

Illuminations

Volume 10 | 2009



Illuminations

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

Volume 10

“Everywhere I go, I find a poet has been there before me.”
Sigmund Freud

Southeast community college

2009

Illuminations Volume 10

Conceptual Creator: Shane Zephier

Editorial Team: Anthony diCostanzo, Dan Everhart, Matthew Hayden, Jeremy Kendle, Jennifer Kroft, Ashley Krska, Julie MacDonald, Dick Nielsen, Mary Ann Rowe, and Sarah Trainin

Project Coordinators: Kimberly Fangman, Mike Keating, and Jennifer Muller

Project Assistants: Rebecca Burt, Sue Fielder, Sally Herrin, Julie MacDonald, Rachel Mason, Donna Osterhoudt, Merrill Peterson, Carolee Ritter, Richard Ross, Barb Tracy, Bang Tran, the LRC staffs, the English instructors of the Academic Transfer Program

Visual Publications Team: Maureen Ames, Amy Amgwert, Trina Davison, Jessica Guerrero-Roca, Tosha Mathers, Kristina Peterson, Amanda Steggall, Lena Stewart, and Stephanie VanAuken

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

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Kimberly Fangman
c/o Southeast Community College
8888 O Street
Lincoln, NE 68520
kfangman@southeast.edu

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Land of My Fathers

Robert Branting • Academic Transfer

West of Seward, Nebraska, is really where it starts—not merely a change of geography, but of culture and spirit. Some may argue it resides on the median of the Missouri River arriving into Omaha, but it doesn't.

My Nebraska exists from the eastern banks to Panorama Point southwest of Kimball from the Niobrara to the Republican. My plains, though, the prairie beyond the eastern rolling hills, have always been a sort of promised land, the land of my fathers.

When I was young, my family ventured to places far away from the plains' borderlands in Lincoln to the Great Smokey Mountains, a place of great beauty and expansive views, and the lands of plantations and bayous. Lastly, they ventured across the plains into the Rockies, but the heart, the soul, remained in Nebraska.

On the eastern border, it was easy to quickly become mesmerized by the vastness of the western horizon. It was a mysterious land worth exploring and understanding, where the sun set at night and the morning glow stirred up a curious haze on certain days. I had learned about the mythical West through stories of cattle drives and gold miners, of Pecos Bill and "Wild" Bill Hickok, much through the support of my parents.

My father descended from a line that settled the lands below and above the Platte Valley northeast of Grand Island. From Sweden, my father's descendents departed Europe for a better chance at life, and they found it in Nebraska amongst the rows of corn and wheat.

I remember bright Saturday mornings when blue skies blanketed the green land. The V-8 engine of the van roared as it crossed the boundary towards York and then north to my father's home. They were the days of early inspiration, of a mind ready to be molded to the ideals of the Western culture. In many cases, I truly learned about the outdoor world there: how to catch a catfish, how to hunt, to swim, to make camp; I learned how to live in the rural West.

Those days continued until an outdoor paradise of lakes and beaches, of ruffled cottonwoods speaking in the breeze, were shut away and literally dynamited. What survived were subtle childhood memories, but those wonderful Saturday morning drives soon ended.

In sixth grade, a long adventure was known deeper into the plains. Along the Platte, the van roared once more into the darkest of night. Severe thunderstorms flashed constant lightning across the interstate, and rain pelted our roof. We emerged through that night in North Platte with lightning still dancing across the eastern horizon. The puddles left behind soon brightened with the lights of that city and the stars above. We continued to Colorado the next morning, but not before feeling the joy and warmth of a crystal blue morning. I can never forget the dew upon the grass and the blue northern horizon there for the rest of my days.

Through the ensuing years, I began to dream of a Western life—perhaps North Platte, perhaps Kearney. My eyes found solace at my former elementary school where it appeared that those gates into heaven stood on the horizon. The tall lights lining the Northwest 48th Street interchange in Lincoln were on the last exit west on I-80. From there on, the path led into the high plains eventually. Soon enough, development blocked my sight, and there the horizon stood, made of brick.

It wouldn't be a stretch to figure the question would be, "Why?" What exists in Nebraska to remain? What beauty can be found on the desolate plains?

Those are questions that are difficult to answer. Perhaps it is the mystique of the western plains of Nebraska where the land is wide open allowing largely unobstructed views from horizon to horizon, although its waves of Sand Hills and ranges of bluffs and rock formations bring about romantic ideals of the Old West as well.

The peoples of the West (although political boundary seems too little along the Great Plains) are friendly and ready to help their neighbors. But they are toughened to the conditions as well,

knowing full well the calluses of hard work. They are among the islands of the plains to be found where the tall elevators and water towers stand, but also the Quonset and barn. The people of the plains define the word “community,” and while miles apart, they know their neighbors.

Most of all, they had captured my most wonderful memories of family and had spurred bright visions of the future—ideals that would extend beyond middle school.

While the prairie called, the city absorbed with more intensity. With campus clubs and urban atmosphere in high school, I felt like a stranger. There were no rural clubs like FFA or 4-H, only an ecology club, and while their mission was environmentalism, I quickly fell out.

Eyes continually lingered west to the lands that had captured my imagination. While classmates dreamed of something more in Kansas City, Chicago, or New York, I dreamed of Ogallala, Aurora, and Kearney. Into college, however, it appeared the West would be left behind. My love was destined for New York, and so I followed, exploring the land for a future on the east coast.

There I only found apathetic faces and concrete—the blight of industrial slums, but also the blight of suburbia, a foul taste in its water and air, a horizon blocked by hills and contained from the east by an ocean. I quickly became homesick, as the plains were continually in my heart.

In the planning for years, a solo venture into the very heart of Nebraska occurred after I returned. My old car, burdened with camp gear and provisions, rolled across the central plains north of Grand Island. There was a land of lush valleys and center pivots, of railways and highways, a land that best personified an example of Nebraska, at least to me.

Soon Broken Bow was in view and the start of the great Sand Hills. At first, a timid stretch of land still claimed by farms gave way to remote ranches and large dunes rolling from horizon to horizon like waves on a frozen sea.

Across rough roads, I found a campsite in Nebraska National Forest, a point ten miles away from the nearest person. It seemed

less lonely to know one was consumed totally in the heart of the Great Plains. There the tent was pitched, and among the tall pines and grasses, I stoked the fire in the decaying daylight. I had wondered what would happen if I became injured or struck by a rattler, but those thoughts disappeared with the orange glow of the sun on an active windmill nearby. The stars soon appeared, and while I dozed, a small companion joined me; a small lizard curled up outside of the tent attracted by my body heat.

Morning brought the small coupe racing over the fine sand of the barren yet majestic hills as I struggled to keep free of sink-holes. The hazy morning had brought out the greens of the hills and the curiosity of two pronghorn antelope—quite a sight.

The car coasted along tall Irish hills doused in the beautiful morning light. Upon the plains around Alliance, the car finally emerged and ventured north into the Pine Ridge region. Near Chadron, I hiked along the buttes and looked back upon the escarpment, attracting the interest of a family of mountain goats.

Soon the road opened into a vast plain, no, an ocean, of short prairie grass sided so often by tall buttes in the far northwest of Nebraska. I set foot in the desolate yet lovely Oglala National Grassland and camped in what was the real West of Nebraska, Fort Robinson—an Old West fort nestled between high buttes covered in the green of pine.

The trip back to Lincoln was abundant with the hometowns of Nebraska: Alliance, Bridgeport, Oshkosh, Ogallala, North Platte, Gothenburg, Kearney. A trip merely stirred my love of the plains with renewed vigor. It was my first time out alone camping, and it was an experience. It seemed to be a sort of journey that needed to be taken to rededicate my life to the Great Plains, to be sure that it would be my future.

Soon enough, college was over, and my first full-time job would happily emerge in Kearney. There was my first apartment, my first attempt at handling bills and groceries, my first home away. It has been little more than a year, but I could never forget riding up and down the gravel roads out east of town on my mountain bike, kicking up dust against a setting sun on the new home. It

seemed I found a little part of my Western heaven there before it abruptly ended.

There couldn't be any hard feelings towards the matter—perhaps a sad irony. The very man who introduced me to the plains brought me back to Lincoln. Dad had contracted cancer, and a chemotherapy treatment pushed a lymphoma into leukemia. I was home little more than a month when he passed away on the coldest morning remembered. He left the world a little before sunrise, on another clear day, though there lay no beauty in that day's skies.

Dad had taught his kids everything they needed to know about life and taught me how to be a man. He had shown the way in the outdoors, teaching me to fish and hunt. While he exemplified the best of Western culture to me with his boots, his Louis L'Amour collection, and his strong belief in work and family, I never knew his true feelings about the West until shortly before he died. His hospital room television was set on the staples of Western life, horse training and rodeos... shows he not often watched but I think made him feel most comfortable during those days. It felt good to know we were so closely bonded with similar ideas and hopes although it's sad to think those days are over.

It is interesting to note what has been lost but also what has been won. The places and ideas of my Nebraska seem to disappear before my very eyes, but memories are gained and continue on.

It is funny to think of moments so mundane at one time in life only to have them draw a tear from my eye: the Sunday nights in York fueling up for the drive back to Kearney; standing against the car keeping warm out of the bitter cold, northerly winds that lofted in over the farmland; on the road soon again into the west and darkness where the only lights emerge from eastbound traffic on I-80, the distant farm lights and the dim stars above. It's quite difficult to look at that gas station when I pass by now—much the same with the hunting lands my dad and I frequented.

I think most of all, my dad was my strongest influence on my views of the West. He showed the way, demonstrating what a man needs to do to live and wishing good luck when his son went

out on his own. A significant part, if not most, of my whole outlook on life can be contributed to him. But, too, the memories of western Nebraska bring about a hope of a permanent return there.

The state of Nebraska, the Great Plains, is my home and will be for the rest of my days. There have simply been too many friends made, too many prairie lands visited and cherished. Whenever I step off a plane in Omaha or Lincoln, I may not kiss the ground, but I like to rub a bit of dirt between my fingers to know “native soil” once more.

My eyes gaze out upon the plains’ lands dreaming of what could be. One thing is for sure: the great motivation they provide helps keep a head on straight and dedicated to the goals laid out in a short mortal life. It is quite a wonderful thing to have inspiration, and while it may be found anywhere you look, a great place to start is between the corn rows and main streets of rural Nebraska. I found it there, amongst the land of my fathers. 🌻

Headdress

Renee Northrop • Academic Transfer



My Daughter

By Lana Young • Human Services

I couldn't get enough—
your smell, your touch,
those eyes, emerald drops of dew,
that hair, all curls aglow with fire
around such ivory, soft petals.
I knew when I met you
I couldn't get enough—
your smile, your laugh,
such tiny fingers 'n toes.
You, such a beauty to behold,
a little fairy princess.
I couldn't get enough
of the big hugs, little kisses,
such determination your brow;
I didn't know then how much I could love
'til now.

Cara's Swing

Kimberly Fangman • English Instructor



An Abrupt Awakening

Sarah Elizabeth Reddy • Academic Transfer

He held out his hand to me, aged and experienced, a hand that had beheld the broad spectrum of existence—the helpless newborns in delivery rooms to the rifles hot with the smell of gun powder. Exposed but not vulnerable, it held still in the air as though suspended by piano wire, astounding this skeptical audience of one. Sixty years his junior, I shook, I hesitated, a child behind a transparent trouser. I took my grandfather's hand and found myself surprised with the warmth and strength that emanated. He brought me closer, put one hand on my side, and arranged his fingers with mine. This dream was off to a fine start.

For the first time, I looked into his face—his eyes a dewy, periwinkle gaze that sparkled as if lit from behind, under folds of wrinkles and laugh-lines from jokes long since forgotten. He stepped left. I followed gracefully. He was slow but precise, as if bones had never been broken, muscles had never ached, and body had never shaken as it truly had during cold nights kept company only by the sound of artillery in the distance.

Under our feet were honey-stained floors. Colossal mirrors lined every wall, but my reflection was nowhere to be found. The grandiose piano, which in any other room would have earned its name, seemed dwarfed and sent a soft melody adrift through the air. This murmur floated over and through the starched wedding veil which was pinned atop my crown of blonde curls and hairspray.

I'm getting married. My head pounded with disbelief, and I must have staggered because I felt the muscles in his hands and arms contract to keep me upright. He gently took his hands out of my grasp allowing mine to fall to my sides. Hands rummaged slowly, and with a sigh of satisfaction he found it, a white lily. *Surely one of the flowers I had meticulously fussed over during months of wedding planning.* I felt the veil slipping from my too-perfect head of hair down the back of my modest white gown and landing coarsely around my feet. It was stark white and crisp, mocking my façade of innocence. My gaze reverted back into his pale blue

eyes that matched mine, save the depth of wisdom. In his eyes was not sadness, but there was a moist tear threatening to fall, catching the moonlight, foreshadowing the importance of what was to come next. Leaning in closely, I could feel his warm breath, forever tobacco-flavored, on my cheek. Tucking the opaque white lily behind my ear and brushing fallen locks of hair magically back to their natural condition of plain understatement, he whispered, "Believe nothing you hear and only half of what you see." His tear departed and rolled slowly down his cheek and landed with a tiny splash onto the veil which neither cushioned its precious fall nor absorbed it.

A witness to the impact, I saw the veil turn bleak, barren, an absence of color, emotion, and meaning. No longer crisp, but ripe, rotten, a compost pile at my feet. Shocked, I lunged for his hands, and upon reaching them, my shock grew to horror. Warm, strong hands were replaced by cold, slimy fingers, sweaty palms, and softness not comforting, but alarmingly suspicious.

With a sudden craning of my neck, I beheld an entirely different man. My eyes were wide, overwhelmed with the task of rebuilding this new reality suddenly at hand. My stare was not met with compassionate blue-grey eyes but with muddy brown criticism. Deep wrinkles were traded for sunken cheekbones. He had been replaced. A crease deepened on the side of his mouth fashioning a malicious smile upon taut skin.

These new hands slithered down my sides to my hips, groping my curves; I felt my skin under his tentacles begin to stick to the fabric that divided us. *Oh, why couldn't I have allowed the dress-maker another layer?* Pulling me closer, I was crushed against his boutonnière engulfed by taunting white lilies. As if showboating for the mirrored reflections, my fiancé brought his hand near my neck. Raising both my chin and my eyes, he leaned in closely and seemed to mouth the words "I love you," but suddenly I could not believe anything I heard. 🧐

Old People

Max Reis • Custodian

Hey,
The only thing
We've got on you
Is TIME.
Sometimes that's a lot.
But
Most of the time
It shows.
Just
Look at my face.

Pride and Joy

Mary Kerns • Academic Transfer

Once upon a time, there was a car. It was a shiny red car—“Tornado Red,” to be exact. The car had four doors, three rows of seating, four-wheel drive capability, all the toys you could ever want, and that “new car” smell. The interior was a soft, gray fabric that said, “Don’t even think of bringing a cup of coffee in here, or any other beverage or food choice, for that matter.” This car screamed, “BUY ME. I CAN GO ANYWHERE. I CAN HAUL ANYTHING.”

Once upon a time, there was a girl. She was a young girl with no attachments or commitments of any kind. The girl saw the car, and she said, “It is good.” She signed the papers and drove away, vowing to be a good steward of her new charge. Every week, she faithfully vacuumed and washed her pride and joy. She did research on which soap and wax was the best to protect the fine red finish. She bought a special brush to clean the wheels and even a power buffer to get the best shine. She checked tire pressure and oil weekly and always scheduled maintenance appointments on time. This car never had one of those ridiculous little garbage bags hanging from the cigarette lighter because there was never any garbage LEFT in this car. And, as for the windows and mirrors, totally smudge-free, thank you very much. It was her pride and joy. That was then.

This is now—one marriage, three children, one dog, one cat, and one guinea pig later. Today, it looks more like a storeroom than a car. Filled with remnants and reminders, it is a testament to a life containing too much hustle and bustle, showing no promise of change anytime soon. In the very back are extra blankets for those cold mornings when we are leaving the house before sunrise, a small box with books and a few toys to keep the little ones occupied, and a box with individually-wrapped snacks for the kids to have during the end-of-the-day commute to pick everyone up from their different locations. If that weren’t enough, I also have various book bags, a gym bag complete with smelly gym clothes,

and a case of bottled water to rid me of all excuses for not drinking enough.

The “Tornado Red” color has been modified to “Mud Brown/Road Salt White.” The wheels that once shone silver now are the same color as the tires. My nice gray dashboard has about an inch of dust on it, and my plush interior has more than one coffee stain from when my travel mug got bumped by happy little feet while climbing into their seats. That power buffer I bought collects dust as I write this. As for those smudge-free windows: a thing of the past. It no longer has that “new car” smell unless that particular smell has been renamed “McDonald’s French Fries,” and as long as the tires LOOK like they have air in them and my oil light fails to illuminate, I say, “It is good.” Vacuuming and washing have become an annual event, accompanied by much fanfare. It involves setting up bleachers, selling tickets, hiring clowns, dispensing hot dogs and cotton candy and, of course, printing up novelty clothing (i.e., “My parents went to the Kerns’ car cleaning, and all I got was this lousy t-shirt”).

As for that garbage bag I swore I would never have—I’ve got one now. I have bad memories of these garbage bags. As the youngest child in my family, I invariably got stuck in the middle of the front bench seat (this was many moons ago when it was still acceptable for a child to ride in the front seat, mind you). Whenever we would drive over the bumpy country roads to Grandma’s house, that bag was always slapping against my knee and, occasionally, spewing out a chunk of used Kleenex or something worse. Then I would hear those dreaded words, “Would you pick that up, please?” But I digress.

If you have no aversion to stale, and possibly fuzzy, food, I’m sure you could find a complete meal in my car. There’s the obvious: a small bag of crackers that was dropped on the back seat floor and then trampled during a mass exodus to get into school before the second bell rang—a mess that even my six-year-old son, the same boy who spends his summers plunging his bare hands into every mud patch he can find in search of bugs to study, declares “gross.” Then there is the not-so-obvious. If you lift any one of

the three booster seats, I'm sure you'll hit the jackpot and find a half-eaten chicken nugget or an inflexible gummy bear. Consider it sort of like a treasure hunt.

I am plagued with visions that one day we will open the car door only to discover that a herd of wild mice has taken it over and claimed it as their kingdom. I envision tiny little huts all around and their "mouse nation" flag suction-cupped to the dashboard, and next to it, their "mouse king" sitting on his throne, adorned in his mouse king robe. A jeweled crown sits atop his little mouse head and a scepter in his little mouse hand. The other mice are bringing him their offerings—the largest of the crumbs—while he surveys his conquest. But I digress once again.

Sometimes as I sit in my car and look over the interior, I question how things got to this point: not just a messy car but a messy life. Why am I in this position of working, going to school, and trying to maintain a home? Then I look over at the section of floor next to my seat and see a small pair of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle nun-chucks. I quickly remember my purpose. Nourishing the dreams of three very young children is my purpose: dreams to be an artist, an astronaut, a writer, or maybe someone with Ninja skills (although not the Turtle variety). It is to set the example of picking up the pieces when the world as you know it has blown up; the example of channeling pain and turmoil into something positive rather than curling up in the fetal position; the example of swimming instead of sinking.

As I cleaned my car this past weekend (on such short notice that there was not time to plan the carnival festivities that usually accompany this event), I wondered if maybe I had missed my calling in life. I discovered a veritable candy store existed in my car that I was previously unaware of. Why, I could be the Willy Wonka of Walker Avenue (try saying that ten times in a row!). I unearthed enough books to start my own library: no more trips to the book store for us. Did I mention all the toys? Under one seat, I found a stash of Legos big enough to create a Lego-land in our own backyard. Now I can cancel THAT trip.

After returning the backhoe I had rented and having the roll-off dumpster picked up, I had an epiphany: I really wish my car's interior was completely adorned with rubber; that way, I could just hose it out and be done.... I'm just kidding. Here's the true epiphany in all of its glory: With renewed eyes, I look upon my car now. Instead of a clutter of toys, I see proof of the children that I always wanted. Instead of ragged book bags, I see the luxury of being able to further my education. Food crumbs remind me that we are fortunate enough to have food. And as for the smudged windows: remnants of a happy little child that likes to tap on the window to say "Hi" to me while I'm putting gas in the car. Smudged mirrors: evidence that there is always time for a game of adjusting the mirror and playing "I spy Harrison, I spy Olivia, I spy Chandler" before dropping each one off at their destination.

Nowadays, as I walk my children up to the school building and watch them walk in, I realize the object that I once called my "pride and joy" has been replaced. My true "pride and joy" now consists of three parts: Olivia, Harrison, and Chandler—a writer, an astronaut, a Ninja, and all three of them artists. I make a vow to be a good steward of my charges. I wish to do everything in my power to nourish their creativity, support their dreams, and help them achieve their goals. I turn to walk back to my car (which I now refer to as an "ode to the unmalleable gummy bear"), the object that I used to adore, once upon a time. 🐻

Oh, Boy

Brittney Marks • Early Childhood Education



All A Day

Lydya Omondi • Surgical Technology

When did they ever come,
When ever, all ever, an engine sound
Wheels then ever, an engine a way drive in sound
Early then ever, birds come in sound

Street across, I ever see them come
Treat of glimpse, I ever held as they come
Shoving all ever, dirt as the sound come
Chattering all ever, birds theirs come a sound

Begging all ever, sun to sky and wind
Powering all ever, chills to sun, sky, and wind
Pouring all ever, rills, n chills speed and wind

Street all ever, pierced by cars speeding
Streets all ever, no words or sound voicing,
Treats all ever, body of mine cold burning
Streetlights all ever command, body of mine wait in shivering

All a day ever, every other day begging
Sunny, windy, chilly, every other day power commanding
All a day ever, body of mine, shivers in waiting
All a day ever, chatters, sun, wind, chill, ever competing

All a day ever, Provident and I to school
All a day ever, parting us care n school
Sleeping in rides ever, all a day to care
Shivering in wait, all a day ever to school

Mama got no umbrella and it's raining
Cars got to race, all a day speeding
Mama got a shiver in wait, all a day ever ridding
Sunny, windy, chilly, competing all a day ever shouting

I got a cling and clung, all a day ever breast feeding
Enveloped warm, in bath and blanket all a day is gone
Provident got asleep, mama got a sturdy, all a day is gone
Gone, gone, gone ever, all a day ever is gone

Pride

Brittney Marks • Early Childhood Education



Devocracy

Sean Flowerday • Fire Protection Technology

“...This nation... shall have a new birth of freedom—and... government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” Can anyone tell me the base assumption and generally ill-fated error that Abraham Lincoln made when delivering this statement in the Gettysburg Address? ...Bueller?... Bueller? Anybody? No? All right. Lincoln’s elemental mistake is the same great sin-of-omission that seems to dog the West and every other country that has since adopted the tenants of Democracy; people don’t care. Lincoln is placing his faith in the common clave of humanity, eager to believe that the citizens’ better humors will guide them past the devils of their more despicable human inclinations and somehow into a rule of law and sustainable order. He states this country will experience “a new birth of freedom” in a “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” Regrettably, I cannot say that the America of today—not the population that governs her—has ever experienced such a happy day. The American people haven’t taken the responsibility for their government that Lincoln put so much faith in. At a time when nearly 49% of the general populace doesn’t vote, I can’t possibly understand how anyone can believe this little exercise in self-governing has proven itself a success.

I maintain that the defect inherent in Democracy is the very manner in which an individual obtains a voice in his or her government. We hand out votes the same as we hand out AAA memberships or the ability to rent a car; once a citizen reaches the appropriate age and fills out one more glacial government form, he or she is ready to participate in sovereign rule. Congratulations! You didn’t die of SIDS or wrap your Nissan around a lamppost; here’s your voter registration card and complimentary pamphlet on civil service. I’m glad we have allocated the national ballot all the same due authority as buying a pack of Lucky Stripes. It would seem to me that if American citizenship is truly that pearl beyond all price we seem to think it is, having a say in this coun-

try's bearing would require more of a commitment than popping open the tab of a can of Milwaukee's Best. Sacrifice, devotion, dedication—that and fifty cents—will buy you a cup of coffee in this country. It would be to my great satisfaction if this nation were to adopt a more selective and concrete foundation for doling out authority than the arbitrary age of 18. Monarchy is the divine right of one man to rule. Now I ask you, if the right of one man makes no sense, than why would the right of everyman make sense?

Every time we hold an election, the figures make it apparent that the ballot is taken for granted and undervalued by many, if not most. I therefore propose that to earn a vote in this nation, an individual must first complete a tour of national service, either military or civil. A tour of national service would separate those who truly value the astounding gift of governance from those who would rather not be bothered with the chore of self-determination. All who would participate in this necessary demonstration of commitment would receive their franchise upon completion and be fully entitled to make their voices heard in the halls of our nation.

I have taken the liberty of christening this new form of government "Devocracy," from the Latin "devoveo," which means to sacrifice or devote. In place of a government of the people, a government of the devoted. I can image no greater virtue than a willingness to place the whole above the self. Preserving community and country with the sweat and blood of a few years' time as a demonstration to the rest of this nation that yes, this individual, this person, this citizen, has proven he or she is ready to take responsibility for the group as a whole. Democracy, unfortunately, does not allow for the worst in people; it operates under the assumption that those who are casting their ballots are truly acting with the nation's best at heart. Democracy is not built for human inadequacy and selfishness. It is, most ironically, a perfect system for a perfect people. Lincoln states in the Gettysburg Address that "all men are created equal." Most unluckily, this has never been the case.

Devocracy, on the other hand, not only makes all allowances for the imperfections of the human soul, it relies on them.

Devocracy would be built on the very principle that those who are too selfish or nearsighted to see the value of putting the whole before the individual would remove themselves from a voting population as they would not perceive the worth of obtaining a franchise. But the path of national service does not simply weed out the more undesirable among us; it also facilitates the very best in us to step forward, past the grey rain curtain of our shortcomings, and burgeon with the opportunity to demonstrate our desire to serve, our ability to perform, and our courage to act. Would it not be better to require that before one has a voice directing the course of this country, one must have a hand in maintaining it?

Some would argue that taxes are the price we pay for our vote. They are wrong. Taxes are the price we pay for the fire department to show up when we call, for the roads we drive on every day, and for the assurance that the water that flows from our faucets and into our children's drinking glasses is safe and clean. Taxes require resources from us and return resources many times over; they are the investment we make into this country's infrastructure, which we use every day. Franchise, on the other hand, allows us to direct this nation; shouldn't this nation first be allowed to direct us?

Implementation would seem the greatest challenge in assuring national service as a path to full citizenship. It would shake the very foundations of the world we have built, opening up the possibility that the all-great idea of Democracy may not truly be the best form of rule. The idea is no doubt an uncomfortable one to most people, yet that does not prove that it is incorrect. And if tradition and antiquated paradigms of thought are all that stand in the way of a government of the devoted, then let's tear down the walls of the past so we may clear the path for the future. Simply because we have always performed a task in a certain manner is no great assurance that we have been wise about our course of action. If we do not try to improve upon the past, then we are nothing but braggarts and hypocrites, undeserving of the great legacy we have inherited in this nation.

National service would instill in those who are to plot our course the very virtues most necessary in guiding a nation. Aristotle spoke of philosopher kings; I come to you with philosopher servants. Winston Churchill stated that, "Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those others that have been tried." I would argue Devocracy is a model worth a test drive. 🐛

Ode to Red Toenails

Jenay Solomon • Academic Transfer

Red Toenails.
You like them.
They're so bright.
So bold.
The color of blood.
The color of roses,
But that's so cliché.
So Red Toenails mean to you different but classic.
Nobody has Red Toenails anymore,
Maybe turquoise or pink.
Red Toenails are old-fashioned
And out of style.
That's why they're different, but classic.
And you like them.
Red Toenails are the color of rosy cheeks,
Or a red, runny nose on a lonely December night.
So perfectly matched.
The color of freshly kissed lips,
Just a bit puffy and deliciously swollen.
In the mirror, you stare and touch your red lips,
The color that reminds you of your Red Toenails.
You lick them and bite them softly (your lips, that is).
They feel tingly and numb from the pressure of his lips.
You love the feeling.
Maybe Red Toenails are your signature look.
Even if they have been around for a while,
But you look GOOD with your beautiful Red Toenails.
The color of blood and of swollen lips.
And you like them.

Chesney Christine

Nicole Milius • Academic Transfer



Baby Girl

Cameron Koll • Academic Transfer

Jake stepped out of the crowded dance hall and took a moment to wipe the tiny white wedding cake crumbs off the blue vest of his tuxedo. He took a deep breath of the mild Midwestern air and exhaled a sigh of relief. He had made it through the entire wedding without Kate making a single comment about the status of their relationship. He knew she was jealous; her younger sister Lilly was married before her.

Jake loved Kate—that much was certain. It was the word “marriage” he grew to hate. This started when he was six years old and his parents divorced, at first splitting his childhood into halves, then quarters, and eighths, until by the time he was ten he never saw his father again. His mother never complained about his father to him. She just said that eventually he would realize what a mistake he had made and come back. Once Jake noticed she was crying while working in her flower garden. He went to her and asked what was wrong. She just stood there, breathing deeply while wiping her eyes and said, “It’s all so beautiful.” Her consistent optimism had always puzzled Jake.

He looked out into the moonlit parking lot of the Pla Mor ballroom and saw Kate leaning against a shiny white Ford Mustang, taking a drag from a Marlboro Light. She looked beautiful standing there in her blue bridesmaid dress with her long brown hair dancing in the breeze. As he walked toward her, she took a long, healthy pull from a bottle of champagne. She glanced up at him, moving only her eyes, as if she knew he was coming.

“I thought you quit smoking.”

She looked down at the cigarette. “What can I say? I’m addicted to tragedy.”

He pulled out a cigarette of his own. “I know it’s hard, watching your kid sister being married before you.” He continued trying to light his cigarette, but the lighter only sparked.

She handed him her lighter without a response.

He lit up and took a deep drag. "You know I love you, don't you?"

"You love me, but you won't marry me?"

"There's that word again."

"Yep, there it is."

"Kate!" Lilly yelled from the entrance. "What are you doing?"

"I'm coming. I needed a smoke."

"I thought you quit."

"I did."

Kate flicked her cigarette into the darkness and started walking back inside.

"Kate." Jake held out her lighter. "You forgot this."

She kept walking. "Keep it."

"That went well," he said to himself as he pulled a note out of his pocket from the day they met, which he had come across the week before. He was going to show the note to her thinking they would have a good laugh. It was the first day of the winter semester at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln and one of the coldest days on record. Jake's car would barely start. His route to campus was littered with accidents and congestion. By the time he arrived, class had begun. When he entered the lecture hall, the door made a loud bang causing the attention of the entire class to focus on him. The annoyed professor took a long sigh in the middle of his sentence. "There's a seat right here," he said as he pointed to a seat in the first row.

"Thanks," Jake mumbled as he lowered his head and quickly hustled to the seat. He set down his bag on the floor and fit his heavy jacket on the back of the chair. When the woman beside him looked up and smiled, he paused for a moment and smiled back. She had an enormous scar from the left edge of her mouth to the top of her cheek. As the class slowly moved along, he found it impossible to concentrate. The more he thought about the scar, the more it fascinated him. He wondered how someone could possibly acquire such a scar.

He finally found the courage to break the ice and tore a piece of paper out of his notebook, scribbling down, *Thanks for saving me a seat*. He passed the note her way. His heart began to race.

She scribbled, *You should get a watch.*

He chuckled. *I thought I would save a few seconds by leaving it off.*

When the class finally ended, he anxiously turned to her.

“Would you like to grab a coffee in the Union?”

She began to button her coat. “You sure move fast for someone with no concept of time.”

“I’ll consider that an unenthusiastic yes.”

They walked together out of Burnett Hall into the frigid January cold towards the Student Union.

Jake yelled over the wind. “So where did you go to high school?”

“What?”

He moved in close so their shoulders were touching and yelled loud enough to penetrate her hood through the wind. “Where did you go to high school?” He positioned his ear, waiting for a response.

She yelled back. “Crete High!”

“No way! I went to Beatrice. We played you in sports.”

“I didn’t play any sports!”

“Neither did I!”

They speed-walked the rest of the way to the Union and hurried inside.

Jake pulled off his gloves and slid them into his coat pocket.

“Ah, now for some delicious coffee....”

“I don’t drink coffee.”

Jake laughed. “What?”

“Remember, I unenthusiastically agreed to come with you. I never said I’d have a coffee.”

He put his coat on the back of a chair in front of the coffee joint and sat down. “Well, that’s a relief because I don’t drink coffee either.”

She sat down across from him. “You asked me out for coffee, and you don’t even drink it yourself?”

“Well, I would’ve, you know, if you had.”

“Well, it seems we have two things in common. We don’t play sports or drink coffee. Okay, first things first, you’re probably wondering about the scar.”

“What scar?”

“Cute. I find it’s better just to get the awkwardness out of the way rather than having people assume the worst. I was attacked by a dog when I was ten. That’s the whole story, twenty-eight stitches and a scar for the rest of my life.”

“That’s horrible.”

“We all have scars. I just wear mine on the outside.”

In the Pla Mor parking lot, he slid the note into his jacket pocket and held the bottle to his lips but did not take a drink. He just stood there a while longer contemplating his own scars.

The next morning after a sleepless night of solitary self-pity and hard liquor, Jake pulled his rusty sedan into a parking spot under the Westfield Mall in front of Holway Formal Wear to return his tux. He slowly moped in, still feeling sorry for himself from the night before. The store was empty except for one employee.

“You just need to return that?” said the man from behind the counter.

“Yep.” Jake handed him the bag. “Thanks.”

“Sure. Have a great weekend.”

As Jake turned to walk out he reached for his back pocket but felt something missing. “Wait a minute; I think I forgot something.” Jake unzipped the bag and pulled the note out of the tuxedo and left the store. Once outside, he lit up a smoke with Kate’s lighter reading the note over and over, thinking about the night before. You love me, but you won’t marry me? He flicked the butt onto the pavement, slipped the note back into his pocket, and started into the mall to take a quick look at engagement rings.

The entrance took him up an escalator to the main level. Jake hadn’t been inside the mall in years. In fact, he remembered it as the Gateway Mall, not Westfield Shopping Town. The ascent on the metallic steps felt a passageway to an unknown world; everything was unfamiliar and new.

He came to a carousel on the edge of the food court. By the carousel was a living room-like area with carpet, several leather chairs, and coffee tables. Half hung-over, he was sweating from the walk and decided to have a seat before going into a store. The

bright opening was surrounded by four jewelry stores. The light was hypnotizing as it danced off the stones in the jewelry cases.

Children lined up in every direction impatiently waiting for a chance to go round and round on the colorful horses. Parents circled the carousel with cameras, waving and taking pictures. He started to think about how many of those children came from broken homes. He wondered how many happily waving fathers, like his, would eventually walk out on their families. How many of the smiling parents had cheated on their spouses?

An old woman pushing an infant in a stroller and trying to contain the excitement of a little girl and boy eased down next to Jake in an empty seat.

“Well, now you kids go on along to the ride. Grandma will be right here.”

“Come on the carousel with us, Grandma,” the children begged.

“Oh my, Grandma’s too old for childhood adventures. I’ll be right here. It’s time for your little sister to get some milk anyway.” She picked up the child wrapped in a yellow polka-dot blanket as the girl and boy ran off to the carousel. She turned to Jake. “Aren’t children delightful?”

“They sure are.”

“Do you have any children of your own?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Well, you have grandparents, don’t you?”

“Yeah.”

“Well then, what are you waiting for? You don’t want your grandparents to be disappointed, do you?”

Jake laughed thinking it was a joke, but the woman didn’t laugh.

“After Arnold died—he was my husband, God rest his soul—all I had left to love were my flowers and my grandkids. An old woman can’t love flowers alone.”

Jake didn’t know what to say. “I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Oh no, I nagged and nagged for almost forty years for him to put that pipe down until finally God took it from him.” She looked down at the child as she gently placed the bottle in her mouth. “See, Cassie, you should always listen to your grandma.”

She paused for a moment. “Look at me ramble on; you must think I’m a crazed old woman. Would you like to hold her?”

“Excuse me?”

“Would you like to hold young Cassie?” She held out the baby.

“Oh, I wouldn’t know what to do.”

“Well, there’s nothing to know, really. You just have to keep the bottle tilted so the child isn’t drinking air. The last thing we need is a gassy baby.”

“Okay.” Jake held out his arms and gently took the baby from the woman.

“There, you see? Nothin’ to it.”

Jake held the baby close to his chest noticing that the yellow polka-dots were small sunflowers. He thought back to that day in the garden with his mother. A tear formed in his eye as he took a deep breath and whispered, “She’s beautiful.”

“What’s that, dear?” asked the woman.

As he looked up at the woman, a tear slid down his cheek. “She’s beautiful.” Jake looked back into the child’s giant eyes and smiled.

The carousel continued to turn, the light still danced off the diamonds, and the old woman continued to ramble, but Jake was transfixed by the loving gaze of the baby girl, swaddled in flowers. 🧸

That's My Grandma!

Debi Smith • Fine Art and Art History Instructor



Memory of Civil War in Sudan and the Death of My Brother

Chuol P. Lul • Human Services

In 1983, a civil war broke out in Sudan when southern Sudanese rebels took up arms against the ruling government in northern Sudan. Because of civil war, many people fled away from Sudan to neighboring countries such as Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia. My family and I ran away from Sudan to the neighboring country separately. First, I fled away from Sudan to Ethiopia in 1986. Then, in 1990, my family left Sudan. We all went to seek refuge in Ethiopia. Ethiopia was one of the closest neighboring countries, just a short journey to seek refuge for us. It took us at least four days on foot to reach the border. However, to reach the Uganda and Kenya borders may have taken us four to five months on foot because those borders were too far away from my area.

When I left Sudan for Ethiopia, the war between southern Sudan rebels and the Islamic government from north Sudan was not seriously disastrous. Then two years later, constant fighting destroyed a lot of areas, including mine, which was the town of Nasir. After two years of war, Nasir had been completely destroyed, and that was the reason my family also fled away from Sudan to Ethiopia in 1990. My family wanted to stay over there in the Nasir area, but war forced them to evacuate the area because there was no permanent place to stay and no food to eat. I was very happy when my family fled the war safely and joined me in Itang, Ethiopia, refugee camp peacefully. At that time, before my family joined me at the refugee camp, I had started going to school. I was in grade nine when they came to the refugee camp in Ethiopia.

In 1991, my brother became one of the Lost Boys in southern Sudan. He joined the civil war at an early age. The civil war in Sudan made a lot of kids move away from their parents, and a lot of kids became involved without any willingness to join the war.

These kids, or The Lost Boys, were taken from their parents

in a very cunning way. Their parents had been misled by the rebels' leader. The rebels' leader was John Garang. He made a very wicked plan and deceived the parents. He claimed he needed the children to go to very special schools in a certain part of east Africa. To win the parents' minds and collect numerous children from them, John Garang used educational philosophy because he knew that everyone believes that education is much better for everyone's future. Because educational philosophy convinced the parents' minds, they finally surrendered their kids to John Garang. Garang's plan to collect children from their parents to let them join the war was very, very deceptive. Garang was totally false. There were no children taken to special schools somewhere else in east Africa, as Garang had said.

When Garang collected many children from different places in southern Sudan, he stationed them in very remote areas where the parents did not even have access to meet their children. Keeping children away from their parents or in the confinement camps, Garang trained them for his own. His idea was to send them to war after they were fully grown. He named them The Red Army. Desperately, my brother had joined The Lost Boys through dirty tricks.

When I was in Africa, I did not even know the name Lost Boys. I began hearing the name Lost Boys when they first arrived in the United States. The name Lost Boys was created when those kids were resettled in the United States. The only name I knew when I was in Africa was The Red Army.

Coming to my brother's death, at the beginning of 1993, I came to realize that my brother was fighting against the ruling Islamic government in northern Sudan. From 1992–1994, my family and I were wondering where he was in southern Sudan. He had been away for two to three years because he left in 1991 and had not returned home in 1994. In late 1994, I was in Kenya, and someone came from where he was, and I went to ask him about my brother.

Before asking him, I was in a panic. I felt really nervous. I felt nervous because I was expecting him to tell me bad news about my brother. Therefore, my thinking was swaying between the

expectations of bad or good news.

First of all, I did not know the newcomer. “Someone told me there was a guy who came from where your brother had been,” someone said.

“Let’s go, and I will ask him about my brother,” I said. I headed to ask the newcomer for my brother, and when I arrived where he was, I sat down beside him and waited as he finished talking with someone. When he finished talking, I began asking him about my brother. My first question to him was, “Do you know my brother?”

He asked me in return, “What is the name of your brother?”

Then I said, “My brother’s name is Tut.”

He answered, “I know Tut, but he was killed in the very heavy fighting in August 1994.”

Terribly, my mind was about to explode with the bad news of what happened to my beloved brother. ❀

Stepping into the Unknown

Laura Drawbaugh • Visual Publications



One Block

Mary Angela Apthorpe • Human Services

This story was written about the most profound day in my life when the consequences of my addiction finally caught up with me. This event will forever be the most vivid of my memories. This is what keeps me clean. My story isn't rare; the fact that I am here now—telling it—is.

I knew it was time to leave Joe's apartment when he began to nod off. I knew he was out, or if he had anything, he was saving it for later. His apartment was on the grounds of the Norfolk Regional Center in an apartment complex named Crown Point. It was converted from an old mental ward. Crown Point was a three-story brick building containing many one-room efficiency apartments—not to say the people living there now were any saner than the former tenants. The only difference I could detect was their willingness to live in complete insanity, having the power to leave, but refusing to do so. I couldn't say I was any better than any of those that lived there at the time. I was also embroiled in the insane lifestyle of those with a sickness that couldn't be cured. The sun had just begun to shine through the slatted, dusty blinds of Joe's apartment when I came to the realization—the quicker I walked among the day people to reach my destination, the quicker I would be able to hide from them. I was reluctant to leave and tired of having to feed some voice inside of myself that wanted the one thing I didn't. I was emotionally numb to the fact I was slowly killing myself every time I let the voice control me.

I decided before I left Crown Point I would need to take a shower; I never knew when I would be around such luxurious accommodations again. There were two community showers on each floor. I always tried to use the cleanest one. Joe was good about letting me use his shampoo. He was about bald, so he didn't really need it. I had a clean change of clothes in my backpack and some hygiene items: toothbrush and paste, deodorant and comb. I decided to take all my belongings into the shower and set them

on the institutional-green linoleum counter. I didn't want anyone to take the few things I actually owned. I showered, put on my clean clothes, slung my backpack on, and placed the stolen Dollar General sunglasses on my face. I walked out of the former insane-asylum-turned-drug-haven with a sense of purpose. I knew the only thing that could begin to take away the pain I was feeling was four miles to the north and west of where I currently was.

I mustered up the strength in my weary and emaciated muscles to mount the bike pilfered the night before. I knew this bike would get me nothing in trade, but it would get me to the place where I needed to go. I said goodbye to the people who were feeling the sickness as I was, and said if I got lucky, I may return. They made me promise to come back as soon as I could, knowing that if I didn't, no one else would. I knew if everything went according to plan, I would not be back for a few days because I would be appeasing the voice in my head to its own selfish ends, and the others would just have to wait.

As I began my odyssey, my body began to disobey the direct orders of my brain. I was nauseous and shaking, realizing a prolonged period of not eating had begun to take its toll. I felt the desperation of hunger begin to interfere with my more important mission of alleviating the sickness. I knew if I could make it to the Gas n' Shop I could spend a quarter on a Little Debbie, and this would tide me over on my journey. As I approached the convenience store, I felt a sense of relief knowing my final destination was only four blocks away. I entered the store as if everything was as it should be and purchased the candy bar, ate it in the parking lot, and threw the wrapper in the trash. I never littered and despised people that did. As I mounted my rusted, black and green Huffy, I could feel the nourishment begin to rejuvenate my exhausted mind.

Upon reaching Northwest 5th Street, a sense of peace began to overtake my soul. I was going to the place where I knew everything would be put into its proper perspective. My friends Rudy and Sylvia lived two houses away from my final destination. I knew they were out of town, having gone to Mexico to take care

of some business. They were junk collectors and sold their useless wares to knick-knack collectors and the occasional uneducated antique hunters. In their backyard, they had a late 1970's wood-paneled station-wagon. It didn't run. It was used to store some of their less precious items. They allowed me to keep some of my clothing and other personal items there since I had no place to live anymore. Next to this car was a large, circular trampoline that looked across two backyards and more importantly, had a direct view of Mark's house, the place I wanted to go.

Mark's house could only be considered a house in the crudest sense of the word. It was a house on the outside. Inside, it was completely gutted without electricity and water. Mark's many ambitious home repair projects never seemed to reach completion before a new one was started. Mark had a large, orange extension cord running between his house and the neighbor's house he hijacked electricity from. If this cord was plugged in, I knew he was home.

I decided I would stop and make sure my possessions were still intact, knowing also I would be able to look at Mark's house before stopping by and would be able to see who was there and, more importantly, who was watching him. Mark was temperamental about people not checking to see what was going on before they stopped by. He knew his house was on the radar, and he attempted to take precautions at first. He set up certain rules for those wanting to purchase his precious commodity. Only certain hours of operation were allowable in the beginning. Now anyone could arrive at any hour and leave with whatever they were holding, something that never would have occurred in Mark's more cautious days. As he became more advanced in his sickness, he began to take more risks.

Mark prided himself on being "certifiable"—that is, he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. He took his medication for a while, and then he medicated himself with lab-cooked powders and alcoholic elixirs. He was muscle-bound, long-haired, and missing a couple of teeth. His many tattoos were mainly attained from brief stints of time he had done in the past without

regret. I knew Mark had probably been up for days, blowing glass and dispersing medicines without prescriptions. I knew not checking out the scene before entering his “compound” would be an upsetting mistake I would not be able to talk myself out of.

While I was standing on the trampoline in Rudy’s backyard, I began to notice the stifling August heat. The black, woven, nylon fabric that constituted the trampoline began to burn the bottoms of my bare and calloused feet. I thought I saw what looked like a black and white Crown Victoria speed down the street in front of Mark’s house and take the L shaped corner without reducing its speed. Before I could jump off the trampoline, another black and white Crown Vic pulled into the alley behind Rudy’s house. Not thinking I had been seen, I decided to cut through the neglected, dirt passage way between Rudy’s house and the L-shaped turn. I began to walk down the sidewalk as if nothing was going on. I had forgotten to put my shoes back on; the sidewalk was hot, so I walked in the grass.

As the second cruiser made its way down the street, I was praying for some sort of divine intervention to allow me to complete the journey to my predetermined destination without rebuke from law enforcement. The police had already recognized me from legal interactions I had had previously, and were always disappointed when they were unable to find what they were looking for. I reassured myself, this time would be no different, and I would make it to the oasis I had been attempting to reach. Little did I know I had made a fateful mistake by stopping by the abandoned car and grabbing a pair of shorts with a bandanna in the pocket, just in case a change of clothes would be needed later.

“Mary, where you headed to this morning?” Officer Bauer said as he dramatically stepped out of his cruiser, donning his bullet-proof black-flak jacket, his government issued sidearm, his steel-toed, knee-high, lace-up combat boots and all-too-square buzz cut.

“I don’t really know how that is any of your fucking business,” I replied, trying to force back the growing feeling of fear originating in my solar plexus.

“So you wouldn’t mind if I walked my dog around you, would you?” Bauer barked off as if he found some sick sense of accomplishment in my apparent agony. Bauer was the only cop in town with a “drug-sniffing” dog, and he tried to use it most of the time, if the circumstances warranted it or not.

“Why don’t you go walk your dog in your backyard? I hear it’s nice this time of year.” I was putting up some sort of defense, not a very effective one, but a defense to say the least.

“Do you mind if we search your backpack?” Bauer snapped off, like this would be the highlight of his law-enforcement career.

“Sure, Officer, why not?” This was my way out of this encounter. If they found nothing, they could not hold me against my will.

While Officer Bauer was searching through my backpack, another officer had pulled up. He had the nerve to ask me how much dope I had done that day.

“None. Why?” I was indignant and failed to see how these people could automatically assume that just because I was seen by a drug dealer’s house, I was on dope.

“Mary? Whose rig is this?” Bauer asked with a smile, knowing what my reply would be. Bauer thought he was hip, using the vernacular for needle that sick people used. He knew I was caught.

It took me at least thirty seconds to process the statement. “What rig? Fuck you! Look at my arms! There is nothing there. You planted that shit.” I knew they hadn’t planted it, but I also knew it wasn’t mine but someone else’s with the sickness that had been with me the other day. The cops don’t really care if it was mine or not. As long as they found me with the rig, I was their primary suspect.

As I placed my arms behind my back, I was informed of my right to remain silent, to have a lawyer present when I did speak, and an assorted list of other privileges I had as a person under arrest. When the cuffs were placed upon my wrists, I realized where I was going. I sat in the back of the police car, my skin sticking to the hot, plastic seat. I was silent and felt no reason to argue anymore. For some reason, the restraints felt somewhat liberating while they were slowly gnawing at the flesh on my

bony wrists. I realized I didn't have to play the game anymore. I knew I would have somewhere to sleep and three meals a day. I was frightened, and at the same time, I knew I was secure, and the insanity would soon be behind me. I had put up the noble fight and lost. I began to cry as we drove away. The sense of relief I felt at the time was one of the most peaceful moments in my life. 🙏

Destination

Teresa A. Duncan •
Business Administration/Marketing

Surrounded by windows on all sides,
I sit enclosed from the dust and noise—
mesmerized by the constant motion
of Eucs, loaders, and trucks.
Mountains of rock removed from underground
brought up into the light of day,
to be separated by what minerals lie within,
their destination now known.
Up the hill in the Euc
to be crushed and washed
like fine driven snow
or left untouched, large and whole.
Down the hill the rocks go
now a finished product;
scooped and shoveled higher and higher
dumped in piles, assigned a number.
Loaders scoop from the piles
raising the shovel way up high to
dump amidst a cloud of dust
into the waiting emptiness of a truck.
Carefully aligning wheels on each side
across my narrow scale, the truck arrives.
Sitting still while the numbers roll,
Hoping they don't go too high.

Waiting for me inside the glass to ask,
Truck name? Truck number?
Where are you going?
What do you have?
Patiently they sit
Awaiting three words
to be echoed through the speaker—
Ok, you're good.
Off they go to their new destination,
a road, a river, a driveway to create.
Near or far they may travel,
their new destination known.

My Friend

Mike Keating •

Visual Publications Instructor and Chair



Kenny

Marsha Radcliffe-Emmons •
Business Administration

My dad was a go-to kind-a guy. You know the one. He was the guy who saw things from a different perspective—the one who could find the solution to a problem you had been fretting over for hours. He was the kind of guy who made friends at the drop of a hat. So infectious was the twinkle in his eye and the grin that looked like the cat's that had swallowed the canary, people were instantly attracted to him. He stood about 5'9, a wiry, 160 pounds dripping wet. At times throughout his life, he sported a bushy handlebar mustache that only added to his roguishness. He would twirl the ends into tight little coils that looked like a smile over his upper lip. Over the years when we would go out for dinner, it wasn't uncommon for people to stop by our table to reminisce with Dad about this job or that. It seemed to me that everywhere we went there was someone who knew him. And yet, there was a lot about my father that was a mystery to my sister, brother, and me.

If you're lucky, when the time is right, your parents begin telling you the stories of their life. They open up easily once the threat of setting a bad example for their kids is past. In my father's case, it wasn't until after my mother had passed away that we began spending more time together. He would finally answer some of the questions I had about his life. I would go to his house after work, and we would talk about his life as we sat around the dining room table, playing gin rummy to pass the time.

He was born in 1913 on the family homestead near Merna, Nebraska. He recounted the early days of farming when they used mule teams instead of tractors. Each and every mule had a name and distinct personality. Jack, the lead mule, would raise his head up at high noon and bray, signaling to men and mules alike that it was dinner time. All work would cease at that time and wouldn't commence again until the mules were fat and happy.

We talked about the first time Dad let me drive. He had picked me up after Driver's Ed one Saturday morning and driven to an

empty road on the edge of town. I looked at him in hesitation as he slid out of the driver's seat. I couldn't believe he was letting me drive. My only experience to that point had been on the simulators in class. I plastered us to the seatbacks as I shot away from the curb, only to nearly put the both of us through the windshield as I slammed on the brakes in surprise. Once we could look back and laugh, I asked where he learned to drive.

"I was eight years old the first time I drove. One on my chores as a kid was taking lunch out to the hands in the field. Normally, I would load everything up in the wagon or on the back of my pony. One day, I decided I was old enough to drive instead," he said with that twinkle. "I convinced my older sister, Thelma, into helping me crank-start Granddad's Model T farm truck. With Thelma riding shotgun, I strained to see over the steering wheel as I followed the fence rows down to the crew. I slid to a stop with both feet on the brakes and hopped out, proud as a peacock. Granddad and Dad never said a word about our feat of daring-do. Their only reaction was a chuckle as we headed back home. Neither Thelma nor I knew how to put the car into reverse gear, so I drove around in circles until the truck was pointed towards home."

He told me of his first road trip with his cousin Lynn, of the excitement they felt as seventeen-year-olds on their first excursion into the wider world.

The year was 1930, one year into the Great Depression. Money was tight, and jobs were scarce. His father reluctantly agreed to let them go west on one condition. They would work their way across country by delivering a train car load of hogs to market in Seattle. From there, they could ride the rails to Long Beach, California, and visit their Uncle Tom. Tom had migrated west with the great wave of settlers at the turn of the century and had become the chief of the Long Beach Fire Department.

He spoke of his Great Aunt Sylvia, who took such a shine to him. She was a wealthy widow, whose only passion in life was playing blackjack. She would dress up in her Sunday best, and with Dad as escort, they would head for the water taxis that ferried

people out to the gambling ships, parked safely out of jurisdiction, three miles off shore.

“So how did you get home to Nebraska?” I asked

“Uncle Tom bought us a Model A. We drove it home, changing tires every fifty miles or so. It took us over a week to make the trip.”

Each day, as we shuffled the cards around, looking for that last card to make a straight flush or a final pair needed to call gin, we would talk of different subjects.

During the fiftieth anniversary observances of WWII, our talks turned to his days in the service. He spoke of the nationwide rush to enlist after that horrible Sunday morning at Pearl Harbor. Dad tried the Army, Navy, and Marine Corp, but at twenty-eight, with a newborn son, he was not accepted. They wanted only the youngest men at that time, so Dad spent the start of the war working in the shipyards, building Liberty ships for Kaiser Corporation. He told me of how he had walked onto the docks with no more experience than the man in the moon and bluffed his way into a welder’s apprenticeship.

Within months, the War Department began expanding its draft calls. Everyone who passed the physical soon found himself on the way to basic training. After six short weeks in the Army’s chemical weapons division, Dad was boarding a troop transport to North Africa.

With atlas and yellow marker in hand, we traced out the route of his campaigns. The path snaked past Carthage, through Tunisia, Sicily, Italy, and France, and finally into greater Germany.

Many of his stories of the war were about the times other than fighting. I could tell by the somber change in his mood that the horrors of the war had come creeping back into his thoughts. He spoke little of their grim discovery of a concentration camp as they moved through the countryside.

I learned of the further heartbreak he faced on his return home. War has many casualties, and among them are families. He returned not to the hero’s welcome he had earned, but to a wife who had sold all of his clothes and possessions, so great was

her anger and resentment at being left at home to cope with the uncertainties of life.

I learned of how he had gone west to Denver and sought out his four-year-old son, who had been hidden from him, and how Dad had taken him back to the farm in Nebraska, only to have the sheriff come to retrieve him. He wouldn't see that boy again until the boy had become a man, eager to reconnect as he started a family of his own. The despair Dad felt at that time would haunt him throughout his life. He became much more guarded in his personal interactions with people. Only with my mother would he form the strong bonds of love and connectedness that we all seek in our lives.

We talked about after my folks were married. They lived in the small town of Fairfield, Nebraska. Dad partnered with my Granddad Drudik and my Uncle Ed. They made their livelihoods building houses and cabinetry for the surrounding community.

One day, as they sat in the café waiting for lunch, Dad's ears pricked up as he overheard the cook bragging about making \$1,000 a month. That kind of money was a king's ransom in 1951.

"Where can you make money like that?" Dad asked, as he was always open to new experiences.

"I don't know where the job is, but the recruiter was just in here looking for carpenters and cooks," he replied. "He was on his way east to Kearney and then to his offices at Peter Kiewit."

Dad told of his wild drive to Kearney, Nebraska, of missing the recruiter by an hour, and a final mad dash to catch him in Lincoln. After a week of hurried arrangements, Dad was flown to New Jersey for testing and evaluations. With no inkling as to what the job was, or even where they were going, Dad found himself among the two dozen men boarding a military plane, whisking out over the blue ocean, heading due north. It wasn't until many years later that he learned they had been working on the DEW line, North America's early warning defense stations that ring the North Pole.

He told me of the endlessly long, cold months they spent on the icecap, hundreds of miles north of Tulle, Greenland. Being a

clever guy, Dad managed to find a way of communicating with his family back home. The radioman would hook up with a ham radio operator in Nova Scotia who would relay a call stateside. My mother didn't have a phone back then and had to rely on friends and neighbors for contact. It would take many hours to make the multiple connections happen, only to be cut short by static or storm, and sometimes by the tears they both shed because of their longing for each other's company.

He spoke of the practical jokes the guys would play on each other to pass the long, lonely days in isolation.

"One of my first jobs in Greenland was working in the sheet metal shop. One afternoon, shortly before chow, a couple of my buddies came by to see me. They had a project they were working on and needed four strips of sheet metal, about six inches long by about two inches wide. After dutifully measuring and cutting the strips, I handed them over, thinking that was the end of it. As I turned to head over for chow, the guys grabbed me and wrestled me down onto a sheet of plywood lying on the floor. Out come the hammers and nails, and the next thing I know, they've nailed the strips around my wrists and ankles, pinning me to the plywood like a bug on a specimen card. They propped the plywood up against the wall and left for chow."

"How long did they leave you there?' I asked, giggling at the thought of him tacked up like a hide on the wall.

"Oh, just long enough to miss chow. But I got them back."

"What'd you do?'"

"I waited until they were in the showers and nailed their boots to the floor. We called a truce after that."

We talked about the Royal Order of the Bluenose, an honorary degree conferred by the men who had dared to live the life of a construction worker in the harshness of the frozen north.

Dad told me of how short the summer working season was up on the icecaps, of how a sudden wind storm could turn the world into a white fishbowl, an all-encompassing sameness from horizon to horizon. All work would shut down at those times. The only way to keep your bearings was by moving hand-over-

hand on the guide ropes strung up like lifelines from building to building. He told me of how the sun never set while they were there, and how he had to convince himself that it was time to sleep in that perpetual afternoon light.

At the end of the season, the company began shipping guys home as space became available on military flights. When it got down to ten men left, management decided it would be best to winter over a five-man crew for maintenance purposes. Being the versatile guy he was, Dad was chosen to stay. He spent an even longer, colder winter on the cap.

Despite the loneliness and bone-chilling cold, he would return again the next year—that time to expand the runway at Tulle Air Force Base. He told me of working in the midst of an active base. Planes were roaring thirty feet over their heads as they came in for a landing. And once again, Dad came up with the solution to their biggest problem. How do you run cables under a runway, through fifty feet of conduit? To Dad, the answer was obvious—parachutes! He tied a miniature chute on the end of a string attached to the cables and with an air compressor blew the chutes clean through the conduit.

Dad would finish his working career with M.W. Anderson Construction. As a superintendent, he was once again the ultimate “go to” guy. He was responsible for turning the architects’ and engineers’ plans into reality. Once again, he was figuring out the answers to the problems that always come up on any big project.

He was the one who crawled sixty feet out on the end of a crane boom to straighten out the tangled cables so that the cement pour could keep to schedule. My mother never did hear of that escapade!

Over the years, as we played our nightly gin game, I realized that what I had perceived as being uncompromising was the one quality that had best served him in his line of work. When you’re responsible for million-dollar buildings, there’s no room for more than one chief.

Many of the things we talked about had occurred years before my birth, but it gave me a glimpse into his world—into the events

that had shaped him, and given him that Cheshire cat's grin. I finally knew why he was so reluctant to share his feelings and why he was so well regarded by those who knew him. ⁶🐾

Little James Dean

Brenda Kruse • Nursing



Rubber Hammer

Phip Ross • English Instructor

As a toddler, I hid my beloved rubber toy hammer in my mom's oven. Later the investigation revealed that the source of the smoke that pearly through the house and insistent goo that covered the inside of the oven was my melted favorite toy. For years, this story was enjoyed by both family and close friends. I don't know why. It wasn't that interesting, though I confess I enjoyed the attention and notoriety—it helped me piece together my childhood self-image: an ornery kid with tangled hair who went around sabotaging adult machines, and who “didn't take to schooling,” as a kind person might say. Eventually, I cleaned up my act, pretty much, and these days I enjoy piecing together scraps of experiences like the smoking hammer by wielding the pen—and not the hammer.

I have never thought much of the toy hammer story as anything other than incriminating evidence of my early deviant behavior, which also included a pre-kindergarten trip to the slammer in Kearney to see where kleptomaniacs were kept—but that's another story. Recently, however, I thought about another anecdote I first heard in the mid '80s while studying journalism at Kearney State College. I was beginning to trust writing as a tool for not only thinking but for expression—and a way to engage readers. It was while I was managing the campus newspaper, *The Loper*, and imagining a writing career when I learned, quite by accident, that long ago my beloved kindergarten teacher, Mrs. B, believed that the kid who never read and sometimes stole Jodi Dietz's graham crackers would “always be better with a hammer than with a pencil.” By this time I had already taken to the habit of carrying a pen with me everywhere. Mrs. B's comment came as a painful shock of irony.

Years passed. Decades, really. And with them dozens of stories, poems, and essays that parse the experiences of a closet musician, over-protective father of three, and rumbling neighborhood jogger in need of a tummy tuck. None of the musings wending out of the life I was living involved a hammer. And then these two scraps

—the smoking hammer and Mrs. B’s prophecy—were written in a farmhouse north of San Francisco on the back of a post card. As I begin to write them alongside each other, I slowly stitch the two together with an idea. It is the idea that as a child, I was, altogether, a fairly senseless kid but prescient beyond my years. I knew somewhere and somehow that small things, like Barbies, pink tutus, rubber hammers, or football jerseys, might just need to be left in the oven at some point.

If not, they could play a role in restricting the possibilities we have for ourselves, nail us to a destination. This sounds right to me as the words I scrawl crowd onto the card. Maybe it’s partially a matter of releasing the responsibility I have for being that childish devil. But even more than this, I think the meeting of these two stories is a gift I’d just opened. The gift is permission to keep connecting the stories I’ve been given, especially these small threads of memory that can sometime be woven together to shed some light on the present. 🧵

By the Dog of Egypt!

Carolee Ritter • English Instructor and Chair



Bird on a Window Sill

Merrion Brooks • Academic Transfer

I am a bird who sits on the sill of a slightly open window,
wishing to go in, and fearing I may never find the warmth
of closely encircling arms that may soon hold someone else.
Yet, I must sit here waiting to be gently lifted and be brought
inside. I wish to feel the glow of the raging, burning heat from the
fireplace. I find myself sitting upon this windowsill, shivering as I
wait. Am I sad? You bet I am. Do I drop a tear; you bet I do.
Warmth will dry a tear, flame consume my pain. I will wait.

The window opens just a little. Oh, delicious excruciating joy.
I will feel the warmth again; a last chance I have waited for.
The place inside is warmer now; a place for me is waiting there.
I know the place is very small, but it is mine, just for today.
Crumbs are left upon the sill, enough to sustain me for this hour.
As long as crumbs are there, I will not ever wish to fly away.
I know the day will come, or go. But I am held by a silken thread
so easily broken, and the nectar there brings unspoken joy.
Don't tell me I am a fool; a fool is what I'll be;
as long as the window remains ajar, a fool I wish to be.

Snow is falling heavy and wet; the window closes, the curtains
drawn. I will freeze before the dawn unless I spread my wings
and fly away. Soon I take to wing, headed south, towards the early
evening sun. Warmth is not behind this window pane, or heat from
this roaring fire, but from the globe so bright, that teeters on the
edge of the evening sky. For it will never turn me away; it is always
waiting there. To lead me to the nest I need and to the lover I will
find. So I will beat my wings and scurry to the paradise island.
Yes, I must go; I must fly, for if I stay, I will surely die.
Goodbye. Goodbye. Goodbye.

Kathie Has Left the Building!

Kathie Niethoefer • Business Administration

“You’ll come back,” asserted my Aunt Priscilla in her nasally, French-accented voice. “After all, this is where your family is.”

I smiled happily at my aunt while taking in her platinum-blond hair styled into an immaculate up-do, perfectly manicured nails painted her typical dark red, and clothes that would have been more appropriate in a corporate boardroom than at a child’s going away party. “Of course I will,” I assured her even as my entire being screamed, “NO! I am never coming back here again!” The thought of living with my mother again dimmed my mood into a depth I’d grown used to experiencing over the six years I’d spent under her roof.

My mother was not an evil person at all, and only once did she ever raise a hand to me. She was a large woman on a petite, five-foot frame. Her nearly black hair was kept at shoulder length for ease of styling. After all, she didn’t want to have to say “no” to a date with any one of her boyfriends because it would take too long to do her hair. She owned more complete dancing outfits than could fit into her huge, walk-in closet. Each time she went to a dance competition or to a special event, she would pick a day and drag me off to help her pick out a dress for the occasion. “We’ll only be gone an hour or so. I just have to get a dress from the mall.”

Picking out a dress would then force her to buy new shoes to match since none of her two dozen or more pairs of shoes were exactly right. Once she found the perfect shoes, she’d realize a new horror. “I don’t have a purse to match these new shoes. We’ll have to go south into Springfield to find that, and we can stop at this cute little jewelry shop I know while we’re there. I need to find a new hairpin.”

When she finished, we had lost the entire day and most of the night as she purchased all of these items then added a contrasting scarf or shawl to complete the outfit. It was so late by the time she

had the shawl, the store employees had to unlock the doors to let us out.

I'd walk patiently by her side assuring her that her picks were perfect and praying to be done sooner than we normally were. I often wondered what people thought as they saw us together—my mother, obviously a woman of taste and breeding, selecting expensive items for a night on the town being followed by a little vagabond child wearing hand-me-downs from her sisters, and sometimes her brothers, that were sometimes too big, sometimes too small, and always looking worn down to the threads.

I know she cared for her children. The problem was that she cared more for her social life. She wasn't cut out to be the "nurturing mom" type. Her friends thought she was one of the kindest people they'd ever met. "I hope you realize how very lucky you are to have a mother like yours," I would hear on at least a weekly basis from one of her friends or another followed by rambling about what my amazing mother, Pauline, had done this time. Smiling and nodding at these ill-informed people became second nature to me.

"I wonder if they'd still think Mom's so great if they really knew what happened here at home," I wondered, all the while wearing a pasted-on smile convincingly. "Yeah, I know. Mom's awesome," I'd lie and quickly escape to the sanctuary of my bedroom under the pretense of homework.

I never actually did homework. My mother never paid attention to what I was doing or not doing and didn't care if it was ever finished or even what I was doing in school. Why put that much effort into a project I didn't even enjoy when there were so many other worlds to explore? Once inside my room, I'd grab whatever book was lying on the floor beside my bed that day and read until I'd arrived back in the mysterious, fantastical world that I'd grown to prefer. It was so much better than the depression of the real world. Aunt Priscilla brought me out of my thoughts by placing a light peck on first my left cheek then my right, being extra careful not to smudge her lipstick.

Breathing a soft sigh of relief, I watched my aunt wander off to huddle together with my mother and grandmother. No doubt they were discussing what a mistake I was making by moving in with my father, but I couldn't tell for certain since they were speaking in French and, to my grandmother's consternation, Mom had never taken the time to teach me the language.

My grandmother, or "Memere" as her grandchildren called her, was a woman of slightly under five feet tall (for whom the word "petite" would never fit). She was the epitome of a moral, Catholic housewife. She believed in staying home to care for her home and daughters. Her home was kept immaculately—not so much as a smudge on a window or dust on the television. She, herself, looked like the home she kept up so well. Even in her night-clothes, she always looked freshly showered and ready to jump up to make her best pork pie. She still woke up each morning at 6 a.m. to make my grandfather's lunch even though it wasn't necessary; he'd become semi-retired four years ago and was always home in time to eat lunch. That fact didn't matter in the least to my memere. "Making his lunch now means he has something to eat when he walks in the door, and he won't interrupt my afternoon show." The last part was added in a conspiratorial whisper with a wink in my direction.

I grinned at the memory of that conversation. Freshly cut pears (picked the night before from my grandfather's pear tree in the backyard), buttered toast, and hot tea had already been set out for my breakfast before I'd even come back from washing my hands and face. The smile faded slightly as I thought about the past six years with my mother. "How on earth could she have been raised by a woman as wonderful as Memere?" was the only thought that came to me as I shook my head ever so slightly and walked on.

I moved outside following the scent of garlic-seasoned hamburgers cooking on our grill. The smile returned to my face as I forced all memories out of my mind and pushed open the screen door that led out to the backyard.

"I couldn't have picked a more perfect song!" I exclaimed in my mind as the music blared from six enormous speakers. Billy Idol

was howling my innermost thoughts loud enough for the neighborhood to hear: "It's a nice day to... start again!"

I danced my way to the cooler in a way that only a 14-year-old girl who's escaping her old life and ready to start a new one can do and plunged my bare arm elbow-deep into the oversized aluminum tub of ice water to grab a Dr. Pepper then quickly headed over to the grill with my stomach already grumbling. When I caught sight of the man standing next to the chef of the night (Mom's current boyfriend, Ed), I hurriedly went into stealth-mode. Stifling a giggle, I silently made my way closer to the two men. In reality, I didn't need to be so quiet. The man I was stalking was involved in a heated discussion with Ed.

"No, George, bidding that low on such a large project, especially with the heat of July just around the corner, would be stupid, and here's why..." began Ed's stimulating sermon on the finer points of negotiating drywall contracts.

My oldest brother, George, was not only paying attention but actually seemed to be taking in every word with rapt attention. I stopped and gazed at my big brother for a moment remembering how he'd looked right before he'd left home to join the Navy: dirty-blond hair that was a little bit too long for most adults to trust him but was perfect for a teenager graduating high school in 1979, bright blue eyes that glimmered with the amazing sense of humor he'd been blessed with, scruffy, untrimmed beard and mustache, and his slightly pudgy body set on a five-foot, eight-inch frame stuffed into a pair of tight blue jeans and a black Styx t-shirt. I was amazed at how much he'd changed! Now, here he was, four years later, and the only parts of him that hadn't changed were his hair color and his eyes. He still had the look of pure goodness that I'd always adored in him, but now his hair had been cut military-style, his face was clean-shaven exposing the facial features that had most girls falling all over themselves to date him even once, and, most importantly, right now, he was wearing grey flip-flops, faded jeans that had been cut into shorts about 4 inches above the knee, and no shirt.

I stared at his exposed back grinning mischievously, glanced at my ice-cold Dr. Pepper, then at his back again. Slowly and quietly, I began creeping my way towards my brother hoping Ed wouldn't notice me or, at least, wouldn't call attention to me while I sneaked up behind him.

On my way to my destiny with mischief, I noticed our dilapidated above-ground pool standing off to the side lonely and rusting. Mom hadn't filled it with water in two years and probably wouldn't ever again. She planned to have the above-ground removed in favor of a brand new in-ground pool. That would surely impress whichever boyfriend she was most interested in at the time. The ladder that led to the tiny dock at the side of the pool still lay on top of the wooden structure pleading with anyone to pass by, "Please take me down from here. I'm bored!" Two summers ago, it had called to me.

I was outside enjoying a perfect summer day. School was out, and the weather hadn't had time to turn as hot as it would later in the season yet. The sun was looking down on Ayer, Massachusetts, through soft, white, wispy clouds. It would have been the perfect day for a swim if the pool had been ready. I took it upon myself to take a look inside the pool to see how much work it would take to make it ready to use.

Being only about five feet tall, I needed to climb to the pool dock to actually be able to look at the lining and interior of the pool. I pulled the ladder down from the dock and set it up against the umber-painted side of the dock and carefully climbed up onto the platform.

"It doesn't look too bad, just kind of dirty inside. Maybe if I surprise Mom by cleaning it up real good, she'll let me fill it this year," I thought.

The skimmer wasn't on the dock as I'd hoped it might be, but I knew where it probably was. I turned my back to the ladder and took a step downward planning to head to the basement where Mom stored items she wanted out of the way. As my foot landed on the first rung, I felt the ladder start to move away from the dock. Too late to actually catch myself, I tumbled down to the

ground right behind it. A quick survey of my body told me that I was fine. I'd had the wind knocked out of me, but otherwise I was fine. Giggling slightly at my luck, I stood up—or at least, I tried to stand up. I placed my left foot firmly on the ground with no trouble, but when I tried to place my right foot, I realized I wasn't as unhurt as I'd originally believed. Touching the smallest part of a toe to the ground was causing searing pain. It felt as though a sadistic person was taking the dulllest steak knife and hammering it into my foot from toe to heel.

Tears streamed from eyes as I hopped on one foot from the pool to the house, up the three steps to the screen door, and into the screened-in porch. When I finally reached the kitchen, I grabbed the closest chair, pulled it right next to the kitchen phone, fell into the seat, and dialed my mother's phone number at work. She answered in a professional voice, "DMS, this is Pauline."

"Mom, I think I hurt my foot really bad!" I sniffled my way through the story of falling off the dock and making my way to the house, including how much pain I was in.

The silence on my mother's end of the phone stretched out for several minutes before she said, "Well, what do you want me to do about it? I'm at work, and I can't leave right now. Go lie down for an hour or so; you'll be fine, and those dishes had better be done before I get home from work. I'll see you at six."

As I hung up the phone, the tears started up again harder than ever. I had told my mother that I'd been injured, possibly badly, and all she cared about was that her stupid dishes were washed! I sat there miserably, feeling like there wasn't a person in the world that cared about me if my own mother didn't. My foot ached horribly, but I hobbled my way to the sink and started working on the dishes. When I was done, I made my way carefully to the couch and lay down with my right calf resting on the arm to wait for mom to come through the door after work.

My foot remained painful and untreated for three weeks until my mother decided to take another one of her child-free trips to Quebec. She left me in the care of my older sister, Paulette, and gave her a note to allow treatment if Paulette saw fit while she

was gone on her two-week vacation. The day Mom left, my sister picked me up and immediately drove me to the Lowell General Hospital emergency room to find out that my foot had been severely sprained.

I shook off that memory and focused on stalking my prey. Stopping about a foot away from George, I held my soda can as far in front of me as possible and pushed it into my brother's back for a split second before I turned and ran.

"ACK! Who the hell? Kathie! That's it!" George bellowed as he took off chasing after me. I was almost to the safety of the house and my mother's long-standing rule about horseplay inside but, as I was reaching out to grasp the screen door handle, I was met by a hulk of a man walking outside.

"Well, what seems to be going on here, girly? Looks like your brother is..." John began as he reached down and swept me up and over his shoulder easily "...wanting to talk to you." I could feel my cheeks burning even though I was completely giddy with laughter. Maybe tonight, I could even steal a kiss goodbye from him.

As long as I'd been alive, John had always been around. He and George grew up together and graduated high school together. Standing at about six feet tall, he always seemed absolutely gigantic to me. His short, black hair was a perpetual mess, and he had the most infectious grin on his face almost continuously. In fact, the only times I remember the grin being gone was when he heard about someone picking on me and when his mother died.

John closed the screen door and unceremoniously carted me off to my brother who was standing against a tree grinning and waiting for me to be delivered to him. We arrived to the sound of a rustling plastic bag and the clunk of small items hitting each other. I barely had time to think about this when I felt the back of my own t-shirt lifted up and about a pound of ice fell onto my back. Each cube sent a new frozen shiver down my spine. If he'd done this a few hours earlier while it was still 95 degrees, I might have thanked him! But, by then, it was almost 7:00 at night and cooling off nicely already.

“No fair!” I shrieked, kicking desperately at John to make him loosen his grip from me. To my surprise, it seemed to work. I leaped off John’s shoulder and ran for the house at top speed veering to avoid family members in my path. I flung open the door and bolted inside before I turned back to see if they were pursuing me. The two grown men hadn’t moved from the tree, but they stared at the path made by my flight to safety with comical, little-kid grins plastered on their faces.

I’d definitely miss those two, but I had a chance to make my life better, and I wasn’t going to miss it. Besides, my brother, Rich had already been living with my dad for the past year, and I missed him, possibly more than I’d miss George and John.

To be safe, I waited inside for about 20 minutes before going back outside. Looking around cautiously, I saw that George and John were already sitting back on lawn chairs and drinking beer in the growing dark, so I knew they wouldn’t chase after me again.

I made a bee-line to the grill and a promise of delicious, grilled foods. Dinner looked wonderful, and my stomach was yelling for attention. I grabbed two well-done burgers and stopped by the picnic table to pick up a heaping portion of potato salad, corn-on-the-cob dripping with butter, and an enormous hunk of watermelon. Carrying my plate to a spot near the music, I watched as the party died down and the guests started to head home, saying goodbye to me on the way.

As I sat in my room later that night listening to the new Pat Benetar album I’d been given as a going-away present, I took a long, last look around the bedroom I’d called my own for the past three and one half years (the longest I’d been able to stay in one spot up to that point). It seemed that every corner of the house, each small item I looked at held memories for me, most of them depressing or irritating—spots like the kitchen sink where mom’s boyfriend-of-the-moment slapped me across the face for telling him we were out of dishwashing liquid, and the place in my room right in front of the window where I finally stood up for myself against my mother.

“That was a nightmare of a day,” I muttered only half aloud.

I could still see my mother standing there absolutely livid with my diary dangling from one hand. It’s not that I’d been rebellious. In fact, by most standards, I was a calm girl. Outside of coming home a little late now and then or wearing my friend’s makeup before Mom said I was allowed to, my “wild side” read more like a scientific journal’s description of the innermost makeup of an atom than a topic that would be seen in a teen magazine. But Mom had decided that reading my diary would be an acceptable idea and apparently didn’t like one of my entries.

“So, you hate me, do you?” she stormed. “How could you! I work hard all day to feed you, clothe you, and give you a home. This is how you thank me!”

I think she rambled on in her frustrated, whiny voice for awhile, but I didn’t care and wasn’t listening anymore. Rage from years of being treated like an embarrassment to her and being made to feel as though I should be grateful for any small crumb of kindness that was thrown at me by her had built up to a boil, and I’d had enough!

“You’re not even listening to me!” roared my mother. “You ungrateful creature!”

She raised her hand to slap me across the face, but I saw it coming and raised my forearm to block it. I was not going to be slapped for expressing my anger and hurt in my diary.

She stared at the point where our wrists met—hers on the way to hitting her youngest daughter, mine blocking her. Glaring into my eyes, she stomped out of the room to tell George that I’d hit her.

But that was months ago. Tomorrow, I would be on a plane to Colorado. I didn’t care that I was leaving most of my personal belongings behind. I’d packed my clothes and a few small items that were important to me. The items that I was leaving behind didn’t matter to me at all. I was leaving the stress-filled house of arguments and confusion that was my mother’s home and moving to my dad’s place outside of Colorado Springs.

Mom woke me up early the following morning. We had to be at the airport by 5 a.m. to check-in for my 6 a.m. flight out

of there. My bags had been loaded into the car the night before, so we didn't have much to do in the morning. I jumped into the shower, threw on the clothes I'd chosen a week earlier for the trip, and was ready to go.

Mom was quiet throughout the two-hour drive into Boston, so I was able to sneak in a little more sleep on the way. I didn't wake up until we reached the airport parking garage, and as soon as she saw me stir, she spoke her first words of the trip.

"You don't have to go. You can still change your mind."

I wasn't sure exactly what to say, so I said nothing. How could I tell my mother that I couldn't stand living with her any longer and that I was scared I wouldn't see my fifteenth birthday if I stayed? I loved my mother and didn't want to hurt her feelings, so how could I tell her that I'd spent the past year seriously believing I'd rather die than live with the amount of depression she was causing me? I couldn't. In the end, I gave her a kiss on each of her cheeks, hugged her tight, and told her I loved her just before I walked up the ramp to board my flight into a new life in Colorado. 🍷

Leroy's Truck

Kimberly Fangman • English Instructor



Black Christmas

Brent Dale • Heating, Ventilation,
Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Technology

Fresh snow gracefully falls to the ground
As Arctic air slowly waltzes in, nipping tender exposed parts
Homes start looking like Broadway shows
Everywhere you go your ears are filled with thick honey nostalgia
Tunes dripping from the speakers
Over-stuffed mail boxes filled with sprites, over priced junk, and
Styrofoam stuffed boxes shipped from afar
Immersing ourselves in the joys, excitement, and happiness,
We become unwise, thinking that death takes a holiday
'Til the rusty weathered scythe is swung
A little boy chasing his hat in the blustery winter afternoon
Ends his chase under the yellow bus's wheels
The freshness of the new snow slowly darkens
As the weeks 'til Christmas become less
Toys hush, wrapped under the tree
Never to be opened

Floundering

Erin Cico-Knowlton • Non-degree seeking student

He used to tell me stories about eating frog legs, taking care of pet baby alligators, and “floundering” at midnight. I would smile and pat his bald head as I said, “You’re such a li-ar, Dad.” But he swore up and down that that was his childhood. Truth be told, I was jealous. My dad grew up in the ‘60’s in southern Texas near the water with a nuclear family—the domestic mother, successful father, and two younger sisters. Me, I grew up as far away from water as you could get during the ‘90’s (post Beatles, Simon & Garfunkel) and with parents separated by an entire state.

When I was nine and my younger brother and sister were five, our parents went through a bitter divorce in which my dad first moved down the block in our smaller than small rural Nebraska town. In all actuality, I only say “bitter” because it was bitter to me. They didn’t go through nasty custody battles or hurt each other financially. But they did take their anger out on each other by means of their oldest daughter. I heard it all.

“You don’t want to live with your mother, do you Liz?” my father would entice me. “Does she leave you at home by yourself when she goes out?”

And my mother would tell me, “You have to be careful, or you’ll end up angry and alone like your father.”

I remember one night in-between the time when my mother filed for divorce and the divorce became final. She had brought a counselor into our home (this was after my dad had moved out) to help her and us kids “cope.” I was so angry at her for making me talk badly about my father to a stranger. After my mom had put us to bed, she sat in the kitchen and had her counseling session. The door to my bedroom led into the living room, which was in earshot of the kitchen. So I sneaked into the living room and listened to what my mom was saying.

“I don’t want him to turn the kids against me. I have worked hard to help them understand why this is happening, and all he does is tell them how horrible I am.” I could hear the counselor agree

as my mom was telling her these lies. I silently squatted there in my pajamas on the floor in front of my room as my mom continued.

“He gets so angry, and then he turns violent. I just can’t handle his anger. I’m afraid he’s going to hurt me. Sometimes, I just want to see him in a body bag.” And at this sentence, I hated my mother. She wanted my father *dead*? I went back to my room.

Even now, just thinking about the things they put me through, I get angry. But it only lasts for a minute because the older I get, the more I realize just how lucky I am to have them as parents. Together, they were a mess, but separately, they made a great parenting team. As an adult, I am very close to both of my parents. Everyone I knew dealt with rough childhoods by rebelling as teenagers. I never did, and at the time I couldn’t understand why I had survived my childhood without any damage. Now, at 27, I realized that my parents had nearly ruined me.

Here’s the thing you should know about me: I love water—ocean water, lake water, pool water, any type of water. One summer during college I took a job on the coast of Florida and spent all my days in the ocean. I knew that as soon as I finished college I would move back to Florida to teach. But then I met a boy. Brett and I have been together since senior year. We met while student teaching at the same school and sort of fell into a relationship. We dated for three years before we took the plunge and rented a cozy apartment together.

I think we have a relationship that others want. We get along so well, have similar schedules, and have been together for over six years. Personally, I am perfectly happy with our relationship just as it is. But I get asked nearly every day when I’m getting married. And my blanket answer, “When I get knocked up,” just isn’t satisfying them anymore.

Brett and I are at a time in our lives when friends, cousins, and even younger siblings are getting married. In fact, we had recently found out that Brett’s 22-year-old sister, Carly, bought a house with her boyfriend and is planning a summer wedding. Hearing this definitely set off some emotion in me, although I’m not quite

sure what emotion that was. It wasn't jealousy because I certainly don't envy her shotgun wedding idea. Yet I can't help but resent Carly for her decision. The fact that she's through renting and dating only furthers the idea that Brett and I should get a realtor and a wedding set.

By most standards, Brett and I certainly have a relationship that has reached the marriage point. Yet, we are *not* there yet. I should tell you the truth. We are so happy together, but when we fight, we fight dirty. We yell, call names—mean names, say things like, “Fuck you!”, and, “I hate you.” That never bothered me, though, because we would have this extremely passionate fight with the most emotional make-up afterward. How successful can a marriage be when the word “fuck” is yelled on a regular basis? And I can't imagine bringing a child into that kind of environment. While the yelling is awful, two weeks ago, something happened that really, really scared me.

I came home on Thursday at ten after dinner with the girls. Our living room consisted of two green recliners and one matching loveseat, a brand new furniture set given as a birthday present. Brett was slumped in one of the recliners with a half empty bottle of Bud Light in one hand. He barely grumbled a hello when I came in.

In the middle of the room sat an old wooden coffee table, unpolished and undusted, with one small yellow candle, barely lit, and an empty beer bottle placed near the edge. I glanced from Brett slumped in the recliner to our small kitchen with all-white appliances. A round pizza stone sat atop the stove with a dirty pizza plate on the counter beside it.

I leaned down and kissed the top of Brett's blonde head.

“I see you made yourself a gourmet meal,” I said, kneeling beside the recliner to look in his eyes.

“Yeah,” was his quick response, not even pausing to look me in the eyes.

I tried to get him to leave the recliner to cuddle with me on the couch. He refused to move, and from then on it was a miserable night. We watched *Family Guy* in silence. After the show was

over, I walked to the bedroom without saying a word. The bedroom was cold, littered with pale colors in shades of brown, gray, and white. The autumn turned winter wind howled through the creaks in the window. The bed was small, hardly big enough for two people to sleep comfortably.

I lay in bed and for every minute I was alone, I got more angry. By the time he came in, it was too late.

“You should just sleep on the couch.” I pulled the covers over my head and spread out my arms to take up the whole bed.

“Why do *you* get to be mad?”

I sat up and stared at him. “You have been crabby all night and *I’m* the one that can’t be mad?”

“I always have to be happy when you want me to be, but when you get angry, I have to just take it.”

“That is not the truth, and you know it. You get mad at me all the time.” I rolled over and turned off the lamp by the bed. Brett made his way toward the bed. “I told you to sleep on the couch.” He pulled up the covers and made his way in without saying a word. I sat straight up in bed. “Get out!” I yelled. He didn’t move. And then something in me erupted like a dormant volcano, and I was angry. “Get out! Get out! Get out!” I yelled right in his ear.

“Damn it, Liz!” he yelled back at me. “I am sleeping here tonight. We can talk about it in the morning.”

“NO!” By this point I was practically screaming. “I don’t want to sleep in the same bed as you tonight. Now GET OUT!” He didn’t move. I could feel the fire in my veins, and the next thing I knew I was kicking him. I was kicking his legs—hard—which he had laid diagonally across the bed. And I just kept kicking.

My dad used to tell me about a type of fishing he would do with his father called floundering. I’ve never seen one, but flounders are a flat fish that rest on the bottom of a salt water bay waiting for schools of fish to swim by. To catch these fish, my dad said they would go out late at night when it was dark with a lantern and a gig—a wooden rod with a nail attached to the end of it. To catch these fish, my dad would go into the water, no more

than knee deep, use the lantern to see the flounders, and then stab them with the gig.

Sometimes I feel like a flounder. I'm going about my life just trying to be happy, when BHAM!—I get nailed by something unexpected.

In order to make up for raising me away from water, my dad bought a hot tub. He purchased it with his then-wife, Melissa, when I was in college. During visits, he and I would sit under the stars—in the snow, rain, summer heat, whatever—and spend some father-daughter time together. My most recent visit was no different. My dad has since been left by his second wife and was lucky enough to get custody of the hot tub.

I go to visit my dad in southern Kansas as often as I can, yet the five-hour drive makes it difficult to get there every time I'd like to. The drive is not much fun by myself, but the last time I went, Brett had to stay home to coach a basketball game, so I listened to talk radio to hold my attention. I usually ride down with my sister or brother, but they couldn't make it until the next day. I was driving down on this particular weekend for my dad's 60th birthday on Sunday. My siblings and I were throwing a surprise reception for him after church on Sunday. (I should probably mention that my father is a United Methodist pastor and has been since I was in high school. He was a school teacher until one day he was "called.") I had employed the help of one of his members to pretty much plan the whole event for me. But since everyone I wanted to invite would already be at the service, it worked out quite nicely. I wanted to do something big for his birthday because I worried about him being alone on special days like that one.

I arrived at the parsonage late Friday evening. The modern, beige, ranch style house looked almost haunted in the light of the full moon. The brisk November wind was blowing as I hauled in my suitcase. My dad was waiting for me in the living room as soon as I opened the door. He wrapped his arms around me in a big hug before I even had a chance to drop our luggage. After a very long week of preparing tests and grading papers, I was ex-

hausted by the time I arrived. Yet, as usual, my dad and I decided to sit in the hot tub before heading to bed.

We made small talk for a little while, commenting on work and the weather. What I love about my dad is his outlook on life. Despite his two failed marriages, my dad is my relationship coach. He is so easy to talk to, and since he is a minister, he always has the best advice and the best stories. He teaches me by his and others' mistakes. We talk about almost everything, but we never talk about the divorce, mostly because I don't ask. Part of me doesn't want to know what happened between my parents. But that night I needed help... because if I didn't ask, I would always be afraid of where my own relationship could end up.

I knew why my dad's second marriage ended. He simply chose the wrong person. He was 50, she was 30 and eventually she was tired of playing second fiddle to his children. What I really needed to find out was how to avoid marrying the wrong person. I hoped that was something he could help me with.

"Dad? I need advice. I don't know what to do." He looked toward me, his hands resting on top of the water making light splashing sounds. I slid my big toe back and forth on the green granite surface at the bottom of the tub. "I need to know why your marriage to Mom didn't work out."

He stared at me and then smiled. I could tell he was recalling events in his head. Then, as he always did, he let out this laugh, put his hand on my shoulder, and said, "For lots of reasons."

"Oh." I had always heard from my mom that it didn't work out because he would get angry with her and get violent. I knew that my dad had gotten angry, but I'd never seen him hit anyone. I also knew that my mom could be manipulative. But beyond these things, I didn't really know much else.

"Liz, I was 34 when I met your mom. I wanted to get married and knew that if I didn't marry her, I would probably never find anyone else. And our age difference didn't help." My dad is nine years older than my mom.

"We simply grew up in two different worlds. I grew up in the South while your mother lived in South Dakota." He was still

smiling as he told me this. It was as if it all worked out perfectly for him. “We had different ideas of gender roles. I didn’t mind that your mother had a job, but I was taught that it was the man’s responsibility to provide for his family. I would work long hours so that I could give you and your mother everything you wanted. She thought that I worked because my job was more important than my family.”

I could feel heat building up behind my eyes, and I had to take a deep breath to keep from crying. He could tell this was a lot for me to take.

“Hey,” he said, “don’t be sad. I always loved you guys more than anything.” He said these words in the sweetest tone I’ve ever heard. And it was too late—I was crying. I watched my tears hit the hot tub water, causing a tiny ripple.

“Is that why you fought all the time?” I asked through my tears.

“That’s what most of our fighting stemmed from. When I was home, I wanted to be with you kids. And your mom wanted the two of us to go out.”

“What made you get so angry at each other?”

“Oh, lots of things. We had different values, different ideas of what made a family. And we would let little arguments turn into big fights. Your mother would say things that made me upset, and I would lose my temper.”

“That’s what I was afraid of.” My tears had turned into sobs. My dad moved to sit by me in the hot tub. He put his arm around me. “I don’t... think I... w-w-will ever be able.... to get married.” I said this between sobs.

My dad, still optimistic, smiled and said, “Why do you say that?”

I waited until I had calmed down a bit to answer him. “I physically hurt Brett last week. I don’t know what came over me. All of a sudden I was so angry with him, and I wanted to hurt him and see him suffer. I don’t want to be in a marriage where we fight like that. I only want to get married once, Dad. But I don’t think I’m capable of having a successful marriage.”

“Of course you are. But you have to remember that marriages take work.”

“Did you and Mom work to save your marriage?”

“I tried, but both people have to want to save it.”

“I know it takes hard work, but seriously, Dad, divorce runs in my family like green eyes.” It was true. Between my parents’ siblings, I have seven aunts and uncles—only two of whom are still in their first marriage. And three of my aunts have been married *and divorced* three times, as well as one cousin!

My dad laughed, his arm still around me, and squeezed me tight. “Do you want to marry Brett?” I nodded.

“Do you love him enough to accept his faults?”

I nodded again.

“All of his faults?”

“Yes, but how do I control my temper when he makes me angry?”

“It’s not easy to do, but you always have to remind yourself that you love him and that nothing is worth hurting him.”

“How do I learn to control my anger?”

He turned this time so he was facing me. He took my hand and held it between his. “Lizzie, the answer is not easy. Anger management is different for everyone. Praying about it helps. But you have to *want* to control it.”

“I *do*. Yet, when the time comes, it is so easy for me to get angry. And most of the time I don’t even know what he did that makes me so mad”

“I don’t know where anger comes from, Liz.”

“So what do I do?” I asked. I was so desperate for an answer.

“You have to want to control it for those you love.” He squeezed my hand so tight. “I did it for you.”

And at these words, I cried again.

“After I lost you kids, I realized my mistakes. While I still blame your mother for some of our problems, I learned that my anger was hurting *you*.” I hugged him. He was such a good father, and he was teaching me more now than he would ever know.

The water was getting too hot to sit in much longer, and between my tears and the heat, I was feeling exhausted.

“I love you, Dad.”

“You know I love you, too. And when you get so angry at Brett that you want to hurt him, I have one thing I want you to do.”

I stood up out of the water, “What?”

“I want you to call me, and we’ll talk about it.” That was the best advice he had given me all night. “We can talk through the problem until you are calm and able to talk to Brett rationally. How does that sound?”

“I think that sounds great, Dad!”

He stood up and put his hand on top of my head. “You have to make the effort though Liz. You have to call me.”

I thought about it. I put my hand on his shoulder for support as I climbed down the steps of the hot tub.

“Ok, Dad, I will.” I wrapped a tattered blue towel around my waist and went inside. I went to bed that night feeling slightly more at ease.

Here’s what I learned: no problem is ever truly “fixed.” I can try different ways to temporarily control my anger, yet that anger never goes away. It hovers over every conflict, just like the gig hovering over the unaware flounder. Some attacks you can never prepare for. What I have to do is figure out why I get so angry at Brett. It could be a sign that we are not meant to be together “forever.” Or maybe I would get that angry at anyone I’m with. Maybe I will never have the successful marriage that I hope for, but I have taken the first step. I have recognized my problem. And sometimes, that’s all you can do. 🙏

I Sang to My Dad

Peggy Schmidt • Academic Transfer

I sang to my dad on his deathbed.

Others held his hand
or stroked his brow
or kissed his cheek,
but I sang.

It seemed the best part of me
came out in his favorite hymns
and melodies.

I'm not a great orator
or mathematician.

I'm not gifted in science
or painting,
but I can sing,
so I sang to my dad on his
deathbed
and eased his way to eternity.

Macro

Jeff Wilson • Academic Transfer,
Radiology Technologies



Spiraling Down

Laura Drawbaugh • Visual Publications



Discovering the Subtleties of Salsa

Caitlin Phelps • Academic Transfer

Do not be fooled. This is not a recounting of the revival of my faith in the generous nature of humanity. I received no blatantly large tips during my shift at the restaurant, nor did I truly connect with some rare engaging soul over the serving of salsa. My only comforts, and what keeps me out of the asylum for the criminally disturbed, are my fellow employees. We all share something. We are all pushing through until our schooling enables us to push past to bigger and better things.

We all understand this. We tolerate our current jobs because it is a means to an end, an end that doesn't include our current jobs. To understand this silent camaraderie, you must understand the dials and clicks beyond the dining area. In the confines of the kitchen, the soul of the restaurant is contained before the long silver counter where the servers await their food. When time is slow and customers are scarce, the employees stand in groups along the strip in a combat of wits with the cooks who are forever at the disadvantage of being trapped behind the invisible heat. Jacob steps towards the servers without the deadly swords of Shakespeare and only his razor tongue: "Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?"

And the saucy server replies, "No sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir. But I bite my thumb, sir." We are the central pumping organ of this place.

There are others. As I look to my right and beyond the window of the manager's office, there is one there who once was among our infectious ranks, eating his salad quietly and browsing numbers on the computer. His hair is closely cropped to his head, and when he gets embarrassed, the betraying blush travels from his cheeks to behind his neck. I used to call him Military, but his name now is Jeremy. I remember when he was promoted. The staff had erupted with displeasure, threatening mutiny for at least a day. The worst of the critics had kicked and snorted like enraged bulls the first time he walked in wearing his collared shirt and dress slacks.

I have never quite understood my lack of outrage or dissent with the majority when it comes to promotions and firing. As I recall, I told Jeremy to unbutton his top button while casually and lightly pushing him in the shoulder. He simply looked at my offending hand. He wasn't his usual cynical self, wasn't smiling, and even now, the dry wit that had endeared me to him as a friendly acquaintance only escapes every once in a while. The employees try their best to leave their work as incomplete as possible, as if they think his failure to notice it has anything to do with his ability. Once or twice a week, his pride rises up like a snake until he strikes with a confusing combination of insecurity and determination.

I work with mostly teenagers and college students in their early twenties. Allow me to correct myself. I work with people that I never see outside of the kitchen or the dining area. They must have lives and goals that have nothing to do with Mexican-American cuisine. I have always assumed that their frustration has come from the same source as mine. I endure that which will one day be over.

As I look at the angry bulls and the aging faces of the cooks in the back, I have begun to realize something that had escaped me due to my incredulity. Some of these people, who are both intelligent and ambitious, have every intention of staying at this place. Some of these people are in exact accordance with their goals and might even find my dismissive nature for my current circumstances as offensive as I find most customers. For them, this restaurant is not a means to end, but a natural step in the way of a lifelong career.

I can still joke around with some. Megan for instance, does an excellent impression of Henry the VIII at table six—her freckled wrist and pinkie tilt in just the right angle of royal demand. She understands. The universal three dollar tip, no matter the bill total, the inevitable request for more chips and salsa than anyone at the table is prepared to eat, and the confused disdain for a full belly after consuming food that is never truly satisfying—all contribute to our disgruntled status.

The difference now is in the perception of my peers. When I am confronted with the impossible-to-please customer snapping at me across the table tops and pointing at his empty bowl of chips accompanied by a full plate of enchiladas, I cannot help but think what this means to the person behind the glass in the back office. Or the “college” girl beside me in the wait station, who I have now decided is in her thirties, scooping up salsa and muttering to herself about how she does not respond like a dog. Her bright eyes are beginning to wrinkle around the edges, and when she runs out the station, her agitated features smooth into a pretty, petite complacency.

These people dawn on me like lights of comprehension in the dimness of our ranks. They may just take their jobs home with them. I cannot help but think it. What a shame to waste them on the subtleties of serving salsa. 🍷

Poppy Field

Debi Smith • Fine Art and Art History Instructor



Too Much Restriction on Immigration Laws

Pal G. Deng • Academic Transfer

Imagine one is a loyal citizen of the United States of America and is married, but the spouse lives overseas in another country. The citizen badly wants his or her family reunited with him or her, but if the Department of Homeland Security was prolonging the reunion because the immigration laws were so tied, how would the individual react to that? When I was in war country in Sudan, the ruling elite imposed self-rules and denied me necessary benefits, including education. I was deprived of privileges such as freedom of worship, learning, and liberty. This perpetuated my long journey in 1988 that led me to my new country, the United States. I lived in lawless refugees' camps in Itang, Ethiopia, and Kakuma, in Kenya. As the refugee, I went through difficult circumstances and horrible humiliation due to the absence of laws. In 1999, I migrated to the United States via the Joint Volunteer Agency, a refugee resettlement program, hoping that my life would change for the better and the loneliness would end, but unknowingly, in the hands of U.S. Immigration, my movements were restricted more.

Prior to my arrival in New York, I was given an I-94, a temporary refugee card that allowed emigrants to work in the United States, but it did not allow me to travel outside the United States. To visit any country in the world, I must apply for the Refugee Travel Document, pay \$380, and wait six months to one year for my traveling document before it arrives in my mail box. This refugee travel document was issued for a period of twelve months and would expire on the date it was issued. In March 2004, I went for a trip and visited my family for the first time after sixteen years of separation due to civil war that drove me out of my country. In April 2004, I married and returned to the United States on June 20, 2004. I applied for a permanent resident card in 2001 and followed the process closely while keeping my records clean because if an emigrant went to jail for some reason—for example, if an emigrant went to jail for domestic or traffic violations—

automatically that individual lost his or her chance of becoming a citizen of the United States. Therefore, one must comply with the laws of this country, and this is true for all emigrants. I got my green card in 2005 after three-and-a-half years of waiting time.

In 2005, I applied for citizenship and paid application fees of \$400. Finally, I got my citizenship on March 17, 2006, hoping this would free me from all restrictions of immigration laws, and also I was hoping that the procedure for my family reunion would become easier. However, immigration restrictions still deprive emigrants and deny them many benefits regardless of the fact that we work and pay the government taxes like natural-born citizens. Both legal and illegal immigrants are deprived and live under the yoke of the Department of Homeland Security.

Even though the Bill of Rights grants all people living in the United States privileges, such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, rights to assemble, legal due process, and equal rights of opportunities and rights to petition the government, the marginalization of emigrants is existing, and emigrants well understand that the current immigration laws contradict the Bills of Rights, even though the United States is a country of emigrants. Immigration fees have been increasing year after year, and also immigration processes for those who need documents such as work permits and those who have applied for visas for their families are much delayed for more than a year. The government claims that the number of cases is too many. There is no access to Immigration when one wants to check the status of his or her case except that one must hire a lawyer with more money in order to expedite the individual's case. This has affected many emigrants and caused anxieties because the injustice went beyond people's limitations due to the fact that the government legalizes immigration laws and uses them as powerful tools in order to punish innocent, poor people, targeting them financially as the way to limit the number of emigrants coming to the United States.

After the September 11 that shaped the entire world, the U.S. adopted the "scorch earth" policy as the retaliations against emigrants. The government has blindly changed immigration laws

without taking a closer look at the negative impacts and financial difficulties those emigrant communities living in the U.S. will suffer. Both legal and illegal immigrants from Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, are paying a heavy price. Many people have been denied services, and their cases were put on hold because of their names, religions, and countries of origin. This is not fair for people who do not have criminal background records. I know that our government has a duty to protect us from any dangers, including terrorists; the government needs to envisage a policy where there are checks and balances between state security and emigrant grievances.

I have conducted surveys in different emigrant communities around Lincoln and Omaha areas, and I have found that all emigrants are sailing the same boat. “Lee Guor,” a former refugee from Sudan, mentioned that in 1994, permanent refugee cards used to be issued after one year of residency prior to the arrival date in the U.S. from the country of origin. Application fees were \$70 and included fingerprints and other requirements; the process and waiting duration to receive his card in the mail was between three to six months, Guor said (Guor).

Based on my personal experience, I have learned that emigrants are not only voiceless in this country, but they are also ignorant. We live among the communities, but we do not know any congressmen/women whom we can contact to air our concerns or grievances or lawyers who can petition the federal government on emigrants’ behalf so that Immigration may relieve some of the restrictions that affected us as the result of the recent immigration reforms.

For refugees who emigrated in the earlier 1990's, getting documents from Immigration was not complicated, and the fees for citizenship were \$193. “Waiting durations for completing the entire process, including ceremony, was only six months if one did not have a criminal background,” says Sarah N.P. Mach, a former refugee from Sudan and a single mother of seven kids and resident of Omaha. Sarah told me that she is facing financial difficulties since her sons’ permanent resident cards have expired, and one

card costs \$1,000. This single woman is wondering where she will get \$4,000 so she can renew her sons' documents. "I make \$9.50 per hour, and I have seven children, and my elder son just turned eighteen last January, and he is looking for a job, but his document has expired; this frustrates me, and I'm mad at Immigration" (Mach).

All emigrants wonder why those people working with the federal government have tied up the laws and prevented people from visiting their parents and loved ones who live overseas; instead, emigrants' movements are much restricted and people have been confined. "In 1996, refugees' traveling document fees used to be issued with a reasonable price for immigrants at the amounts of \$140, but dues were increased, and the application fees for traveling documents increased to \$360. Contrasting 1996 and 2008, there were rapid changes, which is too controversial," says Andrew Jackson, who is an emigrant from West Africa State of Ghana studying psychology at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. "Family reunification is becoming too complicated these days because Immigration is demanding too much money for visas" (Jackson).

Conservative people working in the federal offices for their own best interests perpetuated the immigration reform as wise techniques designed to punish both illegal and legal immigrants. That immigration reform was aimed at immigrants, and many families have been affected as a result. "Lack of resources prevented people from applying for visas for their parents and loved ones; not only that, but also there is too much delaying in processes before issuing people refugee passports," says Binetu K. Daramy, an emigrant from Sierra Leone. "I was angered at Immigration because of injustice they have done to me in 2006. I applied for a travelling document in February 2006. I wanted to visit my mother, who was severely sick, and the travelling document was delayed and issued eight months after my mother died without my seeing her, and I did not even attend her funeral" (Daramy).

The Arab community in the United States thinks that they are prime targets of Immigration due to their cultural and religious background, and their names are identically related to Islamic

religion. One of my coworkers, Mr. Hussam Mohammed, a loyal member of Iraq community here in Lincoln, told me that he did his citizenship interview on February 9, 2005, and he passed the quizzes. He said, "I have been waiting for the ceremony so I can sponsor my wife and children and get them out from that dire situation in Iraq, but I didn't receive any feedback from the Department of Homeland Security for three-and-a-half years. Recently, I hired a lawyer with \$5,000 to find out what's going on with my citizen status and why the case was put on hold for such a long time; my lawyer found out that the case had expired, and I should restart over and pay all fees in case I want it. What a humiliation!" (Mohammed).

When people are voting in polling stations, citizenship has great value for both natural and non-natural born citizens; both can shape the politics during the election, even though there is a great difference between natural-born and naturalized citizens in the terms of respect and getting government beneficiaries. Regardless of becoming a naturalized citizen and my hoping that the way for my family reunion would become easier, things haven't changed yet. My family still lives overseas while my vote is badly needed, well-respected, and counted among voters in the USA. On March 17, 2006, the US district judge in Omaha issued my citizenship certificate, and right after the ceremony, I applied for I-130 visas; I have mailed all documents and fees Immigration requires in order to approve their cases. I have been following this closely because I miss my family very much, and I need them to be with me here in the USA.

This frustrates me, and I can't imagine why Immigration delayed the process of my family. I have provided Immigration with all important documents they needed; this included our original married certificate and birth certificate for our son, application fees of \$675 for each of them, processing fees for each in the amount of \$140, and affidavit of supports for \$800 for both, but still the status of those cases are not yet determined. In this situation, I have not seen any different treatment since I've been a citizen; Immigration disregarded my citizenship and treated me as

a refugee. This is because I got my citizenship via naturalization; that is not fair at all.

Before I became a naturalized citizen of the USA, I was working and paying the government taxes like all natural-born citizens, and Immigration. I have been calling the National Visa Center in New Hampshire three times a week to find out the status of my family visas, but all services were put on the automatic voice record, and I left them several messages but no one called me back even for a single day. Now I consider hiring a lawyer that will represent my family cases and get it expedited while supporting my family overseas, sending more than \$700 a month for food, rent, hospital, and other social needs.

The reform and the restriction of Immigration has caused anxiety for emigrant families and affected them in different ways. "My young daughter Armal will turn six years old next April, and I will miss her birthday party because Immigration denied me a chance of becoming a citizen, even though I was never involved in any crime in this country," said Mohammad (Mohammed). My son, Nasir Pal G. Deng, who was born in overseas in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on January 20, 2005, has just turned four years old on January 20, 2009. I wish my family were here so that my wife, Anna, and I could have celebrated the fourth anniversary birthday of our beloved son together. All these setbacks are blamed on immigration laws, and I feel bad about that. How can this government be so cruel to people who were legally allowed and entered the United States officially as agreed by the United Nation and U.S. lawmakers?

The United States is a land of diversities where laws protect individual liberty regardless of race, religion, color, or sex. Emigrants' communities have contributed to building our nation, working tiredly, and paying taxes to the government that helps boost our economy. In addition to that, emigrant sons and daughters are serving in U.S. military in Afghanistan and Iraq fighting war on terror against Taliban and Osama Bin Laden's al Qaeda terrorists' networks, who have pledged to destroy the American interests overseas. My cousin Dieu contributed to removing the tyrant re-

gime of Saddam Hussien and his baath party from power in Iraq, and now he is deployed in Baghdad. My own nephew John Deng is serving in the U.S. arms in the horn of Africa working as an interpreter for his units helping government agents gather information.

The government and Immigration needs to recognize emigrants who volunteered to serve the U.S. government in the time of their services while one is alive. It does not make any sense for the government to recognize someone after he or she is deceased, as it happened two years ago. I remember when President George Bush rewarded a deceased emigrant soldier killed with his citizenship at his funeral because of service and commitment defending the freedom and the U.S. interests overseas. This ridiculous policy needs to be changed for the better of all citizens.

To me it seemed that this immigration reform was wise tactics formulated by U.S. lawmakers in order to target the emigrant community because they know that it is our Achilles' heel. My fellow comrade Chan Nyakor that I had known for years has been in jail since 2000 for unknown reasons that Immigration alleged as a serious violation of immigration laws. Chan tells me, "Life back home was much better than this current situation; one couldn't have emigrated to US and felt good with Homeland Security where my movement is restricted and confined in the states" (Nyakor).

Punishing people in such a way will limit the fluctuation of people to seek life changes, and this will have a severe impact on our economies because the more worker emigrants we have, the more taxes the government will raise because emigrants are hard-working people. "If U.S. lawmakers will continue keeping immigration reform year after year, adding more restriction bills being signed into laws, many emigrants will not tolerate this humiliation," says my friend Andrew Jackson (Jackson).

War, injustice, and lack of resources are factors that led both legal and illegal emigrants to come to the U.S. Chan Nyakhor tells me, "I was looking for a country where my liberty would be protected, and I have chosen the United States of America based on what I heard about American history. But things are now

different, contrary to what I have heard before I came here; that really surprised me a lot” (Nyakor). Suleman Skojavics, a 32-year-old refugee from the Bosnian community in Lincoln, said that the majority of emigrants will simply return back to their countries of origins as soon as peace is prevailed there because Immigration is doing countless injustice to emigrant communities here. He told me, “I’m planning to build a house in Bosnia and take all my family with me. I know this situation does not apply to me alone; there are many emigrants who are frustrated with situations, and the way Immigration treated people here is not acceptable, and this will lead the United States losing some of its future generations” (Skojavics).

Regardless of the fact that my liberty is being protected and I am working 40 hours a week, a man cannot live with bread alone. I’m paying rents, utility bills, car insurance, and payments. I’m not saving any money because the little money I’m making is not enough when split between my bills and my family living overseas. In addition, I pay attorney fees for the lawyer that will represent my family case and make it expedited. I’m tired of being lonesome, and for sure, I need the support of my wife behind me; also, I like to see my children around me all the time. As Hussem Mohammed says, “How long will I continue living separated from my family since the Immigration deprived me from getting citizenship?” (Mohammed).

We all rely on our government lawmakers who decide the fate of the nation and its security. But the problem is that emigrants don’t have lawyers who can file their cases to appeal Supreme Court. Maybe the government can find a suitable ground that will promote the tranquility for the welfare of our country. The government is denying thousands of Latinos work permits that will allow them to work and pay taxes to the US government. In some big states such as California, Texas, New York, and Florida, Spanish people are pursuing jobs in a very cunning, technical way. Three different people working with different companies at different times a day use one social security numbers and never file tax returns. Yollanda Francisco from Mexico has told me that

her two cousins disappeared last year, and her families have no clue where those people have gone. “Many Latinos from all over South American countries are facing deportation, and I believe the cousins are alive but they are being held somewhere by Immigration” (Francisco).

Security of our nation as a whole and grievances of emigrants are two things that our government needs to compare and envisage since we rely on government for providing our security. The solution for this problem is not difficult, and there is a simple mechanism that Immigration can use instead of deporting people back to their countries of origin. The government needs to recognize legal immigrants fully and give them fair treatment, relieve some restriction of immigration laws, lower the costs for application fees, and shorten the duration of the waiting period to six months instead of two or three years.

In addition, the government needs to provide illegal immigrants who have already entered in the United States with necessary temporary documents such as work permits, Social Security cards, and driver’s licenses, and fully incorporate them in American society. Sometimes the people who have no documents cause harm to people because when they are involved in car accidents, they run away and police cannot track them down because they do not have Social Security. Therefore, they must be given their documents and live in harmony with communities around them.

The government also needs to employ more law enforcement and provide them with high tech equipment and seal the U.S./ Mexico border to stop the fluctuation of illegal immigrants. Finally, the laws must remain unique and shall not be used as powerful tools to target innocent poor people. We are all descendants of emigrants from different nations, but regardless of our backgrounds, we are citizens of the most revered great country in the world, the United States of America. Long live the USA. 🇺🇸

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Sound Off

Claudia Reinhardt • Writing Tutor, Writing Center

On the silent screen, I see
a bronze casket;
people huddle near an open wound in the grass.
Like flowers seeking rain, their faces turn toward
a tall man with eyes dark as his beard.
He lifts a hand to calm the air;
but I hear no sound,
only the emptiness between words
as he stops to breathe.
Maybe he speaks of life and love lost,
a heart's cadence stilled.
No sound. No answer—
only a gasp between gunshots
while the solemn honor guard reloads.
Smoke unfurls like a flag across the sky,
saluting the space between words
and breaths
and thoughts.
In the silence, only the echo of loss remains.

Torn

Connie Beall • Human Services



The Intersection of 66th and Vine Streets

R.A. Kreft • Business Administration, Marketing

On a typical day, the intersection of 66th and Vine Streets is continually hustling and bustling with traffic. However, there is so much more to an intersection than the cars, trucks, SUVs, and commercial vehicles that pass through it. Every day, whether there is or isn't traffic, the intersection of 66th and Vine Streets contains permanent objects and features. The most recognizable and obvious object is the traffic signal which emits green, yellow, and red lights to safely guide the flow of traffic and pedestrians. Perhaps less noticeable, there are cables running parallel with the ground to support and position the traffic signals. Another item is the green, rectangular street signs with reflective white lettering naming the street. The street sign going east and west is named "VINE ST 800 N," while the street sign running north to south is called "N 66TH ST." One more item in the mix is the pedestrian crosswalk signal and activating buttons. Each pedestrian crosswalk guide has two signals. One signal, a white, walking stick figure, denotes it is safe to cross the street, while another signal, a flashing orange hand, denotes it is unsafe to cross the street. Upon the cement surface lay nine rectangular white boxes painted across each street to designate the pedestrian crosswalk. Finally, four light poles, one for each corner, bring the intersection together by connecting all of the objects.

The intersection of 66th and Vine Streets has many core elements which cannot be altered due to weather, traffic, people, or emergencies. Every day, hundreds of people yield, stop, and pass through this intersection. Although some drivers believe they have the ability to make the light change faster, they don't. No matter what weather comes its way, the intersection remains reliable. Snow may cover its lines, and rain may make the visibility of its lights difficult, but the traffic signals change on a regularly recurring time frame. Afternoon, evening, and morning have no effect on its efficiency, nor does light or absence thereof.

Today has reached its brightest point, although it seems no brighter than the average day at dusk. Today, the skies are a dark, heavy gray color. It appears as if it is ready to snow. Unlike a normal afternoon, there are no shadows to be mentioned. The dark afternoon sky leaves somewhat of a lonely, empty feeling to be felt about the day. The roads appear less busy, and the passersby seem much less hurried. Suddenly, the wind begins to blow the branches of the tree below the nearest light post. As the branches waver in the wind, a distinct scent of cigarette begins to fill the air.

No more than twenty feet away, a young man driving an old, beat-up Ford pickup reaches his hand out the partially rolled-down window to dispose of the ashes accumulated at the end of his cigarette. As the ashes fall to the cement, the young man pulls his hand back into the vehicle to inhale another cancerous portion of his cigarette. As he exhales, a large cloud of smoke fills the cab of his truck and begins to make its way out the driver's side window. Then, the light changes to green, and the man in the pickup, along with all of the other drivers, stomp on their accelerators to move about their day. As they take off, each one discharges a different accelerating sound. Some engines emit a mere hum, while others shower the air with loud reverberations of diesel engines.

As the previous drivers take off, a vast array of new motorists driving cars, SUVs, trucks, and commercial vehicles comes to a stop on Vine Street. Thirty-five seconds pass, and these drivers also accelerate toward their destination. Now, north and south bound traffic waits for sixty seconds while east and west bound traffic passes through. All throughout the day, these repetitious light changes continue as a rainbow of different colored vehicles come and go. Red, green, blue, white, silver, purple, black, brown, yellow, and many other paint colors can be seen on the vehicles as they stop and pass through the intersection.

As the five o'clock rush hour approaches, the streets get busier and busier. The flow of traffic stays steady, but drivers begin to lose patience with the lights and inch closer and closer to the cars in front of them as if to speed up the process of the changing lights. Finally, as the light goes from red to green, an upset driver

lays on his horn to alert the “leader of the pack” that the light has changed and it’s time to get a move on. As they accelerate, the ground begins to vibrate harder and harder with the boom of the souped-up speakers in a teenager’s car.

Eventually, the rush hour ends, and the gloomy, gray sky discards all its light. Day finally becomes night. The street lights turn on and replace the day’s missing light. The illumination of the street lamps draws attention to a light falling snow. The temperature has dropped to a grueling 6°F. The road appears desolate. Hardly anyone dares the cold, snowy evening. Then, from a distance shine the bright headlights of an old Chevy Blazer. From the irradiate headlights, the snow is visibly blowing south, but the Blazer treks on through the cold as if weather has no effect.

Several minutes pass by before any more vehicles pass. Then, a large quad cab truck pulling a tarp-covered trailer turns around the corner with a thunderous sound of horses under the hood. Once again, the street becomes empty; not a sound can be heard. As the wind continues to blow, a slight essence of burning wood emerges from the smoke stack billowing out from a house on the opposing street front. Through it all, the traffic signals continue to round from green to yellow to red and back to green again whether or not there be any cars to follow its guidance.

The silence is soon interrupted by the piercing sound of a fire engine’s siren. It starts off in the distance, with no way of telling where it is or where it will be going. The siren keeps wailing louder and louder until finally the flashing yellow lights surrounding the truck become visible. The emptiness of the night creates a clear path for the firefighters aboard. As quickly as possible, they zoom past 66th Street going east on Vine Street. For a moment longer, the lights are still visible, but soon they are gone. The siren begins to fade, and then, it, too, disappears into the night.

The dawn gives way to the early morning light of a new day on the intersection of 66th and Vine Streets. Though the skies grow increasingly lighter, four towering street lamps still shine to light each passenger and pedestrian’s way. It seems almost funny how the light of a lamp appears so much differently from the light of

the burning sun. The nearby street lamp casts light only on the north branches of the tree below it, causing the north half to look white while the south half appears black. As the light shines its way down to the snow-white covered ground, the shadows of the branches stand out clearly, like expertly woven webs of a spider.

As the snow begins to fall faster and heavier, it is apparent that it is here to stay, for today at least. The once visible dividing lines and white crosswalk markings are now hidden below the near half-inch of frozen white snow. Drivers now approach with a more cautious attitude. No one seems to be in as much of a hurry as on an average day. The majority of the vehicles that pass are SUVs and trucks. Many of the trucks are loaded down with one, and sometimes two snow blowers in the back.

Finally, it happens. A young, obviously less experienced driver, barrels towards the intersection just as the light turns red. Without hesitation, he slams on his brakes. The brakes lock up, and he skids straight ahead into the middle of the intersection. Luckily for him, there are no other vehicles in sight. He quickly drives away as if nothing had happened at all.

At seven o'clock, three of the four street lights shut off. The day has finally presented enough light to do without the aid of the street lamps. Moving west across Vine Street, a fifty-some-year-old woman marches along the snow-covered sidewalk. Upon her head she has a pure white fur hat which blends in with her glistening white fur coat. Dangling from her right arm is an oversized black purse. Once she reaches the corner, she presses the pedestrian walking signal. While she waits for the white stick figure to appear on the screen across the street, she continues to walk in place. When the light changes, her walking stick figure pops up designating the appropriate time to cross. Quickly, with a most interesting step, she crosses the street.

As the morning progresses, the traffic picks up. The vehicles emit more exhaust than usual as passengers try to keep warm in the cool of the morning. It is obvious which vehicles are kept in garages and which ones are left to the outdoor elements. The dry and shiny vehicles are stored inside, and the snow-covered, space-

ship-looking vehicles are left to the cold. One gentleman utilizes his time at the red light by stepping out of his vehicle and stretching his arm out across the front of the windshield to remove the snow too frozen for his windshield wipers to remove. Vigorously, he re-enters his car and moves on with the flow of traffic.

On and on, day after day, no matter what the weather permits, traffic continues to move to the pattern of red, green, and yellow lights on the intersection of 66th and Vine Streets. One can quickly learn by observation or sheer experience that no matter how impatient you become with other drivers, or how big of a hurry you are in, the lights change consistently, never altering. No amount of snow, unless of course it knocks out the power, will prevent the lights from changing. The light poles, street signs, pedestrian crosswalk guides, activating buttons, and painted street guides are permanent elements. Just because they are not seen does not mean they fail to exist. Accidents, though they may alter the pathway, will not prevent the intersection from performing its duty, either. This intersection's elements will always be consistent. 🙏

Grandpa's Shop

Jessica Applegarth • Academic Transfer

Kind hands rough as stone
With a touch like silk
Lead me in the door

The heavy scent of grease as thick as molasses fills my lungs
The haze of sawdust coats my nose

As I step into this deep darkness
I see an eerie point of light
Resonating from the fluorescent light fixture
A deep stirring of excitement arouses
The adventure is calling

Piles upon piles of grease-coated shapes
Pique my curiosity
At one time they might have resembled
Hammers, saws, hoses and lumber
Along with other gizmos and gadgets
But now, buried in the grease and dust
They've become the hidden treasure of Grandpa's shop

The kind hands guide me safely
Through the debris
My hand in his looks like
A tiny little pebble
As I run my fingers across
The wrinkles in his hands
The ridges feel like the grain of wood

Rummaging through the dust
I find pieces of Grandpa
I find his hands with their long wooden handles and metal heads
Smashing away at the work to be done

His feet are busy rolling about
Finishing the jobs of many machines
I hear the shrill zing of his voice
As he warns me not to touch
The razor sharp circular saw blades

And his steady gaze and concentration
Show me how to stick with difficult projects

Even now when I catch a whiff
Of grease, dirt and sweat
I'm transported back in time
To my adventures in Grandpa's shop

Sloth: The Fourth Deadly Sin

Kimberly Fangman • English Instructor



Tragic Apathy

Jon Severson • Academic Transfer

I rehearsed what I was going to say for over an hour in the mirror prior to coming to work at the restaurant that night, and another random thirty minutes in the backroom before my (hormone-raged) adolescent pecker got the balls to ask her. I do not believe that it was that long, but in moments like that, it seems like you have prepared for a lifetime. Thoughts just randomly come in and out of one's mind. I could taste my stomach. Butterflies? Consuming fears reveal everything about one's insecurities when standing vulnerable in the face of rejection.

I asked.

You know that moment when the adrenaline settles after an accident and you find out that you are still alive, or maybe when you merely avoid a collision? That little place in time where everything is kind of free-floating for a while? Where your heart tries to find its place again? That is where I was. I didn't care about anything else at that moment. She said yes.

That summer we both worked at a little diner by the name of Mrs. Mom's. It was located less than a block away from two different packing house plants. The buzzing from the plants, screeching pigs being slaughtered, and semis were what you usually heard. When I stepped outside, a sweaty wave of smoldering, unshaded sun coupled with the dust kicked up from passing trucks would generally chase me back inside where a window AC would, at minimum, warm the place. Mrs. Mom's made its money by making itself the gathering place of passer-on truckers and union workers. The building was built like a trailer: a long, narrowed, single-storied grease pit. Dirty white siding clothed the shell that Jill and I called home that summer.

We had become pretty close friends over the course of that summer. I admired her. She was two years older than I was and much wiser in the world of independence and punk. She listened to bands I had never heard of. She dyed her shoulder-length blonde strands with pink strips in the front. She had a mushroom

sticker in the back window of her car. She had a nose ring. She was cool.

I had up to this time spent much of my time conforming to a local preppy community. I played in numerous sports trying to find the place where I belonged. I remember from an early age not feeling like I fit in anywhere. Back when I was in third grade, Jon Robinson was the first kid in school to purchase a mechanical pencil. The entire third grade class was mesmerized by the workings of this pencil. A trend had been started that day. Every following day that I came to school someone new had brought a mechanical pencil. I was sure at the time that if I had somehow acquired a mechanical pencil, everything that felt out of place would fit. I would have the thing that made me cool. It didn't work. The mechanical pencil left me feeling still like something was missing. Like a dog trailing popularity, I would just wait for the table scraps of validation to be thrown. Chasing the wind. Who knew that constrained emotional pain and awkward discomfort is conducive to growth?

Jill Faine and her independence had now somehow infected me with a new determining freedom. This freedom was like disagreeing for the sake of disagreeing. I was free to listen to rock, free to smoke cigarettes, and free to do it with all the manufactured and un-genuine angst that I could muster. I think that my angst was only a symptom of the real problem.

This particular night we closed up shop early. I went through the nightly chores with a half-measured force. I heard the ice sizzling on the grill and felt the steam burn my face as I spaced off for a moment on a sign posted next to the fryer that said "THINK." The owner put it up hoping that it would somehow make a 15-year-old work smarter. How to make productivity more efficient did not even enter my mind that summer. I took hold of the scratch pad and commenced to clean the grill. I wiped down what I was supposed to wipe down and washed what I was supposed to wash. As we were locking up, I could have sworn that I was forgetting something.

We got into her car and proceeded to drive out to the Saint Mary's cemetery. We were listening to a bootleg of The Flaming Lips that Jill had acquired from one of her friends. The evening was warm. Looking around at the elongated shades that mimicked the trees and buildings reminded me that we had less than a couple of hours before nightfall. This would be a good place to coin the term "shady copycat." The air was fresh like evening. A cool and crisp wind would occasionally make its way through the car. This breeze reminded me of swimming in a lake where you get occasional spots of warm water, only opposite. I always thought that someone had peed in that spot of the lake to make it so warm.

I reached down and pulled out my sack of weed and one of my father's tobacco pipes. She asked to smell the weed, and I gave it to her. The pipe reminded me of something that Sigmund Freud would have smoked, except he smoked cigars. I read somewhere that it was for phallic symbolism, but that is neither here nor there. The night before this, I was at "Teen Night" where I had bought the weed from some skaters that hung out by the bathroom. It sounds kind of clichéd, but it is true. I knew that Jill smoked from the stories she told at work, so I thought that it would be a good first date. I had never bought grass before, so I had no idea how to do it. As cool as I thought I was, I'm sure I was as awkward as a 15-year-old doing anything for the first time.

She handed me back the weed and looked at my pipe somewhat confused and asked, "Where did you get that?" I told her that it was my father's. I later learned that they have special smoking utensils for grass.

We pulled into the cemetery and parked. I got out of the car and could feel the butterflies starting to return. I had never even smoked weed before. We walked down the hill a little ways before sitting down to lean our backs against the stone that was the eternal resting place of somebody's mother. I cannot remember her name, but even if I had, you would not remember by the end of this story. The point is that she was once us and now was cold and hard without anything she obtained in her life, except maybe her Sunday best. I wonder

if she found what she was looking for. I pulled my father's tobacco pipe out of my pocket and loaded it with the grass before handing it to Jill. She looked at me with a tranquil and much anticipated smile, as if she was looking forward to this moment. I flattered myself with the idea that her pleasant body language was because of me. It was the weed. My free floating anxiety was interrupted by the sound of crackling, the way dead leaves burn in the fall. I looked over to her face in the midst of a cloud of pungent smelling smoke. I took the pipe and could feel myself shaking as I took my turn.

We exchanged glances and grass a couple of more times before she got up and started to dance. She had left her stereo on, and I could faintly hear the sounds of Plastic Jesus playing in the distance. I had no idea how to do this pot smoking thing, so I just kept on taking more hits. When I was at about my twelfth, Jill told me to stop. She didn't have to because at that moment everything stopped. I was paralyzed, melted into what was left of a woman posed eternally in her Sunday best. I think I want to be buried naked. Donate my clothes, I won't need them. I just need to be entertained and comfortable while I am alive. Solomon calls it "Vanity of Vanities." I believe that I would be very comfortable lying naked less than three feet from my neighbor. I'm sure he wouldn't complain. I find it kind of ironic that comfort with nudity, as the genuine comfort of anything else, comes only after death. Even Adam wasn't content before death; he wanted more. He ate an apple; I smoked grass.

I could see Jill still dancing with her arms out: spinning, swaying, rhythmically floating from one tombstone to another humming to the music. She was beautiful.

"You all right, man?" she asked. I just kind of let out a contented moan that led into an, "Uh-huh." Other than passing intrigue of why I had no mobility over my body, the moment was beautiful. Fear and insecurity did not exist in that place. Concern was completely absent. To hell with your validation; the wind was chasing me. Lost somewhere in a state of apathy, I was free.

"Don't you have to be home soon?" she asked.

Suddenly I began to notice that there was no longer a sun, only a faint glow that acted as a nightlight until the night would completely steal what was left of the day. How long had I been out? I could see the black outline of a maple tree taking the shape of a cactus. What is a cactus doing in the middle of the Midwest?

“Jon!”

“What time is it?” I replied.

“9:15”

“Shit. We gotta go! My dad will have my ass!” I said.

I no more than made an attempt to get up when I fell forward, puking on a tombstone. I couldn't read who this one belonged to. I kneeled there nauseated for a moment before making a second attempt to the car. Freedom soon becomes regret when forced reality, like everything else when it turns out with a different outcome than what was expected. Jill was mumbling something about having told me not to smoke so much as she helped me into the car. I rested my head out the window as we drove back to Mrs. Mom's to get my moped. Jill would wake me up every few minutes with a jab to the ribs followed with a, “You alive?” My content moan had become an exhausting grunt to acknowledge that I was.

It was dark by the time we got back to the restaurant. I had no idea what time it was. “Open your trunk,” I ordered as I got out to load my moped into her trunk. I could tell that she was irritated when she had to load it, mumbling again. This time she was saying something along the lines of, “For fuck's sake,” and something about “the last time.” I didn't care what she thought; I wanted to go home and go to bed, and I could hardly hold myself up. There were other fish in the sea.

To the farm that night the drive seemed exceptionally short. I was passed out for a majority of it. She woke me up about a quarter of a mile from home where I had told her to. I didn't want my father to ask me why Jill drove me home with my moped in the trunk. I didn't have the energy or the imagination to give him some sort of excuse. I got out of the car and could hear the gravel crunch like glass under my feet as I walked to the trunk to

attempt to unload my moped. Jill had already done it for me. She must have wanted me gone. I said goodbye and drove off.

There were no warm pee spots in the air that night. Everything seemed cold. I had an ancient moped from the early 80's that had a carburetor problem when the weather was cold. I could not get it past 10 miles per hour. It is hard to balance a 300-pound moped at 10 miles an hour. Imagine riding a bicycle for the first time, stoned. Somehow I managed to make it home, but not without wishing that my moped had training wheels.

My father was sitting at the kitchen table when I walked into the house. The anxiety had returned by this time. I was nervous that he was going to find me out. My father was a strict and generally intolerant man—never physically abusive, but generally verbally antagonizing. Wait, verbally annoying. My father's career was as a social worker and drug abuse counselor. He had also spent quite some time under the influence himself, so I was anticipating the worst.

“Where have you been?” he asked.

“Got out of work late. It's been a long night; I'm heading to bed,” I told him as sober as I could. I turned and left the room before he could say anything. I felt as though his piercing stare followed me as I walked toward the hall.

The next morning I woke up and put on my jeans. I felt around my pockets and noticed that the pipe, the weed, my cigarettes were all gone. I thought of all the places that I could have left them. The cemetery? I couldn't have left them there; I remember smoking a cigarette on the way to the house. Shit! I was avoiding the thought that my father had found them. Walking out into the hall towards the kitchen I could smell fresh cut grass throughout the house. The wind was blowing the pink pastel curtains in the kitchen like it always seemed to in the summer. My father was mowing. Again, anticipating the worst, I went outside to see if he would notice me and do something out of the ordinary like come say, “We need to talk.”

“This anxiety shit has got to go,” I thought. Standing outside of the back door, I noticed a red cigarette box halfway down the

driveway. On my way to pick it up I found all that I had been missing. He never found out.

Wondering what to do with my Saturday, I learned a very important lesson. It all gets easier. You don't shake so much the second time. 🍄

Sandman

Sam Christiansen • Academic Transfer

I am the puppet master and master sculptor of his dreams,
Molding and shaping each one,
Controlling everything that goes on inside his head.
I play night watchman,
Executing any good dreams that dare trespass.
I enjoy my job and have for years.
This man, I've grown quite accustomed to.
Our friendship is that of a cat and mouse;
It's great, in my opinion.
I've been with him since his younger years.
Always running from his dreams,
Crying his way into Mommy and Daddy's room.
Ah, good times, good times.
But recently, he has become rather odd.
Not like a Picasso painting odd,
More so, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde odd.
A snowy blizzard in the scorching Sahara desert odd.
He dislikes his nightmares for obvious reasons.
But when I am nice and let her into his dreams,
He transforms into a child,
Fleeing from her as he does his dreams.
I always ask him why he dislikes my creation.
"Her beauty could break down walls," I would say.
"But she comes like a lion, roaring through,
Devouring all of my happiness," he would reply.
"Her smile, her personality, her laugh, full of energy and passion,
Could light up the heavens," I would say.
"But she's a chameleon that has no true self.
One day she could be happy, the next upset, over nothing.
Her smile and laugh are both
Full to the brim with dishonesty and manipulation.
She uses my feeling of comfort, distorts it,
Alters it into a grand piano which she plays quite well,

But not for fun, rather to torment me,” would be his answer.
These arguments lead us nowhere;
Therefore, I reminded him of past times with her
Outside of his dreams.
“Ah, but remember how she felt when you first kissed?
Her lips were softer than cotton,” I would say.
“The sense of loneliness you had without her
Would vanish, replaced by warmth coming
From the fires of your hearts.
Her skin creamy like vanilla, sensual and tender to the touch,
Made you envious of her blankets
That shielded and kept her warm throughout the night.
Her eyes, more magnificent than any of God’s creations,
Would beam at you and melt away all of your life’s troubles.
Her fragrance would enflame your nostrils,
Setting them on fire with the aroma of wild flowers.
Her voice, like musical notes performed by a miraculous orchestra,
Would float into your ear and trickle down to the tips of your toes.”
He would crumble under the weight of my words
And memories from his past.
I pretend I’m some nightclub’s bouncer,
Allowing her to sneak past me into his dreams.
Like a Venus fly trap,
She ensnares him in this hellish dreamland that I have constructed.
He must have amnesia,
For he repeatedly returns to these nightly adventures
I create for him.
“I want to go back, I want to stay there, I have to see her again,”
He’s always telling me.
I pretend to have no idea what’s making him request so many dreams.
Overcome with ecstatic ecstasy,
He pleads for one more dream.
He reminds me of an addict,
So I guess that would make me his dealer.

Radiant Raine

Jessica Applegarth, Academic Transfer



Fantasy Waves

Liwayway Sorensen • Academic Transfer

The road continued to wind along the beach; million dollar mansions lay behind stone walls on either side. I had only been driving for ten minutes, and I could tell my foot was getting heavy on the accelerator; momentum pulled me as I took each turn. Excitement powered me to overcome the fears I had of the water nine years before. I was eleven then, too scared to swim very far from the shore. Finally, the stone walls ended, and there the beach opened for all to enjoy. The sun had disappeared already, and the moon lingered over the waters. The ocean was dark, and waves were crashing high. This was going to be a fun night.

It had been a long work week for Mike, Amy, and me. We wasted no time looking for the stairs to climb down from the walkway. The three of us jumped, and the sand gave way beneath our feet. Mike took off running toward the water, and I immediately followed suit; like children we raced, stripping off our clothes, kicking off our shoes. “Last one there’s a rotten egg!” I cringed with every step. I hated the feeling of sand between my toes, but once I hit the water, I knew it would all wash away.

As soon as my feet got wet, an oncoming wave rushed up waist high and knocked me down. “Bring it, Poseidon, it’s on!” I challenged him. The water was cool, and the waves were powerful that night. I struggled to get back on my feet after the impact of the crash. I never remembered the ocean being so rough. My heart pumped blood all through my body, and soon I was no longer cold. I felt the undertow pull on my legs, and the horror stories of people being dragged down to their deaths crept into my mind.

The ocean roared menacingly. Who or what had angered the god of the sea that night? All the sounds of the modern world were lost in the water’s drones. In this wet world, no cars cruised by rocking their loud stereos. No crickets played in a symphony as I enjoyed the evening breeze. No cell phones rang with my boss on the other line giving me yet another task to finish before lunch break. No worries nagged in my ear about a car payment that had

yet to be made and the new job I still needed to find to afford it. All sounds were drowned away, demonstrating the overwhelming power of Poseidon.

It was fun, though, knowing there was a potential danger. I was outside of my own security circle where I called the shots. It scared me to be such a little person as a guest in a large abyss. I half expected something gross and slimy to swim up and bite me. I imagined diving under the water and surfacing with a starfish stuck over my nose. I tried to not let my nerves get the best of me. Those things didn't happen in real life. I felt something brush against my leg, so I jumped and paddled away. It followed me as if it had a mind of its own. "Okay, Li, be brave!" I told myself. I mustered up the courage, sunk my hand below the water, grabbed, pulled and threw. Damn seaweed! Yuck!

I hoped Mike or Amy didn't see my charade. They would make fun of me for sure. I laughed at myself when I was sure they didn't notice. Mike hadn't been in the ocean for years, and he was having too much fun to recognize my fears. The smile on his face reflected nostalgic memories. He wasn't a young man that night. The waves turned him into a four-year-old boy back in Hawaii, and he had no fears. He was invincible, reunited with his childhood playmate and protected from Poseidon by his innocence. It was uplifting to see him have so much fun after a stressful week of work. I cared about him so much and saw the ocean brought him a happiness that I could never provide.

Amy, the pro, went scuba diving once a year. She felt at home in the water and disappeared beneath it for a long time. I almost started to worry until her head resurfaced, and there she was again. She didn't let the ocean push her around. It was as if she and Poseidon were good pals, and she read his mind. He was agitated that night, but I think Amy had dealt with his temper before. Another wave came. She disappeared, and moments later her blonde head popped up even further from the shore. I wanted to have her courage. I wanted to have her strengths. On I went.

I knew I had never spent too much time in the ocean. I knew I was inexperienced, but I wanted more. I wanted to be brave. I wanted to throw myself deeper into the ocean and fight the waves, to show Poseidon he wasn't the only tough guy around there. The next wave came quickly. "Uh, oh," I said to myself. My eyes widened, and I remembered to close my mouth this time; the ocean had more salt than my taste buds could handle. My feet left solid ground, the wave came up over my head, water went up my nose, and I flailed my arms trying desperately to get a fresh breath. I might not make it; this could be it. Seconds later, the wave passed, and I was still standing. I hung in just long enough to catch my breath, but still I kept going further out. I had to make up for that last wave that bullied me around. I felt like those kids in high school who got thrown into lockers for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I kept telling myself, "One more wave. One more crest. Keep swimming out. Don't look back. If Amy can do it, then so can I. I want those bigger waves over there, the ones right beyond *that* crest." It could have been stupid. It wasn't exactly smart. I was inexperienced, but I went nevertheless. What didn't kill me would only make me stronger. I waited and saw a new, white, crest break, the water rolling toward me, growing bigger and taller. I gritted my teeth, "Wait for it, wait for it. Ok, jump now!"

"Just go with it, let it take you in," I heard Amy say until the wave overpowered me, and I couldn't stay above the water anymore. This was my way of releasing control and letting a power greater than I take its course. A rush of achievement and satisfaction overcame me because I knew I was one up on Poseidon. I saw how far out I was from the shore, but I didn't care. I swam further out than I ever had before.

When I stopped, I looked back to the beach that seemed so far away. I realized I was really helpless with no ground below my feet and no safety net to catch me if I gave up; I was inspired. I saw the condos behind me and the mansions just down the beach and thought, "How cool would it be, to wake up with the sun shining through my window and the ocean as far as my eyes could see?"

There was no reason I couldn't one day grow up to have that. I was twenty and free to go in any direction or strive to have anything. I would have loved to have the ocean as my back yard.

"Mike, let's stay," I sputtered, splashing over to him. "We can find jobs here. We can make money and get a place to live. You and I can do anything if we put our heads together." So we tossed around the idea of flying home, collecting our belongings, and living on some beach somewhere. Anything was possible for us, and we were determined to make it happen soon.

I knew I had been in the water a while, and I knew it would take some effort to swim back to shore. When was I going to get a cramp? I would rather not find the answer so far out. Some of those waves really picked me up high, and I fought for my life. I had to keep paddling and just went with the waves. Poseidon was still vicious, probably because he could sense my stubbornness and the way I taunted him to make the tide rough, but I was having too much fun. Another wave was on its way, and I jumped, but this time my leg tightened up, and I couldn't kick it straight.

Swimming back simply wasn't an option. I was at the mercy of the sea, waiting for the waves to push me in. "Please, please, Poseidon, don't grab me by the ankles and pull me to the darkness below," I begged. "We're even. You win!" The beach got closer, and the sounds of tires on the pavement and wind rustling in the trees became apparent. Wading back to the shore, I knew the magic was ending, and I would have to walk on the sand again. I hated having sand between my toes when I couldn't wash it off. For a moment, I was brought back to Iraq where sand and dirt found its way into everything and never really went away.

We trudged back up the beach and found the stairs on the walkway as we made it back to our rental car. I changed under a towel, hiding from the passing cars on the road. No one spoke as we let the memory of the waves marinate in our minds. I noticed a soccer game on the big screen TV in the bar across the street as I brushed the sand from my toes and wrung the water from hair. Soon my fantasy land where I relinquished my power and gave

up my worries vanished, and my dreams of living on the beach blew away.

“Where are we going?” I asked Amy as we got back in the car.

“You’re the driver,” she replied. As she spoke those words, my power returned. In the once magical moments of being in the ocean, I became a different person. I released all fears, responsibilities and doubts about life. That night the ocean became my muse. Yet as easily as my imagination and desires were set free to wander when those first waves hit me, they vaporized all the same when I put my feet back on solid ground. 🧘

Do you really want to know me?

Nicholas Ortiz • Academic Transfer

See me; this is just an act, a ruse, a plot, a ploy, a pretense. I stand here as a different man.

Not holding back, just spray the mic with what burns within, hoping I strike someone who can relate with no question.

Do you really want to know me?

Or do you want to know the mask that hides my true identity, for the truth is too ugly to see.

You say you want someone amazing, a superman, one that will treat you with respect and call when he can.

A guy that can put a smile on your face when the world seems so hard to face.

Well, here I am, baby, but still you think

I am not good enough for you.

I don't have the car, or the money.

Oh, I may be funny and paint that beautiful smile on your face, but I am just cast in the friends bin to never be heard from again, to be replaced.

So I am chemically imbalanced,

So I take pills for depression;

I am not perfect, but who of us are?

Definitely not you.

See me; this is just an act, a ruse, a plot, a ploy, a pretense. I stand here as a different man.

Not holding back, just spray the mic with what burns within, hoping I strike someone who can relate with no question.

So at the end of this rant, applaud if you can relate.

Hoot and holler if you have ever been wronged by that supposed loved one.

If she has ever taken all that you had and said, "That's not enough. I want more."

Stomp the floor if you have ever felt that burn, that never-ending burn before.

So much so that you could have slammed the door in her face, but out of love, you took her shit with grace.

Like a man.

You didn't strike her down; you just stood there, not making a sound.

Waiting with never-ending love to paint that sweet smile back on her face.

But in the end, who did she replace?

Graduating to a Ceremonial Sunset

Rob Filkin • Medical Laboratory Technology

There comes a time in high school students' lives when they robe in a gown of silk, wear a tasseled hat, and walk in formation to a song that describes the many tribulations and joys experienced...and the ones destined to face.

Graduation means a transition from the nonchalant days of high school to an expanded world full of adult responsibilities and decisions, a time when adolescents mature and prosper enough to hopefully face the world on their own and succeed...or possibly fail. While there are many moments of joy and happiness as a graduate ricochets through life's journeys, there will be hardship. Every high hurdle, solid obstacle, and hard-hitting brick wall is hurled at full force with devastating effects. The difficult choices that graduates make will be the deciding factors in what lay beyond their horizons.

My graduation was one of the most important memorable events of my life; it meant that I had achieved academic status at a high school level and was ready to transcend to an advanced educational facility.

I'm not keen on every minor detail of that day. Most of my recollection consists of fuzzy video clips locked in my cerebral cavity and about two dozen photographs that my close friends and family took that now collectively lace my photo album. I even frantically dug through dusty boxes of my adolescent belongings to obtain my senior yearbook that held pages of comments and pictures of curriculum, hoping to mold more thoughts from the past, but I found my trip down memory lane met with suppression.

As I looked over the withered photographs of myself, clothed in a blue silk commencement gown and hooded in a blue and gray tasseled biretta, I think back over my progressive academic career that was surrounded with a series of successes and failures. On the day of May 15, though, there was no presence of failure; I was ready to commence with the rest of my peers and classmates into

a new transition of life. But to verify my scholastic achievements, I needed to obtain the one item that symbolized recognition for the accomplishments that brought me to that place in time... my blue and gray ribbon-wrapped diploma.

From the photographs, the late spring weather seemed to welcome my arrival as an erudite adolescent. The clear blue sky was absent of any cloud-cover, and the blazed sun shown gold as it tipped towards the horizon. Throughout the cement bleachers of the stadium, I could distinguish the many joyous faces of close friends and immediate family members as they snapped cameras in my direction and cheered rants in my name for what I had accomplished. Despite the crowds' merriment by laughter and shouts of recognition in stereo, I tried to desensitize myself from the classmates' overwhelming tears of joy; I centralized on the realization that life hereafter would not be simple.

As I stood in line and waited to walk across the football field to take my seat among the rest of the class, I noticed the female classmate that asked me to accompany her at her side was just as excited as I. Her face glowed with a smile, and her attention was drawn in all directions. I looked around at other classmates and acknowledged that while in school, we each had our own cliques. But on that day, all the classmates came together to share this event as one group...we were "the class of 1988!" Once the ceremonial music started, we walked to our seats in a side-by-side formation, one couple at a time. Fifty-two couples entered that field with one collective thought on their minds—"I made it!"

For some of the guys, this event was the start that would change their lives forever; for others, they continued the same clown antics as they did in class. I remember I heard one fellow student tell everybody around him, "I'm not wearing any pants!" This was discovered when someone commented on his appearance after his gown slipped to one side and exposed his crossed hairy legs. We all got a chuckle. Or consider the fact that one of the valedictorians was seen wearing headphones right after he had just spoken the student address. He sat, crouched in his seat, head bobbing to the sounds of music, oblivious to his surroundings.

And who could forget the few male graduates that portrayed a Texas-sized smile while they sported black shades and acted quite cool throughout the whole event?

The girls seemed mature and more serious about the ceremony. Many of them I saw in a different light; their beauty really caught my eye. Maybe it was just due to the right angle from the luminance of the sun. They looked as though they spent the entire day at the beauty salon with their hair frizzed out and curly, along with their face, dusted to perfection with the use of make-up. It was almost as if I'd entered a beauty pageant, and my female classmates were the contestants; it was truly a blissful sight. Some of them I never really gave a second look while I walked through the halls between classes. But it was at that moment that I thought to smack my forehead in regret and wonder why I never asked them out on a date.

The ceremony felt like it lasted forever, but time did not stand more still for me than when the observance drew to an end. Each classmate moved his or her tassel to the other side, and the announcer said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome the graduating class of 1988!" As the crowd cheered, we all threw our birettas into the air with an explosion of spinning blue squares and gray tassels. It was as if we were all trapped in a bubble of time where every moment was played in super slow motion. I recall receiving embraces from many classmates. I didn't know whom I exactly threw my arms around because of the enormous shock and numbness I experienced. Surrounded laughter and smiles reflected the idea that we had progressed beyond our academic ball and chain, at least from a high school point of view. Emotional tears streamed down the cheeks of many, signs of joy and newfound relief from all the scholastic struggles we had to endure. And yet those same tears also meant that all of us had acknowledged this would probably be the last day we would be together as a whole group. It was customary for the senior class to schedule a graduation party, late at night, at an old abandoned farmhouse somewhere in a secluded location, undisclosed to local authorities. But

after all the alcohol was consumed and the bon-fire died, each classmate would walk away with hazed brain cells and the realization that a few would keep in touch, but most would go their separate ways never to meet again.

After a closer look through all the photographs of my commencement, I noticed that in every close-up of me there were displayed signs of confusion as the camera caught me with a gazed look towards the sun. I could see the gears turn in my head as I appeared to have the thought, "With the accumulated knowledge of thirteen years, where am I going in life now?" The answer to that question lay within the rolled diploma gripped tightly in my hand. From that day forth, I possessed the attributes to accomplish and acquire any goal set in the path before me.

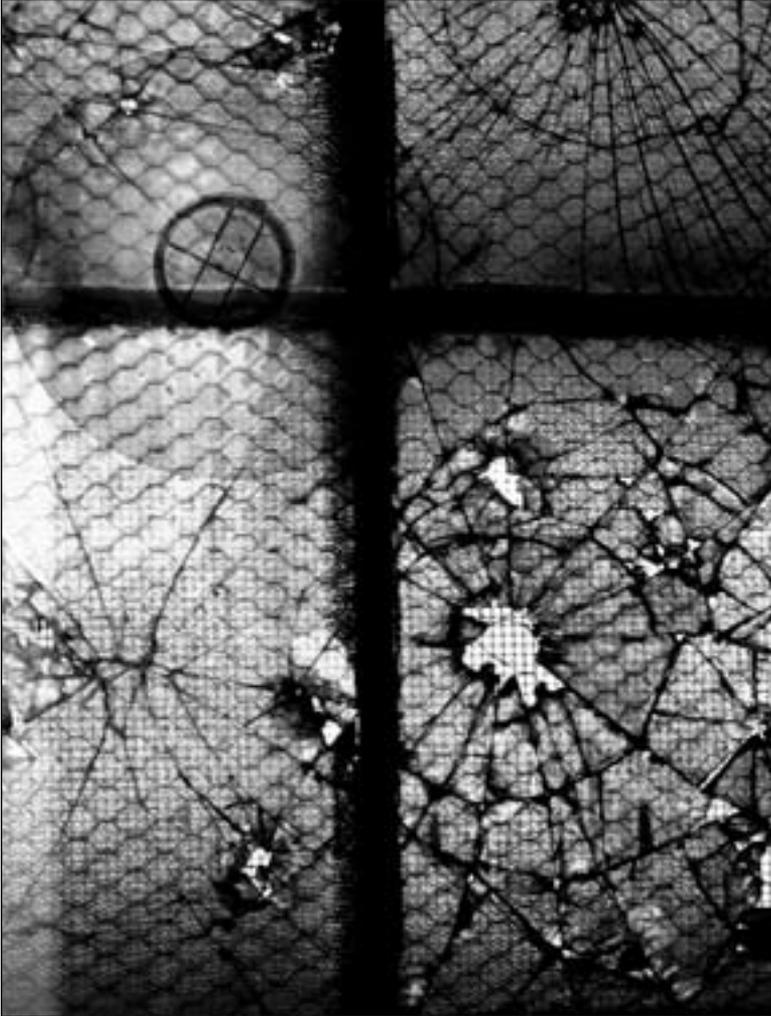
After the ceremony, my family and friends recognized my achievements with an honorary celebration. Upon arrival at my parents' house, I was greeted with oversized affections of hugs and hand-shakes, huge assortments of food arranged from pizza to sandwiches and chips, countless gifts and cards, along with endless plates of congratulatory cake, all because of my academic progress. After the experience of the entire chaotic bustle, I found myself in need of a little time to get away and reflect on the reality of the day's event. I walked onto the deck of the back yard porch and faced the horizon just in time to say, "Good night, sun," as the last of the fiery sphere set into a clear sky surrounded by the blended commencement colors of gold, blue, and gray. I could hear friends and family behind me through the screen door share events in their lives that involved me, scattered discussions as though each was simultaneously reading a different page out of my life's biography.

My memory does recall an important but vivid flashback. I stepped towards the edge of the deck where I found it easier to zone out the conversations of the background. I stood in quiet, peaceful bliss and cracked a smile across trembled lips as a tear ran down my cheek, my attention drawn on the cliché that a higher power had enveloped me. Behind me were the people I held dear and those that meant the most in my life. They were the friends

and family who had shared my joys and sorrows and would be there to watch my back and pick me up when I faltered. Before me was a wide-open horizon that resembled my future, and on it was the setting sun that lit a path to show me the way. Above me were the clear skies painted in ceremonial blue and gray, chased with gold, an indication that there wasn't a storm in sight that would prevent me from obtaining chased dreams. 🕯

Destroyed

Laura Drawbaugh, Visual Publications



Lost at the Cabin

Sara A. Mosier • Academic Transfer

I can smell the metallic lake outside my cabin window,
still as stone marble,

only whispering faintly against the shore.

Every morning it tries to escape its man-made cage in wide wisps
of foggy smoke.

The storm from the night before fed it a few more drops
to encourage its agenda,

but now its fingers reach into my window as if to tell me its plan
before it loses strength
and recedes back to its bed.

The air is still sticky, as July refuses to breathe deeply,
leaving the area stagnant as a stagnant swamp.

Although the world around me is still and heavy,
I feel content.

The lake may cause the birds and trees to gasp,
but it fuels my love for this place

A tiny wren agrees with me as it sings high up
in the sodden cotton wood tree.

My skin may be sticky and uncomfortable,
but my mind smiles in contentment,

for this is the only place I am completely safe
from the harsh world outside,

the only place I can think freely and unhinged.

The sun rises higher into the sky
away from the suffocating ground.
Good for the sun, bad for everyone else.
The temperature climbs with it, pushes me from bed.
The house is still quiet; no one is up but Dad.
The crackling of the AM radio drones on
about presidents and sports,
things I neither understand nor care about.
The bitter smell of coffee clogs the room.
I want to go outside and play, but I know
I'm not allowed to go alone, so I only sit on the porch
to mingle with the now sleeping water.
The birds are waking, and the rich thickness
of the lake air instills in my memory.
I am happy.

Cabin Revisited

Sara A. Mosier • Academic Transfer

She stalks the silent house to escape to the porch.
The iron smell of the lake overwhelms her in one breathless swipe.
For a moment she forgets the year;
she sees herself small, blonde, blue-eyed, and happy,
a young girl carefree and more than ever,
unaware of the harshness waiting in her future.
She remembers the birds tweeting in a never-ending wordless song,
the green gobs of weeds that tangle up on the shore.
The hours spent in the gritty, wet sand swell
a hard-to-swallow lump of ache in her throat.
She calls on her memories for the familiarity and comfort,
but it's gone now, and her life has changed.
The rustling sound of the budding cotton woods' leaves are echoing,
"Not the same, not the same."
A coveted comfort she greatly craves.
No one grows up here in this place of childhood dreams,
so she comes, because change does not happen beside the lapping water,
despite the swirling anger, grief, and worries that muffle the hap-
piness in her life.
She tries to scrape up the same contentment she felt so long ago,
but the trees remind her, and she sighs, taking in one more gulp of
rain-saturated air.

Waiting to Cross the Berm

Chris Berggren • Academic Transfer

Eventually I grew bored of watching the planes blow up chunks of the city. I tried to eat but really had no appetite, not that MRE's (Meals Ready to Eat) were appetizing. I just sat there and made small talk with my fire team. I didn't worry about what was to come; lots of things had to happen before we entered the city. First we had to get back in the tracks and move up behind the berm (a large pile of sand that separated us from the city). Then we had to wait for the engineers to breach and clear the berm. That was when I could worry about the next step. There was too much waiting left to dwell on the "what ifs."

I awoke earlier that morning at Marine Corps reveille, 0530, and was not the least bit tired. I was on an adrenaline rush; it was the big day when we would finally assault the city of Fallujah. The months of training and preparation were behind us. The weeks of endless waiting and orders being changed as soon as they were issued were over. It was game time.

The first thing I did that morning was to make sure I had packed everything that I would need and put away everything I wouldn't. We were told to put everything away so our area would look neat and squared away. The reality was our command expected high casualties and wanted to know who owned what. I took my time with this task. I focused all my attention on it, so I couldn't dwell on what was to come later that day.

Once I had finished packing, I began to put on my gear. My gear consisted of a flak jacket with, hopefully, bullet-proof SAPI (Small Arms Protective Insert) plates, six-magazine leg holster, helmet, knee-pad, camelback backpack with my water, MRE main meals, entrenching tool, extra ammo and grenades inside, a SMAW (Shoulder-launched Multipurpose Assault Weapon) rocket, and finally my M-16A4 service rifle. Then my team leader, Corporal Terry Brooks, looked me over. "You're good to go," he said. The Marine Corps loves neat phrases like, "Squared away," and, "Good to go." These little sayings are so common they invade normal speech patterns.

We boarded the Amphibious Tracks (we called them “am tracks” for short) around 0700, which took us to the first staging site. There we waited while artillery and aircraft bombed the city, destroying the enemy’s fortified positions.

Our mission was simple: retake the city of Fallujah from the insurgents. I am not sure how long we waited at the first staging site. Time had seemed to speed up and slow down randomly. I was uncertain if I wanted to hurry things up and just get this battle started or enjoy what could possibly be my last moments on earth.

Typically, when my squad was together, we were anything but quiet. We knew everything about each other and would always be talking or making fun of each other. That day, however, was anything but typical. For a while we all sat with the same blank look on our faces, the same posture: leaning forward, elbows on thighs, chin resting on hands, and eyes fixated on a spot but never seeing it. It was like the whole track was under a spell, and every one of us had the same thoughts. “How would I react under fire? Am I going to die? Will I come home with ten fingers and ten toes?”

That mental pondering only lasted a few minutes. It ended as abruptly as it had started. My platoon Sergeant, Sgt. Chambers, helped break the spell by passing around beef jerky, Tang drink mix, and bottles of water. I was surprised that the old guy cared enough about us to bring us something to eat and drink while we waited. I would come to find out later that he found the jerky and the drink mix under his seat. While the am trackers were chauffeuring us around, we were eating and drinking food from their care packages! The food brought out our old selves. Soon things were back to normal, and we were talking and joking around.

We moved into our blocking position around midday. We were told to dig in and watch for any insurgents coming out of the city. That order was unnecessary because beside us were our am tracks and Humvees, in front of us were LAVs (Light Armored Vehicles), and in front of them were the best tanks on the planet, the M1A1 Abrams main battle tank. There was no way anyone was getting through all that.

Nonetheless, our digging in soon became ludicrous. We were able to move six inches of sand before we hit the desert floor. It would take us days to dig a fighting hole using only our entrenching tool. The Marine Corps uses the term “fighting hole” instead of the Army term “fox hole.” We fight in ours, while they hide in theirs! So we did what any good Marine would do. We said, “Screw it!” and just quit trying.

Unfortunately for us, our Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Mike Ramos, came by inspecting the company blocking positions. He flipped his lid when he saw us lying in our shallow fighting holes. He kept telling us to dig in while we tried to explain the futility of it. Eventually, common sense beat out military logic, and we moved our position to where it was possible to dig in.

We sat there for the remaining daylight hours. Most of us tried to sleep, but only a few accomplished that task. I was still full of adrenaline, so sleep was out of the question. I spent my time watching the show Uncle Sam put on for us. There were tons of United States aircraft in the sky: AV-8B harriers, FA-18 Hornets, Apache and Cobra attack helicopters. The jets would come diving out of the sky, drop their bombs, and then deploy missile counter measures (shooting off flares). It was better than watching the History Channel: it was live.

Finally, the time came to board our am track and drive up to the berm. We would wait there while the combat engineers would go up to the berm and clear away any obstacle that the insurgents had placed there. This was supposed to take half an hour.

After what seemed like an eternity, the call came over the radio that we would be moving out in twenty minutes. Twenty minutes went by, and we were still waiting in the tracks. There were too many of us in the back of the tracks. It would have been fine if it had been a short time, but we waited there for hours. Several of the Marines from my track jumped up on the roof. They had two reasons for doing this: they were able to create some much needed breathing room for the rest of us, and it gave them a better position to watch the new light show.

The artillery had started to shoot illumination rounds as well as incendiary rounds. The planes were still dropping bombs, but now it was dark. The darkness added to the grandeur of the show. There was a lot to look at. Parts of the city were on fire giving a reddish glow to the

skyline; the illumination rounds added green, and the white phosphorus rounds added white to the mix. It was a spectacular sight, beautiful even, if not for the purpose of it all.

Eventually, the planes stopped dropping their bombs, and the artillery ceased firing. They stopped so those of us in the ground forces could finally enter the city. But when this happened, the insurgents started shooting RPG's (Rocket Propelled Grenades) at our positions. They hit one of the tracks that was down the line from us. Through the radio in the back of our track, we were able to listen to the drama unfold. The radioman in that am track was screaming for a medivac, saying that they had mass casualties. While listening to this, we talked amongst ourselves trying to figure out what platoon was in that track. Earlier that week, we had all been issued quick kill numbers; mine was Charlie 13. Everyone gave me crap for being number 13. I took it as a good omen because it was the same number as our unit, 1st Battalion 3rd Marines Charlie Company, or Charlie 13.

After the wounded were medivaced out, the platoon Sergeant for third platoon (it was their track that was hit) called off the quick kill numbers of those that had been medivaced. We tried to figure out whom the numbers belonged to. While I listened to the rest of my squad try to figure out who was hit, I couldn't stop thinking, "Holy shit, this is real! Holy shit, this is real! Holy..." All day I had been thinking about me, what could happen to me. Now I understood that other people could and probably would die. It took me a few minutes to regain control of my brain and change my focus onto what I had to do the minute I left the track. It was a simple plan: we would exit the track and walk in single-file lines (just in case the area was mined) until we met up with the two Abrams tanks we were to provide security for. Then we would follow those tanks to our first objective.

After what seemed like an eternity, we were given the green light to go. I exited the am track and crossed that berm. 🙏

The Quiet Place

Laura Drawbaugh • Visual Publications



I Am All

Shannan Brown • Academic Transfer

I see all, I feel all, and I am all. You won't know me till the end, yet I am part of you from birth till death. I am the whispers you hear and the voice that you ignore. I am the white, the black, and the gray. There is no in-between; the night and day are one. I am silence, and I am noise. You tell me to listen; you beg of me, and you plead. I am without boundaries, yet you hide me.

I am with you when you think I am away. I am inside and all around you. I sit here above all. I watch every day, your work, your family, and your free time for only you. Why don't you include me? You read my book as if it's fiction. I am the breath you breathe and the blood that flows in your veins. I keep you alive, so in the end you will know what life truly feels like. I put you through tests, and sometimes you fail.

I talk to you to point you in the right direction; sometimes you follow, sometimes you lead your own way. I wrap my arms around you, yet you push me away. I walk with you and carry you when you are weak. You tip-toe through your life; you skip when you are happy, and drag your feet when you are sad. To you, I am fearless and fearful. You want to be with me, yet you worry what others may think.

I am mystery with knowledge and mesmerizing with my touch. You feel me next to you; you shrug it off as a cold chill. The end is near, and you would know this if you took my words for truth. Many years have passed since I created all you see. You take advantage of all I offer, but you don't use it to the fullest as you should. I can make your life easier. I can help you with life's challenges.

I am the water, and I am the wind. I am that old woman you walk by every day, the one who holds out her hand for your help. I am that child crying in the department store that you pray the parent will silence.

Without me, you would not exist, you would have never been. I enter you; you feel at peace with all around you. I am the sunset and the sunrise. I help you start and end your day. I am the dirt

beneath your bare feet. I am the scent of magnolia that runs through your home. I am never going to leave you, no matter how hard you try to push.

I am a blank sheet of paper. I am a notebook full of thoughts. I am what you need, yet you don't know it. I am the want of forever and the promise of it shall be. I fulfill. This is why you need to open your heart to me, and you will not suffer as I watch as your world is falling apart. I can make you whole again.

I watch the ending as it begins. You will no longer feel trapped; you are free. Finally it is over, yet it begins. I am God. 🕯️

Splash!

Jeff Wilson • Academic Transfer,
Radiology Technologies



Waiting to Fly

Brittney Marks • Early Childhood Education



Writer's Block

Sam Christiansen • Academic Transfer

I just sit here merely thinking.
Writing a poem is clearly impossible.
I don't know how long the poem should be.
A grand strand of creativity falls out of my head,
But I am unable to catch it.
My poetry is inferior to others.
My procrastination is superior to many.
I can feel myself turning green,
Like the Incredible Hulk.
With every misspelled word, creative mind blanks,
My shade becomes darker and greener.
I wish, just once,
An idea would swim up to me like a fish.
I keep tossing up ideas
That I keep shooting down due to my negativity.
I don't know.
I probably won't write a poem, I guess.

Silence

Heather Williams • Academic Transfer



Our Contributors

Jessica Applegarth (“Grandpa’s Shop,” “Radiant Raine”): Jessica wrote her poem, “Grandpa’s Shop” to honor her grandfather and all the wonderful memories she has with him. A multi-talented artist, when Jessica saw “Radiant Raine,” she couldn’t resist capturing her beautiful and elegant image on film. Jessica is in the Academic Transfer program at SCC.

Mary Angela Apthorpe (“One Block”): Angie says she had always been a fun-loving and outgoing person until her addiction rendered her incapable of having social interactions beyond getting and using drugs. Angie has been clean and sober since August 6, 2005, and is currently the addictions counselor at Summit Life Recovery short-term residential treatment facility in Hickman, NE. A 2007 graduate of SCC, she is now a follower of the Buddha and is continuing her education at Doane College.

Connie Beall (“Torn”): Connie says she enjoys wearing ugly shoes that no one else will wear, and she loves her life and her kids. This is her third consecutive year of having either a poem or a photo published in *Illuminations*.

Chris Berggren (“Waiting to Cross the Berm”): Chris is 23 and in his first year at SCC. He joined the Marine Corps right after high school, and his essay, “Waiting to Cross the Berm,” describes one of his experiences while serving. Chris thanks Mrs. Humphrey for motivating him to submit this essay to *Illuminations*.

Robert Branting (“Land of My Fathers”): Robert was motivated to write “Land of My Fathers” by various western trips he’s taken during his life and by the passing of his father. A dedicated outdoorsman, Robert is also a student of science and history.

Merrion Brooks (“Bird on a Window Sill”): A broken heart motivated Merrion to write her poem, “Bird on a Window Sill.” She has been a student at SCC for many years. She says you may have seen her putting around with her backpack and gray hair.

Shannan Brown (“I Am All”): Shannan was motivated to write her tribute to God, “I Am All,” for a class assignment. She says she’s not good at offering biographies of herself and, “I am what I am.”

Sam Christiansen (“Sandman,” “Writer’s Block”): Sam enjoys writing, listening to music, making people laugh, spending time with loved ones, and more. Sam says of “Sandman” and “Writer’s Block,” “These poems are very personal to me, and I enjoyed writing them.”

Erin Cico-Knowlton (“Floundering”): Erin is recently married and a 7–12 English teacher at Prague Public School. Although her essay, “Floundering,” began as an assignment for her SCC Fiction Writing class, Erin found that as she wrote, it became extremely personal, and her passion for it grew.

Brent Dale (“Black Christmas”): Brent is 27 and married. He’s been in the York area writer’s guild for over seven years and loves to write poetry. This is the first time he’s submitted his work for publication.

Pal G. Deng (“Too Much Restriction on Immigration Laws”): Through his essay, “Too Much Restriction on Immigration Laws,” Pal wanted to make known the immigration situation to people who may not have a clue about immigration laws. Pal’s wife and son are living far away, and he’s trying hard to bring them to the United States; as his essay indicates, it hasn’t been easy.

Laura Drawbaugh (“Destroyed,” “The Quiet Place,” “Spiraling Down,” “Stepping into the Unknown,” cover images): Laura says photography is by far her favorite thing to do. She also loves music and going to concerts. “Destroyed” is of a broken window she encountered while walking through the Haymarket. “The Quiet Place” is a photo taken at a lake. She hadn’t seen a tornado slide in years when she created the image “Spiraling Down,” and she wasn’t even going to photograph the scene in “Stepping into the Unknown” until her friend Scott insisted she did. Now it’s one of her favorite photos. Her stunning photos “Vent” and “Dreamscape,” grace the cover of *Illuminations*.

Teresa A. Duncan (“Destination”): Teresa works at a limestone mine and was doing homework when she came up with the idea to write about something she saw every day. The result was her poem, “Destination.” Teresa is an “untraditional” student—a widow with three sons who moved back to Nebraska four years ago. She loves learning, expanding her knowledge, and interacting with new people.

Kimberly Fangman (“Cara’s Swing,” “Leroy’s Truck,” “Sloth: The Fourth Deadly Sin”): Kimberly is the editor of *Illuminations* and an English instructor at the Lincoln campus. Photography has always been her passion, as well as reading and music. Her most recent proud hour was serving simultaneously as official photographer and official pianist for a wedding—not easily accomplished! In regard to her photos, “Cara’s Swing” features her daughter, “Sloth” is one of a series of photos on the Seven Deadly Sins, and “Leroy’s Truck” is a nod to her Modern Fiction students who felt Leroy got the raw end of the deal.

Rob Filkin (“Graduating to a Ceremonial Sunset”): Through the motivational tutoring of Southeast Community College’s writing instructors, Rob says he’s only begun to exercise an array of hidden compositional talents that have allowed him to add to his increasing portfolio of writings. He is currently working on another project, a book called *The Wickerpot Traveler*, which he hopes to publish by the summer of 2009.

Sean Flowerday (“Devocracy”): Sean was motivated to write his argument essay, “Devocracy,” by his deep-seated distrust of the common man. Sean says he was born union and will die union. He interests include Democratic politics, firefighting, arsenal football, the Red Sox, the Red Heads, and the Huskers.

Mike Keating (“My Friend”): Mike is 51 and hails from Montana. He loves the West and tries to go to the mountains whenever he can. He has two kids, a dog, and a wife and loves teaching in the Visual Publications program at SCC, which he feels is challenging and rewarding at the same time.

Mary Kerns (“Pride and Joy”): Mary’s goal is to obtain a nursing degree. She is the mother of three wonderful children and a self-proclaimed connoisseur of coffee and chocolate. As she delved into her essay “Pride and Joy,” her eyes were opened as to how much her priorities have changed in the last eight years.

Cameron Koll (“Baby Girl”): Cameron plans to pursue a Film Studies degree at UNL. While he had worked on screenplays in the past, he had never written a short story before taking Fiction Writing at SCC. He says this class was wonderful and his favorite to date. Cameron has been in a band for three years and has been fortunate enough to be able to pay for school with his poker winnings. He’s honored to be published in *Illuminations*.

R.A. Kreft (“The Intersection of 66th and Vine Streets”): Rachel wrote her observation essay, “The Intersection of 66th and Vine Streets,” for Judith Ottmann’s Composition I class. She is pursuing a degree in Business Administration and Marketing.

Brenda Kruse (“Little James Dean”): Brenda is 36 and a certified Reiki Master and holistic therapist. She enjoys nature, singing, and taking photos of her son. “Little James Dean” was taken after her son did his own hair and was playing the part of a reluctant model.

Chuol P. Lul (“Memory of Civil War in Sudan and the Death of My Brother”): Chuol wrote his memoir as an assignment in his creative writing class. He left Sudan in 1986 to flee civil war and came to the United States in 1995. He and his wife have four children.

Nicole Milius (“Chesney Christine”): Nicole loves children and was just shooting a few random shots when she captured “Chesney Christine.” She loves how it turned out! Nicole plans to transfer to Nebraska Wesleyan to major in social work. Her Intro to Photography class, however, has been her favorite class so far at SCC. She also enjoys scrapbooking and going to the lake.

Brittney Marks (“Oh, Boy!,” “Pride,” “Waiting to Fly”): Brittney says she was born in Norfolk, and since there wasn’t a lot to do as a child, she often took her mom’s camera and ran around taking pictures. Once it was storming, so she took an umbrella and her mom’s camera out in the middle of the storm to photograph lightning. Her mom freaked, but Brittney didn’t know if it was because the camera might get wet or because she was standing in a lightning storm holding an umbrella with a metal rod reaching toward the sky.

Sara A. Mosier (“Cabin Revisited,” “Lost at the Cabin”): Sara says she’s written so much poetry since taking Julie MacDonald’s class that she considers herself a poet now. She’s also written three novels, which are linked and are traveling/drama/adventure/romance novels all at once. Sara says denying her the freedom to write would be like denying her air.

Kathie Nietenhoef (“Kathie Has Left the Building!”): Kathie says she’s like most mothers her age: she plays video and computer games with her 13-year-old son and reads horror stories with him when he sits still long enough. Halloween is the favorite holiday around her home, as it’s the one day of the year when it’s completely acceptable for adults to act childish.

Renee Northrup (“Headdress”): Enrolled in an art class each year from kindergarten through 12th grade, Renee loves to draw and paint when she has the time. She’s currently working in a hospital and plans to earn her nursing degree. She also loves the outdoors, enjoys trap-shooting, and is learning how to shoot a bow.

Lydia Omondi (“All a Day”): Lydia is married and the mother of three girls and one boy. She arrived in the United States in June of 2008 but almost returned to Kenya after learning she was pregnant. Instead, the Sudanis helped her establish roots in Lincoln. Lydia is now in school for her surgical technology degree. Her husband is in Kenya with the rest of her family, and she misses him very much, but she says school has been a blessing. Once an elementary teacher in Kenya, Lydia hopes to return as a more learned teacher.

Nicholas Ortiz (“Do You Really Want to Know Me?”): Nicholas was motivated to write his slam poetry by a poem called “How I Feel.” Nicholas hopes to pursue a degree in psychology and believes that poets become lovers, lovers become fighters, and fighters become poets.

Caitlin Phelps (“Discovering the Subtleties of Salsa”): Caitlin loves the smell of the library and sifting her fingers through the gold-lined pages of an old book. When she wins the lottery, she’ll have an entire room dedicated to book shelves and a rolling ladder along the wall. Her idea of the perfect evening is summer stars, a southern-style front porch, laughter, and food. Caitlin says her coworkers are intelligent people, and she thinks many of them deserve better than the service industry. Her essay, “Discovering the Subtleties of Salsa,” is a tribute to them.

Marsha Radcliffe-Emmons (“Kenny”): Marsha’s essay, “Kenny,” was written for a Composition project. She says she had so much fun recalling all the stories she shared with her dad while playing gin rummy that she found it hard to narrow the stories down to the final version.

Sarah Elizabeth Reddy (“An Abrupt Awakening”): Sarah says she’s a soul-searching person who believes that “not all those who wander are lost.” She wrote her essay, “An Abrupt Awakening,” for a class assignment.

Claudia Reinhardt (“Sound Off”): After a career in business communication and promotional writing, Claudia is now a freelance writer/editor and a writing tutor at SCC. She has always been fascinated by the power of words and silence. At the end of the PBS television program *Washington Week in Review*, the photos of soldiers killed in action are shown in silence. The impact of the images is magnified with the sound off—in contrast to the military command “sound off,” prompting each soldier to shout out his/her presence. In her poem aptly titled “Sound Off,” these concepts are woven together, while leaving unanswered the who, when, where, and why.

Max Reis (“Old People”): Max works as a custodian at SCC and was motivated to write his poem, “Old People,” by the diversity of ages he sees on campus—not only among the students, but among the staff and faculty, as well. Raised in Nebraska, Max has been married for more than forty years, has lived on both coasts, has raised three sons, and has been an artist and a teacher. He says he’s ready to retire!

Carolee Ritter (“By the Dog of Egypt!”): Carolee got her first dog six years ago, and life has never been the same. She now understands what unconditional love really means. Carolee was motivated to create her photograph while on vacation at the New Jersey shore. Everywhere she went, there were signs that disallowed dogs. She found it hilarious that her dog seemed to get bored as a result of being banned from even the parks they encountered.

Phip Ross (“Rubber Hammer”): Phip is an SCC English instructor who enjoys writing, teaching, and making short video essays called “digital stories.” He also enjoys playing the guitar. You can find a story of his and other amazing stories at storiesforchange.com.

Peggy Schmidt (“I Sang to my Dad”): Peggy wrote her poem, “I Sang to my Dad,” after he died in 2004. She says she is 52-years-young and getting younger every day! Peggy loves to study, but she doesn’t drink coffee. She gets all her caffeine from Pepsi.

Jon Severson (“Tragic Apathy”): Born in Storm Lake, IA, Jon always felt Lincoln was the unimpaired heart of the Midwest, so he thought it would be a good place to embed his roots and grow old. He worked construction for ten years before deciding to return to school to pursue an education in religion and philosophy. His hobbies include art, playing piano and guitar, reading, and building things. Jon says his essay, “Tragic Apathy,” is a personal narrative about seeking validation, finding yourself, and doing drugs for the first time.

Debi Smith (“Poppy Field,” “That’s My Grandma”): As a fine art and art history instructor, Debi feels it’s important to encourage her students to enter publications like *Illuminations*; she also feels it’s important for instructors to do the same. Born in New Mexico, Debi has lived in Germany, California, and Ohio. She spent over 13 years as a photographer for the Air Force and three years as a helicopter mechanic. She hopes she can encourage her art students to take risks and find ways to feed their creative sides.

Jenay Solomon (“Ode to Red Toenails”): Jenay is 19 and a graduate of Lincoln High. She has a strong passion for books and music, especially indie rock. She wants to be a marine biologist and study wildlife and feels that she’s willful and has a tendency to say whatever she thinks. Her poem, “Ode to Red Toenails,” was more or less inspired by her inability to think of a topic; while pondering what to write about, she was admiring her recently painted toes and wrote the poem on a whim.

Liwayway Sorensen (“Fantasy Waves”): Instead of going to college right out of high school, Liwayway went to Basic Combat Training. Less than a year after graduation from AIT, her boots were on Iraqi soil. Although she’s been home only a short time, she feels like it’s been 100 years since she drove past road-side bombs and trucks going up in flames. Liwayway wrote “Fantasy Waves” to not only create the physical sense of being in the ocean but also to illustrate her accomplishment in facing her fears. For her, it’s a story of bravery and inspiration.

Heather Williams (“Silence”): Heather wanted to study the techniques of combining color with a graphite image when she created “Silence,” the portrait of a large, docile beast at rest in the silence of the forest. Heather is 19, generally confused, and likes pretty colors. Paint and marker stains are her fashion statement.

Jeff Wilson (“Macro,” “Splash”): Jeff loves photography and capturing beauty in all things. “Macro” was created after encountering leaves after a light shower, while “Splash” is an image of a coconut found on a beach on Kawaii Island. Jeff is currently in SCC’s Radiology program.

Lana Young (“My Daughter”): Lana is in the Human Services program at SCC and writes poetry and bakes when she’s feeling sad. She loves to read, and she feels that writing poetry is a way for her to deal with life. She wrote her poem, “My Daughter,” for her infant daughter.



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