


Illuminations

*A magazine of student, faculty, and staff
creative expression*

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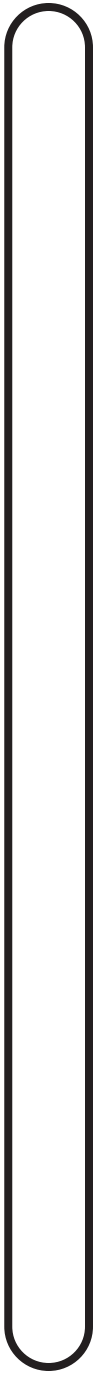
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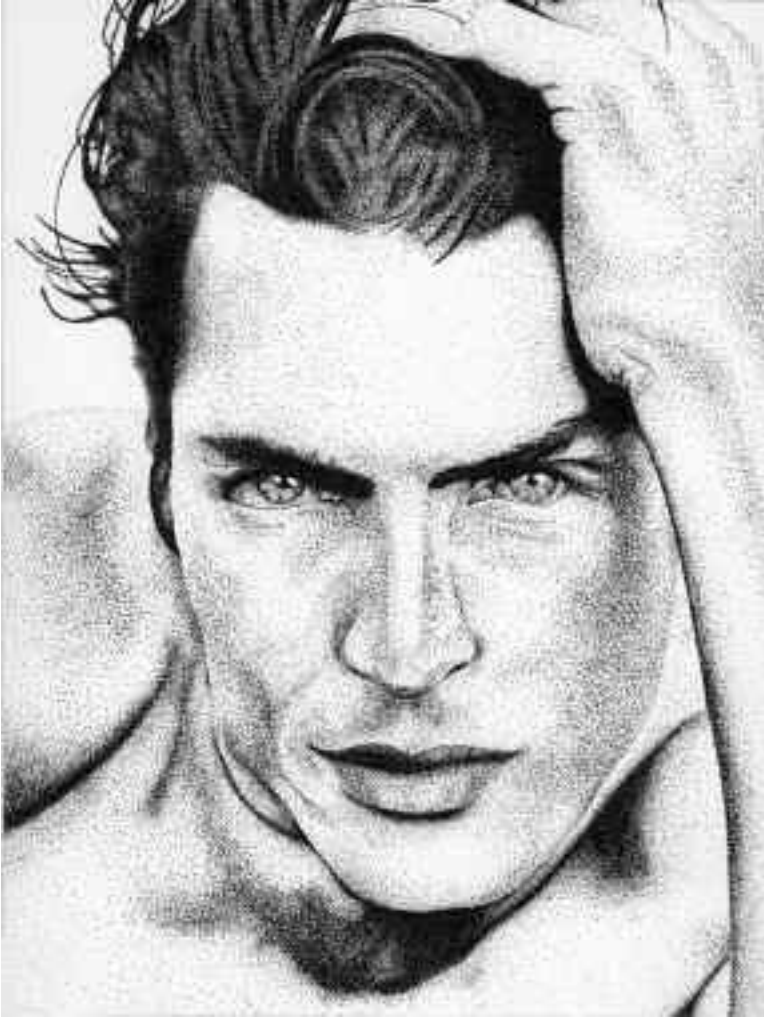
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Armani Model




A Curious Voyage & Glorious Endeavor

As we began this curious pilgrimage and glorious adventure
it became apparent that the articles we had
utilized during that day
had become useless and inappropriate for our journey
a new approach would become necessary
and a new beginning would unravel itself and come forth
to appear more authentic than in any previous moment
a successor for the endings we shed
from finger to toe
{rebirth}

as we became more lucid of this conscious dream
it suddenly occurred to me (though I was dimly aware all along)
that this is no dream at all
...at least not in any traditional fashion
this is to be the manifestation of not only
the sum of our experiences
but the sum of what our experiences expect for our futures
and what the future expects from our experiences
to abandon ship now would be as to
rendering oneself blind deaf dumb and senseless
the proverbial walking of the plank
fall and meet the unforgiving below
to further fortitude our mindset, we discussed life
in a more angular way
to reassign our specific positions in the scheme
and then in the universe
we affirmed our journey and the notion that
the sea refuses no river
and the river never did flow so openly and intricately
it was neither story tale lie nor exaggeration
merely a novel with a preface
and the most beautiful visual representation of life
ever imagined and conceived
spanning the front cover

while beginning the first chapter
you may have noticed that at first, either the pages are blank

or the words are microscopic
realization slowly rises as the tide does rise
and as the water reaches the levy
the levy can no longer hold the shapeless mass
it snaps
you now realize it is not the pages that are blank
instead it has been left up to you
and you have made that interpretation for yourself
to aid the continuation of this collection of
 motion called the great Life
or to shake away all notions of life
and set that book back up on a shelf
we are the directors, producers, promoters,
 cameramen, writers, editors,
and even actors
of a cinematic thriller called ourselves
premiering in a shapeless massive collection called the universe
and how we choose to make record of this glorious endeavor
is the image that will be conjured up
in a future feature presentation
in a grand venue
within



A Curious Voyage & Glorious Endeavor

Yulia



Billy's Courage

On July 25, 1995, my son Billy was involved in a motorcycle accident in northeast Colorado on the outskirts of a little town called Fleming. Billy went out to the motor-cross field to practice that day. A thunderstorm abruptly brewed up. Billy thought he could beat the storm and headed for home. The wind was blowing hard, the dirt was thick, and visibility was poor. A motorist coming up over the hill did not see Billy, nor could Billy see him. The two collided head-on, throwing my son about 175 feet according to the state patrol. Another motorist came upon the accident and called for an ambulance. An ambulance finally arrived and transported Billy to a local hospital in Sterling, Colorado.

When I received the news about Billy's accident, I was working at a hospital that evening in Kearney, Nebraska. The emergency room doctor informed me that Billy was on a respirator. As an experienced nurse, I knew he was paralyzed. During our conversation, the doctor told me, "My prayers go with him." Billy was flown from Sterling, Colorado, to a trauma center in Greeley, Colorado. He had a cervical 3 and 4 fracture. In most circumstances, persons with this type of injury are considered to be quadriplegic.

I had to drive several hours before I could reach Billy. All I could do was pray and wonder how my son would deal with this if he survived. Eventually, there would be more things to consider regarding his injuries. When I arrived at the hospital in Greeley, I asked the first person where the ICU was. That person, who was an employee of the hospital, told me ICU was on the fourth floor. I got onto the closest elevator and anxiously waited for the elevator to get to the fourth floor. I also had to wonder if not only Billy, but also I, could be strong enough to deal with this.

As the doors opened, all I could see was the nurse's station. The rooms in the ICU were located in a semi-circle. I didn't see any nursing staff, but I looked toward each room to see if I could tell which room my son was in. All of the rooms had the lights turned off except for one. I could see from a distance there were a lot of machines, a bed, and a body with a pale left arm and hand lying outside of the bed. I heard a voice say, "There's Billy." I was relieved to be with my

son. Lying in that bed was a lifeless body with a metal cage screwed into his head. There was a tube protruding from his throat, hooked to a respirator to help him breath. Billy had wires extending all over him. I could see blood and what looked like gravel in his hair. A machine by the bed was helping him breathe. His chest moved up and down as the respirator helped him breath. Looking at all of this and seeing my son so pale, scraped up, and so still got me wondering again how he was going to deal with this. This was difficult to take in. This just couldn't be the son I knew.

I reached out and put his cold hand in mine and placed his hand under the blanket. I was crying uncontrollably, trying so hard to understand. This was unreal; Billy was so athletic and active. I yearned for answers. How would he survive if he lived? What would I say to him if he ever woke up?

The days passed with an unresponsive body! I stayed with him, held his hand, and talked to him about everything and anything. I could not eat. The thought of leaving Billy and him not waking up diminished my appetite. After all, Billy could not eat or feed himself. I just wanted him to wake up and be able to eat and talk to me. I blamed myself. If only I could have been there, perhaps I would not have allowed him to go to the motor-cross track.

The day Billy woke up was cause for celebration. I wanted to shout and dance! Instead, I cried tears of happiness. He had survived! Now would come the hard work, and everyone would be supportive and encouraging. Billy underwent surgery to stabilize his neck. He had to be weaned off the respirator, learn how to swallow food, and sit up in a wheelchair without fainting. The physical therapists had to work him to keep him from losing any more muscle mass since he wasn't able to move any of his extremities by himself.

Basically, he had to learn to live as a paralyzed person. I had to learn to understand and meet Billy's needs. I was surprised Billy was adapting so easily. Billy adhered to whatever the hospital staff asked of him. He always gave his best! I watched in amazement as he progressed through the stages of his rehabilitation. Here was my son, the one who always pushed himself to do his best. He was a scrawny

little boy; sometimes people would assume he was not capable of playing sports or defending himself. Billy didn't care whether he was playing football, hunting, or motorcycling; he always strived to be his best.

Now Billy's sixteenth birthday was spent in the hospital with an uncertain future. I was apprehensive how this important birthday might affect him, but he surprised me and took his birthday well. Billy always talked about getting his driver's license. Instead, he would be learning to drive an electric wheelchair. Incidentally, he picked out a shiny colored maroon wheelchair.

Billy worked hard with his physical therapists in the hopes of walking again one day. He knew he wouldn't leave the hospital walking, but he still had the hope that one day in the future he would. His friends came to visit him in the beginning, but as time wore on, they eventually stopped visiting. I felt helpless that Billy wasn't able to see his friends. His friends were still active in sports, hunting, and riding their motorcycles. I asked him if he was bothered by his friends not visiting him. He said, "No, I can understand."

I worried when the time came for him to go home. Would he understand? Billy hesitated about returning to school when he arrived home. He felt like he wouldn't fit in. Personally, I couldn't blame him. I could only hope things would work out.

My oldest son Aaron has always been my quiet son. Although Aaron is four years older than Billy, they have always been close from the start. Aaron has been there beside his brother since the accident. I knew he was scared and worried about Billy after the accident. Aaron was supportive and encouraging with his brother's progress. I think Aaron had courage, too, as I watched him through a lot of this after Billy's accident.

As time passed, Billy showed me through his strength that life goes on. He seemed to accept his plight in life and all of the challenges lurking in the future. He still has the same sense of humor and the same interests. Billy and Aaron worked on modifying a gun rest for his wheel chair so that he could go hunting. In the book that Christopher Reeve wrote, *I'm Still Me*, he told his wife that, "I'm still

me," from which he got the title for his book. Reading that helped me know Billy is still Billy. I couldn't be more proud of my two sons, Billy and Aaron. I truly do have the best sons that anyone could ask for! Thank you, God! •



Tranquility

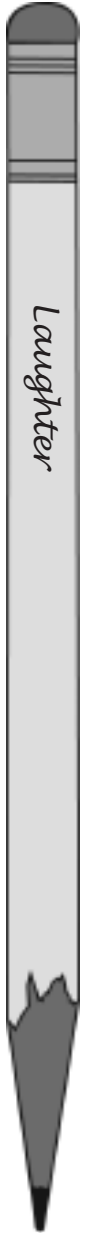


Laughter

Life often presents opportunities we never considered, never thought about, and certainly never dreamed we would take. This was one of those times, one of those pivotal moments in life when I could either choose to be scared about the prospect in front of me or I could choose to embrace it, regardless of the unknowns that may encircle it. I was nervous, but not scared. I was about to see the world in a new way, a different way, but more importantly I was about to see how far God's hands could go and how He had the power to use me to touch people and to change lives.

It's July 2004. I am a naive 17-year-old girl that has never really been out of Nebraska, but here I am on a little island off the coast of Venezuela, Margarita Island, Venezuela, to be exact or La Isle de Margarita, as it was locally known. This is my first mission's trip, and I am in a place far away from the plains of Nebraska. There are no plains here, just some cows that look like they need to eat a little more grass. Margarita reminds me of a sad book, for as beautiful as it is with its aqua blue water and sparkling gold beaches, the poverty is like I've never seen. Amidst the picturesque sunsets are children trying to sell anything they can make, and in this instance, it's a turtle made of shells. The little girl selling them can not be more than seven years old, "¿Te gusta uno?" "Would you like one?" she asks. She reminds me of my sister with her curly dark hair and ornery grin. I decide to buy a mother and a baby turtle, but I have to insist that I don't need the sisters and brothers to go along with them, which is a bit more complicated then it sounds considering my Spanish is somewhat limited. I look out over the water, and the stench of red seaweed rises up in my nostrils. It smells like dead fish; the stench is inescapable. It keeps hitting me with new intensity, making me scrunch up my nose as if that would help somehow.

It's my third day on the island. I am here with about 30 teenagers from across the state of Nebraska. The particular organization we are with is called AIM, or Ambassadors in Mission. It is dedicated to offering every teenager in the state of Nebraska the chance to go on a short term mission trip before he or she graduates from high school. We are all unique people, but together we make



perfect sense; each of us plays a role in this trip that not only helps us to grow individually but helps the entire team grow. My roommate, Anna, is very much a citified girl. She's wearing high-heeled flip flops and is talking nonstop about how she doesn't want to get her jeans dirty. Trust me, by the end of the trip, that's the last thing on her mind. We are staying in a little hotel just across the road from the beach. It reminds me of a villa, with its stone and tile walkways, and the fruit trees that residents really do take fruit from for breakfast in the morning. It's funny how I can remember every detail of a place after being there for only a short while. My favorite part of the hotel was how it felt like its own little village. It felt like I knew every single person there, from the maids to the front desk clerk. The hotel took on that homey feeling that I've only experienced one other time, when I went to Austria this past summer on another mission's trip.

On this particular day, we are headed outside of Margarita to a little fishing village. This village is simply one of many whose inhabitants rely on fishing for their livelihood. Fishing may provide money for food, but it certainly does not provide enough for much more. The people who live in these villages are poor, dirt poor, like the kind of poor you read about in National Geographic. Our goal is to put on a puppet show and minister to the kids there – in other words, to spread the message of Jesus.

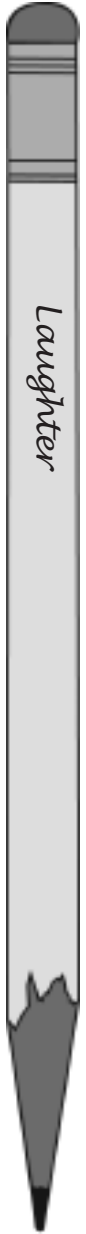
We start our journey in the early afternoon. It takes quite a while to get to the fishing villages because we are riding in tour busses that have definitely seen better days, and those days are surely long gone. At first the road is pavement, but that eventually turns into gravel, which then turns into red clay dirt, a powdery substance that reminds me of the way chalk feels on my hands after I write with it. We finally turn onto yet another unmarked road, except this time, amidst the bush-like woody trees, we begin to see small 8 x 12 buildings. At closer inspection, we realize that these houses are nothing more than odds and ends held together by clay mud. The houses are one-room, dirt floor, the kind you see in infomercials that try to convince you to sponsor children in Africa. We make our way yet a little farther and pull up in front of a building that has no walls, just a roof

supported by four wooden poles; it's situated about 15 feet from the beach. This is our stage for the next two hours.

All 35 of us pile out and begin unloading our equipment: the sound system, puppet stage, games, and candy for the kids. Then, out of nowhere in particular come kids, moms, grandmas, dads, uncles, and anyone who may be even slightly curious as to what a whole bus load of English-speaking white people would be doing here. The language barrier fades away as we begin to minister to the kids. For me, every little girl is my sister, and every little boy is my cousin. I can see just how delighted each child is with the shrieks of laughter at the puppets and eagerness to be involved in the games we play. I look over at one mother in particular while we are making balloon animals; we never speak a word, but it seems as if she says thank you. Then we set up the puppet stage and sing a couple of songs in Spanish using the puppets. The missionary guide who is with us has the kids play a game that involves shooting water guns at my friend Dustin who is dressed up like Bozo the clown. The goal is to fill up a cup with water, but it turns out to be much more fun to get Dustin all wet. The kids love it; there is no sound that can compare to their laughter.

The missionary, who is also our guide, is named Tom. He reminds me of Papa Smurf in the way he takes care of us, like a surrogate dad for the time being. He closes the service with an altar call to accept Jesus into our hearts, and 60 little hands shoot up into the air. A salvation prayer in English is wonderful, but there's something about hearing it in another language that makes it take new precedence. We load up our gear, say goodbye to the kids, and head back to the hotel.

I learned to look at the world with new eyes that day. My life is so different from the children's in the fishing village, but I choose not to look down on them in any way. My world consists of TV, radio, and media everywhere, while theirs is simply a struggle to get dinner on the table or sell enough shell turtles to make ends meet. I grew up that day. I got beyond the plains of Nebraska. I pray that I never forget what that fishing village looks like, or the pure sound of laughter



coming from the kids. God sometimes gives us gifts in ways we never expected to get them; this was one of those for me. He gave me a new set of eyes to see the world, and to realize that it's bigger than what I let it be sometimes. I learned that day that my influence can be as far reaching as I want it to be, even as far reaching as a fishing village half a world away. •



Body Surfing (At the Execution)

They were body surfing at the execution,
Oddly searching for some means of retribution,
Gladly cheering and calling out for someone to be "fried."
Is this the only justice that we feel justified?

They were lighting fireworks at the scheduled killing,
Young kids showed up, too; they thought it would be thrilling.
The witnesses all talked about it that night on TV,
To satisfy, enthrall, or appall citizens like me.

There were also those who thought it wrong – a farce,
a tragedy,
This strategy to play God on behalf of society.
Then some to whom forgive and forget's a problem
they've not solved,
And still those who'll live with sheer regret that
we have not evolved.

Perpetually a pep rally or a somber wake,
Courting contradictions with humanity at stake.
When all there is is punishment, there's no rehabilitation,
Not to the victim's memory, our own souls, nor to this nation.

Murder sure stirs up hard feelings one way or another;
Everyone who's ever killed is someone's friend or brother.
And it's tough for me to sort this out, not sure what more to say,
Yet I can't see this "Eye for an eye" – must be a better way.

Life With Brandon

I was standing in the middle of this bright and cheery-colored room. The walls were a bright white with a blue border. The border had teapots of every variety in it. The kitchen was shaped in the form of an "L." Above the sink was a big window that had curtains to match the border. The kitchen was small, but it was very organized. Everything was put away except the canisters, which matched the border, too. It always made me feel good when I came in here because it was bright and clean. I would come in the kitchen and sit down at the small wooden table and relax.

Suddenly, I heard God-fearing growls from the living room. I ran down and found my four-year-old son Brandon lying in the middle of our pale green carpeted floor. Brandon was a tiny-framed boy of average height and very skinny. *Sesame Street* was playing on the television in front of him. He did not see me coming down the long paneled hall and walking up behind him. He kept laughing at the Cookie Monster on *Sesame Street*. In the middle of his laugh, I heard that scary deep growl again. It was like hearing a scary noise from the movie *The Exorcist*. "Is Brandon possessed?" I frantically thought. I had goose bumps all over. I just watched him and trembled. I slowly turned around and walked down the hallway without him noticing me. I did not want him to see me worried. Immediately, I turned into the bright, cheery, sunlit kitchen.

Grabbing the phone on the wall, I started dialing his doctor's office. "Please push one if you're a doctor, and if you need to speak to a nurse, please push two" was the first thing I heard after the ringing. I pushed two so hard I thought I jammed my finger. I was pacing around impatiently as I was listening to some type of music that I would hear on an elevator.

The nurse finally answered the phone and asked, "Can I help you?" I had so many thoughts going through my head. I wanted to scream.

Slowly I calmed down and stated, "Something is wrong with my son, and I need to get him in as soon as possible."

She questioned me, "What is wrong with him?"

All I could do was stutter, "He's crazy or possessed." She tried to

Life with Brandon

reassure me that Brandon was ok and that there was probably a reasonable explanation. She then made an appointment to see the doctor in one hour.

I put Brandon in our dusty old Tempo. I drove out of our small country town to drive into Health America. This was a frustrating long ride. Brandon continued talking to me, and in the sentence he would start doing the long, scary, drawn-out growl. Then he would continue the sentence about what happened on the *Sesame Street* show.

I was gazing into the fields of alfalfa. My eyes were watering. I was not sure if I was crying from the smell of the alfalfa or because of the situation with Brandon. I kept worrying, "What is wrong with my son?"

As we pulled into the Lincoln area, we were stopped by a long coal train. I thought it would never end. Brandon was in the back of the car counting the railcars on the train and continuing to growl. Finally, the end of the train crossed the tracks, and the gates rose. I hurried down the busy streets, missing all but one red light on the way to the doctor's office.

We arrived at the big brick building. I hurriedly parked the car and grabbed Brandon to take him inside. The doctor's office was on the right side of the front door. We sat down waiting for the doctor in this area surrounded with chairs up against a portioned white wall. Brandon was looking at a book on rabbits that he found on the end table by the chairs and started making up a storyline for the book. Growling continued to come out during his conversations. Other mothers with their children looked at me with deep concern. One young mother fanatically grabbed her daughter and proceeded to go clear across the room from us. She kept giving us disgusted looks.

Sarah, the young nurse came walking down the long, white hallway and called Brandon's name. We followed her into the first room. Sarah was a happy and pretty nurse. She had long, curly brown hair, and she smelled like flowers. Kids always loved the bright and bold scrubs that she wore. It would make the kids more relaxed when they saw her come in wearing Care Bears, Strawberry Shortcake, or sometimes the Ninja Turtles. She would always have a joke for

Brandon, and she kept everyone laughing. Sarah asked what Brandon was being seen for, and when I started to reply, Brandon started talking, and the deep growls started coming again. Sarah was startled. With her face turning white, she shook her head in disbelief. Before, she always visited with us; that day she hurried out of the small room to get the doctor.

The room had white walls and a poster of a cat hanging from a tree with the words at the bottom of the poster that read, "Hang in there, Baby." The counter was clean with cotton balls in a jar. The cupboards were closed, but they had glass doors, and I could see they were filled with all kinds of medical supplies. Brandon was playing with his toy cars on the black and white tiled floor.

Doctor Evelyn, a tall older lady with graying hair, walked through the door in her white coat and grey dress. Smiling at Brandon, she asked me, "What brings you in here today?" At that moment, Brandon let out a deep, long growl. Continuing to ignore us, he played with his cars. Doctor Evelyn did a lot of testing that day. She immediately ordered X-rays, an EEG (checking for brain activity), an EKG (checking for heart activity), and a full line of blood work. They were done all that day. They could find no reason for his actions. Dr. Evelyn continued sending us to doctors after doctors, reporting to them that she knew something was wrong. Brandon continued making the growling noises for over a year. Later, he started making other noises.

One day we were at the park in Roca, NE. An old slide, a swing set with one of the four seats ripped off, and a basketball hoop was all that was at this small park. The kids in town were down there with my kids and my friend Kathy. It was a hot and humid July day. Everyone was wearing shorts and T-shirts. Kathy's son Todd was 14 years old and very dependable. He was pushing five-year-old Brandon on the swing, while some of the other kids were playing basketball. Todd told us he would watch my kids while we walked across the street to pick up our mail at the post office.

The post office was on the opposite corner of the street. It was an old house turned into a post office. In the office, the post lady start-

ed telling us of her son's surgery on his back. While she was talking, we heard the sounds of a semi's horn blowing.

This was not abnormal in our small town with the semis coming from highway 77 into town, where they have to almost stop on the old bridge to cross the railroad tracks. Trucks came through town blaring their horns.

Two minutes after hearing the semi's horn blowing, my daughter came running into the post office screaming frantically, "Brandon was almost run over by a semi!" Running out of the post office, we saw the kids in front of the town hall shaking their heads and yelling at the same time. Brandon was lying motionless on the green grass in front of them. I was so scared that everything else was a blank to me except the smell of the diesel fuel from the semi and two of the older kids standing over Brandon.

Todd repeated over and over again, "He would not listen to me."

Brandon all of a sudden jumped up and excitedly said, "Let's go swing." My mouth dropped, and I was in shock.

Todd told us that Brandon saw the glossy black semi coming and ran into the street and then laid down so the truck would run over him. Honking his horn, the driver stopped, but Brandon continued to lie there. The driver then got out of his truck on Main Street and bent over and picked up Brandon who was lying there stiff as a board. He carried Brandon to the side of the road and laid him in the grass.

I grabbed Brandon and questioned him why he would ever pull a stunt like that. He remarked, "I always wanted to see the bottom of a moving semi." I knew then that something was wrong with him, and I could never leave him with anybody who was not experienced with difficult children.

Dr. Smith, a neurologist, diagnosed him three years later with an attention deficit with hyperactivity (ADHD) and compulsive disorders. One year later, we saw a child's neurologist and psychiatrist named Dr. Green.

Her office was colorful and children-oriented. There were cars all over her dark green walls. Fading stripes were on the border of the walls. Toys were laid in a basket for kids to play with. The examining

room had pictures all over the walls. My kids loved going to her office and talking with this kind lady. Brandon was never afraid to go there and looked forward to talking to the doctor. She was a jolly little woman with a petite voice and always had a smile. Dr. Green knew within ten minutes of looking at him and at my husband's family history that he had Tourette's Syndrome. His condition came with a compulsive disorder, dyslexia, ADHD, and another part of the disease that made him do dangerous things. "Tourette's children always get worse in their teen years, and you can expect all kinds of unexpected episodes," she continued warning me. A diagnosis was finally revealed, but I was still in shock, trembling as she continued to tell me more of this disease. I just stared at Brandon who was playing with his power saw from his child's tool set.

Brandon always looked normal, but when he talked, sometimes he would stutter, and he always had strange little tics that would drive people nuts. Sometimes he would make clicking sounds with his tongue that would last for hours. Popping his knuckles, and pulling his eyebrows and eyelashes out were his normal tics. When he was scared or upset, he would also have a loud outburst that consisted of a long and loud laughing spree.

Brandon had several teachers who did not know of the problems that could come along with Tourette's Syndrome, so they would give him a hard time. A few teachers knew of Tourette's, but since Brandon did not use vulgar language, felt he must have been misdiagnosed. They would call me for a meeting about Brandon's behavior. It would start off saying something like, "I know that children with Tourette's swear, and since he is not doing it, he must have been misdiagnosed." It would continue by stating, "He is causing a disturbance in my class from his laughing bouts, and he needs to have them stopped or else he will be staying after school." One day, a teacher gave us a stern and cold look and stated that Brandon was a problem child, and not a child with a medical problem. She made me nervous, so I could imagine how Brandon must have acted out in her class. I got very frustrated with some teachers due to their lack of knowledge of Tourette's, but they were full of advice on what was

wrong with him. I ordered a detailed video of children with Tourette's and offered it to the teachers and their classes. A few of the teachers refused to watch it. They believed they knew more than the experts on this disease. Once in a while I had to take Brandon out of school and home-school him. He had two teachers who were terrible and would criticize him in front of the class during his laughing spells.

Brandon slowly is getting better with the correct dosage of medicine for his anxiety and tics and also due to his continued relaxing breathing treatments. Many people did not think Brandon would live to his twenties because of the dangerous stunts he pulled. I look back at those terrible dark days. I thought that I would have a breakdown or a heart attack. Brandon has never liked talking about his Tourette's. He would rather someone think he is crazy than to go through it all over again.

Brandon is older and is better at controlling his outburst. He looks like a typical twenty-year-old. He still continues with his laughing spells when he is nervous. We have survived the worst of it. We have learned patience and acceptance through all of this. We learned never to judge someone just because he does not act the way someone thinks he should act. •



Creator

He sits endlessly,
Never missing a moment.
Lifetimes pass in the blink of his eye.
You surely have met him,
Passing him in the bustle of city life
At a lonely old tavern.
He looks like everyone but no-one in particular.
The only thing that betrays his timeless existence,
The only thing you would, or could ever
remember about him are his eyes.
They speak to you like a wonderful love song on a lonely night.
They tell you volumes with one glance at what he has seen.
Your mind cannot grasp what has transpired within that gaze.
He sees time itself—
Not as you or I see it in days or weeks or years,
But in some unearthly, infinite manner,
For he is time itself, the beginning and the end.

Love Across the Street

Her name was Dolly Hazelbaker. She was in her 80's when she began her career as my babysitter. She lived across the street in an old two-story house with peeling paint and a worn porch swing. Dolly was my surrogate grandmother and my friend. I never knew my real grandmothers, but she was an excellent substitute.

I couldn't say "Hazelbaker" when I first stayed in her home, so she was "Baker." She wore old, cotton housedresses with handmade aprons. Baker stood in the kitchen on her sturdy, sensible shoes making food strange to me – ham-hocks and beans, homemade sauerkraut, boiled cow tongue, parboiled turnips. I'd lift the lid of the pan just to peer in at that tongue in its bubbling stew. It seemed like witchery to me; it tasted heavenly. Baker would instruct, "You have to try just a small piece." I trusted her, so I tasted the tender meat. As Martha would say, "It was a good thing." Baker's gingersnaps were perfectly sugared, chewy confections, best enjoyed fresh from the oven. I wish I could experience again the spicy aroma wafting from her Hoosier cabinet in the pantry.

Baker's face displayed the lines of good humor, hard work, and a challenging life. Her hands were calloused from years of working in a steamy commercial laundry. Those same knobby hands could create delicate needlework, a skill passed through generations of women in her family. She was raised in the old way, when quilting was a necessity, not a hobby. Her quilts would win awards at today's quilt shows. Her stitches were perfectly small and delicate; her crocheting was a work of art – doilies shared as remembrances for family and friends. I spent time each visit digging through her button box for colorful treasures, while her knitting needles or crochet hook spun intricate creations. No pattern was needed for those; the designs were etched in her memory.

Baker's home was a short run across Garfield Street, a safe haven from my brother's teasing. When I was lonely for company, her door was as open as her arms. I could count on her being there. What more could a child ask than to have "grandmother's" home in view from her bedroom window, to know love was always right across the street?

Dolly Hazelbaker died at age 96, one day before my wedding. I believe she felt her work was done. She did well; I was blessed by her guidance, devotion and friendship. •

Doorway

I stood there in the doorway-
The opening that you passed through to leave me,
for a devastating amount of time.
Your empty presence fluttered about the room,
behind me-
Dancing before the walls and my back.
I stood still,
observing your echo of disappearance.
Your footsteps kept wading through the grass
long after you were gone.
When the doorway began to close in on me,
I pushed hard against the panels
until my strength wore out, like the love
that we once shared.
I fell to my knees in that doorway,
wanting your disappearance to reverse,
but the grass lay still before me.
The doorway no longer moved.
I just waited for you to return.
Long after your footsteps were gone,
I remained,
on my knees.

In that doorway.





Confused

Gnawing on a yellowed pencil,
clock snickering with each wave of its hands,
pencils not in mouths around me, scribbling on papers,
the sounds of flipping pages around me sneer with the clock.

1.) $(6x^2 + 18x + 20) + (9x^2 + 11x + 5)$



Honoring the Fallen



Somewhere in Time

Slowly, Slowly

Through lives I have traveled to get here

Lonely and searching

Always three steps in front of or two steps behind

But never quite with you

I was the dream that comforted, when as a girl you cried

I was the young child you helped, when there was

no one else who would try

The lost feeling in your life you could never find

always three steps in front of or two steps behind

I have moved through the memories and I have returned

Both of us with one past, separated at every turn

And sadness is in understanding and to forever try

Because I am three steps in front of or two steps behind

So in this lifetime

If not my lover, then my friend

laugh with me, share with me

And when I am gone

Know

The brush of air on your cheek in the night

Is my kiss

And

My promise

with the force of love

Somewhere in time, I will find you again

And no longer be

Three steps ahead of or

two steps behind



Somewhere in Time





My Sister



The Hourly Employee

I've become a corporate whore.
Daily, hourly, monotony winds around my soul.
I sell myself for 6.65 an hour, not a dime more.

Smiling, faking our happy rapport,
their satisfaction, my ultimate life goal.
I've become a corporate whore.

I know I don't matter, a fact I ignore,
Because I auditioned, begged, and accepted my role.
I sell myself for 6.65 an hour, not a dime more.

When they're not watching, I confidently abhor,
And when they turn around, I crawl back into my hole.
I've become a corporate whore.

I come in the front and see no back door.
They hide it behind their power and control.
I sell myself for 6.65 an hour, and not a dime more.

I'll tighten my lips (opinions aren't what I'm here for)
and tighten up for the punches, preparing to roll.
I've become a corporate whore;
I sell myself for 6.65 an hour, and not a dime more.

The Scents of Me

I am from a two-bedroom shack full of kids, love, and laughter. With gratitude and simplicity, like early mornings and coffee, bare feet and the sunshine upon my face. Playing outside all day with no worries. Fruit trees and grapevines to eat from whenever I chose. The smell of honeysuckle, and big beautiful roses. Where hugs and kisses are many, words are very few. I am from fishing in big canals, swimming in huge lakes, and a one-room church-house in the foothills below the mountains. I am from homemade ice cream and sliced watermelon on hot summer days. I am from the smell of fish and lanterns and the sound of crickets chirping as the sun goes down. I am from bloomers, handmade dresses, and ringlets in my hair, where money was very little, yet we always seemed to have plenty. I am from the heartache of my grandparents' death and the self-destruction of my mother. I am from the sound of my mother's broken spirit and the many filthy hands that she trusted. I am from the sadness on my baby brother's face. I am from empty refrigerators and scarring words. I am from many self-defeating mistakes and broken chains of addiction. I am from God's amazing grace and never-ending love. I am from a wonderful man and a house full of beautiful children who love me. I am from kisses, hugs, kind words, and prayers, five boys, two girls, long adventurous walks in the park, bike rides, laundry, and busy mornings. •



The Scents of Me

Tire Smoke and Racing Fuel

The tow truck turns off Highway 30, grinding onto a gravel road that we travel every summer. The grinding of the gravel beneath the tires and the washboards in the road awaken me from my early morning nap. You would think that after two years of this routine, I would become accustomed to this ritual. I become increasingly nervous as I watch each passing cornstalk, remembering that today is race day, the first race of the season. The large white tow truck trembles as it moves slowly across the washboards, almost as if it, too, is nervous. I sit up and stretch to see my competitors out of the black-tinted windows, hoping that they can't see the fear in my eyes. I see that I am not the only one that is scared as they, too, are looking down the road in hopes that they don't see their rival rumbling through the entrance. You can see the fear in their eyes as they wonder who they will meet in the competition later today.

As we roll through the gate with the cracked and peeling sign that marks the entrance to Kearney Raceway Park, I wonder if that is the same sign that my dad passed many decades ago when he came here to drag race. It seems as though he, too, has not yet overcome his drag racing jitters as he nervously discusses the weather and complains about the poorly maintained road.

He pays the entrance fee, and we drive onto the crumbling concrete that was once an Army Air Base. Driving aimlessly, we look for the perfect stall to park, one that protects us against the hot July sun and shelters us from the harsh Nebraska winds. I begin to tremble as though I am going over those same washboards we passed minutes ago. We park on the freshly cut weeds and slide out of the truck, greeted by the sweet smell of summer's lawn clippings. Stretching as I walk to the rear of the white enclosed trailer, I undo the hinges that lock the ramp and lower it to the ground. The wind wafts the smooth aroma of racing fuel and tire smoke that I grew to love in my childhood. The aroma eases my tension as I walk up the black and white checkered ramp and crawl through the window of my 1967 Camaro.

I climb over the roll bar and carefully land in my small driver's seat amongst the many straps and buckles that will hold my body in place as the car is propelled down the drag strip. As my dad pushes

the car out of the trailer, the sun dances across the gloss of the maroon paint and sparkles on the chrome trim. I reach around behind the seat and put on my black racing jacket and pull on my helmet, which still smells of last year's tire smoke and sweat. Clicking the lock on my five-point harness, I pull on each strap to ensure that I am secured.

I pump the stiff accelerator twice and flip the ignition switch to "on." Taking a deep breath, I push the start button with my trembling, sweaty thumb, listening to hear the engine crank; it fires and roars to life. I pull the gear shifter back until it clicks into first gear. Watching carefully for other racers, I cruise to the staging lanes where the other drivers are already lined up in two single-file lines. The older racers stand outside of their cars smoking one last cigarette as they think about the upcoming race. The younger racers sit nervously in a trance, staring straight ahead at the quarter-mile drag strip.

My competition pulls up next to me, and my heart sinks to my knees. It's my nemesis in his 1970 Dodge Barracuda that I have learned to hate over the past two years. I have never beaten him, causing a mental block that tells me, "You will never beat him," which only makes the butterflies in my stomach flutter fiercely. I patiently wait for the man on the starting line to motion us forward. While I wait, I daydream again, wondering if this is the same man who motioned my dad toward the starting line decades ago. I snap back to reality and panic at the thought of what I must do in the next eleven seconds as I race to the finish line.

The starter motions to us, pulling forward into the water box to do my burn out; I rev my engine to hear the loud cackle between the cement barriers. The cackle only frightens me as I realize that in a few seconds, I will travel a quarter-mile in only 11 seconds at 120 miles per hour, just to meet defeat once again. Realizing that it's too late to back out now, I press the brake pedal firmly, locking the front brakes, letting the rear tires spin freely until smoke begins to roll off of them. Letting go of the front brakes, I carefully inch forward to the starting line, waiting for the bright yellow lights to blind me from the

staging tree, telling me that there is no chance to turn back. They blink on as my hands begin to tremble again, but there is no time to be scared because the rest of the yellow lights are dancing down the tree now. As the last one blinks on, I mash the accelerator to the floor as the green light glows. I shift gears into second and third as the engine screams, with the tachometer showing the engine's hard work. I suddenly realize that I am no longer scared as all fear rushes out behind me in the exhaust as I cross the finish line.

Realizing that I had paid no attention to where my nemesis was, I look to the other lane only to find that he is right next to me. I panic as I think of the possibility that I have lost. I nervously glance to my competitor's win light, looking for the orange strobe to mark my defeat. No light. I look at mine to find a flashing orange strobe. I won! I let out a scream of delight as the tears of joy begin to stream down my face. I turn around to drive down the return lane where I drive past my dad, waiting with a proud smile and a thumbs up. All of the long hours that he had put into working on my car had paid off. I had won not only the most important race of the season, but the most important lesson in life – that if you put your mind to it, you can do anything your heart desires. •



Head and Neck



With Grace

The passage of time
Is mainly a crime,
If age lending rage
Ignores the sublime.
The gaining of years
Won't satisfy tears,
Or save youth from truth,
To preoccupy fears.

Security,
Tower of surety,
Reveals absurdity,
Powers obscurity,
Renders maturity,
Bereft of tranquility.

Grandmother,
None other,
Lets me discover
And behold
Wisdom of old.
I love her!

A Fine Art

Clemente was excellent at cooking beans. Perhaps an inherent trait passed on from his Central American ancestors, the first peoples to cultivate the common pinto bean over seven thousand years ago. "You gotta have frijoles frescos," he would tell me. "If they are old they will turn dark when you boil them, and they never get soft like this," he would say while pinching a light tan bean fresh from the pot in front of my face.

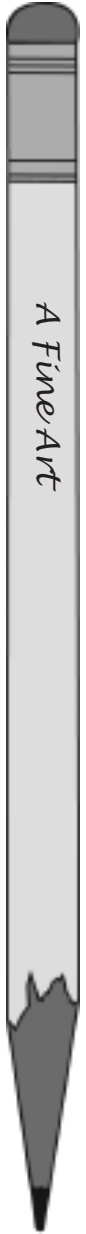
My husband's legume expertise started with purchasing the seed from Jack's Bean Co., a bean warehouse in our hometown. He would buy them in fifty-pound bags three or four at a time. "Mi amor, I sell the extras to pay for gas!" he would exclaim. We both knew that any extra money that might have been made went to buying the kids Sprites and flimsy plastic toys at the dinosaur gas station, Sinclair's, that marked a half-way point on the 140-mile trip.

After bringing home the beans and "profiting" from the extras, he would pour a quart or so on the kitchen table. The hard seeds would sing with small clinks as they hit the veneer oak. Swearing, "Pinche carrones!" his brown, work-hardened hands hurried to catch the ones that threatened to scurry off the edge of the table. Then he would gently pat the beans arranging them in a circle on the table, making it easier to spot the soon-to-be outcasts.

Placing the bean pot in-between his legs, he would begin inspecting the lot for holes, brown-spoiled spots, dirt clods, and any other debris. Clemente would not let a single defective bean into the large stainless steel kettle. Once I suggested that the split and cracked ones would cook faster, knowledge I had received from my father. He lowered his head, shaking it from side to side, muttering, "Gringa estúpida," as if I could not be taught the fine art of bean boiling.

After the meticulous sorting process, the pulses were then rinsed with cool tap water. Placing the kettle under the kitchen faucet, he would turn the water on. As the pot filled, he would swish the beans around and around making a gravelly sound. Hollow seeds and bits of dried plant matter floated to the top and were quickly skimmed off with a brown callused hand.

After all the floaters had been discovered and discarded,



Clemente would let the seeds soak. "They cook mas rapidos when they soak, mija, and it takes the pedos out," he would say as he looked at me and grinned as if I should be pleased that these beans would not cause flatulence.

Sometimes the beans soaked all night. Other times, when he was in a hurry, he just threw them in the pot with water, salero, and a little bit of garlic, letting them simmer until the bodies had lost their spots and had become an even beige.

After the beans were tender enough, once again, accessed by pinching them between a forefinger and thumb, they were ready to be fried.

"Where's a pan?" he would ask as he opened the bottom cupboard door to look. "I found it!" he would exclaim talking more to himself than to me. The pan of choice was a well-seasoned, large cast iron skillet that weighed close to ten pounds, purchased for me at an auction the year before we were married, sort of a pre-engagement gift. With the pan sitting on top of the burner, Clemente would turn the knob to start the fire. Inevitably the electric igniter wouldn't work and the air would quickly become saturated with natural gas. "Got damnit!" he would mutter while grabbing a wooden match from an empty jar that sat next to the stove. With the igniter clicking vainly, he would strike the match and throw it under the skillet, quickly jumping back as the burner woofed to life with a small explosion – the stench of singed hair replacing the smell of the gas.

While the pan was warming up, Clemente would scoop out a lump of Crisco and sling it into the pan where it would slide around all by itself until melted. Picking up the wooden chopping block and holding it over the pan, Clemente scraped minced garlic, diced onion, and chopped pickled jalapeño peppers into the hot oil, which popped and sizzled, filling the air with their delightful aromas.

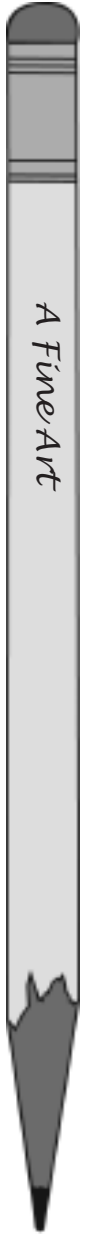
Once they were gently sautéed, Clemente began adding the beans; the liquid splattered and sputtered as it was poured into the pan. "Aii yai yai!" Clemente cried while rubbing his hands together as if trying to hurry the process and get me excited. He would let the beans fry adding liquid as needed. He explained to me on several

occasions, “Ya gotta letta ‘um cook together so that the flavor gets inside,” all the time gesturing with his hands as if to show exactly how this process would occur. By some mystical manner he always knew when the flavors had been incorporated and would exclaim, “Aiee, mi amor they are almost ready,” once again rubbing his palms together and slapping me on the butt if I was anywhere near.

With the bottom of a glass or a pint jar, he would start mashing the beans until they were a creamy brown paste that would bubble and pop, releasing puffs of steam that would rise up and mix with the beads of sweat on his brow wrinkled in concentration.

When the frijoles were all mashed, not a single identity left, it was time for the cheese. “We don’t have any of that white queso left, mi amor?” he would ask.

“No, they didn’t have any. You’ll have to use that cheddar cheese that’s in there,” I would reply. It didn’t seem to matter how much cheese I had in the refrigerator, a new eight-ounce block or a half a block, there was never any when Clemente was done cooking. When questioned about it, he would simply shrug his shoulders and say, “Aren’t they good?” and I would nod in agreement as he spooned a hearty amount onto a plate. •





While Pedaling

In spring's thin shade
beneath a flowering pear tree
I coast or almost whisper
between a chilly veil clutched at the hem by sunlight;
my feet steady the pedals in the cocktail
of robin-song and lilac breath
until beyond the caress
my skin shivers with a lover's memory
that wishes never
to forget.



Full-Speed Takeoff

A full-speed takeoff
a temporary landing
brain took a walk
was weary of standing
envisioning visions
of electric light
illuminating this vision
so I might see through this night
if vision is a test
to see if we can see past it
if consciousness is a rubber band
will you be elastic?
if imagination is a drawing board
some dream of a clean slate
and if you're always waiting for the right time
time can wait...



Manet and Me



Benjamin Hike ~ Graphic Design

Acceptance

Simon and Alex walked through the revolving door and over to the hospital admissions department. The room was empty except for a boney old man, sitting in a wheel chair. He sat lifeless, moving only occasionally and letting out a low grunt. An elderly woman rattled off a few commands to the man in a scratchy, high-pitched squeal.

They completed the necessary paperwork and were led to the elevator.

“How you doing Simon?” Alex asked as the elevator took them up to the fifth floor.

“Why does this have to happen to me?”

Alex gave him a sad nod. He had heard it all before over the last half-dozen months. After all, Alex was probably one of his best friends, one of the few people that Simon could really confide in. They had been friends since they were kids, ever since Simon and his family moved into the house next door.

“You knew it was coming. Your mother’s got the same thing. She’s been telling you to get it checked out for the last 10 years. What did you think; if you ignored it, it would go away?”

Simon bowed his head and stared at the floor. As a kid he thought he was invincible. His hero was Superman, the man of steel, able to leap tall buildings —all that stuff. Of course he had the usual cuts and scrapes that any kid had and still had the scars to prove it.

By the time he was fourteen, Simon had fallen out of half a dozen trees, crashed his bike several times, and was even in a car accident when his Aunt Sara smashed into a parked car. But through it all, Simon had picked himself up and walked away, proudly wearing the invincible cape.

They exited the elevator and headed down the hall. The speakers squawked out a string of doctor’s names requesting them to appear somewhere. There was a flashing red light next to a door, and a nurse walked quickly toward the room. An elderly woman shuffled past dressed in a blue and white floral wrap and matching bedroom slippers dragging her IV pole; a nurse pushed a bed down the hall; a man lay there solemnly, his face only offering a pained look.

They reached the end of the hall to a semi-private room, com-

plete with a private bathroom and shower.

"Here you go," the nurse said with a pleasant smile. "Why don't you change into this?" She tossed a gown on the bed closest to the door.

Simon stared down at the gown as if it were a snake about to bite him.

"When is the doctor going to be here?" he said harshly.

"Shouldn't be too long. Why don't you go ahead and get changed." She turned around and headed out to the front counter.

Alex looked at Simon who just sat on the bed. "Aren't you going to get dressed?"

"Yeah, eventually," he mumbled.

"You might as well just get on with it. You're not going anywhere."

"Tell me again why this is happening to me?"

"Simon, you're not alone. There are lots of people that have the same thing you do."

"That doesn't help. You know, my mother was 65 when her kidneys went out on her. But me, I get it when I'm only 45. I wouldn't mind waiting another 20 years."

The nurse reappeared. "The doctor said he'll be here in five minutes. Why don't you get changed now?" she reminded him."

He looked at her name tag. Her name was Mary. She was short and shaped like a loaf of bread. She had large, saucer-shaped eyes, with a dimple of a nose and a smile that could cut through the most hardened patient.

"Sure. Ok." He looked down at Alex, who had sat in the chair next to the bed. He gave Simon a shrug as if to say, "I told you so."

Alex picked up the gown and headed into the bathroom to change. As he exited the bathroom, Doctor Meek appeared.

"Simon. Sorry, you have to go through this. But as I told you on the phone last night, according to your latest blood work, we're going to have to start you on dialysis today."

"At least I'll be able to get out of here today. Yeah?" he said sitting up on the bed. It was a question he knew the answer to before

he even asked; after all, why would they have him change if he was just there for the day? But he wasn't going to let that stop him.

"I'm afraid not. I'd like to keep you here overnight just to make sure everything works out OK."

Simon responded with a disappointed look.

"Simon, it's probably for the best," Alex offered.

"Fine."

"All right, the nurse will take care of everything. I'll be back tomorrow to check up on you," he said, retreating out the door.

Simon, donned in his new hospital garb, tucked himself into bed and stared blankly at the wall. It had been a long journey for him. Less than a year before he was living in Hong Kong, a city he lived in for the last 15 years. But with his kidneys on the verge of failing, his doctors suggested he would have a far better chance of finding a suitable donor in the U.S. A week later, he was on a plane heading to his father's house in San Francisco.

"Well, I'm going to have to get back to work," Alex said, standing up. "You're going to be OK, pal? You need anything, and I mean anything, you call me. Otherwise you can reach me tomorrow and I'll swing by and pick you up."

Simon gave him a broad smile. He realized how fortunate he was to have a friend like Alex. It seemed too many friends, afraid of sounding trite and insensitive to his condition, chose to say nothing and remained out of sight. And now, when he needed a friend more than ever, few were around. "My father said he'd take me home. But thanks, anyway."

"No problem. Hey Simon, I'd suggest you give the nurses a break. Whether you want to be here or not doesn't matter. You're here, and they're just trying to do their best to make your stay tolerable," he said before disappearing down the hall.

The curtain separating the two beds slid open with a long whoosh. A boy no more than 20 years old appeared, his face covered in pimples. He squinted at Simon through small, grey, marble-like eyes. His coal black hair hung from his head in scraggly clumps.

"How you doing? I'm Simon."

"Rex. What are you doin here?" he said, sitting back down on his bed.

"My kidneys are out."

"Kidneys? How did it happen?"

"Inherited from my mother. What about you?"

He paused, giving Simon a blank look. "Car accident. Just over a week ago. Broke a few bones and messed up a few other parts as well. Doctor told me I'm luckily to be alive."

"Anybody else in the car?"

"Yeah, they didn't make it."

Simon paused, his faced turned down. "Friends?"

"No. My mum and pa."

"Sorry to hear that, man."

"Yeah, I messed up. I was drivin' crazy. Wasn't watching where I was goin'."

They sat in silence, each weighing their respective fates.

The nurse appeared pushing a wheelchair. "It's time for your dialysis treatment, Simon."

He crawled out of bed, his hospital gown sliding off. The nurse tied it in the back, and then he slumped into the wheelchair. She wheeled him down the hall past the nurses' station busy with several chatting nurses, until he reached a large room. The walls of the room were lined with refrigerator-size, high-tech dialysis machines with a bed next to each machine. A pulsating thud filled the air.

He looked around the room. He was finally here, starting dialysis. There was no pretending that there was nothing wrong with him now. He was long past that point. Now he faced the same shock he struggled through five years before when he went to see the doctor for a bad flu and discovered, during a brief examination, that his kidneys were enlarged. Finally, after avoiding the topic for the last several years, Simon repeated what his mother had been telling him all along – he might have PKD, or Polycystic Kidney Disease. The doctor immediately set him up for an ultrasound and a blood test, and the next day, the results confirmed his long-held suspicion; Simon had PKD.

The nurse pushed the wheelchair alongside a bed, and Simon jumped off the chair and lay down. She wrapped a blood-pressure sleeve on his left arm, which would monitor his blood pressure every fifteen minutes during the process. In his right arm, she inserted two large needles that were hooked up to the dialysis machine by clear tubes. Simon winced as they slid into his arm. She placed a strip of tape over the needles to make sure they wouldn't move. Quickly, he saw blood flowing through the tubes.

The nurse explained that the machine filtered out waste products and extra water from his blood that his kidneys couldn't take out any longer. She pointed to a thick clear cylinder that was already red with Simon's blood and told him that his blood went out one tube and through the filter, where it was cleaned and then back into his arm through the other tube.

Simon was overwhelmed with emotion as he realized that the machine was the only thing keeping him alive. He lay there silently and quickly fell asleep. Three hours later when his first dialysis session was finished, the nurse removed the needles from his arm and covered it with a bandage. Simon scooted into the wheelchair. He felt a strange sensation, like he had a buzz from a few beers, but at the same time, his sense of taste and smell were on full alert. The nurse rolled him back to his room where he crawled into bed.

Within minutes of returning to his room, a woman walked in pushing a cart with dinner. It was covered with a plastic, dome-shaped top. He lifted the cover, and the smell of garlic escaped. There was a scrawny steak that looked like it came from an abused cow, a stack of mashed potatoes covered in a brown watery paste, a few slender string beans, and a cup of hot tea.

He didn't care what it looked like; he was starving. He figured it must have been the result of the dialysis treatment. He quickly emptied the plate of every scrap. When he finished, Mary came by and took the tray away.

For the remainder of the evening, Simon and his roommate lay in silence, outside of the occasional comment, watching a TV show recommended by Rex. After several hours of TV, they were both tired,

and Simon shut off the lights.

At 2:00 a.m., with the lights from the hall escaping into the room through the partially opened door, the hall filled with the sound of a woman crying out for a glass of water and a constant repetitive beep paging the nurse, Simon lay in bed wide awake. He thought of his mother. She had been on dialysis and had received a kidney transplant; that was more than five years ago. Now she was just as exuberant, just as lively as she ever was before her kidneys failed. He smiled at the ceiling.

"Rex, you up?"

"Yeah."

"How are you holding out?"

"Not so well."

"Why, what's going on?"

"The accident; wondering if I'm going to be OK; being without my parents; where am I going when I get out of here?"

Simon thought of his own situation, leaving behind his wife and son in Hong Kong and coming back to a city that, despite growing up in, was a place where he had few remaining friends. But no matter how painful his loneliness was, when it was all over and Simon found a donor, he could hop on a plane and step right back into the life he left. But that wasn't the case for Rex.

"You know, I managed to put this off for some time, but now it's right in front of me. In my face. And it makes me realize that I'm lucky to even be alive."

"I guess that I at least have that one."

"Yeah, you do. Hold on to it. Don't let go for nothing, man."

"I know," Rex said meekly. He lay there for a few seconds in thought, and then finally said, "I'm gonna get some sleep. Good night."

"All right. See you in the morning."

By 9:00 a.m., breakfast had come and gone, and Simon and Rex each sat up in bed talking.

"So how are you feeling this morning, Simon?" Doctor Meek asked as he stepped into the room.

Simon turned around. "Good enough to go home," he said with a large grin.

"Well everything looks OK. No reason I can't send you home. I'll get the paperwork going for you now," she said and then headed to the nurses' station.

"I guess that means I'm on my own," Rex said sadly.

"Hey, you know I'll come by and visit you."

"Sure?"

Simon scribbled something down on a piece of paper and handed it to Rex. "Here's my number. Let me know if you need anything. I mean it."

"Thanks," he said with moist eyes.

Simon grabbed his clothes from the small closet and then slipped into the bathroom and changed. He was met by the nurse as he came out; the nurse had him sign the remaining paperwork then gave him his discharge instructions before heading back down the hall.

"How are you feeling, Simon? Are you ready to go?" his father said, poking his head in the door.

"Yeah, just a second." He walked to Rex and stood over him as he lay in bed. "Hey, buddy. You take care of yourself. And I promise that I'll see you soon." He gave him a long look and then put his hand on his shoulder and gave it a firm squeeze.

Simon and his father disappeared out the door and down the corridor.

"Who was that?" Simon's father asked.

Simon gave him a thoughtful look. "Someone who doesn't have it as good as I do." •

Exceptional Role Model

Mother, I'm leaving, I can't take it anymore.
I feel like using my fist to indent your bedroom door
with extreme rage,
Frustration.
I wish I could lock you in a cage and force you
to overcome all of your obsessions,
And the lessons that you should have learned, the concerns
and important terms you repressed in your mind.
Maybe that's why you choose to be high all the time.
You want a quick fix, a brief escape from reality.
When's the last time you even tasted formality?
You're forty years old for crying out loud.
All I want for you is to make me proud, the way I do for you.
But the addictions are twisted within you terribly too tight.
And in spite of all the arguments that have led to a fight,
All the confusion and disorder, the panic and fright,
You might as well have been an enemy to me if I might
Be perfectly frank; I hate you.
But not you as much as what you've grown to be,
All the sights that I really didn't deserve to see;
The pain and suffering you insensibly bestowed upon me
Made me realize, while gazing into your dreary,
melancholy eyes,
You've translated into someone I can't help but despise.

Exceptional Role Model



Shift Change

Lauren hustled through the swinging kitchen doors of The Corner Bistro and set her tray on the front line. Her nostrils filled with the familiar aromas of garlic and saffron from the food being prepared and the stale smell of sweat from the five cooks behind the line. Lauren felt something trickle down her fingers; she looked to see sticky, purplish liquid on her skin. Shit. She had spilled raspberry salad dressing on herself. She wiped her hands on one of the towels on the counter and threw the dirty rag in the linen basket near the door. She tried to gather her thoughts, but the restaurant had not been this busy on a Wednesday for months. It seemed that all of her customers wanted something new every time she passed by their tables. They wanted drinks, soup, salads, a new salt shaker because this one was broken, and maybe if she had time could she bring them some extra bread? Soup, she told herself, let's start with the soup.

She reached underneath the soup wells to grab a small cup, careful not to burn her hands on the scorching metal. Lauren ladled the steaming minestrone into the soup cup, set it on her empty tray, and reached across the server station to grab a package of oyster crackers, only to find the basket empty.

"Damnit, you guys!" she yelled, annoyed. "Doesn't anyone know how to restock the fucking server station?"

No one seemed to pay any attention to her; they were all lost in their own frenzy. Lauren swiveled around and headed towards the dry storage area in the back of the kitchen where pounds and pounds of oyster crackers were stored in boxes on metal shelves. Her eyes searched for the familiar white boxes with red lettering but could not find them. She scanned the shelves, until she spotted the boxes placed high up on the very top shelf, far from their usual place. She could not reach the top of the shelf and looked around for a cook to possibly help her.

She sighed angrily, and wondered why Adam, the chef, would put things she needed so far out of her reach. He must be trying to piss me off, she concluded. She felt bad that she had hurt him so deeply. She had been dating Adam up until just recently, when she

had broken up with him after two years. It had ended badly. Adam wanted to move things along, and Lauren had said that she didn't want to be tied down. In truth, Lauren had decided that Adam just wasn't what she was looking for. Her thoughts were interrupted by a proverbial voice. Adam.

"Do you need some help reaching something?" he asked.

"Yes, Adam," she retorted. "But I wouldn't need your help if you hadn't put the crackers up so high. Why did you do that? You know I can't reach!"

"Sorry," he replied, his words laced with brutal sarcasm.

"Maybe you should get yourself a step stool."

"God, Adam!" she roared at him. "What is your problem?"

"I don't know what you mean." His dark eyes were staring at her.

"C'mon, you know that you've been doing things here to make me quit my job - or so you can fire me!"

"Jesus, Lauren, why the fuck would I want to do that?"

She tilted her head back and let out a long sigh, before speaking.

"Adam," she began, irritated. "You're still pissed because I don't want to date you anymore."

He looked at her then. She could see in his dark brown eyes a faint smile, and then it was his turn to tilt his head, and slowly sigh.

"Oh Lauren," he moaned, seemingly to mock her. "You think about yourself too much." Adam stretched his long arms to the top shelf, and with the tips of his fingers coaxed the cracker box into his hands. "Now, put these crackers where they belong, and get back on the floor. It's rude to keep your table waiting, and besides, you could get fired for that."

Ω

She headed out to the main floor, and delivered the food to her table. Her customers in the corner of the restaurant ordered another round of drinks, so Lauren headed for the bar. She ordered a couple bottles of wine from Jay, the evening bartender, and leaned against the cool marble counter of the bar. She could see her reflection in

the mirrored walls behind the bar. She walked to the back of the bar to get a closer look. She thought her face looked pale in the florescent light, and that it showed dark circles under her light colored eyes. Lauren pulled her long blond hair into a ponytail, and walked back to the other side of the bar.

She reached for the light switch on the wall and turned the lights off. The bar began to glow with the soft lights of candles.

"What the fuck, Lauren? I can't see the computer with the lights off!" Jay shouted.

"Well, I look like shit in those florescent lights, Jay. Besides the lounge area looks way better with just the candles." Lauren looked at him, daring him to argue with her.

"Whatever. Look, I can't see with it this dark in here, so you ring in the drinks."

"Fine," she retorted. "If I miss a couple, then Adam can just take that money out of your tip jar."

"Screw this, I'm going to smoke." Jay ripped his coat from the rack next to the bar, and stormed passed Lauren. She snatched two bottles of wine from behind the bar, and out of the corner of her eye, she saw Adam emerge from behind the heavy oak doors of the kitchen.

Lauren lifted her head and watched as he carried a tray laden with food out of the kitchen and over to her corner table. Adam's face was glowing and his smile bright, as he placed the food in front of her anxious customers. She watched as he carefully positioned the food in front of a pretty brunette and her business suit husband, who could not seem to detach his cell phone from his ear. Lauren was mesmerized, watching Adam's lips mouth the names of the entrees and their ingredients.

Lauren smiled to herself, staring across the room at Adam in a clean white apron, telling jokes and laughing with her patrons. That was one good thing about Adam; he was always useful in helping her acquire great tips. She knew that in just thirty short seconds, he had gained the men's respect, while subtly flirting with their wives. He does have a charming personality, she thought to herself.

Grabbing the wine bottles, she headed over to her table, not wanting to miss Adam's show. She wanted all of her customers to see that Adam was her friend. She had almost reached the table, when Adam turned away, looked straight at her, and winked. Lauren felt a sudden feeling of excitement as Adam brushed past her on his way to the kitchen. He hadn't winked at her like that since the first few months they had been dating. She felt like she was in a movie, at the part where suddenly you watch your life go by in slow motion. She could faintly smell his sweat, and she couldn't stop herself from remembering. She had almost forgotten. She closed her eyes, as if to savor every inch of him. Lauren remembered that in the beginning, she had loved him.

Lauren recalled those first few months as glorious and exhilarating. Adam had hired her on the spot and taken her under his wing. There seemed to be an instant attraction between them, and Lauren had thought Adam lucky, for of all the men working at the restaurant, she had chosen him. Lauren remembered the way that Adam had treated her then, bringing her samples of food to try, making banana desserts especially for her. Every time the hostess would seat a group of angry customers in Lauren's section, Adam came out of the kitchen with a bottle of wine to make them smile, then empty their wallets.

He would watch her on the floor then, from the square window on the kitchen door. Lauren would look across the room to see his face peering out, watching her as if she might fall. She liked Adam watching her, protecting her. She felt safe with him in the beginning, lying with him in bed for hours on Saturday mornings, rising only to smoke cigarettes outside on the balcony of his apartment, their bodies warm, pressed together under his fleece blanket, while the cold, white snow fell around them.

She remembered feeling bad working alongside Jodi. Jodi was another server who briefly dated Adam, right before Lauren had been hired to work at the restaurant. Jodi and Adam never got the chance to go on more than a few dates, when he fell hard for Lauren and her unfaltering persistence. Even though Jodi never held hard

feelings toward her, Lauren knew that they'd broken her heart.

Ω

Lauren put the heavy oval tray on her shoulder and headed into the kitchen. As she cleared the dishes off the tray, she stared at Adam, now behind the line cooking. The sleeves of his white coat were rolled up, stopping at the middle of his forearms. His hands worked quickly to assemble the different dishes in front of him. His dark hair was tucked neatly under his black cap, with a few subtle curls peaking through the bottom. Adam's eyes were dark, and intense, and Lauren could see the half smile on his face. Oh, but he was beautiful.

Lauren grabbed her coat and purse out of her locker. It would be at least another hour before Adam would be heading home. She decided to wait in her car until he was finished with work. Digging to the bottom of her purse, she felt around for a pen, but had no luck. She reached back into the locker for her apron, found her notebook, and a pen. She began to write on the paper, but after four attempts at reconciliation notes, she gave up. She would simply put a note on Adam's car, telling him to meet at her car across the parking lot. She was going to give Adam a second chance.

The snow had begun to fall outside as Lauren watched the lights from the kitchen turn off. One by one the last remaining employees made their way to their cars. Adam was the last to exit the building, stopping first to make sure all of the doors were locked, before entering his four digit code to set the alarm. The anticipation of Adam finding her note put tight knots in Lauren's stomach; she began to bite her fingernails, and tried to keep her left leg from twitching. Adam lit a cigarette, and looked around the near vacant parking lot. He waved to his employees as they drove off in their cars, but he remained standing by the back door.

"What in the hell is he waiting for?" she wondered out loud.

But her thoughts were interrupted by the smile of recognition she saw on Adam's face as a familiar car pulled up, its headlights barely casting enough light for her to recognize Jodi in the driver's seat. To her dismay, Adam reached for the handle of the passenger door,

and got in the car. She watched, unconvinced that this was her Adam, as he leaned over to kiss Jodi on the neck. Lauren felt like she was trapped in that movie again, watching in slow motion, as her life drove away.

Lauren sat in her car, unable to move for a few minutes. Finally, she put the car in gear, and drove over to Adam's car. The note she had left for him was still pressed to the windshield by the wiper blade, but the fast falling snow had dampened the thin green and white lined paper. Lauren felt a strange feeling inside, like she was empty, just a hollow shell. She picked up the note with her gloved fingers; the cold air filled her lungs, but she didn't care. •


Geese at Winter Sunset

I hear them before I see them;
their ancient calls pierce the brittle air.
Pushed by a west wind,
the birds flee the red explosion of sunset.

They wedge banks overhead
so close I hear their sighs and see their bellies,
the same soft shades of snow and grass and cornhusks.

Their slender necks point to the darkening east –
individual bodies with a collective purpose.
They trace ancient sky paths
searching for nighttime shelter
guided by some memory of places long ago safe.

For a moment, I hear single calls, see separate wings,
bodies sliding on the breeze like pearls on a string,
then they blend into a wavering thread,
dividing sunset and nightfall,
winter and spring...
a faint smile over the darkening prairie.



Geese at Winter Sunset



Hand and Moon

Her knuckles curve so –
A full moon clenched as if commanding the tide.

Spit sprays from her lips as she yells.
The tiny village below boards up with planks of legs and arms.

Closet hangers clang and tumble off the bar.
Storm debris sweeps along the shore with the fists of wind.

Behind her dark faceless head, a brilliant light bulb
swings from the ceiling.
She would will the sun to come after the storm.





Faces of Death

Many faces come to mind when I think about death. I have childhood memories from when some of my family members have passed. I also have some traumatic memories from my experiences as a firefighter/EMT. None of my memories of death are pleasant, but then again, whose are? Numerous faces hide in my mind waiting for another one to join them. When another face comes to join, they can all come out to welcome the new face home.

The first funeral that I really remember was my great grandmother's. A petite 104-year-old lady, her generous heart helped her create a full home and a loving family. When my cousins and my sister and I were younger, we would go over to her house in the morning for some breakfast before heading off to school. Until her death, I don't think that our parents had any trouble getting us up for school. It has been long enough now that her face begins to fade in my mind. I am afraid to describe what she looked like because I know that I will forget some significant detail of her face, under its short curly white hair.

My grandfather passed away when I was in high school. His wake was held in a Super 8-Motel banquet room. Although I knew many people at the wake, there were many people I didn't recognize. I can remember Pa's face a lot better than I can my great grandmother's. The roundness of his face reminded me of a beach ball with a flat side where his chin sank in. His skin was as dark as a rich bowl of molasses, with freckles that stretched up his face to the top of his smooth head and the ring of hair that went around it. The gold chain that he always wore around his neck now finds its home around mine.

The morning that Pa died, I went to the hospital before I went to school. When I walked into his room, he said, "What the hell are you doing here? I told you goodbye last night." That is when I realized that he wouldn't be leaving the hospital alive.

Those are the more peaceful memories that I dredge up from my past when I think about death. Perhaps the peace comes from knowing these were people who were both expected to pass before they did. Expecting someone to die is a bit of a buffer to the sharpness of

death; it gives us time to reflect on the person's life before they are actually gone.

However, I have also seen the faces of those who have passed away suddenly, both from natural and unnatural causes. The first face I saw as an emergency responder was a little old lady much like my great grandmother. She had died while she was preparing herself for bed. I saw her lying on the bathroom floor wearing a cream-colored night gown. She had the same short curly hair as Granny. This experience was a shock for me; it was when I first realized that I was going to see dead people as a member of the fire department. The fact that the face was one belonging to an older lady probably helped me deal with the harsh reality of the situation.

The next face that comes out from the closet belongs to a man who was the grandfather of one of my good friends from home. A heart attack claimed his life in the morning, and he was not found until later that day. His white beard stretched up the sides of his face to that same ring of hair that my grandfather had. His skin was cool to the touch, and his death disturbed me a bit more because of my friend. As an EMT, how could I tell her, "There was nothing that we could do for your grandfather."

About two weeks later on New Year's Day, I sat on the couch holding my month-and-a-half old daughter, who was not even supposed to be born until late that January, and my pager started screaming; a hunter had fallen through the ice at the lake. I handed my daughter off to a friend as I ran out the door. When we got out of the fire truck at the lake, we asked the other hunters where their fellow hunter went under the ice. I stood there as the only scuba diver on the fire department and had to wait until a dive team from an hour away could arrive. I felt helpless. When the divers arrived, I stood in the water providing shore support for them as they went under. We worked all day and found nothing. Then about dusk, three pulls came from the rope. The signal that the diver found something had finally come. He emerged from the water carrying the man's shotgun. Being a hunter myself, I took the gun and unloaded it. It was then that I remembered when I fell through the ice while

one that young.

My memories of these faces may change from day to day, but there always remain the constant faces that are in each memory. The memory of each face has a much bigger story than I can tell. I don't know everything about the owners of these faces or even some of their names, but they are still there in my mind. Sometimes not knowing a lot about each face helps because then it appears as just that face, even though I know that there is much more than a face to each person. We all live with painful memories that we want to eliminate from our memories. I wish that I could let the faces of these people who haunt my memories all get onto a boat and sail off into the sunset to create some sort of resolution in my mind. But I can't, and they will always remain in my mind, waiting for the next face to come home. •



Ballerina Boredom



God's Gay Love

There truly is a love unlike any other
One that opens the lips of even a monk
To rejoice in singing and prayer
Fear follows this delicious love
And opens up my drowsy eyes
To stare upon the pious throne
Whom some may even despise
Why can love and hate
Join hand in hand
When he and he
Must part
To make another have a stand
Which hurts even the Father's heart
The Father's love is grand you see
And not confined to the mortal mind
So stop standing between she and she
And love will finally find
The place it dwells
In you and me
This truly is a glorious love
The one God has for you and I
No justice will be dealt unfair
If in your heart you're kind

Djinn in a Bottle

Welcome, welcome, my friend. You are surprised at this shop, I see. Well, take a look around, to your eyes' fill. There are many treasures scattered in this colorful bazaar. But beware, my friend, the greatest among them may be quite hidden, so take care to look very carefully. Remember: no one comes twice in The One-time Cave.

You wonder why? Well, it is quite simple, really. You see, the owner is an original. He is so rich, he does not need this shop to begin with; yet, he took great pain to put it together and fill it with all kind of riches you can either eat, or use, or read, or listen to, or watch, or ponder, or enjoy in a thousand different ways. Of course, he was not alone; he gave orders to a whole gaggle of helpers. They were swift and efficient, a quite reliable lot. Well, most of them at least. As it turned out, the First Clerk was a bad egg; he came back, one night when the shop was closed, and hid his own treasure among the rest. But what he put here was terrible, for it looked marvelous on the outside but held intricate, even deadly traps on the inside. He placed crowns that can change men into tyrants, books that render readers unable to distinguish between lie and truth, good and evil, or jewels that turn one's soul into dust. It was really not nice of him.

Why didn't the owner remove all these bad things, you say? He thought about it for a while, but eventually decided that the many good things he had brought here were plain enough that each customer could recognize them either by sight or by the clues he had scattered around the shop to guide them. Of course, he was absolutely right, and it adds spice to this treasure hunt, does it not? Besides, you are here to enjoy yourself; where would be the excitement of it all if you knew you could never fail?

So, take a good look at this cave of wonders. Surely, you have heard of Ali Baba's cave? Well, this one looks a little like it... what? Oh, yes, Ali Baba's cavern did exist indeed. People think it is just a tale because it happened so long ago. No one of that time is still alive to witness to its existence, but you can trust me on that; I know. I have been there myself. Of course, not too many people are aware of it, especially since the cave is rather bare now; besides, Ali Baba's



Djinn in a Bottle

descendents have discovered they could make even more money selling that disgusting, sticky, smelly black stuff to Occidentals... Ooh! I can't remember the name of it? Yes, that's it, oil. Oh? You like it? You don't know how you could drive your car without it? Well, I am sure Ali Baba's relatives will be glad to hear that. Personally, I don't go out. I'm perfectly satisfied in staying here.

Where am I? Ohohoh! A thousand pardons, my friend! I am hidden behind that big bulky chest, and that towering lamp, over to your left. Ah, no, sorry, I can't tell you more, you see, I am one of the treasures. Yes, I know, it's a difficult choice, and you can only pick six items from each of the wings of the cave. Easy to remember, isn't it, six, six, six? Well now, let's get started. What tickles your fancy? But, stand away from the light. All these chandeliers and lanterns are so bright that it's blinding. Besides, it is often in the shadowy corners that the most interesting items can be found. Don't be afraid to dig through all these piles of objects. Who knows? The perfect thing for you may be at the bottom.

You are almost there! Look well, down the shelves in the corner. Yes, yes! That's right, just behind that dark lantern. Here I am. What do you mean "just a gold bottle"? Haven't you been taught not to trust appearances? After all, I am made of gold; that's not so common. And look at my shape, too. I bet you haven't seen too many bottles as graceful as I. Notice, if you please, the narrow, elegant neck, that let your eyes glide easily to my expansive middle, with all these intricate designs of filigree and gemstones. And then, the neat tapering of the base, that concludes perfectly the whole of me like a fitting envoi to a French sonnet. Ah, I can see, you are reconsidering.

Well, let me tell you that whatever beauty you see on the outside of me is absolutely nothing compared to what is inside... what? No, no, no, nothing of the sort! I am NOT a vulgar container for perfume or liqueur. I hold a magic world within. Yes, that's right, a world of delight for all the senses, a world that makes real your most impossible desires and imaginations.... Oh, is that so? You don't believe me? You think you know everything, don't you? Well, if you are so sure, why don't you come and have a look for yourself? After all, you

have nothing to lose.

Oh, you think you are so smart, doubting smugly that a big person like you could get into a bottle like me, when I am no more than a tenth of your size, if even that. Well, I've got news for you. The only thing preventing you from coming in is yourself. All you have to do is wish it; remove the dark crystal stopper, and voila!

Well, now, aren't you glad you didn't let your antiquated prejudices guide you? Come in, come in! Visit all my chambers, all more luxurious ones than the others, live your dreams, become heady with the pleasure of... you find it dark? Of course, it's dark, you just came from the bright daylight; it takes time to adjust, and... the windows? No, of course there are no windows. This is the whole point: To stay away from the world, to give oneself completely over to the bewitching atmosphere of this magic abode, to become one with it.

What now? You find the place sinister? Well, what do you expect? This is, after all, the Palace of Gloom.... Oh, really? Did I forget to mention it? How remiss of me. Still, didn't I tell you not to trust appearances? Didn't I tell you about the First Clerk's mischief? You should have heeded my warning. You should have appealed to your common sense, your insight; all humans have that, you know, though few make use of it. Well, it's too late for you too, now, tsk, tsk. Pity.

Dead? No, you are not dead, though maybe after a few weeks here, you might wish you were. No, you are alive, but I trapped you fair and square; well, at least according to my definition of "fair and square." Yes, indeed I've got you. You want out? How amusing you are, but it won't last, trust me. For your information, there is no out; you are here to stay. Do you realize, pitiful being, what the Palace of Gloom truly is? No? How delightful! It is another name for despair, depression as modern humans call it nowadays. Yes, and I am the Spirit of Despair, tormentor extraordinaire; the First Clerk's right hand, I might add.... Oh, and one more thing: Notice the long flight of stairs we just used? That's right, now as a slippery slide it puts the finishing touch to this abyss whence no one escapes, wouldn't you agree?

No cries, no tears yet? They'll come. They always do. It won't do you any good though, but, by all means, do indulge in them; they are so utterly tempting.

Are you brooding, maybe? Brooding is good. Yes, yes, and anger too. How about wine and drugs? Have some, as much as you want. They are yours freely. They taste so sweet, at least at first, and when the bitter taste bites afterwards, you just take some more. That's how most people end up down here. Unless, of course, you want to kill yourself. Some fools think their problems end if they do that; if they only knew....

What are you doing? Isn't it a little late to think? What do you mean I don't look so powerful now that you can see me clearly? You said yourself we can hardly see anything here. What are you trying to do? Strangle me? Ah, ah! This is truly laughable. You pathetic fool! Do you imagine, even for an instant, that because I am less than half your size, you can do anything to me? Well think again... Wait, I didn't mean that literally. Just accept the facts: you took your chances, you lost, and that's it; you won't ever find your way out, you cannot... Stop! Stop! Oh no! Not that, please... I'll make your stay more bearable, I promise. But, if you persist in your decision to be joyful, you'll be the death of me. Surely, surely, you wouldn't want that on your conscience.... Stop that singing! Please, please I beg you! What is the First Clerk going to do to me! Oh, ouch! That light is so bright, I can't see th ... Too late, he's escaped! •

Meal of Love

Who in the world believes
I would like to see you kissing
Bringing me to my knees
With all that I am missing

Honing your ever present skill
In the midst of my demise
Flaunting before me a tender morsel meal
In your two toned faced disguise

The feast contains an entrée
Which exceeds that of the lower class
Princely fashioned poise of cookery
From which none other can surpass

A brief pause among the collation
To gather space between the portion
Lips meet again in secret hesitation
To distribute the pleasurable ration

Kneeling here among the dead roses
You have succeeded in dividing me apart
Shredding with your cleaver poses
Making a succulent meal of my heart



Baseball



Fall from Grace

The farm where I grew up was a child's Eden. The large, white frame house was situated in the middle of a half-section of bountiful corn and golden wheat fields and rolling green pastures. To the south of the house stood two isolated pear and apricot trees. To the west mother's vegetable garden, like a patch-work quilt, produced peas, beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, lettuce, radishes, and sweet corn. Tall red, pink, and white hollyhock blooms fringed the edge, like rick-rack, for additional color. To the north stood a large apple orchard, running the length of the house and the wild lawn combined. In spite of the deliberately planted trees around the farmstead, though, my favorite fruit was born on the wild mulberry trees, which seemed to ring the property; the mulberries were popular with my family as well. My mother baked them in pies, but my family and I also ate them fresh with a sprinkle of sugar and a splash of sweet cream.

I looked forward every early summer to the mulberry season. With a productive imagination, a child could always find industrious play on a farm, but insuring no idleness, my parents assigned practical chores as well. I was the designated mulberry picker, which suited me fine because then my reward was to eat while I picked. Unfortunately as the youngest, I was also the shortest in the family, but learned early how to compensate by becoming a human mountain goat; I scaled, for additional height, anything resourceful within my reach. My dad, who was a young adult during the Depression, acquired the habits of a pack rat. Outdated farm equipment lay in organized abandonment everywhere, including within the mulberry grove. This junk made great ladders and scaffolding for me to reach the berries.

One day in early June, when I was eight, I went berry picking. With bowl in hand, I climbed a rusty, antique tractor with iron-lugged wheels. My mind was on the berries. The best ones looked beaded and shiny-plump, like baubles in my mother's jewel box. Not only were they large and sweet, but they easily plucked off the tree, leaving behind the stems. I picked as many of the dark purple, oval berries as possible, and then reached for the white berries, which were even sweeter. An especially tantalizing one dangled on the

next branch....

There is a point where swift, violent action transforms time imprinting events, in slow motion, indelibly on one's mind. Some piece of the tractor I had used for scaffolding had broken loose, and I tumbled, like over-ripe fruit, toward the ground. I landed, stunned, straddling the iron-lugged wheel. My beautiful picked berries lay wasted, scattered and rolling around the tractor in the dusty earth. I lost awareness of time– I could have remained there ten seconds or ten minutes. I believe it was possible I was slipping into shock. After a while, I recognized the need to reach my mother, who was back at the house doing motherly things.

Nearly unable to walk and too far from my mother to call, slowly and bow-legged, I hobbled to the house. It was at this point I realized I was hemorrhaging, although I was unknowledgeable of that word then. Every step I took left a partial, red, size-four foot print in the brown soil. I don't remember if I was frightened or just concerned. I recognized, though, what was happening to me was wrong, and then I started to feel the pain. With thin, warm, red rivulets trickling down my thigh, every aching step became a deliberate effort with the goal to reach the house and my mother.

When I finally limped to the back door, I feared spotting my mother's clean tile floor. Reluctantly, I remained outside on the concrete step, knocking and calling her name.

"Mom, come here!"

"I'm busy in the kitchen, Susan; wait a moment."

The moment turned into a duration. I knew interrupting my mother's work would annoy her, but I was feeling weak and desperate. I needed to risk it, so I continued to knock and call.

"Mom, I need you!"

After a few minutes, my persistence paid off.

When Mother opened the screen door and saw the nearly plate-sized red pool surrounding my feet, she turned pale and caught herself against the door frame. I'm not certain what happened next.... My father was working in a field, and I believe she must have gone to fetch him. I do recall at some point she changed me out of my

soiled and bloody play clothes and into my favorite house dress. It was a puffy-sleeved, flower-printed cotton frock that conveniently zipped up the front; I normally wore it only after a bath. I was lying on a thick bed of towels on the sofa when my father arrived.

We lived thirteen miles from the nearest hospital, so the ride seemed interminable. I sprawled prone in the back seat of our red and white-finned Dodge, too weak to feel pain. My father carried me, like a loving parcel, to the emergency room from the parking lot once we arrived.

A hospital is a large and wondrous place to a child, with strange murmurings and medicinal smells, and whose walls and floors were all glaring white! I felt alone and vulnerable in the examination room in spite of the doctor and nurse's presence. I could view my parents through the tiny rectangular window in the swinging door. They both pressed their forlorn faces against the glass, looking like a portrait snapped by a poor photographer. I recall yelping in pain with each exploration, and of course, this caused them to look even more distraught.

For a child who dreaded vaccinations, the next week was an ordeal. Bad news for germs, this was penicillin time; bad news for girls, the antibiotics were administered via injection. To prevent any infection from the dirty, rusted lug, I received more shots in one week than I had received cumulatively in my life. I was also confined to bed. The good news was I was showered with coloring books, Sleeping Beauty paper dolls, a menagerie of stuffed animals... and it wasn't even my birthday. I also received a stack of cheery cards...some contained a dollar or coins scotch-taped inside. I wasn't sure then why people should pay me for feeling bad.

The post-hospital recovery was an exercise in patience and understanding. I could not ride my bike or swim with friends for six weeks, which was nearly a lifetime for a young girl on summer vacation. My child-mind lacked the ability to process the devastation wreaked on my anatomy. But I healed and grew like the weeds along the rural roadside, and no lasting effects lingered from the accident... except the mulberries in the grove had lost their allure.





The Eye



The Senior Prom

They say that Nebraska is the safest place to live in the United States. You don't have to worry about earthquakes, mudslides, and typhoons. All you need to worry about here is the boredom. Some people go nuts trying to get rid of their boredom. I guess you can call Nebraska boring, but to tell you the truth, it's actually kind of peaceful.

This, however, wasn't the case for me. Some people in this world would do just about anything to rid the "filth" that is plaguing this country. If you don't know what I'm talking about, you will by the end of this story. Why is it that we all hate one another because they are of a different race and/or a different orientation than everyone else? My name is Leo, and this is the story of my senior prom.

6 months earlier

What do you look forward to at the end of your senior year? Many seniors are mostly taking it easy. A lot of seniors are taking longer lunch breaks, and some are just goofing off. Spring sports are in the best time of the year. It can be really hot, and you get a better work-out than in the other seasons.

For me, I wasn't the typical jock. I guess I could say that I was a nerd. I got good grades, and I attended every single one of my classes throughout the year. I guess I'm a straight A student. Look at it this way: you need a good reputation to attend Yale University.

Girls around school always thought that I was the cute one in my class. I don't know why they think that way. I have blackish hair with my hair highlighted, and I have crystal green eyes with a smile to die for. Don't get me wrong - I love the attention, but I still have no clue why girls think I'm cute. They all know that I'm not physically attracted to them. I have more women friends than I do guy friends. Why is it that women like to make friends with gay guys?

My best friend/boyfriend Jordan and I have been together since our sophomore year of high school. When I came out to him, he immediately said that he was gay, too. We hit it off even more after that fateful day.

Jorden has beautiful long blond hair that barely reaches his shoulders and dark brown eyes. Jorden and I work out, so our bodies are healthy. We are on the track team at our high school, and we are both long jumpers. The thing is with the track team, the coach never cuts anyone. If you do your best, then that's all that matters. There is a varsity team and a junior varsity team. Jorden and I can jump at least 19 to 20 feet a jump, so our coach has put us on the varsity team.

But today after a vigorous work out, it was time for us all to leave and go home. It was at least 6:00 by the time we got done, and it was starting to get a little dark. Jorden and I have a special situation with the coach. He has granted Jorden and me time to change after the others on the team leave. He suggested that to us because he knew that we were together and thought it would be safe for us to change when the others left.

Our long jump coach told us to get ready for the next track meet; he wanted us to walk a full mile around the track oval. We were tired, and we didn't want to walk a full four laps. But we did anyway, and we started to walk around and do our laps.

"Have you told your parents yet?" asked Jorden looking into the distance.

"Mother took it quite well. Dad, on the other hand, well, he was pretty non-responsive to the whole ordeal and he went into his workshop to finish the spice rack for mom. I have no idea if he will accept that his only son is gay, but it's my life not his. I'm eighteen, and I'm old enough to run my life," I answered, turning the curve on the track field.

"Well, you know how liberal my folks are," Jorden said. "They were proud of me that I had the guts to come out to them and to face my fear for doing what I did. They were really cool with it and I can tell you why."

"Yeah, how?" I asked.

"Well, my mom turned to my father and said these words: You owe me fifty bucks," Jorden replied as he sped up his pace to a jog.

"She bet that you would turn gay?" I said shocked and trying to

catch his pace.

"At birth, mom and dad made their bets," said Jordan as he started to run faster.

"Hey, man, slow down; I jumped too hard today," I said trying to catch up with him.

"Try to catch me, bitch," Jordan yelled as he took off running.

Jordan is fast, but since I'm a little smaller than he is, I could run faster. I caught up with him and tackled him to the ground and pinned him down.

"Who's the bitch now?" I asked out of breath.

"Oh, please, we both know who the man in the relationship is," Jordan replied.

"Whatever!" I replied as I gave him a soft kiss on the lips.

I helped Jordan to his feet, and by the time we got our breath back, we heard the coach's whistle blow, and that signaled that it was time for us to get changed.

After we changed, both Jordan and I went into the student commons area, which was right next to the locker rooms. As luck would have it, the vending machines were still on, and I decided to get Mountain Dew for me to drink on the way home.

"Hey, Leo, over here," said Jordan.

I walked over to where Jordan was standing, and he was looking at a flyer that was notifying of our school's senior prom.

"Under the Moonless Night'," Jordan said. "That's a really gay name"

"Prom. Whoop de freaking do," I said drinking my Mountain Dew and walking away.

"Leo, wait, you're saying that you don't want to go to your own senior prom?" Jordan said catching up.

"Yeah, why not?" I said walking outside to my car. "Get this, I guess I don't want to go because I don't want to be looked at funny."

Jordan grabbed my shoulder and pulled me around.

"Are you ashamed of your lifestyle? Or do you feel embarrassed to show up with me, or do I embarrass you?" asked Jordan, getting

upset.

"No, it's just that, I really want to go with you.... It's just that I don't know how the other rednecks that go to this school will feel about it," I said.

"You know what I say to that," said Jorden. "I say fuck them. Fuck what other people think if I brought my boyfriend to our senior prom," said Jorden

I love it when he gets all macho and defensive about things.

"I want to go with you, Jorden. I love you, and you know that," I said giving him a hug.

As Jorden and I embraced, a car full of football jocks came by and started to harass us.

Harris Carter was the one driving the car. He was the typical football jock that thinks that he is the top dog of the school and thinks he can push anyone around because of his size. He hates everything that is different in his eyes.

As Harris's buddies got out of the car, Jorden and I started to get a little scared for our lives.

"Lookie here, boys! Looks like we got ourselves a couple of fags here," said Harris.

Jorden and I started to walk away from the idiots.

"Where in the hell do you think you two are going?" yelled Harris.

"Just keep on walking," Jorden said.

"I'm not through with you fags yet!" Harris said as he started to run towards us.

His friends started to run after Harris yelling at him that it was not worth it and to get back in the car.

Jorden and I turned around just when he pushed Jorden out of the way and knocked me to the ground.

Harris got on top of me, held his hands to my throat, and started to choke me. I could smell booze on his breath as he drove his knee into my groin. The next thing I can remember was that Harris was off me, and I saw him clutch the side of his face. Jorden took his gym bag and smacked him across the face.

"Hurry up and get to the car!" Jordan yelled as we started to run.

I handed Jordan my keys, got into my car, and slid through the open windows like Bo and Luke Duke. We drove past where Harris was getting up as he screamed, "I'm going to get you two fags!"

"Jordan, I don't know what you did, but he is going to kill you man," I said to Jordan.

"Don't worry about him; I'm not afraid of him," Jordan replied.

"I just hope you're right," I said.

Ω

As time passed, Jordan and I had no more trouble with Harris, except a few hated looks from him in class. We talked to the principal, and he said that it would be a great experience for Jordan and me to go to the prom together. Our principal is a great guy, but I think he is still trapped in the 70's.

Jordan and I got our white tuxes and awaited the big night.

When the big night came, Jordan rented us a limo and picked me up at my house. When he arrived, he was more handsome than I could have dreamed. I could tell that he was nervous on the ride to the hotel ballroom where the prom was being held. I, too, was nervous, but I couldn't care less. I was with my date who I loved dearly. The limo driver pulled up to where he was supposed to drop us off, and Jordan told him thanks for the ride and told him to leave because Jordan and I would walk home after the night was over.

As Jordan and I neared the doors to the ballroom, I had to take a step back and get my breath back in order. Jordan saw this and came to my side.

"What's wrong, baby?" asked Jordan.

"I just need a minute," I replied.

I finally got enough courage when Jordan held my head, and as I felt his lips press against mine, I knew that everything was going to be okay from there on out.

We entered the ballroom, and to my amazement, it was beautiful. The student council and the prom committee did a great job decorating the ballroom. We saw that everyone was glaring at us, but I

didn't care. Jordan and I sat at the nearest round table we could find. As we sat down, I felt normal like everyone else, and I knew that Jordan felt normal as well.

I saw Harris sitting at least four tables away from us with his date. It was really typical for a football jock going out with the captain of the cheerleading team. It was sad, though; Harris treated her like she was his own property. Harris had this mean glare staring at Jordan and myself.

Jordan noticed this, too, and he said, "Don't worry. Nothing bad is going to happen."

The DJ was now playing the first slow song of the night, and to my surprise, it was my favorite song in the world – Elton John's "Can You Feel the Love Tonight." It was also lucky that this was Jordan's and my song.

Both of us got up, and Jordan lead me out to the dance floor. As Jordan held me close, I had never felt so loved in my entire life. I saw in the corner of my eye that Harris was leaving kind of pissed off as he pushed his date out of the way and left out the doors. I was relieved that he left. Now I knew that there would be no more trouble that night.

The night passed on quite peacefully, and the King and Queen were crowned and shared the traditional King/Queen dance. The last dance was underway, and Jordan felt that we both had one more dance left in us. The dance was so peaceful, and the song was just mesmerizing.

I was lost in the song until someone yelled, "HE'S GOT A GUN!"

As shots were filling the room, many people started to run to the emergency exits. Shots were fired once again, and I saw that Harris had a .44 magnum in his hand. People tackled him to the ground and subdued him.

Jordan held me tight as the shots rang out. What a guy – he was protecting me!

"Babe, are you okay?" I asked concerned.

Jordan was shaking really bad, and his breathing got really erratic.

"I'm hurt," Jordan said softly.

As I looked down, I saw red on Jordan's tux. I saw that he had been shot four times – once in the side, twice in the back, and once in the back of his neck.

Jordan collapsed into my arms, and he brought me down with him. People then finally realized who was hurt and began to cry. I looked up and saw Harris was being taken away in handcuffs in a struggle. I looked back down at Jordan, and he looked up at me.

"Leo, I don't know if I'm going to make it," Jordan said, trying to speak.

That's what made the water works start for me.

"No, you're going to be just fine," I lied. "You're going to make it through this."

"Leo, I need to tell you something," Jordan said, trying to lean against my ear. "I will always love you. Please don't forget about me. Please don't cry. I know where I'm going. I know I will be safe where I am going."

After Jordan said this, I felt the life leave his body, and for once, I never felt so alone. I held his body tightly and begged God to bring Jordan back to me. I never cried so hard before, and even with my own sobs, I heard others crying, too.

The toughest part of the whole ordeal was letting go of Jordan's body, and I will never forget the image of the paramedics putting Jordan's body into the body bag.

6 months later

Now that time has passed and I kneel at Jordan's grave, I will always remember the fact that he protected me from the bullets, and he gave his life for me. I know now that I shouldn't take life for granted. I learned something these past few months. I learned that you should cherish the memories that you have with that person; you should always think that the person is there with you, and he or she is never gone. As I kneel at Jordan's gravestone, I put a rose down. Today would have been our third-year anniversary. As I get up, I feel

the fall wind pick up, and I know immediately it is him.

As for Harris, he was found guilty of first-degree murder. When asked why he did it, he replied that "all fags must be dealt with accordingly. What I did was what is just and fair to today's society." When asked if he would do it again, his reply was so cold that it even made the judge shudder. His reply was the he would, "with a big fucking smile on my face." The judge sentenced him to life in jail with no parole. I wanted him to fry in the electric chair, but you can't always get what you want.

As I walk to my car and leave the cemetery, I think if I will ever love again. Perhaps I will, but for now, the world is mine. I turn up the radio and drive off into the sunset. •

I want To

I want to travel the U.S.
to travel the earth
feed the hungry
and heal the hurt

I want to shelter the homeless
to help the needy
heal the ill
and end the greedy

I want to change the world
to cheer up the sad
fix the broken
and stop the bad

I want to love the unloved
to warm the cold
to light the dark
and
never grow old



Whose Life Depends on It?

In today's society with the astronomical jump in the number of shootings, stabbings, muggings, car jackings and the use of illegal drugs and alcohol, the rare breed of people who provide pre-hospital emergency care services is standing in the shadows waiting to pick up the pieces for the sick and injured affected by these things. Any time of day or night, First Responders, Emergency Medical Technicians, Paramedics, Flight Nurses, and Firefighters make up an elite group of humans that perform a line of healthcare that few can handle. Vomit, blood, urine and feces are just the beginning: lacerations to the skin that reveal the bone it encased due to the depth of the damage; grotesque deformities of extremities from vehicle accidents, farm accidents and falls; and burns that cause the stomach-turning aroma of burning flesh to fill the back of an ambulance are a few more. There are also patients that are unresponsive and can't tell you what is wrong or what happened to them, and the patient who doesn't stop complaining at all, sweet little old ladies that are lonely and scared living at home by themselves, and patients who are confused, agitated, and combative and try to kick, hit, scratch and spit at anyone who comes near them. Some professionals do this as a full-time paying job, and others do it as volunteers to contribute to their communities. In either case, the importance and demand to have emergency care services available is an absolute necessity today.

It is 2:30 in the morning, and the temperature outside is a cold and windy ten degrees. You are sleeping soundly in a nice warm bed with the dog curled up in a little fuzzy ball at your feet. Suddenly, the air is filled with a high pitched shrill that pierces your ears from deep within your dreamland. It is a series of rapid beeps with static filling in the background. As you are peeling yourself off of the ceiling and picking the dog up off of the floor that you launched out of the bed and across the room on accident because of the sudden startle, an unfamiliar voice fills the air, and the instant punch of adrenaline consumes your every thought and action. "Attention Adams Rescue; medical response needed; please be in route to...." It's a rescue call. Someone in our jurisdiction is seriously sick or injured, and

they call on the link in the chain of life that is known as Emergency Services. They need help, and you and your colleagues are called upon to get that patient in need to the hospital alive and without causing any further injuries. The tone of the pager going off, as ear-piercing as it may be, means that a life is hanging in the balance, and when you accept that patient, their life then rests in your hands.

I have been an Emergency Medical Technician-Basic (EMT-B) for over three years. Emergency services is a fascinating form of health care, which is fast paced and functions off of organized chaos that causes the biggest adrenaline rush and the largest amount of self-satisfaction I have ever felt. I am not just any EMT-B; I am a volunteer. I do it because I want to, pro-bono, without pay and on my own free will because I know it can make a difference in many lives. I help the sick and injured by providing care and basic life support to them en route to the hospital at any given minute of the day or night. In order to do these things, I had to subject myself (and my family) to 150 hours of grueling in-class lecture time and twelve nerve-racking hours of emergency room clinical time in the local area hospitals. I did all of this so I could contribute something to the small community of Adams, Nebraska, that I call home.

EMS providers are often stereotyped as adrenaline junkies. In all honesty, I will have to agree with that. The surge of adrenaline that rips through your veins and pulsates your entire body does take control of you. However, this is a very positive thing. It is in the hours of training and the things that one experiences out in the field of duty that teach the EMS provider how to focus, tame, and apply that adrenaline rush for the benefit of the patient. Most people who experience such a strong, intense adrenaline rush act before they think and don't always have the capability of rational, sensible thinking. As an emergency care provider, one has to possess a strong sense of self-control and self-discipline and must be able to channel the thoughts and actions being pushed by that adrenaline rush to focus on the patient and their well being. If you can't do that, someone can die.

I am a volunteer because I choose to be and not because I can't

get a full-time paying job in the EMS field as many people speculate. I volunteer because I enjoy it, and to do it as a “full-time paying job” might change that. As an active volunteer, I am pretty much always on duty when I am within my jurisdiction, and that does cause some interference with extra curricular activities, family time, school, and work, but volunteer emergency services are crucial to several small, rural communities in southeast Nebraska. Without the individuals willing to give their time to our small towns, many lives would be lost. Adams is at least a thirty-minute drive from Lincoln, Beatrice and Tecumseh. All of these towns are equipped with at least one hospital. That minimum of thirty minutes in driving time it would take for a squad to come from one of those other towns could lead to imminent death for several patients.

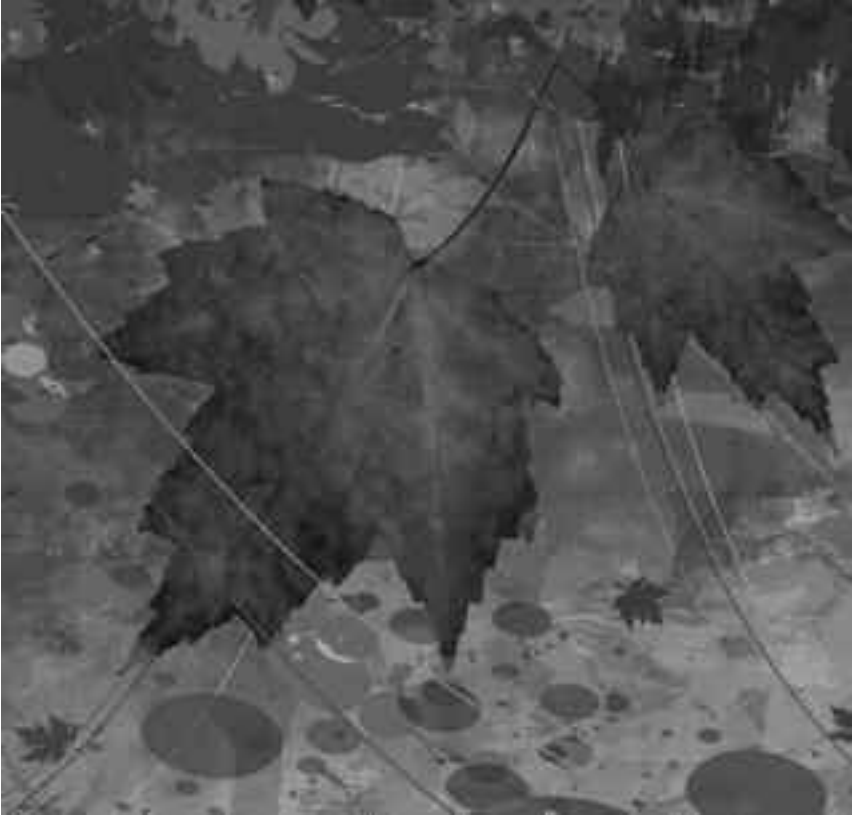
Many residents in the community of Adams have said, “I don’t know how you guys do what you do.” I have also heard some make the comment, “There is no way I could treat a friend, family member, or a child I know.” Although those statements reinforce the fact that it does take a special person to do our type of work, what I would like to say to my readers is this: “If not you, then who?” Every good EMT knows that everyone possesses a limit, and treating one of my own three children would be mine. Aside from my children, when I am dispatched to an emergency call, the question I ask myself is, “Do I do all I can to treat this patient in need even if I do know them, or do I freeze up, let emotions get in the way, and administer no care at all?” Although it is difficult to provide emergency care to someone you know, the reality is that in a small town, that can only be avoided temporarily. It will happen and when it does, it is better to know you did all that you could for that person.

Volunteer emergency service care providers are professionals and stand for just as much as non-volunteers. We may end up delivering a patient to an emergency room with our pajamas on, shoes with no socks, hair and teeth not brushed, and sleepy dust still lingering in the corners of our eyes at three in the morning, but these things make us no less professional or important. It isn’t how we look or what we wear, it is about who we are, what we do, and why we do it.

Rural communities are staying alive in a large part due to the volunteers of the community. We all deserve to be acknowledged and appreciated. An emergency room doctor at Saint Elizabeth's Regional Medical Center in Lincoln, Nebraska, was overheard by a member of Adams Rescue saying to one of his nurses, "I can't believe people would actually volunteer to do this stuff." In many ways, that comment pretty much sums up the point of this essay. We, the volunteers of emergency services, are an elite group that is dependable, knowledgeable, competent, and professional and deserve to be appreciated and respected. Someday, it could be you or one of your loved ones who need help. Be thankful people like us exist because one never really knows whose life may depend on us. •



Whose Life Depends on It?

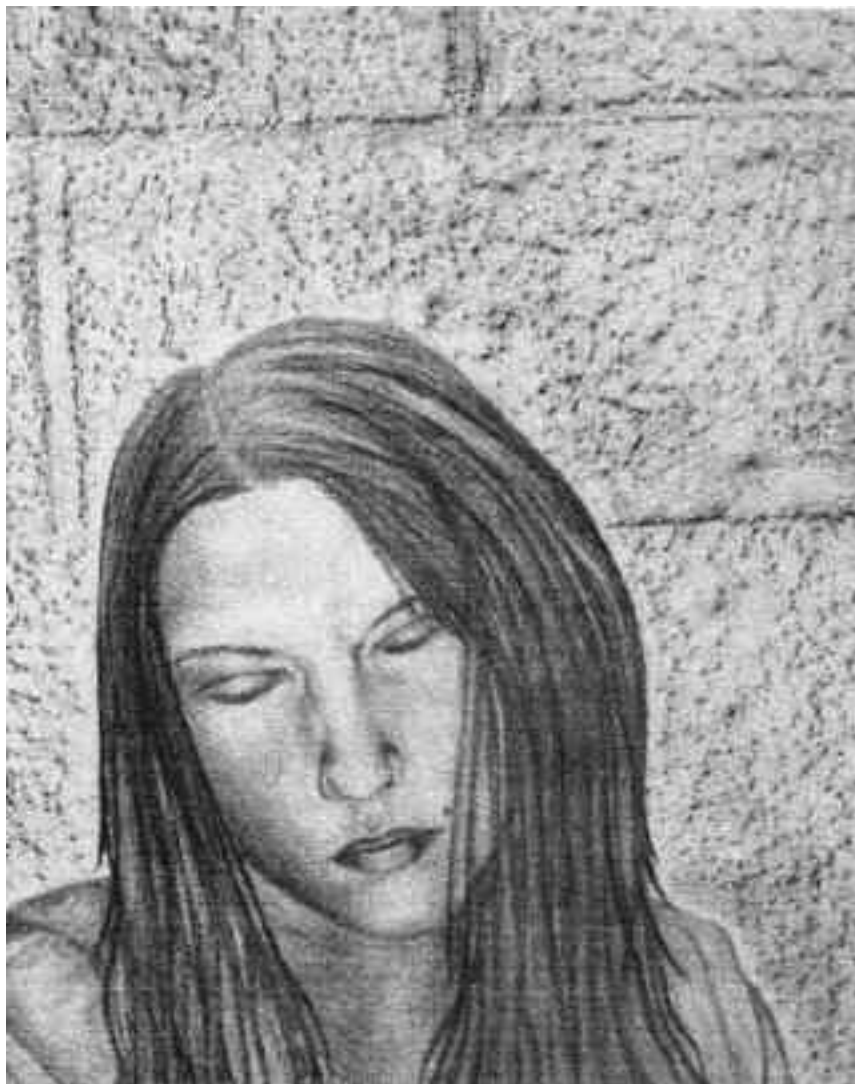


She Was Mine Once

She looked so beautiful when she walked by
with her brown hair up,
and her arms full of empty boxes.
She didn't even stop.
She just kept on going,
making me chase her with my eyes.
She was mine once.
As she sat across from me,
the table kept the distance between us.
As I traced my finger around a ring of water
left from a glass,
I focused my eyes to hers.
I just wanted to slide my hand in hers,
lace our fingers together,
like I used to.
Never let her go,
like I had to.
Ever again.
I had to blink a few times and close my eyes,
to take a second to remind myself,
that she no longer belongs to me.
And try to hide away the feeling,
of knowing
that she never will again.
I would remain in the pouring rain that she left for me.
Waiting for her to open a door that I once had the key to,
but it is now forever lost in the midst of all the pain I endured
on that night in September when our forever faded away.
But the beautiful and undescrivable love that I felt for her will
hold its place
in time forever,
and even though she still makes me forget to breathe sometimes,
I had to let her go.
She looked so beautiful when she walked by.
She was mine once.

She Was Mine Once

The Storm Left Me



The Outcast

The sun was reaching its apex over the town of Valparaiso, Arizona, as my shining Harley roared its way down the dirty, dusty roads. The sign read, "Population 15,000," but that stupid sign hasn't been updated since the town's heyday back during World War II. I knew that only a meager 5,000 souls inhabited this dying gasp of a city. It had been almost nine years since I fled my hometown out of fear for my life. Now as I pulled up to the house I knew so well, I recalled every taunt and insult that had ever come my way.

I had grown up just like every other kid in Valparaiso, playing in the dirt, climbing trees, and diving off the edge of Dead Man's Gulch into the moss-green water some forty feet below. But somewhere after my childhood, later in my teenage years, things began to change for me. Well, of course, I changed as every other young girl did at that age, but something else altogether began to occur. I remember the date exactly, October 12th, 1990.

I began to hear voices –not the sort that a crazy chick hears, but like I said... something else altogether. I was in class taking a math test and getting stuck on a particular problem when voices began shouting answers at me.

"Twelve times three equals thirty-six!"

"Nine times nine equals eighty-one!"

"Ten times nine equals eighty!"

I say "at me" because they weren't paying me any mind; they seemed to be shouting for the hell of it. I looked accusingly at my classmates, assuming they were the ones doing the shouting, but their heads were all bent over their textbooks – save for Joey Brown, who was peering at Alex Dugan's answers. The voices continued shouting different numbers at me. I panicked and tried to cover my ears but to no avail. Finally, I just fell out of my chair and screamed. The teacher, Ms. Hall, came to my side and tried to calm me.

The voices continued, but louder now, and they seemed to have gotten over their math obsession; now they were talking about me.

"What's wrong with her?"

"What a freak!"

"Stop screaming already!"

"I hope she's all right."

"Jacey, tell me what's wrong, why are you screaming?"

That's when my nose started to bleed, badly. All the while, I was being tormented by these voices screaming and shouting in my mind. I couldn't even tell which voices were human and which were imagined, so I just screamed louder in an effort to drown them out.

I can't tell you how long I lay on the floor of that classroom, but it was probably only a few minutes before the ambulance had me on my way to the Valparaiso clinic. There they sedated me, and with sleep came silence.

I woke up later that night with a pounding headache and a lot of tissue paper stuffed up my nose, but the voices were gone... for now. My dad and brother were talking with my doctor. Being twelve years old, I figured I'd keep my eyes and mouth shut for a while; otherwise they might go out in the hall where I couldn't hear them.

"So what exactly happened to her?" my dad said.

"Jacey suffered some kind of brain hemorrhage. We don't know what started it, or why it stopped, but she lost a lot of blood. She's stable but at risk for further hemorrhaging. I'd like to have her transported to Phoenix for observation and tests."

"But Phoenix is over one-hundred miles away!"

"They'll send a helicopter as soon as I call."

My dad paused for a second and contemplated his options. Ever since Mom had died, he'd had a terrible mistrust of doctors. "If it's really necessary, go ahead."

They began to talk about what kind of tests I would have to take and how long I'd be there. It was all boring stuff, so I "woke up" and asked for some ice cream. I remembered back when I'd had my tonsils removed, and they had given me buckets of the stuff. I ate my ice cream and settled down back into bed; I suppose it was the blood loss that made me tired.

They woke me up when they put me on the chopper bound for the children's hospital in Phoenix. The flight was noisy and boring, and I wanted my big brother Jimmy to bring me more ice cream.

I stayed in Phoenix for a total of nine days while they ran various

tests and scans on me, only to find that I had nothing unusual at work in my brain. This relieved me, as I had thought I was going starkers. My dad and Jimmy drove me home, and life began getting back to normal.

Dad still didn't want me to going to school for a few days, but he and Jimmy couldn't afford the time off of work so I stayed at home by myself.

This was nothing new to me; I was often alone for a few hours anyways after school. I entertained myself with my meager collection of Barbie dolls, but after a while, Barbie got boring, so I thought I'd look at the pictures on the mantle, as I often did when my father wasn't around to say no.

I had to use a stool to reach the pictures in their frames on the mantle. After I had pulled most of them down and laid them on the floor, Sniffs, our sleek tomcat, jumped up onto the nearly empty shelf and knocked the single remaining picture off of the mantle.

It was the picture of my parents' wedding some twenty years since, and it was the only one that was in a breakable frame. I reached my hand out to catch it, but I knew I was too late to catch the delicate picture. I closed my eyes, expecting to hear the soft chink of porcelain and glass breaking on our old, ratty carpet, but that sad sound never rang in my ears.

I opened my eyes to see the picture in its delicate porcelain frame floating just a few inches beyond my grasp. For several seconds, or an eternity, I marveled at the picture floating before my hand. Then reason overcame wonder, and I caught it in my childish grasp.

It was a pretty picture. It showed my mother, Abigail Keifer, wearing her wedding white just as she was tossing her bouquet of red roses. At her side was my father, George Keifer, without the wrinkles and gray that he had now.

I admired the picture for several more minutes before replacing it on the shelf. Sniffs licked himself and gave me a look of annoyance, as though I had spoiled his fun by catching the picture.

I was amazed at my power to move things and began practicing

it on other things in the house. Over the next few days, while Dad and Jimmy were at work, I would practice moving things. I began with small stuff like spoons and plastic cups, but as my confidence and my strength grew, I moved on to larger objects like the family bible and the weights that Jimmy lifted in the garage. My nose would bleed when I tried to lift too much, and once I even passed out when I tried Jimmy's 50-pound weight. Luckily, I woke up before he got home.

After two weeks of at home "rest," Dad and Dr. Kilgary decided I was okay to go back to school. I was glad to go back; there were all kinds of fun to be had there: knocking books off shelves, rolling the teachers' pens off her desk, and even writing on the chalkboard sometimes.

There was one major drawback, though; the voices came back. This time I didn't freak out. I figured it had some connection with my power to move things, so I wasn't worried. The problem was that they were loud and distracting. For weeks, I had trouble focusing in class, and my grades suffered for it. It took months for me to be able to control the influx of voices but not in time to save my grade.

By the end of the year, I had an average of 60. My dad wasn't happy, but fortunately he blamed it on my aneurysm and on the doctors who treated me. I dared not tell him, or anyone, the truth for fear that they might think I was crazy. I was later proved right.

I spent the summer of my 13th year mastering my new abilities... the voices part anyways. Now that I had learned to block the voices entirely, I focused on picking out only one or two at a time. Once I had accomplished that, I realized that these voices were not just random things I was hearing, but rather the minds of the people around me. Armed with this knowledge, I redoubled my efforts to master these powers with which I had been endowed.

Out of view, and apparently my sensing range, I practiced moving rocks, attempting larger and larger stones until both of Jimmy's 50-pound weights required barely a thought to throw.

By summer's end, I was lean and very tanned, were it not for my hair, bleached white by the sun's rays, I looked hardly different from

the several kids who came over from the reservation for school.

I did well in school that year. I used my powers to get the answers for tests as well as excel at sports. Even now, I don't feel ashamed for it. I had lost most of the previous year due to my lack of control over these powers, so it was only right that I used them to gain back lost time.

After I began experimenting with sending words out to other people instead of receiving them, I found that I could make quite a few of my peers do what I wanted. Of course, I didn't do anything like tell them to rob a bank or hurt someone; I merely used my power to win a few class elections.

That school year, and elementary school, was over all too swiftly. I spent another summer training and hiking and entered junior high with confidence.

I made varsity for baseball and was a star player. Of course, knowing the other team's plays, as well as being able to propel the ball right into my glove, or out into the stands, had a hand in that. I reveled in my popularity and confidence but yearned to tell my secret.

The rest of junior-high and most of senior-high was spent like this. Occasionally, scouts from various women's sports leagues would come out and watch my games, but other than that, nothing really changed until my senior year in high-school. I was eighteen, and along with my body, my power had grown. I had kept my secret well... until one fateful night - the night of graduation.

We dared not get our drinks in Valparaiso; everyone knew us on sight. So we all piled into Alex's junky van, and drove the 100 miles into Phoenix.

Between the eight of us, we drank something like four kegs and would've moved on to the fifth one if Frank hadn't realized that he had to be at work in two hours.

We hid the final keg in some nearby bushes, intending to go back for it the next night. Alex was swerving all over the road as he sped toward town to get us home in time to sleep some of it off so our parents wouldn't know.

I remember that there was a railroad crossing, and that Alex was too drunk and too rushed to see it. There was a loud sound as Alex jammed the pedal into the floor in a vain effort to get past the train that was barreling by. I also remember looking into my best friend Kait's eyes when the train hit us. There was a brief moment when her eyes suddenly cleared, and the beer lost its effect as she realized that we were about to die.

The last thing I remember was throwing a shield around me, something I had recently learned, to protect myself. My normally whiplash mind was slow to respond. I felt the shield slowly creep up and around me until it finally encompassed my whole body. But I was too slow, and got a bad gash from some metal.

Then I blacked out.

I was later told that I had gone into shock from blood loss, and nearly died while a surgeon tried to sew my jugular back together. But there was little medical explanation for the mental breakdown I suffered. For months I just wandered the psychiatric ward of Phoenix General in a sort of waking coma. It was a full year before I was able to piece my fractured mind back together and think coherently.

I blamed, and still blame, myself for not preventing the accident, and this guilt had obviously shown through my damaged mind and made it into words. For months after I had recovered from my coma, I debated with myself on whether or not to say why I believed the accident to be my fault. Eventually I decided yes.

So when I called a "press conference," which consisted of a single reporter from the *Valparaiso Sun*, I finally revealed my secret.

At first, the young, blonde reporter didn't believe me when I told her of my strange powers. But there is little arguing the truth of psychic abilities when a notepad and pen are writing the Gettysburg address all on their own. After that, I had the recent journalism school graduate's undivided attention. So, slowly, I told her of why I blamed myself for the crash and how even now the memories of my friends haunted me every time I tried to sleep. At the end, both Nikki and I were crying. To this day, I'm not sure if it was true empathy on her part, or if I inadvertently imprinted my own sorrow upon her.

In the long run it didn't matter if I had the sympathy of one journalist; seven years of secrecy were now out in the open. When that story was published, front page the next morning, my father faced an angry horde of people waiting at our doorstep. Each one held a copy of the *Valparaiso Sun*, with a picture of me holding the paper and pen at eye level... without my hands.

Whispers of, "It's a crock!" and "How dare she!" rippled through the 500+ strong crowd that was gathered on our front lawn and in the street beyond.

"What's going on!?" My shocked father shouted out to the crowd.

Allen Tucker, Mayor of Valparaiso, as well as Kait's father, stepped forward. "I see you haven't read today's paper, have you George?"

"Of course not!" my father shouted to the crowd, and my best friend's father. "I'd rather watch the evening news when I get home."

Mayor Tucker nodded; he knew that was true, "Well, George, your girl's claiming some pretty fantastic things here. You'd better read it."

My father skimmed through the article, and finally called for me from where I sat looking out the window at the crowd.

"This ain't true.... It can't be." He muttered as I stepped out in my nightgown, "Jacey, tell em' it's a lie."

I shook my head; my decision had already been made. Across the yard, the garden faucet turned on, and water poured out into an invisible bucket. I suspended the water above the crowd, and shattered it into a fine mist that descended upon the stunned crowd.

Most flinched as the fine droplets fell upon them. Several screamed, one shouted an obscenity, and the preacher declared me a demon "sent to kill off the town's fine youth."

As the crowd lapsed into silence again, I could sense them recalling every homerun I had hit, every test I had gotten an A on, and every promotion my dad and brother had received. As they went over my past, I could feel their anger growing and gaining momentum. The raw emotion of it made me ill, so I trusted my dad to chase

them off and went inside to lie down.

I guess I slept all day, but it was not a peaceful rest. Even in my sleep, I could feel the collective anger of the townspeople, which translated into all sorts of hellish nightmares. I relived the crash dozens of times and felt my friend's deaths all over again. When I woke, I was feverish and sweat soaked.

I could feel my father downstairs; he was pacing back and forth in the kitchen talking with Jimmy. I quickly changed into shorts and a tee and headed downstairs. I knew there was much to answer for. I pulled up a chair and sat across from my father and brother; their faces and their minds betrayed their anger.

"Why didn't you tell us?" My dad's voice cracked as he spoke; he had been crying.

Slowly and calmly, I related the story of how my powers had come to be, and how I was frightened of not being believed, that perhaps I was crazy.... Eventually, I found myself telling of every single time I had used my power for my own gain. The telling lasted into the afternoon and long after the sun had set. My brother and father's faces were blank when I finished.

They were quiet for a full five minutes before my brother broke the silence. "My job, all those raises, even meeting Tara... it's all been a lie fabricated by you?"

"Jimmy... I... I just wanted us to be happy!" My anguish showed through the tears that found their way down my tanned skin.

My brother's fragile calm broke. "Save it Jacey! I don't want, or need your help!" He stood up so fast that his chair fell. He didn't even bother to pick it up before he stormed out of the house.

My father just shook his head and walked over to the mantle where the wedding picture sat in its porcelain frame. "He's just angry Jacey... Your mother's death hit him hard."

I nodded, even though I knew that to be wrong. I had long ago learned to sense the difference between simple anger and overwhelming hate. "I don't know what to tell you, Jacey, other than the town's pretty angry about this. To them, you're more responsible for the crash than Alex was. Maybe time will cool their heads."

I nodded, hoping and praying that was the case. It was not.

The *Valparaiso Sun* tried to sell the footage of the notepad and pen to all the major networks, but they all scoffed it off as a hoax. For that I am glad, but at the time, it didn't make things any better. The anger felt throughout the town quickly turned to revulsion and hate... mostly hate.

Whenever I would go to the post office to collect the mail, or go buy groceries, or just plain take a walk, I was spat at or rocks were thrown at me, or curses were shouted as I went along. Of course, none of the projectiles ever found their mark. I'd sometimes drive them into the ground, or crush them in midair, but mostly I just hurled the rocks back. I felt victorious when they finally gave up with the rocks, but that was short-lived, as things quickly escalated.

My father and I routinely found bottles broken all over the porch and bags of dog or cow crap left all over the yard. It would have been a simple matter for me to find out who did it, but it really didn't seem worth the energy. I knew as soon as I thwarted them in this, they would find some other way to torment me. Besides, the Sheriff was Sam and Frank's uncle; we knew he'd be no help. Lacking any other course of action, my father and I agreed to silently put up with it until things passed.

Things never did pass. In fact, they got worse; we received crank calls all night long and twice got bricks through the window. Yet still we tolerated it... until the fire.

I woke up coughing and gagging and quickly realized that my room was full of smoke. I sat bolt upright and wondered why the alarms hadn't gone off. I threw on my slippers and ran down the stairs to my dad's room, but he wasn't in there. I panicked and searched for his mind, but all I got was a blank. A sob escaped my throat, but I knew I'd be dead, too, unless I got out now. I ran outside, and used my dad's cell-phone, which he always left in the jeep, to call 911.

The firemen were slow in coming; I suppose it's because Lanay's uncle was the chief. In the thirty minutes that elapsed, I found my Dad unconscious and gagged out on the lawn. I realized with relief

that he had only been knocked out, and I had been too hurried to search better. I used my power to bring him to and asked who gagged him.

He spoke one word, one word that broke my heart, "Jimmy."

Tears streaked down my ashen face. "He took the batteries out of the alarms, knocked you out, gagged you, and set the place ablaze."

My dad nodded and gasped as he forced out the words. "Go... take the jeep and go. They're not going to stop until you're dead, Jace. You can't stay."

I nodded slowly; there was no disagreeing with that. The ambulance was in view; they would take care of my dad's concussion.

In the meantime, I quietly started the jeep and drove off into the night. I never looked back.

That was nine years ago. I got this letter in the mail from Jimmy about three days ago. "Dad's gone, his funeral is tomorrow." I'm glad my brother had the courtesy to tell me.

Now I stand before the front door to my home. I guess Jimmy had it rebuilt the same way as before. I reach up to push the doorbell, but I hesitate. Should I ring it? Are they ready to forgive and forget? But more importantly, am I ready to do the same? •



Verbal Portrait



Not a Problem

I see my life
As though it's not my own
There are no footnotes;
I must "write" it alone

Some times I am carried
And given a rest
Other times I am dragged...
Though none have confessed

Now and then I will trip
Falling right on my face
At these times I learn
Where future steps I should place

More often than not
I bear my friends' load
I don't complain about it
Since we travel the same road

Semi-Trucks

"You still there, Joe?" a man called into his radio.

"Yep, I'm about a half mile ahead of your ass right now," a voice responded.

"I'll catch up; don't you worry about that," the man chuckled. He picked up speed and looked closely around him to make sure there were no cars in sight. It was late at night, so his chances of spotting a person on Highway 2 in Nebraska were actually pretty slim. There would be a car every once in a while, but nothing to worry about. He was finally close enough to Joe's fuel truck to see the tail end of it. He switched into the lane next to him and caught up until the head of his truck almost stretched past half of Joe's fuel truck. He could see Joe giving him a mischievous look through his rearview mirror as they were close to being neck and neck. They were barely even speeding. Although they both knew what they were doing was dangerous, they didn't want to make matters worse by going too fast. Besides, they did it a lot, with many different drivers; they knew that they could not make a scene. This was their job after all. To an onlooker, it would only seem as if they happened to be driving closely, or one was trying to get around the other, and nothing else.

As the man got closer and closer to Joe, he kept looking into his rearview mirror to make sure there were no cars or cops behind him. Then he looked back up to Joe's mirror and noticed the look on his face still glowing with excitement. They passed an intersection with one car stopped at a red light; the man did a double-take to make sure there were no sirens on top of that car. Since there were none, he picked up speed a little. Only three more miles, what could it hurt? He caught up neck-and-neck to Joe, finally. He could see into Joe's passenger side window, but the man noticed Joe's expression had suddenly changed. Then he saw why. In the middle of the road, only a half a block ahead, there was a piece of furniture lying there. A couch, maybe, he couldn't tell. It happened so fast. He tried to slow down, but knew his only choice was to plow into it; this was going to happen, no stopping it. Joe slowed down as well.

The man did not panic, though. Sometimes things were left on the highway; people are assholes like that, and this was not the first

time this had happened to him. Of course, last time it happened someone noticed the item miles before he was close to it and warned him about it via radio.

As the truck smashed into the piece of furniture, pieces flew everywhere. The impact made him swerve a little, and he skidded into the side door of Joe's truck. Joe panicked and lost control of his wheel, and soon he was flipped over in the ditch by the road. All he could think about was the fuel he had sitting behind him. The other truck smashed into the fuel tank, pushing Joe's truck a little farther into the ditch. Joe wanted nothing more than to crawl out and make it out of this mess unharmed.

Joe unbuckled himself and scrambled to his door. As he was trying to get his door open, he couldn't help but realize that when death stares you close in the face, you do not see your life flash before your eyes. Instead, you only think, "I'm about to die." Just as he was getting out of the truck, his truck driver friend was running towards him to help.

"No!" Joe shouted. "Run!" But the man kept coming towards him, not wanting Joe to get hurt. He already felt like it was his fault that Joe was in this predicament; he wouldn't be able to live with himself if he didn't at least try to get him away from the truck alive.

A young girl, stopped at the red light no more than three blocks back, watched the explosion in horror and awe as a cloud of smoke and fire escaped from the fuel tank. Her dropped jaw was quickly closed when she noticed a huge semi-truck exhaust pipe charging at her car. All she could think about as it flew towards her was how sorry she was. And how she never really said goodbye, or I love you.

Two Weeks Prior

Sidney was a petite young lady, with a cute, child-like face. She was 16 but looked like she could pass for fourteen. Her hair was jet black, like her dad's. Her eyes were brown; she thought that came from her mom. She didn't know much about her mom. Sidney's mom

died when she was two years old from breast cancer. She didn't remember anything about her. Sidney's dad had been raising her alone since. She loved her father but hated the fact that he rarely had time to spend with her or to get to know her. She thought this was such a waste of their time together. Before he knew it, she would be all grown up, and although Sidney hated the idea of leaving her father alone, she would have to move out eventually. And if they barely saw each other now, how bad would it get when she didn't live with him anymore?

Sidney walked into a nearby record store to get a new CD. She was into heavy metal and ached to go to a concert. She had never been to a metal show before but only heard of them. Her father was not open-minded, though, and disapproved strongly of what he thought the music stood for. He saw it as devil worshipping and a poor excuse to use curse words and start fights. She saw it as a way to fit in. Besides, he was never home anyway; he was some big head at the office he worked at – upper management. In other words, he was a man with no time to see his daughter, ever. She was a latchkey kid and had been since he got promoted when she was seven years old. Who was he to tell her what to do?

Sidney walked over to the rack that had the CD she came for, the new Ravage Revenge CD, on sale for \$15.99! She couldn't believe it. If she understood her friends right, this was going to be one of the greatest metal CD's ever made. Then she saw it, the flyer that would change her life indefinitely – an advertisement for a Ravage Revenge concert in her own home town. She bought the CD and hurried home to call her friends and tell them the exciting news. Then would come the hard part: getting money from dad.

"Please Dad! I've been good, I do all my chores, and I always do what you tell me! Why can't I go?"

"Because I'm not wasting my money on that crappy music when I have other things to buy; I have to keep food on the table and pay bills. Besides, you're not going to die if you don't go. There will be other chances; if they're any good at all, they'll go on tour again."

"But all my friends are going; they're all getting tickets right

now before they sell out. I need to get mine now, too! What if you change your mind later and they're all gone?"

"Look Sidney, you know you're my baby girl, and I love you to death, and I want to make sure you enjoy your adolescence, but this faze you're going through is not going to keep pulling money out of my wallet! It's bad enough you spend all your allowance on those hundreds of CD's you own, but I'm not going to shell out \$35 for you to waste on that concert."

"If you don't give it to me, I'll find another way. I'll borrow it from a friend, or something, you'll see! I'm going and that's that."

"Well, just for that I'm going to get on the phone right now and call all of your friends' parents. I'm going to let all of them know not to let their kids get any extra cash from them to give to you."

"Dad!"

"Well I have my ways, too. If I say no, that means no."

"Fine, whatever," Sidney mumbled under her breath as she stomped away. She went into her room and sat on the telephone with all the friends she could think of and talked to them long enough until they were convinced to at least donate a dollar to her own "Send Sidney to Ravage Revenge" fund raiser. She knew her dad didn't even know half of her friends and therefore would be unable to go through with his threat. After only two hours, she was up to \$20. As she lifted the phone to call her only last hope for the rest of the money, her hand was shaking. She had dreamt of seeing this band for a long time, and what a treat it would be for her first concert to also be her first time seeing her favorite band. She was overwhelmed with excitement and sure that things would work out for her in the end. She dialed Charlene's number.

"Hey, Charlene?" Sidney asked when a voice said, "Hello?"

"Yeah, who is this?"

"It's Sidney, duh."

"Oh, sorry, what's up?"

"I need to ask you a huge favor! I really want to go to that Ravage Revenge concert, ya know."

"Yeah, everyone does. My mom just went and picked up my tick-

et.”

“Well, my dad doesn’t want me to go and won’t give me any money, but I started my own fund raiser. I’ve got twenty bucks so far. I was wondering if you’d be willing to donate. You’re my last chance! If I don’t get the rest from you I have no one else to go to.”

“Well, that’s fifteen dollars, I was gonna save up for a t-shirt, Sidney. I don’t know. I guess since you already have the rest of the money, might as well.”

“Thank you so much; you have no idea how much this means to me.”

“All right, but don’t tell my mom I’m giving that to you! She hates it when I give away my allowance. She always says if I’m just gonna hand it over to my friends, I might as well just hand it back to her.

“You have my word.” And with that, Sidney was going to the concert. When she hung up from talking to Charlene, she could hardly breathe. She had to do something; she was so excited. She wanted to run downstairs and tell her dad that she still loved him and that it was okay that he didn’t give her the money. But by the time she got down there, he was already pulling out of the driveway to go back to work. He was doing a split shift today. Someone called in, but the work won’t get done on its own, he’d always say. He’d probably be there well into the night.

The next few weeks went on as usual. Sidney would arrive home from school just as her dad would be going back to work, or Sidney would be on her way to a movie, just as he was getting home for the night. They never really saw each other. And she never apologized for yelling at him about not giving her the concert money. He seemed to forget all about it anyway.

Philip Snyder loved his daughter. He would do anything for her. But he was scared for her. She seemed so fragile. He didn’t want her to get hurt. He knew what went on at those kinds of rock concerts. Everyone would be banging into each other and crowd surfing; he just didn’t want her coming home with a broken arm or leg. Maybe he was being over-protective, he thought, but he already said no.

Now there was no turning back. He just wanted her to understand that if he says no, even if he does feel bad about it later, he still means no. Who knows what she'll try to get away with if he goes back on his word now? She must understand that she can't throw fits to get her way. And that's final. He only wished that she would understand him better. Also, he wished he could understand her better.

The night of the concert soon arrived and Sidney felt bad, because she knew she would have to lie to her dad. He was still at work, so she'd have to call him, which would make it a little easier at least.

"May I speak to Mr. Snyder if he's in the office right now?"

"Yes, may I ask who's calling?" a secretary asked.

"This is his daughter, Sidney."

"Hold, please." Sidney held on the line for what seemed an eternity. Her friends were waiting on her; they wanted her to ask her dad if she could borrow his extra car. He only had the car to give to her; she even had her license and everything, but he didn't think she had any need to drive it often. Not until she turned eighteen would it officially be hers. Until then she was able to borrow it on occasion, as long as she earned it. She knew he would probably let her use it; it was just a matter of coming up with a reason to use it.

"Yes, Mr. Snyder speaking." Her dad's voice interrupted her thoughts.

"Hey, Daddy, when are you going to be home tonight?"

"Not 'til, late, baby, I'm sorry; I have lots of work here."

"Well, I was going to go out with the girls tonight, and I was wondering if I could borrow that old rust bucket you call a car that's sitting in the garage. Can I, Please?"

"What are you planning for the night?"

"Don't know yet, maybe just a movie. We might try and go see..." Before she could finish he interrupted her.

"That concert you wanted to go to?" he said in a frustrated voice.

"No!"

"Look Sidney, I know tonight is the night of the concert, I know you still want to go; I'm not stupid. And how dare you try and disobey me! And then try to lie right under my nose. I don't know how you got the money, but just for trying to scheme against me, you are definitely not getting the car today or anytime the rest of the month."

"Listen, Dad, I volunteered to drive all my friends there! The parents that are driving already have cars full of kids, and the kids driving are packed, too, so only me and a few of my friends are without a ride. Are you seriously not going to let me go and make them suffer, too?"

"Yes! You weren't supposed to go to that show; it's not my fault you volunteered yourself."

"You're so unreasonable. Why can't you just let me do what I want? I'm not hurting anyone!" Sidney screamed in anger as she hung up the phone. A few minutes later the phone rang, but she wouldn't pick it up; she knew it would be her dad wanting to yell at her for hanging up on him or one of her friends, and she'd rather not answer and have to tell them the horrible news. After she wiped away some of her tears, she tried to think straight. What other way could they get there?

She finally decided; she would take the car anyway. She had to wait a while, and they might miss the opening band, but that was no matter. They would at least get to see *Ravage Revenge*. She called her friends and told them her plan. After her dad came home for a short break, as usual, she would take the car. He would go back to work after a rushed dinner; that's always what he meant when he said he'd be home late. He would be home for dinner, in other words, but would not stay very long, than he'd go back to work until about eleven or midnight. She still might be gone by that time she thought, but it would be worth it even if she got caught.

Soon her father arrived at home like she knew he would. She could hear him rustling around and making himself something to eat. He came to her bedroom door, which she always closed when she was angry at him, and he talked to her through the door.

"Look Sidney, I'm sorry but I'm not going to have you running

around doing as you please. If I don't want you to do something it's for a good reason." Sidney sat in her room and did not respond.

"All right, kiddo, you'll understand when you're older. You want anything to eat?" Still she refused to respond. Although she really just wanted to run out of her bedroom door and cry on his shoulder and tell him she was sorry, but she couldn't bring herself to do anything, not even talk to him.

"Well, more for me then," he chuckled, trying to break the awkward silence. Little to Sidney's knowledge he had a gift for her, sort of a peace offering. Of course, Sidney's dad knew her when she was in these moods and that she would refuse to even open her door to look at the gift he was so proud of getting her. He reached into his pocket and pulled it out. It was a small locket with a picture of him holding her in his lap when she was five. It was her favorite picture of them. They both looked so happy. But he had never framed it; it was just thrown in a junk pile for years. But he thought she should have it somewhere safe, close to her heart. He just sighed and put it back in his pocket. Maybe he could give it to her tomorrow when her temper wore off a little and when they both had had time to sleep off the argument they had earlier.

Sidney listened as her father finished up his dinner and hurried out the door. About an hour later she was all ready to go. She'd never dressed up so perfectly for anything before. She made sure her make-up and hair were perfect. Her nails were all painted a beautiful, shiny, silver color. Her jet black hair was pulled back in a pony tail to keep it safe in the crowd of people. Although she had never been to a concert before, she was well aware of the people in the front, where she would hopefully be, that cram together making it almost impossible to breathe or move at all. She made sure that she was wearing comfortable clothes and shoes.

She looked out her bedroom window to see what it was like outside. It was dark already; the concert had probably been going on for a little while now. She didn't care; they could still make it.

As she opened the garage door, she felt guilty but knew there was no turning back now. She took her dad's old car and was on

her way to pick up Charlene. She drove as carefully as she could, slowly backing out of the driveway onto the street and slowing driving down to 33rd and making sure to stop behind the white line at the stop light where 33rd and Highway 2 intersected. She felt a weird feeling in her stomach as if she had done something horribly wrong.

She began to wonder why this was so important to her, why she was risking the already damaged relationship between her and her father for a concert. But then again, it was just a concert. How mad could he be when he found out? He'd get over it.

Sidney had a million things racing through her mind. She could barely keep her thoughts straight. On one hand, she was the happiest she'd ever been because she was about to go to the best concert she'd probably ever go to. On the other hand, though, she was sad that she went as far as disobeying her father just to do so. There was no way she'd ever be able to live down such deception, not in her heart anyway. She could already see her dad's disappointed face as she walked in the door – that hurt face he always had on when she completely went against everything he said. The last thing Sidney ever wanted to do was hurt her father. She suddenly felt something in her throat and tried to hold it back. But it was no use; she started to cry.

Her attention was suddenly pulled toward two semi-trucks that seemed to fly by in front of her down the highway. They almost seemed to be racing. She wiped away her tears as she waited for the light to turn green.

In almost the blink of an eye, she realized that the semi-trucks were now moving out of control. One of them flipped on its side into the ditch; the other continued to slam into it and push it a little farther into the ditch. Wide-eyed, Sidney watched in awe, not knowing what to do. Then she realized that one of the trucks was carrying fuel. It was too late for her to move, though, and too late for those truck drivers as well.

In a split second there was a huge explosion. The glow of the bright orange fire reflected off of Sidney's eyes as she stared at it;

wanting to shield her eyes from the burning glow but also not being able to keep her eyes from watching. She was hypnotized by vast cloud of smoke forming high in the air. She came out of it just as the muffler to one of the semi-trucks charged at her, as if on a mission to kill.

All she could think about as it flew towards her was how sorry she was. And how she never really said goodbye, or I love you. •



Maddilyn Mae



Jessica Polak ~ Academic Transfer

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Soldiers

Walking through the sand in a distant land
Protecting the freedom on which we stand
Fighting for the peace of one and all
Hoping that no soldier will fall

Soldiers, the great symbol of peace
Fighting against terror in the East
Saving the red, white and blue
Protecting the unborn and new

Soldiers, carrying their guns near
What a sight they are to fear
A mass, the soldiers are walking
These sights dictators find shocking

Soldiers, fighting for the flag
For this no soldier will lag
For citizens, the soldiers fight
The soldiers always keep this in sight

The soldiers are visible much on the news
At home there are many different views
For the soldiers fighting the war is the same
Fighting it much without any individual fame

While on lasting peace, America is bent
The soldier is worried who will be sent
Soldiers don't want to be the next to die
With this burden, any ordinary man would cry

Soldiers, fighting in the enemy's land
Leaving many dead bodies in the sand
To the enemy's fire, many fell
To soldiers, this is a private hell

The horrified expressions they wear
This is what many soldiers will share
Nevertheless, these soldiers still fight
Keeping approaching peace in sight



CLEARLY THREE

DRAGGING BEHIND HER IS A HOUSE OR IS IT A TABLE?
A TRAMPOLINE AND A SLIDE?
OH WAIT IT'S A WAGON! NOW A STAGE!?
CLEARLY ITS EACH AND EVERY ONE, CAN'T YOU SEE?
RISING WITH THE SUN TO FILL THE DAY WITH SPLENDOR,
HER MIND'S EYE IS CAUGHT AS SHOULD BE
PLAYING, SINGING, DANCING FREE
LIGHT MY LIFE MY DEAR THREE YEAR OLD
IT CAN BE ANY THING YOU WANT IT TO BE!

-JEANNINE TOMASEK



