uncle Bob did the same to Uncle George. All of a sudden, the game was forgotten, and the water was flying, and everyone got wet. If someone was in the line of fire, they got nailed. Then the wives stepped in and stopped it.

Everybody laughed and went back to finish the game. When they hit their mark, they gave a kick of their leg and a fist pump. And if they didn't, it was a sigh and blame for the other guy. My Uncle Bob was the best. He could land those horseshoes very close to the pipes or around them for a ringer.

My mom, aunts, and both grandmas always wore long dresses that seemed to sway in the wind like sheets hanging out to dry. Mom had on a pink dress with a belt around the waist that showed how slender she was. Dad always joked that if she stood sideways, nobody would see her. My aunts all wore long dresses, too, with a multitude of colors. Grandma Foster wore a red dress with big white circles, and Grandma Tiny wore a black dress with white circles. I guess that was so a person could tell them apart, but of course, that wasn't hard anyway,

Grandma Tiny came by her name naturally because she was only about four-foot seven, if that. She had a warm smile, and she loved to be a little on the mischievous side. She was always trying to pull up her daughters' skirts if they didn't watch her.

Grandma Foster was a big woman with mid-length curly hair and wire-rimmed glasses, and she, too, was not above pulling a joke on a person. One time, my dad went to the port-a-potty, and she and Grandma Tiny carried a chair over and sat down in front so he couldn't get the door open. When he got flustered, they would move and blame the first unsuspecting soul who happened to come by. Once, Dad was filming, and here they came pulling up skirts and trying to pull down pants, but they never seemed to get it done, and they would run off laughing.

It was always Uncle Bob's job to get the brick fire-pit ready and cook the hot dogs and hamburgers. We could smell them from a long way off. The aroma tickled our taste buds, made our mouths water, and enticed our noses. It was hard to play with that smell, but just when we were playing our hardest, someone would yell, "They're readyyyyyyyyyy!," and we'd drop everything and go running. We looked like a herd of buffalo coming across the plains. Then, after eating our fill (sometimes a little more), we

would slowly head back to where we had been playing, sometimes a lot slower than we had moved when we were called to eat.

Mom had this one uncle, Uncle L.C. He had a turkey ranch in California, and he lived in the mountains. He was short and drove a big Ford truck, and he needed a footstool to get in and out of it. He would always drive back from California and then have real mountain spring water flown in so it would stay cold. The water was so cold, I was afraid if it exploded, it would snow. When that water hit our throats, our minds went into freeze mode, and as it slid down our tongues, we thought of ski jumps. Boy, was it good!

Uncle Roy—now here was someone special. He had a wife and six daughters, and could they sing! That was the time we all looked forward to—Uncle Eugie and Aunt Tommi would get their instruments. Uncle Eugie played the lap harp and Aunt Tommi the washboard. Uncle Roy would get out his guitar. Then the most wonderful voices would start to sing. It was like a heavenly choir. This family could sing so well that they were offered a contract to sing in Nashville, but Uncle Roy turned it down, saying, “We sing for the Lord and the family; that’s it.” Everyone would get up and dance, even us kids, although we looked more like baby chicks surrounding a mother hen with arms and legs going every which way.

Aunt Lucille would slip away then and return with gallons of ice cream from her restaurant. We would all eat ice cream until we were through. One time, I asked my mom if I could have more, and then I promptly went over and dumped it on my sister’s head. Why did I do this? She had thrown my frog in the lake! Dad then took me behind the port-a-potty and began to expound upon me why I shouldn’t have done this and that I shouldn’t do it again, and for some reason, he explained it to my backside, and we both got the message.

Like all good things, there was a time for it to end, and one by one, everyone would get ready to leave. They would pack up their cars, and like dogs chasing a car, we would run and chase

them—waving, hollering, and making faces until they were out of sight. This would go on until everyone was finally gone.

I find myself looking back at these memories that were etched forever in my mind. These are the kinds of memories that find a person looking in a mirror and wondering where the years have gone. I find myself staring in that mirror remembering my Grandma Foster and John (her boyfriend), whom I had always thought to be my grandpa. Even though I found out later he wasn't, he always treated me like a grandson.

A year later, Grandma Foster and John, along with my Aunt Lou and her boyfriend, would be killed in a terrible car accident while on their way to Rulo, Nebraska, to do what they loved most—square dance with the younger generation. While we were in Germany with Dad, my mom died of cancer in 1992, which she was told was only the stomach flu.

The memories they gave were priceless, and every time I remember them, it shows that they are never truly gone. They live forever in my mind and my dreams. 🧡

Mornings at Dean's

Natalie Schwarz • Writing Tutor

The sky is always blue here, bluer than in the city,
and I don't mind the bright sun flooding our room.
I watch as the forest of Cottonwoods is illuminated
with brilliant light that shimmers off the flurries
of cotton floating in the air; shimmers off
the silvery flesh of the leaves.

We watch from the windows as the sparrows hunt
and peck for their breakfast. Last night's rain
has left the ground soft for the task.
I eww and you ahh at the sight
of worms and beetles being extracted from the soil.

Today I hope to catch a glimpse
of the herons near the bank of the pond.
Dean told us they only come when we are visiting
and if we are still enough, quiet enough,
we might be able to hear them flying our way.

Trash

Digital Imaging

Ben Penton • Graphic Design



My Stomach's Favorite Place

Tim Woosley • Academic Transfer

It feels like my whole body is against me. My mind is creating visions—no, fantasies—of large plastic plates brimming with slices of piping hot, all-meat pizza with stacks of golden brown pepperoni calzones cresting the pile—and an ice-cold Coke so big, it reminds you of those commercials you see before the movie starts. Big. Real Big. We're talking about a water-tower-sized glass of carbonated glee.

The cravings start sometime on Saturday afternoon, and I know I'm in BIG trouble. "You were just there YESTERDAY!" I yell to him. But he doesn't care. Selfish. Inconsiderate. "C'mon, you're gonna kill me! At the very least, make me a fat guy!" I reason. But the only response I get is a grumble. He's always grumbling, it seems.

My mind is having its way with me. They're in it together, you know? My mind and my stomach. They have a sort of blood-brother pact to destroy me. I think about it several times a day—the trip to satisfy the beast in me. I have to wait until Friday. Can I wait? Or will I cave in like an alcoholic falling off the wagon? I can see it now: "Hi, I'm Tim, and I'm a pizzaholic. It's been three days since my last slice."

Most of the time, I do pretty well. But, on occasion, I have been known to visit the buffet more than once a week. I know, I know—my will is made of tissue. It bends easily and is even easier to break. But I think I'm on top of it now. Wait. Isn't denial one of the steps in PA (Pizzaholics Anonymous)? Oh well....

Every Friday, my good friend Dave and I make the sojourn to our carb-infested Mecca. Oh. Are we supposed to change the names to protect the innocent? Oh, well. Dave's not innocent. In fact, I consider him an accomplice. Yeah, an accomplice to third-degree cheese burns on my fingers and first-degree murder of my waistline. Dave is his name. D-A-V-E. There. That'll teach him.

Anyway, we meet at Godfather's Pizza every Friday afternoon to get our weekly "fix" of some righteous food. An old friend of mine used to call going to a buffet the act of "crushing it." Sounds bad, right? Wrong. It couldn't be more wonderful.

You see, Dave and I restrain ourselves the rest of the week. We eat all the proper foods to be healthy specimens of the human race. We focus on eating for fuel, not for taste. So it's not uncommon to have "boring" things like tuna sandwiches, skinless chicken and leafy green salads with toppings like nuts, berries, and the occasional twigs. (O.K., no twigs.) We do this all day, every day, for six days in a row.

But Friday's a cheat day. Cheating can be a good thing. It keeps us sane and gives us the proper motivation to eat well all week. That way, it cuts down on the guilt when we "crush it" on Friday.

The buffet starts at 11:00 a.m. and ends at 2:00 p.m. That gives us a three-hour window to do as much harm to ourselves as possible. When we first started doing this, we would meet around noon or 12:30 to talk and partake. Then, after a couple of weeks, we were meeting earlier and earlier, until we started coming in at 11:00 sharp. On top of that, I noticed I was getting full too soon after I got there, so I stopped having breakfast on Fridays. Gotta make enough room, ya know. That's when I knew we were locked in an unspoken agreement. This was now becoming an event, not an occasion. It was on the mental calendar now. No need to write this "meeting" down.

I usually arrive first at Godfather's, either right at 11:00 or a few minutes after. Most of the time, I have to wait for a few minutes for Dave. I don't think he has "it" as bad as I do. I'll wait outside if it's a pleasant enough day. Also, it's easier to not start without him if I'm outside, too. There, that's the only restraint I exhibit on Fridays—waiting for Dave. Otherwise, I'm off the chain!

When Dave pulls up, he hops out of his golden late model Pontiac and exclaims, "Hello!" in his usual, jovial manner. I imitate looking at and pointing to my watch, as if to say, "You're late." He laughs, but the Beast does not find it funny.

We saunter into our favorite eatery. My olfactory senses explode. My mouth begins to water like Pavlov's Dog. "Only a few minutes more, Mr. Stomach," I whisper. He growls with delight. The restaurant is dimly lit with old, yellowish light bulbs that bring out all the worst of the green motif. Tables and chairs with a select number of booths are all decked out in Christmas tree green Naugahyde. We always opt for a booth if space permits. We usually are granted this request since the place only opened up a few minutes earlier. We place our belongings at the booth to secure it and head to the cashier.

There is usually one of two different ladies at the register, depending on the day. One is the young female, her dirty blond hair rescued behind a ponytail. She has a weak chin, a lanky frame, and a tired look in her eyes. A woman in her early twenties should not look that exhausted.

Most recently, we ended up with another twenty-something girl as our cashier. She wore a little too much eye makeup and had shiny skin, probably from a combination of acne, sweating, and being in a greasy pizza parlor. She is always smiling and very polite to us. She, like the other employees, knows we come here regularly.

To illustrate this point, once I was having a garage sale on a Friday when Dave called asking, "What time are we getting together?" I informed Dave that I was stuck babysitting my junk on my front lawn and I couldn't go that day. I asked him if he would want to come over, and we could have Godfather's deliver. "Sure," he replied. "See you in a bit."

Dave showed up, and as we chatted, the delivery guy pulled up with three large cardboard boxes. He was probably in his mid-thirties, overweight, and had a mustache and eyeglasses that were tinted, so they turned into sunglasses when outside but gave a creepy yellowish hue to the lenses. "Any luck with your sale?" he asked.

"Not much," was my reply. He collected the money, turned around, and headed back to his car.

Fast forward to the next week's visit—as Dave and I examine the buffet, a head pops out from behind the kitchen. “Not having a garage sale today?” questions the delivery guy.

“Uh, nope, not today,” is all I can think to say. I can't believe he remembered us.

Anyway, back to the pizza! After we have settled up with the cashier, we are issued two golden plastic drinking cups and authorized to “saddle up” to the buffet table.

The first pizza on display is always a large pepperoni pizza—cascades of mozzarella cheese with several slices of pepperoni, each clinging for life. The flaky crust encircles the glorious pie. This is my own private heaven. The other pizzas pale in comparison to the big P.

What follows is a hodgepodge of other pizzas: the all-beef pizza, the all-meat pizza, the combo pizza, and the “taco” pizza. What were they thinking when they made the taco pizza? I know of a few people who like it, my brother being one, but, c'mon, taco and pizza, together? You don't even know what kind of meat “taco” meat is. It has a funny smell. Then there's all the shaved lettuce that obscures the best part of the pizza, the ocean of luscious golden cheese. Instead, they throw a handful of shredded Colby on it to finish out the twisted “theme.”

After the pizzas, the next foods in line are the two dessert choices: cinnamon sticks or dessert pizza. Ooh. Desert pizza. I can leave the cinnamon sticks, which are cooked in a pizza tin then drizzled with a frosting, but the dessert pizza is something altogether different. While it, too, is baked in a pizza tin like the cinnamon sticks, it is in a different class altogether. The pizza is topped with a mysterious, provocative array of crumbled cake-like topping and topped off with a spider's web design of rich, white frosting. It makes my knees buckle.

Finally, we come to the assorted items for feasting, many of which I can't recall, mainly because I don't care for them. But there is one item that holds my gaze—the mighty calzone. Now this calzone is similar to the pepperoni pizza with the only

exception being that the crust is of another design, more crisp and buttery. The calzone will melt in your mouth and gently slalom down your throat.

I fail to mention the salad bar, and for good reason. If I wanted to eat yard work, I would have stayed home! But the good news is it brings us closer to the soda fountain.

Unlimited refills of my favorite controversial beverage... Coca-Cola. Not controversial in your life, perhaps, but when you hear all the news on how terrible soda is for you, how much sugar, empty calories, blah blah, blah...shut up! Let me enjoy this concoction of high-fructose corn syrup and carbonated water if I want to. Just for today. Just for lunch. Thanks.

Dave and I spend the better part of our Friday afternoon here—usually two or three hours, sometimes more. We communicate, interrogate, pontificate, and even regurgitate our loftiest and lamest ideas here over a pile of various meats and cheeses. Most of the time, the staff comes over to our table to ask us if we're done with the buffet. The response is two sheepish grins. We talk and stuff ourselves until we both need a wheelchair to exit. So much for our dignity. At least we get our money's worth—and then some.

As I waddle to my car, I can feel my stomach stretch out with a sloth-like yawn, content at last. The Beast is grinning ear to ear. (My stomach has ears.) Tomorrow, I'll be back on the wagon. And hopefully, the Beast in me is satisfied. Until tomorrow. 🍷

The Beetle is Dead

Jeremy Kendle • Academic Transfer

He looked down at the frozen dirt by the door.

“The beetle is dead.”

“Is it really dead?” she asked, holding him from the side, trying to hide from the wind.

The frigid air clutched at her skin and made her shake violently, even though she wore the coat she didn’t own. The little yellow chair had moved from her smoking corner. He noticed when he went through the back.

“Just one more hug.” She looked up at him with asking eyes.

“Kim....” He held her for a minute and then tried to pry her from the side of his body.

“I’ll never let you go. I can’t. I just can’t,” she said.

“Kim, please let me go.” He trembled as he spoke. He looked down at his exposed hand holding his cigarette. The smoke was blowing from the cold wind, and his hand had turned pale. “I have to go.”

“Just stay here with me.”

“I can’t. Please don’t ask me to,” he said, turning his head away.

A car drove past. They could hear it, and he looked that way.

“I have to go. Please let me go.”

“I want to be with you. I care about you a lot.”

“I know. It’s just not fair, and it’s not right.”

He tried to walk away. She held him.

“I haven’t finished my cigarette yet. You can’t leave until I finish it.”

“Smoke it then.”

“I’m never going to finish it,” she said as she smiled faintly.

He looked down at the beetle. “It no doubt froze to death last night,” he thought. Last night the temperature dropped for the first time that year. A car drove by the other side of the house. They couldn’t see it, but it was there nonetheless. A chill blew down the hill and around the house.

"I care about you a lot. Don't you believe me? You don't think I'm just using you, do you?"

"Kim, I can't...betrayal does not become me."

"Just say it."

"No, I can't."

"Just say it, please."

"No." He shook his head for emphasis.

"Please just say it."

"Kim, you know how I feel."

He tried to walk away. She held him. He tried again. She was trying to hold him back. He had to walk backwards. She was holding him by the sides.

"I have to go."

"Just one more hug."

The embrace was long, and for a moment, the cold was negated.

"I'm going to go back inside and start crying. I won't be able to take care of my kids," she said not letting him go.

"You have to. They are more important than I am."

"They're all you care about," she said with a little smile.

She looked at him. His eyes were full and bright.

"If you're going to drink later, call me.... Please don't drink."

"Ok, I'll call you if I am going to drink. I'll call you."

"Promise me."

"I promise."

He walked back to his car. The seat was cold, and his lighter wouldn't light.

"The beetle is dead. It froze to death." 🐞

Grandpa's Rose

Photograph

Lacey Janak • Graphic Design



It's a Beautiful Day in My Hawaiian Paradise?

Stacie Higa • Academic Transfer

“Ugghh!” I moan as my rambunctious nephews, Todd, 4, and Patrick, 3, jump and bounce on top of my sleepy body.

“Let’s go fishing! Let’s go fishing!” they shout. “You promised! You promised!” they whine. If we weren’t going fishing to my favorite fishing spot today, I’m pretty sure there would be a couple of boys spending their day sitting in the corner. After all, I am nine years older than Todd, so I have the POWER. At least, that’s what I tell them.

My sweet nephews have jolted me out of bed at the ass-crack-of-dawn. And by ass-crack, I mean when the bubble butt of the sun has risen just a smidge over the horizon. Thus, when the sun settles in the evening, I see its full belly disappearing under the horizon. The sun is always full at the end of the day. Absorbing universal energy is NOT low in fat.

My sister Gerri (eight years older than I am) and her family remind me of the *Rosanne* show—the grouchy, chubby mother Rosanne, the hardly-able-to-hold-down-a-job Dan, and bratty kids that can never be pleased no matter how many frogs I blow up for them.

Gerri is in the kitchen preparing lunch for today. Yummy spam musubis (moo-suu-beez), my favorite! Spam here in Hawaii is like hotdogs in the states. The only difference is that spam comes in a can and has a gooey gelatin coating it. Oh, I must not forget that yummy salty aroma that wafts through the air when a can is open. It’s like a dinner bell except it doesn’t go “ding-ding.”

After Gerri finishes preparing today’s lunch, she has to round up her four kids—Todd and Patrick, her highflying acrobats, and her two youngest kids, Beverly, 2, and Kristen, 1. The girls are not highflying. They like sticking to the floor, so they can scramble and try to eat everything in sight. Her husband, Big Todd (we call him Big Todd because he’s bigger than his 4-year-old son Todd, and he is 6-foot and weighs over 250 pounds—needless to

say, he is B to the I to the G), helps me get all the fishing poles and tackle rounded up. This is the part I hate about going fishing. My dad, my two brothers, Gregg, 20, and Garrett, 19, Gerri, B-I-G, and myself (I'm 13) all fish, and we all live in a 3-bedroom duplex. Space is at a premium here in the Higa household. We use the trunks of our cars as storage for our fishing poles, diving gear, and coolers. With such limited space and ten people living in such cramped conditions, gear tends to move back and forth between Dad's car and my brother's trucks. Fishing poles are broken when they are used as fencing swords. (I plead the 5th to not self-incriminate.)

B-I-G and I have a system. We open every car trunk and spread all the contents on a blue tarp. It looks like we are preparing to sell our fishing gear at a flea market. Even though we do this practically every weekend, there is always some neighbor that really thinks we are selling our gear. On the flea market blue tarp, there are big poles, little poles, and poles that climb on rocks, plus all the tackle for every pole we have or don't have. (There might be some fisherman at your fishing spot that may need something.) We have different-sized spears, knives, masks, snorkels, fins, and every possible size cooler known to man. (By the way, the part about poles that climb on rocks is totally fictitious.)

"Where's my pole?" I yell across our personal flea market.

"How should I know? It's your goddamn pole!" my lovely B-I-G in-law yells back.

I ponder that when I find his poles, I'll break them so I can watch him cuss up a storm. The downside to that is that he will probably blame his kids. Being from the South, he'll tell them to get a "switch." This is funny because he has lived here for three years now, and the only trees we have in our yard are a coconut and mango tree (neither of which can make a good "switch"). I choose not to break his stuff because he still has a belt (bastard!). I love my nephews and nieces too much to do that to them. "Grrrrr," I grrr. B-I-G is such a hoser. I need to forget what an ass he is because there are much more important things to do, like finding my gear.

The first place I check is Dad's car. I fish the most with him, and I dive with my brothers, so my chances are better searching Dad's car. My brothers are older than I am. Gregg and Garrett are great divers, so I feel totally safe when we are diving. Gerri prefers to fish because she doesn't like to dive for one reason. "There are sharks in the water," she usually says with her arms crossed and nose in the air. She has had this fear ever since we saw *Jaws* with our grandmother. Grandma laughed throughout the entire movie, I saw the movie through my fingers, and Gerri squeezed my arm and screamed throughout the movie.

There is no sense in searching Gerri's station wagon. Her car is a wasteland of old Cheerios, discarded McDonald's Happy Meal toys, and old French fries, which the girls will try to eat. My brothers are taking off to go diving on the other side of the island, so I can only search their truck bed once.

"Damn it!" I yell at my brothers. "That's my new diving gear dad bought for me."

"Sorry, sis, we gotta go. We'll sort through the gear when we get home." This usually means I'll have one fin, someone else's mask, and if I'm lucky, at least a spear.

Finally, after searching everyone's cars a few times and a fly-by search of Gregg's truck, we find enough gear to make it through the day. The next thing we have to do is make sure we have enough food. I make sure the spam musubis are in the small cooler by themselves. If they get placed in a big cooler, they might shift to the bottom of the cooler and get soggy from the melting ice. THAT can't happen. Sometimes I think we should drive a separate car for all the coolers and food we take.

Finally, the kids, my sister, and her notorious B-I-G are set for a fun-filled day in the sun. Dad is off with his (belch) girlfriend. B-I-G is driving a 19-ancient something Plymouth Volare station wagon. It looks like a sea cucumber driving down the road. It is a solid car, but the suspension is so bad, the car jiggles like a sea cucumber. Gerri sits in the front seat because she has to do the all-important reverse backhand spanking that comes with

driving four kids and a bratty younger sister. She also has to turn her head to say, “Don’t make me come back there!,” or “Don’t make me stop this car!” After all, it wouldn’t be a car ride without those pleasantries. With B-I-G and sis in the front, I am in the backseat with her two daughters safely tucked away in their car seats. Poor things. It’s like spanking kids in a barrel if you ask me. This leaves brattiest of all brats (not me) in the rear-facing seats in the station wagon. This means that my sister has to unbuckle her seatbelt to smack them, which she has been known to do.

Finally, after a gazillion choruses of, “He did it!” and “Stop touching me!” and “Who farted?” (in case you’re wondering, it wasn’t me), we arrive at Heiea (pronounced Hey-EE-ah) Pier. This fishing spot has a busy boat ramp, and navigating a jiggly sea cucumber around is usually hard to do. The boats are revving their engines as soon as they get in the water. White smoke appears from their outboard motors, and the smell of gas, diesel, and burning oil chokes up anyone near the boat ramp. The trucks that put them there rev their engines as well. The last thing we do is slide down the slimy seaweed growing on the boat ramp. I have witnessed this a couple times. I always find it funny to watch the driver get out of his submerged truck scratching his head. Usually, a herd of the other boats start laughing and pointing. A couple of them actually try to help the poor guy out.

After navigating the boat launch ramp, we unload. Unloading is as treacherous as the drive. My nephews bolt out of the rear window as if someone had squeezed the sea cucumber, and its insides were bursting out. Todd and Patrick head straight for the water. They won’t purposely jump in, but I can’t promise that they won’t push each other in. B-I-G unloads his two daughters from their prisons—I mean, safety seats. I grab the gear and walk to the end of the pier. Gerri puts the girls in strollers, and B-I-G takes the all important (to him) food coolers.

Setting up the fishing lines should only take a couple of minutes. I have been fishing all my life. I am an old pro at tying fishhooks, sinkers, and baiting hooks. It should take only a few

minutes, but I have two nephews that want to be like me (who wouldn't?). They want to learn from the best, but my dad isn't here, so I will have to do. I try to show them to hold the hook in their left hands between their thumbs and index fingers so that it looks like the letter "C." First, I show them how to take the fishing line from the left and through the hole at the top of the hook. I show them how much fishing line should go through, about five inches. Now take it back through going from right to left and leave a circle on the right side of the hole. There is still a bit of line left over from the circle we made. This part will be cut off when we are done tying the hook. I tell them to start wrapping the main line tightly around the shaft, right below the hole and wrap the circle with it. After wrapping it between five to seven times, put the remaining line through the circle. Now, hold the bottom of the hook and pull the main fishing line up. Cut the leftover circle line at the bottom of the hook, and we are done. All in all, we have only four hooking injuries. One of them is mine.

Making sure that there is a safety zone around Todd and Patrick, I let them cast their own poles—one at a time, of course. Even though my dad is the finest fisherman I have ever known, I still had to learn the hard way that casting a fishing pole around other people is extremely dangerous when you are four years old. It's not only dangerous for the people around the person casting the line, but, I know through multiple personal experiences, it is easy to hook the back of your shirt or even your ear. Dad's favorite way of teaching is letting me learn by my mistakes. (Thanks, Dad! Oh, and thanks for the scar in the middle of my forehead that I had to get three stitches for. Don't ask how I got a hook stuck in the middle of my forehead. It just happened. I love you, Daddy!)

Finally, all the lines are in the water. I sit back and relax. B-I-G has already had three beers, and he is getting a little sun burned. (Dummy!) Neither, my sister nor I tell him to put sun block on anymore. Gerri and I are part Hawaiian, so we tan very well and have never needed sun block in our lives. Gerri does, however,

slather sun block on her kids. Her kids are half Caucasian and can burn very easily. (Then they'll look just like their dad at the end of the day.)

I sit back on my beach chair, and I overhear a couple of local fisherman telling a story that happened yesterday. These fishermen are like the pier. They are always here. So much time in the sun has turned their skin into dark, wrinkly, leathery skin. (Note to self—consider sun block.) I walk over and say, “Hi.” I know them very well. I have fished with them practically my whole life. They're my dad's friends. They have been my surrogate fishing fathers when my dad is off with his hussy. (No apologies here. She IS a hussy.) They invite me to sit down and share with them their pupus (pronounced poo-poos). The pupus are appetizers, and today it is raw fish cut into cubes with green onions, red pepper, and sea salt mixed in a bowl. (Excuse me while I salivate.) While nothing is biting on my fishing lines, I sit down on the pier and listen to them. Apparently, a 20-foot hammerhead shark was spotted swimming a couple feet from the pier. (Twenty-foot? C'mon, talk about a fishing tale. I think it was more likely a 10-foot, if not smaller, hammerhead.) The hammerhead part doesn't bother me. Heiea Pier is located in Kaneohe (pronounced Kahneh-oh-hey) Bay. This bay is known to be a nursery for hammerhead sharks. Every once in a while, I would catch a baby one. They put up a great fight, and once you get them out of the water, these hammerhead sharks didn't seem so scary. Granted, the biggest hammerhead I ever caught was only a foot-and-a-half. Once out of the water, they smell like their flesh has been rotting in the hot sun for weeks with their gooey guts boiling in it. This smell makes me gag. It's always worth catching them, though, even if I see the lunch I just ate on the ground next to the shark.

I say good-bye to my leather-faced fisherman friends and retreat back to my fishing spot. An hour goes by with nibbles from small reef fish. The irony is I am using small reef fish for bait. I need to change up my bait plan. I try octopus first. I bite off a tentacle about two inches long from an octopus I had caught a

couple of weeks ago and kept frozen until today. No nibbles, so I try raw shrimp. I bite that in half about an inch long and toss my line into the water. To this day, I can't stand the taste of shrimp. A couple of hours and umpteen bait changes go by with barely a nibble. Strange, huh? The fish here are usually eager to snack on a free meal. That's why it's my favorite fishing spot.

I don't know if I had been in the sun too long, but I see something floating towards me. What is it? Is it a shark fin? No, it's too small. It looks kind of round, and it glistens from the sun, making it seem that it is winking at me. Is it a plastic or glass bottle? I hold a hand over my eyes to shield them from the sun. Squinting, I see it is a round glass fishnet float.

"Oh, my freaking God!" I shout as I run around the pier "Gerri! Gerri! Look it, look it!" I yell as I pull her towards the edge of the pier. (Not too close to the edge.)

"What? I don't see anything?" she says.

"Ugh, right there!" I point towards my future trophy.

"I still don't see it," she says as she walks away to tend to her children that are running amuck—much like I am doing, but I actually have a purpose to run amuck.

These floats are a popular collector's item. These types of glass floats are no longer used, but many of them have broken off from past fishnets and are still floating around the world, mainly in the Pacific. The first people to use these types of floats were the Norwegians. However, in Hawaii, it's the Japanese glass floats that are most coveted. Japanese glass blowers using recycled glass, especially old sake bottles, make most of the glass floats that wash up on our shores. The most coveted glass floats are the ones that carry the mark of the maker. These are trophies for any fisherman. Anyone can find and catch a Marlin—you just fish where the Marlin are. Now for the glass floats, you don't find them—they find you, and this one had found me!

Here it comes! Closer. Closer. A little closer, and I can scoop it up with my net. My heart is racing. It's mine! MINE! ALL MINE! Damn it! Damn it! The current is pushing it past the

pier. “Where are you going, my precious?” I ask softly to my Precious. So caught up in watching my glass float floating away, I don’t even realize that one of my poles has snagged a bite. B-I-G takes my pole and begins to fight with whatever is at the end of my line. At this point, I don’t care about fishing, and I let him have the honor of touching my fishing pole. I WANT that float! Several other fisherman and tourists are eyeing my prize. I must get to it before they do. Perfect! It’s coming closer now, and it will soon be in the reach of my net. Wait! No! What is it doing? It’s moving away from the pier now. The evil current is taking away my prize. I think to myself, “Self, what are you going to do?,” and before I could answer, “Let it go,” I dive into the water.

From my excitement, as I come up for a breath, I take in a mouthful of salty water. Still choking from my unwanted salt water shot, out of nowhere an orchestra appears on the reef in front of me. I am in the middle of the pier and the reef. The orchestra starts to play its ominous song. Duhn duhn, duhn duhn, duhn duhn duhn duhn duhn. (For those of you that don’t know, this is my rendition of the theme song from *Jaws*, which, by the way, is the best creature feature the ‘70’s ever produced.)

My heart is racing faster, and the music speeds along. The electricity my heartbeat is putting out will attract sharks to the area. My heartbeat is getting faster, and the faster my heartbeat is, the louder the dinner bell. Except this dinner bell is not going “ding-ding.” Instead, it is screaming, “HELP ME, DAMN IT! IT’S GOING TO EAT ME!” Whatever B-I-G has at the end of my fishing pole isn’t helping my situation. A fish fighting for its life is not a welcome disturbance that I appreciate at this moment in time. Wait, I hope it’s not a shark. Not only am I alone in the water, there is a good chance that B-I-G has pissed off a shark at the end of the line.

I turn to the pier for guidance. No one is there! Where did my family go? Where is B-I-G with MY fishing pole? He better not have broken it! Where did leather-faced fisher guys go? I’m panic stricken, but if I’m going to get eaten by a 50-foot hammerhead

shark, I might as well swim for my glass prize. The rule of measurement depends on the perception of the person making the measurement. I'm alone in the water, and there are sharks in the water. The shark swimming around in my mind is 50-foot long.

Wait! Where did my prize go? Diving in and swirling around made me lose my bearing. Damn it! There! There it is! I swim at least—at least—a hundred yards to reach it. (Again, measurement is the perception of the person in the water.) Finally, I grab my Japanese Glass Fishnet Float. (It could be Chinese, Taiwanese, or even Norwegian, but I consider it Japanese.) Triumphant, I raise the tennis ball-sized glass float above my head. Victory is mine! I turn back toward the pier and ponder if I want to swim the open water back to the pier. I am closer to the reef that connects to the beach, but the reef has its own dangers, too—sharp coral, moray eels, and venomous sea urchins, not to mention the fabled Heiea. In Hawaiian, “Heiea” is the word for octopus. The legend that has been passed down for generations tells of a giant octopus drowning a fisherman that came too close to its den in this reef. GREAT! Which do I choose? The fabled giant octopus or the tall tale of a giant shark? I know it is only ten feet, but it could still take a leg or arm, and I happen to be very fond of my appendages. Weighing my options, it's a good thing I'm in water because I think I pee myself. You know the feeling of the cool water swishing around you with your warm pee in your shorts. Don't pretend you don't know what I'm talking about.

I've been swimming and treading water for about twenty minutes now. I think to myself, “How many hammerhead shark attacks have actually occurred here? None. Perfect.” Well, it was perfect until my Self pipes up and says, “There haven't been any attacks because no one gets in the water here!”

“Fabulous, Self! Just freaking fabulous! When I need your opinion, I'll give it to you!” I have to remind myself to kick my Self in the ass when I get back on dry land.

“That is, IF you make it to dry land,” my Self smirks. I could continue to tread water and argue with my Self but I choose to

swim back. If I get gobbled up, so does my Self. (Jerk.)

Swimming away from the pier was easy. The current carried me away from the pier, just like it did my trophy. Now I'm swimming against the current. By the way, that damned orchestra is still on the reef playing the *Jaws* theme. As I'm swimming in my head, I picture the *Jaws* movie poster. You know the one—with the girl swimming in the ocean with a colossal shark coming up from the depths to swallow her. Yeah, that's going to be me.

I have to remember to swim fast but smooth. Remember to breathe easy. Don't choke on the salt water that just splished up your nose, Stacie. Easy, easy does it. You're almost there. Wait, when did the tide go out? The pier is fifteen, OK, ten feet above me. The pillars holding up the pier are covered with sharp barnacles and slimy seaweed, so there is no way I can scamper up them. None of the ladders from the pier are close enough to the water for me to reach them. Do I swim back and brave the open waters again? (Only to cut myself, be envenomated, or possibly drowned and eaten by the giant octopus roaming the reef?) I can't stay here and wait for the tide to come back in. Visions of *Jaws* lurking below sends me into another panic attack.

"Grab my hand." I hear a booming voice from above.

"Buddha? Is that you?" I ask meekly.

"I may have the belly of Buddha, but Buddha I ain't," my notorious B-I-G in-law says to me.

Farm-bred and corn-fed, B-I-G is built like a solid Redwood tree. Only when he moved to Hawaii with my sister did he inherit the Buddha belly. He had dropped to one knee and was hanging onto a tire bumper with one hand and reaching for me with his other hand. I grab his hand, and B-I-G hurls me upward. I land on the pier with a great thud. The concrete warmed by the sun warms my chilled and shivering body. I don't know if I am shaking because I almost died (hey, it could have happened) or because I was in the water too long.

"Ugghh," I moan. Tired from the swim and bruised by my brutal landing, I'm not surprised that my nephews jump on me

and yell, “Aunty Stacie! Aunty Stacie! That was cool! Can you take us next time?”

Gerri chimes in and tells them in an angry singsong voice, “Aunty Stacie will not be swimming here again. EVER!” I open my mouth, and before I can say anything, my sister points a finger at me and says, “Don’t even.” At least that’s what I think she says because her jaw is clenched while she says it.

Gerri tells the family that it’s time to go home. “Enough excitement for one day,” she says while looking at me. Side note—B-I-G wasn’t able to reel in whatever was on the fishing line. No fish for dinner tonight. Looks like the 50-foot hammerhead is going to have Hamburger Helper like the rest of us.

The kids are tired from their day in the sun; they sleep quietly in their seats on the ride home. My sister is sitting in front of me shaking her head while periodically looking back at me. I’m too excited to sleep or pick on my sister. Not to mention, I value my life, and pissing off my sister right now is a certain death. I ponder if I should scrape the dried-up slime from my glass float, or should I leave it as it is? I hold it up to inspect it in the remaining sunlight. Plus, I want to show the other people in passing cars what a treasure I have.

Tired from the day’s events, I grab a couple spam musubis and retreat to my bunk bed. I didn’t get a chance to eat them with all the excitement from the day. It’s a couple of hours until dinner, and the musubis will hold me over until then. I fall asleep holding my prize, my Precious. 🍷

Home Cooking

Phip Ross • English Instructor

*“But this is the language I speak
when I’ve an appetite for the moon and for you....”* (Paul Guest)

I get home and rest my chin
on your shoulder as you
lift the lid on the chicken thighs frying in flour,
stir chopped tomato into white rice.

Steam coils. I follow. You measure
and sprinkle oregano, cilantro, garlic.
I nuzzle into your pink scarf and
smoke roils from a stainless steel bowl.
I ask what’s burning.

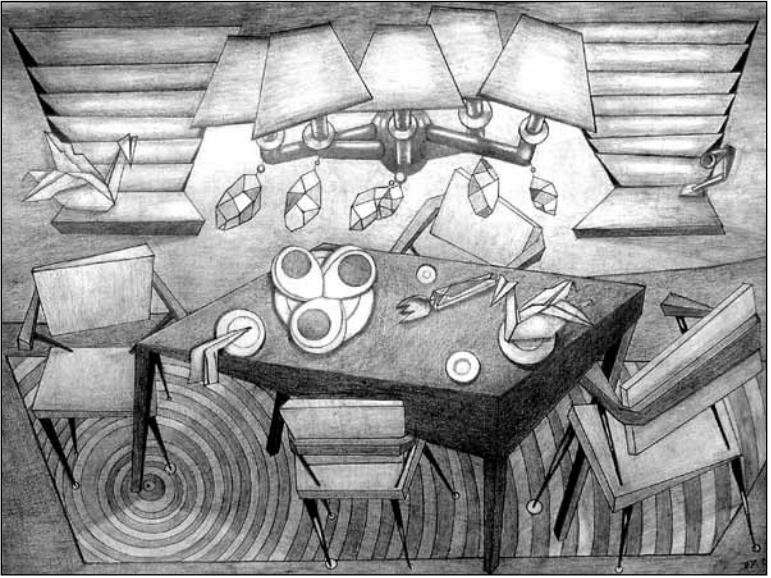
Nothing, you say, it’s just cooking.
I climb to the bedroom,
toss my trousers, hang my shirt,
try to warm myself
first between pages then behind
my drawn eyelids. Still I
smell you, this burning
I cannot put my nose into.

I stumble into cellars
of darkness, sniffing for crust,
gnawing on roots. Wander
toward meals you make
of what and for who? I find
seating at last a feast,
a table and us.

Dining Room

Graphite on Paper

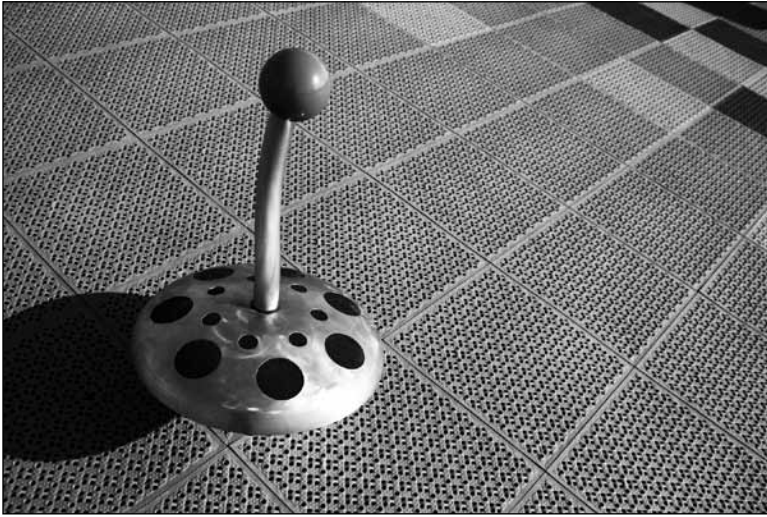
Julie MacDonald • English Instructor



Spin Me

Photograph

Laura Drawbaugh • Visual Publications



Rock n' Roll Ain't Noise Pollution

Jennifer Creller • Academic Transfer/Journalism

One winter day in 2005 as I was driving home from work, I heard on the radio that Slipknot was putting on a concert in Council Bluffs. They were a kind of thrash-metal band with lots of ear-splitting guitar riffs, obnoxious drumbeats, and visceral vocals. Suffice it to say, I wasn't exactly a fan; I thought the noise they called music sullied everything the founding fathers of rock had worked so hard to establish. But they were my then-husband Gene's favorite band, and since the tickets went on sale shortly before his birthday, I thought they would make the perfect gift for him. Knowing he would be content with any seat, I decided to try to get tickets on the floor, so he could get as close as possible to the stage. I hunted around on eBay, found two floor tickets for slightly more than face value, and happily made the purchase on the sly. He was surprised to open his birthday card and find a ticket inside, but he was ecstatic when I produced a second ticket and told him I would be going with him, as well. It was a sacrifice I was willing to make.

After three long months of waiting, the night had come for Slipknot. It was a clear and mild late-April evening, the not-quite-spring weather perfect for waiting in long lines outside. This was my first hardcore rock concert; I didn't know what to expect, but Gene's child-like excitement was contagious. The crowd started up a chant of "SLIPKNOT! SLIPKNOT!" as we all waited with fevered impatience for the entrances to be unlocked. The first stars of the evening had just begun to dot the sky when we heard a cacophony of CLANKS as the many doors finally opened. A cheer arose from the fans as we all began filing into the building.

Inside, employees were checking tickets and directing people which way to go for their seats. We felt like royalty, as we followed along with the chosen few who had secured a highly sought after spot on the floor. We were the elite, but I started

feeling a bit apprehensive, and my eagerness ebbed as I observed those around me. Gene strolled enthusiastically down the corridor; he belonged here. He was a big guy, built like a linebacker, and he looked pretty tough. With his clean-shaven head, long goatee, thick arms covered in tattoos, and double piercings in both ears, he was one of them. But I, with my unassuming blonde hair, blue eyes, and face devoid of smeared black makeup, stood out a mile. I could feel the raven eyes scanning every inch of me, being weighed and measured and found lacking. I had tattoos, but they weren't visible. Did I even have enough to be there? I imagined there was an unspoken five-tattoo minimum to enter. No, we weren't the elite; he was, and I was a court jester riding in on the coattails of my rock king. I couldn't wait to get into the darkened arena and fade into the shadowy nooks of that sanctuary.

The first opening band was a pathetically lame and completely out of place KISS cover band. Campy, upbeat songs like "I Wanna Rock n' Roll All Night" had no place on the same stage as the bitingly angry "People=Shit." It was like putting Big Bird in a horror movie: it was just...wrong. We used the opportunity to grab a couple of beers and a couple of smokes before the real show began. The second band was so non-descript that the name eludes me today, but the third and final opening act was a band called Lamb of God. I only knew of them from watching a show about Ozzfest, Ozzy Osbourne's annual rock music festival, but it seemed everyone else at the concert knew who they were. Even Gene knew some of their songs! Now I really felt like an outsider.

Lamb of God played a little harder than I was used to, but I was surprised to find that I liked what I was hearing. I was irresistibly drawn into the lead singer's ominously commanding voice and the intricately woven melody, the machine-gun staccato of the guitar viciously piercing. The excitement of the crowd soon became infectious. Even though I didn't know the songs being played, I was getting into the music. But the band wasn't the only entertainment that night.

I began cheering on the young kids who had started a mosh pit in front of us, which, simply put, consisted of a group of people creating a crude circle in the crowd, then blindly slamming into and bouncing off of each other. The sheer, reckless abandonment those guys possessed would make even the most liberated person green with envy, and I was enjoying it every bit as much as the music. A tall, lanky young man suddenly crashed to the ground; the thud of his skull meeting concrete reminded me of a dropped watermelon. In a matter of seconds, the crowd had picked up the unconscious fan, and passed him over the barrier to security. I was amazed by the concern and consideration these strangers displayed. It was obvious they weren't the young man's friends, yet they took care of him just the same. I had always imagined mosh pits as mindless, violent shoving and pushing, every man for himself. I thought that if someone went down, he would be trampled, that the goal was to see how many people you could hurt. I soon realized that my preconceived notions were completely wrong. The people moshing were just so overcome by the energy of the music that the frenzied and manic pushing, shoving, and slamming was their only release for it. And if someone fell, there was always a ready hand to help him back to his feet. Seeing it now, it seemed that moshing was more like a strange and loosely choreographed dance, and I had a new respect for it.

After Lamb of God finished their set, I decided to hit the restroom before Slipknot came on. I didn't want to leave in the middle of their performance, and I knew the beer I had consumed would not comply with my wish to wait. Apparently, everyone else had the same idea, and it was at least fifteen minutes before I got back out of the crowded restroom. As I neared the entrance to the arena floor, I heard the music start up, signaling that Slipknot was about to take the stage. There was a sudden rush as crazed (and mostly drunken) fans streamed onto the floor. Bodies flew past in a mad dash to get to that coveted place, whether they had a ticket for it or not. Standing in the entryway between

the doorframes and the open arena, I pressed myself against the white brick wall, laughing as the riotous mob whizzed by me, followed by echoing shouts from security. Two guards were rolling down the big steel doors in an attempt to stop the flood of people, and I could see a jumble of legs and feet under the doors kicking at the guards. Fists pounded on steel, combined with angry and defiant protests. One young man scrambled under the door, shoved aside a guard, and sprinted toward the open arena. Yelling for him to stop, the guard drew his taser and pulled the trigger. The kid immediately froze in mid-stride as the barbs pierced his grey Metallica t-shirt, entering flesh, and he slumped to the ground. I decided I had had enough of the mayhem and headed inside to find Gene.

Slipknot was finally all on stage when I reached him. As they started their set, the energy, excitement, and anticipation of the agitated crowd was palpable. With the first note struck, there was a forceful surge toward the stage, and I was carried along on the crushing wave as the fans rallied for the best position. The music didn't just pour out of the massive black speakers beside and above the stage; it spewed forth as water does from a fire hose. I felt the thundering vibrations from my toes to the ends of my hair, a rumbling earthquake under my skin. It was difficult to even hear my own thoughts, but it soon didn't matter. I was caught up in the act, in the music and the heat and the crowd. Slipknot's performance was like nothing I had ever seen before; the stunts they pulled left me in absolute awe. A drum set with an empty beer keg attached to the side was hoisted in the air as one of the band members dangled from it by one hand, a metal baseball bat in the other. He swung his massive frame back and forth, striking the keg with the bat in time with the music. During a drum solo, the platform that the main drum set was on slowly lifted and tilted forward at a ninety-degree angle, then began to rotate 360 degrees. Joey, the drummer, strapped into his seat and just kept on playing his solo, unfazed and never missing a beat.

But the most powerful moment was in the middle of “Spit It Out” when the music abated as Corey, the lead singer, crouched down at the front of the stage, and told us to crouch down on the floor as well. “When I say, ‘Jump the fuck up!,’ whatcha gonna do?” he growled. The crowd roared its acknowledgement. “But not until I say, ‘Jump the fuck up.’ Is that clear, you crazy fuckers?” The music swelled to its original viciousness as he launched into the next rabid verse. The dense anticipation was easily felt as we collectively waited for the command, building like roiling thunderheads on a summer evening. And when it came at the end of the verse, thousands of bodies exploded upward in one fluid motion, and we all jumped up and down with frenetic energy, both driven and amplified by the raging music. It was at that moment that thousands became one: one mind, one heartbeat, one pulse. The whole had truly become greater than the sum of its parts.

The passion and the force with which those nine men played flowed into and through me, and I found myself rocking with my devil horns in the air. Corey’s ferociously guttural lyrics pierced deeply, striking a savage and primitive part of me as I pumped my fist in perfect rhythm with Joey’s furious drumbeats. I was in full headbanging mode, long blonde hair whipping to and fro without reservation. Lost in the moment, my self-consciousness completely vanished. I didn’t care anymore if I looked like an idiot, if everyone knew this was my first time, that I was a hard-rock virgin. The truth was it didn’t matter to them anyway because we were all there for the same reason—to just let go and have a good time.

We stayed until the last note and beyond when the stage lights died and the harsh arena lights were resurrected. Drenched in the sweat of a thousand bodies, ragged breaths tearing across our raw throats, muscles already protesting their unfamiliar and vicious usage, I walked away with a new appreciation for the music and its fans. But more than that, I had been converted into a fan myself. In this sacred temple of rock, there was no judgment, no

exclusion, no image to live up to. It was a night of mutual love of music, and I was accepted just as I was. I didn't need to be clad in black and chains. I didn't need to be a social misfit or an outcast. I just needed to be there. 🙏

Sehr Musikalisch

Graphite Drawing

Cristian Mendez • Associate of Arts



Pleasurable Pain

Jessica Larimore • Academic Transfer

Tattoos date as far back as the fourth to fifth millennium B.C. The procedure for having this body modification done has varied through time. Some tribal cultures created tattoos by cutting designs in the flesh and rubbing ink, ashes, or other agents into the skin. Others used sharpened spears or animal bones and “tapped” the ink in. Most common in modern days is the use of the electric tattoo machine that can have up to a five-needle set-up that rapidly drives the needles and ink in and out of the skin at rates from 80 to 150 times a second. This once rite of passage, though not for the timorous, has become a phenomenon sweeping the world. So, why is it rare to meet a person with only one tattoo? Many people go back and yearn for the hours of self-torture at the hands of their own personal executioner, whom they pay to administer the non-lethal physical punishment. Is it the adrenaline rush? Are they trying to stand out as individuals, or are they simply proud of their art?

Walking into a tattoo parlor is like taking a step back in time with Bob Marley or some other form of retro reggae blaring through the speakers of the not-so-high-tech surround-sound stereo, as if the mellow, yet upbeat sounds and rhythms are actually supposed to calm my racing heart and fear pumping through my veins. My mind screams at me over and over to not submit to the pain, not by choice anyway, while the curious combination of patchouli and apprehension surrounds me. Like a cruel joke testing my courage and self control, I’m asked to wait on the beat-up couch (filled with tears and cigarette burns) close to the door. As I sit waiting for the artist while he prepares for the ritual, my nicotine addiction kicks in. I begin to hate, no despise, the cigarette ban. There is nothing in the world that would calm my nerves better than a smooth Parliament Light right now. Finally, after what feels like a lifetime, I’m called back to the chair.

Once seated for my private session of masochism, the tattoo artist preps the area where my masterpiece will go. Still trying to calm my unsteady nerves, I jump as he rubs cold alcohol over my skin and places the outline for guidance. The true beauty and details are actually in his creative mind, not in this little stencil. While he's doing this, he is thinking, "What shading will look best? How does this part of the body move, and will this movement alter my piece of work in any way?" He is an aficionado, like a self-described plastic surgeon; the work he does is going to be with me for my entire life, as well as his. I am his walking advertisement. Then the moment of truth arrives.

"You ready?" he asks.

Still not completely sure of my decision, I am barely able to squeak out an unsure, "Yep." I am told to take a deep breath, and the process begins. The needles pierce through my skin like a thousand knives. I keep thinking that there is no way I am going to be able to sit, let alone stay still, through the finale. I think the pain is never going to stop, but finally there is a flash of relief as the tattoo artist takes a break to add more ink to the gun. It begins again; my skin feels hot as my natural human pain sensors rush to the skin. My teeth clench down in agony while I try to breathe normally as my body accepts the foreign liquid being forced into it. The sound of a dentist's drill echoes in my ears with the same amount of monotony. Finally, when I can't stand both the itchiness and throbbing a moment longer, it is finished.

The devil himself releases me from his hell as he re-hydrates my skin with a cool splash of water and a soft rub. My flesh seems to sizzle while he puts cool ointment on to heal my fresh wounds. I rise from the chair to look in the mirror at my new work of art and smile with pride. "Thanks, Eric! See you in a couple of months?" I say on my way out the door. "Sure thing, Jess!"

After all, it wasn't all that bad, now that it's done. On my way to my car I'm already thinking, "What am I going to get done next and where?" 🧐

Daddy

Kathy Samuelson • Academic Education Instructor

“I didn’t think I’d be like this.” Impatience and frustration add a touch of anger to his voice. Time has stolen his independence. He leans on a walker, sweat forming on his lip as he forces a step. His arms shake from the effort of standing.

But his eyes—blue as ever and clear—speak intelligence, humor. He’s just so damned mad at being helpless, but the humor will win. He’ll make some pun, relieve the tension. The pain lingers, though, and clouds the sparkle. His smile has a twist that didn’t used to be there.

His clothes no longer fit. A tuck and a roll at the waist keep his pants up, usually. “God dammit!” he hisses when they fall. The favorite sweater provides comfort, warmth, in spite of elbow holes and missing buttons. There is no replacing anything. New clothes scratch, are too tight, cost “too damned much. I’m just useless.”

This man is precious, a treasure fading away. In memory, his eyes squint to catch the irregular wave in the sun. A largemouth bass breaks the surface and swallows the lure cast squarely in its path. “Hot damn! I got him.” His eyes squint still in concentration. He has to make it to the desk. There is still work to do, things to get settled.

He has a list of assets. Folders bulge with meticulously itemized receipts. “Do you know what this is?” The safety deposit box key hangs from his hand. “Just write out the checks. I think I can sign them.” His hand shakes, and his tongue just touches the outside corner of his lip. Head down, he shifts to get comfortable on the pillow which makes the chair not quite so hard on his bony butt. The hump in his back appears more pronounced when he bends to write. He looks so small—not at all like the cool daddy who made music to the words of A. A. Milne long before “Winnie the Pooh” was a published song. Not like the man who had a solution for every problem a girl could have.

Time to eat, but he eats little. Food is too cold, too hot, impossible to chew. But it smells good, and he tries. The hunger is real for a while. Always a gentleman, he says, “Thanks. Guess I’m just not hungry.” But he loves ice cream, especially at bedtime.

Just going to bed brings a new level of effort and pain—long walk to the bathroom, clothes off, always the damned walker in the way, and he swears at it. The toilet is too low, the bed, too high. Settled stiffly, he tries to relax. Now his body can rest but his mind won't. He needs reassurance. Independent, stubborn, resourceful—yet his options diminish. The refusal to surrender weakens, and he is afraid.

For those who love him, good memories—songs, silly rounds, countless jokes, trips to the lake—will crowd out these hard times. Laughter will replace tears. But now days are impossible, and death is certain. He's giving himself permission to go. 🕯

Seashell

Macro Photograph

Nicholas Borer • Graphic Design



Our Contributors

Brandy Anderson (“Time’s Endless Love”): Brandy says that a couple in love is a beautiful thing, but a couple in love after 60-plus years is absolutely breathtaking, and that’s what drew her to write about the couple in her story, “Time’s Endless Love.” The mother of two girls, Brandy moved to Lincoln last August so she could go to school to become a hospice nurse. She enjoys gardening, reading, writing, and spending time with her family. Her favorite class so far has been Composition I.

Karen Azparent (“Hard to Say, Easy to Feel”): Karen has an addiction to personal diaries, and she says her story, “Hard to Say, Easy to Feel,” sprang from a diary entry. She began her first diary when she was nine and now has 42 full ones. She wrote “Hard to Say, Easy to Feel” to remember her relationship and also to vent about its complexities.

Sloane Beckler (“Roadside Exploit”): Sloane wrote her descriptive essay about a bike ride she took last summer and her encounters along the way. She says that riding a bike engages every sense of the body, and she wanted to try and capture that in words. Sloane is 21 and can’t wait to become a nurse. She loves writing and loves fiction above all genres. Once she becomes a nurse practitioner, she wants to write medical thrillers, although she wouldn’t mind being a stand-up comedian as well. Sloan played softball at Doane College for two years before transferring to SCC and loves watching the Discovery Health and National Geographic channels.

Chris Berggren (“Just Another Day in Fallujah”): Chris has just finished his second year at SCC; he spent four years in the Marine Corps before coming to SCC. His goal is to be a writer, and he feels publication in *Illuminations* will be a step toward that goal. His story, “Just Another Day in Fallujah,” is a fictionalized and generalized account of a day in Fallujah.

John Bockoven (“SCC Ring”): A Machine Tool instructor in Lincoln, John has 17 years experience as a toolmaker, and he loves teaching the Mastercam software class. He and his students in Machine Tool think that the capabilities of some of the software they use to machine their projects is unlimited in its usefulness. He says they can make a program using Mastercam that will produce items similar to hand-carved works of art. “SCC Ring” is a photo of a ring made by CNC (Computer Numerical Control) machines in Machine Tool. Between quarters, John enjoys working on his own projects at school rather than taking time off at home.

Michael Boden (“Artifacts”): Michael was motivated to write his poem, “Artifacts,” by the time he spent on his grandparents’ farm as a child. He says he’s always been a writer, but he’s never before tried to publish anything. He plans on transferring to the College of Agricultural Science and Natural Resources at UNL to become a park ranger/environmental scientist.

Nicholas Borer (“Hydraulics in E,” “Seashell Macro”): Nicholas took his photo, “Hydraulics in E” to show that beauty can be found anywhere, and the elegant “e” shows graceful script within an industrial setting. His image, “Seashell Macro,” is intended to show the beautiful, minute details of a seashell worn by the waves and sand of the beach. He claims to be a simple guy with complex tastes. Born and raised in Lincoln, Nicholas says his interests are as eclectic as the weather

Samantha Cradick (“Silent Jiggs”): The 27-year-old mother of a “crazy” 10-year-old boy name Jory, Samantha lives in West Lincoln with her boyfriend, Jerod. She is going to school for the second time and is enjoying her classes much more this time. A self-proclaimed clean freak, Samantha sweeps the floor at least once a day; the pillows on her couches are always neatly positioned, and she rarely has dirty dishes in the sink. Samantha says she’s been through a lot of dramatic relationships (romantic and otherwise), and she’s learned life lessons from each of them.

Jennifer Creller (“N’awlins Blues,” “Rock n’ Roll Ain’t Noise Pollution,” “Playground Picasso,” “Whisper”): Jennifer wrote her essay, “Rock n’ Roll Ain’t Noise Pollution,” about her first hard-rock concert experience. A single mom of two girls, she is going back to school after being out of it for ten years. She plays coed softball on Friday nights and has been singing karaoke for over ten years. She loves to travel and has been to Paris and Germany, but her favorite vacation was to New Orleans for Mardis Gras, as reflected in her photograph, “N’awlins Blues.” Her silhouette image, “Whisper” was taken of her four-year-old daughter Lilly, and “Playground Picasso,” is a portrait of her two-year-old daughter Sage.

Joshua Daugherty (“Meeting Grim”): Josh is 23, has served in the Navy, and is now working towards an Associate of Arts degree with hopes of transferring and majoring in forensics or mortuary science. He is a golden gloves boxer and a huge fan of contact sports. He also loves to sit in coffee shops, play guitar, and drink lots of coffee.

Taryn Dorn (“Aderyn Ashleaf,” “Hilde”): Taryn says she’s always enjoyed drawing outside of school and loved coloring books as a child. She was born and raised in Nebraska and attended Beatrice High School. Taryn plans on studying dietetics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She loves to read books, listen to music, watch movies, cook, and learn new things.

Laura Drawbaugh (“Chillin’,” “The Escape,” “Home Sweet Home,” “Spin Me”): Photography has always been one of Laura’s favorite things to do. She loves using Photoshop and taking photos of “totally random things” as well as bands. “Spin Me” is an image of playground equipment in a park close to UNL, while “Chillin’” is a photo of a cute dog she saw in Omaha’s Old Market. “The Escape” was the result of Laura’s attempts to enliven her day with Photoshop, and “Home Sweet Home” is an image of an abandoned country house she found in Kansas.

Katie Ebert (“Thank You”): A memory from 15 years ago prompted Katie’s moving essay, “Thank You.” Katie is recently retired from the military and is now looking for a job that is a little slower-paced. She has a 13-year-old who drives her crazy, and she loves chocolate.

Vincent Foster (“A Blanton/Foster Reunion”): Vince is 54, was born in Bryan, TX, and graduated from Hiawatha High in Hiawatha, KS. He has lived in Germany and most of the states and has been a professional wrestler, police officer, casino dealer, and pit boss. His essay, “A Blanton/Foster Reunion,” was inspired by his last memory of his Grandma Foster.

Danae Fuller (“Skulls and Bottles”): Danae is 25 years old and was born and raised in the heartland of Nebraska. She graduated from SCC on March 20, 2009, and moved to Portland, OR, in July to attend the Art Institute where she is pursuing her Bachelor’s Degree in Interior Design. Danae loves art, both creating and observing, and would like to someday be able to finance her own studio and gallery.

Emily Gilmore (“She Called Herself Bird”): Emily is 19, and her friends and family say she’s funny and a fireball. English is her favorite subject because she’s always been told she’s a good writer. She is fluent in French and is in the process of learning Czech. Emily loves to eat fried frog-legs, was homeschooled her junior and senior years of high school, and has two degrees—one in Floral Design, and the other in Wedding Planning.

Maggie Rose Gorgen (“Paca’s Place”): When Maggie was little, she couldn’t say, “Grandpa,” so she called her grandfather “Paca” instead. Maggie’s lovely photo, “Paca’s Place,” is her opportunity to share her peaceful memory of the home of her “Paca,” now deceased. Maggie’s favorite quote is by Hillel: “I get up. I walk. I fall down. Meanwhile, I keep dancing.”

Joe Harris (“If Americans Knew”): In the spring, Joe chases storms. The rest of the year, his hobbies include playing guitar and keyboards. He believes that the biggest threat plaguing the American people is ignorance, which could kill us in time. His essay, “If Americans Knew,” may be a remedy.

Osmin Hernandez (“Street Struck”): Born in Los Angeles and raised in the projects, Osmin wrote his searing essay, “Street Struck,” for his composition class. Osmin says he was inspired by his past experiences of living in the inner-city, what he saw of his surroundings, and what he did. Currently, he’s an Academic Transfer/Secondary Education major. Osmin says he’s open-minded and likes to learn new things, and he plays—or tries to play—the guitar.

Stacie Higa (“It’s a Beautiful Day in My Hawaiian Paradise?”): Stacie says she’s made of oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, phosphorus, H₂O, and a sense of humor. Plus, she’s really complicated. Really. She wrote her story, “It’s a Beautiful Day in My Hawaiian Paradise?” to share a day from her childhood.

Lacey Janak (“Grandpa’s Rose,” “New Spurs”): Lacey has lived on a farm all her life and has been interested in art since she was little. One of her favorite things to do is take photographs with personal meaning. “Grandpa’s Rose” was a photograph taken in remembrance of her grandpa. The subject was a rose from a bouquet of flowers sent to all the grandkids in her family after her grandpa passed away. “New Spurs” reflects her love of being a country girl and her fascination with western things.

Liz Karre (“Untitled 1”): Liz’s pastel and charcoal piece, “Untitled 1,” was a project for her Drawing II class. A student at the SCC Beatrice campus, Liz is in the Academic Transfer program.

Jeremy Kendle (“The Beetle is Dead”): Jeremy is an avid reader of classic fiction and nonfiction, and he believes those writers have an impact on him daily. He is also heavily influenced by his work with developmentally challenged individuals. Jeremy wrote “The Beetle is Dead” in response to a personal experience that changed his life.

Jessica Larimore (“Pleasurable Pain”): A “second time” college student, Jessica enjoys writing and hopes to join the journalism and mass communications department at UNL within the year. Her guilty pleasure is eating all kinds of candy. Her essay, “Pleasurable Pain,” was motivated by her love of tattoos.

Dale Leach (“Faded Painting”): Dale says he’s into computers and “tech stuff,” electronics, music, and poetry. He loves to listen to music—including a lot of Goth industrial rock—and to play online role-playing games. His poem, “Faded Painting,” was inspired by the trance song, “Satellite,” by Oceanlab, and an experience with an ex-girlfriend.

Julie MacDonald (“Dining Room”): After taking Drawing I and II at SCC, Julie completed a number of perspective drawings of the rooms in her house. One of the results is her drawing, “Dining Room.” An SCC English instructor, Julie is endlessly working on her fixer-upper house with her husband and on finishing a degree in studio art. She and her husband accidentally have five cats.

Christian Mendez (“Sehr Musikalisch”): Christian is 17 and enjoys playing tennis. He is interested in photography editing, graphic design, and music and plans to pursue a career at the College of Hair Design. After picking up a copy of *Illuminations*, Christian thought he’d submit his own work of art.

Micaela Mota (“Chris,” “Grandma’s House,” “View from the Shop”): “Chris” was part of a photo documentary assignment Micaela did for school. Chris is a diesel technician at Crete Carriers and was nearing graduation from the Diesel Technology Truck program at SCC when Micaela took this photo. Her image, “View from the Shop,” was also part of the photo documentary project. She looked out the shop garage door and noticed the “frame inside a frame” and took the shot. Her beautiful photo, “Grandma’s House,” was made when she was sitting in her grandmother’s living room and realized the lighting was perfect. Sewing, drawing, and making jewelry are some of Micaela’s favorite things to do. She also loves running and being active.

Olga Mun (“Skyscrapers in Chicago: Stone Trees”): Olga was impressed by the lack of natural trees and the abundance of “stone” trees in the form of skyscrapers in downtown Chicago. Olga is a 19-year-old international student from Kazakhstan (“Remember Borat?” Olga asks). Olga’s major is International Relations, so her interest is primarily politics. However, art is very important to her. She loves drawing and writing poetry and is keen on traveling. So far, she’s been to Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, German, England, the Czech Republic, and Turkey. She most values honesty in people, and her favorite quote is from Confucius: “Wherever you go, go with all your heart.”

Nicholas Muthersbaugh (“Nil Carborundum Illigitemi”): Nicholas’s intriguing photo was an exercise in surrealist photography, and its Latin title means, “Don’t let the bastards grind you down.” When not lost in surrealism, Nicholas says he’s a clown for sure; he loves photography and graphic design and hopes to be doing both for the rest of his life. Nicholas says if you don’t see him in front of a computer screen or behind a camera lens, he’s probably playing soccer.

Chuck Parker (“Journal Entries”): After graduating from high school, Chuck was set for college when, just a week before classes began, he decided to stay at his summer job and hold off school for a few months. Months turned into years, and finally, at the age of 44, he found himself in college. Although it took him 25 years to get there, Chuck says his life lessons have been as valuable as the college credits he’s striving for now. Chuck’s been everything from a full-time musician traveling in a country music band to a bank manager. He’s currently employed as a sales manager for Pepsi-Cola. His “Journal Entries” were part of a greater assignment for his Composition I class, and he credits instructor Mike Smith with persuading him to submit them to *Illuminations*.

Ben Penton (“Trash”): Ben created his digital piece, “Trash,” to signify student consumption of junk food. Ben loves cold weather along with drawing and photography. He’s also into video games, computers, philosophy, and astronomy.

K. Caitlin Phelps (“Mermaid”): Caitlin says King Midas has nothing on her when it comes to cooking, as her hands have the ability to burn everything they touch. As a result, she only cooks for those who anger her. When not practicing her culinary revenge, she loves to cozy up with a classic novel and a cup of hot lemon water. Caitlin also insists that if she had an excuse to dress up as a zombie on any day other than Halloween, she’d do it in a heartbeat (no pun intended).

Tom Rathbun (“Twins”): Tom was motivated to carve from wood his piece, “Twins,” after reading an article about antique ice fishing decoys. He says all of his pieces reflect his love of wood and what hides within it. Tom calls himself a Santa Claus-shaped guy who loves to make objects that people treasure. He also loves good pasta.

Claudia Reinhardt (“Crossed Flight Paths”): Claudia holds degrees from Illinois Wesleyan University and Emerson College, Boston. After a career in business communication, PR, and fundraising, she’s now a freelance writer/editor, SCC writing tutor, and volunteer with area nonprofits. Of her poem, “Crossed Flight Paths,” Claudia writes, “I often bike on the Mo-Pac trail, a place filled with sights, sounds, and smells. I often catch glimpses of birds and hear snatches of songs. When I lived in Boston, I took public transit daily, also a source of sensory overload. Flocks of people would flit in and out of noisy rail cars. Somehow, these two images blended in my brain.”

Snera Riley (“Welcome Home”): Snera wanted to share some “beauty” in a tragedy in her touching story, “Welcome Home.” Snera is going to school for Broadcasting and Sports Management and plans on being the next Ryan Seacrest. She also loves football. (She says Darren McFadden could be her soul mate, but they haven’t gone public yet, so don’t tell anyone).

Phip Ross (“Home Cooking”): Phip is an SCC English instructor who tries to write a poem a day. He also writes his own music and enjoys performing it for himself at home. One of his favorite sayings he’s put up in his cubicle is from Ted Kooser and Jim Harrison’s book *Braided Creek*: “If you can awaken/ inside the familiar/and discover it strange/you need never leave home.”

Mary Ann Rowe (“Abandoned”): Mary Ann took her stunning photograph, “Abandoned,” of the Rock Island Railroad bridge. She enjoys taking pictures of winter scenes and often uses them for her personal greeting cards. A Developmental English instructor at SCC, Mary Ann loves learning new things, whether it be cooking, baking, or a using a new skill learned in a class she’s taken.

Amy Salisbury (“Baby Bottle Calf”): Amy was waiting for a train in Rushville, NE, when she walked over to the small farm town and began taking pictures. That’s how she captured her endearing image, “Baby Bottle Calf.” The native of a small town in western Nebraska, Amy has always loved arts and crafts. She said once she toured the Graphic Design room at Milford, she fell in love. She graduated in December 2009 and intends to stay in the Lincoln area. Amy’s passion is photography, and she would one day like to own her own studio of design and photography.

Kathy Samuelson (“Daddy,” “Time”): An instructor in the Arts and Sciences Division, Kathy is a reader, hiker, and lover of dogs. She says she teaches because students fascinate her, and she writes because it’s fun. Kathy wrote “Time” after walking down a street in her hometown and discovering an old house, which she personified in her poem. Her beautiful essay, “Daddy,” was motivated by love.

Micky J. Schumacher (“Dirty Golf Ball”): Micky is in SCC’s Graphic Design program and took a picture of a golf ball for a macrophotography assignment. Micky says, “Golf is one of my hobbies, and I thought it would be cool.”

Natalie Schwarz (“Mornings at Dean’s”): Natalie is a writing tutor in the MAC at SCC and has recently earned her Master’s degree in English from UNL. She loves poetry and 20th century American literature, is fanatical about the Dave Matthews Band, and is married to an aspiring ukulele player.

Jake Sullivan (“The Education and Adventures of a Young Jake

Sullivan”): Jake is 26 and an avid cyclist. He spends as much time on his bicycle as he can and often winds up riding longer than he should while contemplating homework and responsibilities. He loves good food, knowledge, and chocolate. He loathes unfortunate souls who are close-minded and fearful of new experiences and those who go through life living for others and always feeling concerned with what others think of them. Jake was motivated to tap into a fond childhood memory and put it into story form, and the result was “The Education and Adventures of a Young Jake Sullivan.”

Rita Thomas (“Fields of Rapeseed,” “Moondancer,” “Queen’s Walk”):

Rita says she’s a crazy woman who will travel the world in search of a great photo subject. She captured her stunning photograph of fields of rapeseed on the western coast of England. “Queen’s Walk” was shot in London along the river Thames. Rita says London is a photographer’s buffet! Her image, “Moondancer” is from a series of photos she shot of the Dance of Gratitude, offered for two people and their families from different cultures who had met during a tragedy. She was moved by the event and captured it with her stirring photo.

Michelle West (“The First Hit”): Michelle is married, has a son, and works as well as attends school. Her son was born three days after her 25th birthday, and she says he’s the best present she’ll ever receive. Michelle loves to play volleyball, even though she claims she’s not that great at it. Her essay, “The First Hit,” was written about a personal experience.

Tim Woosley (“My Stomach’s Favorite Place”): After being assigned in class to read a story from *Illuminations*, Tim thought he might give it a shot, too. In his free time, Tim loves to play guitar, eat pizza (thus his story, “My Stomach’s Favorite Place”), and “take an occasional chance at being foolish, like submitting my paper to *Illuminations*. . . .”



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