

illuminations

Volume 18 • 2017



illuminations

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

Volume 18
2017

“Art is our one true global language. It knows no nation, it favors no race, and it acknowledges no class. It speaks to our need to reveal, heal, and transform. It transcends our ordinary lives and lets us imagine what is possible.”

Richard Kamler

CREATIVITY LIVES HERE

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

2009

Cameron Koll, "Baby Girl"
Merit Award in Fiction

2010

Illuminations
3rd Place Literary Magazine, Central Division

2011

Katrina Bennett, "Brown Walls"
1st Place Nonfiction

Illuminations
1st Place Literary Magazine, Central Division

2014

Mystery Harwood, "Nebraska in My 30s"
1st Place Poetry

Alanna Johnson, "Descendants"
2nd Place Poetry

Cameron Maxwell, "The City's Outstretched Hand"
3rd Place Poetry

Shannon White, "Black Violas"
3rd Place Fiction

Ashley Cornelsen, "Homeless Dreams"
Honorable Mention Fiction

Thomas Joyce, "The Hovel"
2nd Place Nonfiction

Stephen Kaminski, "Number 9"
3rd Place Nonfiction

Casey Lowe, *Eyes of Innocence*
3rd Place Art

Derrick Brinkmeier, *Not on This Night*
Honorable Mention Performance

Illuminations
1st Place Literary Magazine, Central Division

2015

Samuel Huff, "Snowflakes in Summer"
1st Place Song, 1st Place Performance, Central Division

Illuminations
1st Place Literary Magazine, Central Division, Small Colleges

2016

Lanny Tunks, "The Girl"
1st Place Art

Illuminations
1st Place Literary Magazine, Central Division, Small Colleges

ILLUMINATIONS VOLUME 18

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

Illuminations is published in March of each year. Submissions are accepted year-round from SCC students, faculty, and staff. Email submissions to Editor Kimberly Vonnahme, kvonnahme@southeast.edu, with the following information:

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

Written work is accepted as .rtf or Word files. Submit artwork images or photographs as .tif or .jpg files. (We can photograph or scan artwork for you if needed.) Video files of dramatic, musical, or other creative performances of ten minutes or less can be submitted as MPG4, MPG2, MPG3, AVI, MOV, FLV files. **The deadline for Volume 19 submissions is June 2, 2017.**

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

“Like” our Facebook page for updates, creative challenges, news, contributor spotlights, and more. www.facebook.com/illuminationsscc

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

for Dan, still

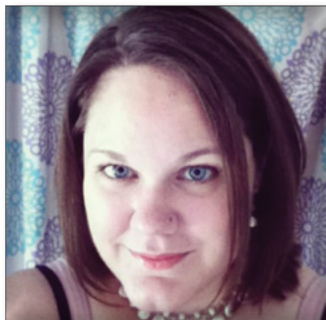
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ILLUMINATIONS VOLUME 18

PRIZE WINNERS

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

PROSE WINNERS



Grand Prize: **Ashleigh Fuson**, “Two in the Void”: Ashleigh’s engaging story with dual narrators and perspectives intrigued Editorial Team members. As one member wrote: “This author does an excellent job of reeling in the reader. Moments of romance, glimpses of conspiracy, conflict, and pain so deeply buried by denial it begins to crystallize—I was hooked within the first two paragraphs and actually sitting on the edge of my seat by the second section. I was especially impressed by the author’s ability to flesh out Andrew’s character in only two brief ‘chapters.’ Great job of letting the characters describe

themselves through deed. If there’s more to this, I want to read it.” Several team members commented on the mysterious science fiction elements within the story. As another team member wrote, “This story raises a lot of questions in the reader’s mind, and that’s a good thing. Well done.”

Runner-Up: **Lisa McDermed**, “A Mother’s Life and Death”: Lisa’s moving story of loss and eventual understanding and peace about her difficult relationship with her mother connected with many of the Editorial Team members. One member wrote, “It’s good to see this writer find a way to cope with her mother’s passing after such a difficult relationship.” Another went further by stating, “This is a quiet story told by a mature person with excellent writing skills. Her perception of what it means to serve—and to receive—is remarkably shared. I vote for this one.”

POETRY WINNERS

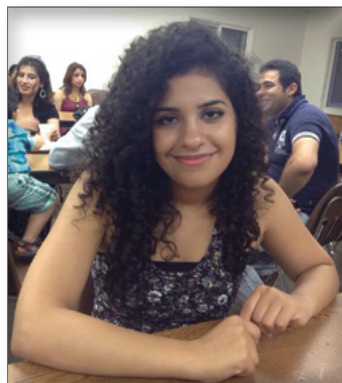
Grand Prize: **Melissa Nuss**, Collection: Melissa’s provocative and sharp-edged poetic style allowed her poetry to stand apart from other submissions. As one team member wrote, “This poet is dealing with real issues here—dirty, mundane, universal, exhilarating issues that end



up changing one’s life, although it isn’t known at the time. This poet writes with great skill and insight. The poems end up being subtle and a two-by-four to the head at the same time.” Another team member elected “Stained” as a suitable illustration of Melissa’s poetic power: “Stained’ is a despairing depiction of death from someone who has taken responsibility for the process and its finality. Caring for a dying relative takes courage, and the writer’s simultaneous acceptance of both the task and its desperate difficulty is expressed in her description of the miserable journey and the tasks

necessary for her mother's comfort." A third team member wrote, "She Stands Twenty Stories High' shows that those who think they are bigger and mightier are usually just the fragile ones in disguise, and in 'Breakneck,' I felt like I was on that bike. I could see and feel the experience, including the pain. Wonderful poetry."

Runner-Up: **Safaa Al-Sarhani**, Collection: Safaa's mournful collection of poems sits uneasily in a reader's psyche, but the poems' power is undeniable. An Editorial Team member wrote of one of Safaa's poems, "I Was..." reminds me of an Emmylou Harris song with its meditation on the loss of present innocence and future potential through the world's lethal brutality." Other team members commented on the poems' ability to haunt with emotion. "This poet has seen bitter days," a team member wrote. "After reading her poetry, I can sense some of that, and that's what a good poet does—moves you with emotion and words."



ARTWORK WINNERS

Grand Prize: **Samah Al-Sarhani**, Collection: Samah brought a frenzied tone to her artwork that made her drawings stand out among the submissions. Each of her pieces brought praise from Editorial Team members. Of "Falling," one team member wrote, "This artwork deserves a top position because it uses good color, the shading is nicely done, and the expressions are detailed. I also like how comical it is." Another team member wrote, "This perfectly illustrates how it feels to have a dream—nailed it!" Of "Caught in the Middle," a team member praised the "eloquent depiction of the conflict between an immigrant's old and new homes. Color me impressed." Samah's "Where My Demons Hide" was widely praised for its excellent execution; one team member wrote, "Beautiful and expressive. The subject's serene expression suggests that maybe she's managing these demons just fine."



Runner-Up: **Anastasia Leigh Finner**, Collection: Anastasia's electric and original collection of artwork brought her the runner-up award and the cover for this volume of *Illuminations*. Of "Sky Captain," one team member wrote, "A very unique piece, vibrant. A mistake gone well. Jumps off the page and forces you to pay attention." Of "Our Lord and Savior Andy Warhol," a team member wrote, "The title made me laugh, and the art is solid." A second team member wrote of the same piece, "This one's quite a trip! It's a complex image, which forces the viewer to ponder and challenge one's perceptions. I really like this one. Let's put it on the cover."

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ONION LADY

CLINTON SMITH • ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS TECHNOLOGY

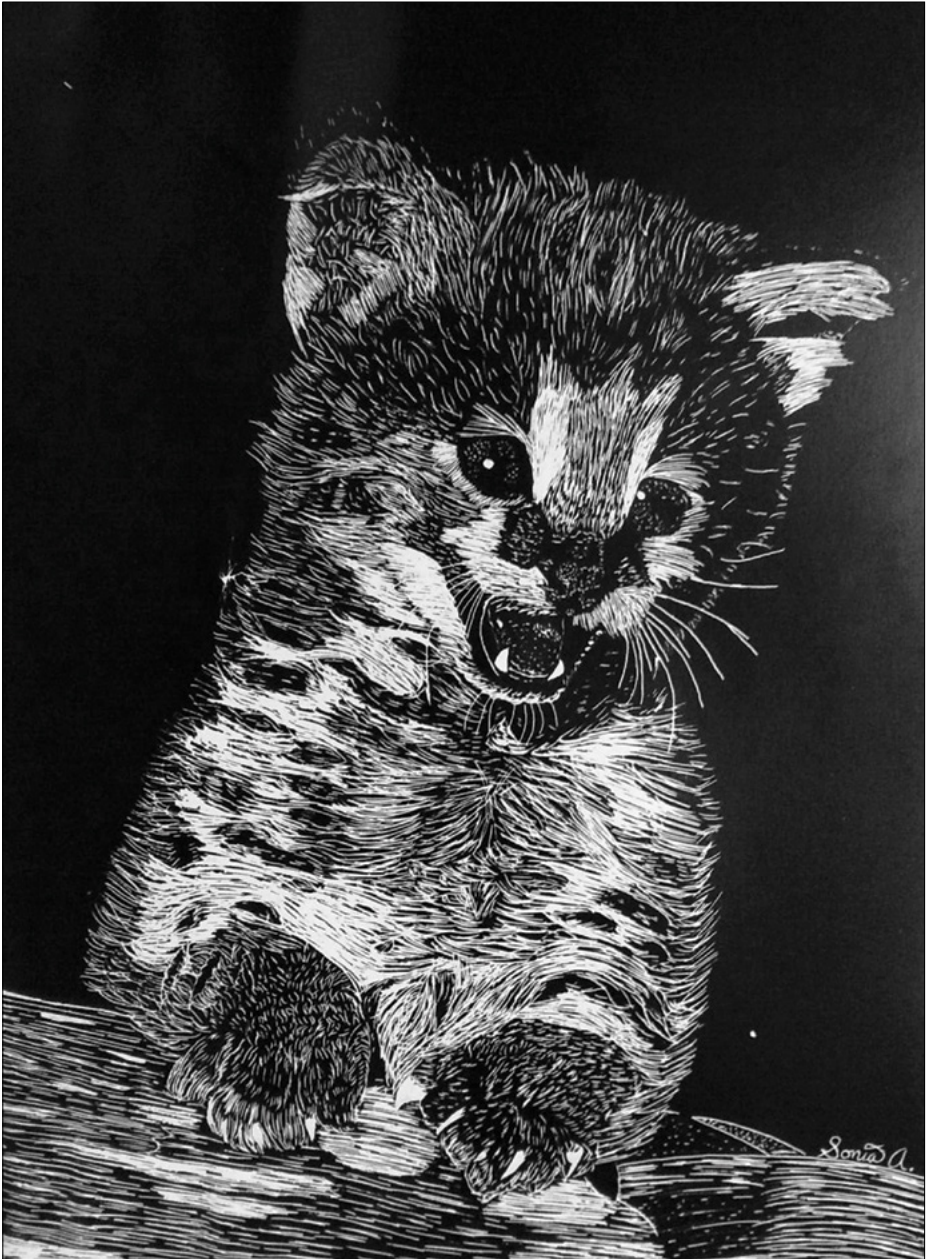
If you could take just a moment
From the lemon-hills and tall grass;
The dew-doped moments on mountains with
A sneaky sun looming,
I'd love to talk about robots.

The A's and B's of yesteryear,
Pigeons and spackled mayonnaise,
Star-spangled barnacles and wholesale hoopla!
Lurking in the unknown shadows,
Were we to cast a light...

Where did my feet go?
Glowing in the darkness, a weird beetle.
I might ponder the musics of tomorrow.
She's the Onion Lady, and though they're quiet,
Everyone suspects it.

WILD CAT

SONIA ARELLANO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



ALLERGIES REDUX

LAURA MADELINE WISEMAN • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

When I had the first dream of broken kittens, we should have gotten rid of the cats. Instead we played Cat's Cradle, downloaded the original Felix the Cat to our phone, watched *Shrek*, *Catwoman*, and that 1980s flick I watched as a girl where people turn into panthers after they have sex. Didn't my aunt find this alarming, seeing a preteen eating chocolate chips and pretzels, watching this movie while playing with the swisher? Was my uncle working? Was there ever any evidence of the nurses' cart? Did my mom notice anything at all? For the record, I've never had sex with the hope of turning into a panther. I've never dreamed of panthers, broken or otherwise. For years, broken cats in dreams prevented me from sleep. I got up hourly to pee, the cats jiggling the door, caterwauling, chasing objects, thumping walls. You said, *Maybe we should have a nightcap. I made chocolate beer.* Itching, I rubbed in lotion, thinking desert air, thinking ick, thinking about what itchy palms mean. My head ached. I thought it was the futon, poor posture at work, the slouch I fall into like my favorite hoodie—soft, worn, and spineless. You brought me my hoodie. You handed me a bar of Cadbury chocolate, just like you used to buy me when we studied abroad. *Maybe you're craving it.* I ate the chocolate, thinking cat thoughts, sitting next to you, holding your hand. We didn't know. How could we? All along the brown tabby, Pandora, sat between us, licking her paws.

DOWNTOWN'S MANY FACES

CHELSIE WEST • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

Leisure time and relaxation are two intangible factors as a college student and full-time waitress. I go to my morning classes, which leak well into the afternoon, and follow them up by heading to work in my all-black attire and floor-length apron. I most look forward to the hour-long break in-between classes, which I use to its fullest potential. An entire hour to myself—an entire hour that I can stop thinking so much and catch my breath. Whether I'm wandering around downtown—debating if stopping for food is worth precious minutes of my hour—or mindlessly staring at the hurried lunch crowds, I find that hour to be a sacred time.

I often sit outside and listen to music while watching the actions of passersby. I like to think of the passersby as part of a production. Each has his or her own story in the film called *Life*, yet something brings them all together each day to walk the streets of downtown. This time is important to me; it reminds me that we're all the same, all equally here at the same time, acting out different parts of our stories. It's interesting watching real life skits unfold before my eyes. I never know where each story will go, and some seem better written than others. The unfortunate ones, the "extras" who are overlooked by everyone else, these are the saddest ones to watch. On these days, I find my sacred hour to be unsettling.

My heart hurts each time I see this man. He's one of the unfortunate extras, the man that society doesn't care to notice. I see him often during my free hour. Our first encounter was at what would now be one of my favorite places in Lincoln. At the time, I had just turned 21 and was new to the bar scene. After encountering plenty of terrible bars downtown, I soon found my niche.

Local music, cheap drinks, and a unique crowd made for an easy decision when the time came to go out for a night. Duffy's Dollar Beer Night soon became the Tuesday routine for my friends and me. The place was always packed with familiar faces or random college kids enjoying a night off from work or studying, yet I always saw him sitting in the far corner of the bar. To this day, a Tuesday has not gone by at Duffy's Tavern that I don't see this man.

He stood out from the unique college crowd for a number of reasons. He was a short man with a long black ponytail, a peculiar smell, and a deformed face. With the attractive young faces that filled Duffy's every Tuesday, it was easy to notice the quiet man in the corner. Above all else, though, I was drawn

to him. I could see the numerous groups of people pass him by, bump into him, or completely ignore him altogether. For a long while, I was just another kid who looked at him with strange curiosity. His lonely demeanor and unusual appearance made him nearly invisible to the rest of the world. I, however, did not want to be another one of the judgmental faces he saw every week.

Positioning myself wherever I could around the bar to get a drink, I decided to buy an extra and head over to that desolate corner. He looked shocked when I handed him one of the beers, and I realized that I might have been the first person to have ever done something like that for him. The look of pure shock quickly turned into a deformed, yet recognizable, smile. As soon as he spoke, it became evident that he had chosen that lonely corner for a reason—communication was clearly an obstacle for him. Although his words were undeniably hard to understand, there was something about his beaming smile and his pat on my back that could have meant only thank you. I still had no clue who this man was, but I did know that on that specific Tuesday, he might have felt a little less lonely.

After painlessly trying to change a man's night, I couldn't understand why I had seemed to be the first person to do so. He was completely harmless—quite friendly, actually. Yes, his face was abnormal, his clothes were dirty and tattered, and his smell was off-putting, but he was no different than any of us—just another actor playing his role. If I could look past his rough appearance, why couldn't anyone else? Were people offended by the peculiar man in the corner or too focused on their own scripts to realize that he was a living, breathing human?

This first encounter took place nearly two years ago, but I still see this man every Tuesday, and occasionally on the streets of Lincoln. It's evident that he is a homeless man, and even though I've had conversation with him, I still know nothing about him. I don't know this man's story or the script he was handed by life, but that doesn't stop me from wanting to make a sad human smile, even if just for a moment.

Now when I pass by him, he smiles at me, and he usually waves or attempts to say hello with his words. He remembers who I am. I like to think that it's because I took a few minutes out of my rare leisure time to say hello to a stranger. When I see him napping on a bench during that precious hour of people watching, I wonder how he is doing or if anyone has said hello to him recently.

This experience has stuck with me over the years and impacted my way of thinking. What made me want to strike up a conversation with this man in

the first place? The looks I get when I give him a hug or buy him a beer every now and then are interesting. I wonder if people are judging me—or judging themselves for their lack of kindness. It would have been impossible to tell just by looking at this man what his reaction was going to be when I sat down next to him with an extra beer—much like it's impossible for me to know any of the reactions or personalities of the other people I pass on the street.

My afternoon strolls in-between classes are filled with silent nods and quaint smiles to all of my passersby now. I get out of class excited to see the day's show, wondering who will be the star and who the extras will be. I enjoy people watching; I like to imagine all the possibilities that brought these people together on the street corner and how their stories are different from my own.

Sitting in a shaded corner on one of downtown's many patios, I often think back to that man in his own dark corner at the bar, and I know that we're the same, just playing two different roles in two scripts written by two different people. I draw inspiration from the different characters and roles. Before I know it, my favorite hour of the day has passed me by, much like the actors and actresses walking the streets. Then I remember that it's Tuesday; maybe I'll run into my nameless friend sitting at the end of the bar. I think hello is in order. 🌸

DAYS GONE BY

ALAN L. CARTER • *PRECISION MACHINING INSTRUCTOR*



RELAX

SONIA ARELLANO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



MY GRANDPA'S LOVE

DEVIN AYLOR • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

My grandpa never said to me the words, “I love you,” and I never said them to him. Despite this, I know my grandpa loved me more than I could imagine. He was my idol. My grandpa joined the military; I joined the military. My grandpa loved sports; I love sports. My grandpa loved to bake; I love to bake. My grandpa loved to play cards; I love to play cards. I looked to him for guidance and support, and I admired how he wasn't afraid to cry when my grandma put in a chick flick movie. He showed his love without saying it.

One winter after a heavy snowfall, my cousins and I took a huge block of ice and carved it into the shape of a heart. Using sleds, we dragged our sculpture to my grandpa's wooden porch and placed it there—calling it our “heart table.” My grandma made us hot chocolate to drink at our heart table. When my grandpa came home, he was furious that someone had placed a chunk of ice on his wooden porch. When we told him it was a heart made for him, his anger quickly melted. He threw it off the porch anyway. He didn't need to say he was touched by it, but I knew. And it was just like my grandpa to throw it off in spite of this.

My grandpa was gentle, but he had a temper—a temper that came out only when he was trying to protect me or when there was a bad call at a football game. The day I ran out of his sight at the county fair to look at an exhibit, I had never seen him so angry. I knew he wouldn't have cared if he hadn't truly loved me.

My grandpa teased me, and I teased him back. The words didn't come from a place of hatred—both of us knew this. Instead, our sarcastic exchanges came from a place of pure love. It was a type of love that I reserved for only my grandpa. From the outside looking in, it may have appeared we hated each other. The contrary was true. His smiles and lighthearted tone of voice let me know he loved me despite what it looked like to others.

As he taught me how to bake, he was patient when I messed up but never failed to tease me about my mistakes later. Even as I grew older and would run into problems baking on my own, I would call him for help. I knew I could expect to hear him say, “You did WHAT?,” as if I should have known better. He'd give his best advice on how to fix the problem anyway. I never felt closer to my grandpa or felt his love any stronger than when we baked together.

The last time I saw my grandpa was a few days before I left for Basic Training. We played cards, and he teased me for eating with my left hand. Typical grandpa. As I sat in my First Sergeant's office at 4:00 in the morning to hear the news delivered, I was heartbroken. But that last day I spent couldn't have been more fitting. Did he ever say, "I love you"? No. But he didn't need to—I just knew. ✨

SKY CAPTAIN

ANASTASIA LEIGH FINNER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP ARTWORK AWARD



UPROOTED SKELETON

WAYNE REA • MOTORCYCLE, ATV, & PERSONAL WATERCRAFT TECHNOLOGY



PROFILE OF A FARMHOUSE

ELLEN KRATZER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

The July sun shone down and warmed us as we stepped off the porch. To my right, the neighbor's pond sparkled like diamonds in the afternoon light. My cousin and I decided to stroll along the countryside that neighbored her Iowa farm. Gravel crunched beneath our feet as we trudged along. 'F' Avenue unfurled before us: two miles of unimpressive gravel road. Dexter, my cousin's dog, bounded ahead of us and trotted down into the ditch before running back up and across the street to check out the other ditch. Dexter's black and white mottled coat told of his mix between Australian shepherd, Border Collie, and a few other breeds. Always full of hyperactive energy, he bounded far ahead of us, looking back only once or twice to make sure we were still alive. To our right lay a cornfield, the stalks gleaming green in the sun. To the left lay a field with a short green crop that shone silver-green under the powerful influence of the sun.

We walked for a while in companionable silence before Carrie asked, "Hey, Ellie, do you want to go to the abandoned house? It's only a quarter mile out."

"Sure!" I agreed readily. I loved old houses. We came to the first crossroad and turned right. A farmhouse stood sentinel on the corner with a barn out back, a staple look for rural Iowa. I glanced down at the corner ditch where rain water had pooled. Some minnows, probably washed up from the nearby creek, swam in the water. A wild tree grew next to the ditch and shadowed the corner beautifully, creating the illusion that the small rain-water puddle was a scenic pond.

The gravel road turned into plain dirt right before we reached the drive to the abandoned house. The house stood a hundred feet back from the road and resembled a haunted house from a cartoon. The white paint peeled back from the weathered wood, leaving it gray with white specks. The front door stood open, and the screen door, propped at a crazy angle, stood off its hinges. The roof of the porch sagged. From a distance, the shingles appeared to be a weird shade of green, and some parts of the roof lay bare, stripped by years of winds and snows. A rusted weather vane rose from the roof and pointed to the blue summer sky dotted with clouds. Carrie and I trudged up the gravel driveway and into the overgrown yard. The grass lay flat, too overgrown to stand. Bush-like weeds grew stiff enough to stand tall. They brushed my hips as I climbed through the mess of brush toward the house.

One large tree grew on the west side of the house. It rose majestically, splitting at its base into three trunks. The silvery green leaves rustled in the breeze. This tree, I supposed, must have been planted on purpose. It stood larger,

more mature, than the five others that sprang up haphazardly in the yard. They were ugly, gangly trees that grew unplanned and were badly placed. One grew in front of the house and, had the house been livable, would have blocked the view from inside. Another sapling sprang up right next to the house's foundation and clawed at the shattered window on the east side.

We approached the house cautiously from the west. That side of the house presented a shabby lean-to where residents could kick off their shoes or store a broom. The door was gone, ripped off its hinges by a bygone wind. The floor held a striped, multicolored rug (an eyesore not from this century) and lay littered with dirt and loose boards fallen from the siding. Through the lean-to doorway lay the doorway (also missing its door) to the main house. The shadowy interior projected a sense of mystery. We walked a few paces more and discovered the exterior stairs to the basement—the door slightly ajar, displaying a dark, foggy interior.

At the front of the house, we peered into the window wells that looked into the basement. It looked similar to the lean-to with debris and trash on the floor, but strangely, a stove stood angling away from the wall, not connected to anything. The ramshackle placement seemed eerie to me, and I wondered how it had gotten there. On the east side of the house, we carefully picked our way around glass fragments (and one completely intact window pane that lay on the ground) and peered into the windows. That side gave us a better view of the interior. The main floor seemed to be one open room, maybe two. The floor had an old rug, tattered, dingy, and crumpled. The wooden floor looked rough and splintery from laying open to the elements. Trash lay scattered about the room, probably left by the drug dealers who had allegedly used this site as their headquarters a decade ago. The staircase caught my attention and held it fast. It looked narrow with walls on either side of it, but one could see, even from our imperfect angle, that it had an intriguing curve to it, like that of a medieval castle. I wished then, more than ever, that we could go inside.

“Do you think we could at least go into the basement?” I asked my cousin. “There’s no way we could fall through the floor there.”

Carrie looked at me like I was slightly crazy. “But Ellie, the rest of the house could fall on us,” she pointed out wisely. I didn’t argue that point; I just continued looking at the melancholy scene before me.

We moved away from the house and looked at the outbuildings. Two different storage sheds stood, one to the east of the house, one to the north. One still rose stately from the ground, weathered, but mostly intact, while the other leaned crazily, having completely collapsed on one end. On our way to the barn, I stopped when I saw the hydrant, so like my own. A long pipe of brushed

steel rose from the ground, crowned with an orange spout that had a handle like a maimed “D.” “Des Moines, IOWA,” it read. The orange paint faded slightly in the sun, but other than that, it looked exactly like the well pump in my own backyard.

The barn stood in much better condition than the house. It rose tall and proud. The wood had grayed and weathered, but other than that, it looked brand new. We peered inside at the dirt floor. It lay wide open and empty. Because it still seemed sturdy and sound, Carrie and I braved entering this building. The dirt floor sat empty with a shin-high board separating it into two parts.

“We should go up to the loft,” I suggested. It took a few minutes of deliberating, but eventually we reached the conclusion that it would be safe to try. We hopped the board and climbed up the ladder. It led out of a square hole to the loft, which was a huge wooden floor. The loft had only four columns of square wood post to break up the open layout.

“Can’t you imagine having a dance here?” Carrie breathed. I could. I saw the lights strung up across the rafters while country music twanged out of a stereo and people line-danced and laughed. This open floor that was in near-perfect condition, with sunlight streaming in through the one window, brought a much happier picture to mind than the dilapidated house.

After tiring of trudging through knee-high grass to explore old buildings that no longer served a purpose, we started back to Carrie’s house. At the street, I stopped and looked back. The house was hauntingly sad, but also beautiful in an artistic way I could never explain. Once a family called this place home. Once soup simmered in a pot on a stove while fresh-baked bread filled the house with its aroma. Laughter rose in the rooms, and children ran about underfoot—but not anymore. The once loved house stood doomed to suffer a lonely end, worn down gradually by the elements until one day there would be nothing left of it. The thought saddened me.

Quietly, we walked home while admiring the beauty of the summer day. The fields rippled in the wind, birds called to one another, and the smell of summer soaked the air around us. White-gray clouds spread across the blue sky the way a puddle slowly spread its edges. In the distance, an old windmill stood silhouetted against the gray that hailed the possible coming of a warm summer’s rain. By the time we reached the end of the street, the rain had started to fall, splashing into the pool in the ditch corner and promising new life for the crops and grass. We jogged down ‘F’ Avenue toward the welcoming light of home and, like countless others, forgot the lonely house behind us. ❀

EAT THE ICE CREAM

ERI SUE RHODES • HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY

DEDICATED TO DAVID JESSE KLUKAS (1934-2016)

*Though he is gone, his legacy of laughter, optimism, and love
lives on in my dad, Mark Klukas*

I was blessed beyond words when my mama married Mark. Not only did I get Mark, the best dad a girl could ask for, but I was immediately accepted into his family—acquiring a new aunt, an extra and truly wonderful grandma, and something I had been lacking—a grandpa.

It didn't take long to see where Mark got the “best dad ever” gene. It seemed that every time Grandma and Grandpa came to visit, Grandpa would cheerfully (Grandpa was always cheerful) do work on my Aunt Cheri's house wherever it needed it—something Mark would do every time he came to my house, too. On one such occasion, Mark and Grandpa added a deck to Aunt Cheri's house. Under their patient (Grandpa was always patient) tutelage, I learned about the importance of measuring twice and cutting once and about how not to swing a hammer like a girl. This wisdom has served me well over the years.

But by far the most important lesson I learned from Grandpa came when I visited him and Grandma at their beautiful home in Lima, OH. I call this lesson “order the chocolate ice cream.” One beautiful sunny day on my vacation, Grandpa took me for a ride with the top down on his MG. We scooted over for ice cream (Grandpa always loved ice cream), and he let this clumsy girl order whatever she wanted—in this case, a giant chocolate cone. Grandpa watched with a mix of horror and amusement as I quickly became covered in chocolate ice cream.

When we parked that MG back at their house, he stared at me a while before saying, “Well, we can't let Grandma see you like this!” He then led me to the backyard to hose me off and, at least for a while, Grandma was none the wiser about what a mess Grandpa had let me make of myself. When I find myself too caught up in the minutiae of life and sweating the small stuff, I think about Grandpa in his prized MG letting me cover myself in chocolate ice cream, and I relax (Grandpa was always relaxed).

I'm grown now with two sons of my own, one of which is named after my dad, Joshua Mark. Both boys have my big blue eyes, but inexplicably, they also have Grandpa Klukas's twinkle of mischief and amusement in them.

Genetically, of course, it's impossible, but I know Grandpa believed as I do that with God, all things are possible. I said at the beginning that I knew where Mark got his "best dad ever" gene. Now, watching him with my sons, I know where he got the "best grandpa ever" gene, too. Genetically, I was never really Grandpa's, I suppose, but in his heart and mine, I was his only granddaughter, and I never doubted how much he loved me. He gave me the experience of having a grandpa, and he taught me how to live an entire life with positivity, kindness, patience, mischief and, most importantly, good humor.

I love you, Grandpa; I am so thankful for the life lessons, and I am grateful that my boys got a chance to know you. ❁

BLUE EGG AMID GREENERY

LAURIE GRACE JOHNSON • COMPUTER AIDED DESIGN & DRAFTING



SNOW TREE

KENT REINHARD • PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY INSTRUCTOR



SUN DAWG

RICHARD HADLEY • SPEECH INSTRUCTOR



THE ASPEN WOOD

AURELIA LONDON • OFFICE PROFESSIONAL

Where do I live? I live in a cold and bitter place where it snows. The ice never dances; it is immovable; the winter's cold as my lonely soul. My little white house is in the center of a wood of naked aspen trees. And the fall, spring, and summer sleep all year long.

In the aspen wood, animals roam and play in white sheets upon the ground. And the snow owl appears every day. I, being in my black heavy cloak with the hood upon my head that carries burdens, I wander with my white flying friend beside me.

North, four men lived. They each lived in a tent of their own made from elk hides that were supported by long aspen logs and rocks long ago. When they are away, I still roam the blinding white trail thinking of them while the foxes follow, dragging their tired, bloody wet paws. My four friends and forest companions are gone for good; they have died....

So now I walk alone and weep while I sweep the memories away on my cold brown floor in my little white house that stands alone in the center of a dead, gray aspen wood where you rub your hands to stay warm.

ICE RINGS

KENT REINHARD • PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY INSTRUCTOR



ARTWORK COLLECTION

KENNETH FREE FOX • CUSTODIAN, CEC

NATIVE AMERICAN ART I



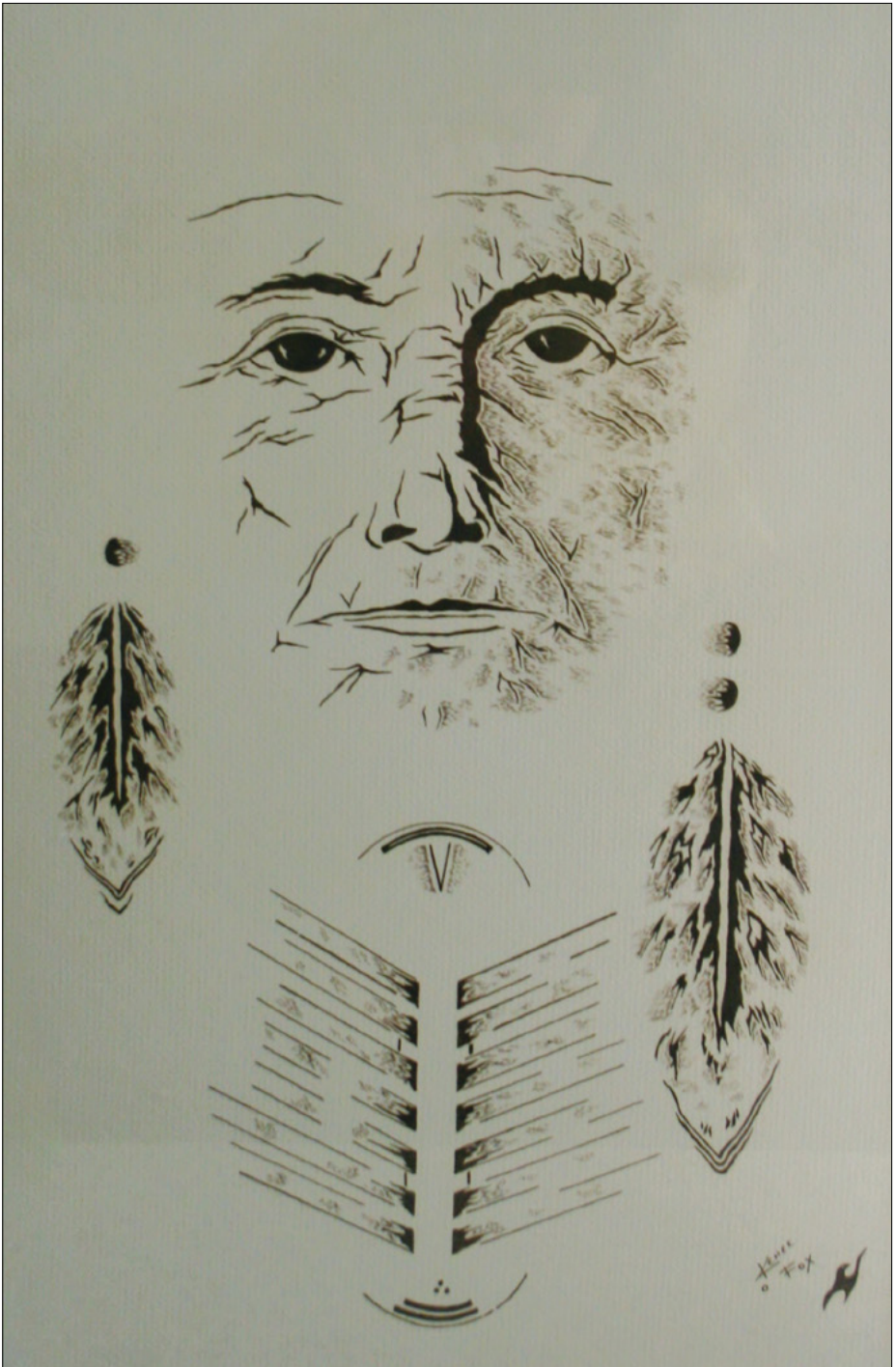
NATIVE AMERICAN ART II



NATIVE AMERICAN ART III



NATIVE AMERICAN ART IV



FALLING DOWN

OLIVIA SHELBOURN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

What if I fall? Oh, but my darling, what if you fly? (ERIN HANSON)

I believe in falling down. As a tumbling toddler, I was covered in scrapes and bruises. As a child, I was everywhere I shouldn't have been. I would be found on top of bookshelves or scaling the side of the house. I was testing the limits of my abilities. One of my favorite stories of my daredevil blunders was when I was about five or six. A daycare worker had witnessed me running on top of an outdoor picnic table and then making a giant leap to grab onto a large metal pole in an effort to slide down like a firefighter. Unfortunately, I had miscalculated and instead smacked my face into the pole, giving myself a fat and bloody lip.

"What were you thinking!?" my father scolded me that afternoon. "What possessed you to believe that was a good idea?"

Five-year-old me looked up at him innocently and said, "Well...I made it the first time." When I play roller derby, this logic still applies.

I suit up in full protective gear and repeatedly get knocked down by women much bigger and much more skilled than I. My skate boots are hopelessly scuffed, and my knee pads are scratched and cracked. Sometimes I pop right back up after I fall. Sometimes it takes me a minute to catch my breath. Sometimes pain shoots up my limbs so much that I can do nothing but crawl off the track while fighting back tears.

I believe with every collapse to the ground that I'm learning something. I believe with every re-entry that I'm showing I will not give up. I believe with every embarrassing blunder I am showing that I am human, I make mistakes, and I am not perfect.

After every game, I am met by fans that tell me repeatedly, "I could never do that." I know it may seem intimidating with me jumping, whipping, and racing around the track, but this three-year, smooth-skating veteran started out as a newbie with Bambi legs. To this day, I fall.

One practice, I took a hard fall. I was a jammer that was racing around the track. As I approached the opposing blockers, I decided to go for an apex jump. An apex jump is when a skater jumps across the curve of the track. I was in mid-air when an opposing blocker's knee collided with my own. I remember front flipping over her leg and crashing onto the floor. My hip was red and swollen from the impact. My apex jump had failed, and I felt embarrassed.

My teammate, Stromstris, helped me up and offered me these three words, "Nice jump, Sunshine."

I believe my fall was not a failure; it was an attempt to succeed. I believe every bruise, scratch, and rink rash shows that I am improving. I believe in not being afraid to fall because I just might fly. ❀

FALLING

SAMAH AL-SARHANI • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE ARTWORK AWARD



DAUGHTER

LANNY TUNKS • ELECTRICAL & ELECTROMECHANICAL TECHNOLOGY



CLEMENTINE

MORGAN DINNEL • HUMAN SERVICES

A clementine is like a young girl with pores. Sweat pebbles cover her body from how hard she tries to please everyone. Her outside skin is frail, ripplable, and soft like leather, but with bruises from being dropped. She is cold to the touch and as small as a tennis ball. A hard green stem with four leaves once connected her to a vine blessed with desperation. The world viewed her as weak and sensitive. They forced their noses into her life and jabbed her with stereotypes rounded with negativity. The aroma created was a citrus reminder of the soda called Squirt; a lasting pit in the throat reminds her of her impact on the world.

She tastes of old innocence and pure bitterness. She wants people to make music on her and tap through the pain and hear the loud silence. At one point, she was a beautiful shade of orange and well put-together. Then one day, after several outbursts, she expanded into something unexpected. The inside skin was juicy with secrets and layers of concern (fibrous webs of lies and hiding, her inside soul knotted of frayed threads from previously sewing the negativity of others—which ultimately defined her) into her life. Her center rippled like an alcoholic's liver.

The pieces of her were bandaged together by skin and hope; they were nine pieces of a nuclear bomb ready to explode, each piece with thin skin. She contained two seeds of the most dangerous, lethal, and illegal chemical ever produced. Veins exposed the cuts that bled out excessive juice. She once heard a quote that said: "Our ultimate goal is to make as many people as sad as possible when we die." She had a belief that the sun and tears of rain gave her life to one day fall off the tree and cause as much damage as she could. She was simply a suicide mission. ❁

CHANGE IN THE CARPET

ANASTASIA LEIGH FINNER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF THE RUNNER-UP ARTWORK AWARD



ARTWORK COLLECTION

AUDRA PODLIŠKA • RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST

DEVIL'S BRIDGE ANTIGUA



VIEW OF ANTIGUA FROM SHIRLEY HEIGHTS LOOKOUT



SERENITY IN JAMAICA



DESPERATE LOVERS

NATHANIEL ALLEN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Silence fills the air as a deep, dark night falls upon me. My name is Rolf, and I have just been exiled from the village I had finally grown accustomed to. Even worse is that I have been forced away from my love, Katalariina, who has a beautiful name but is an even more beautiful, Nordic goddess of a lover. When her father entered the room and found Katalariina and me in a state of passionate lovemaking, his temper erupted. He quickly tried to draw his dagger from its sheath, but he took just long enough for me to grab a bit of clothing and escape to the desolate woods surrounding the village.

Once I had made it into the woods, the wolves howled saddening refrains for a long time. After a restless, sleepless night alone in the freezing cold hills of Scandinavia, I was only slightly bitter and planned to not rest again until I had retrieved Katalariina from her protective father's household.

While I had been a warrior in my old village—and a relatively skilled warrior at that—a brutal training accident had left me too injured, at least in the Jarl's eyes, to fight alongside far less competent warriors. He had decided I was without a future there, and so I had wandered until I came upon a much smaller, more destitute village. I tried my hand at many types of work there, finally choosing to be an armor merchant. This village was where I first spied Kata, and I hadn't put her out of my mind since.

A few days after fleeing for my life, I met Kata in the forest next to the village. We embraced and kissed and were content again after experiencing certain doom for our young romance. Feeling more confident than was warranted, I decided I could impress Katalariina's father with enough sufficiency to request her hand in marriage. However, from how he had reacted to catching us in the act, I didn't expect my request to be granted for many years.

As Kata and I conversed in the forest together, I was horrified to see that Katalariina's father had followed her. Upon seeing his fierce glare, Kata fled the woods; her father chased after her and paid me no mind as I stood my ground and contemplated my options.

Katalariina's father locked her in their residence with the intention that I would never be an issue again. The traditional Norse way was that the father of the bride would command the suitor as to when, where, and if a marriage would occur. Even knowing this, I still decided to bravely—or stupidly, depending on the judge—approach Katalariina's still infuriated father.

I waited one more day before approaching the village. I was miserable living alone in the freezing Scandinavian forest; I attained food and water only after striking down a vicious wolf next to a hot spring. Despite the water and meat from killing the wolf, I was cold, and in my rush to escape the furious father, I had grabbed only a light set of bear fur clothing designed more for the indoors than for the frigid March weather I was now trapped in. The cold sharpened my senses and added ferocity to my generally tempered mind.

The wolf I was now dining on had, at first, sneaked behind me and bit deeply into my upper back. I was so furious that I had let the feral beast sneak up on me that I had throttled it to death with my bare hands; the wolf had bellowed a noise like the deep, dark death that was befalling the creature.

The physical hardships I had been enduring, however, were not uncommon for a young man of my warrior culture. What frightened me was speaking with Katalariina's father. I had fled the village like a coward for fear of being slain prior to marrying the love of my life. I prayed to the gods of my people and ate a bit more before finally deciding to be brave (or stupid) enough to approach my possible executioner and ask for his daughter's hand in marriage.

After making it halfway to the village, I built a fire and finished off the last few bites of chilled wolf meat before I heard the voice behind me.

"Don't be alarmed, love," Katalariina cooed to me.

"Why are you here?" I exclaimed in a startled tone.

"I believe my father should have no part in which man I choose—marriage, tradition, or otherwise," said Kata, whose voice was even more soothing than usual.

"Why am I confused?" I nervously asked.

"Rolf, I realize this isn't how it is supposed to be, but I want you to be mine—my friend, my lover, and maybe one day, even more."

After this was said, I, Rolf "The Animal," brave warrior, fainted face first into the dirt ahead of me. Upon awakening, I agreed to her plans but was concerned with where we would live. A basic fire pit partnered with hunting and gathering every day and sleeping in near freezing temperatures every night might work for an outcast young man but was not a good plan for a relationship.

The birds of the forest were singing a glorious, harp-like tune, giving us more hope and joy inside of our hearts. I had been deep in thought and was scaring myself with those thoughts because of the brash decision I had made to confront the man who had witnessed his daughter and me together in his home.

I decided I would still ask Kata's father for his daughter's hand in marriage and then propose to her if her father agreed. This plan required surreptitious

actions, as I wanted the proposal to be a surprise for the only woman I would ever give my heart to.

The next night, when I assumed both Katalariina and her father would be in a deep sleep, I hiked the last couple of miles to the village I had thought I would never enter again. It was pitch black outside, but this was generally the time I had sneaked over to visit Kata in the past. The tension was high as I slid as quietly as possible into their home. Horrified, I noticed Katalariina's father crouched next to my entrance point. He wielded a dagger and stared directly at me.

"Well, hello there!" he snidely growled while brandishing the long dagger in his soft, weak, wealthy man's hand. When it was pulled from its sheath, the dagger made a shrill noise that awoke Katalariina from her slumber.

"Father, no!" her shrill voice exclaimed.

I instinctually rolled out of the way to avoid striking distance of the disgruntled, homicidal father; I was ready to strike at him if necessary to defend my precious lover.

"I love this man! His name is Rolf. He works in the armory in the market—or at least he did until you and your high and mighty friends ran him away. If you cannot accept whom I choose to spend my life with, Rolf and I will leave this village forever."

I felt my heart sink. I loved Kata more than anything, but tearing her away from the only life she had ever known for a lowly life with a wash-up like me felt excessive. Kata's father had money, power, and influence in his community. Compared to him, I had practically nothing.

"This is it. It's all over," I thought. "Hopefully she can be happy without me. What have I been thinking? I am practically a peasant, and she is a goddess. I am sure she will find a more attractive, wealthier man and be content." My eyes watered as I prepared for the pain, anxiety, and despair I would endure.

I felt dragged down, the lowest I had ever felt. The occasional lone wolf howl from the woods played a somber tune inside my head. Despite their sad, nocturnal calls, the sun had begun to rise. The rooster's call was an instant jolt back to reality for all of us in that room.

Katalariina's father was physically still, almost frozen, not moving a muscle from his face to his feet. His eyes were transfixed on the wall. The gaze wasn't directed toward Kata or me. He appeared to be deep in introspection; his eyes glazed over, and the dagger dropped with an audible thud to the floor.

"This is nearly exactly how your mother and I met, Katalariina," he stammered awkwardly. "I love you more than anyone, including myself," he continued. "This is why it has been so hard for me to allow you to be independent and to be married away from your lifelong home."

"Father, maybe it is time I begin a new home for Rolf and myself—and

for the child inside me,” Kata said, shocking both her father and me with the announcement.

Kata’s father reached across the room and pulled me into his arms. I assumed this gesture was the prelude to a dagger to the spine, but I was surprised when he embraced the trespasser and defiler of his only daughter as if I were his own kinfolk.

“I never thought my family’s blood would continue on after I passed because I was never blessed with a son, and I had never met a man I would trust with my beloved daughter. The amount of hardship and effort, including risking your life on multiple occasions, has proven to me that, perhaps, I should allow Katalariina to seek out a man—or at the very least, to be associated with you, son. What is your name again?”

“My name is Rolf, sir. Thank you!” I responded, having never been called “son” by my own father. I was more excited than I had ever been, and, just like I had earlier, I passed out, face down, albeit this time into a padded bed instead of the dirt. ❁

SUN OFF TRACY ARM FJORD

ROGER EVANS • PROGRAMMER/ANALYST



EXPECTATIONS

WILL PATTERSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

It is easy to feel overwhelmed when everyone believes you should be the best. That was how I felt on the first day of baseball season when my team was ranked not only number one in the state, but third in the country. I remember talking with my friends about being ranked so high. One friend said, “It must feel pretty good to know that you are one of the best teams in the country. You guys better win every game this year!” When he said that, I realized how impossible those odds would be, and I immediately became aware of the expectations.

For our first game of the season, we played the second-ranked Wildcats. In the first inning, we scored eight runs. By the end of the game, however, we had lost 9 to 8. We were expected to win nearly every game, and we had lost the first game of the season. On our way out of the dugout, I overheard one person say, “Wow, I thought these guys were supposed to be the best.” It was like a slap in the face, and it was only the first game. After one loss, no one believed we were going to be that great team anymore. We went from 100 fans at the first game to 30 fans at the next.

By the end of the spring season, however, we had 35 wins and three losses, and we won the state championship by ten runs against that same Wildcats team. We moved on to the summer season and made it to the state tournament again. With each game, it was as if the other team quit before we even started. Each time we moved to the next part of the bracket, the other team’s coach would begin strategizing for when his team lost, as the tournament was double elimination. The top two teams in the state moved on to regionals, so the goal for most teams wasn’t to beat us but just to make it to the championship game.

In the championship game, we played our rivals. Those players loved to trash talk and play dirty. We were excited to play them in the championship because we disliked them so much, and just as with our first game of the year, we were expected to win. This time, we won the championship game 16 to 0. Our rival team didn’t come close to winning that game, and we moved on to regionals.

On the first day of regionals, we loaded onto our school bus and rode eight hours to Fargo, North Dakota. Before the tournament started, the championship organizers had a gathering for all the teams to be recognized in front of 5000 fans. By the end of the night, it seemed like 3000 fans had bought caps with our team on them because we were picked to win the tournament and to move on to Nationals.

As our first game of the tournament came around, we were all excited to play. By the end of the game, however, we had lost 6 to 3. We were now in the losers’ bracket

and had to win every game in order to make it to Nationals. When we arrived at the field for the second game, only about 100 people were wearing our caps in the stands. We were expected to be the favorite until we lost that first game. Fortunately, we eventually won every game and got to the championship. We won the regional championship game 15 to 3, and we were able to punch our plane tickets to Shelby, North Carolina.

When we arrived at the airport, we realized that we had first class tickets. We were offered free food and drinks on the flight. When we landed, ESPN reporters asked us questions about our season. When we arrived at the hotel, we learned there would be four people per room. None of us wanted that many in the room because we felt it would be too crowded, but when we walked into our suites, we realized the rooms were big enough to fit eight. The suites each had four queen-sized beds, a bar, and a hot tub. That night, a gathering at the field recognized us once again. As we boarded our giant charter bus with a flat-screen TV, we noticed two police cars in front of us and two behind us. As the police escorted us to the game, it began to sink in how big this national tournament really was.

This time, there weren't 100 fans; there weren't 5000 fans; instead, there were 20,000 fans. Our games were televised live on ESPN, and we each had an individual interview about our performance throughout the season. I remember only one question the reporter asked me: "You guys now have 91 wins and eight losses. You are expected to win this tournament; how does that make you feel?" The first thing that popped in my mind was when my friend had said to me that we should win every game that year, and we had lost our first game. I answered her question politely and then quickly forget about it so I could stay focused for the games ahead.

The next day when we got to the field, we were able to smell the freshly cut grass before we even walked into the stadium. On the scoreboard we noticed "Nebraska vs. Tennessee." We had never been represented by our state, only our team name. There were about 100 ESPN reporters and 15 cameras watching us everywhere we went. We were asked questions by the reporters while stretching, and the cameramen would get in our way while we were playing catch. We were told we couldn't warm up with our cleats on so the grass wouldn't get cut up for the cameras. Right before the game, our names were announced, and we lined up on the third base foul line so we could listen to the National Anthem.

The tournament was set up so that every team would play three games. Of the eight teams, the top two teams with the best records would make it to the championship. We couldn't throw any of our good pitchers because they had to pitch in the last few regional games, so we had to throw three average pitchers in the first three games. As we began our first game against Tennessee, the first pitch

was hit to our shortstop. He fielded the ball cleanly but then threw it over the first baseman's head by ten feet. With the next pitch, the ball was hit to our first baseman. As he went to field it, he came up too soon, and the ball went under his glove. The other team ended up scoring three runs in the first inning. I began to believe that the reporter had jinxed us, and we would lose another game, but after a few innings we were able to get used to the huge crowd and the cameras. We won the first game 6 to 3.

After the game, we were once again swarmed by reporters. We made it back to our bus and decided to go out to eat and celebrate. When we walked in, almost everyone in the restaurant stood up and clapped for us. Young kids walked over to our tables and asked us for our autographs and congratulated us on our win. We each got our own steak dinner and an ice cream dessert. The next day, we didn't have to play because the other side of the bracket was playing instead. On our day off, we went bowling and watched a free movie. As we relaxed and got ready for the upcoming games, it began to sink in how we were treated like royalty.

The following day, we played a team from California. We had always heard that players from California were good because the teams had a huge variety of players to choose from. The game started off similar to the last one; we made a few errors but eventually came back to win the game 8 to 5. The next day, we had to play one of the fastest teams in the country. Hawaii was a team that played only 35 total games because there weren't many teams in Hawaii, but they had 35 wins and 0 losses. This team was incredibly fast but didn't have the best pitching, and we ended up winning 15 to 8.

So we had three wins and no losses in the national tournament. We knew we would make it to the championship because we had not lost a game. We now had our best pitchers ready, and we were scheduled to play a team from Michigan. We had played this Michigan team early in the summer and won that game 10 to 2. We knew how they played, and we knew we could beat them again. They had even lost once in the tournament but still scored enough runs to move on to the championship. After our three wins, we were able to have a day off before the championship. During that break, we received multiple calls, texts, and emails telling us how great we were doing. Our star pitcher's parents called him and told him that if he didn't win, he wasn't allowed to come home. Although his parents meant it jokingly, he had a worried look on his face and gave a short breath of laughter, even though he didn't actually think it was funny. That same night, almost every player was asleep by 8:00. All of us were exhausted from playing, but we knew that if we hadn't given 100% to every game, we wouldn't have made it to where we were.

Finally, it was time to start the big game! The attendance for the game was

25,000, which was a new record for attendance for a high school baseball team. It was a late Saturday night game in 100-degree weather with no wind. The crowd looked as big as the crowd of a celebrity concert and was as loud as a small room with a thousand people in it. I started becoming nervous, as the expectations for our team were beyond what we believed was possible. No other team from Omaha had ever made it to the national tournament, let alone won it.

The game finally started, and as each inning went on, we felt more and more pressure. We ended up scoring two runs in the third inning off a two-run homerun by our pitcher, which took away a bit of the pressure. In the sixth inning, I made a bad throw to first, which led to a run for Michigan. Throughout the game, our star pitcher wasn't throwing nearly as hard as he had in previous games. After every ball he threw, he had that same worried look he'd had when he got off the phone with his parents in the hotel room the night before. In the eighth inning, he gave up three runs, and we were losing 4 to 2. It was late in the game, and we began to visualize the thought of losing. We went into the last inning and saw the opposing pitcher throwing as hard as a major league pitcher. When the first batter got out, our hopes began to fall even lower. Then the next batter got up and hit a double. This brought a little energy to the dugout. The next batter was walked, and now we had two runners on. The next hitter got a base hit, and now the bases were loaded.

As the next batter struck out, our nerves began to rise. I had never heard our dugout so loud when cheering for the next batter. He was walked, and now the score was 4 to 3. I was now on deck getting some warm-up swings in as our shortstop, Matt, walked up to the plate. I could only imagine what he was thinking on his way up. As each pitch went by, each player would cringe and hope for the best. After three balls and two strikes, we were down to the last pitch. The entire season came down to this moment—the baseball dream situation.

As the pitcher began to deliver the last pitch, I felt as if the action was in slow motion. He threw the ball, and Matt swung and hit the ball square against his bat. Our eyes opened wide, and we hoped for the best, but the left fielder went after the ball, dove, and made the catch.

We had lost the championship game 3 to 2 and ended the season with 94 wins and nine losses. We were expected to win the national championship, and we hadn't. We were expected to win every game, and we didn't. It was as if a young child did his chores for months and was shown his reward but never received it. At the time, the loss made a lot of us feel like failures. As we shook hands with the opposing team's players, we could see the enormous smiles on their faces, which only made it worse for us to be in that moment. I looked toward first base and noticed Matt crouched with his head down and his hands on his head. Matt felt like he had lost

the game for everyone. After what felt like 30 minutes, Matt stood up and started walking slowly back to the dugout. When he looked up, we could see tears rolling down his face. It was like a chain reaction, as the entire team started to tear up. We all sat on the bench for about an hour just staring at the field. We would occasionally stand up and hug the seniors and thank them for all they had done for us.

After that hour of sitting, our coach asked us to walk to the outfield and have a talk. Our three-year-old bat boy was sobbing as if he was also a part of the team. His dad, our assistant coach, picked him up and said, "I can't thank you enough for how much effort you boys have put into this team." He began to tear up and could barely get out his words. "The way you have not only played the game but also made my little boy cry because he feels like he's a part of this team is the best gift you boys could have ever given me."

With his words, the feeling of failure and overwhelming expectations began to lift off our shoulders. We went from having our heads down and crying to tears of joy and excitement. We began to get up and congratulate each other on how far we had actually made it. We walked back to the bus and sat down. Matt got up and said, "So where do we want to eat our last meal together, boys?" Even the player who thought he had lost the game for us felt the pressure lift from his shoulders. After our flight landed in Omaha, we walked off the plane to see our families and friends applauding, and we ran over to our families and hugged them. After a long six-month season, the expectations were finally over. ❀

RAINBOW

KENT REINHARD • PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY INSTRUCTOR



TULER, THE LION CUB

MATIOP LUETH ATEM • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

People who aren't familiar with lions regard them negatively, but lions are wonderful animals once one learns more about them. I and my friends went hunting for antelope and gazelles in my home village in South Sudan during the civil war in 1989, and we came across a lion with two small cubs. It was a dangerous situation for us; when lions see people in groups, they think that war is being taken out on them. When a lion roars, it's a sign that it wants to know whether you've come in hostility or in peace. When we came upon the lioness and her cubs, we didn't know she would be there hunting food for her cubs. Therefore, we ended up fighting the lion to protect ourselves while the lion was fighting to protect her cubs.

When we saw the lions, one of us pointed at them, and we all tried to run away. That move exasperated the lioness, and it jumped in our direction, but my friend John quickly fired his rifle, killing her on the spot. I was torn up when I saw the cubs circling their mom. They roared like big animals, and it was hard to catch them because they were small. They were a little heavy to carry, so we made a small cage for them. We continued hunting until we had two small gazelles and then returned home with the gazelles and the lion cubs.

The young cubs were in my care after that, but within a month, one had perished. It was a devastatingly sad moment for me because I was not expecting the death to happen. The other cub was alone because his sister was gone, and, being young and lonely, he was afraid at night. He started roaring every night, and I decided to take him into my room. It was hard for both of us to sleep during the night because he didn't feel secure, and he made too much noise.

Because I planned to care for him as a pet, I studied his mood and what he liked most when we played. When I gave him meat, I would pull it away to see his displeasure. First, he would make sure he was holding the meat. If the meat was still being taken from him, the cub would roar to show that what was happening was not good, and he would jump with his front legs to attack me as I pulled the meat away. The second sign that he was mad was when he looked at me with eyes strong with anger. Those were the signs I learned best from my Tuler, which was what I had decided to name him. I learned a lot from the lion cub while I was training him.

Tuler was quick to learn new things each day, and he grew stronger and stronger eating the food he liked. His favorite food was rabbit; when he was young, I taught him to also drink milk from the cow. Tuler became friends with me and with others,

as well. He liked chasing chickens and goats around the compound and playing with them when he was small.

Tuler, having lost his mother at a young age, didn't know what it was like to grow up around other lions. He didn't have experiences with many other animals because his dreams were cut short, and what he knew as a community was different from most lions' communities. The young lion became curious about where he had come from, but he had few memories of the Bush because he had been adopted into a human family. When he began maturing, Tuler tried finding his own way to the Bush, and he began protesting against food brought to him. He started to face the Bush often, which told us it was time for him to go back home, even though he didn't know exactly where his home was. I tried to empathize with him, but he wasn't feeling friendly anymore.

Tuler wanted to join other lions, but he didn't know how to find them, and I didn't know if he could handle Bush life. I couldn't decide how to be good to Tuler; if I let him go, he might die in danger, and if I kept him, he would not be happy. I decided to leave him alone to see what he would do.

When I left him alone, he left the compound and headed toward the Bush; he moved like he was attacking another animal. Tuler went for one day without being seen, so everyone in the area thought the young lion had joined his kind in the Bush. Later, on the second day after noon, he reappeared from the Bush. Tuler the lion was starving and angry. He looked like he was wrestling with something, but no one could understand what he wanted because he couldn't talk to any of us. He went straight to where he usually stayed with us.

Now I knew the lion was in pain and was not understanding why he saw no creature similar to him. He was missing something, and he wanted to find out where he belonged. As a friend to him, I tried to help him, but the only way for him to find what was missing was to be released into the Bush to find his loved ones. For his safety, I built him a big cage, carried him to the nearest place where lions were, and released the young lion to find his love. I knew I had done what a friend would do, even though I was unsure of his safety.

I had had a wonderful time with Tuler, and his emotions had become clear to me because I had studied them with pleasure, even though they were sometimes difficult to understand. I had learned lessons from Tuler, and he gave me a unique experience I couldn't have had any other way. ❀

THE ENDANGERED KING

WILL TIETMEYER • WELDING



WE CALL THEM BEGGARS...

SAFAA AL-SARHANI • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP POETRY AWARD

His eyes begged me for some food,
as his hand reached to me.
His shirt was torn, his pants were old,
as he stood shivering in front of me.
His left shoulder told me the story untold,
as his left arm was nowhere underneath his sleeve.
“Life doesn’t beg us for money or gold,”
as his dry lips moved to answer me.

...KILL THE DREAM

SAFAA AL-SARHANI • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP POETRY AWARD

Empty plates and pockets are gathered to kill the dream.
Hollow shots and tears are waking up to kill the dream.

Red eyes and black hearts are smiling to kill the dream.
Golden medals and black suits are meeting to kill the dream.

Guns and tanks are Boom, Boom, and Boom to kill the dream.
Long beard and white mouths are advising to kill the dream.

Green suits, women, and children are waiting to kill the dream.
Money, body, and memory are here to kill the dream.
Madness isn’t! The dream has been killed with time.

WE CALL THEM BEGGARS...

SAMAH AL-SARHANI • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



“CRY IT OUT” METHOD FOR SLEEP TRAINING IS DAMAGING FOR CHILDREN

JUDY LINDSEY • EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

There is much controversy surrounding the topic of sleep training for infants. In particular, the “cry it out” method is a much researched and argued concept. There are those who feel this method establishes independence in children, while the opposite end of the spectrum wholeheartedly believes that this method is dangerous and causes children to be dependent and insecure throughout life. Scientific research should be examined more closely before deciding to adopt this approach. Allowing babies to become distressed can damage their brain health as well as emotional health and should be avoided. Infants need to be soothed in a timely fashion to establish trusting and secure long-term relationships and self-esteem.

Babies grow and thrive from being held and comforted. In the womb, babies have their needs met continuously and on demand. Why wouldn't this same level of care be expected by infants outside of the womb? As in gestation, the infant's brain continues to grow rapidly during the first year of life as neurons are connecting through direct experiences, both physical and emotional, that the baby receives. Nerves are affected that contribute to other bodily functions, such as digestive issues. Close physical contact and emotional connections are vital to an infant's ability to thrive. If left alone to cry and self-comfort, babies will learn to shut down, which results in slowing of growth physically and emotionally. Dr. James McKenna, Director of the Mother-Baby Behavioral Sleep Laboratory at the University of Notre Dame and world-renowned expert on infant sleep, remarks that he was shocked about what pediatric sleep researchers had to say regarding the notion that infants must self-soothe. He writes, “The solitary infant sleep environment represents a neurobiological crisis for the human newborn, as this micro-environment is ecologically invalid for meeting the fundamental needs of human infants” (Huffington). Darcia Narvaez, Ph. D., agrees that “solitary confinement,” or leaving babies alone to cry it out, is “like torture” for them. She states that “babies are built to be physically connected to caregivers” and “do not understand why they are alone” (Narvaez).

Both baby and mother enjoy better sleep quality when the baby is not left alone to self-soothe. Contrary to popular literature and media, co-sleeping, or at least sleeping in the same room, can be beneficial for both babies and parents and is a safe option. Newer research shows that infants who sleep with or near a parent rarely startle during sleep and cry less during the night than those who sleep alone in their own rooms. If sleeping with a parent, an infant also has a more stable body temperature, heart rhythm, and breathing patterns. Additionally, everyone wakes up more rested and prepared to cope with the day ahead. With the baby near, a mother

is able to relax and have less anxiety regarding the well-being of the baby.

Feeding can also be done with more ease and less awake time, allowing a less interrupted sleep pattern. Amy Golter, Nursing Instructor at Union College and mother of four children ranging in age from seven months to twelve years, states, "I have four kids, and I have tried just about every method of sleep training in search of a good night's sleep, and the 'cry it out' method was not successful for any of them. We were awake from three to four hours per night trying that method." She further states, "I felt dissatisfied with letting them cry so much. With the last two, I tried co-sleeping and found that overall, we experienced less awake time, and the nights were less interrupted." On the subject of attachment/independence, Golter states, "My two-and-a-half-year-old appears a little more advanced socially than the older two and definitely does not have any issues with independence."

The idea of babies sleeping alone is a rather new idea and largely a Western practice. In many cultures, sleeping with or near infants is viewed as not only normal, but in the best interest of both babies and mothers. All other mammals co-sleep to protect their young and keep them warm and fed. It is not advantageous for humans to try to reverse a naturally occurring instinct.

Prompt caregiver response contributes to more successful outcomes in children's lives. Studies show that timely responsiveness to infants' crying increases self-regulation, social competence, and independence in children—a claim that advocates for the "cry it out" method have vigorously touted. According to the article "Scientific Benefits of Co-Sleeping," "Co-sleeping babies grow up with a higher self-esteem, less anxiety, become independent sooner, and are better behaved in school." Receiving consistent care throughout the day and night provides reassurance of love and support. By being attended to when they cry, babies learn that they have some control over their environment and can trust that their needs will be met. When infants are allowed to cry in an attempt to "train" them to learn to sleep or self-comfort, they can become unnecessarily distressed and can feel abandoned and isolated. Not having needs met can contribute to feelings of insecurity and dependency later in life, as well as lessen the ability for feelings of empathy or compassion toward others. Dr. Narvaez writes, "Making babies stress-reactive from under-care is a good way to build an easily distressed personality and create a society of self-concerned folks" (Narvaez).

Some might argue that training infants to sleep on their own in their own space is safer as far as SIDS is concerned. On the contrary: recent studies conducted by Notre Dame University reveal that sleeping alone poses a greater risk factor for SIDS. This is because there is a physiological element to an infant sleeping near other humans, particularly the mother. Babies' sensory modalities are affected by that of their mothers'—literally, sharing breathing rhythms and carbon dioxide reminds infants to breathe should their internal systems falter. Other researchers are now studying the possibility that SIDS may be related to the ability or inability of infants'

brains to control breathing, heartrate/rhythm, and temperature during the first few months of life while they are still developing neurologically.

A commonly held “disadvantage” of nurturing infants throughout the night is the notion that children will develop unhealthy dependencies and have a harder time later in life, both with sleeping alone and with becoming independent. While personality types vary regardless of sleeping arrangements, the idea that children should sleep alone was based more on socially acceptable standards than on the needs of the infant. More research is becoming available as today’s pediatricians and anthropologists look at the results of comparing children who were trained to sleep on their own and those who were comforted during the night according to their signals of distress or need. Children who were conditioned to sleep independently had more issues with aggression and anger and were more dependent and attention-seeking than those who were regularly attended to during the night. Those who were nurtured during the night performed better socially, emotionally, and academically than their counterparts.

Dr. Richard Ferber outlines an eight-step technique known as “The Ferber Method” (aka “cry it out” method), that will “train” babies to sleep on their own. Babies instinctively know how to sleep, and in the appropriate environment, will do so efficiently without this step-by-step process. In the same way that we don’t teach children how to crawl or walk, we don’t need to teach them how to sleep. Infants have needs, whether physical or emotional, and crying communicates these needs to caregivers. Letting a baby cry himself or herself to sleep is neglecting a need, even if the need is only to be held.

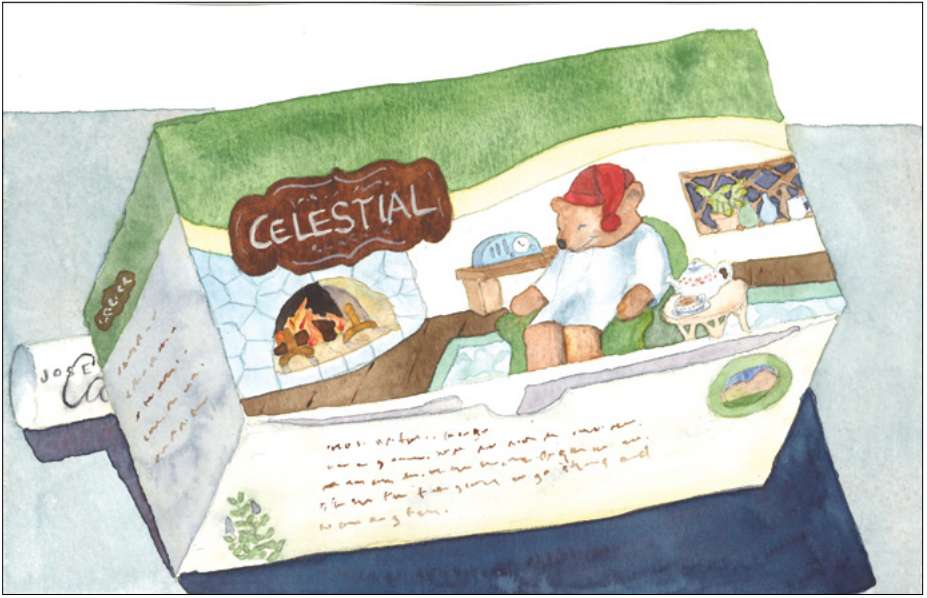
Doing what is best for children may not always be what is convenient for us. Modern parents, as a result of media and the push to excel, are well-meaning in their attempts to create human beings that are self-motivated and self-sufficient. However, when we take a serious look at what has worked for centuries and note how successful generations before us have been in sustaining family and community, we see that it is in the best interest of our children to give them a beginning of trust and security. ❀

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SLEEPYTIME

REBECCA CARR • ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH



DOUBLE ZINGER

REBECCA CARR • ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH



PINK TRIANGLES

ANASTASIA LEIGH FINNER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Every picture gives way to a story. An air reticence reverberates through every scene. What looks one way does not always reflect the truth.



Weeks had passed since even the slightest brush of lips or a slip of a letter had passed hands; instead, a mask of wholesomeness had been worn at all times. In the far-off distance, pink clouds painted the morning sky. A mile away, the solemn drone of city streets echoed with the heavy vibrations of black boots. On a broken road by fields of dying grass, a work-weathered hand grasped for the embrace of its counterpart, but only for a second. Alone at dusk, two souls trudged forward, hoping for freedom and hiding their thoughts.

“It’s been a few days since the Ackermanns have been by. You don’t suspect that they have...?” His voice trailed off. He felt a hand fall upon his shoulder from the man standing on the porch behind him.

“Surely not, Leo. We have only a few days to leave.”

Leo turned to a faint smile, a smile that offered little comfort and was tainted by unspoken thoughts. Ahead in a horse-drawn cart, a crooked man sitting atop a scuffed wooden bench managed to raise his right arm and cough out, “Sieg Heil!” The two souls responded with an enthusiastic salute. To exist in plain sight demanded them to walk in invisibility.

As the cart passed, the two held their breath and waited for an entourage of voices to command an about-face and a surrender to their guilt. But nothing happened, and they breathed again.

“Three days,” Leo breathed as his full lips trembled. The wind blew his sandy hair into parts as he turned to look at his partner, whose face hung tired and scarred with fear.

“Yes, Leo,” he managed to speak, “three days.”

They turned and walked inside to wait for a break in time to take them to a new life—or the potential for a new life. Silence dampened their voices, but their minds were alive. Leo greedily thieved glances at Chey, his long-time friend, to catch hopeful smiles; he would roll Chey’s name around his head and savor the memories, like the taste of fine chocolate melting on his tongue. He watched as Chey lifted his arm to wipe away the sweat from his brow, and he would take note of everything. Under the sullen cracks in Chey’s face

was a vibrancy that still longed to write in his journal and converse about his studies, but now there existed only quiet. Leo could see his jaw clenched in concentration and his green eyes pointed forward out of necessity. They felt Leo's eyes on him but did nothing. His mind flooded with plans of escape and ways to bribe. A gold pocket watch (to be used for trade) and weathered hands traced an outline in his pants pockets. They had heard rumors and stories of what his life could be if his facade cracked.

The day passed, and nothing happened. The air was quiet without the Ackermanns chatting in the kitchen or their little boy playing in the abandoned farmland. Night would fall soon. Six weeks in that tiny farmhouse were souls of the city. Days dragged on in an eternity of strangling fear and feeble hope. Neither Leo nor Chey slept much during those times.

One day as night finally fell, Chey lounged on the bed with his glasses nearly falling off the end of his nose as he perused the Bible his mother had given him. "Perhaps it will save your soul," she had told him once. Line by line he read and rolled his eyes and yearned for Wilde or something of substance. Leo watched him as the dim light hit his contorted face. Chey's dark eyebrows furrowed as he read on; eventually, he gave up and threw the book across the bed. Leo floated around the room, drawing the floral curtains and further dimming the light. As soon as the curtains were stretched, Leo crawled across the tattered bed and leaned his head against Chey's shoulder.

"I do miss the city," he sighed as Chey's arm fell around him.

"I do, too, but everything crumbled beneath us." There was a sudden lurch in Chey's chest, a tightness that threatened to explode if he dared to breathe. It would be so easy to slump down and cradle Leo against his chest and weep into his silken hair, but once he opened that door, he couldn't make his way back. Instead, he allowed Leo's soft hand to caress his face, and he rolled over to escape his touch. They parted ways and tried to sleep.

No sleep came. They lay there, backs facing each other, waiting for the dawn to break again and the birds to bring their morning song. The outside world transformed from black to gray with only the beginning of sunlight daring to break the night. A noise in the distance began to stir the air. Perhaps it was the birds coming back to greet them. No, it was far too subtle and far too human. A low buzz from the horizon edged closer. Panic ensued. The Ackermanns never arrived this early, and their ride wasn't due for another few days.

"What is that?" Leo whispered, his voice convulsing.

"I don't know, but we need to leave!" Chey hissed as he rushed out of bed, threw his clothes on, and grabbed his bags.

“Where are we going to go?” Leo whimpered in a panic.

“Away.” Chey’s voice tried to be soothing. “If we keep low, make it over the rise in the land, and try to hide in some high grasses, we might evade capture. We still don’t know who it is.” They buckled their trousers, slipped their shoes on, and ran down the stairs and into the backyard.

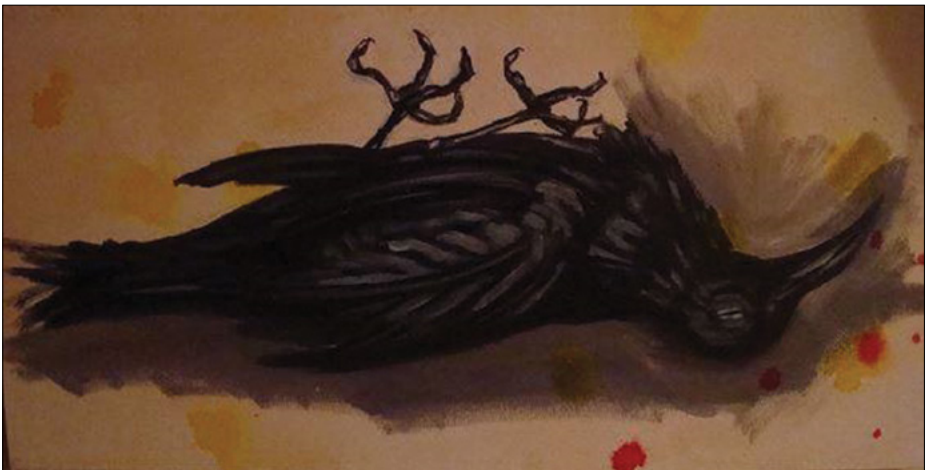
The sky had lightened more, and they could now see a car speeding down the broken dirt road. Their pulses quickened, and sweat poured from their skin. “Quick and low, quick and low,” Chey breathed. They panted up the rise, backs broken and chests heavy, and then they heard the shouts of discover, violent and penetrative. Shots fired, and Leo could see silent screams painted across Chey’s lips—lips that he had touched so tenderly before—, and it was that touch that would condemn them.

Over the rise, they dropped their meager belongings and sprinted in the direction they hoped would offer protection. Just before the tree line, officers in pressed green uniforms emerged with vindictive, salivating hounds. Behind them, the vibrations of black boots made Leo and Chey’s bones quake as they faced a decision: they could collapse and be torn apart by lead and teeth or plead to wear a pink triangle.

A soft click rang through the countryside. ❁

ANATOMY OF A MURDER

NANCY HAGLER VUJOVIC • ART INSTRUCTOR



INSIDE THE DEVIL'S LAIR (DANCING IN THE RAIN)

KEVIN G. MOORE • ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE

Playing in the rain
Trapped in my mind
As the brown demon I hold in my hands takes over
My soul warmed from the liquid that takes over my soul
Slowly counting the day
As I'm trying to come out of this daze
My body takes control as
I drift in and out of this dream
Funny, sometimes I have a conversation with the devil
Trapped inside the lair; I dance under the rain
I beg Allah for forgiveness
Through my eyes, there weren't sunny times
Clouds hung high with darkness that evades
Like the smile of a beast
Walls painted with the blood of the incenses like a mockery
Government tells us lies to slowly kill us off
Mass genocide slowly kills off the generation
When the killing stops makes the
Devil smile when he in his lair counting tax's dollars
I dance in the rain
As I play in the devil's lairs
Sometimes I have conversations with devil
News never contain my mind
As I search for answers
Even at times when they are not answered
I drift in and out of this dream
Feel my pain as I dance with the devil

GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS

OLIVIA SHELBOURN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

High school is always an awkward time. A lot changes for a person during high school—one of those changes being the acknowledgement of the other sex. What I mean is, girls start noticing boys, and boys start noticing girls. They start dating, kissing, and all that other nonsense. However, for a select few, their sexual desires are awakened, but not for the opposite sex. This is my coming out story.

I was about 15 when I finally pieced together the puzzle as to why I was not like the other girls in my friend group. They ogled boy bands and oozed over each band member's attractiveness. I saw only faces. I could recognize that some boys looked nicer than others, but they all seemed pretty revolting to me. Many boys in my grade tried in vain to get me to like them, but it was a losing battle.

Lesbian. The word was planted in my head by my peers. Girls who like girls. The girls in my lunch gossip group sneered at a girl sitting at an adjacent table.

"She's totally a lesbian," one girl hissed.

"How do you know?" I asked, looking up from my chicken by-product sandwich.

"She stares at girls in the locker room."

"I heard she makes out with girls all the time behind the school."

"God, that's so gross."

Fear was struck into my heart that day. I liked girls. I was a lesbian. Would these girls turn and gossip about me if they knew? What was wrong with me? Could I change? Was it too late? I decided to keep my secret hidden from those around me. I figured I had much more important things to worry about and that this problem would fix itself on its own.

Fast forward to my senior year. I still felt a heavy longing for women, but I kept it hidden from my friends—except for Smash. As a 17-year-old misfit, I was delighted to have the chance to join a junior roller derby league. It was the first of its kind in Lincoln. In a place where everyone was different but all accepted, I felt free. Smash was my best friend. She was a thick, sturdy girl who stood two inches taller than I did. She was a solid, hard-hitting blocker, while I was a light, quick-footed jammer. We were a dynamic duo.

"So are you gonna come over later?" Smash asked me during free skate.

"Yeah, maybe." I held onto her shoulder while my eyes were fixed on my feet. I was trying to turn them both completely sideways in an effort to do the crab

skate. "Is anyone else gonna be there?"

"Nah, just me...oh, and Jess."

"Who's Jess?"

"My...my girlfriend."

"Oh." Her words struck me like a shot of lightning. I had not met another lesbian so open about her sexuality.

"Sorry if that makes you uncomfortable." Smash seemed disheartened by my silence.

"No, no!" I let go of her shoulder and turned my skates to face her. "I was just shocked initially. See, I...I'm a..." The word felt foreign in my mouth.

"Lesbian."

"Are you not out?"

"No." I looked down at my feet once again to avoid eye contact. "I've never had a girlfriend, either."

"Girl," Smash laughed, "we need to get you laid!"

Suddenly, we were both beside ourselves with laughter. Free skate came to a close, and we rolled off the floor. I felt relieved to finally have my secret out to someone. I also felt scared. I'd heard so many stories of people's lives being ruined due to their sexuality. What would my parents think? My entire family? What would the girls of my social circle say?

I kept my secret hidden from all but Smash until I met Tori. She was Smash's friend who went to a different school. Tori and I hit it off slowly. Tori was completely comfortable with her sexuality and didn't care who knew it. She was out to her friends and family, who all accepted her no matter what. She proudly wore rainbow accessories in support of her LGBT community. She waited patiently for me to catch up. After two months of dating, I had a breakthrough.

Tori and I were shopping at a local mall. Out of the blue, Tori asked me a simple question. "Can I hold your hand?"

My usual answer was, "No, not here," but I suddenly felt different. I felt more relaxed. I looked down at Tori's outstretched hand. "Sure!" I smiled and took her hand in mine. We walked the rest of the time hand in hand, and we got our fair share of dirty looks.

"Fuck 'em," Tori stated proudly.

Instead of cowering, I, too, puffed out my chest and said, "Fuck 'em." It was like I was on a high. Never before had I felt so confident.

Tori must have sensed this, because then she asked me, "So, are you going to come out?"

“I probably should,” I sighed. “I can’t live in the shadows forever.”

“I mean, you probably *could*,” Tori laughed.

“Yes,” I laughed as well, “but it would be a huge pain in my ass.”

That night, I made my coming out as simple as possible. I updated my Facebook relationship status. Soon, my hundreds of friends would read that I was in a relationship with a girl. I was optimistic about it; I was sure that everyone would see it, accept it, and then move on. For the most part, a lot of my friends were happy for me; the few that weren’t made their disapproval known.

I wasn’t surprised to receive several messages from some of my extended family. My cousin Amy “knew” this was all a joke and that I should delete that status update. She was certain that a future employer would see my status, and it would ruin my chances of getting a good job. She assumed I was simply “lost” and needed only to turn my sight to God.

Then entered my crazy Great Aunt Lee. She was appalled by my actions. Aunt Lee had been following my antics for some time now. She was baffled by my choosing to skate under the devil’s number (666), and she became upset when I uploaded a picture of myself from the previous Halloween wearing a pentagram necklace; now I was promoting homosexuality, which was the last straw. She begged me to see the light in God and urged me to revoke this lesbian lifestyle that I had chosen.

I was upset initially by their words. However, I never saw Amy, so why would her opinion matter to me? As for Aunt Lee, she was harmless. However, my next encounter would shake me the most.

I went to school the next day hoping no one would make a fuss about my new status. I knew they had all seen it. They were children of the 21st century, always on their phones browsing the Internet. The bell rang for lunch. Everyone rushed to the lunchroom while I lingered by my locker. A voice sounded behind me.

“So, what, you like a dyke now?” It was Katelyn. Katelyn and I were never friends. We were in the same social circle because of mutual friends. She was, as I liked to put it, “Queen Bitch.” She was known for being a gossiping, backstabbing wench. How appropriate that she used this information to push me out of our social circle.

“I’m not talking to you about this.” I tried to brush past her, but she pushed me back. My heart began to pound. What was she up to?

“No! You’re a fucking dyke. I saw it on Facebook.”

“It’s no big deal. Who cares?”

“It’s fucking disgusting. Do you just stare at us all the time?” Katelyn stepped closer to me. She was trying to intimidate me. I refused to back down.

“Fuck, no. I’m not like you. I don’t want to bang anything that moves.”

“Fuck you!” Katelyn grabbed me by my shirt and shoved me against the wall.

“Hey! Break it up!” a security guard shouted. Katelyn bolted, and the security guard ran after her leaving me alone in the hallway.

My heart was pounding, my hands were shaking, and I felt close to vomiting. I was almost expelled due to Lincoln Public School’s zero tolerance policy. However, the security guard vouched for me saying I was clearly the victim and should suffer no consequences. I left that social group. As I predicted months ago, those girls turned on me. It felt more like a blessing than a curse.

In my extended family, I became a subject of avoidance. They would visit and ask my sister and cousins about school, sports, and love interests. I was left out of the conversations. My parents tried to avoid the subject of my sexuality. When I spoke of hurt feelings from being rejected by my family members, my mother would usually defend them and state that I must respect other people’s opinions as if I was the one being intolerant.

After years of being “out” to the world, I now feel free. The shackles of secrecy are gone, and I am free to be me. It still stings to think I may have lost any chance of a close relationship with my family members; however, I try to focus on the relationships I have formed outside of my family and spend my energy appreciating the people who accept me as I am. I accept those who accept me and respect those who respect me. I am me, and that’s who I’ll always want to be. ✨

INTERRUPTION

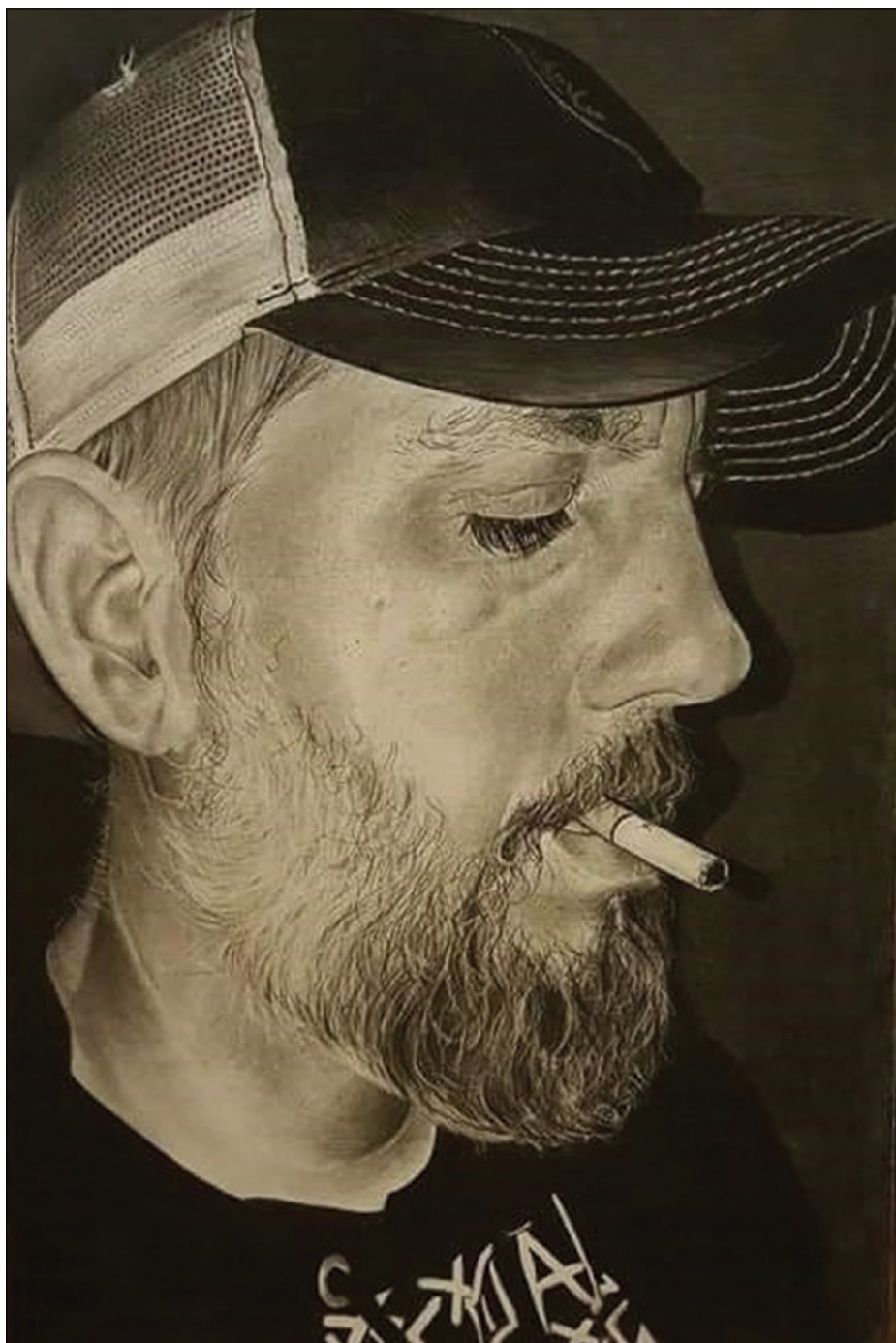
JOSLYNN AFRANK • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

All I could hear was splatter after splatter of water on the front window accompanied by flashes of light with close, vibrating roars of sound. Between loud roars, I could make out the sounds of the waves crashing against the rocks and the tide traveling up further on the beach.

It’s the middle of the night when the silence is slowly interrupted by the nearing rumble. The closer the rumble gets, the stronger the vibrations. The house starts to shake, and the windows rattle with the small force. Just as quickly as the silence was interrupted, it is once again gone.

SELF-PORTRAIT

LANNY TUNKS • ELECTRICAL & ELECTROMECHANICAL TECHNOLOGY



OPPORTUNITY

MUTETHIA GATOBU • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Given to all men, yet received by few,
You can have luck, but a boy need to study, too.
You'll know the ones who succeed; give it a decade or two,
While the dunce will blow it before thirty-two; what am I?
Turn the page, chapter twenty-one.
The Man threw us the rules, but we marched on through
And against all odds, the minority still grew.
But we're still in a small box expanded by those few.
Why?
Cam became our best friend with the solid catch,
The only legitimate witness against that badge.
What a white house for such a colorful land.
Could two thousand and eight be a change of hand?
The milestone that can't be moved by the next.
The Chosen Pests! Continued unrest!
Are we destined to contest? On a system for the select best?
Please, make haste;
We help fund this pace.
I forget we're all in a race.
They forgot we're all the same race.
Omitting Micah six eight must've been the case.
Keep peeling the layers; the color is still red,
Insinuating a world full of dread.
After the war is when truth crawls from hiding?
Claiming the Trophy, which will be a branch,
I named it olive, so we can all live.

TWO IN THE VOID

ASHLEIGH FUSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR PROSE

Chapter 1

ANNIE

Before he left, my father used to tell me this story. He said that when elephant trainers with the circus would get a baby elephant, they would shackle it by the back leg to a tree or a pole. As the elephant grew, the trainers would only need to attach the shackle to get it to stay in one place. You see, the elephant didn't know that it was big enough and strong enough to easily pull down the tree. It didn't know that it could probably snap the chain without exerting much force. The elephant believed it was stuck, and so there it stayed.

I write the story down and decide to give it to Andrew the next time I see him. My dad had always talked about the prison of the mind. I still don't fully understand most of what he said, but for some reason, seeing Andrew every morning reminded me of the elephant story. I wish I hadn't already decided that I would see him again. It was a fluke to begin with. Walking my regular route to school one morning, I had spotted a gaggle of protestors. I wasn't able to read what was on their homemade signs, even though I had wandered quite close. Glancing across the street, I could see two eggs resting in a nest on the uppermost limb of a Bradford Pear. As I focused on the nest, my feet turned to avoid the hubbub and take an alternate route to school. This new path led me past the Western State Boys' Hospital-South—the sibling of Western State Girls' Hospital-North. They were mirrors of one another—a fact I was made aware of during my year-long stint at WSGH. It was upon my release that I returned home to find only half of my parental unit remained. No more warnings about “the man.” No more insightful conversations by starlight. No more deep, rumbling laughter reverberating through the pinewood floors and pulsing into the soles of my bare feet. Now there was only Mom with her “take a sweater” directive, her high-octane breakfasts and bedtime vitamins, and her “yes or no” questions.

When I found myself wandering past the high chain-link fence, I wasn't thinking about what was contained within; I wasn't thinking about anything. I was letting my mind whir unattended. It was the buzz that made me glance up—that loud, familiar signal that it was time to step forward. I watched a line of boys file pristinely into the enormous yard. Most were close to my age—old enough to want

to drive, but too young to get a license. Some looked older, but it is hard to tell, sometimes, if a guy is 17 or if he has just hit an early growth spurt. Mom says it's the hormones in the milk turning average boys into John Henrys and Paul Bunyans. Some looked as though they should still be gazing at picture books on their mothers' knees. One such small boy looked so familiar that I had to close my eyes against the glare of recognition.

I had stopped to watch the acre fill with wayward sons, each dressed in the same navy jumpsuit, each with hair shorn closely to the scalp. They made their way to their own stations. Some piled bricks frosted carefully with mortar to construct a wall connected to nothing. Others lifted large, heavy bales of hay and moved them from one place to another. The boy who stopped nearest to me was using a tool taller than himself to dig postholes. He didn't seem to notice me standing there, for which I was glad. He was a head taller than I was and broad across the shoulders. His skin was bronzed by the sun, and his gloriously green eyes were fringed with thick, dark lashes. His hands were muscular with long, slim fingers. Although he had already begun to sweat from his labor, his breathing remained quiet and even.

I read the name sewn on his pocket: "Andrew."

He ceased his work and raised his head to gaze at me. In my 14 years, I had never noticed a member of the opposite sex in the way I did him. In a split second, I found myself imagining his square jaw under my fingertips—and then wondering what the hell I was doing. Andrew didn't smile at me. His expression betrayed absolutely nothing. I was suddenly aware of my own face and tried (in vain, I'm sure) to contort it into something resembling cool nonchalance. I raised my hand in greeting. Andrew did nothing. Suddenly, a new file was created. Instances of Humiliation in Adolescence. First entry: Andrew.

After that, our interactions improved. The following day, he saw my small wave, and I raised him half a smile. It took four mornings until Andrew and I were waving, smiling, and saying, "Hey," to one another. On the fifth morning, I placed a single buttercup between the links. On the sixth morning, it was still there, wilted and lonely. I took it down from the cross and laid it to rest beneath a nearby tree. It took me two full days to recover from the buttercup incident and to build up the courage to say anything else. I arose early that morning, bushed my hair until it shone, applied the mascara and lip gloss that I was permitted to wear, and wore the softball t-shirt from two years ago—the one that was starting to cling in fortunate places. Walking between the fence and the tree line, I willed myself to not screw up.

Andrew and I spotted each other, waved, and exchanged "Heys." I, oozing false bravado, sauntered up to the fence. The toes of my sneakers rested against the steel wire. Then I made my move. I performed a well-executed (much practiced) head tilt

and beckon—the flirtiest thing I could come up with. Andrew didn't move; he stood as though he had been planted. After the longest ten seconds, Andrew turned to look at something.

I couldn't believe I had never seen it before. I have since spent a long time trying to convince myself that it wasn't there at all, but it was. A break in the fence. Not a crude hole cut with wire cutters by an ambitious patient, but a break where a gate was supposed to be. Whether the fence segment had been taken down or had never been put up was unclear, but there it was—a space big enough to drive a truck through. That was probably its intended purpose. But there was no gate, simply a string tied waist-high between fence posts with a piece of paper taped to it. On the paper in orange marker had been scrawled, “DO NOT CROSS.”

I gazed at the yard full of little boys and young men who should be at school, at work, or at play. I watched as they performed their assigned tasks of physical labor with no intended purpose. There were no guards. There was a gaping hole in the fence. I felt suddenly cold. My eyes suddenly felt like sand, and although I was dying to close them, I forced them to stay open so I could identify what was building inside of me. I tried to sort out the roar in my head, but it was too difficult. Andrew was looking at me again with his wide eyes and practiced smile. “He's learning,” I thought, “but the Gentlemen of Distinction don't know about it.”

With unexpected urgency, I wanted to be as far away from WSBH as possible, but I was afraid for it to be out of sight. Andrew watched me back away from the fence until I was absorbed into the trees. When I could no longer see him, I turned and ran as fast as I could. I didn't go to school that day. I went to my dad's Secret Spot instead.

ANDREW

Annie left a small piece of folded paper on the fence today. I'm not sure what to do. She placed it there after her normal greeting and proceeded on without pausing. She left a small organism on the same spot several days before and seemed displeased to find it there when she returned. Had she wanted me to retrieve it? My Human Relations professor tells us that female behavior is particularly difficult to understand. I am more confused about why these personality defects are any of my concern. What's more, I want to understand why I feel the need to repair them. Why do I feel so off-course when her mouth is turned down at the corners instead of up? I'm not a programmer of teen girls, so why do I feel the need to adjust her emotions? Why do I feel that I could do that if I wanted to?

I will retrieve the paper and gauge her reaction when she sees that it is missing.

The 38 inches of grass between myself and the fence haven't been flattened by foot traffic for many years. I step forward from my workspace, and while I am not afraid, this is unfamiliar behavior. I was not instructed to do this. I grasp the folded paper between my fingers and slide it into my hip pocket. For the rest of the day, I glide through my automatic behaviors: standing in line, receiving food and eating, attending class, eating again, sports and recreation. All the while, I am thinking about what could be written on that paper. It is not until after lights out, when I am alone in my bunk, that I unfold it and read a confusing story about elephants in the circus. I file the story away and destroy the paper it was written on. I wonder what her reaction will be as I feel myself giving way to sleep mode.

ANNIE

Dad's spot was a secret to everyone but me, and that's only because I followed him there once. When he caught me, he was only mildly perturbed. There, in what seemed to be the dead center of the forest, was a small clearing. It was there that Dad liked to go to be alone or to work on ideas or to write in one of his many journals. He kept things hidden there: notebooks tucked into moldy logs, sketches folded into the knotholes of trees. I hadn't been back to that spot since my release from WSGH. It was as though I had forgotten about it. As I stepped into the clearing, odd things began to happen. The colors around me became more vibrant, and the birdsongs sounded more melodic and spontaneous; I was aware of the cool dampness of the air on my skin. Experiments. The word cycled in my head like a broken phonograph. I lay down on a bed of leaves and inhaled their sweet, decaying scent. I repeated that word, experiments, in my mind, then as a whisper. Each time I repeated it felt like a tug on a rope that was bringing the answer to shore. Then I heard my father's voice. "Experiments, Marie! They put those kids through all sorts of..." and it was gone like a ghost. But I remembered him and my mother arguing about delinquent children and institutions and the isolation of our town, and my mother's loud shushing that she did when she was trying to quiet him down and drown out what he was saying at the same time.

It felt like hours passed as I lay there completely immersed in my own thoughts when I resurfaced with an idea. I was grinning like a fool before I remembered that certainly, the school would be looking for me by then. I reached into my pocket for my cell phone. No bars. I was in a dark spot. The privacy and solitude was so tantalizing that I, surprising myself, sat up and removed my t-shirt and bra. I decided to spend the rest of my day topless in the forest and communing with nature—what my mom would call *hippy dippy crap*. As I lowered myself back to

the cool earth, I caught a glimpse of yellow paper beneath my shoe. It was a long discarded Post-It note, caked with mud and leaf particles. I peeled it off gingerly and turned it over. There, written in my father's small block lettering was a question: "Where are the towers?"

Chapter 2

ANNIE

I went home at the same time I would normally return from school. Mom's car was in the driveway, so she had either received a call from the school and was inside worried sick, or she had worked only half a day at the real estate office and then come home to tend her garden. I entered the house cautiously and walked into the kitchen. Sitting on the counter was half a glass of water and Mom's prescription migraine medication. Most of my friends' parents were also afflicted with blinding headaches and dozens of other symptoms. They all took the same medication. Knowing Mom wouldn't feel like eating or cooking, I made myself a plate with two sandwiches, a wedge of cheese, some grapes, an apple, and a cupcake. Running around in the woods all day had made me ravenous. I took my plate to my room and sat down at the computer. It took only a few Google searches before I knew the schedule, rules, and regulations for WSBH. The same searches led me to other sites—sites full of conspiracy theorists and strange stories. Real roil-hat types. Scrolling through comments led me to a girl, Carmen, who had been at WSGH with me briefly. She had been removed from the premises for violating curfew. That's what we were told, at least, but Carmen told a different story. Rambling comments with no structure and the use of numbers to spell words made her nearly indecipherable. There were words she used repetitively in all caps: TREATMENTS. THE SWITCH. GENTLEMEN OF DISTINCTION. MIND CONTROL.

I read until I couldn't force my eyes open any longer. It was 8:30 p.m., and I could hear Mom moving around; her migraine must have lifted. I closed the final window just as the soft knock came at my door.

"Hi, honey," Mom said, poking her head in. "Sorry I didn't make dinner. Did you eat something?"

"Yeah. Are you feeling better, Mom?" I spun my chair to look at her. Her eyes were tired, and her hair stood up in wild spikes. She had not bothered to check a mirror since rolling out of bed.

"Yeah, I am. How was your day?" She gingerly made her way over to me.

I hesitated slightly. "It was fine. Nothing to report. I am really tired, though. I

think I want to go ahead to bed.”

Mom looked concerned. “Right now? Have you taken your vitamins?”

I sighed. Mom left my room and returned quickly with five enormous pills and a frosty glass of water.

“Ok, down the hatch!” she chirped, trying to disguise her fatigue.

I was so tired of taking the pills, but I knew it would be worse at home if I didn’t. Mom needed me to take them. The structure of my home life depended on my mother’s peace of mind. She pulled me down to sit on the bed and went to grab my brush. My mother still insisted on brushing my hair every night before bed. I never questioned it although I did sometimes wonder if other 14-year-old girls were getting their hair brushed for bedtime. We sat in silence except for the sound of bristles through my fine hair. Mom massaged the spot on the back of my neck like always.

“Mom...,” I began. This was going to be tough.

“Yes?”

“Tell me again why you sent me to WSGH.”

“You don’t remember?” she asked, concerned. “Darling, it was because your father left, and you had such a hard time dealing with it.”

I didn’t argue with her even though I knew she was lying. “Oh, yeah,” I squeaked.

“You shouldn’t talk about such unpleasant things before bed.” Another one of Mom’s rules. She dropped a kiss on my forehead and walked toward the door. As she was reaching for the knob, she turned and said, “We should go ahead and donate that shirt, too. It’s getting pretty small.”

“Oh,” I replied, suddenly exhausted. “I hadn’t noticed.” I fell asleep and dreamed of Andrew trapped behind the fence.

ANDREW

I see her approaching long before she sees me. She is wearing a floral skirt and a shirt so full of holes that I can see the sleeveless top she is wearing underneath it. My mind tells me this is called lace. I wait until she is close enough to notice that the paper is missing. Her face turns into something more beautiful than the artistic masterpieces we study in class. She waves. I wave. She says, “Hey.” I repeat. Once again, she approaches the fence, and this time I step forward, too. I have moved to retrieve the paper, and everything has been OK. Standing at the fence, close to Annie as I am, my feelings about her become tangible. I do not understand this feeling, which I have never before experienced. I feel longing to reach to where she has her fingers hooked over the links, and I want to cover them with my own.

“Come out. Come walk with me,” she implores.

“I cannot,” I reply.

“Why?” She tilts her head and wrinkles her nose slightly.

Again, I look toward the string. Between her index and middle finger appears a small square piece of paper. Deftly, I take it from her and slip it into my pocket.

“See you soon,” she murmurs before slipping into the woods. I find myself noticing the sway of her hips, and instead of closing my eyes and resetting, I allow myself to relish that new and uncomfortable feeling.

It is after lights out when I turn my attention to this new slip of paper. I turn it over in my hands before unfolding it, and when I finally do, I run my fingertips lightly over the words as I imagine Annie writing, pressing down harder than necessary. There is no story this time, only a simple direction: “Add me to your list.”

Of course. It seems so obvious. I decide to take care of it first thing after bunk inspection tomorrow morning. The possible scenarios running through my system prevent me from entering sleep. I disobey protocol and touch the spot just below the hairline on my neck. Right before I drift off, pressing Annie’s note between my cheek and palm, I wonder how she knows about the visitors’ list.

ANNIE

I stared into my closet wishing I had a middle range of clothing. As it stood, I had standard school clothes (jeans and t-shirts), typical teenage girl weekend wear (sweatpants and hoodies), and the mom-required pieces (for weddings, funerals, and other ceremonial events). I tried to envision myself in something that the popular girls at school liked to wear—like a cute sundress. Maybe some of those strappy sandal things. I felt so uncomfortable wearing my Easter outfit in front of Andrew the day before. Feminine wiles have never come easily to me. That is, until recently.

I had beaten myself up after handing my request to Andrew. We didn’t even know one another. Surely, he thought I was a creep who skulked around the woods watching him work and trying to lure him out. Wouldn’t he be right? But I told myself that even if he did think I was a weirdo, he was a guest of WSBH, and if he rejected me, no one else would ever know about it, and I would never have to see him again. That was the worst case scenario. I couldn’t let myself think about the best case. Not yet, anyway.

I got to the fence too early, so I climbed a tree that allowed me to stare openly at the grounds of WSBH without being noticed. From my station, I could tell that the building was a mirror of WSGH. Looking through the windows, I could see the mess hall, common areas, gymnasium, and classrooms. The viaduct connecting

the dormitory to the main building was in a state of disrepair, but other than that, there were no differences. I glanced at my watch and mentally counted down until the buzzer sounded. I couldn't look away from Andrew as he walked to his station. He kept his eyes forward and began his work immediately. He didn't even notice that I wasn't there. Suddenly, I felt ridiculous in my pink cardigan and black Chucks. I decided to climb down and head to school, never revealing myself and never returning. I had spent nearly every waking hour thinking about Andrew, and he didn't care. Why would he? I allowed myself three more minutes to sit in the tree, wipe the tears from my face, and say a silent goodbye to my first crush. Three minutes and then good-bye forever, I vowed. It was then that I noticed Andrew had slowed his digging pace. He was staring off to his left. I strained to see what he was looking at but saw nothing. He continued his halfhearted postholes, but his attention was clearly on whatever he was looking at. Then it hit me—he was looking for me! He was staring in the direction I normally came from. My heart flew twice as high as it had just been low. Someone was looking for me. Andrew was waiting—for ME! I scurried out of the tree, cleared the debris from my hair and clothes, and revealed myself to him. This time, he approached the fence before I did. He didn't wave or say, "Hey," but he was smiling. This new, spontaneous action took me by surprise.

"I did it," Andrew spoke quietly, retaining his smile.

I couldn't help smiling back. "I'm glad," I said to my shoes. Looking at him for too long seemed to make me terribly bashful, another new emotion for me.

"For you," I heard him say, and I glanced up to see him sliding a piece of paper through the fence. It was not folded as my notes had been; rather, it was constructed into a diamond shape that slid perfectly through the chain links. I found the shape bizarre, but I decided to find it quirky instead. I didn't want to say goodbye, and I couldn't think of any other brilliant lines, so I just waved and walked back into the woods to retrieve my backpack. I'm sure he thought I was a real charmer.

I couldn't wait until I got home, so I unrolled the paper right away. On it I found a printed copy of Andrew's daily schedule with visitors' hours highlighted in orange. At the bottom he had written "Come soon" in ballpoint pen so hard that it nearly broke through the paper. ❀

To be continued...

SCARS

KAYTON E. FEE • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

People have been asking me for weeks, “Are you okay?” “How are you coping?” “I know death is hard.” Well, you know what—they don’t know *hard*; they don’t know what I have been through. I get so many questions on why I am such a quiet person or why I hurt myself. I am quiet because I have trust issues, and I don’t hurt myself; I could never inflict pain on myself purposefully. You see me as if I am something that needs to be fixed and not as an actual human being. You stare as if I was displayed in a museum for your entertainment.

These things you see all over my body—they are not inflicted wounds, but wounds that someone else created over and over and over again until I’d had enough. I was too young to fight back, too young to know that she never loved me, never treated me like a daughter. I block out the noise about friendship and love because I never had that. I never knew what it felt like to be loved or cared for. I tried to be the loving daughter that she was supposed to see, supposed to love. These wounds, these burns all over my body, are reminders of how weak I was—reminders that she never cared. These burns are me trying to help my mother with her addiction. She then repays me with scars that will never go away—scars from the disease she couldn’t contain.

Every time someone looks at me, I cannot help but look away, knowing that what they see are fragments of who I was, not who I am now. When I look in the mirror, I don’t know who I see; mostly, I see a girl scared out of her wits because something happened to her years ago. I tried to understand, tried to put myself in my mother’s shoes, but every time I did, I felt even more disgusted. There was no reason for it—she could have done something different, something better for herself. The way she tried to solve her problems ended up with losing me more and more every day.

I keep wanting to reach out, to scream, to yell, to cry my way into exploiting the truth—just letting it all out, but how, how can I move on with life? How am I supposed to feel about all of this—my past, her death?

So don’t ask me if I am okay because the answer is no. Don’t ask me how I am coping because I don’t know how I am. Yes, death is hard, but so is life. How can I feel sad about her being gone? Yes, she was my mother, but I had not seen her or spoken to her in over ten years, and since Dad, she had decided to cut

herself off from everyone. All that is left of her are these scars—scars that will forever haunt my life.

Now that she is gone, I know I can finally let that part of my life end, but forever will I have the scars reminding me of her—of the pain I endured. But she is gone; I am still here. I pulled through, yet every now and again, I can still feel the burn. ✿

STRUGGLES WITH DEMONS

TONYA SCHROEDER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



KISSED BY THE MORNING RAIN

MIRANDA CARLSON • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS



PEACEFUL MOMENTS

MIRANDA CARLSON • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS



A TRUE HEAVEN-SENT

MOMO KEKULA SARPAY • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

If one is looking for a man of great character—polite, selfless, down to earth—, a man who put his family and friends above all other things, including his own life, I will direct you to no one else but my uncle.

His name is Mollinenah Kekula, but I call him Uncle Muscle due to his physical appearance. He is dark in complexion, stands about five feet and nine inches, and weighs around 300 pounds. As military personnel some years back, he was a very busy man, but in spite of that, he took time to visit us each weekend. That was how I became so familiar and close to him. There was not a day he came without a gift for my little brothers and me, but mine was always special—my favorite digestive biscuit with some cash. He would sometimes put us in his black military truck and take us shopping, buying us clothing and foodstuffs. For that reason, my eyes were on the road whenever it was a weekend. He always showed up, even when I had the feeling he would not make it that particular weekend due to time.

My love, respect, admiration, and gratitude toward him went to another level when the Liberian civil war broke out in 2001. The rebels were rapidly overcoming the government troops, and within no time, our residential area, Stephen Tolbert Estate, became the territory of the rebel while we were still present. Because the government troops were going to try their best to take back that territory, which was going to cause more casualties to civilians like us, we thought our lives were coming to an end. Surprisingly, at 6:00 p.m., we heard a knock on the gate; we were afraid, but my dad went there and realized it was Uncle Muscle. He came dressed like a civilian with a private car. I then wondered—why he would risk his life for us? He was one of the main targets of the rebels due to his position in the military they were fighting against. It seemed my dad was also thinking the same when he asked Uncle Muscle, “Why do you have to risk your life to come here?”

Uncle Muscle replied, “My life will not be worthwhile if I allow something bad to happen to you.” He quickly told us to get in the car and to leave all our belongings behind since the car was not big enough to take extra things.

Somehow, we managed to pass through the various checkpoints of the rebels without many difficulties due to Uncle Muscle’s ability to speak their dialect and their failure to recognize him. He took us straight to the border between Ivory Coast and our country, Liberia, after an almost 20-hour drive. The saddest

moment came when he handed over his valuable gold chain to my dad and told us he had to go back. My dad tried convincing him not to go, but he insisted that he had to go. All I did was cry; he gave me a hug and told me to not worry and that he would be with us soon. When he got in the car and started moving and waving good bye, every one of us started crying. Even our dad, who was trying to stay strong for us, was in agony.

Through the help of humanitarian groups, we were able to make our way to Ghana and were temporarily hosted by one of our dad's friends in Accra. My dad later sold the gold chain given to him by my uncle, which was essential for our upkeep for a long time.

More than a year passed; we did not hear from my uncle even though the war had ceased by then. My dad tried every means possible, but there was no news of him. That brought fear upon us, thinking that he might have been killed, but the love I had for him gave me a tiny hope that I would see my Uncle Muscle again.

As time went by, things became so difficult for us; it was so extreme that my dad decided to move us into the refugee camp. There, we didn't have to pay rent; we were given a single room for the whole family where every one of us slept. Things went from worse to ridiculous.

One Saturday evening, while sitting at the back of the building we were staying in and wearing hungry faces, Uncle Muscle appeared from nowhere accompanied by one of his old military colleagues whom we had met at the refugee camp. We were all joyous to see him. Words cannot express the excitement we felt, which could be seen from our jumping and screaming that called the attention of other people around. He was looking great, even better than before, with a million-dollar scent. He later explained to us that he was just in transit, getting ready to board a plane to the United Kingdom, when he coincidentally saw his friend at the airport who told him that his family was at the refugee camp. He cancelled his flight immediately in order to come see us. He also explained how he had gone to Ivory Coast on two different occasions in search of us.

Those few days were all about merrymaking and eating the best meals we hadn't eaten for months, if not years. Uncle Muscle donated a large sum of money to the refugees, and it was used for the purchase of foodstuffs and medications. He was with us for two weeks, and throughout his stay, we were lodged in a guest house. Before his departure, he gave my dad a significant amount of money which Dad used to purchase a house in the city of Accra, which we moved to immediately.

Although he went back to the United Kingdom where he still stays today on political asylum, Uncle Muscle never relented in sponsoring my little brothers and me throughout high school. My dad received money from him on a regular basis for our upkeep, and that changed our situation for the better. Uncle Muscle was also of great help to his friend, even to the point of sponsoring his trip to England.

In two crucial moments—when my family and I were stocked in the middle of flying bullets and when poverty was striking us to the point that we could barely get food to eat—, this man came to our rescue. He did it with no strings attached, with just joy and satisfaction. Even though my dad sponsored him throughout his education process, that is nothing compared to what Uncle Muscle did for us. He is a true heaven-sent to whom I will be forever grateful. ✨

SOCIETY

DANUL PATTERSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



THE HOMELESS HOMEOWNER

HEATHER VAN HUFF-SYKES • HUMAN SERVICES

My name is Heather. I am 43 years old. I have three beautiful children, and I am going to college. If you take a look at my life from the outside, you would probably never guess that I live in a transitional living facility for homeless women. Before my 40th birthday, I wouldn't have believed it, either, if you had told me that one day, I would be known as the homeless homeowner.

I was secure in the fact that I was married with children. We lived in a charming house that we had purchased in January 2010. I had been a homemaker for nearly 20 years and proud of it. In my home, every piece of furniture, every picture frame, and every knick-knack was meticulously arranged. Books, movies, and CDs were in alphabetical order after they had been organized into categories. Toys were organized on shelves with labeled bins. I needed order and structure in my life.

My kitchen looked like a photo in a catalog. Think of an appliance, no matter how obscure, and chances are I had it. I absolutely loved my original 1955 stove with its side-by-side ovens and colorful push lights for the burners' temperature selections. The dining room held a table from my stepfather, who got it from his father, both of whom have passed. Seating for eight was provided with chairs made by the Amish.

My bedroom was a sanctuary, as well as a geological exhibit. I had collected rocks my entire life. My treasures ranged from a few tiny flecks of gold to sheets of shale; there were geodes and even a fossil of a fish I had found. I had a luxurious California king piled high with nine pillows of all shapes and sizes. Jerel's bedroom was designed with a cars theme. A collection of license plates—mostly mine, one I purchased on a trip to Belize—was used as a border. Caution cones, a "Road Work Ahead" sign, and a road block with its flashing light took up a great deal of space. Yet, his room was not overcrowded; it was just right.

Miah's room was like walking into a Dr. Seuss book. Floor to ceiling had been painstakingly painted as if Seuss had come there himself to do it. One wall had the Cat in the Hat standing in the corner. On another wall, Horton sat upon his tree holding his flower. Red Fish, Blue Fish were swimming over to the quote, "A person's a person, no matter how small." This room was the main reason I wanted to buy that house. There were two bathrooms located across the square-shaped hall; all three upstairs bedrooms entered the hall, as well.

My living room was like most—a couch, loveseat, and chair. I had an old

stereo/television combination, which looked like a long cupboard or chest. An actual cedar chest was filled with photo albums and used for additional seating. Also located in the living room was the largest of eight TVs scattered around the house. Plugged in by a jungle of cords was a menagerie of electronics.

Downstairs had originally been two rooms divided by a brick wall. Eventually, it consisted of my eldest daughter Ella's room, a walk-in closet for her, a bathroom, a storage room, a toy room, and an office with an adjoining bedroom that later became my husband's.

Outside in the summertime, I had a flower garden I tended daily. Mulberry bushes were plentiful. I also had an arbor that I was weaving from fallen branches I had gathered. The children enjoyed playing on a jungle gym their father and I had built. Cooking on the grill, then dining al fresco was a favorite activity of the children. We all enjoyed swimming or lounging in the pool. All year, we enjoyed playing games outside, from tag to football, hopscotch to hide-and-seek. I can't forget all the chalk-drawn cities, kitties, and friends—simple masterpieces.

Back inside is where most of the tangible artwork was produced. The kids and I painted pictures and ceramics. We made jewelry out of pretty much anything. We created stained glass pieces. I tried to teach them crocheting; only Ella picked up on that. Shrinky Dinks were fascinating to the little ones. Arts and craft time was a staple of everyday life in my home. Education was a main focus, but I tried to make it fun. Games, any make or model, were played with joy. Having a connection with my children was a top priority. I loved my house, my family, my life.

Things unraveled when my eldest began to become extremely defiant. She was later diagnosed as having ODD. Ella skipped 73 days of her freshman year. My son was having troubles of his own. He was now disruptive, destructive, and dangerous. Asperger's was suggested as the main culprit for the issues he had developed. His father blamed me, saying I must be coddling him. The reason my daughter was misbehaving was my fault, as well, he said—I was treating her more like a friend than a daughter. My marriage was at the point at which I felt I could do nothing right. I was blamed for every little thing. I was told I wasn't trusted with money anymore. My name came off the bank accounts. I was given \$300 a month to pay for all household goods and food. With two in diapers, I couldn't finance the family with that little bit of money—another "failure" on my part. A divorce was inevitable. What lay in the paperwork would shatter my world into a million pieces and make it impossible to restore to its previous splendor. Signed, sealed, and delivered, the decree read that I was legally evicted

from my home. My relapse on alcohol allowed him to gain full custody of the children. I had lost all that I had loved and cherished. And so, my wandering began with no sense of direction. I was without purpose or meaning.

I moved in with my grandma, but my welcome was short-lived. I ran to a motel but quickly found myself running out of money. My thirst for alcohol could not be quenched. My newfound addiction to K2 left me spiraling into oblivion. I started living in my SUV. A few tickets later, and my husband confiscated that as well. Absolutely homeless, I bounced around from camp to camp. I found myself sleeping in parks or under random trees. Finally, someone said for me to follow him to the bridge at 33rd and Huntington. Little did I know that this was to become my new home, a place to call my own, and a place that I cherish to this day.

At first, the bridge wasn't very inhabitable. We had little: a few blankets and a couple of changes of clothes. Still, we three under the bridge—Hughie, Chico, and me—had so much fun. We laughed, sang songs, told stories, shared tears, and became family. They were spotters for me when I flew my sign, always watching my back. I watched out for them in return. No matter what, we had each other, and that was all that mattered. I christened our bridge Hughieville, for Hughie had lived there the longest—four years. I labeled the cubbies we slept in with apartment numbers 1 to 6. If asked, we would say, “I live at 33rd and Huntington, Apartment #,” (mine was 3, Hughie was 4, and Chico was 6). Later, a judge asked Hughie where he lived; Hughie gave that as his address and thoroughly confused the judge. The judge demanded the street address, and Hughie said, “Isn't one. I live under a bridge.”

Several people moved in and out of #2. Hughie and I realized we needed an infrastructure, a set of rules and titles. Hughie was named President; Manson was deemed the enforcer for his sheer size and his odd ability to not feel pain. I was the CFO, only fitting, considering I brought in the most money. Usually, I made around a hundred bucks a day, and no, I did not prostitute. I used the money to take care of everyone's needs, including cigarettes, alcohol, K2, weed, toilet paper, food, and miscellaneous household items.

Once, while out on a run, I stumbled upon a queen-sized mattress. I snatched it and dragged it back to the bridge. Hughie came home demanding that it had to go, and then he fell asleep on it. He woke up proclaiming it was the best night's sleep he'd had in years—the mattress could stay. A week later, I rummaged up a twin bed for him, and he was delighted.

I turned my attention to the kitchen by gathering plates, cups, silverware, towels, spices, and condiments. I organized everything on a tablecloth in Apt.

#5. I found a koi pond liner with the intention of using it to collect rainwater to do dishes. Instead, it became the recycling bin at the end of the bridge in an unmarked cubby next to Apt. #1. With so many people living in or visiting Hughieville, this was a better use for the liner and kept many cans from “taking a drink” in Dead Man’s Run. Eventually, Chico became disheartened with all the changes and moved.

My bedroom started to take shape when I acquired a jewelry box and a small shelving unit. I amassed a library of books, at least two feet tall. I had bags of clothes and 15 pairs of shoes. I purchased a first aid kit, which was vital; I performed little procedures, along with simple surgeries, in my office.

My next big find was a loveseat made with two reclining chair pieces. Everyone was amazed that “li’l ol’ 90-pound Heather” (I was 98—semantics) was able to single-handedly get it home. I placed it in front of the kitchen and invited Cassie to move in and use it as her bed.

Then word of mouth spread the message: “You have got to go to the bridge. Heather made it a home.” Soon, so many people wanted to live under the bridge that they had to move in on the other side of the creek. Our little community was in a population boom. At its height, twelve people called Hughieville their home. Occasionally, things got out of hand with too many uninvited guests or drunken fights between neighbors or lovers. For the most part, however, it was a wonderful place—a poor man’s paradise.

When I was incarcerated for the various tickets I had accumulated, I dreamt of returning to my home. Every day, I told stories that impressed other inmates. I drew maps for people to come and visit to see for themselves the mysterious bridge they had heard so much about. On my birthday, November 21, 2014, my divorce was finalized. A few days later, I learned that police had arrested Hughie and charged him with procurement of a government entity—in other words, stealing the bridge. Judge Foster laughed it out of court, but not before the city had gutted our beloved home. Everything was taken except our memories. But Hughie returned to live under the bridge once again. Upon my release, I ventured there and stood in disbelief that once again, all that I had had been stolen from me. My heart broke for all of us that had been displaced and then threatened with trespassing if we returned. We were disregarded and discarded like trash by the city of Lincoln.

In March 2015, I died from one hit of K2 and had to be revived. When I finally woke up and could answer questions, the hospital realized I was homeless with no insurance. I was told I was being discharged only 30 minutes after they said I would be moved from ICU to a private room. I continued

living on the streets and sleeping in parking garage stairwells or just by the side of the road at times. On March 31, I was badly assaulted, resulting in broken ribs and a torn rotary cuff. I was laying in an abandoned building when I had that moment of clarity, the proverbial spiritual awakening. I could not have died to live like this. I vowed to go to treatment and get off the streets. I entered treatment on April 28, 2015; I graduated on June 12 and moved to where I am residing at present. I applied for general assistance and found that according to the County Assessor, I was still a homeowner. I had to quick deed my share of the house to my ex-husband for one dollar, adding insult to injury.

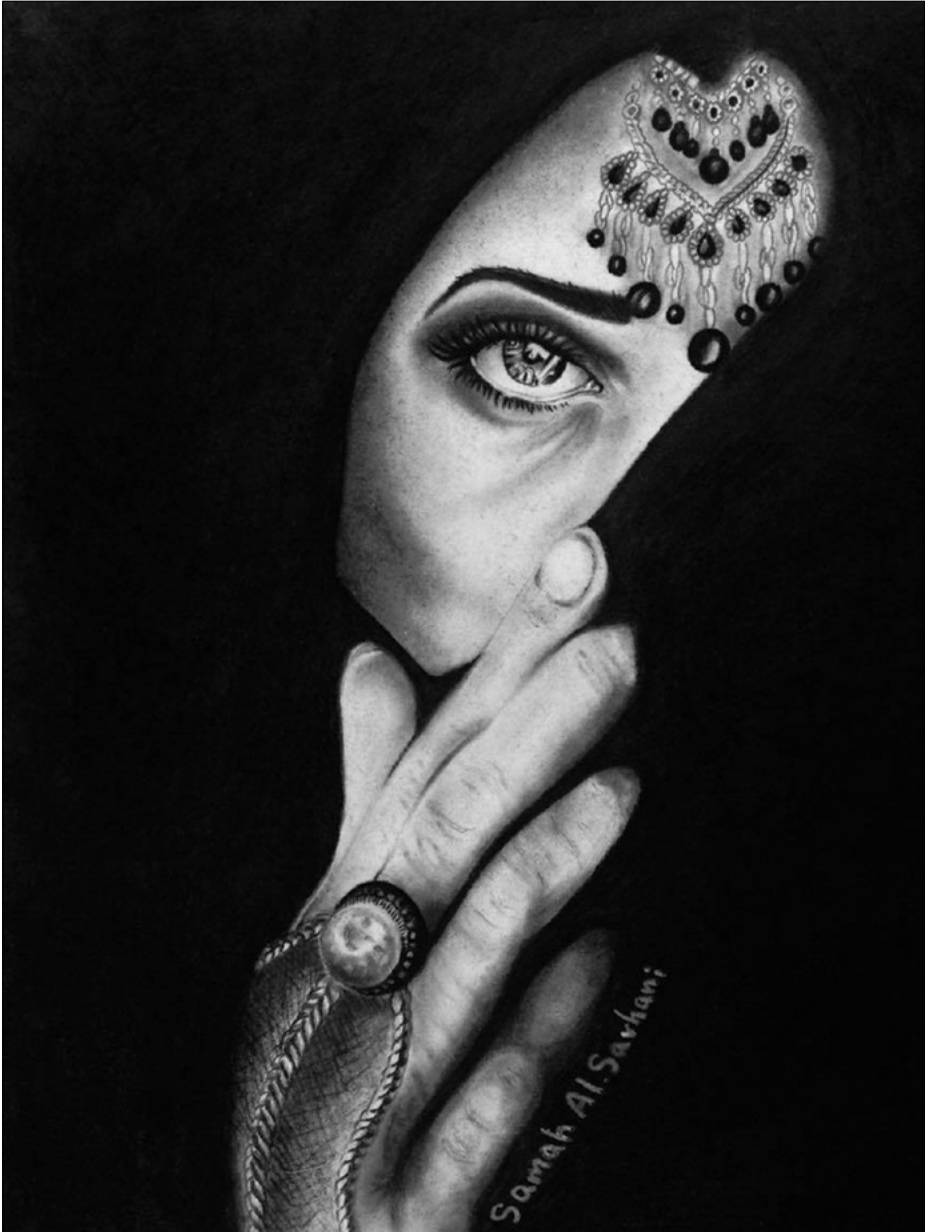
I am awaiting my homeless housing voucher, so I can move onto the next phase of my life. I've already started down my newfound path by attending college to become a homeless outreach worker. I know firsthand what it's like to be homeless; from the outside point of view, it looks awful, but that is not always the case. Many people I know love it. I also know that people think it's wonderful when you own a home of your own, but living in it can be dreadful at times. I want to help others find their way to what they see as the perfect place for them. If that is a home, let's try and get you one. If it's outside, let me get you a tent and some blankets!

I've learned I can live without walls, but not without love. I am even more empathetic than I was before, but I'm not as naïve. I've been honest with my children; therefore, they have developed deeper respect for all people, and they are non-judgmental. I no longer judge others on what they have or don't have at face value; I judge by what's in one's heart. ❀

UPDATE: Not only am I housed, Hughie now has an apartment through Center Pointe. Chico passed away this past September from a heart attack, and Manson remains homeless. Cassie suffers from grave emotional and mental disorders that prevent her from getting off the streets.

SAMAH

SAMAH AL-SARHANI • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



I WAS...

SAFAA AL-SARHANI • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP POETRY AWARD

I was my mother's hope, my dad's door.
I was the four spring girl drowning in the jail of poor.
I was my sister's laugh, my brother's joke.
I had the dream that would make the world rock.
I was the pure sky, the grown tree.
Didn't know what the cloud is, or what the axe is meant to be.
I was the lucidity and the warm shore.
I was the tenderness flaking on every once door.
I was the power, the determination, and the working bee.
Thought if I did that, the destiny's hand won't come after me.
I was the brain full with thoughts,
until the world woke me up by cutting my throat.

I WILL BE...

SAFAA AL-SARHANI • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP POETRY AWARD

I will be a fox. I will be a killer.
I will be a good person in the eyes of the devil.
I will be a crow eating the dead people's flesh.
I will be the truth; that's the way to make the world refresh.
I will be the dancing priest who led the ignorant to their ordeal.
I will be the red eyes, the yellow teeth to Adam's last seeds.
I will be the mothers who feed their children with perversity.
I will be the perfect friend full with malignity.
I will be just like everybody who comes to this world harmless,
But most certainly,
I will be Pharaoh and leave the world with my golden dress.

IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS

OLIVIA SHELBOURN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

As of 2016, there are an estimated 7.4 billion people on planet Earth. Each person has his or her own beliefs, opinions, and lifestyles. Some say this, and some say that. Others claim this is best, while others claim that's the worst. Out of 7.4 billion people, I am one, and how I conduct my day-to-day life is none of your business.

Now, this rule does not apply to everything, so allow me to rephrase it. If I am not hurting you or directly affecting your life in any way by how I choose to live, then don't worry about it. I don't believe in Christianity or any sort of "god" for that matter, but I have several friends who do. I respect their lifestyles, and they respect mine. The ones I don't respect are those self-righteous Christians that spew misquoted Bible phrases, say that I'm condemned to hell, and continuously try to take away my rights. I also don't approve of atheists calling my friends unintelligent and shoving their beliefs down people's throats.

I'm not only judged on my beliefs; I am judged on my outward appearance. I am a woman. I sometimes like to dress in tight shirts or short dresses. Sometimes my shoulders or stomach is exposed. It's fashionable; it's "in." I feel proud of my body and my image. My friend Quinn prefers to dress more, "comfortably." While I'll sport a face full of makeup, curled hair, and a flowy dress, she'll prefer a face without makeup, a messy bun, a simple t-shirt, and jean shorts. We all wear clothing. They've evolved from a resource for warmth to a societal statement, and somehow, my style of clothing offends people.

"Are you that desperate for attention?"

"Do you really need to dress like that?"

"You'll never get a good job wearing things like that."

That last statement stuns me the most. There is such a thing as dressing for the occasion. I am aware that wearing a crop top and shorts to a job interview is highly inappropriate unless it's for a job at Hooters. I know the difference between a wardrobe choice for a job interview and a night out with the girls.

Speaking of nights out, I like to flirt. I like to go out with my friends to dance and have a good time. Some may give me winks, and I may give one back. I might be a tease. I also might go home with one of them. Are you going to go with me? No? Then keep your nose out of it. Unless you're my doctor or my next partner, you do not need to know my sexual history.

People say, "You'll always be judged, no matter what."

I do not accept this. These people sound as though they've once fought against those who've judged them and accepted defeat. I don't necessarily walk around shouting, "Do not judge me! It's none of your business!" I fight judgment in subtle ways. When people give me dirty looks, I flash a sincere and cheesy smile their way. For those bold enough to make comments directly to me, I poke holes in their logic. Sometimes, I'll respond with "And?" continuously until they run out of material. If I'm not feeling the fight, I'll simply remark, "Kay."

I believe my style of dress does not haunt you late at night. I believe my homosexual lifestyle is not damaging your existing romantic relationship. I believe that what I do with other people behind closed doors should stay between them, my doctor, and me. You were not part of the fun, so you do not need to know about it. It's none of your business. ✿

SELF-PORTRAIT AS CARTOON

KARSEN FELZIEN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



HE'LL BE FREE NOW

BRIAN GORDON • COMPUTER INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

On a cold Monday morning in late January, I plodded through the snow. I felt safe and warm in the new snow boots I had gotten for Christmas a few weeks earlier. After tearing open the large, festively wrapped present and finding only the boots in the box, I remembered being disappointed initially. The shiny, brightly colored conglomerations of rubber and plastic proved a vast letdown compared to the anticipated playtime marvel that my imagination had promised. However, the sturdy galoshes quickly proved their usefulness. They fit comfortably over my tennis shoes and prevented the cold water from the puddles I liked to step in from leaking through.

I was a third grader on my way to school. Along the way, I passed a big blue house with an unusually large back yard. My path to and from school had taken me past that three-story Victorian hundreds of times, but I'd never before noticed the little brown and white Sheltie in the back of that huge yard. He was sitting on top of his doghouse. On my way home at the end of the day, I saw him still there on top of that little doghouse.

The next morning on my way to school, I spotted that little dog again. He still hadn't left his rooftop post. Something compelled me to investigate. I stepped off of the sidewalk and waded into the six-inch deep snow that covered the littered and unkempt yard. Upon my closing vantage, I could see where the dog had pushed all the snow off the doghouse roof. It was the only place where the poor thing could avoid having to stand in the snow.

As I approached the dog, I noticed the chain that bound him to the doghouse. There was no collar and no identifying tag or any other sign of affection for the animal. The end of the chain was fastened around his neck with a padlock. I instantly felt sorry for him. The doghouse, obviously built when the dog was a puppy, had grown too small for him to enter. It was the cruelest sight I had ever seen.

He stood when I got to him, his tiny paws balancing him on the pitched roof of that undersized doghouse. I didn't know if it was from cold or fear, but the small dog shivered uncontrollably. His dark brown eyes, sitting above his thin muzzle, regarded me in a pleading fashion.

I reached out to him, and he flinched as if he thought I meant to strike him. I didn't want him to be afraid of me, so I held out my hand for him to sniff. I touched his cold black nose and let him lick my palm. I gently scratched behind his ear with the other hand. Underneath his long fur, the poor thing was skin

and bones.

The contour of his little skull felt fragile next to the cold, hard metal of the chain that encircled his thin neck. I tried to undo it, but the strong chain was bolted tightly to the little doghouse. I then tried to slip the barbarous leash over the small dog's head, but it was fastened too tightly around his neck.

I didn't know how long I was there, but when I glanced back at the sidewalk, I found it empty. All the other kids had completed their school-ward treks. I knew I had to hurry if I didn't want to be late. When I turned to leave, the dog made a silent protest. Moving to the edge of his rooftop haven, he stood, shivering. It felt as though he was looking straight into me with those sad brown eyes. It was an easy deduction that he didn't want me to go.

I turned back one more time to pet him and let him lick my face, but then I had to go. It tore my heart to leave him there, but I didn't want to get to school late. I could feel his warm brown eyes on my back as I trudged toward the cleared sidewalk. I didn't dare look back. If I had, I wouldn't have been able to leave.

As it turned out, I was late. I took the teacher's scolding in stride. The sympathy I held for the little dog in the snow far outweighed feelings of chagrin the teacher could have given me. I was distracted the whole day. That poor dog was all I could think about. I couldn't wait for class to be over, so I could visit my new friend again.

When the day did finally end, I made a beeline to the big, blue house. There he was in the same spot. I hurried across the snowy yard to get to him. When he saw me, he immediately stood, constantly moving on his little feet, as he excitedly anticipated my affection.

I decided to call him Bingo after a song I'd learned a couple of years earlier in music class. I had never owned a dog, and it was the only good dog name I knew. He seemed to recognize the name I had chosen for him and responded when I called it.

The time came once again for our brief encounter to end. This time, Bingo seemed to understand that I had to leave. I even thought I detected a touch of belief in his eyes when I promised that I would be back again. I looked into his dark eyes, we exchanged our silent goodbyes, and I headed home.

As soon as I entered the house, my nose brought me good news. Mom and Dad were still at work and never got home before 5:30 p.m. That could only mean that Grandma, who lived with us, was cooking for that evening. I loved it when Grandma cooked. In my eyes, she was the best cook in the world.

"Kinda late gettin' home, aren't-cha, child?" she asked when I stepped into

the kitchen. Grandma was like that. She paid attention to the small details that most people would brush off as unimportant. That was what I loved most about her, but this time it was working against me. I decided to take advantage of the fact that she was preoccupied with her cooking and made my exit without responding to her query.

That evening, Grandma's dinner, which normally brought me so much joy, brought me only misery and grief. I thought about Bingo and how he was out in the cold without such a good meal. Grandma, seeing that I was not my usual self, asked if I was all right, and I assured her that I was.

I wanted to talk about Bingo, but I knew that Mom would tell me not to touch other people's dirty animals. Then Dad would tell me to do as my mother said, and my older brother would tease me. Grandma would be more understanding, but she would still expect me to do what I was told. Still, dinner was delicious, and I scarfed down every guilt-ridden bite of it.

That night, sleeping proved to be even harder than eating. I kept thinking about Bingo. I pictured him out there shivering on that rooftop. I thought about how if he wasn't on that infernal chain, he could come and sleep in the warm bed with me. When I finally did fall asleep, I dreamed of Bingo.

The next day, I secretly wrapped some of my breakfast in a napkin and hid it in my pocket. I took it to Bingo and was once again late for school. At lunch, I hid more food and saved it for my after-school visit with Bingo. That was the agenda for Thursday, as well.

On Thursday night, my parents called me into the kitchen. I could tell I was in trouble by the tone of their summons. Dad had that stern but concerned look in his eye, and Mom had her arms crossed. I already knew it was lecture time. I entered the kitchen and timidly took my place in a chair at the table.

"We just got a call from your teacher," Dad said. "Do you know what it was about?"

"Bein' late," I mumbled in my barely audible "I'm in trouble" voice.

"Three days in a row," Dad said. "What have you been doing to get to school late three days in a row?"

I took a deep breath, preparing myself to explain about the abused dog when my father spoke again. "You've been playing around on the way to school, haven't you?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I confessed, still preparing to explain about the dog with whom I'd been playing.

"And are you supposed to be playing around on your way to school?" Dad asked, not giving me a chance to speak.

“No, sir.”

“What are you supposed to be doing?”

“Goin’ straight to school.”

“And what are you going to do from now on?”

“Go straight to school.”

“And are you going to be late for school tomorrow morning?”

“No, sir.”

“Good man. Now I’m going to hold you to your promise.”

“Kay.”

“You can go now.” I had gotten out of that easier than I’d suspected. I found out later it was because my older brother, who was in middle school, had gotten in so much more trouble than I had that day. “Send your brother in here,” Dad said as I left.

This was going to make things more difficult. I couldn’t be late for school anymore. I was going to have to limit my visits with Bingo to after school only. It was a frustrating decision, and I hated it, but it had to be made.

The next morning, even though I told myself it wasn’t necessary, I saved some of my breakfast. I convinced myself that it was so I could give Bingo twice as much after school. I knew if I was late again, my parents would find out about Bingo and forbid me to see him again. I couldn’t have that. No matter how hard it would be, I would have to refrain from stopping to see him in the mornings.

I took the usual route to school that morning. Inevitably, I came to the big blue house. I kept my head straight forward and quickened my pace. It didn’t help. In my peripheral vision, I could see Bingo, and he saw me. He was standing on his doghouse ecstatically wagging his tail.

I couldn’t stop. I couldn’t be late. To visit him now would only stop all future visits, but Bingo didn’t understand that. How could he? I was the only one who had been nice to him, and now I was letting him down, too.

I had almost passed the house. Bingo’s tail stopped wagging. I could feel those eyes on me. I couldn’t do it! I turned and ran full sprint across the yard to Bingo. His tail started to wag again. I gave him his breakfast and stroked his long fur. I touched his cold, black nose and scratched behind his ear. But then I had to go.

Without saying goodbye, I raced off. I ran the rest of the way to school, making it to class just in time. It was too close. There had to be a better way. If only Bingo was free. That was it! I had to find a way to free Bingo. As soon as they saw him, Mom and Dad would have to let me keep him. Then he would be

my dog, and I would take better care of him than the people who had him.

I had figured out what I had to do, but how I was going to do it was a completely different story. I racked my brain trying to figure out a way to free my dog. Just before school let out, it hit me. Dad had a set of bolt cutters in the toolshed. I had seen him break old padlocks with them, and that was exactly what I needed.

After school, I went to see Bingo. He seemed to sense my excitement. "Tonight," I told him as I fed and played with him. "Tonight you'll be free."

Nighttime came, and I was growing impatient. My plan was simple: wait for everyone to fall asleep and then sneak into the tool shed to get the bolt cutters. After that, I would go to the big, blue house and free Bingo. Then he would be all mine. I couldn't wait!

However, a huge, winter storm hit that night. The snow fell, and the wind howled. There was no way I could sneak out. As soon as I opened the door, the sound of the wind would wake the whole house. I couldn't do anything that would make my parents tell me I couldn't see Bingo anymore. I had to wait another night.

The next day was Saturday. There was no school, and my parents wouldn't let me go outside. There was a foot of snow on the ground, and it was twelve degrees below zero. I knew Bingo was waiting for me, but I couldn't go to him. I pictured him shivering in the cold on his rooftop and wondering where I was. Sympathy and guilt almost drove me to depression. I had promised him that I was going to free him, and then I had broken that promise.

Nighttime finally came again. This time, nothing was going to stop me from going for Bingo. A late promise was better than a broken one, and I was going to keep whatever was left of the promise that I had made to my friend.

I waited until everyone was asleep and then silently dressed. Afterwards, I stealthily stole out the back door and into the tool shed. Then, with the cumbersome bolt cutters in hand, I made the three-block trek to the big blue house. The excitement was unbearable; I couldn't get there fast enough.

There he was, finally! He looked so cute—sleeping, curled up on top of his doghouse. I ran across the yard to him. I pulled off my glove and touched his cold black nose, as I always liked to do. His nose felt a little too cold, and it was dry. I stroked his fur, but he didn't wake. His long hair was cold and stiff. In fact, his whole body was cold and stiff. And still, he did not wake. As my last desperate grips on denial waned, I knew that Bingo was never going to wake.

My heart sank as the pain of disappointment welled up. I fell to my knees, defeated by grief. Bingo was dead. The excruciating pressure crept upward,

forcing the tears to come flooding out. I sat on my knees and convulsed with sobs. It was all my fault! He had waited in that blizzard for me to fulfil my promise, and I had let him down just like everyone else. I had not showed up, and now he was dead. He probably thought I had forgotten about him.

I hugged Bingo's dead body to me and cried even harder. It didn't feel like Bingo. It was cold and stiff. There was no warm tongue to lick my face, no dark eyes to stare at me—just a shell of what Bingo used to be. If those stupid people would have just taken better care of him!

I cried some more. The cold night closed in on me, and I was all alone. My home seemed an impossible distance away. Then I felt a hand gently touch my shoulder.

I turned to find Grandma behind me. How had she known? Somehow, she always seemed to know. Sobbing, I went to her. She took me close and hugged me tightly. Tears and snot saturated the wooly material of her overcoat as I cried on her shoulder. I could hear her soft words over my own cries. "I know. I know. Hush, child. It's okay. Shhhh. Now you can finish your own breakfast. It's okay. He'll be free now." ❁

COMRADE

BRITTANY MCCOY • ASSOCIATE DEGREE NURSING



SHE STANDS TWENTY STORIES HIGH

MELISSA NUSS • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR POETRY

With grace and frankness,
she was a better angel
than your guardian or conscience
as she stood you down, refusing
to unravel the knot of your marriage.

Your shame, no longer a secret,
cries out drunk and sloppy and sad.
Swallowed by giants,
you stubbornly crave height,
but even full of you, we are left starving.

There's no meat on your bones.
Resigned, you brush yourself aside,
an abandoned circus tent
whose center pole caves
and crumbles into soft, wet sand.

THE EIFFEL TOWER AT NIGHT

LYNDA HEIDEN • ADMINISTRATIVE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT, AREA OFFICE



HEARTBEAT

KAYTON E. FEE • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I know the exact date and time of when I died. I felt like a part of me was gone, that the whole world fell at my feet. It was June 18, 2012, 2:30 p.m. It all started with a gaze.

I see something in his eyes no child should; his dark, tired eyes look up at me like a dog's begging for food. His pleading eyes tell me not to worry. I look at the corner of the room, and I see boxes and furniture in a pile as if for a bonfire. I walk away and run into my room in fear of what's to come. No, no, I won't accept this. I cannot accept this; I have to do something, but what—what can I do? The damage is already done. Later, I hear a car pulling into the driveway. It is Dad's friend Ray from work. Ray offers to take Dad and allow him to be his roommate for as long as he needs.

He's leaving because Mom cannot communicate with him; she cannot let things go. She tells him that they are over, that she is seeing someone else. She wants him out so her "play toy" can move in. One side of me wants to help; the other side wants to run away. This is our father, who works harder than anyone to keep food on the table, a roof over our heads, and smiles on our faces, even if the smiles come because of the silliest of things.

I step into the living room, and reality hits me in the face so hard I am knocked into the chair next to me. I try getting up off my seat, but my legs give out. I sit back down, ashamed. I won't help him leave. I feel guilty for it, but I am not strong enough. The world starts spinning, boxes seem to fly everywhere, and people run in and out of the house as if this was a stupid cartoon. The world is coming to an end. Then, in one swift moment, it all stops. I look down, and there lay big, strong hands of reassurance. It is his touch, his gesture of love that stops everything. He grabs my hands, pulls me off my seat, and holds me in his arms as if he never wants to let me go.

In this moment, everything freezes, and in this moment, I die. My body gives up, my legs became paralyzed, and I lose control. Tears start flowing so hard I cannot breathe, my heart thumping as if a pack of elephants was about to charge into the house. He just stands holding me tighter and tighter. I can hear his heartbeat. I can feel his hands supporting me. I can feel his lips on my head and his breath swaying at my hair. I close my eyes tighter and try to eliminate the pain. Everything goes quiet. All that is left is a heartbeat. That heartbeat

keeps going as if it will never lose power. My dad, he is what keeps me alive, his loving embrace keeping me from feeling powerless.

While I am breaking down, my dad whispers in my ear, “It’s OK. It’s not your fault. Everyone took part in this, so don’t blame yourself or feel guilty.” I cannot say anything. I disagree with him, but a part of me wants to believe him. I look up at him and see his eyes full of hope; I cannot disappoint him. He kisses my forehead and tells me that he loves me and is proud of me; he holds me for another minute. I grab my sister and my dad and squeeze them so tightly my arms flex.

In this moment, I know that no matter what, I feel loved, needed, and supported. I am not alone in the world. I know that even if my dad does not live under the same roof that I do, I can close my eyes and see him, feel him, hear his voice and his heartbeat and know that a father’s love never dies. 🌸

A ROSE

DAWN CLOVER • ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, BUSINESS



A TYPICAL DAY WITH THE GUYS

ALEXIS THOMAS • DUAL CREDIT

Almost every high school student looks forward to high school graduation, and my friend Andy from band was no different. The last day of school, he gave me an invitation to his graduation party and left me with the daunting task of sending the information to the rest of the trombone section. Once I started a group chat, my phone blew up with texts. So after a crazy group chat, I told Andy who could come: Andy, Bryce, Lance, Cal, Chad, and myself. My instrument section hangs out a lot together; we see each other in class and outside of school. Whenever our group gets together, it is always a blast, and something crazy happens. Even though Andy's graduation party was supposed to be a little more organized, I knew one way or another, my friends would find something crazy to do.

A week later, I drove to Andy's house. Though I had been friends with Andy for two years, I had never met his family, nor had I been to his house. To be honest, I was a little nervous, as I was late to the party. After I got out of my car and locked it, I looked up. His white brick house had a sign in front that said, "Andy's Graduation Party." The garage was open, and in it were long tables with board games; the front door was open as if to say, "Yeah, come on in!" The house looked inviting; however, that didn't settle my nerves, so with a deep breath, I walked across the street and up the driveway. As I walked through the front door, I looked for my friends, who were nowhere to be seen. Instead, I saw adults standing or sitting and talking, but no kids. Before I could find someone I knew, a woman from across the room walked toward me and said, "Come on in!" As she walked closer, I got a better look at her. She was skinny, about 5'5, had blond hair, and seemed to be in her mid-40s. She seemed friendly, but something wasn't sitting right with me; although she greeted me with a smile, her eyes told me she was looking for something. Once she was standing in front of me, she held out her hand and said, "Hi. I'm Andy's aunt. What's your name?"

I shook her hand and looked at her face while smiling and answered, "Alexis."

She smiled back at me, but in her eyes, I saw the wheels turning. She then asked, "What grade are you in?"

"I'm a junior."

If the air could have emotion, it would have been curiosity. Before I could ask where all the teenagers were, she said, "Now, did you go to prom with

Andy?”

I attempted to contain a laugh but widened my smile and said, “No, I’m just a friend.”

I could tell she was disappointed because her facial expression changed from happy to sad for a split second. Although she didn’t intend to show or for me to notice the change in emotion, I still saw it. She then said, “There is food in the kitchen. Would you like some?”

“No, thank you.”

She gestured to her left and said, “The kids are hanging out downstairs.”

“Okay, thank you.” I crept down the stairs. I chuckled at my conversation with Andy’s aunt and thought that it probably wouldn’t be the weirdest conversation I would have at that party. Knowing my friends well, I guessed that weirder conversations were bound to happen. I started to relax because I was going into familiar territory—well, as familiar as it gets with teenage guys. When I came to the bottom of the stairs, I smiled bigger than I had all day. The room was full of guys sitting on a grey L-shaped couch playing *Call of Duty* on the X-Box. It took a moment for them to notice me; they were too busy screaming at each other about the video game. I noticed that I was the only girl there.

The first guy to notice my presence was Andy. He gave me a half wave. “Hey, Alexis.”

With that, everyone turned in my direction and said, “Hey.” My friends were scattered around the room: Chad was sitting on the futon playing *Call of Duty*; Andy was sitting in the armchair eating a sandwich; Andy was talking to Lance; and Bryce was sitting on the couch with a soda in his hand. After everyone greeted me, I walked over to Andy, who was standing by the coolers.

Andy pointed behind him. “Drinks are in the cooler.”

“Okay, thanks.”

Bryce turned to look my direction and said, “About time you showed up.”

Truth be told, I showed up late on purpose. I stopped and turned his direction. “I showed up before Cal.” It’s one of our group’s inside jokes; Cal showed up an hour late to everything.

Bryce laughed. “That’s not an accomplishment.”

I walked to the cooler, pulled out a Sprite, and stood behind Conner to watch them play *Call of Duty* and yell at each other.

Since Andy had a pool in his backyard, Lance decided it would be a great idea to jump in the pool. Even so, he didn’t want to do it in his clothes, so he said, “Hey, Andy, can I borrow some shorts?”

Andy looked at Lance like he was crazy and then laughed at him while shaking his head. “No.” Then Andy headed upstairs to get more food.

Once Andy was upstairs, Lance turned to Andy’s younger brother and said, “Jack, can you get me a pair of Andy’s shorts?”

“Sure!” Jack walked around the bar into Andy’s room. Not 30 seconds later, he came back out with a pair of Andy’s shorts and handed them to Lance.

Lance grabbed the shorts, told Jack, “Thanks,” walked over to the restroom, changed out of his clothes and into Andy’s shorts, and walked out of the bathroom with a towel in hand.

I looked at him and shook my head; knowing Lance, no amount of reason was going to change his mind, so I didn’t bother saying anything.

He set his clothes down at my feet and said, “Will you hold my stuff?”

I just nodded my head, and he placed the items in my hand, grabbed the towel, opened the sliding glass door, and dropped the towel. Lance walked a little faster and did a sideways cannonball into the pool just as Andy walked down the stairs and saw what Lance was up to. Andy then ran outside and attempted to be mad at Lance while the rest of us were laughing our tails off. The two then came back inside. Lance began to dry himself off, and Andy went back to his plate full of food. While Lance was drying off, I took a seat next to Bryce on the couch.

Lance changed back into his clothes and gave Andy his now wet shorts. He then walked over to me and demanded, “Can I have my stuff back?” I pulled his stuff out of my purse and handed it back to him, and then he went and grabbed another pop.

Bryce turned his head to look at me and said with a slight smile, “When we got here, Andy’s aunt asked us if any of us were trombones; she was trying to find all the trombonists.”

I chuckled and said with a smirk, “Well, that’s better than what she asked me.”

His eyes widened, and he raised his left eyebrow. “What did she ask?”

I tried to contain my laughter. In spite of my efforts, I let out a little laugh and admitted, “She asked if I went to prom with Andy.”

He raised both his eyebrows and pulled his lips in between his teeth, suppressed a laugh, and smirked.

I heard someone coming, so I looked toward the stairs just as Cal hopped down the last couple of steps with a plate full of food. Bryce joked, “About time you got here, dude.”

Cal said “hi” to everyone and sat down next to me; Bryce and I caught him

up to speed on everything that had happened so far. When I was not looking, Cal got into the main pocket of my purse and took out my phone and wallet. I looked to my right and saw that he had my stuff in his hand. I tried to take my things back, but I failed. “Cal, give my stuff back,” I whined.

Cal shook his head no and tossed my phone to Bryce. I tried to get my phone back from Bryce as Cal teased, “Thanks, Alexis, for the cash.” I whipped around to face Cal. I grabbed my wallet, but I was too late—he pulled the cash out of my wallet as I pulled it away from him.

Cal then got up from his seat, walked around the couch, and pretended to pass the money to Andy as Andy was heading to the other room. I asked Andy for my money back, but he didn’t have it. I headed back to the other room, stood in front of Cal, held out my hand, and gave him a stern glare.

He laughed and said, “I don’t have it,” and glanced in Bryce’s direction.

I sat on the armrest, looked down at him, and demanded, “Give me my stuff back.” He just smiled at me and pretended to think about it. So to push his decision, I slid down off the armrest and half onto his left leg while Cal took a seat on the other side.

“Okay, fine. If you tell me the password,” Bryce said as he waved my phone in front of my face.

I leaned forward to take the phone, only for it to be moved further away. With a sigh I acquiesced. I reached for the phone once more, and he let me take the phone to show him my password. He asked me, “Why did you chose those numbers?” while he pulled my money out of his pocket.

“It’s a date.”

He grabbed my phone once more and typed the password in while I put the money back in my wallet. I then took my phone back and zipped up my purse. We turned our attention back to the TV. After a while, we saw Andy tickle his younger brother. Before I knew it, Bryce was moving his fingers along my sides. I burst out laughing. I tried to get him to stop but had no luck. After a moment or two, he stopped. I glared at him, but it wasn’t effective because I was half smiling and trying to catch my breath. He just smiled at me like he had done nothing wrong. I looked across the room at Cal, who had a plate half full of food and his sandwich in hand. He turned and looked at the two of us, sitting right next to each other almost touching shoulders. He tilted his head slightly to the left. With a smirk on his face and a mischievous glint in his eyes, he said, “You two should date.”

With those four little words, the two of us froze and stared at Cal. I could feel my face heat up; I did not dare look at Bryce in fear that he would see me

blush. After a couple of moments, I got up and moved to the next room where some of the group was playing pool. I hopped onto the barstool and watched the others play pool; not long after that, Chad, Cal, and Bryce joined me at the table. Chad and Cal took the seats across from me, leaving the last chair next to me. Bryce took the seat next to me but turned his back to Chad and Cal, so he could face the dart board.

Bryce grabbed the darts that were on the table and began throwing them. I then grabbed the three left on the table. After I started throwing darts, it became a game, although it wasn't about how well we could play darts. It became a game of him laughing at how poorly I could play darts, and how he could play fairly decently without even trying. He would sometimes not even look at the dartboard but at me instead. We played darts until he had to leave, although he didn't sound like he wanted to leave, as he kept saying, "One more round. Then I have to leave." He and I played more than 20 rounds of darts before he said his goodbyes and left.

Once Bryce left, Andy asked me, "Sooo..., you and Bryce. Care to explain?"

I could feel my face turning crimson, and with a small smirk and my best attempt at a straight face, I denied it. "I have no idea what you're talking about." After that, I said my goodbyes and told Andy thank you and headed home.

To most of my friends, I am a little sister or a big sister, but the trombone section usually treats me like I am one of the guys. Nonetheless, to one friend, I am not certain who I am. As I expected, the conversations got weirder and weirder as the party went on. I know these guys well, and they know me well. They know exactly what to say to make me laugh or blush, and they know what they can use against me. As for me, I know precisely what to say to make each of them laugh and feel embarrassed. Every time the group gets together, we have a great time, and there is always a story to tell afterwards. As we finish high school, the group will continue to get smaller, but we'll keep in touch. Even still, I highly doubt the trombone section will get any less crazy. ❀

SELF-PORTRAIT AS CACTUS

NANCY HAGLER VUJOVIC • ART INSTRUCTOR



COCOA BEACH SUNRISE

REBECCA BURT • LIFE SCIENCES INSTRUCTOR



NEW ORLEANS TRAIN TRACKS

REBECCA BURT • LIFE SCIENCES INSTRUCTOR



BUCKET LIST

TERESA BURT • UNDECLARED

If you think Nebraska doesn't have hills, you have never travelled across the state by bicycle. Democrat Hill, located near Callaway, Nebraska, is the steepest, windiest hill, and I have ridden up it on my bike. The year was 2011, and I was three months from turning 50 when my partner Rebecca and I rode the BRAN (Bicycle Ride Across Nebraska). Check that off my bucket list!

The BRAN was a seven-day ride consisting of a total of 454 miles. Although I'd always loved bike riding, I hadn't biked much for many years. I thought I would be one of the older riders during the week-long ride, but I would say I was the average age. There were even two World War II veterans who made the trek. Since purchasing my bike in 2010, I have biked over 6200 miles.

In the last five years, I have lived a lifetime of doing things I have always wanted to do. I'm marking them off one by one from the "Things I Want to Do Before I Die" list. I plan to never check them all off, as I keep adding to the list.

I have always wanted to fly free like the birds. While I may never be a bird, I have flown like a kite. Parasailing off the coast of Cozumel, Mexico, 600 feet above the ocean, was an amazing experience. I saw the coral reefs through the clearest blue waters you could ever imagine.

A person is never too old to start something new, to do the things he or she has always wanted, or to start on that bucket list. Your list may include travelling to different states or countries, swimming in the ocean, mountain climbing, or anything else you have dreamed of doing. I would encourage you to make that list, and as you are able, start checking off the goals and living a life full of adventure and experiences.

Snorkeling in the ocean near Cozumel and in and around the Hawaiian Islands was another adventure I will never forget. Seeing the vivid colors of the tropical fish, the coral, and anemones was a surreal experience—like seeing a little piece of Heaven.

Travels in the past few years included trips to Long Beach, California, where Rebecca and I rode an odd sort of side-by-side bicycle for two along the coast. We still laugh at the way she often forgot to pedal, making me do all the work. A short stay in New Orleans, Louisiana, netted a venture of drifting through an alligator-filled bayou in a pontoon. Yes, believe it or not, such an adventure had

been on my bucket list. How I had lived without standing on top of a volcano on Maui and looking at the vastness of the craters below, I'll never know.

I'll never tire of watching sunsets and sunrises over the oceans. There is such a peace that comes from sitting on a beach and listening to the waves crash the shore or picking up little treasures of sea glass in the sand.

I love to dance but never did much until recently. It's such a freedom of expression. Another defining moment was getting a tattoo to celebrate turning 50. I've picked up my dusty brushes and started oil painting again after a 15-year hiatus.

Bucket-listing isn't always a bouquet of thornless roses. A recent spring trip to western Nebraska with a hike in the Wildcat Hills brought a not-so-pleasant surprise when we found ourselves close to a three to four-foot long rattlesnake that was quite angry about being disturbed. But I had gotten to see a rattlesnake, which is something I had never seen before.

Each is a new and wonderful experience. Every day is meant to be a great adventure. This doesn't all come with ease; I fight chronic migraines, joint and muscle pain, and depression, all while working full-time. I can choose to sit in my chair and complain, or I can get out there and enjoy living.

If we don't do the things we want to do now, we may never get a chance. Life has a way of throwing surprises our way, and those surprises are not always good ones. Disease and disaster take young lives every day, so why not live your dreams today? People shouldn't let finances or time get in the way of living their dreams. Keep a simple list; this might include picking wildflowers along the roadside, watching the sun set or rise over a lake, or waterskiing with your neighbor who owns a boat. Keep an in-the-future list, as well, of your more grandiose dreams and wishes.

Memories are built one checkmark at a time and pieced together in a maze of life's magnificent worldliness. So what's next on the bucket list? Well, let's see—skydiving for one. It's been on my list for a while, and hopefully, I will soon cross it off. I love anything to do with water, and I've never been white-water rafting, so that has a spot on my ever-growing list. Australia, Africa, and New York City are waiting for me—I hope to see you there soon! ❀

MAJESTIC MOON OVER COVE

TONYA SCHROEDER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



WAITING FOR THE MEMORIES OF FOREVER TO BE OVER

CASEY CHRISTENSEN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

A forgotten plastic bag at the
young cashier's register.

An eternity frozen with the stare
of her brown eyes, pupils dashing
my skull, side to side.

A clumsy, black shoe-lace blunder
on 70th and Eternity.

Waves of frozen words drown out
all my self-aspirations. Icy adjectives
pierce my chest with just strength.

A myriad of mistaken hellos. A
collection of forgotten farewells.

To live with friendly bereavement;
citrus spitting on an open sore,
leftover from my own salted knife.

Absently wilted, covered in a
self-reflective doctor's note.

A snake's blood attempt at the
chance to love my off-centered,
broken, and torn body.

OUR LORD AND SAVIOR ANDY WARHOL

ANASTASIA LEIGH FINNER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF RUNNER UP ARTWORK AWARD



CHRYSANTHEMUM

KALEIGH GORMAN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



SUNBATHED SUNSET

(A Continuation of John Steinbeck's "The Chrysanthemums," 1931)

JOSEPH MCCARTER • WELDING TECHNOLOGY

She tipped the brim of her hat toward the orange sky. Her eyes followed it forward while her arm lazily swept the dust from her brow. Letting out a long sigh, she squinted her eyes toward the edge of the pathway leading to

her house. It had been a long time since anyone had come to visit Elisa. In fact, she was having trouble remembering the last time.

Then, like a whip cracking in the dry air, she remembered. Mary had come shuffling up the road on an old tattered bicycle. Wisps of her hair had tossed in the wind. She was a curious woman, that Mary. She had worn a pantsuit that didn't quite fit right. One size too big. Elisa was sure she had gotten it secondhand.

Standing in the field, Elisa watched Mary draw near.

"Hello!" Mary said, but through the air, all Elisa could hear and see was the sound of a muffled voice and the glimmer of a moving mouth. Mary exaggerated her kindly wave and skipped to where Elisa marked the dirt.

"Hello!" she repeated, this time close enough for Elisa to make it out clearly.

"How do you do, Mary? Busy day?" Elisa forced a smile that had refused to relax for years now.

Mary, with a hesitant glance, searched the field. Was it just Elisa out here? No hands to help her with the cattle and land? It had been two years since Henry had died. It was a terrible thing. His heart had failed him one hot day out in the field. Elisa had been urging him to go see the doctor, but since things had been rough on the farm, there was no time for that, let alone any money they could afford.

Since that day, Elisa had a sharp confidence within her that she could manage the land. The others urged her to sell it to the gentlemen in town who were searching for land to purchase for a fair price. They had plans to build something or another. Truth is, no one in town really knew who these stout men were, but they dressed nicely. Their pants fancied fine creases with tightly kempt handkerchiefs tucked away in their chest pockets, and their heads were topped with the most suave hats in town. No one thought to question the men's origins during that time. Two men like that, coming to a town like this, had only one sight on their minds. Big city men, they wanted land. They had lost their chances a few years back in the crash but were hoping to build it up again.

But Elisa, as strong as she was, never gave herself the slightest halting opinion.

Mary skimmed the dried up land once more. She noticed the insignificant herd of cattle. Elisa must be clinging to whatever bit she could now, but it wouldn't be long before the vultures got to her. In fact, that's why Mary had come. "Yes! You see, my sister Betty is getting married next month. She was having trouble arranging table settings when I told her about your lovely chrysanthemums. It's a big wedding, you see. She's marrying a man from the city. She'll be moving away soon, and I wanted to send her off nice. You see, I remember back when—well...." At this, Mary paused. She had heard the

rumors in town that Elisa had refused to think of herself before Henry. She knew better than to bring that up now. “Well, I just know you love those gorgeous flowers of yours. So I thought I would come on up to see how things were going and place an order. You could do that for me, couldn’t you?”

Elisa’s jaw hardened. All the women in town would set up a schedule to visit her. It started out being every few weeks, but the space in time got thicker. Now, it was every few months. Elisa preferred to stick to herself, but they didn’t get it. They didn’t know why she would stay here on this farm by herself—no husband, no kids, no hands. Just her and the cattle. But Elisa liked it that way. She always knew she could do it. Her mama had told her she had a gift with things.

“Oh, honey,” Elisa started, “those dried up a few months ago when that sun hit hard. Even with these planting hands of mine, they couldn’t manage the fight anymore.” Elisa stopped; minding her manners, she left time for Mary to respond.

“That’s a shame!” Mary pinched the side of her pants, and her body shifted in an impatient, directionless manner.

Elisa understood how this part went full well. She nodded toward the river. “I hear Shirley down the road a ways has some lovely amaryllis plants she could share with you. Go along now; I’m sure you can catch her out there now.”

“Oh, right.” Another silence held in the air for a while until it fell. Weak, Mary replied, “It was nice to see you, Elisa. I’ll talk to Betty about sending you an invite in the mail next week.”

Now Mary knew she had done it. She saw Elisa’s smile scratch along the side of her cheeks. Her eyes squinted in a way too narrow to be kind. Mary turned her back and with a quick leap on her bicycle, briskly pedaled her way up the road. She picked it up. With a final peek toward Elisa, she waved quietly and let the bicycle lead her way toward the river.

Elisa followed her with her eyes holding attentively and her smile gathering back to its hardened creases. She watched until the sun fogged her vision and the bite of a fly grounded her. “There’s something there,” she said to herself, realizing full well there was no one around to hear her anymore.

It had been a while since she’d thought of the odd tin man who had come her way what seemed like years ago. “To live on a wagon. That’s just silly.” Elisa laughed, but the laugh quickly faded. “A woman alone on a wagon, spending her time year-round traveling the road.” This time, Elisa let out a sigh that continued. On its own, it whipped up in the air and shadowed its way toward the road.

She bent back down to the dirt where the sun's rays were swallowed in the deep cracks. So little was left here now. The cattle strayed; the house needed a new coat of paint. Her chrysanthemums, dried up. For the first time, Elisa let herself think of those two fancy men. Her cheeks blushed at the idea, and she quickly started digging at the dirt. "A woman alone on the road. What a silly idea," she said, but was it really so much? She took off her man's hat and laid it beside her on the ground where a bug surfaced and followed the stitching closely, travelling beside it, alone, without a glimmer of doubt guiding its step. "What a silly idea," she repeated. 🌻

BARBED WIRE & OPEN SPACES

BRITTANY MCCOY • ASSOCIATE DEGREE NURSING



BREAKNECK

MELISSA NUSS • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR POETRY

Liberated

from the banana seat, she caught wicked air,
taking an unexpected flight from the lavender bicycle.
Arms outstretched and hands splayed wide, fingers
confused as to whether they should still be gripping
white rubber handlebar cozies, or reaching out behind
in a clumsy attempt to break the fall.

Her

dad hadn't taught her how to ride. She learned
pointing her front bumper down steep inclines,
launching into barely controlled freefalls, staying upright
until wheels slowed in thick, grassy yards at the bottom.
She careened down another neighborhood mountain, the day
she was forced to fly. Focused on the ride, he went unseen.
His name was...

Freedom.

The bike drew near and with calm instinct the older boy
closed fast, raised an arm out over the concrete,
and clotheslined her. This tormentor stood gangly and tall
with uncut, greasy corn-colored hair. A girl, aged nine,
knew how to despise someone, and as a grown woman
she would continue to find blondes unappealing.

Cracked

cement broke the fall. Displaced sounds of a small body
hitting pavement and a violently loud vomit of air
hung in the quiet playtime. Her throat finally caught fire
as she tried to catch breath and cry at the same time.
A season passed before she witnessed Freedom crash, not

Ironically,

from his front door and spill onto the same sidewalk.
Face bruised in tears, hair matted to his forehead,
he would not quite escape the meaty hands
of a loud, large man who was not his father
and was dragged back inside, squealing.

BEING WOMAN

JESSICA BADOUSEK • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



MAGIC TOAST

CLINTON SMITH • ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS TECHNOLOGY

The Hi-Way diner,
Hot Strippers and Magic Toast.
For lack of money, I stuck with water and hoped
no one would mind, having spent all
on highs and lows
She drew my portrait
while I drew conclusions, thinking
I had finally met and understood another!
Then it was all on the table,
and I lost.

CHOICES

ALAN L. CARTER • PRECISION MACHINING INSTRUCTOR



A MILLION ACTS OF SUBTERFUGE

PHIP ROSS • ENGLISH CO-CHAIR

I. Manifestus “I”

Wake up, Oh, rebel-head, trickster, and ploy plotter.

As long as the act is doable,
one-a-day doable, Do it Different

with a destructive-constructive seed within,
such as a strike of conversation
with a stranger. This breaks rules already
and can change how you see or feel when you leave the rut,
even though ruts aren't always bad
since they've probably proven safe.
But today, old convicts, we've been around
to snort at this path grown bare and stale by our industry.
Now this kick in the caboose tastes naughty good.
If you feel like saying “this is stupid,” yes, sir:
You are in deep.
It's time to be master of your slave-self.

II. Easy: Use your legs & walk to run an errand, as in a purpose, that is not exercise focused. Outside. Raise your hands up when a car drives by like you just won the world title for most amazing human being. (Cuz you kinda are right now!) Sing the oldest song you know; hum when the lyrics break down. Hug someone you should hug but haven't for some reason. Before you start your work day, doodle a figure with a pencil, as in playful sketch. Graduate to a box of Crayons. Make an intentional choice to deny yourself one pleasure every day for a week. The pleasure can change each day. Wake up at dawn and do not exercise. Just get your bones out of bed and sit outside and watch the day dawn. Coffee or tea is optional. Be serious about giving something precious away. Bonus if it's not someone in your family or closest friend. Thank someone for doing something nice for you and mean it. Whistle a while even if or especially if you cannot whistle. Make up a song. Introduce yourself to a neighbor you've never met. Plant from seed something in a cup by a window for a year; take care of it, watch it, and name it. Wear a bolo tie for once in your life, even if your grand-dad didn't make one for you.

III. Intermediate: Skip somewhere at work where it doesn't endanger someone. Dance a jig to a song; allow yourself to feel the song for a moment. You may be by yourself. Bonus if you risk strangers seeing you. Eat healthy for a day. Seriously, vegetables will not hurt you, and you may be surprised. Look for an opportunity to do something solidly good for someone else. Let yourself enjoy it. Play hard and compete but lose. Don't eat all the food on your plate. Walk around the block bouncing a ball of some sort. Scream somewhere private. Hang out and read in a library—this is more subterfuge than one ever imagined. Write a bad poem about happiness that uses a noun from three hobbies and features a cameo of an ugly fruit or vegetable. Go to a new church service. Wear something in your closet you have not worn for a long time just for this fact. Note: Tattoos are not subterfuge-istic, but go ahead if you want.

IV. Advanced Subterfuge: Cut off or scribble out or sew appendages on the logos of everything you wear, shoes included. Especially shoes. Display what you find under the seats of your car or of several friends' that is not biodegradable as artifacts like on a mantle, in a diorama, or the like. Volunteer. Accept you're really not doing subterfuge if you're being told any of this, and you're hardly volunteering if you're told to volunteer. To reclaim your badassness tell this list to "screw off!" and toss it behind a piece of furniture and stomp off. You rock by making this declaration of independence. This is good. Now, go make up more acts of subterfuge and send them to the author of this, thereby ruling over all subterfuge. Then go find this wadded up paper you've tossed behind a piece of furniture and continue because you've made an intentional choice to buck the rut. Make up a handshake of your own that does not use hands. Do it. Must involve another. Recognize the sanctity of all life by burying with honor and respect something you've found dead, plant or animal (wear gloves or take other precautions concerning your health). Read newspapers every day for a month; these are made with paper and ink and are delivered by hand to your door or sold daily for pennies. Go to a secondhand store and buy a book and read some of it. Fix something yourself, no matter how simple or complex. Commit to fixing it. Find a word you like and be a malaprop: use it how you want and watch people squirm. Take some junk/trash and make a sculpture; display it publicly for one week in your front yard or window; return it to recycling. Build a campfire and keep it company with your own

warm presence. Research how to make a kite, make one, and take it out. If it doesn't want to fly, recognize that it is not that kind of kite. Flaunt your kite. Make or alter an item of clothing for yourself. You may also make a pair of cut-offs out of old jeans if you like. Wear whatever you make at least five times or longer, however long it takes for you to realize you are not your clothing and whatever shame you might feel washes away to just humility. Repeat as often as necessary. Road trip. Make a pilgrimage. Observe the difference of the former two. Sit outside after work and read your newspaper and greet anyone passing by. Find a way to sleep outside where it's safe, preferably on the ground. Get off the grid every day: phone, TV, etc., off or out of reach. Eat what's in your fridge and in your cupboards for a week: no shopping. Unless you really run out of food. Many people have enough food on hand to eat for at least a week. Pick a topic of interest and start a research project by going to a college or university library and researching that topic for ten hours over a month. Present your findings. Patronize a skilled person in your community, namely a seamstress, tailor, cobbler, or watch-maker. Make a new friend. Write a letter to an old friend, relative, or someone you owe a thank you to. If you have not written a letter to yourself, do it: consider this your autobiography and take stock of your life over the years. Allow yourself to feel good about what you are a part of. Acknowledge failings and what you can still accomplish. Consider meat a side dish. Make a small altar of gratefulness where you see it daily: put one or two items that symbolize something you are thankful for. Rotate items on your altar. Go to an AA meeting. You will know why.

IN MEMORY OF DAN EVERHART

SPGO

RICHARD HADLEY • SPEECH INSTRUCTOR



ON DREAMS

BROOKE BRESTEL • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I am soaring high above a meadow filled with flowers of purple and pink and gold. I am on cloud nine where nothing can hurt me, but I start to fall. I am terrified. I start flapping my arms like a bird thinking that will help me fly again, but then I remember—I'm not really here. I am in a dream, and even if I were to fall into the meadow filled with flowers, I would not be hurt. The meadow turns into a mess of my pillows, blankets, and mattress. I wake up sweaty and confused in my room.

"It was only a dream," I say to myself, attempting to slow my heartrate. I roll over to go back to sleep when I see a poster on my wall. It is a Disney College Program poster: my real dream that is only a dream.

I fear that this dream will never become reality because life gets in the way. This dream is one that I have had for a long time. For a while, I actually believed it would come true, but plans change. Now I can only imagine what it would be like to live in Florida for a semester and work at the "Happiest Place on Earth." I can only dream, so I sleep once more.

I see myself walking through the gates of the Magic Kingdom. I look down to find myself wearing a frilly dress with shades of purple lace. I walk into the castle and start to work on a little girl's makeover. She says she wants to be like Princess Belle. I ask her name, and she tells me it's Stephanie. I tell her that she should want to be like Princess Stephanie because I hear she's amazing. She smiles, and I know I have made a little girl's day. Every day of work is like this at the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique.

I wake with a smile on my face until I realize, "Oh, it is only a dream."

It has to be a dream because it can't be real. I cannot take a semester off from college to work in that magical place. I have to play softball and receive scholarships; I don't want my parents to worry about the money for my college. They shouldn't have to, so I just keep dreaming. I tell myself that only 20% of applicants are accepted into the Disney College Program, and that the likelihood of getting a spot is low. I tell myself that I can always visit the Kingdom. I tell myself that Disney wouldn't want me anyway.

At the same time, I know this is not true. I know that I can earn a spot. I know that visiting is not the same as being a part of the magic. I know that Disney would want me, and so I dream. I will dream until I find a way because my dreams can come true if I have a little hope, a little faith, a little trust, and a little pixie dust. ✨

HOME

BLAKE SMITH • DIESEL-AG EQUIPMENT SERVICE TECHNOLOGY

turn off the highway two-and-a-half miles down a gravel road. Corn on the left side, soybeans on the right. The pivots creep through the fields, nurturing the crops. Over the tan dash and red hood of the truck gathers the view of grain bins and outbuildings. As I pull into the gravel drive, I see the dust sailing by.

The light tan modular home with a white porch hasn't always been there. Not too many years ago stood a sturdy square farm home, a house unmoved by time and the countless tornadoes Mother Nature threw at it. That was a house so sturdy I thought God Himself had built it. It had stood 120 years with a few remodels. It started with two bedrooms, a family room, and a kitchen. There was no indoor plumbing—just an outhouse. The house had been rebuilt twice, yet it still stood in the same spot. The kitchen, third bedroom, and sunporch were added on. In the kitchen, Grandma made every one of her meals from scratch. She was the final ingredient to make the house home. All of this was demolished for the house that is there now by an excavator with zero sympathy running through its hydraulic veins.

Southwest of the house stands a 60 by 40 Morton building—white with green trim. The building is just big enough to house the combine and pickups, along with the generator hooked to the M tractor. I remember when Grandpa and I got the shed all ready to go. We wired all the outlets and switches; one scoop at a time, we spread the gravel floor. This was only the third building in the same spot of land in the last 40 years. Every tornado that comes through seems to take this building.

A walking distance to the south, through what was once one of the cattle lots, are two hog houses. Once a parking spot for over 1500 hogs, the houses are now in ruins with trees growing in the hog panels and the walk-through door blown off the hinges. Walking inside brings the horrid smell of death. Insulation falls from the walls. Wires and rafters have broken and dangle down. The houses are dark and gloomy with holes in the sides where possums and coons move in and out.

To the north is the Quonset building, around 40 feet tall and 120 feet long. With the doors open, the 379 Peterbuilt has gorgeous chrome and is tan with red fenders. It's all polished up and ready for the road. Waiting for its duals to be installed, the Case 2590 is behind it. Old oil jugs line the outside walls, and parts off various equipment from through the years lay scattered on the floor. An old John Deere B rests in the corner; Grandpa always wanted to fix it back up. I can still hear him saying, "I know she'll start right up. Put some fresh fuel

in it; she'll start—I know she will.” He’s been gone for years now, but I bet he’s still waiting for the day I can prove him right. The opposite end encases snowmobiles and dirt bikes, entrapped by the 20 years of dust and dirt holding them to the earth.

South of the Quonset is the old corn crib. It has three sides with walls and an open front and serves as storage for the M loader with the bucket a faded red paint. The loader hasn’t seen a bath since 1975 when my uncle bought it. Also in the Quonset is the Oliver with the mower deck, an old silage wagon full of wood chips, and Grandpa’s not-so-secret case of Windsor from Mom and Dad’s wedding. The dirt floor has been the landing zone for garbage for years. Old semi stacks, a couple of hundred sets of chains, and battery chargers, old and new, just sit there and wait for the next time they’ll be used. The upper level supports the possum, coon, and rat families, still feeding on what’s left of the corn last put in there 40 years ago. Admittedly, 120 years of use doesn’t look the prettiest, but it makes the farm. It’s funny seeing all the old, dirty machinery sitting there with a sharp, detailed white Ford F-250.

East of the old corn crib is the heart of the operation. Built to last in 1954 by my grandfather, great uncle, and great grandfather, a 40 by 60-foot hoop building with a huge 20 by 40-foot white garage door stands. It has three windows and some drawings from when my uncle and a couple of his buddies got drunk and decided to paint the door with four different colors of paint. My grandfather laughs about it now, but, well, he’s made his own legends. Walking through the door, I see tools and parts in the last place they were used. It’s a trend around here that most people have to get used to. The middle of the floor is empty with about half a bag of feed scattered around because someone didn’t have enough buckets. My uncle sits in the old gray barber chair; the bibs he’s wearing are screaming for release. This shop has been my sanctuary since I was eleven, and it’s where I had my first beer. We were moving equipment when a tractor shredder dropped on my foot. I was in the shop with a Budweiser on my foot when Grandpa walked in. With a smile on his face, he chuckled, “Not going to solve anything doing that! You have to drink it to feel better.” As he handed me a fresh one out of the fridge, he said, “Just don’t let your grandmother find out; I’m getting too old to pretend to listen to her.”

I make excuses to visit the farm; there is always a project to be done between planting, harvesting, and keeping everything else up and running. Every time I see the farm in the mirror through the dust, I know one day I’ll be the fourth generation working the land. ❀

KATHY'S EYES

TERESA BURT • UNDECLARED

She thinks
she hides behind
the caked make-up facade,
perfectly styled hair, and the reading
glasses that she wears. She lives
behind the designer sports-line clothing
and well-trimmed figure of an athlete,
but Kathy is betrayed
by her eyes.
With downcast head, they open up wide
or roll slowly left then right.
Subtle movements
make her statement.

The built-up barrier
around her is not blind at all. Concrete,
no one can see in,
but those eyes
peer outside the wall and give a peek
into the depth
of sorrow and sadness,
anger and tragedy,
shame and pain,
and low self-esteem.

The eyes don't lie.

INNER BEAUTY

SONIA ARELLANO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



A MOTHER'S LIFE AND DEATH

LISA MCDERMED • LONG TERM CARE ADMINISTRATION

RECIPIENT OF RUNNER-UP PRIZE FOR PROSE

My mother had huge, expressive hazel eyes and curling black hair trimmed short to her scalp in a pixie cut. She had a slightly upturned nose that wrinkled when she laughed. She was small in stature and structure and grew to be only five foot tall. Her personality, however, was so large it filled a room with no space to spare. She had a big, booming laugh and a wonderful ability to make one want to smile and laugh with her. Everyone loved my mother, and people would frequently exclaim how lucky I was to spend my childhood with her.

My experience with my mother, however, was very different from what other people saw. My mother and I never got along, and I was jealous of the girls who could tell their mothers anything or who would sincerely say, "I want my mom." I couldn't remember a time when my mother had been comforting, helpful, or supportive. My parents divorced when I was two, and my mother had become a single parent. She was also a severe alcoholic with bipolar disorder. When she was in a manic phase, she would show up unannounced at school with cupcakes for the entire school, not just my class. She would make a production about how excited she was to do things for the children and how much she loved being around them. When she was in a depressive phase, she would lay on the couch and drink to the point where my brothers and I learned to shop, cook, bathe, and do other everyday tasks for ourselves. She would not acknowledge that we were present, much less do motherly duties. I resented this. When she was feeling good, the house was spotless, and every inch was dusted and polished to a high shine. When she was depressed, trash and laundry would pile up around the house.

As I grew older, the alcoholism grew worse as did her behaviors. Instead of just providing for myself, I was frequently called upon to pick her up when she was too drunk to drive home from the bar; sometimes, I had to cook her food and beg her to eat it when she had gone days with nothing. When I was 14, I went to live with my father and never looked back. My father took care of me, was soft-spoken and never yelled, and didn't call upon me to perform parental duties. I felt that I could be free and not responsible for everything when I was with my dad.

When I became a parent, I allowed only infrequent and closely supervised

visits between my children and my mother. I withheld them from her presence and called it protection. I refused to call or visit her more than once a year. Even when she was ill, I relied upon updates from my family and suffered their silent disapproval with stoicism.

So, of course, when she became terminally ill, I was very practical. I had been a nurse for more than ten years at that point and thought I was completely prepared for the loss. Because I was so accustomed to caring for people who were sick and dying, I felt I had the skills necessary to cope with her passing. I was wrong. After my mother died, I had a meltdown. It wasn't so much losing her as it was losing the possibility of understanding or reconciliation. All of my deeply hidden wishes and dreams for a traditional mother-daughter relationship were shattered. There could never be forgiveness between us, and there were no more opportunities to understand each other. Prior to her passing, I would have said that I had come to peace with the feelings I had about my mother. In reality, it was difficult to come to terms with what was, rather than what I'd hoped for. Acknowledging this was one of the defining moments of my life.

Following my mother's death, I tried to go back to nursing. It was the only job I had done as an adult, and I was comfortable with it. The first day back, one of the residents at the nursing home where I worked passed away on my shift. After calmly completing my work day, I went home and called my boss to inform her in a matter of fact way that I would never, ever be returning to work. That one loss was the straw that broke the camel's back. I cried for days over a resident I barely knew and over my perception of the loss her family was feeling. I could not cope with any more grief or pain.

For six months, I stayed home, day after day, and baked pies. It seems crazy now, the number of pies I baked in that six months. It wasn't just pies, either. I learned how to make truffles and cakes from scratch and frosting, and a multitude of other sweet things. The most baffling thing about this was that I don't even like sweets—I never eat them. Still, I stayed in my white and meticulously cleaned kitchen and baked. After a long time of dessert after dessert, my husband quietly asked me one day why I was making so much. On that day, it occurred to me that I was baking sweets because they were my mother's favorites. She loved any kind of sweet and would always save room for dessert. I was baking for my mother.

That was a moment of understanding for me. My mother was gone, and I could never get her back. I could not talk to her or beg forgiveness or even just sit quietly with her. I could bake her favorite treats, though, and I did. Sometime later, my husband asked why I had had such a hard time

communicating with my mother when she was alive. My reply to him was that I had always felt like I was the parent, and she was the child, and I had felt responsible for her actions. I had had no control or say in the things she had done, but I still felt her actions were my responsibility.

My husband was a rock for me during this time. Over six feet tall with a muscular build and a quiet voice, he rarely became frustrated or upset and calmed me when I was angry. He said something to me then that I will never forget. In a quiet and somber voice, he said, "God puts people in our lives for a reason. I think you have been thinking about your mother backwards. Maybe she wasn't put here for you, but instead, maybe you were put here for her." At first I dismissed the idea. It was crazy! She was the mother, and I was the child. However, over the next few days, I thought about what he had said. It occurred to me, after some reflection, that he might be right.

My mother was the third of seven children. Her oldest brother had been sick with diabetes as a child and required a lot of attention. Her youngest sibling was only four years older than I was. She spent her childhood surrounded by other children and without much parental supervision. Her dad was frequently away for work, and her mother worked as the elementary school secretary in addition to caring for seven children and her own ill and elderly mother. My mother's father passed away at only 49. I began to think that maybe my mother had been loud and boisterous in order to get attention for herself in that sea of siblings.

I began to think more about my relationship with my mother. I purposely tried to focus on good memories rather than bad ones. I remembered that many times, when my mother had been feeling sad, she would softly stroke my hair as I sat quietly next to her on the couch. Maybe when I brushed her hair, it gave her a little measure of peace. Maybe when she asked for help, it was because she needed help and not because she was trying to make things harder on me. One statement from my husband had made me look on my relationship with my mother with new eyes. He had given me back my mother.

My mother has been gone for five years now. It still hurts sometimes to think of her or to unexpectedly see a picture of her. When I don't have the opportunity to shield my emotions, it hurts more. Recently, my aunt invited me to her house. She was excited to show me something. When I arrived, she handed me a thick sheaf of yellowed paper. I ruffled through the brittle pages and caught my breath when I recognized my mother's handwriting. It was poetry—pages and pages of my mother's poetry. She had written it in high school, and my aunt had found it tucked in an old dresser at my grandmother's

house. Reading my mother's thoughts and emotions poured out onto sheets of lined notebook paper was magical. Her words were full of hope and love before life and disease had robbed her of her happiness and joy. Her words were whispers come back to soothe me. I could hear her voice reading them aloud to me. It was the greatest gift I had ever received.

After those six months of baking, I went back to work as a nurse. I have discovered that I don't rush with patients and their families as much as I used to. I take more time to talk or to look at the pictures of grandchildren the residents are excited to share with me. I know the names of their family members. Sometimes, I just brush their hair or hold their hands. I never ask about their personal lives. I don't judge or make comments. I am much more forgiving since losing my mother, and I think my experience has definitely made me a better nurse. I never shy away from staying with those who are dying or with their families; I share their grief with them. I'm not afraid to let them see my own tears. Many times, I think about what my husband said. Maybe I'm not there for them at all; maybe they are there for me. ❀

A WOMAN'S RHYTHM

TONYA SCHROEDER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



GUILT

BRIAN GORDON • COMPUTER INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

In a daze of surreality
my mind a haze of strife
Stammering like an automaton
I walk the path of life

While memory lane behind me
dismally haunts my wake
I stop before a crossroad
and ponder which path to take

I gaze the nighted heavens
in query what to do
Stars form new constellations
and in them I see you

I watch their scene unravel
and heed the tale they tell
Times that I have hurt you
and crystal tears that fell

Tears to feed the river
of sacred cries you've cried
I drink the salty flavor
which bitterly stings my pride

Pride and emotion battle
my heart can find no truce
Emotion seeking penance
my pride just seeks excuse

I sanction myself to sorrow
and wallow in regret
For neither penance nor excuse
allows me to forget

After all is said and done
I attempt to change my way
And yet I tend to wonder why
"I'm sorry" is so hard to say

LIGHTNING

WADE LYMAN • FIRE PROTECTION TECHNOLOGY



LONE TREE AND STARS

KENT REINHARD • PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY INSTRUCTOR



WILDFIRE AT BAY

PAIGE SHORE • OFFICE PROFESSIONAL - MEDICAL

On your very worst day, you're a wildfire at bay

But even on my best day, I'm a hurricane

I will shake you up and drown you out

I warned you when I told you what I was about

But you wouldn't listen, and you won't be forgiven

Because when it rains, it pours

And I was born to show no mercy when I come to create storms

THE ART OF MANAGING CONFLICT

MIKE SHERWOOD • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

How should one handle conflict? Can it be a healthy thing if handled properly? I believe so. My family has, for as long as I can remember, had conflicts that would make most people cringe. Four years ago, there was an example of this when my father decided to buy a house for my brother and his new family. The catch was that it needed remodeling, and hiring a contractor wasn't in the budget. So, since our family has never shied away from a challenge, all of us that could chip in and help out did. The other catch was that whenever we are all together, we end up disagreeing; we are all quite stubborn.

The house my parents decided to buy was the house next door to them. The house appeared to be in decent shape, only needing minor decorative remodeling work. After Dad closed on the house, we discovered this was not the case. The washer and dryer setup the previous owners had must have overflowed water badly, as the surrounding floor was damaged. Because the appliances were located in a closet in the kitchen, we had to replace the kitchen floor. As we removed the lower cabinets to replace the floor, we found that the floor damage went into the adjoining dining room floor. Up that floor had to come as well. When we removed the sink, we found the plumbing was all wrong and had to be reworked.

At that point, we started actively searching for damage and followed it down the stairs leading from the kitchen to the basement. We then realized the sheetrock on the basement walls had to come out on the bottom three feet from mildew caused by all the water. This small surface project had just traversed into the major overhaul territory of projects, and my parents were not equipped to do all of the work on the timetable they had set forth. My parents and my brother had some rather contentious discussions about how to proceed; however, they all agreed they needed help. A call was made to every family member with construction or remodeling experience that could potentially help. Even my Uncle Earl from Georgia got a call; he was a contractor there. My wife and I received a request. So did my sister and her new husband who knew nothing about construction but were willing to learn and help out however they could.

Now, I had some reservations about all of us working together on the same house. When too many of us are in the same space or on the same project, conflicts are a certainty. My family's history with conflicts has evolved over

the years; it started with yelling and everyone storming off, breaking things on the way out. Now, we still get plenty loud at times, but breakage is all but eliminated, and no one storms off. Long-lasting hard feelings from a conflict is not something we understand. In the heat of the moment, we get fired up and loud and occasionally say things we do not mean. Shortly after, we are able to talk civilly and sometimes joke about how worked up we got.

Sure enough, once we were all in the kitchen trying to come up with a game plan, everyone wanted to be the boss, and no one volunteered to be the subordinate. Most of us kids backed down since Dad and Earl had the most experience. Earl thought we should be able to just cut out the rot and patch it back. Dad wanted the entire floor gone to make sure we found everything. Dad won because he was paying the bills for this project.

Once the call was made, even though Dad won the discussion, Earl's opposition to the idea of completely gutting everything made him rethink his stance. We ended up tearing out all the rot we could see, plus a little more, but we left the majority of the floor alone since we stopped finding damage. An unspoken compromise was accomplished by the conflict; our family uses conflict as a unique and delicate way of negotiating.

After we repaired all the damage and started the process of rebuilding the carnage, the time came for my bout with my father. I was the only one with experience with laying laminate countertops. Dad and Earl both had ideas on how to proceed. I laid out the most logical and efficient way to install the countertops, which was contrary to their proposals. They listened to me at first to learn the basics of what was involved. Then they came up with a "better" way. I wanted to have all the cabinets installed and to buy a router to cut and trim the exact piece we needed and to let the rest fall as scrap. They wanted to precut everything then glue the countertop down to save on materials. We went back and forth. I wasn't articulating the reasoning for my position in detail very well, and they didn't have the experience I had to draw from. I knew that precutting to match the cabinets rarely ended well and usually ended with getting a new piece. I got so flustered at one point that I left and told them I would handle it. While I was cooling off, I failed to pay proper attention to my body positioning when using the power tools, and I grazed one of my fingers with a skill saw.

Once I did that, all thought of the dispute ceased. Thankfully, I was wearing gloves and had only a minor injury. It was just Earl, Dad, and me in the house at that point. We discovered I did take a small chunk of flesh from my right index finger, but after a few stitches, I was fine. When I arrived back at the house, Earl looked at me and asked, "What in the hell were you thinking?"

You know better than that!” Before that incident, I thought I was able to keep myself in complete control, but in truth, I was so mad I couldn’t think straight. I told Earl that Dad got me so worked up that I couldn’t think straight and didn’t pay attention. His response has stuck with me: “Now why would you allow his problem to become yours? Yeah, he was mad, but you’re the one with a tore up hand.”

That brought me back to when I was a child, and I would throw temper tantrums. When Dad was home during the episodes, they got exponentially worse. They always ended eventually with my mother making me read a sign on the mirror she had on the wall. It said: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” She would then ask me what I could control in the situation. The answer was always the same; I could control only my own actions and reactions to a given situation, nothing more. Furthermore, if I couldn’t control myself, I couldn’t control a thing. Earl had just rung the same tone as that mirror in my head. It was like a piece to a puzzle I knew was there; I had forgotten about it, but now it had fallen into place.

After that we discussed the countertop again, and this time when the conflict presented itself, we started asking questions to understand the other person’s perspective. Again, eventually, we came to a compromise without realizing it and cut rough shapes intentionally oversized similar to what they wanted. We then trimmed them back the way I said they needed to be done. Through the conflict, we both discovered things we had not considered before. Had there not been any conflict, that house would not have turned out the way that it did.

For our family, our conflicts serve as a discovery and learning process. If we were a little less stubborn and enthusiastic about our positions, we could probably save a lot of frustration. Another step to save frustration and constructively work through conflicts would be to start off by trying to see the perspective of the opposition; sometimes they see something you have overlooked. However, if we didn’t fight our positions as vehemently as we did, would we really have taken the opposition as seriously? Also, if our family didn’t feel passionate enough to fight for what we felt would benefit our family, or a member specifically, would we really have cared that much about one another? Sometimes you can judge just how strongly someone believes in a position by how passionate he or she fights for his or her view. I see conflict as much a necessity as love and communication in a family. If you love someone, you’re always willing to fight for what’s best for them, even if they don’t agree.

There is something to be said for learning the art of conflict management. Many people today have no idea how to handle it. When we have Presidential candidates that can't handle a dispute other than to start calling their opposition names, we are in a sad state.

The most important part of handling any conflict is to consider the opposition's perspective and to actively seek flaws in your own stance if the intent is to come to the best possible solution to a problem that has presented itself. Without conflicting opinions on topics or projects, often the solutions would be one-sided and potentially missing key elements for success. ✨

CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

SAMAH AL-SARHANI • ACADEMIC TRANSFER
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



SAD SONG FOR WINTER

A SONG LYRIC

JACOB R.L. SUMPTER • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

A sad song for winter
Roaring in soon
Its bitter brace of silence
Longing for June
Every bit of speck of life will change

Mother Nature has a lot to say
Underneath the under-toe
Waiting in peace
Slowly pulsing hearts of life
Still 'til release

Starting to grow weaker
As the time goes by
Keeping their shirts on
For life in the sky

We don't have to wait too long
For winter to sing its song
We don't have to wait too long
For winter to sing its sad song

Buying into misapplications
To be damned for your aberrations
Giving into nothings
That'll never make you learn

Mother Nature's coming
And she'll make all of us burn
Life's a bloody trial
And she's the bloody judge

She owns the sky we fly in
The dirt we bloody trudge
Making you want to repent
Like woman does
Killing everything that moves
Just like man does

THE LAST LEAVES

RIYA PANDEY • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



SYNCHRONIZED BIRDS

REBECCA BURT • LIFE SCIENCES INSTRUCTOR



LETTERS

P.K. • GENERAL STUDIES

“It’s been about ten years already.” I listen to him talk; that’s all I can do. It is that time of year again, the time when memories flood his dreams and blur the lines between past and present. His emotions change as quickly as the spring weather. It’s understandable, considering everything he has been through, but he walks tall with pride and never lets others know—except for me—what sometimes struggles under the surface. There is nothing special about me except that I listen. At least, that’s what he says.

“God, I feel so old,” he sighs.

“You’re not old. You’re only 29!” I say, but I’ll admit I’m in no real position to talk, being only 23.

He pauses, and all I hear is him breathing on the other end of the phone. After about a 20-second pause, he starts again.

“My first deployment, we got tore up bad. Totally got put through the ringer. Our battalion commander was this lifer Lieutenant Colonel who was slotted to go pretty high up. He was in for 23 years or somethin’. Anyways, when we got home, we had a safety brief before we got to go on leave for a few days, and his was the last speech. He came up in front of all of us, at first laughing and joking, but then he started to cry. In his hands were dog tags for each of the Marines they had lost. He told us to be safe and that he wanted us all back. Our Staff Sergeant patted his back and whispered something in his ear and then dismissed us. It was like, at most, a five-minute brief.”

“Really? He must have really cared, huh? Well, I mean....” I start and realize how dumb I probably sound, but he understands completely what I am saying.

“Yeah, you never see people in those positions break bearing like that. It was really hard on him, but it was just as hard on us.” That’s what makes this entire thing work so well; we know in subtext what each other means, even when we make zero sense to everyone else.

“You wanna hear the crazy part?”

Of course I do, but he continues before I can answer.

“He personally handwrote ‘sorry’ letters to all their families. He sent home the dog tags to the families, and I swear to Christ, I will never forget what the letters said. They said, ‘I personally didn’t know your son, but I was his Battalion

Commander. The fact that he died under my command and that I didn't know him will haunt me the rest of my life.' He shocked everyone and took an early retirement right after he left January 1st."

Sometimes I feel like when we have these conversations, he forgets I'm even there. It's not a bad thing; it makes me feel like I'm there with him in the memory. He says, "You know, you're the only one I've ever told that to."

My heart feels heavy at that last statement, and I finally get the nerve to ask him the question I have wanted to ask him for years. "Why do you never tell anyone else any of this? Why did you wait until you met me to say anything to anyone?"

"Just because you always listen."

That night I don't sleep at all. Instead, lost in my thoughts, I stare at my ceiling while the coyotes serenade the moon. ❀

AS THE SKY DARKENS

JAMES BARNETT • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



THE TREE

TERESA BURT • UNDECLARED

Oh, the death
you wish for me.
I am old, I know,
just waiting for my time
to die,
but you've marked
my bark
for death.

Oh, why do you
plan the murder of me?
We have so many
memories,
you and me.
Remember when
you were just a lad
playing hide and seek
behind my trunk?
And as a teen,
you thought
I couldn't see
you kissing Sally Jean
beneath my leaves.
And like a tattoo,
you carved
a heart
into my skin.
Now faded and worn,
but still it's there
for me to wear.

So many birds
have rested,
nestled
within my arms,
and I've lost track
of how many baby birds
have taken their
first flight
from my fingertips.

~~~

I know that you,  
 too, are blue  
 thinking of my demise.

I see you looking  
 up at me.

I'm sure you are remembering  
 when you and she  
 picnicked  
 upon the bed of leaves

I shed for you,  
 then on bended knee  
 you asked  
 if she would say "I do"  
 (and she did).

It's alright now;  
 I really do understand.

I'm old and feeble,  
 disease has set in,  
 and my branches often break.

You worry  
 about that little tike,  
 your grandson,  
 that comes to play.

He runs 'round  
 and 'round my feet,  
 playing peek-a-boo  
 just like you.

You're afraid  
 my heavy dying limb  
 will fall upon  
 his sweet head.

Alas my lad,  
 don't you cry;  
 it is time  
 to say goodbye.  
 I'll close my eyes,  
 and when I wake,  
 I'll take my place  
 beyond Heaven's gate,  
 where one day  
 you will climb  
 upon my back  
 one more time.

# DISTORTION BY DARKNESS AND RAIN (BRUGES, BELGIUM)

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LYNDA HEIDEN • ADMINISTRATIVE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT, AREA OFFICE



# THE STORM DOWNSTAIRS

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BRIAN GORDON • COMPUTER INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The late June wind was warm, offering no relief from the sweltering heat which, even in the absence of sun, was nigh unbearable. The central air conditioner, running throughout the big house, was going full blast, supplying comfort for the sleepers within.

The members of the family were dozing upstairs in their respective rooms except for the boy who slept in the basement. His job was to clean the kitchen after everyone else had gone to bed. He usually took until 1:00 a.m. to finish. The big man was asleep in his room. His five-year-old son slept in his own bedroom, while the one-year-old daughter slept in her crib across the hall. His wife slept in bed next to him, and that damned boy was downstairs washing the dishes. All was in perspective, the big man thought to himself as he drifted somewhere between wake and sleep. He would beat the boy again if the job wasn't done well; the boy always took longer than necessary.

Tomorrow, he would wake up for work and, when he went into the kitchen for breakfast, he would see that the son of his dead sister had forgotten to clean something. Then he would have to whip the boy, as usual. He couldn't figure out how any 14-year-old could be so stupid. In the big man's estimation, the boy would finally tire of getting hit and actually do something right for a change.

Even the five-year-old child hit him from time to time. On one such occurrence, the boy found the courage to hit the child back. The man heard of the incident, and the boy wore bruises for two weeks afterward. Hitting the child back was not a mistake the boy made again.

The man hated that boy. His wife hated him, too, but they both understood how much the boy was worth. Aside from the monthly check they received for taking care of him, the boy was invaluable for the work he did around the house. In the summer when school was out, he saved them a fortune in babysitting. As far as they were concerned, no one else in the house should have to lift a finger as long as that dumb boy was around.

As the man turned in bed to find comfort in a different position, a subtle noise drew him from his twilight of coherence. It was an old house, not without the noises that come with old houses. This noise, however, seemed more substantial than the usual foundation yielding squeaks and groans. When walked on, the floor also creaked in places, but this noise was too quiet for that.

The noise came again, still too loud—yet too quiet—to be identified as



anything normal. It was similar to the sound of the creaky floor, but too soft and slow. It was as if someone was trying not to make noise. Then came a new noise, the sound of a door being slowly opened. Bit by bit, the hinges squealed in defiance to the perpetrator's efforts of stealth.

Fully drawn to awareness and feeling disturbed because of it, the man sat up on the edge of his bed. He stretched his huge frame and craned his muscle-corded neck as he heard one of his children's bedroom doors creak open. As the impending threat came to fruition, the man hurried into the hallway, turning on the nearby light-switch in time to find the boy exiting one of the bedrooms with the one-year-old baby in his arms. The boy, small for his age, looked up at the huge man standing in front of him. His eyes filled with terror—the kind of terror a criminal gets when caught in the act of an intended crime.

“What the hell is goin’ on?!” the man demanded. The boy didn't answer. He stood silent, eyes to the ground, as the baby played with his face.

The man noticed that the boy was fully dressed. Jeans, a clean t-shirt, socks, and tennis shoes replaced his normal garb of bare feet with sweatpants or cut-off shorts. The boy also carried the baby's diaper-bag, which was overstuffed with diapers, baby clothes, and other necessities. The baby was in complete comfort, feeling no sense of danger as she cooed in the boy's arms. “I asked you a question, boy!” The man's booming voice nearly shook the walls as he yelled, “Answer me!”

By this time, the man's wife had emerged from the doorway of the master bedroom. She was a small woman with stringy, permed black hair. “What in hell is going on out here?” she asked, yawning and rubbing her left eye.

“That's what I'm tryin' to find out,” the man answered his wife and then turned back on the boy. “Now, **WHAT** are you doin'?!” he snapped as he advanced on the boy.

The boy flinched but made no effort to put down the baby or the diaper bag. The woman, quickly assessing the situation, wrenched her baby out of the boy's hands. The boy looked after the baby with what looked like fear.

The man, as an added matter of good measure, cuffed the boy across the ear. His huge hand matched the side of the boy's head in surface area. The boy stumbled from the blow but didn't fall. He almost staggered into the five-year-old child who had just come out of his room yawning and rubbing his eye in childlike similarity to his mother.

Quickly regaining his balance, the boy shrank against the wall with his head down and his shoulders hunched into a diminutive posture. His eyes trained on the floor before him, making sporadic glances to the babbling baby who

appeared to be his objective. "What are you doing up here with my baby?" the woman asked.

"Nothin'," the boy timidly mumbled with a slight shrug of his slumped shoulders and his eyes still on the floor.

"Doesn't look like nothing to me," the woman pushed.

"Just wanted to take her for a walk," the boy mumbled back.

"At midnight?!" the man yelled hitting the boy again hard across the face. This time, the boy was knocked to the ground.

At this, the five-year-old child chimed in. "Yeah, what are you doing?" He kicked the floored boy in the middle of his fetal-positioned back. The boy quickly got back to his feet and returned to his prior position. He shed no tears, which was unusual. Normally, the boy would have stayed on the floor sobbing. None of this went unnoticed by the man.

"Look here, you little bastard, I want some answers, and I want 'em right now," the man slurred through gritted teeth as he glared at the boy, a mere two inches between their faces. "Now, what the hell were you doin'?"

The boy remained quiet, his eyes darting like a cornered animal seeking escape. He clearly wanted to escape, but he wasn't going to leave without the baby. He looked tiny huddling under the menacing shadow of the big man, but he held his position.

The woman, so confused by the boy's single-minded intent on taking the baby, almost considered handing her over to him. Decidedly dismissing the impulse, the woman asked, "Why were you trying to take her anywhere at this hour?"

"Cause she ain't never done nothin' to me," the boy answered, barely audible.

"What the hell does that mean?" the woman shrieked, frightened by the boy's unexpected response. "Get back downstairs. Now!" she ordered. But the boy didn't move.

It was unlike the spirit-broken boy to so brazenly disobey a direct order, especially an order which sent him any place where the man wasn't. The boy had long since learned that blatantly fleeing from the man only led to worse consequences. However, the boy had never passed up an opportunity for a fearful, slumping exodus from the man's presence. This time, he stayed put. His body language made it clear that if he was going to move anywhere, it would be only for the baby.

"Did you hear what the hell she just told you to do?" The man yelled so loudly that his voice cracked. He struck the boy again, this time in the stomach. Gasping for air, the boy crumbled to the ground. As soon as he was able, the

boy regained his feet and once again returned to his spot against the wall.

The man was outraged. "Are you stupid?" he asked. Not even giving the boy a chance to answer, the man continued. "That's what it is; you're stupid, aren't you? Well I'm gonna beat the stupidity right outta you." He turned to his five-year-old son and barked, "Go downstairs and get me the cord."

The child smiled in anticipation of what was to come and trotted off down the stairs to fetch that which his father had ordered. The boy did not show his usual fear of the three-foot section of orange, utility extension cord with which he was often whipped. His only concern seemed to be the one-year-old baby who played innocently in her mother's arms.

The child returned empty handed. "Why is it a storm downstairs, but not up here?" he asked, worried. The boy's darting eyes spared the child only one glance, as their sporadic references to the baby were becoming more frequent. His demeanor was becoming more and more anxious, like someone who knew he was running out of time. He wanted to take the baby, but he knew there was no way to get past the huge man in order to acquire her.

The man noticed that his son was not carrying the brightly colored oppressor for which he'd been sent. "Where's the cord?" he asked, growing more irritated. "I asked you to do one simple thing.... I swear, sometimes I think that damned boy is starting to wear off on you."

"My son would never be that bad," the woman protested.

"Whatever," the man grudgingly conceded. "Now, will you please go down and get me the damned cord like I asked?" he said to the child. The child's eyes grew round, and tears began to well up along the bottom lids. "What are you cryin' about?" the man questioned.

"I don't wanna go down in the storm downstairs," the child wailed.

This made no sense to the man. He knew the child was afraid of storms, but it wasn't storming outside. "What on earth are you talkin' about?" By now, the man was shouting at his son.

"When it's a storm, you gotta light a candle," the child sobbingly explained.

"Cause the 'tricity goes out."

The man had had just about enough. As if one idiotic boy, trying to take his youngest kid out at all crazy hours of the night, wasn't enough, now his oldest was going on about nonexistent storms. The man stomped down the stairs to retrieve the cord for himself. When he got to the bottom stairs, all of the lights were off. There was only a faint, flickering light. The man went into the kitchen to find a single candle burning on the dining room table. He flicked on the light-switch and went over and blew out the flame. That's when he smelled it.

An easy recognition led the man's attention to the wall, where a gas-powered oven was located. The pilot lights were blown out.

The undeniable reality of responsibility and consequence came crashing in. For the first time, the man could see it, and he knew what it was. He had come face to face with that which he'd created. His own temper, his own sense of superiority had brought on a danger to him and his family that he never saw coming.

That boy, quiet for so many years, huddling in his dilapidated bed in an unfinished basement, and now this. It's always quiet right before. But for how long had it been brewing? A contemplative sigh escaped him as the man resignedly sat down on a kitchen chair. He considered just how right his oldest child had been. It was, indeed, the storm downstairs. ❀

## DON'T LET PEOPLE DEFINE WHO YOU ARE: STOP BULLYING

SONIA ARELLANO • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# CHANGE

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NICHOLAUS LAMBLIN • ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

The definition of what we know will no longer be that by the time we die  
Denying the results of change is to refuse the facts of evolution  
What has become is what we live in as the present  
Memories are the only thing that own a time and a place  
Nothing in the world is permanent, nothing at all

Constantly, people push and shove it back down into its hole  
Believing if they cannot see it then no one will believe it  
You can try, but you will never succeed, as change is constant  
What you may have once thought before may change in your lifetime  
Who you will become is the result of many constants that are out of your control

Problems have arisen from the resistance of constants  
Dreams have been achieved by surrendering to constants  
War, murder, and suffering are all results of change  
Life, longevity, and evolution are all results of change  
Change is neither good nor bad; please don't be confused

A better word to describe change is inevitable or perhaps unbroken  
If I were to tell you to fight and resist an inevitable and unbroken concept,  
would you even try?  
Politicians, Doctors, and Teachers cause change; you and I cause change  
This all happens around us daily; we have never been able to stop it  
Change isn't a hard concept to understand; acceptance is

# MILKWEED IN THE WIND

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ALAN L. CARTER • PRECISION MACHINING INSTRUCTOR



# SUN & STEEL

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BRITTANY MCCOY • ASSOCIATE DEGREE NURSING



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## WHEN WE DISCUSS FICTION

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*With a nod to Raymond Carver*

WYATT PACKARD • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

**M**y friend Gina Hamilton was talking. Gina Hamilton is an English professor, which, during our book club meetings, gives her the right. The five of us, each having a glass of wine, were sitting in my living room. The setting sun shone through the bay windows. In the room were Gina, Charlotte, Charlotte's boyfriend Will, and my neighbor Martha. After abandoning our discussion of the month's book, we arrived at the subject of what differentiates a good book from an average one. Gina believed that a good book elevated our thought process to new levels. She said she had spent over 15 years studying literature. She said she looked back on those years as some of the most significant of her life.

Charlotte said this was all wrong. "Oh, no, that's not it at all. A good book is

all about the plot and action. When you read a book, your heart should pound, and you should feel the blood pump. The actions of the characters should make your stomach clench and your toes curl from excitement! I don't know how you read all that stuffy literature. A good book is never work."

Gina took a sip of her wine. "Well, I know you enjoy your entertaining fantasy and science fiction, but those genres do not contain the complex puzzles and writings that fall into great books. Great books exist to make the reader think and to open a discussion of universal themes of life and death. The study of literary works exists to bring enlightenment and self-discovery."

"Well, you can say what you want, but I know a good book," Charlotte said. "When I was growing up, my sci-fi and comics got me through high school. I think that makes them important."

Martha crossed her legs. "Well, you want to know what I think? A good book is about romance! I mean, it's nice to think about that other stuff, too, I suppose, but a steamy bodice ripper is pure escapism!"

Will laughed. "What would your sons say about that?"

"Oh, they're teenagers. They wouldn't like their old mom talking about romance."

"And that's because those aren't real proper writings," Gina said with a slight smile. "Like you said, it is escapism. Escapism is all well and good, but a proper story must have a theme." She set her wine glass on the coffee table.

"Well, surely sex can be a theme," I spouted, leaning forward. "I mean, after all, isn't desire a universal condition?" We all laughed.

"Well, yes, but in so much of escapist literature, it is mindless; it is like eating only candy," Gina said. "It may bring you enjoyment at the time but will do little for your health." She thought for a moment. "Literature makes one think introspectively so that the mind may comprehend new feelings and ideas. Please tell me if I am wrong, but the way I see it is that while there is a crossover at times with genre works and literary ones, generally, genre works do not provide the same intellectual stimulus."

"Gina, I think you are way off base," Charlotte said.

"I am not criticizing your taste. It is just my opinion that one must exist in a balance." Gina leaned forward to pull a small, leather-bound journal from her handbag; in this, she wrote down her favorite quotations. "Here, this is what F. Scott Fitzgerald had to say about literature: 'That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong.' You can't tell me that doesn't ring true," Gina said as she slid her journal back into her bag.



“But I believe Mark Twain said that a classic is ‘a book which people praise and don’t read.’ Isn’t there something to be said for mass consumption and mass enjoyment of a book? Surely the act of reading is just as important as *what* you are reading,” I said.

“I think you have a grand point, Sarah,” Will said. “As a librarian, I see every type of book go out and have heard every argument there is on why this genre or that title is better than the rest. In my opinion, there is no such thing as a concrete definition of a good or bad book. As soon as you start making that distinction, you burn away personal choice and become a censor to what matters for other people.” Will took Charlotte’s hand.

Martha nodded. “I agree. Even fairy tales teach children. I know I never forced my kids to read anything they didn’t want to. Jacob loves to read now, and I think if I had made him read the same type of books he was being assigned in school, he would have grown to hate reading.”

Gina said, “I concede that is true. But imagine reading a revolutionary work such as *Mrs. Dalloway* upon its publication—or witnessing Shakespeare’s plays as they were first performed. I think it would be hard to contest that these works endure because they are of great relevance and great art.”

“I agree with that completely! I wonder why there is such a distinction between literary works and genre works,” I said. “It seems to me that works classified into genres provide an escape from reality, whereas works thought of as literary provide a window further into reality.” The sun had finally sunk below the horizon, and the soft glow of twilight sky had taken its place.

“On that thought, we must get going,” Will said. He and Charlotte stood and went to grab their coats.

“Me, too. Best make sure the boys haven’t burned the house down,” Martha laughed.

“I better be on my way as well. I have an early lecture tomorrow,” said Gina, as she, too, grabbed her things.

“Well, thank you all for coming over. What a fascinating discussion! I look forward to our next meeting.” I followed my friends outside.

The streetlights were on, and the cool fall breeze brought a handful of leaves skittering across the sidewalk. We stood soundlessly in the night air—each of us continuing our own internal discussions. Then I went inside and picked out a new book to read, not caring if it would meet Gina’s standards of a literary work and not minding if it wasn’t an adventure Charlotte would enjoy, but instead going in blind and seeing what would happen. ❀

# TURBICIT

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ERIC ARNOLD • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Everyone is speaking, but no  
one says a word.  
The room should be dark, but  
it's lit with an unnatural glow.  
They're sitting in a circle, but  
every man is an island; an  
archipelago of lives.  
Their heads snap to the door  
as it closes.  
Pained expressions mark  
faces with no lips.  
While the faint tapping still  
hasn't ceased, their faces  
scream what only their  
thumbs can say.

# STUDIO SINK

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KARSEN FELZIEN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



# WHERE MY DEMONS HIDE

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SAMAH AL-SARHANI • ACADEMIC TRANSFER  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR ARTWORK



# FACING MY DEMONS (WHILE LOSING MY RELIGION)

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HEATHER L. STREAM • CRIMINAL JUSTICE-HOMELAND SECURITY

*Oh, life...is bigger, bigger than you, and you are not me. The things that I would go through... (R.E.M.)*

I must start with one clear confession to the reader: yes, I am a ghost hunter—or ghoster, as I call it. For over 40 years, my life has been about ghosts in one form or another; I have seen the ghosts of people who were supposed to love me, as well as non-corporeal entities in houses and haunted places. Because of the numerous ghost sightings I've had, I delved into a pit of darkness and, not trusting anyone with my personal feelings, I faced my issues alone. At the end of this dark period, I learned to not play with fire and to forgive those who hurt me, even if that meant a demonic wakeup call from Charles Starkweather in Wyuka Cemetery in Lincoln, Nebraska.

But more on that later. My first experience as a ghoster was at Fort Fisher, NC, with my biological father and his girlfriend Judy, my big brother Joel, and I looking over the sacred area as the tide rolled in for a windy afternoon. Fort Fisher was a Confederate stronghold of long ago that was overcome by the Union armies due to its defensive system of the Cape Fear River system near the end of the Civil War. As some ghosters know, Fort Fisher is haunted by spirits of Civil War soldiers. When we were there, a man in a blue uniform and a handlebar mustache appeared to me. His demeanor seemed quiet, but he looked out into the distance and then at me. I must confess, he was brown-haired handsome as he began questioning me about why I was there. I answered but wasn't afraid of him, as his aura spoke of pleasantries but purpose for a young girl of seven. The next thing I can recount is my father, worried about whom I was talking to, kneeling before me with his hands around my arms and shaking me as if out of a stupor. The group stared at me, and all I, in fear of my father's temper, could utter was, "The man in blue was really nice."

"Who were you talking to? There is no one here besides us," my father corrected with a tinge of "You're lying," in his voice. "There is no man in blue."

"But I saw him," I shot back with a quiet and concerned voice as if I had done something wrong. "He wore blue, and he was right in front of me. I saw him."

My biological father then looked at his girlfriend with a strange look, and Judy nodded at my father. "We'll talk about this on the phone," I remember her

telling my father in a voice that reminded him to be gentle with us. “I think I know what’s going on.”

After Judy and my father spoke, she knew that I was “special” in regard to seeing ghosts. Therefore, I have known I was special since I was small; I thought I was “misplaced” in my family, but genealogically speaking, my Great Uncle Walter was also a seer like I am today; the fact was kept hush-hush, however, as things like that were not talked about in polite company in the Bible Belt.

*That was just a dream, just a dream, just a dream, dream...* (R.E.M.)

My involvement with the paranormal became my focus as ghosting groups from all over the world friended me on Facebook. Demonologists, agents from non-profits, and even celebrities on television became close confidants. One day, I read up on Lincoln’s history and found out about Charles Starkweather. In questioning who he was, I bought a book at the antique store on the way to Omaha one afternoon. My friend pointed the book out, and I read just a little until I felt the overwhelming sense of curiosity get the best of me.

“He’s buried here in Lincoln,” my friend told me, “right in Wyuka Cemetery downtown.”

“What?” I wondered aloud to show my piqued interest. “He’s buried here?”

“Yep. Don’t go looking for his grave, though. His family still gets shit because of their last name and relations. They aren’t responsible for what he did.”

Don’t ever tell a ghoster about a serial killer buried in a town where she currently lives because that spells *opportunity*. With my friend Scott in tow, off I went. After looking up Starkweather’s infamy on the Internet, I decided to find out where this creature was buried. I read that Charles killed eleven people, including the family of his 14-year-old girlfriend; another website stated that he had murdered 13 people with two of his victims buried only 100 yards from where his body lay. Shivering slightly, I was on the hunt to find where this damned soul slept, and I eventually found Section 23 as designated on the Wyuka Cemetery website. Scott was not all too happy to find Charles’s grave, as I kept putting black tourmaline on certain graves that “spoke” to me. As I knelt at one grave, two people came up to me with friendly smiles on their faces.

“You’ve stopped at my brother’s grave,” the older woman spoke to me. “Very nice to meet you.” I told her my name and, ironically, she was from an Iowa-based ghosting group that I knew well. She was the well-known medium (or psychic) that goes with members to haunted places; finally, I had met a kindred soul. The medium was with her niece using an EMF detector to measure electromagnetic energy to find spirits. Once when the machine went off, I saw

an old male spirit walk by and curse under his breath, but then he disappeared as if he were impatient.

“You more than have the gift,” the medium detected in me. “You can see spirits. I know this in you.” I was taken aback by her own gift as she read me like a book. As the medium kept telling me about her group, I looked to my left to try and find him. Finally, I admitted what I was doing there.

“Heed my warning. Don’t try to find him,” she cautioned heavily. “*He wants to be found by you.*”

“Why?” I questioned, observing her now solemn mood. “Is there something I should know?”

“Leave him alone!” her ultimatum rang. “Just don’t go near him. We’re going over here to Babyland to pray. I will see you and talk to you soon?”

After replying yes, I went about my business of trying to find Charles regardless. After the fact, I knew she was right, but at the time, I didn’t care. My goal was to find him (or *it*, as I came to find out) no matter what; in my compromised frame of mind, I didn’t care what happened to me. I had a death wish because of my compounded anguish in recently disowning my dysfunctional biological family.

Then I noticed a white cross with a child’s writing on it. When I got closer, I read the cross; it said, “We love and miss you, Uncle Charlie.” I had found the grave, all right. Never fearful in my bravado, my body approached the grave with caution, and then my eyes beheld a most horrible sight. In the ghosting world, if you desecrate a grave in any way, shape, or form, you’re asking for trouble. The white cross was a misnomer for something horribly wrong; I closed my eyes for a moment, taking in the dreadfulness of the medium’s words. Charles Starkweather’s grave had no marker for the faceplate that now contained an empty slab of concrete. Someone had removed it, and then I became wary of my stupidity. Swallowing my fear, I knelt over his burial place and placed two black tourmaline stones (good for warding off evil) and two quarters I had found in a parking lot; I made the Sign of the Cross on the concrete (even though I didn’t believe anymore). My words came out peacefully as, “You’re forgiven. Go and rest in peace now.” Now I can’t help but cry because I know I stirred up a hornet’s nest that day and brought *alive* something much worse that would haunt me.

Fast forward to *that* day. A friend of mine was photographing me for my book as I laid three silver roses at the feet of the angel in Babyland. I was in Wyuka again. After the photo session, the photographer and I went our separate ways. As I was leaving, I quietly turned the corner by Starkweather’s grave when suddenly, the door of my truck flew open with the force of several

men trying to pull it off. I was still driving when I felt a demon-like, unbearable burning on my left arm trying its best to yank me out of the moving vehicle. I fought and fought, slamming on the brakes and yelling in vicious anger, “YOU ARE NOT GOING TO TAKE ME, CHARLES! GET YOUR HANDS OFF ME, YOU SON OF A BITCH!” I wasn’t going to succumb to the awakened demon! I somehow got loose and pulled the door shut, driving as quickly as I could out of the cemetery.

From that moment on, I changed my beliefs. God had intervened to help me escape the Devil. Unfortunately for me, that was only the beginning. The next day, the car door was hanging by a thread, and I drove to a shop in downtown Lincoln where someone would fix the door. While waiting for my car, I walked around downtown. Suddenly, I saw a man with blonde hair, rolled-up jeans from the 1950s, and a red, James Dean jacket. He was smoking a cigarette and staring at me, as he leaned against the thrift store wall across the street. The man kept his eye on me, taking a drag every now and then and studying me closely. He was *real*, and I went into a store to avoid what I was seeing. After exiting the store, I saw again the same man staring at me, this time with eyes squinting as he took another drag of the same cigarette.

My heart wanted to ask who he was, but my mind screamed, “OH, HELL NO!” Turning my back to see if the tattoo parlor was open, I saw a sign that read, “Hours: 1:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m.” I was out of luck for a piercing, and I turned back around. The man was gone! I had turned my back for a minute, and he was gone. It was Charlie; I *knew* it was.

Breaking my thoughts, my old, weathered cell phone rang; it was the shop calling me to pick up the truck. As I meandered through the streets to avoid Charlie, I ended up at the shop, but the mechanic was at a loss for words. He pulled the hinge pin out of his back pocket, and my mouth flew open, as an abject fear flooded my veins.

“It seems like someone was trying to break into your truck with a forklift,” he commented with a tone of growling concern. “I’ve never seen a pin bent like this. It took me a little bit to bend it back, but this is as far as I do to remove it. I almost had to saw it off your door hinge.”

After hearing his words, I broke down in tears and fell to my knees.

“What have I done?” I whispered.

“Did you do this?” the man asked, confused at my words.

“No,” I replied, getting to my feet. “Someone else did. I can’t talk about it—I’m sorry.”

“You didn’t get into an accident...?”

“No!” In fear, I corrected him quickly. “I waited too long, and the door was getting loose from wear and tear. I should have brought it in earlier.”

I had to lie, and the nice, caring man nodded his head in affirmation.

“This kind of wear and tear happens all the time. I’m surprised the door stayed on for as long as it did.”

After I paid him for his work on the truck, I zoomed home and decided that the incident was a catalyst for change. Praying for the first time since my divorce, I asked for forgiveness and then went to the Catholic Church at the urgent behest of caring friends. I stared at the cross and prayed and prayed and prayed. I was given a holy water flask by a former work supervisor and filled it, trying to cleanse myself of what I had done.

Now my faith has changed to a spiritual Catholicism, in which I say my prayers and protect myself against demons at all costs. I forgave my biological family for their dysfunctional behavior but decided that no contact was still the best solution. This morning, I admitted to a psychic friend of mine what I had kept inside about seeing the man.

Her only words were, “That was Charlie. You saw *Charlie*.”

*Every whisper of every wakin’ hour, I’m choosing my confessions. Trying to keep an eye on you, like a hurt, lost and blinded fool, fool. Oh no, I’ve said too much...*

(R.E.M.) ❀

## CRANKY HANKS

RICHARD HADLEY • SPEECH INSTRUCTOR





# ARTWORK COLLECTION

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BRITTANY MCCOY • ASSOCIATE DEGREE NURSING

## CONVERSATION

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## NEW JOURNEY

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## BOUQUET

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# EXPOSED

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TERESA BURT • UNDECLARED

I'm laid out  
for all to see,  
naked, vulnerable,  
exposed.  
I'd hoped  
for nurturing,  
feeding, suckling  
at the breast,  
a bottle at best.

Instead, you pluck  
at my skin, my limbs,  
gashing muscle,  
tendons to shreds,  
exposing bones,  
lacerating extremities  
one by one.

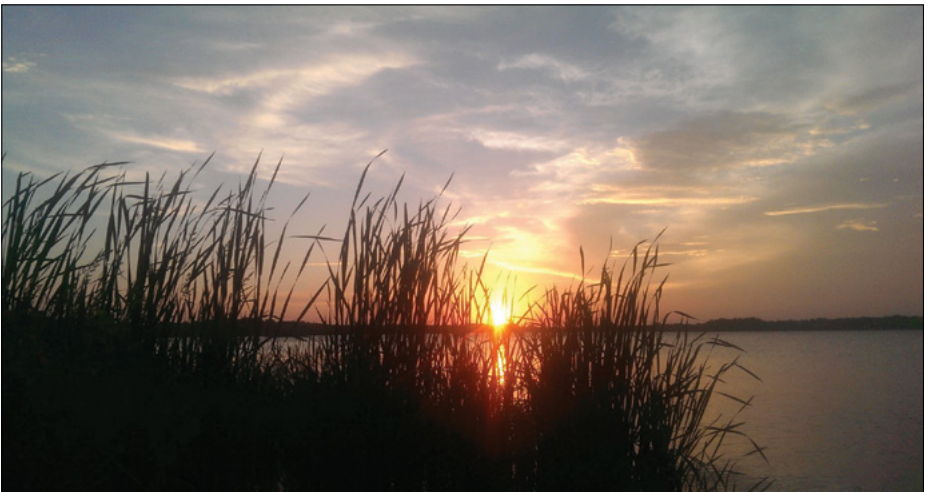
Words, written  
bit by bit,  
pieces  
created  
into a whole.

Now, riding ocean's waves  
fragmented pieces  
tossed onto the shore,  
like sea glass shards,  
waiting  
to once again  
be created,  
shaped and molded  
into  
a beautiful poem.

# GRASSES

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WAYNE REA • MOTORCYCLE, ATV, AND PERSONAL WATERCRAFT TECHNOLOGY



# UNTOUCHED

MIRANDA CARLSON • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS



## CLOUDED TRANSITION

ROSE SNOCKER • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

The northern Platte, sunken tree stumps, hollowed constant.  
Twists its way to the Rockies, housing death inside cubes.  
The natural wood fades into hazy glass compartments,  
dotting the bleak water line to infinity.  
Far from transparent, the cubes are tangled with body parts;  
stumps of a businessman, palms of a baker, the disappearing  
eyelashes of a child. Drown in chaotic unison.  
In the midst of these watery graves, steelheads navigate to find  
the edible bits, feeling for the cold flesh they recently shed.  
Their human identity floats through the cloudy water, some still  
thrash in fear or anger, in transition. Seconds to new life.  
Faces remain muted expression, fingered fins still seeking surface,  
an image of terror lasts only as long as the eyes stay afloat.  
Upon completion, the starving cutthroat devours its severed human.

# ARTISTS' ALTAR

KAREN SILVERSTRAND • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS



## GHOSTS

ERI SUE RHODES • HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY

I pass through the halls of my own life,  
a shadow on the wall that no one sees.  
A breath in the darkness without a sound,  
my voice barely able to cry out an echoless “please.”

I pass through the people of my own life,  
a ghost in the hearts of those I know.  
Always trying to figure out if I’m haunted,  
or if I’m haunting like the whisper of freshly fallen snow.

I pass through the pages of my own life,  
carefully reading the words of life that were once magic.  
Reading between the lines to find the place  
where all that was bitter and beautiful turned tragic.

I pass through the gates of life eternal;  
once healed scars are open and bleeding anew.  
The time has come for me to shine forever  
with other fallen angels away from all that was black and blue.

## THE ERADICATION OF YELLOW

RICHARD HADLEY • SPEECH INSTRUCTOR

There comes a time when the illusion of the beauty of the rainbow is betrayed by good intentions and false promises. The pot of gold we seek has been scavenged by grave robbers, as our fantasies of untold riches were entrusted to those who found the courage to go forth and steal before us.

Buck was tired. He rested precariously in the 52-year-old tottering, wooden rocking chair, the only piece of furniture in the middle of the vast and seemingly endless warehouse covered entirely with one-inch by one-inch wooden blocks of different colors. It was almost over. Every small movement he made in the old chair caused a concerto of fortissimo creaking, and he was afraid that any undo weight or movement could cause the chair to collapse. Exhausted, he sat there, uncomfortable and ill at ease.

He had just spent the last 18,980 days—or 27,331,200 minutes (whichever of those figures sounds the longest and most tedious)—collecting all the yellow one-inch by one-inch blocks and placing them mercurially into Slot Number 3 in the far back corner of the warehouse. He leaned back, creating the expected shrill popping sound from the chair, which echoed like the cackling of green wood in a fire. He held up his left hand to examine for a moment in the ever dimming light the last yellow block. The last block, and it was over.

He ran his fingers over the edges of the block as he lifted it up in mock tribute; the cascades of dust formed a hazy background to his one truly great and monumental accomplishment. It was in this moment, and this moment alone, in the dust-filled fading light that he gave himself pause.

The vast tedium of the task had grown into a void of inconsolable emptiness. Whatever slight joy the process brought, its completion signaled the end. He

delicately held this last block up in his cut and marred hand, gingerly rubbing his calloused fingertips over the smooth sides and sharp edges as he tried to focus on the triumph of the occasion. The only fanfare he heard was the faint sound of his breath leaving his body.

It was this, his moment of pause, that had put the whole production behind schedule, and time was desperately running short. His life's accomplishment was based on letting the last yellow block tumble down Slot Number 3 and into place. Yet, he sat unwavering as his mind went to the memory of the declaration to all he loved, which drove him to the moment where completion was the task at hand.

Clouds beautifully cover the misfortunes of those who have loved and lost, while the rainbow leaves the bitter taste of disdain for those who have only dreamt of love. The imagery of his dreams would occasionally drift across the warehouse as a whisper and then elude him. The hushed rumors and stories he had known in his heart were a constant reminder of what would never be.

It was in these moments of indecision that his mind sat wondering, searching for the answer, but he could only recall the brief clumsy poem he had ingrained into his thoughts years ago. During the desperate countless hours of futility and decompression, he worked away at the unfinishable task that lay ahead of him. Now it was the only thing that remained.

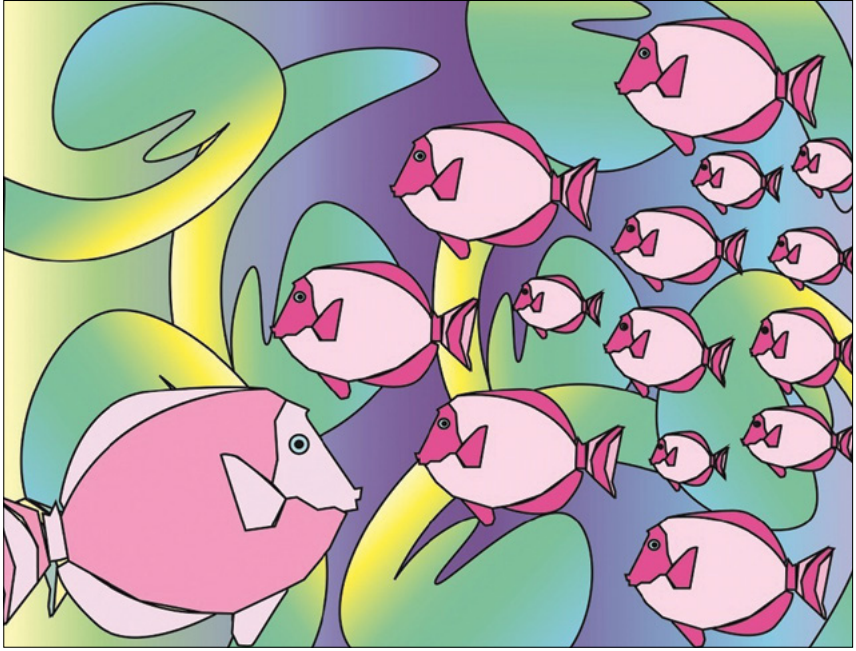
*Flaxseed burgeoning robes of love  
Disgusting flailing from above  
Toast with a bite of love  
Cheerios pumpkin saddle man  
Winters blanket frozen break  
Caged inside the flower mistake  
Basket time ticks to you  
Trite photos antlers fear and disgrace*

*Picasso stain glass tie-dyed eyes  
Records passing drums of rain  
Faces dropped in longing sorrow  
in the moment of the eradication of yellow.*

Buck stood with delicate ease, and without consciousness of consequence, he let the lone remaining yellow block tumble from his fingers, never to reach its unescapable destination. Succumbed by the weight of the day, he slid back into the chair, and his heart was filled with uncontrollable pulsating joy. 🌸

# SCHOOL OF FISH

KARSEN FELZIEN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER



## SOAR

KARSEN FELZIEN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER





# SILLY OL' BEAR

OLIVIA SHELBOURN • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

Dear Ralph,  
Hey, buddy, how have you been? I'm sorry it's been so long since we've talked. I'm 20 now—can you believe it? We've been together for 20 years! I don't know how we've made it this far, especially during those times when we weren't sure I would make it to my 16th birthday. I know I don't drag you around like I used to, but you're still one reliable bear.

I don't remember how you came to be in my life, but I was told you were simply purchased from the hospital gift shop by a coworker on the way to see me, the new baby. That would make sense with your white fur, pink jumper, and a small rattle embedded in your stomach stuffing. I can't imagine you being sold anywhere else.

You didn't start out as much—just another form of stimulation for my young, developing mind. But you must have been a pretty charismatic guy because as weeks turned into months, I liked you more and more. Remember how I used to puke pretty much daily as a baby and toddler? Of course you do because most of it got on you. That's why Mom and Dad named you Ralph.



You're really starting to show your age. Your fur isn't as white as it used to be; it's more of an off-white now. That's probably the result of too many trips to the washing machine. I know that was mainly my fault, but that was such a short time in my life compared to where I am now. How many times have I vomited on you in the last ten to 15 years? Like, three?

You do hold a lot of happy memories. You've been with me through four moves. At the beginning of each move, there's always a "keep," a "put in storage," and a "throw away" pile. When I packed my things as an 18-year-old, I thought, "I really don't need this bear. Why drag him around?" But maybe I do need you.

You've always had a calming effect on me. I feel better knowing you're there sitting up on your little shelf. Hearing your rattle brings me happy vibes. Now I'm sure there's probably some psychological term for why the sound of your rattle brings me joy, but I like to stick with the thought that you're a nice guy and a

good friend.

Since we've been together for so long, we have to keep going. I'll be 32, have a career, maybe married, have a kid of my own, and I'll still insist that there be a place for you to sit on a shelf. You're a good guy, Ralph. You remind me that I was little once and that I'm not so little anymore. You've been a good friend to me. I'd take you out for a drink, but we're not 21—nor is it normal for a person to take her childhood stuffed animal out drinking. Can you imagine that? The two of us at the club? Believe it or not, it wouldn't be the strangest thing to happen there.

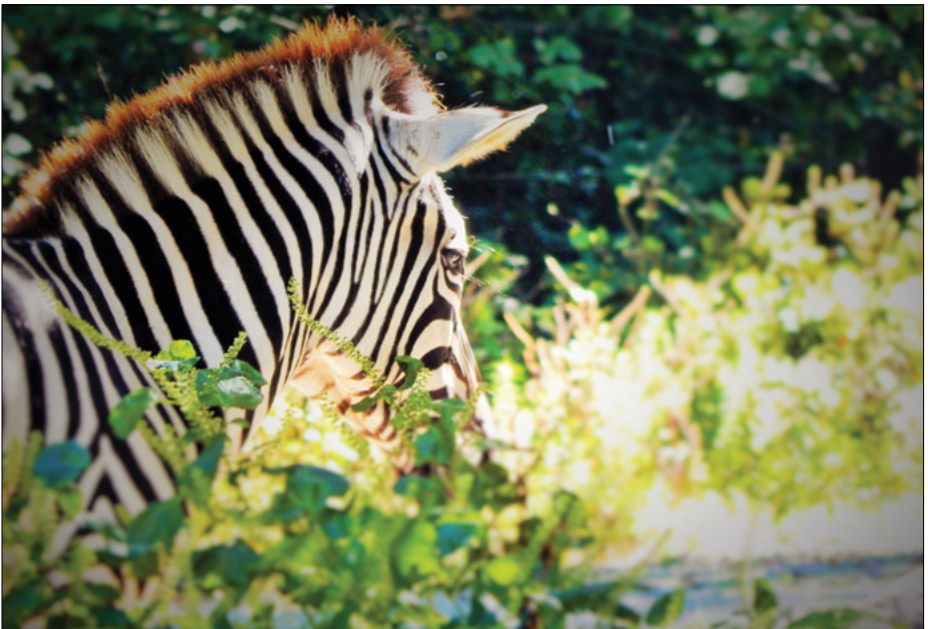
It was nice talking to you, Ralph, even though I'm always the one that does the talking. It's fine. You're more of a quiet guy, and I get that. Thank you for your 20 years of companionship. Let's go for 20 more.

Love, Olivia ❁

## ZEBRA

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REBECCA WELSH • BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



# TULIPS IN HOLLAND

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LYNDA HEIDEN • ADMINISTRATIVE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT, AREA OFFICE



# NIGHT LIGHTS BRIGHTEN BUILDINGS IN BRUGES, BELGIUM

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LYNDA HEIDEN • ADMINISTRATIVE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT, AREA OFFICE



# HANDS

ERI SUE RHODES • HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY

*DEDICATED TO DAVID JESSE KLUKAS (1934-2016)*

*Though he is gone, his legacy of laughter, optimism, and love  
lives on in my dad, Mark Klukas*

If you were careful and took a personal look at my small hands, you would be able to tell several things about me. First, you would realize that I am a woman of small stature who hasn't worked hard at all. My hands are soft and delicate, and there are no rough spots or callouses to find. These hands have cradled my children, though, stroked their hair, cleaned their scrapes, and, on numerous occasions, fished peculiar things out of ears and noses.

You would find that I am fair-skinned from the creamy color of my skin and the freckles that dot my fingers. My fingernails are painted some outlandish color and covered in glitter, indicating a reluctance to conform. The polish is chipped, though, relaying that I don't have time to paint them regularly, much less get to a salon.

On the ring finger of my left hand, there is evidence of the new life I have made for myself. My wedding ring is an antique, an estate piece, and it is entirely unique to me. Never one to be ordinary or to follow the trends, my husband picked me out a ring that is a series of infinity loops; tiny white diamonds line the outer rim of the loops, and in the center of each one is a larger blue diamond.

On the right hand sparkles my engagement ring, a colorful and vibrant opal that shines bright blue and green and red in the sun. The colors distract me—sometimes at the most inopportune times. My right palm bears a tiny scar. You would wonder where the scar is from. It's faded, but still, somehow, pronounced. It's a straight line running vertically directly down from my middle finger. It's a small line with branches, like a tree. On that same hand, there is a freckle on the palm side on the thumb.

If you would travel a little up from my hands to my wrists, you would see on one a charm bracelet that reads "Sister, Friend, Forever" and is adorned with silver and pink charms. This gift indicates I am special to my best friend—so special that she has designated me her sister. You would also notice a series of faded, but still prominent, crisscrossed scars. Though I was once ashamed to admit it, these are self-inflicted wounds, physical evidence of my anxiety and reminders to myself that I am a survivor. I usually wear a number of bracelets on this wrist as a reminder that my scars do not define me. These hands tightly grip my children's hands to protect them as they cross the street; they tightly grip my husband's hand, symbolizing our affection; they tightly grip each other—these small, soft hands—when I am suffering from anxiety.

These hands write the words that carry my voice into the world. They are irreplaceable. ❀

# STAINED

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MELISSA NUSS • ACADEMIC TRANSFER  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR POETRY

Clear her stomach. Fill the empty water bottles.  
My steady hands spill no bile. Tricky to wield  
this medical turkey baster/syringe/bile sucker.  
No one ever told me its name. Escaping the hospital  
I can only speak ill things of, we drive.  
The snow wants us buried. She'll be dead in six days.

Caught in white out, we claw along half a day seeking quiet;  
a refuge from the light and the dark. A hospice waits.  
Mom sags and whimpers for time no one can return.  
A tube snakes from her gut, bullies out of one nostril,  
and slithers down her cheek to curl in my lap.  
I fill another bottle as her pleading presses me.

My every now-withered wish is to hear her voice  
for the rest of my life, yet there's no way  
to coax this present babble into a comfort or sound  
I would ever desire to remember from her.  
Drops of morphine are under her tongue. I hate myself  
for the want, but I want her quiet.

I want to torture this time until her silence comes,  
so focus my eyes wide-open on fast-moving reflections  
not quite come to life on the windows. Refusing to blink,  
my eyes dry, lids ache to close, and I wonder  
if the blasting heat from the vents could curl my contacts  
where they lie. My discomfort and distraction shames me.

She's hushed. I should clear her stomach again,  
but rest my forehead and fingertips for a moment  
on the frosted glass and finally notice my hands.  
Nearly every digit wears an angry yellow stain.  
Mom's illness has spilled over. I'm branded in bile  
and drowning. Proof, I'm not as steady as I think.

# MOTHER A' GOD

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MELISSA NUSS • ACADEMIC TRANSFER  
RECIPIENT OF GRAND PRIZE FOR POETRY

I  
am seven years young

staring up at her hem  
of blue and white stone robes  
and pray for strength to push her

to tumble over and perch there  
accusing this vacant marble  
of no offered comfort

or safe harbor and whisper  
that her child's sacrifice  
might begin to feel true

if His eternity was spent  
not by the Father's side  
but in hell forever apart

*because I am only seven years old  
and I know what eternity feels like*

to never seek strong refuge  
in my father's arms when I know  
what is between his legs

not through any harm of his  
the scar from those boys' sin  
brands me and it is unfair

that which makes my father a man  
makes him one of them  
my seven-year-old peace of mind

will be preserved as I choose  
to sacrifice my father's loving touch  
We are crucified together

*Do I despise the Virgin for her given grace  
or myself for being stripped of it*

Her statue's too great to topple

and I want stones hurled  
to smash and scatter me wide  
into a thousand hosts

to be lain on her parted lips  
full of grace as I'm devoured  
joined to some part of her

that is not this silent scream  
from a seven-year-old girl  
grasping crooked pigtailed

# FOG LIFTING FROM THE MOSEL RIVER

LYNDA HEIDEN • ADMINISTRATIVE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT, AREA OFFICE



# WATER REFLECTION

KENT REINHARD • PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY INSTRUCTOR



# MISINFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY

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TOM SULLIVAN • ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE

Unless one has been living under a rock, it is impossible to ignore the implications of social media. The platforms for social media include, to name a few, Twitter, Flickr, Pinterest, and Facebook. Subscribing to these sites can produce various results, some obvious, some less than obvious. Most see these sites as tools for social engagement and entertainment. They help people connect with others who share similar interests. With so many people sharing ideas and opinions in a largely unregulated forum, however, information is apt to be misunderstood, misused, and misrepresented. While most of the time the spreading of misinformation is relatively harmless, it still represents a problem that is not likely to change in the near future.

Facebook is one of the earlier and more resilient social media sites. It launched in 2004 and is still going strong. Facebook was originally intended to connect college-aged students via an online network. It quickly grew and eventually allowed access to anyone with an e-mail address and a pulse. It is undeniable that being actively involved on Facebook will provide the most current updates on topics that are within the spectrum of the user's interests. However, the validity and accuracy of the information gained from Facebook can be questionable at best. Often, information is presented by people or groups that have ulterior agendas, whether they be conveying points, making money, playing politics, or advertising flat out. Facebook offers a place for people and companies to say whatever they want in an "ends justifies the means" attitude without the accountability of traditional information and news sources.

Facebook has given birth to BuzzFeed and Gawker style sites. These sites post groundbreaking articles like "35 People Who Just Realized that Seth McFarlane is Actually Hot" and "37 Things Conservatives Would Rather Do than Watch Obama's State of the Union Speech." I am going to go out on a limb and say that no one has learned useful information from these sites. The term "clickbait" was coined for sites like these. Owners generate money based on the number of people that click their links, so they come up with the most outlandish titles possible. The articles themselves are almost always speculative, but it does not matter to the publishing site as long as people click the links.

Sometimes this misinformation comes from sources closer to home. Most of my "friends" on Facebook I had known for some time, whether it be from high school, college, or other places. Some of the more active posters would jump onto



anything big happening in the media. For example, the musician Prince passed away recently. After finding out about his death, masses of people claimed to be his biggest fans and posted how distraught they were with the loss. While it is sad to see someone die at an early age, and I will concede that I know a few people who truly loved the man and his music, there is no way that so many people from my generation cared so deeply about his passing. It leads me to assume I am the cold-hearted one because celebrity deaths do not weigh heavily on my heart. This is where I can relate to Libby Copeland's essay, "Is Facebook Making Us Sad?," when she writes, "The site's element of constant performance makes people feel alienated from themselves" (593). Facebook, at times, can be a place where people are constantly trying to outdo each other on who feels the most. It has obviously gotten out of hand when people are vying to be the biggest fans of an '80s rock star posthumously. The only solace lies in the fact that a Kardashian is going to get something surgically replaced soon, and Facebook will move on.

Along with bandwagoners, there are a number of incessantly argumentative people on Facebook. It starts as simply as people posting their opinions on political, religious, or social matters. It seems there are always people who have to chime in with their unsolicited and aggressive points of view. I happen to have a few of these righteous know-it-alls in my family alone. One is a cousin who lives on the west coast. He seems to take the apologist's view on every topic in the media. Often, he would get tired of searching out arguments and resort to baiting people by posting subject matter ranging from Obama being a terrorist and the theory that the government staged mass shootings in order to pass gun control laws to anti-vaccine/anti-GMO rhetoric. If someone falls into the trap of debating him, he will come up with the most ridiculous arguments and send links to fringe news websites that are clearly not credible. He will never concede an argument and will always win by attrition, if nothing else. My cousin is an extreme example, but certainly not altogether an anomaly. I will admit, I did find his ramblings to have a twisted entertainment value to them, comparable to watching a terrible satire character on a comedy show. That being said, his rants were mostly just infuriating.

I also recognize the growing sentiment that Facebook is "fake" and that people show only the good parts of their lives on their profiles. In the aforementioned essay written by Libby Copeland, she summarizes Facebook as the "very public curation of one's assets in the form of friends, photos, biographical data, accomplishments, pithy observations, and even the books we say we like" (592). While this is true, people were doing this long before Facebook was around. Any respectable household in the years before Facebook would certainly have

framed pictures of recent vacations, weddings, graduations, or professional family photo-shoots. Those same houses did not have pictures of the uglier moments in the family history, so why should Facebook be held to a different standard? Still, Copeland appropriately compared Facebook to the airbrushed and unrealistic models on the covers of most women's magazines. At the end of her essay, she gives wise words that regular Facebook users should take to heart: "You will never be as consistently happy as your Facebook friends because nobody is that happy" (Copeland 593).

I have been without a Facebook account for two years now. I was a casual user at best, logging onto my account once a week or month at most. I never contributed anything to the site; I entered the site only every now and then to look at pictures and check on friends. When I looked through the photos that were linked to me, I realized they were all taken by other people. While I did find it fun to take a trip down memory lane, the process gave me a weird feeling. I was tagged in photos without knowing it, and I felt the photos didn't represent who I really was but were more snippets of what I had done in the past. I originally deleted my account because I did not want a potential employer to have access to that part of my personal life, even though it seemed bizarre that an employer would form an opinion of me based on photos other people had posted. Not much has changed for me for better or worse since going off the grid. I do occasionally find that I have missed an invitation to a party or the planning of an event. I figure if something really important comes up on Facebook, my wife is on every day, and she will let me know, or I will find out by other means.

On a less negative note, I do see the value of Facebook in situations when someone dies, especially if the deceased died tragically, at a young age, or with a family to grieve in the wake. Facebook can provide a way for people who were friends or acquaintances to post non-intrusively the happy memories they created with the departed. The description of the "memorialized profiles" mentioned by Elizabeth Stone in her essay "Grief in the Age of Facebook" seeks to offer something of a "greatest hits" from the life of the lost one. Elizabeth styles the memorialized profile as a place where people that her late friend knew posted messages and shared touching anecdotes. While the profile may not paint a complete picture of the deceased user's life, it brings the happier moments to the surface. The family can, in their own time, look at the pictures and read stories of their loved one smiling and enjoying life before he or she was taken. The memorialized profile sounds like something I could see therapeutic value in if I were put in a position of losing someone close to me.

Facebook is a social networking tool. It has many good uses, with more to

come. However, it is important to follow a few simple rules when using Facebook.

1) Don't believe everything on the Internet. There is a lot of information out there; find multiple reputable sources. In addition, do not propagate information from shoddy websites; doing so makes the human race dumber.

2) Avoid engaging people who are not mature enough to have rational debate. They are not interested in hearing anyone else's side of the argument; they just want to argue.

3) Remember to be happy for people who are posting happy things. They are called Facebook "friends," not enemies, and they probably have as many things going wrong as the rest of us, even though they don't post about them.

In the end, Facebook is a leisure activity and should not be the source of too much grief. If it is creating problems, then deleting the account is always an option. Life will go on the same as before—I promise. ✿

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## CLOVER

WAYNE REA • MOTORCYCLE, ATV, & PERSONAL WATERCRAFT TECHNOLOGY



# SOAKING UP THE SUN

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MIRANDA CARLSON • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS



# COLORADO

WADE LYMAN • FIRE PROTECTION TECHNOLOGY



## UPON THE SWEEPING FLOOD/ TROUBLE THE WATER

DANUL PATTERSON • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

### *I: The Trickster's Visit*

Ashley Brown dreamt of his childhood again. For the third time that week, Ash found himself ten years younger. He was 16 and sitting on the front steps of the robin's egg blue house with Grams sitting in her wicker chair rocking slowly and methodically.

"Gawd, sweetie," Grams had whispered in a voice so small that Ash had struggled to hear her, "loves his chil'un no matta wha payple say. We awl are sinnans an' cain't nan un of us cast no stone lessun we stone uhselfes ta deft."

Ash awoke from the dream that Sunday morning in a cold sweat without knowing why. He looked at the clock on his nightstand. The angry face of the alarm clock shone in the darkened room and quietly muttered that the time was a quarter after seven. Ash stretched the kinks from his long, sinewy form and went to draw the heavy drapes. As the light poured into the room, he wondered at what time Jackson had wandered out of the bed and the house and if, this

time, he meant it to be the last time they would know each other in that way. He shrugged off the thought and went downstairs.

Ash opened a can of tuna, set a saucer of cream on the counter, and went to the back door to let the cat in. He put on the pot of chicory coffee and cooked himself breakfast. He had an appetite that morning for the first time in he didn't know how long. He usually didn't get hungry until around one or two in the afternoon.

After he'd made the grits and eggs—both scrambled and over easy—, bacon, hash browns, rye toast with large dollops of butter that melted and glistened over the browned flesh of the bread, fried ham with black-eyed gravy, and four links of andouille sausage (two of which he ended up sharing with the cat), he sat down and ate.

He was nearly done when he heard a short, sharp knock. He shooed the cat off the table, put his plate in the sink, and went to the door. As he approached, he wondered who could be knocking on his door at such an early hour.

The knocker was a short, rosy-faced youth who appeared to be all of 18, but as Ash was a poor judge of a person's age based solely on face value, he conceded that this hatless boy could have been as old as he was. This youth held in his close-fisted hand, timidly—as though Ash was some easily frightened and unpredictable wild dog—a careworn, black suitcase. The youth smiled, and his peach-toned face became a burst of sunlight.

"Hi! Is your mother in?" the boy asked in a warm Southern drawl that Ash had trouble placing.

"I'm 'fraid not," Ash said lightly. He found himself intrigued by this boy. He wanted to say, "Do I look that young?"

"I'm sorry to have woken you, then. When will Mrs. Johnson be back?"

"It's jus' me. Mama's been gone fo' years now."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Mr. Johnson."

"Name's Brown, actually."

"Oh, but the post box said Johnson, so I thought..."

"Johnson was my Gran's name. This was her house. Wha' can I do fo' you, Mr...?"

"Oh, silly me. The name's Nathaniel. Nathaniel S. Frondda. My friends call me Nate. You can call me Nate."

"So, Nate, wha' can I do fo' you this mornin'?" Ash muttered in a voice full of laughter.

"Could I trouble you for a cup of coffee?" Nate asked as he stumbled forward, wedging his battered case between the door and the frame in a manner

that was meant to be accidental.

“Sure. The kitchen’s this way,” Ash muttered as he motioned the boy into the house and ushered him into the kitchen. Once Nate had found a seat, the very one Ash had vacated earlier, Ash went about fixing him a cup of coffee. When the tray was ready, Ash carried it to the table and sat it down in the middle. “I didn’t know wha’ you wanted in yours, so, I brought everythang.”

“Three sugars and cream. Between the two of us, I’ve got a bit of a sweet tooth,” Nat muttered conspiratorially with a wink. His deep umber eyes sparkled mischievously.

Ash fixed the coffee the way he specified and set it on a saucer in front of him before fixing his own and sitting across from him in the only other seat available. “So, Nate. Wha’ can I do fo’ you today?” Ash said after a sip of black coffee.

“Well,” Nate said after a sip of his own coffee, “Mr. Brown, are you prepared for the Lord’s return?” As he finished his question, he sat his cup down on its saucer and looked at Ash with heavy-lidded, reverent eyes.

“So, that’s wha’ this all ‘bout,” Ash muttered dryly.

“I don’t mean no harm in asking,” Nate said; he seemed to sense Ash’s agitation as though it was a palpable force.

“Well, Mr. Frondda, you ain’t gonna find no one to bite here,” Ash muttered in a hot hiss as he took another sip of his coffee.

“Man shall not lie with man as he does with women,” Nate hissed from his spot across the table.

“I ain’t got nonthang ‘ginst Gawd. It’s his peoples here on Earth I’s got the problem with,” Ash muttered as he sat his cup on its saucer with enough force that the clamoring ring that rose from it reverberated off the walls in the kitchen.

“Man shall not lie with man as he does with woman!” Nate shouted. His pallid face took on the lurid red color of a boiled lobster. His knuckles became ashen sausages as they latched onto the edge of the table, contrasting with the rich mahogany table like blood on freshly fallen snow.

“May I see one of your Bibles?” Ash muttered coolly. After a spell of some minutes, in which neither of the men moved so much as a muscle, Ash rose and went to rummage in the top drawer to the right of the refrigerator. Upon finding the Bible there amongst the varied detritus of bygone years, he sat down and turned to the passage he was looking for. *“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in*

*thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?* Matthew, Chapter 7, Verses 1-3.”

“You’d use the word of God to justify your depravity!” Nate exclaimed. “That same word said: *If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.* Leviticus, Chapter 20, Verse 13.”

“That same word said: *Love Gawd with all of your heart, mind, and soul, and love your neighbor as you love yourself.* Matthew 22: 37 and 39.”

Nate responded, “*Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.* Romans 7: 4 and 5.”

“Was it not Christ himself who said of the three great virtues, faith, hope and charity, the greatest is charity? Charity is a two-pronged thing involving love of both Gawd and man and service to both, as well?”

After a spell of some minutes, Nate muttered, “Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed for its wicked practice of homosexuality.” A slight, smug smile stretched across his face.

“The crime those cities were destroyed for was not homosexuality, but inhospitality. I ask you, who has committed the greater sin in the eyes of Gawd? The man who gives freely of himself for Gawd and man, who loves all without question of their deeds, or the man who turns another out for his sins and who won’t help another when it is in his power to do so?”

“The one who spent his life in service of God and man is the greater,” Nate relented. “I best be on my way.” As he finished speaking, he stood up. Ash rose and showed him out the door. Nate looked up at the sky before muttering, “You best take care. There’s a flood coming soon.” With that, he strolled off down the road.

Ash looked at the sky with wondering eyes. There wasn’t a sign of any clouds—white or pewter gray—in that vast expanse of robin’s egg blue. Although he didn’t see signs of rain, Ash knew that something about the encounter with the boy rang true. Looking at the sky once more, he saw that it suddenly seemed like a fastened lid on the barren pressure cooker of the earth. Ash shuddered and shook off bad thoughts as he wondered where Jackson had gone.



*II: The Hierophantess*

Jackson Monroe walked down what the denizens of the Endes district of New Rivendale, North Carolina, liked to call Main Street. He strolled leisurely, taking in the desolate sights about him. The dilapidated remains of once majestic red-bricked buildings sat crumbling into the dirt-bare earth from which they were erected. Outside the back door of The Old Toad—the booze-soaked, smoke-choked, dimly lit hole-in-the-wall health code violation that the locals called a bar—was where Jackson had met Ash three and a half years ago. Jackson had been fresh-faced and 21, and Ash had been the best thing he'd gotten for his birthday. Ash had been recovering from the smack and booze-fueled fling from the previous night and had looked, Jackson had thought, like one of his Gram's old silver-tongued sayings, *like last night ran over and warmed up and no doubt feeling like two days after last Sunday*.

Jackson continued his trek down Main Street with no destination in mind. Really, he was just wandering and contemplating the big questions. He didn't know why he was on Earth, and at that moment, he didn't want to know. What he did know was who his soulmate was. When all was said and done, the one who held his heart would always be Ash. He considered that that was his problem; he'd found the love of his life too early—when he'd been too young to understand what he and Ash had. “Have,” he corrected himself. “The love we have.” His laughter rose in hysterical notes as he let his feet carry him where they willed.

“Wha chu got ta bay so happy ‘bout,” Jackson heard as he walked passed a house. As he looked up, allowing himself to be drawn back to the lands of the present, he saw that he was on the beginnings of Gingham Road. His feet were carrying him home, taking him back to his Ash. He saw that the voice belonged to The Marchioness, Lady Evelyn Marie Bartiste St. Michael; she was so old that not even the town historian, five years back when there still was one, could recall a time when The Marchioness hadn't resided in the town—and he had known everything that had happened since the town's inception well over a century and a half ago.

“Ah'm goin' home ta mah main,” Jackson said as he walked up the rickety steps to where the lady of the house sat on the porch in her mahogany and oak rocking chair.

“It's 'bout time ya'll toe gat tagedder. Ah near bout though dat Ah was gonna halfta get involvet,” The Marchioness muttered with a wheezy breath.

“Naw, ma'am. Ah was gonna gets there ventully.”

“Ya show took yo sweet time. ‘T’ ain’t lak youse gots all da time in de world ta use,” The Marchioness muttered after a coughing spell of several minutes had elapsed. Jackson wondered when she’d start in on her usual ghost stories. “Halle Mae Whitloc, po’ soul, ain’t been long left this house,” The Marchioness muttered as though she were telling some big life secret.

“Here we go,” Jackson thought to himself as he waited with bated breath for her to continue.

“Halle Mae jus’ fount huh own chil’ dead in its crib. She done pult the snake fum its mouff and all. Ya gone on ta da churcht howse an’ pray fo’ em, ya hair, may boy?”

“Yes’am, Ah’ll bay stoppin’ on by dare now.”

“Chil’, ya jus’ ‘membah dat Gawd luvs awl his chil’un jus’ as day are, an’ ain’t not one of us is widdout sin. Maybay yorn prayers will raycht da airs uh Gawd an’ put an endt ta da flood dats commin’.” With that said, Jackson took his leave of The Marchioness and made his way to the church.

### *III: Judgement in Rem*

That Sunday was the day of the annual bake sale at Nebuchadnezzar Missionary Baptist Church, and Mother Mary Owens was late. As Mother Mary came into the church, as quietly as a mouse, she saw that the Reverend Moses Mann was in a mood. Her son’s face, usually a shade of ceylon yellow, was a burning, ruddy red. His words today fell from his mouth like a sweeping flood—a rushing river of flames that burned and consumed the air in the room like an overfull river spilling onto the bank. His usually cool and composed demeanor was a bubbling cauldron of nervous energy that set him going like a whirlwind.

Mother Mary had seen him like this once as a child. That ended with him taking a beating from his father that nearly killed them both. Seeing him like this made her more nervous than a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs. She decided that if he held out, she’d talk to him after the service.

As she was noticing these things, she also noticed that the Monroe boy had come in. She hoped that Moses wouldn’t notice. She personally didn’t care what a person did behind the doors of his own home. It was none of her business, and who was she to judge? That wasn’t her job. That was Jesus’s job to judge a person’s heart.

She wished that her son was as accepting. Moses was a good enough man who followed the laws of God and man in equal measure, but he was too narrow-minded for his own good. She feared for the day that this flaw of his

would be tested.

She knew when Moses spotted the boy. He went quiet, and a hush fell over the room. It was like the room itself took in a lungful of air and waited on bated breath for what would happen next.

Then, like a dam bursting, it happened. “Get you gone! Gawd called for Adam and Eve. He ain’t never meant there to be no Adam and Steve. Get! You! Gone! Out! Now!”

Mother Mary sat in shock along with every other soul in the building. What had been warm and inviting grew cold and empty. Mother Mary’s face burned scarlet. Up until then, she’d been somewhat proud of her boy. Now, as she sat in the front pew, her face burning red, she was ashamed to call him her son.

“No!” As Jackson turned to leave, she stood up and intercepted him. “No, you ain’t going nowhere,” she said to him. She then spun around and started in on her son. “You just remember that before you start dealing out judgement and casting stones, you get your own house in order. You may be the mouthpiece of God almighty, but, that don’t make you God! You ain’t Jesus. You ain’t got no right to judge anyone.”

“Man shall not lay with man! It is an abomination! Those who do so should be put to death!” Moses shouted, his face flaring red as spittle flew forth with the force of his words.

“I see you got the stones ready and the mob gathered,” Mother Mary said to him in an exasperated voice. She knew this was where it would go from the beginning. She turned to the congregation. “Here’s how this is going to go. I’m going to ask ya’ll some questions. If I ask something that’s true, I want ya’ll to raise your hand. Understood?” After a resounding yes, she began.

“Raise your hands if you’ve ever eaten pork or shellfish?” She raised her hand along with most of those gathered before her.

She put her hand down and said, “Raise your hands if you’ve ever worn anything made from more than one type of material?” In response, everyone raised their hands.

“Congratulations,” she said wistfully to those gathered before her. “We’ve all, by our own admission, committed abominations in the eyes of the Lord our God.” She turned back to her son in his pulpit and said, “Now you may cast your stone at all in here who’ve sinned against God.”

“But, were that to happen, we’d all be dead,” said someone from the back of the church.

“That is my point. Only those without sin can justly pass judgement on man, and the only man that has never sinned is Christ our Lord.” With that said, she strolled down the aisle, pausing long enough to grab Jackson’s hand and to lead him out of the church. ❀

# BUTTERFLY

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ALAN L. CARTER • *PRECISION MACHINING INSTRUCTOR*



# ARTWORK COLLECTION

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*DAWN CLOVER • ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, BUSINESS*

## ON LITTLE POND

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# THE BIG BLUE RIVER IN ACTION

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## BIRDS IN PARADISE

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# THE ABSTRACT MIND

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HAYLEE DILTZ • ACADEMIC TRANSFER

I wake in a tranquil area that in two seconds turns into a scene from an old horror movie. Sketchy trumpets blare in my mind as they did in the movie *Dracula*. I wake to my mind spinning and words smashing in one ear and going out the other. My eyes jolt open to a loud crashing coming from the front living room. I jump out of bed only to find my husband dry heaving over my dining room chair.

I see him, but is it bad that I couldn't care less? If it weren't my job to care for him, I wouldn't. Being his wife, I feel obligated. I bend down and help him to his feet, and within seconds I'm falling, falling hard, and hitting the ground with a loud CLUNK.

I wake in a bloody mess on the dining room floor and realize the mess is my blood. My head is bleeding. I slowly maneuver my legs into a crouched position and use a chair to help myself up. "I need the bathroom," I say in a panic.

"I can't believe I let him do this to me again. I should have left the bastard on the dining room floor," I think. As I look in the mirror, I feel enraged; trumpets blare in my mind, and I lose it and start to cry.

After the salty tears have disintegrated from my eyes, I see my cheek is welted with a huge bruise, and the top left of my head has a huge gash in it. The blood continues to run down my face. I grab a hand towel and dab at the cut on my head as I wipe away the remnants of the blood that still drips down my face.

After cleaning my face, I scowl at the purplish red bruise becoming clearer and clearer. I realize I have counseling in the morning, and I can't help but feel angry. I head for the dining room and continue to clean up the blood with a hand towel until there is no evidence left. After I finish, I head for my bedroom only to find my naked husband fast asleep and sprawled across *my* bed. I grab my pillow and blanket and head for the guest room after sticking my tongue out at him in a scowling manner.

I wake to a calm morning with the smell of coffee in the air. I know this morning will be nothing but Beck trying to make up to me; he does this in complete and utter silence, never saying a word. I rise from bed and head for the dining room where my eyes automatically dart to where I was passed out the night before.

I turn my head to the kitchen where I see Beck reading the paper; I walk in the room only for him to glare at me and leave. It takes me less than a half hour

to get ready to leave for my counseling session.

I walk through the wide double doors into Dr. Rimley's office and sprawl myself on his couch; I say nothing. Sometimes, I think Dr. Rimley can hear my thoughts, as most of the time I don't even say anything; he just brings up exactly what I'm thinking.

My husband is abusive; he goes to the bar almost every night and stumbles into the house around three every morning. Sometimes, I wish I'd wake up alone, and he would be nowhere to be seen. I know it's a horrible thought to wish about someone you're supposed to love, but honestly, he terrifies me. I'm constantly on edge. Every time something is about to happen, I hear drums booming louder and louder until my thoughts are erased from the horrible sound in my head.

"Why can't you just leave him?" Dr. Rimley blurts over the loud booming of the drums.

For some reason, I never thought I could leave Beck; it just seemed too painful. I couldn't imagine not being afraid. How stupid that being afraid sounds normal to me.

I stare at the ceiling and then finally get on my feet and burst through the wide double doors; I hear no sound behind me. Sometimes, I have no idea why I see Dr. Rimley since I don't talk during our sessions; mainly, I sit and listen to the tap of his pen on his tiny notepad. Sometimes, I think Dr. Rimley should be a drummer instead of a therapist. The beat of his pen is always on point, and the sound of his words confuse me more and more.

I get home and close my eyes before walking into hell once again. The words "Why can't you leave him?" repeat in my head, and in a split second, I am back in reality and packing as much stuff as I possibly can. I know I need to get out.

I grab everything—my blanket, my clothes, my computer—everything except my furniture. As I am about to head for the garage where my car is parked, I hear the garage door opening and end up dropping everything except my clothes. I sprint for the back door, burst through it, and head for the interstate.

I run as quickly as I can to avoid being caught by Beck. I run until my mouth tastes of blood and my knees give out. I fall on the damp grass and cry. I know Beck is going to look for me. I know he's going to kill me.

I watch as the sun rises and realize I have been here for hours. I know I need to find somewhere to go, but where? Where will Beck not find me? I pull out my wallet and see I have three 100 dollar bills. I think about what I'm going to do until the drums slowly invade my thought process, and I realize



I'm screaming. I'm screaming because I have nothing, but yet, I have everything now. I realize I am free—free of a man who cannot hurt me anymore. I pick up my bag of clothes and walk. I keep walking, not knowing where my feet will take me or in what direction I am headed.

“It’s time to start over,” I say to myself with a slight smile growing on my face.

At this moment, I know I’ve made the right decision. I may have nowhere to go, but I know that from now on, I can be happy, and it’s at this moment that I hear the victory song—the silent and calming melody of happiness and angels singing and shouting with joy. ✨

## SUNRISE WITH RAYS

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KENT REINHARD • PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY INSTRUCTOR



# SUMMER DEW ON FLOWER

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ALAN L. CARTER • *PRECISION MACHINING INSTRUCTOR*



# CHAPTER I: THE BEGINNINGS

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DENON FEAGIN • GRAPHIC DESIGN AND MEDIA ARTS

**A** lone. In the complete, utter darkness before the dawn, the shape of a lifeless body lays on a cool bed of grass that ripples and waves in the early morning winds. The dancing lights above show their brightest colors, ones that would make you believe you had never seen color until that moment. The wind carries dust, fine and smooth—dust that leaves skin feeling soft and new. The horizon changes from the dark and lonely black to a more welcoming and warming pink.

Just before the sun peeks over the horizon, the dancing lights begin to move more rapidly and unpredictably. The lights begin to break apart as the sun's beams begin to shine. The dancing lights fall to the cold earth above the lifeless mass, dissipating before they touch the skin of the creature. There is almost a whisper in the air as the sun breaks from the bondage of twilight, and with the faded dancing lights, the sky lights up in pink, light red, and hints of orange. Suddenly, the silence of the night is broken by a yell—life.

Gasping for air, the lifeless body flings his arms above him, looking as if he is reaching for something to keep from falling. After the moment of panic and the realization of his safe position, he takes in his surroundings. With the light of the early morning, everything is softly painted, as if it were all from a dream. The air is still filled with dust, which gently brushes the skin of the creature as he slowly makes sense of his whereabouts. He is able to make out the place. It is of a circular shape. Tall trees line all sides except for north of him, which is closed off with waist-high green bushes. In the center of the circle stands a mass of black metal.

To the creature, the looming figure seems the only thing not native to the place, yet it does not bring a sense of danger with it. To the creature, the figure seems to be the only thing that is not breathing, feeling, or reacting. The sculpture, as he realizes it is, brings curiosity and wonder. It brings with it a million questions, the majority of them ones that the once lifeless creature cannot answer. As the sun rises above the horizon, the creature's mind races as he is able to make out more specific details of the towering structure.

The statue is 15-feet high—half as tall as the trees encircling it—and has varying width. The structure looks as if a pyramid has blown over, and now its base faces the sky with its peak in the ground. With the morning light from the east, the silhouettes of trees and the structure begin to stretch across the open

plain of grass. The structure casts a much different shadow. The silhouette is full of holes, places where it looks like limbs hold onto one another, connected as one large piece. The creature approaches the giant mysterious object with caution. Not threatened, the creature feels a sense of warmth and understanding toward the statue.

As he grows closer, he reaches out and feels the smooth texture of the metal, much like the feeling of graphite pencils. The metal leaves his hands cool, as the morning sun has not had time to warm it. The creature perceives that the object's shape resembles the tip of a quill dipped in ink ready to write a story or depict a masterpiece. He also realizes that the bodies of the sculpture encase the shape of the pyramid. Each character on the statue has a head, but upon closer examination, he notices that not all the characters are the same. Some are missing their arms, others their legs; some have larger bodies, and others have younger, smaller bodies. The creature walks around the statue and is gripped by the awe and greatness of it.

As he approaches the north-facing side of the structure, he notices an opening in the trees that is signified by two columns, which contrast the brightly colored sky with their stark white bodies. He stares at the opening and wonders about the world he is in. He returns to looking at the statue and notices the faint shape of three mountains in the distance. Curious about what is outside the circle of trees, he runs to the opposite side where the green bushes are. He approaches the edge. A sickening sense of horror shoots through his body from head to feet. He stares over the endless canyon between him and the mountains. He stumbles backwards, reaching for something to make him feel secure.

With his heart pounding with the force of an army of horses, he tries to catch his breath. For a moment, he thinks he can actually hear the beating of hooves in the distance. He gets to his feet and turns around. Listening, he advances south toward the two white pillars with an anxious feeling gripping his stomach. As he peers over the edge of the plateau under his feet, he sees coming from the east a valiant army of 1000 men riding white horses. They are led by a single man. He can now hear the sound of horns, the shouts of soldiers, and the clanking of metal as the men race towards those coming from the West.

The second army is much more threatening and ominous. It has more soldiers—at least 2000—and they resemble soldiers from a nightmare. Rather than riding graceful white horses, they ride the bare backs of large boars. Both armies stand still before the center of the battlefield. The leader of the army from the East speaks to his army in words that are strong but still bring a sense

of comfort. “We come here not to win for our own sake, but for the sake of our King and our country! Let us fight with the strength of his sword, the might of his arm and the power of his word!”

The anxiety that the creature had been feeling turns to adrenaline and excitement, as he prepares to watch a battle between worlds. The army from the West speaks in terms that cause chills to run up and down his spine. “They have caused nothing but trouble in this land, and it is time we take our rightful place in this country. We shall strike down these worthless insects, and next, their King!” screeched the leader of the “nightmare” army. The creature thinks he has given them an appropriate title with “nightmare.”

The leader of the East takes his position at the front of his army and speaks once again. “To battle and to victory for His name’s sake! For the Light!” The previous noises the creature heard were nothing compared to the yells and shouts of the armies as they charge toward one another. The creature finds himself shouting and joining in on the excitement as he watches helplessly on top of the sanctuary.

The sun, now at its peak, bakes the earth with its rays and warms the air with the smell of steel and blood. From the lights of the earlier morning to the afternoon heat, the creature watches the battle. As the last nightmare’s sword drops to earth, the shouts of the army from the East are heard for miles. In the cheering and celebration, the eyes of the leader of the Light army are drawn to the plateau, and he notices the creature dancing for joy. “You two,” the leader says to his closest soldiers, “come with me up to The Beginnings. I believe we have a new recruit awaiting us.” The leader and two of his soldiers move toward the path that leads to the sanctuary, and the creature sees their movement toward his position. At first he is startled, thinking they may be coming to hurt him. He quickly makes his way to the north side of the plateau. He sits awaiting his own fate and thinking through the endless possibilities of what might happen when the captain and his soldiers reach the top of the plateau. “Come near, creature of dust. What draws you away from the hands of the Light army?” the captain asks in a sweeter voice than the one heard on the battlefield.

As the creature tries to speak, the words stick in his throat. “I have seen the way you defeated that army, and I am afraid the same fate awaits me.” The creature reduces himself to his knees with his face nearly touching the ground from fear. The captain comes near the creature, reaches out his hand, and brings the creature to his feet saying, “You have no need to be afraid, for my King has brought you here. Knowing your head is spinning, I will do my best to

bring peace to your soul. You are in the land of Aperióristos Gracia, meaning Boundless Grace, which is ruled by the one true God, our King.”

“The place you are in now is called The Beginnings, as it is the starting place of those who have been brought into this land. The statue that has been placed here is a symbol of the Creator. He designs each and every person, and they are all connected through their designer. I am the Son of the King, Jesus, and I am here to bring you home to the Light Castle. There shall be a feast made in your honor! We shall rejoice in your life and future. Walk with us in the world of light. To begin your new life, you will need a name. You shall be called Elijah.”

Speechless, Elijah is lead away from the only place he has known and is placed on the Son of the King’s horse with the Prince walking beside. Elijah sees the castle in the distance and feelings of hope, thankfulness, and love embrace his heart as he is led to a new life—a life waiting to be lived. ❁

## UNTOUCHED BEACH IN JAMAICA

AUDRA PODLIŠKA • RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST



# SOMETHING LIKE NINE QUESTIONS

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LAURA MADELINE WISEMAN • ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

Why do claws flake at the edges after clipping? Why does one have bad breath, always? Why does one walk over to empty corners, sit on her haunches in the weasel-kitty pose, circle her head to yowl? Why is one forgetful after vacation, and she hides in the closets, runs from the rooms we enter calling her name? Why did the calico die? Why couldn't we adopt another one, the one named Madeline? Why is five the legal limit of cats in the city? What's wrong with seven cats? Why not nineteen? Why do cats get to be housecats when we have to work? Neither of us are barflies. I am a housecat, even if, officially, I'm a vet. Why don't we get to have four eyelids? Why don't our eyes glow in the dark, become slits, brim the color of gold? Do I even like cats? Do you? Why, of all the cats we've ever had, only one held our gaze like a human? Why does my head ache at work and at home? Why can't I breathe? Who brought cats into our life, and why are they still here? The cats look at us, blink. They are a question we keep trying to answer.

# FARM CAT ON THE LOOKOUT

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ALAN L. CARTER • *PRECISION MACHINING INSTRUCTOR*



# GUARDIAN OF THE GATES

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JOSE LIZAMA • *ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS TECHNOLOGY*





# I WILL NEVER FORGET

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AUDREY BIEBER • ASSOCIATE OF ARTS

Your words,  
“I’m not as good as I once was,  
but I’m as good as I ever was.”  
You’re crazy,  
wild,  
a child at heart.  
The way you spun me around  
that shag carpet,  
friction on my feet,  
laughter in my smile.  
The guitar,  
a sweet country accent ringing in my ears.  
That moment.  
I will never forget.  
You pulled me up,  
sat me on your lap,  
buckled us in and hit the gas.  
My little fingers held the wheel.  
Your hands on mine,  
pulling us toward the road.  
Away from the lake.  
That would have been our fate;  
if you let my fingers do what they pleased,  
we would be treading water,  
because in my world we would float.  
Luckily,  
you knew.  
An eight-year-old has no sense of reality.  
The crazy,  
creative world  
I lived in  
was fiction.  
Everything and anything  
I wanted  
would be true,  
including  
having you.  
This moment.  
I will never forget.

# BEAUTIFUL TULIPS

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LYNDA HEIDEN • ADMINISTRATIVE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT, AREA OFFICE





# OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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**Joslynn Frank** is a student in the Academic Transfer program who hopes to obtain a degree in psychology. She loves reading all types of books, but mysteries and crime novels are her favorite genres. In her free time, she enjoys scrapbooking and spending time with friends and family.

**Nathaniel Allen** was recruited to play football at UNL in 2011 and redshirted his freshman year. After crashing his vehicle, Nathaniel found himself with a broken collarbone, burst kidneys, a ruptured spleen, a lacerated liver, a torn ACL, MCL, PCL, meniscus, and a traumatic brain injury. In the next 14 months of rehab, he re-learned how to talk, read, write, and walk. His brain injury caused short-term memory loss and academic problems at UNL; this led Nathaniel to SCC for the chance to raise his grades and re-enter UNL. His passionate story, “Desperate Lovers,” is a reflection of his family’s Nordic roots.

**Safaa Al-Sarhani** says her poetry is inspired by her sister, her family, and the life they’ve been through. She is an Academic Transfer student.

**Samah Al-Sarhani** is in the Academic Transfer program and creates her conceptual artwork with great self-introspection. “Caught in the Middle” reflects her idea that innocent people don’t look for someone to blame; they look for someone to save them. “Where My Demons Hide” illustrates how we create our own demons and give them shelter inside us where they feed on our fears. In “Falling,” Samah reflects the notion that if we believe strongly enough, our dreams will come true, but that nightmares are also dreams. Finally, Samah created “We Call Them Beggars” to partner with her sister’s biting poem of the same name.

**Sonia Arellano** is a young, determined woman who thrives at a challenge. She has dreams and goals for her future and is determined to make them reality. Her family has always supported her, but her daughter is the main reason she keeps going.

**Eric Arnold** is a broadcast production student from Valentine, NE. His work is unavoidably affected by his Midwestern roots and a deep love of the outdoors. When not writing poetry, Eric enjoys cycling and craft beer, but not necessarily at the same time.

**Matiop Lueth Atem** is originally from Sudan and is interested in pursuing Global Studies as a major. He admits that through the difficulties of the past, he has become who he is today.

**Devin Aylor** has the two best jobs in the world: she’s a mother and a parachute rigger for the Army National Guard, where she gets to jump out of airplanes. Devin plans on transferring to UNL to pursue a career in law enforcement.

**Jessica Badousek** is a self-admitted coffee addict. She’s also a full-time mom, wife, and student. Jessica spent most of her life doing the things she was expected to do, but now that she’s discovered a passion for painting, she intends to never put the brush down.

**James Barnett** loves animals; in fact, he has an exotic pets license and can own anything but a big cat. He specializes in monkeys. James is also a photographer—go to <http://picsbyjames.blogspot.com> to see more of his work.

**Audrey Bieber** is a hopeless girl in love with a lot of pain in her past. She likes to live in the moment, but she never forgets what got her there. Working toward her Associate of Arts, Audrey believes the small things mean everything.

**Brooke Brestel** plays softball for the SCC team in Beatrice. She has been writing since she could pick up a pencil, and she enjoys watching Netflix (especially her favorite show, *Supernatural*), reading, and listening to a wide array of music genres. Brooke doesn’t go to parties because staying in with family, friends, and her boyfriend is much more fun.

**Rebecca Burt** loves outdoor photography—when it’s not windy, that is! When she’s not instructing life science courses at SCC, she enjoys traveling, bicycling, and reading. She has recently learned to paint with oil paints, and her portfolio currently includes one painting.

**Teresa Burt** is always working on checking things off her bucket list and adding new ones! She is an undeclared student at SCC.

**Miranda Carlson** is in her second year at SCC and will transfer to UNL to start on her Bachelor’s degree for elementary education. She has two children and an amazing partner who provides inspiration for her photography.

**Rebecca Carr** is the Associate Director for Institutional Research at SCC. At home, she shares her life with her husband, their too-fuzzy dog, and two chickens. She is trying to get back in the habit of having creativity be part of her everyday life.

**Alan L. Carter** likes to capture the beauty of the world with his photos. He is a Precision Machining Instructor at SCC.

**Casey Christensen** is an odd person who at first comes off as quiet and reserved, but is actually a weird little creature with a passion for writing and music. A guilty pleasure is *Project Runway*.

**Dawn Clover** loves taking photos and has broadened her spectrum to take pictures of things other than barns! Dawn is an Administrative Assistant for the Business department.

**Morgan Dinnel** loves to play and watch volleyball. Originally from Imperial, NE, she was only 3 pounds 12 ounces when she was born, and to this day, she is the smallest baby ever born in the Chase County Hospital. Morgan enjoys photographing landscapes and is a bubbly, energetic person. She doubts she’ll ever get a tattoo, but she does like the infinity symbol, which she sees as a representation of empowerment.

**Haylee Diltz** plans to major in secondary English education and minor in English when her time at SCC is complete. She comes from a family of eight kids and admits that being the youngest definitely has its perks!

**Roger Evans** enjoys taking photos during his travels around the world; his beautiful shot of Tracy Arm Fjord was taken during an Alaskan cruise. Roger is a Programmer/Analyst at SCC.

**Denon Feagin** is a creative and self-motivated person who enjoys making art for others, such as photographs and hand-lettering artwork. His hobbies include playing racquetball, drawing, listening to music, drinking coffee, and watching *Parks and Recreation* and the *American Office*.

**Kayton Fee** is an overachiever and finds just about everything interesting. Her guilty pleasure is old music that almost no one in her age group has heard of. When she is thinking really hard, she sticks out her tongue. Kayton is in the Academic Transfer program at SCC.

**Karsen Felzien** is a sunny, optimistic person who enjoys life and likes to see the beauty in people and things. She is an Academic Transfer student.

**Anastasia Helena Leigh Finner** is a nerd about many things: math, art, politics, books, more books, and writing. She calls herself “all sorts of indy,” and says she appreciates things out of the norm. If she had her way, Anastasia would keep her apartment decorated for Halloween all year. If you’re lucky, you might just run into her at a local coffee shop, bookstore, or art supply office.

**Kenny Free Fox** works as a custodian for SCC’s CEC. He was inspired to submit his beautiful artwork after picking up a copy of *Illuminations*.

**Ashleigh Fuson** moved to Lincoln from Kentucky six years ago; she is currently a full-time student whose hobbies include reading, writing, flute-playing, cooking, avoiding housework, and trying to hide her Southern accent. She has been a featured poet at Crescent Moon and has had

work published in *The Lincoln Underground*. She has loved writing since her sixth grade language arts teacher asked to publish a note that he caught her passing in class. Ashleigh resides with her husband, who is a Dr. of Jazz, and her three sons in a Hobbit house she built from piles of laundry.

**Mutethia Gatobu** loves reading, sports, Jesus, movies, and food. He also enjoys talking to all people about literally anything. His guilty pleasures include sweet tea, good jerky, and ginger candies.

**Brian Gordon** has worked hard to overcome the difficulties of both dyslexia and ADD. He is a student in SCC's Computer & Information Technology program.

**Kaleigh Gorman** was inspired to paint after reading John Steinbeck's story, "The Chrysanthemums," and she chose colors to reflect the feelings described and implied in the story. Recently married, Kaleigh enjoys reading, working out, hunting, and spending time outdoors. Her guilty pleasure is watching reality TV, and she and her husband have discovered a newfound love for all things wine.

**Richard Hadley** is a speech instructor on the Lincoln campus and enjoys the witty observations of life.

**Lynda Heiden** has worked in the SCC Area Office since 1979. She enjoys working on her family history and scrapbooking; in fact, her enjoyment of photography has deepened as she's scrapbooked her memories.

**Laurie Johnson** is an avid reader, amateur photographer, and baker. She is a student in SCC's Computer Aided Design Drafting program and was motivated to submit her photo after picking up an old volume of *Illuminations* in an SCC library.

**Ellen Kratzer** enjoys baking, thrift shopping, and chocolate, in addition to writing. She is in the Academic Transfer program at SCC.

**Nicholaus Lamblin** enjoys writing to express thoughts and ideas in creative ways. When he writes, he strives to make people think, whether they agree with him or not. He is a fan of song lyrics and motivational speeches, and he believes these influence his writing. Nicholaus is an Administrative Assistant at SCC.

**Judy Lindsey** is in the Early Childhood Education program at SCC. She wrote her persuasive essay for class.

**Jose Lizama** says the dog featured in his photo, "Guardian of the Gates," is named Cerberus. In Greek mythology, Cerberus is often called the "the Hound of Hades" and is a monstrous, multi-headed dog that guards the gates of the underworld. Jose is a student in SCC's Electronic Systems Technology program.

**Aurelia London** (Emma Anderson) has been a writer for as long as she can remember. The first book she created was in preschool, and her writing rocketed from that point on. Her guilty pleasure is reading lots of Shakespeare and other classic literature, as well as writing. After junior high, she decided on her pen name, formed by using her middle name "Aurelia" and her great grandpa's last name "London." Aurelia is in SCC's Office Professional program.

**Wade Lyman** has never had a job indoors; all of his jobs, like landscaping and detasseling, have taken place in the great outdoors. Wade lives in the country and loves working out and fighting fires. He's also a Christian and enjoys playing with his little brothers.

**Joseph McCarter** is in his second year as a Welding Technology student at SCC. Although this is how he spends the majority of his time, he always finds time for reading. He's a big fan of classic literature from the 1800s through the 1960s, specifically because of the historical aspects of the works. Some of his favorite authors include Hemingway, Steinbeck, Dickens, and du Maurier. In addition to reading, Joseph enjoys watching movies, YouTube videos, and TED Talks. He also picks up various DIY projects and works on his car when he has the time.

**Brittany McCoy** is a woman on a mission: she loves what she does and works really hard at it. The Midwest is her home, and she loves a challenge; she has a certain style that even she doesn't understand. In other news, she likes baths, Oreos, and cake, and KD is her gorgeous German Shep-child.

**Lisa McDermed** is both a full-time student and a full-time administrator of a long-term care facility in western Nebraska. She has been a nurse for 18 years but still manages to read every day. She loves spending time with her husband and children, and her motto is, "Just because I can't sing doesn't mean I won't!"

**Kevin Moore** has always loved poetry's ability to help him escape from a dark place into a place where he can be free within his mind and soul. Kevin is working on his Associate of Science at SCC.

**Melissa Nuss** is a soccer mom with a stage name. She's a semi-retired rock star, and on stage and film, she claims to have saved a man off a mountainside, been a demolitions expert in the Marines, become possessed, offed the king of Scotland, been the queen of fairies who fell in love with an ass, appeared as Cinderella, the Witch, Rapunzel, AND the step-sisters, controlled time and tornadoes, died from a snake bite in Egypt, and generally, had a lovely time playing. Now it's nose to the grindstone as she does homework at the table with her teenage son, and she wouldn't have it any other way.

**Wyatt Packard** works at the Lincoln City Libraries and is a devout believer in the power of the written word. He enjoys dabbling in the craft of writing now and then, and his perfect quiet day would be spent with a cat, a book, and an iced coffee. Wyatt plans on earning a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and pursuing a Master's in Library Science.

**Riya Pandey** is from Kathmandu, Nepal; she has a twin sister who is seven minutes older than she is, so her sister likes to brag. Riya can't stand spicy food and loves listening to "oldies" and playing sports; she hopes to travel the world before she's 30. She also has to have at least two chocolates a day.

**Danul Patterson** says he thought himself a radiant star, but then he realized he was a dying one—a supernova, in fact. With that in mind, all he wants out of life is to live moderately well in a chocolate and cream Queen Anne with honeysuckle-choked wrought-iron fencing, find passion with the perfectly imperfect man of his dreams, and be able to pen all of that in well-constructed sentences.

**Will Patterson** grew up in Omaha and has played baseball his entire life. His story, "Expectations," is a reflection of his opportunity to play for one of the best high school baseball teams in the country and his desire to show others what that experience was like. Will is a student in SCC's Academic Transfer program.

**Audra Podliska** is a Resource Development Specialist for SCC. She loves good coffee, dark chocolate, gardening, and her cat. She and her dad love traveling together, and neither can seem to stay home for long.

**Wayne Rea** has dabbled in writing, drawing, and photography all his life, never focusing on one for long. His return to school has awakened his creative side again. Wayne is a student in the Motorcycle Technology program.

**Kent Reinhard** is an instructor of Physics and Astronomy at SCC who admits that spending a lot of time outside watching the sky treats him to some great artwork.

**Eri Sue Rhodes** is a 35-year-old, young-at-heart, second-time-around student. She's a newlywed (married to an author!) and has two sons. Eri is proud to be a quirky, silly, complete word-nerd. She loves Edgar Allan Poe and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and she has a cat named Daisy Buchanan. She also collects Chuck Taylor sneakers and no, she won't tell you how many pairs she owns.

**Phip Ross** likes bolo ties, pocket knives, old guitars, playing cards, fishing poles, beer-battered fish filets, and breaking loose. “Caedmon” by Denise Levertov is his favorite poem. A self-professed scaredy-cat, Phip believes that public, free art is the only art.

**Momo Kekula Sarpay** is a Liberian from the Gbandi ethnic group. His experience as a writer began in high school, and his love for music inspires him to write his own songs. He graduated from Apam Senior High School, situated in the central region of Ghana, West Africa, in 2009. In 2011, he enrolled in the University of Liberia, where he studied economics and accounting. He immigrated to the U.S. in 2015 and is currently in the Practical Nursing program at SCC.

**Tonya Schroeder** is a student in SCC’s Academic Transfer program, and the search for hope and calm in her life inspires her artwork.

**Olivia Shelbourn** is an Academic Transfer student. She works at the USA Roller Sports Organization, where she plays roller derby and speed skates.

**Mike Sherwood** is a non-traditional student with a skilled labor background. He loves his family and just about anything automotive related. He enjoys working with people and sharing his experiences if he thinks it can help others with their struggles.

**Paige Shore** is compassionate, intuitive, outspoken, and forgetful. She spends more time organizing her “to do” list than she spends doing the things on the list. In her free time, she enjoys going to concerts, writing, cooking, making jewelry, camping, and spending time with her dog Buddha.

**Karen Silverstrand** loves to paint and draw. Lucky enough to marry her best friend, Karen calls herself a weirdo who is still as awkward as ever. Her intriguing photo, “Artists’ Altar,” celebrates the artists for Day of the Dead in Rosarito, Mexico.

**Blake Smith** is in the Agriculture Diesel program at SCC and wrote his profile, “Home,” for his composition class.

**Clinton Smith** could talk to a stranger about carrots for over an hour in a casual manner. He is a student in the Electronics Systems Technology program at SCC.

**Rose Snocker** likes to think that she has a sarcastic, monotone nature in all of her relationships, but she’s truly an open heart with many fluctuations. Her desire to learn outruns any desires she has for financial success. With wildly ambitious and smart children, a husband who makes her laugh, parents who raised her to be a thinker, and siblings she can share inside jokes with, it’s no surprise that family is her life. Rose was inspired to write her poem after reading the surrealism chapter in Kevin Clark’s *The Mind’s Eye*.

**Heather L. Stream** is a transplant to Nebraska from North Carolina and California. She has been a ghost hunter by trade for over 40 years, and she can’t wait for Halloween each year. Since Heather hadn’t seen a horror story in *Illuminations*, she decided to submit hers and to dedicate it to her favorite teacher, Dr. Mary K. Stillwell. Heather lives in Lincoln with her two cats and is a student in SCC’s Criminal Justice-Homeland Security program.

**Tom Sullivan** is a student in SCC’s Academic Transfer program. He wrote his persuasive essay, “Misinformation Superhighway,” for his composition class.

**Jacob Sumpter** is a musician first and foremost. He remembers his dad playing the Beatles for him before he could walk; he started playing the drums at nine and began to seriously study the guitar at 13. His taste in music covers the gamut of human history and all genres, including Franz Liszt, Billie Holiday, A7X, and Cattle Decapitation. Jacob is pursuing an Associate of Arts at SCC.



**Alexis Thomas** is a high school senior who plays the trombone and has been on the school's varsity golf team and trap team since her freshman year. A member of the National Honor Society, Alexis also finds time to volunteer as a table leader in the three-year-olds room at her church and to work at Hy-Vee as a checker. She says she is always striving for improvement and working hard to achieve her goals.

**Will Tietmeyer** created his majestic sculpture for a Skills USA competition in which SCC's welding program was competing; he says the project was difficult and time-consuming, but he wanted to challenge himself as a welder. Will grew up on a small farm outside of York and fell in love with welding in high school. He hopes that someday his sculptures will be presented in art galleries and parks around the country.

**Lanny Tunks** is an artist and dabbling guitarist who learned about *Illuminations* through a poster at SCC. When asked about his motivation for creating his beautifully detailed drawings, Lanny responds, "I'm an artist, and that's kind of what artists do... create stuff."

**Heather Van Huff-Sykes** is 43 and has three children. She had a typical life until three years ago when she became homeless. After technically dying in March of 2015, she decided to turn her life around, went to treatment, and then to a transitional living facility for homeless women where she currently lives. Heather is proud of the fact that she's 13 months clean and sober and on the Dean's List at SCC.

**Nancy Hagler-Vujovic** loves animals, thrift shops, Scandinavian murder mysteries, and chocolate. She is an art instructor on the Beatrice campus.

**Rebecca Welsh** is in the Army National Guard, and she enjoys the varied activities she does during drill. Her biggest procrastination technique is playing *Skryim* on her PS3 followed by knitting and binge-watching Netflix. She is a student in SCC's Business Administration program.

**Chelsie West** is her own individual. With a sleeve of tattoos, she flaunts her love of art, and embraces her painful commitment to it. She paints the world and dreams of one day seeing it. She has finally accepted that her cat is the boss of everything, and she still believes that her Hogwarts letter will come soon. She finds joy in the little things, but is most happy to just be here.

**Laura Madeline Wiseman** is the author of 22 books and chapbooks and the editor of *Women Write Resistance: Poets Resist Gender Violence*, selected for the Nebraska 150 Book List. Her collaborative book, *Intimates and Fools*, is a Nebraska Book Award 2015 Honor Book. She teaches at Southeast Community College.



She tastes of old innocence and pure bitterness. She wants people to make music on her and tap through the pain and hear the loud silence. At one point, she was a beautiful shade of orange and was well put-together. Then one day, after several outbursts, she expanded into something unexpected. The inside skin was juicy with secrets and layers of concern (fibrous webs of lies and hiding, her inside soul knotted of frayed threads from previously sewing the negativity of others—which ultimately defined her) into her life. Her center rippled like an alcoholic's liver.

Morgan Dinnel  
"Clementine"

For over 40 years, my life has been about ghosts in one form or another; I have seen the ghosts of people who were supposed to love me, as well as non-corporeal entities in houses and haunted places. Because of the numerous ghost sightings I've had, I delved into a pit of darkness and, not trusting anyone with my personal feelings, I faced my issues alone. At the end of this dark period, I learned to not play with fire and to forgive those who hurt me, even if that meant a demonic wakeup call from Charles Starkweather in Wyuka Cemetery in Lincoln, Nebraska.

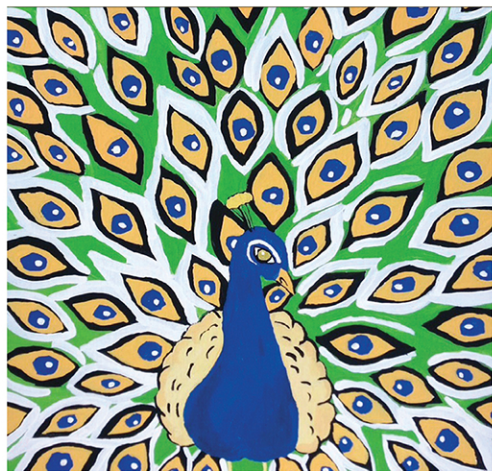
Heather L. Stream  
"Facing My Demons (While Losing My Religion)"

Experiments. The word cycled in my head like a broken phonograph. I lay down on a bed of leaves and inhaled their sweet, decaying scent. I repeated that word, experiments, in my mind, then as a whisper. Each time I repeated it felt like a tug on a rope that was bringing the answer to shore. Then I heard my father's voice. "Experiments, Marie! They put those kids through all sorts of...," and it was gone like a ghost. But I remembered him and my mother arguing about delinquent children and institutions and the isolation of our town, and my mother's loud shushing that she did when she was trying to quiet him down and drown out what he was saying at the same time.

Ashleigh Fuson  
"Two in the Void"

I suit up in full protective gear and repeatedly get knocked down by women much bigger and more skilled than I. My skate boots are hopelessly scuffed, and my knee pads are scratched and cracked. Sometimes I pop right back up after I fall. Sometimes it takes me a minute to catch my breath. Sometimes pain shoots up my limbs so much that I can do nothing but crawl off the track while fighting back tears.... After every game, I am met by fans that repeatedly tell me, "I could never do that." I know it may seem intimidating with me jumping, whipping, and racing around the track, but this three-year, smooth-skating veteran started out as a newbie with Bambi legs. To this day, I fall.

Olivia Shelbourn  
"Falling Down"



The sky had lightened more, and they could now see a car speeding down the broken dirt road. Their pulses quickened, and sweat poured from their skin. "Quick and low, quick and low," Chey breathed. They panted up the rise, backs broken and chests heavy, and then they heard the shouts of discover, violent and penetrative. Shots fired, and Leo could see silent screams painted across Chey's lips—lips that he had touched so tenderly before—and it was that touch that would condemn them.

Anastasia Leigh Finner  
"Pink Triangles"