



 ***illuminations***

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illuminations

A magazine of creative expression
by students, faculty, and staff at
Southeast Community College
Beatrice/Lincoln/Milford, NE
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Volume 26 2025

*"It is through art that we will prevail and we will endure. It lives on
after us and defines us as people."*

Rita Moreno



illuminations Volume 26

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illuminations publishes prose, academic writing, poetry, and art by SCC students, faculty, staff, and administrators. We encourage submissions from across the disciplines. Our mission is to be an inclusive outlet for artistic works with a diversity of voices, styles, and subjects meaningful to the SCC community.

illuminations is published in the Spring of each year. Submissions are accepted year-round from current SCC students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

Prose submissions are limited to no more than three from one contributor; poetry submissions are limited to no more than five from one contributor; art submissions are limited to no more than three from one contributor.

To submit, please complete the submission form.

Written work is accepted as .rtf, .doc, .docx file. For art, please submit high-resolution images as .tif or .jpg files, with a minimum resolution of 300 dpi, and a minimum size of 1500 pixels wide and 2100 pixels tall, or 5" wide and 7" tall. Works can be photographed or scanned for you if needed. Images embedded in Word or PDF files will not be included; please provide a separate image file(s). 3D artwork should be photographed against a white or single, solid color backdrop. **The deadline for Volume 27 submissions is June 30, 2025.**

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

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



A NOTE FROM ONE OF THE EDITORS

On the evening of April 23, 2024, Linda Hartman stood on her deck, looked up to the night sky and witnessed what she later learned to be called a pink moon. She captured the stunning moment with her camera and shared it with us at Illuminations. The moment now resides permanently on this volume's cover.

My breath caught when I first saw Linda's photo. I thought it was an eclipse. It almost looked too perfect to be real.

When Linda shared the story behind the photo, she mentioned she didn't take the time to clean her camera's lens beforehand because she knew the moment wouldn't last long.



This 26th volume comes during an interesting time thanks to artificial intelligence's impact on the creative process. I don't know what the future holds for us in terms of how our understanding of creativity will evolve, but I do believe beauty lies in imperfection. The smudge left behind. The comma splice overlooked. These are creation's relics.

As I went about my duties as co-editor for this current volume, my increasing appreciation for the imperfect was ever present. I felt compelled to exercise caution especially when editing prose. I dare say I'm as good as a machine when tasked with detangling an awkward sentence, and a few years ago, I would have run my comb through paragraphs with diligent vigilance in the name of upholding the integrity of flawless grammar and mechanics.

But for this volume, my hand dropped the comb, and I just couldn't bring myself to pick it up again.

Given AI's ability to churn out airbrushed work faster than I can rummage through a drawer and find a comb, I chose to keep the work of SCC's students, faculty, and staff as close to the original as possible. In all, I touched two pieces. I combined some sentences to form a paragraph in one and synchronized some verb tense across another. Everything else remains untouched so that we may bear witness to what it means to be human.

Will this be the standard in subsequent volumes? I don't know.

I do know that I feel proud when I read the words and view the art within these pages. It feels similar to my experience walking SCC's hallways—diverse, vibrant, authentic—anything but robotic.

If one is to read this volume looking for grammatical errors or an awkward phrase, they will find it. I've left them there so as to capture the here and now just as Linda was able to capture her moon's moment by leaving the dust on her lens.

Cheney M. Luttich
Co-Editor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Front cover image, “Interstellar” by Linda Hartman

Back cover images, “Dancer in Blue” by Emma Waack, “Peach Peony” by Mathew Chilcott

ARTWORK

Angel Aviarre	Wolves Vs. Bloodies	126
Mathew Chilcott	Angry Indignation	116
	Crown Prince	98
	Peach Peony.	106
	Poppy Unabashed	133
	Red Peony.	137
	Red Poppy.	144
	Wilting Peony.	120
	Yellow Columbine	120
Richard M. Hadley	Footsteps Left Behind.	136
	Snowposts	146
	Sunrays	121
Tanya Hare	Blowing Bubbles Wall Art in Iowa.	130
	Sea and sky	108
Linda Hartman	Foxy Sip.	117
	Interstellar	140
Lynda Heiden	Flowers Series	111
	How Do You See with Such Long Bangs.	132
	The Regal Eagle	123
	Under the Sea Series	127
Cheney Luttich	Central Park	107
	Statue of Liberty	124
Abbie McCoy	Dream	114
Bryan Emanuel Ortega	Kiss of Life	99

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Susana Schmidt	Riomaggiore	147
	Streets of Parma	142
	Parmanean Bridge.	119
Emma Waack	Dancer in Blue	101
	Dancer in Jeans	145
	Portrait with Flowers.	135
	Portrait with Glasses.	138
Dillon Walker	Apple Blossom at Dusk.	102
	Bumblebee.	104
	Butterfly on a Leaf.	105
	Fountain of Youth	100
	Obelisks since AD 80, Eyewear since 1956.	131
	Silhouette of a Power Line.	118
	The Spanish Steps.	143
	The Spider Awaits its Prey	115
	Sunrise over the Missouri River	148
	Sunrise over the Niobrara River	122
	Tyndall Creek Waterfall Near Emerald Lake	109
	Wildflowers at the Villa Borghese.	141
Hayle Yoakum	The Creative Process.	125
	Eye of the Beast.	104
	Flowers	134
	A Gift to My Younger Self	110
	Geometric.	139

TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY

Angel Aviarre	For Ezio	171
Ashley Bosco	From Darkness to Dreams: A Modern Fairy Tale of Resilience and Redemption	92
Kal O'Bryant	The Farmer	149
	Home	18
	Moonlight on Alaska	89
Natalie Duchesneau	Revolutions	209
Kate Gonzalez Mireles	I Hate Christmas	214
Harsh	Burn	68
	Cliche	191
	Consumed	156
	Craquelure	53
	Enchantment	40
	Lethal	181
	Little Dragon	29
	Moonlight	152
	Sync	91
	Terminal	226
Erica Howard	Colorful Canvas	84
	Crisp Air	35
	Mirror, Hope, Divided	94
	Ray of Sunshine	215
	Swaying Trees	207
Angelina P. Miller	In your new life I Hope...	64
	Thank you Earth for cleaning my soul	200
Hailey Morris	Foiled Plans	45
	Names of the Forgotten	196
	Stranded at Sea	61
Kristine Morris	Rise	225
Haley N	My Mind	19
	Sour Behind Her Teeth	34

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Uyen Nguyen, MA	Childhood Memories in ABC's	177
	Mother's Day	162
	My daughter, Uyển.	220
	The Never Ending Fire.	232
	Thoughts of You, at 33	46
Eugene Prochaska	First Two Breaths.	201
Erin M. Rengan	Apathy As It Relates To The Passage Of Time	151
	Creative Block	161
	Future as it turns into the present.	48
	Losing a Friend.	82
	Solipsism	41
	Suicidal Ideation.	230
Olivia Schwickerath	Golden Skies	52
	Green Gaze	39
	My God	216
	Wild Soul.	153
Nicholle Aileen Soukup	Hope	60
	Judgement Day.	63
Makenna Standley	Isolated.	42
	Production	185
	Wilting.	234
Dillon Walker	The Dragonlord's Sword	172
Reagan Winsor	Birch of Borderline	20
	Praise Your Paperback	66

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROSE

Richard Barnes	Fear of the Unknown.	157
Natalie Duchesneau	A Picture's Worth	62
Richard M. Hadley	My Bigfoot Story	95
Desmond Hauser	Memoir Essay	182
G.C. Hughes	Hunger.	208
	It All Began	176
Elsa Johnson	Relationship Success	188
Sarah Lange	The Rabbit Hole Bakery: A Profile.	210
	We Were all Clueless Once.	30
Dylan Lester	Strawberry Starbursts and White Spoons.	164
Vincent L. Litle	The Hunt.	49
Storm London	Watching Your Six	11
Shadan M.	The Importance of Land of Dreams	197
Lizzy Massey	The Importance of Your Presence	43
Isabella Minatti	Beyond Words: The Broad Advantages of Dual Language Education . . .	54
	From Fandom to Fluency: How Learning a Second Language Changed My Life . .	222
Uyen Nguyen, MA	Asian Fusion World-Dream Fiction.	85
Ruqaya Raji	AI's Powerful Impact on my College Education and Reputation.	179
	Bridges That Connect Us All	154
Kale Riley	The Measure of a Dog.	228
Shaghayegh Rouhi	The Poster.	202
Courtney States	Reflection of my Childhood.	26
Richard TerKeurst	Thirty-Three Years	217
Wendy Carr Weitzel	Birthday Fireworks	36
	Cracking the Humor Code: Comparing Forms of Humor in Children's Literature	69
Hunter Weaver	The Gunslinger.	192
Chelsea K. Wilson	Everything's Going to be Alright: Shame and Mental Illness	9

EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE ALRIGHT: SHAME AND MENTAL ILLNESS

Chelsea K. Wilson • Student, Psychology

GRAND PRIZE WINNER, PROSE

It was the week of Thanksgiving 1996 when my father took his own life. My dad had just turned 33 years old. He was a normal young man with deep set hazel eyes, dark brown hair, and a baby face. He was an avid sports fan favoring the Dallas Cowboys and Kansas City Royals. While I didn't take after his love for sports, I did inherit his love for music. One of our shared favorites is the band, Pink Floyd. Their song "Wish You Were Here," always reminds me of my dad. Not long before his death, he had taken my older brother, my little sister, and myself to the local movie theater to see *That Thing You Do* starring Tom Hanks. My father, my siblings, and I made our way downtown. Before the lights went dim and the hush fell upon the theater, my dad leaned in and quietly said to us, "I know things are bad with me and your mom right now, but everything's going to be alright." The look in his eye was innocent and hopeful. He believed his own words. While I sat next to him and my siblings that night in the theater, I believed them too. None of us knew it but, looking up at the screen with wide eyed anticipation, the four of us would sit together for the last time.

When my father died, life as I knew it changed. I was young, but I was very aware of the shame I was supposed to feel regarding the subject of suicide. My mother was outcasted by members of our community, thus my siblings and I were too. Friends we ran into at the grocery store, who would normally stop for a chat, began avoiding us. Members of my mom's family refused to talk about my dad, and my dad's family refused to even put out a public funeral notice. To them, his suicide brought shame to their family. Some of my dad's family even cut off communication with us. In their eyes, we were as good as dead too. Nothing but a shameful reminder of what they wished to erase.

My father's family played a major role in his mental health struggles. When he was a teenager, he lost his own mother to suicide. His family never acknowledged it. Treating mental illness as if it didn't exist was the norm in those days and the years to follow. My father never overcame his trauma. He never spoke of suicide or mental illness and never received any kind of counselling. Being forced not to speak about mental illness and never working through his trauma only made things worse for him. Instead of getting help for his own mental illness, he self-medicated with drugs and alcohol while those around either didn't see the warning signs or flat-out

ignored them. All these factors led to his death, starting with unaddressed trauma that went untreated due to the stigma of mental illness.

I only know these few details about my dad's experience with mental illness. For myself, growing up with a parent who died by suicide created many obstacles. Besides the obvious grief and trauma, there were social repercussions. I recall the first time I was cruelly shamed over my dad's suicide. I was in first grade on the playground just after he had died. A little girl from my class ran up to me, pointing her finger and laughing, "Your dad killed himself!" I was stunned. From that point on, I kept it a deep dark secret from all my peers. Looking back now, I understand this bullying came from a small child who didn't know any better, but it reflected society's ignorance about mental illness.

I was taught by society, and often told by my mother, that "suicide is the most selfish thing a person can do." I wondered with every cold shoulder I received from a fellow student or their parents if it was because of the shameful thing I was attached to. I loathed my father for what he had done. Other than deeming him selfish, my family and I rarely spoke of him. Just like my dad struggled on his own throughout his short life, I started down the same path—a cycle created by the stigma of mental illness.

Unlike those before me, I was able to break the cycle. I couldn't have done it without enabling myself to work through my trauma and talk openly about mental illness. It took many years before I understood my father wasn't selfish, he was sick. It's so easy for society to understand that a paraplegic can't walk, or a blind person can't see. Not to say these people aren't sometimes treated unfairly, but with mental illness, it's not so easy to understand because there's little or nothing to outwardly prove it. I'm now the same age as my dad was when he lost his life. Growing up, I couldn't grasp how young he was when he died. Now that I'm older, I no longer have judgement or hatred in my heart for that young man. I only have room for empathy, compassion, and love. I see him clearly now, no matter how much shame society has put on him. I know who he was. He was a young man who was sick, existing in a society unequipped to help him. I think back to the last night I remember seeing him when he said, "Everything's going to be alright." I remember the innocence in his eyes, clinging on to hope, not knowing it was already too late for him.

WATCHING YOUR SIX

Storm London • Student

RUNNER-UP AWARD WINNER, PROSE

In the morning of November 2, 2001, a team of hand-selected force recon Marines was chosen for an intelligence mission behind enemy lines to collect data on a small Taliban group operating from within a secured compound located in the center of a small village. Taliban insurgents had been identified using guerrilla warfare tactics against United States forces as well as causing severe havoc with food, water, and medical resupply efforts to help villages in need.

The hand-chosen group of Special Forces Marines consisted of myself, my best friend Luke, and three others. Our jobs consisted of: an overwatch (person to watch your six from a specified distance and eliminate any threats quickly and quietly); a spotter (person to watch, locate targets, and assist overwatch shooting ranges); a team leader (person who takes control and makes decisions for the team's effectiveness); a combat medic (person that treats minor wounds and prepares more severe wounds for exfil); a communications expert (person that operates the main radio and all electronics for the team).

Having the highest long-range proficiency rating among the members, I was named overwatch (call sign wolf cub one). Luke, for his uncanny ability to perform calculations for distance, windage, and elevation, earned him the job as spotter (call sign wolf cub two). Sly Owl (call sign wolf cub four) was the comms (communications) expert, because he had a special knack for McGuyvering any hand-held electronics into a communications device. Rocky (call sign wolf cub three) was selected as team leader of our little misfit group, also given the nickname (of 'man') not because of his age, but because he has more missions recorded under his leadership than the other four of us put together. Lastly, our youngster of the bunch, Josh (call sign wolf cub five) who just completed field medical training, was assigned to be our corpsman (combat medic).

Before being deployed on this mission, we trained what seemed like hours on end to make our choreographed movement as near to flawless as we could get it. But every specialized operator in our line of work knows deep down nothing is or ever was perfect. Something can always go wrong. When it does, we instantly have to improvise, adapt, and overcome the new situation at hand.

Gearing up for this mission, we had to make a list of the equipment that we need. This would include: one .50. Caliber sniper rifle with a modified round suppressor screwed to the front of the barrel for muffled shots; two carbine M4 semi-automatic rifles; one semi-automatic M16 rifle with grenade launcher bolted underneath the lower receiver of the M16; several H.E. (high explosive) shells for the launcher; one S.A.W. (squad auto weapon); individual hand frees 2-way radios; five 9mm pistols; assorted hand grenades; proper camouflage clothing; one field laptop computer with satellite antenna; long range lens camera; and enough water and MRE's—meals ready to eat—for two weeks.

Our mission recon a medium sized village of about three hundred people that did not include the insurgents that were located inside a secluded concrete compound. A single wrought iron gate provided the compound's entry and exit point only. Location was roughly thirty kilometers south of the Pakistani border where the village in question was to be.

The big kahunas in charge of this mission had given specific orders to collect as much intel on the compound as possible without being caught or seen. Orders also included, but not limited to, taking pictures, uploading them to the laptop, and sending them back along with daily reports of any and all movements in and around the compound. Contents would be downloaded on a secured encrypted network and relayed back to command base. The big kahunas (officers) would make the ultimate decision to either eliminate the insurgent's leader on site quickly and quietly or make it a snatch and grab job so professional interrogators could do their job with the cell's leader at one of many black sites of undisclosed locations.

Our transportation provided to us by good old Uncle Sam was a twin rotary helicopter known as a CH-46 (or chinook). Riding in the dull grey skinned chinook wasn't the smooth as glass ride everyone would think it would be. But this oversized tin can was a hell of a lot better than taking the standard issued military Humvee, which the suspension sucked and definitely didn't come with air ride.

In this terrain taking the Humvee would be a brutal six-hour bone jarring episode. By the time the ride was over, you damn sure felt like you just went twelve rounds with world heavyweight boxer Mike Tyson. So, the chinook was the much more relaxed way to travel, it was only a short two-hour ride. The high-pitched decibel whine of the twin turbo engines made your ears ring. The pleasure of having earplugs to dampen out the noise was the only way you had to save your hearing. Another downfall was being shot at because the tin can wasn't bullet proof, and this coffin sure wasn't insulated for warmth either.

Just outside of arriving at our designated destination, we had to land twenty kilometers away. The reason for this landing being so far out is to ensure not only our safety, but the safety of the helicopter crew as well. It

also gave us a huge advantage in the element of surprise.

The night vision goggles that attached directly to the front of our helmets, making us look like four bug eyed aliens, took in dim moon-lighted night skies and in return produced a lime green backdrop and solid objects that were a contrasting dark forest green. The goggles made it possible for being able to see nocturnally, so an individual is not out walking around aimlessly in total darkness. Traipsing around in any desert you could get lost ever so easily if you have never experienced being in such a place—imagine being shrunk down to only two inches tall and stand inside a huge cat litter box and not ever finding the edge.

If the head brass sent in any regular platoon size personal (size was usually about 24 people give or take) instead of us, they would have been seen due to the vast openness. They would have been greatly outnumbered and forced into a fire fight that could have been avoided altogether. With all the inhabitants living in or residing around the village, an outsider would have no way of knowing who was friendly and who was not because everyone dressed the same. So, one had to be suspicious and downright cautious of their surroundings while being leery of every person, making this a hostile induced environment.

Having the five-man team and being trained in the art of stealth operations made it difficult and almost impossible for someone or something to spot or even locate without proper equipment. Our type of training made it seem as though we were basically ghosts-- being unseen and unheard in any type of climate or place we were inserted into was our specialty.

Strapping on gear, we proceeded moving out on the twenty-kilometer hike, while only basically stopping long enough to check our progress on the map, get a swig of water and change out our socks. Walking on this type of terrain you have to take good care of your feet and keep them dry. If you fail to complete this task, your feet will develop half dollar sized blisters, making it painful to walk and could make you a liability.

Walking for what seemed like eternity, we finally came to being within half of a kilometer away from the village. Rocky gave the hand signal to stop, whispered into his two-way radio, “Storm, you and Luke get your asses into a secure spot on top of that hill on our immediate left, set up your over watch and contact me when secure.”

As a pair of smart-ass twins, in unison, we both gave him the thumbs up and replied, “You’re the boss ol’ man.”

The only rely heard was growling like an old grizzly bear. Smiling in response to our commit, both Luke and I knew just as soon as we were able to make it back to our base safe, we were gunna really get a good thrashing up one side and down the other.

Over watch is a very important job on the team. It's the eyes for making sure ground teams stay undetected in getting their jobs done and getting every member home safe by any and all means necessary. No man gets left behind is the motto. Snipers and spotters had to pick places where a shooter can sweep his rifle in a hundred- and eighty-degrees area without ever changing or moving positions. After locating and securing a well-hidden spot, both Luke and I donned on our gullies (camouflaged garment made of colors and materials) that would make us blend into our surroundings—much like a chameleon does to camouflage itself from being detected by its predators.

I placed myself in the prone position directly behind my Barrett 50, where I would remain for the duration of this mission. In this type of position, not being able to move more than just inches at a time—due to fear of being spotted—make eating, drinking, and even having to relieve oneself of liquids difficult, but manageable. Setting up his spotters' scope, Luke, started recording all the ranges from our location to the target areas he could see around the compound into his shooting solutions notebook.

Being still as an ivory statue, I steadily peered through my Leopold scope which gives me the ability to see targets that are a mile away as if they were only standing a foot in front of me. This scope was also decked out with thermal, and night vision capability provided an upper hand to get my job done under the cover of darkness if needed. I continued to survey the local area near too far for any potential bogies or threats.

Keying up my radio, I whispered, "Wolf cub one and two in place—area clear—proceed to wolf den—over."

Laying and waiting in one spot for hours on high alert and full of adrenaline with a rifle butted up tight against your shoulder is the absolute worst if you haven't the discipline and dedication. Imagine laying in one spot for an extended period of time—stationary—no matter how uncomfortable it seems. Pins-n-needles feeling begin to get your attention starting at the base of your neck and gingerly creeping down through your spine, pelvis, and all the way to the tips of your toes. The numbness and tingling sensation become almost unbearable, much like being shocked by an electric fence. Joints start to lock up and become non-compliant (like the Tin Man in The Wizard of Oz), basically falling into a deep slumber.

To keep this from happening, one has to slowly flex each part of their muscle groups in order to keep them oxygenated and active. If unable to accomplish this, then, you are royally screwed (or in military terms FUBAR which means f*cked up beyond all repair). In an emergency bug out situation, you jump up, your body doesn't respond and the voice inside your head saying, "OH! SHIT!" falling right back down on your face. This is known by the team as "a dead situation."

Coming across in earbuds in a whispering mode, “Wolf cubs one and two—this is three—over.”

“Wolf cub three—this is two we read you—over.”

Upon the ground team’s arrival to the wolf den, a big problem that could very well get them noticed occurred.

“Wolf cub two we need help taking care of a problem here before potential shit hits the fan—over.”

As Rocky quickly relayed the coordinates, Luke was already doing his wizardry, fly by the seat of your pants, calculating for distance and elevation on moving target. Finishing his quick calculation assessment while simultaneously reaching over with his right hand tapping me on the left shoulder. He talked in a soothing gentle-like tone. His voice vibrated deep down in my ear becoming much like my very own personal Jimmy Cricket.

Guiding my right hand upward using just my fingertips to caress the outside of the rifle—much as a man caresses his lady lover’s cheek—I felt the coldness that has encased itself around the metallic gunmetal, grey-colored stock, came to a held position, and hovered just over the adjustment knob on the side of the scope.

“Elevate—two clicks—lead one and a half clicks right---.”

My thumb and forefinger delicately rotated the knob. I felt the tiny tumblers falling into place with each clicking sound that occurs. I adequately get to the desired elevation, mimicking a sloth’s movement. I repeat the same thumb and forefinger action for the knob directly on top of the scope for direction.

Through Luke’s dopage (calculations in civilian terms), I received a clear Polaroid photograph image of the intended target. The color of his eyes was of dark almonds; the sharp curvature of his nose; the brown leathery facial features due to being prolonged in the desert sun for much of his life; the salt and pepper color ingrained in the beard showing his hardship or age. This picture will be forever hanging up on my memories wall of terror for the remainder of my life’s span.

The roaming sentry had strayed off his normal route, rather by choice or by accident, heading in the direction of the wolf den. That’s what we call danger close (meaning way too close for comfort), and in return caused Rocky and the boys to get a little antsy. For them to take out the sentry target themselves without causing an alarm was a risk they weren’t going to take.

I relaxed my entire body making it become dead weight all while still lining up the crosshairs dead center on the sentry's head. Easing my right hand gently, I reached for the bolt lever on the side of my rifle to chamber a round. In one smooth fluid piston action of racking the bolt lever straight back till I couldn't anymore, I then pushed forward returning the bolt back to its original position locking into place with the all familiar sound of—"CLICK"—that was quiet as a church mouse.

"Wolf cub one declared hot ready on your call to execute."

I let my right-hand free fall, lightly floating much like a butterfly glides on the breeze of a springtime day against the outer metal skin of the rifle stopping directly beneath. I slid my index finger through the stationary trigger guard, letting it rest atop the ribbed metal trigger mechanism, only holding just enough pressure in the touch, to feel the breaking barrier point of having the no return no reset policy put into effect.

Using controlled breathing techniques, I slowed down the rhythms of my inhaling through the nose to exhaling from the mouth to have it seem as though one is not breathing at all. In doing this, my heartbeat soon followed suit, syncing together as one. Listening—feeling—the rhythmic cadence beat--the whole world around me slowing—slowing—slowiiiiing down, coming to a sudden stand still, "boom boom—boom boom---boom boom ---booom boooooom- boooooooooom—boom-boooooooooooooooooom—booom," mimicking each beat my heart produced, I squееееееееееeed back on the trigger, letting the last of the oxygen escape my deflating lungs—FAAA-PHOOMP!!!—the Grimm Reaper exits from the rifle breaking the sound barrier, but, muffled from the manufacturer armory's specially built suppressor. The recoil from the bucking of the rifle was absorbed through my shoulder, as kinetic energy being released from the propulsion of the rifle being fired found its way surging through my entire body. The only exit found was out through the bottom of my feet.

I continued to observe the aftermath of my shot. I had executed my job perfectly. Tango (target) was down. All that was left to see was a pinkish mist combined with dark grey matter splattering the cement wall, looking like an abstract painting behind where this unlucky being was walking. His lifeless body slid flawlessly down the side of the wall and came to a peaceful resting place on the desert covered floor.

Luke broadcasted across the radio, "BINGO bogy down—wolf cub three proceed as planned."

Everyone then keyed up their mics and chimed, "Nice take down shot."

WATCHING YOUR SIX

Slov and Josh low crawled out and bagged the body and then dragged the corpse off to properly dispose of it and then returned to the scene to finish ridding the place of evidence that anything ever happened there.

The remaining morning festivity we had going on stayed pretty much quiet. Our surveillance went according to plan. In everyday life it's always good to have people to watch out for you and keep you safe. In the military world, your brothers and sisters call this,

“WE GOT YOUR SIX!”

HOME

Kal O'Bryant • Student, Academic Transfer

GRAND PRIZE WINNER, POETRY

We took the car trip he planned.
His head nestled my shoulder
From the passenger seat.
We drove until daylight hid
And glowing crescent lifted
Itself into the night sky.

I turned to watch him sleep,
Lost in the peace of his
Resting face. I focused
Again on the road.
Blank brown eyes and a slim,
Antlered face stared back.

He vanished through the windshield.
I hobbled out the smoking
Steel mess, shards of window
And mirror lodged in my skin.
I found him twisted in
A ditch, clothes snagged on dry brush.

I still haven't moved his teacup
From his spot at our table.
Its white inside stained brown.
The air in our loft spun sour.
His plants wilted stem to leaf.
Silence echoed off the walls.

His absence floods every room.
Every fold in my brain.
My home is gone
And he's never coming back.

MY MIND

Haley N • Student, Academic Transfer

RUNNER-UP AWARD WINNER, POETRY

There's no such thing as silence
In my head.
Constant lapping against my skull
Like waves eroding rock.
A rip tide churning,
Bubbles bursting
Sea foam popping in my ears.
It's green and gooey
When I think,
And when a thought comes
A seagull swoops down
And plucks it away,
Right out of its fold.
Flaps his dirty wings and
Flies off with it.
The further he gets
It disappears,
And if I can, I think,
"How rude."
If I'm lucky, I'll manage
To force against the howling wind
And the rain that hurls itself
And step into the eye of the storm
To recover.

BIRCH OF BORDERLINE

Reagan Winsor • Student, Human Services

I am trapped inside the tree
Held within my conscious.
At a glance,
The birch is strikingly picturesque.
Take a longer look,
And there is disaster unknown to anyone else.

The leaves are overbearingly polychromatic.
Verdant,
Rich green.
Lurid,
Pale yellow.
Carnelian,
Mud orange.
Crimson,
Ink red.
Auburn,
Golden brown.

As the wind blows throughout my mind,
These leaves rustle.
Softly whispering to each other;
To me.

The psithurism of them
Should be beautiful.
Instead, they cause an uproar.

The wind significantly
Increases in intensity.
In return, the blades mutter
At full tilt.
Those murmurs,
Those intrusive rapid-fire thoughts,
Fill my mind to the point of destruction.
The many-hued leaves
Attach to different bronzed branches;
Linking and intertwining
To form dominant voices.

The long, thick arms
Stretch out as far as possible
Reaching all depths
Of my mind.

One voice questions,
Numerous answer.
Branches bloodily battle
Each other;
A world war
Within my psyche.

The trifling, weak scarce,
Rational twigs
Fight with the
Momentous, powerful, overflowing,
Irrational boughs.

The twigs push to succeed,
Only to break and fall endlessly.
Forgotten forever

By my hurting brain.

History repeats itself,
And so does conflict.

New branches created
By new leaves
Strike and injure and destroy
Each other.
Rationality wants so badly
To persevere,
But the weak will never
Win the war.

How long will this vicious cycle last?
That is for the
Trunk to decide.

The trunk is held by its roots.
Bleached immovable fibers,
Deep into the heavy dirt,
Entangled ancient beasts,
Full of the past,
The memories,
The trauma.

They pry at the surface,
Releasing their pungent odor
Causing sporadic flashbacks
As the leaves and branches
Carry on.

The trunk itself is massive.
A thick heavy bulk,
Upstanding,
Reaching through and above
The roots,
The branches,
The leaves.
It is the center of all the chaos.

Although this timber
Is the center,
It has no control
Over its moving parts.
Yet, this being,
This colossal foundation,
Still has its grip,
Still stands erect.

As this stock stays in one place,
It watches the madness unfold
Confused as to why this is happening,
Not knowing what to do.

The trunk is my being.
My dense hefty mass,
My core,
My true inner voice.

My gnarled old deciduous
Is spazzing
Out of control.
The edge of sporadic insanity
Oh so near.

I cannot kick,
I cannot scream,
I cannot cry.
My mind does all of that for me...
Internally.

I sit.
I wait.
I sway.
I wait.
I stare.
I wait.

The wind has come to a halt.
I know my waiting game is over.

My leaves fall of my branches,
Turning to the color
Feuille morte.

My branches are now bare and lonely,
Not having anything to feast on
It is time to cut them down.
One by one,
They disappear.

My roots pry no longer.
They shrivel back down
Into the subconscious
To be forgotten about.

The forest within
My brain

Is now extinct;
Empty.

All that is left
Is my bare trunk,
Freestanding,
Alone,
No longer afraid.

My core had survived.
My single being
Is now at peace.

Until next time.

REFLECTION OF MY CHILDHOOD

Courtney States • Student, Academic Transfer

Looking back at myself as a young girl I cannot believe how wrong I actually was about the way people should be versus how they are in reality. Growing up from the time I was 5 to about 7 ½ years old, I lived in a smaller gated community. Inside this gated community there were others with really big houses as well as ours. The house I lived in was a beautiful brick house that was 3 stories tall. In the front yard there was a beautiful pine tree that stood about 15 feet tall or higher.

At the age of 5 I just knew it was enormous. My bedroom alone was outrageously overwhelming for a child my age. I had a half bath with a walk-in closet that had shelves on one side going all the way to the ceiling. In the upstairs we had my room plus 2 other rooms which were my older brothers and my younger brothers. We even had a bathroom with double sinks. On the main floor we had 10-foot ceilings in the living room and the main entry way. In the main entry way, we had a magnificent 6-foot crystal chandelier that hung down and you could either go up the open staircase to go upstairs or walk straight through to the living room. From the living room if you went to the left you would walk into my parents' master bedroom, and if you walked to the right, it would lead you to a hallway where you could enter the kitchen, the guestroom, or the sitting room. In the basement you had a huge 6-seater theater and on the other side of the basement was my uncle's living courters. A lot of the houses in this community were unique to the people that lived inside them, but the house I will never forget was a close friend of mine. Sam's house was on top of the biggest hill in the neighborhood and he had his own skate park in the backyard for bikes, skateboards and basically anything without a motor that had wheels. We would spend hours just playing in the skatepark and that is the place where almost every parent could go and find their child was at Sam's skate park. Living in this gated community I never thought how much empathy it would give me and how humbled I am now to have the privileges I had.

When we moved into our house, I was about to start kindergarten. My older brother Chris and I were going to be riding the school bus. On the first day of school Chris and I were all ready to go and we walked to the bus stop. There we were in our new clothes, new shoes, and all of our school supplies. We arrived at school, we went into our classroom, and everything went smoothly up until recess. I was on the playground and a girl comes up to me and she starts making fun of my clothes. Her name was Kelsey. She always wore dingy tennis shoes that were always caked in dust with her ripped jeans and an old, oversized T-shirt.

She sasses, "Where did your parents get your outfit from, the goodwill?"

REFLECTION OF MY CHILDHOOD

I, being the shy 5-year-old I was, looked down at my brand-new Arizona jeans and my cool Hannah Montana shirt and began to cry and ran to the other side of the playground and sat by the old oak tree until recess was over.

Later on, at lunch she snarled at me, “Your parents can afford a big house but can’t afford cool shoes. You’re a loser!”

I responded, “Stop it my shoes are just fine! Leave me alone.”

Later on, that day school is over, and we all get on the bus. Of course, there sitting a few seats away was Kelsey. I looked in front of me a few rows up and I see her giggling and whispering to one of our classmates. I could have sworn they were talking about me because they kept leaning over to each other and then they would look back at me. Then they would look at each other and start giggling. Then the bus stops and Kelsey gets off the bus at her house. I then saw that her house is a single story double wide trailer. In the front yard there was an old rusty, sun faded swing set that was falling apart. The trailer she lived in was a pale worn out yellow with torn gold curtains that looked like they still hadn’t made their way out of the 80s. The screen door on the trailer had broken springs and didn’t latch with the screen ripped halfway up from the bottom. The front porch to get into the trailer was made of old unfinished wood that was rotting away slowly. That’s when 5-year-old me started to feel sorry for the kid that was bullying me. She didn’t have even half of the luxuries that I had.

Looking back on just this one instance of what happened as a child I realize that I was still learning what perceptions were and didn’t realize at all how they were going to affect me later on in life. I now realize why I am the way I am with my girls. We do have a lot of luxuries that most families still don’t have but I have learned to be humbled by the things that I do have. If it wasn’t for having the luxuries that I had growing up I probably wouldn’t be so willing to donate a lot of clothing, toys, electronics, and anything that my girls and I no longer need. I am always trying to find ways to give back to those in need. Some things that we do to give back is around Thanksgiving I always get a big 50-gallon yard bag, and I ask my kids go through all their old toys. We fill the bag 3/4s of the way full and we take it to the Salvation Army or Goodwill to be donated. My girls right now don’t understand the concept of donations, but as they grow older this will teach them the importance of having empathy and giving to those in need.

When I was a young girl, I never thought to myself, “Oh, how is this place that I live going to affect my perception of myself?” I never thought, “What do people think about me since I live in this neighborhood?” I now understand that everyone comes from different backgrounds, and some are going to have more than others, but others can become enraged in jealousy from what other people do have. This is why most kids start bullying other kids and what I have learned from this is that we need to teach our kids not

REFLECTION OF MY CHILDHOOD

to judge or tease other people because of what they may or may not have. Through this experience the effect it had on me has been life changing because I always make sure my kids don't go without, but I also make sure that they do not have an overabundance of things, so they understand that a little is not a lot, but a lot is not everything.

LITTLE DRAGON

Harsh • Student, Academic Transfer

So here I stand as her storm passes by.
Why is it years of rain couldn't hide my cries?
But it was the summer storm that was my alibi.
A showered embrace under warm clouded skies.
The place I hid from all of my crimes.

And the crackling fire goes out in my room.
Warm and fierce should never belong to a tomb.
But here we are, me without you.
On opposite sides of being gone too soon.
I'm bleeding out with no one to lick my wounds.

You choose now after seventeen years in?
Everything good about me holds you as the reason.
The champion that slayed my sin's legions.
But i'm still here fighting, barely breathin'
And I love you, but how is this not treason?

I owe you my world but you chose to leave it.
No! You made me choose my own bereavement!
It was your job to protect me from evils!
But I had to give the order to alone suffer my demons.
And now my Little Dragon's gone and I am left sleepless.

WE WERE ALL CLUELESS ONCE

Sarah Lange • Student, SENCAP

“Are you a Democrat or a Republican?”

I was in third grade, sitting in my elementary school library, when I asked my best friend at the time this question. When she wasn’t sure of the answer, I followed up with a clarifying question.

“Are your parents Democrats or Republicans?”

Why exactly did I ask her what party her parents belonged to? Somehow, I incorrectly deduced that your political party, just like the color of your hair, was an inheritable genetic trait. When she responded, with uncertainty, that she thought her parents were Democrats, I scoffed. My dad grew up on a dairy farm, and my mom grew up on a ranch in Western Nebraska. They were, and still are, your typical rural, Midwestern Republicans. Growing up in a polarized political landscape, I thought this would make me and my best friend incompatible buddies, even though we had been friends for four years.

Back then, I didn’t have the political literacy I do now. The idea of a “third party” would have blown my mind. I was an oblivious yet opinionated, extremely blunt kid. I didn’t understand the facts of current events, much less the people they affected. Yet in the decade between then and now, I’ve learned to comprehend current events as they happen. Learning to understand political issues and events has fostered my empathy for those affected by them, and it has developed my desire to do something to help. But before that, I was a sixth grader who had just joined the speech team.

The speech event I chose to participate in, which would shape the beginnings of my political literacy journey, was extemporaneous. I was given 30 minutes, the internet, my brain, and the choice of one out of three pressing questions in current world affairs. My task? Construct a 5-7 minute speech arguing for my particular answer to the question, memorized. In one of my first extemporaneous speeches, I discovered just how much I didn’t know about our political world.

Covid-19 was still lingering, so I was on Zoom. I logged onto the online question software, and it spit out three questions. I scanned my options, and I was drawn to a question that involved climate change. Instantly, I pictured polar bears on rapidly sinking ice sheets, an image that never left my mind. I can talk about climate change, I thought. How complicated can it be? I finalized my question selection with haste. As I started my research, though, I realized that the question wasn’t directly asking about climate

change. It asked if climate change provisions have a place in a national infrastructure bill, a more complex matter entirely. I panicked. I wasn't one hundred percent sure what infrastructure meant. Sure, I knew that roads and telephone lines were infrastructure, but the idea of a national infrastructure bill felt too broad. When I couldn't come up with the name of even one recent similar bill, I knew it was over. If I didn't know anything about these bills to begin with, how was I going to determine if climate change provisions belong in them? As my thirty-minute timer ticked down to about five, I was distraught. I had something resembling a thesis statement scribbled on my paper, but my three main points were hardly related to infrastructure. I flitted my time away trying to research a topic my young brain couldn't comprehend. I hopelessly watched the last five seconds of my time tick down. Nothing could save me now. I turned my camera to show my face on the Zoom livestream. My judges stared back at me, giving me the nod to start speaking. I started my introduction by using that image of polar bears as a hook. I tried to include background information about national infrastructure bills and climate change provisions, but I didn't know what to say. I read the question at the end of the introduction, as required, and said that my answer was yes because climate change is a pressing issue that must be addressed. The rest of the speech was a blur. I had no idea what I was talking about, and while I did my best to conceal that fact, I'm sure the high school students judging me could see right through my act. I logged off Zoom feeling one emotion. Frustration. Why hadn't I taken the initiative to learn more about the world that I live in?

After I gave that speech, I realized that in addition to domestic politics, I was also clueless about international political affairs. I didn't know why France cared so much about the Sahel region in Africa, to which the complicated answer I now know is colonialism. I was confused about why countries are so intermingled economically, militarily, and politically. To try and understand the world better, I used my Barnes and Noble gift card from my parents to acquire the book *The World* by Richard Haas, former President of the Council on Foreign Relations. I took the book with me on a family vacation to Orlando, Florida, and I cracked it open on the flight there. I read the first few chapters with incredible frustration. It was like I was a toddler learning to walk. Every time I followed a string of words, I would eventually fall into a state of perplexity. I failed to grasp why world affairs happen because of, once again, insufficient background knowledge. The fact that I didn't understand events in the world that I live in still haunted me. I needed a different approach to solve that problem.

My solution was immersion. I started every morning by reading the "Five Things" newsletter from CNN, and after that, I played the NPR "Up First" podcast. Throughout the day, I read news articles from a combination of domestic and foreign publishers. The harsh realities of our world hit me quickly, but I was a better person because of it.

On February 24th, 2022, the number one story on my CNN “Five Things” newsletter didn’t come as a surprise. Russia invaded the sovereign country of Ukraine. I had been meticulously following Russia’s buildup of troops on Ukraine’s border since late 2021. When I got to school that day, all my classmates wondered why this happened and what it meant. Fairly quickly, I realized I could explain the war to them. I finally knew enough. I understood why this happened, and what Vladimir Putin’s motivations were, even though they were disturbing, for invading. I knew that the U.S. would soon act along with other NATO countries. I knew the havoc this would wreak on global markets. I was proud but still unsatisfied with my political literacy progress.

Because I understood the facts of the war, I had room left to feel for the people it would affect. I felt for the innocent Ukrainian people, children, who would die at the hands of one evil dictator with an unthinkable desire to rebuild an empire. It was that day I discovered a new complexity in my political literacy. I was feeling empathetic towards these victims instead of just subconsciously viewing them as pawns in a mind-boggling game.

Later on in the spring of 2022, I was researching for a speech about inflation. Amid all the dismal economic reports reducing people to mere numbers, I stumbled across an article with testimony from a woman trying to support her family. Grocery prices were climbing through the roof, and like many other Americans, she was struggling to stay afloat. A year before then, I would shrug off individual human stories, believing that they were too soft. In this speech, though, I decided to break up my macroeconomic analysis with anecdotal evidence about this woman and her family. As I told her story, I realized that anecdotes are just as influential as quantitative data. I started to look beyond those oversimplifying statistics to find the struggling families they represent.

In the fall of 2023, I started my online International Relations course through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. With a week left in the course, I had a 99%, a measurement of how much I enjoyed the material and the work I put in to immerse myself in it. Yet when I saw an extra credit opportunity posted on Canvas for an extra 1% grade boost, I was interested. The task was to find a “talk” at UNL, about anything you wish, not even limited to strictly political science, attend it, and write a paper summarizing it and reflecting on it. As I scrolled through the UNL calendar for events that week, I instantly saw a perfect panel talk. The topic was “Teaching Human Rights in Times of Trouble,” and it was organized by the College of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs. I went with my sister, and I was engrossed from the start. Four professors, one from the teaching college and three in Political Science, spoke about their experiences teaching human rights principles in an increasingly grim, appalling political world. A world I had begun to understand about a year and a half prior.

WE WERE ALL CLUELESS ONCE

Each professor gave an enlightening and intelligent presentation. Then, the professors gave closing remarks and advice. I was most touched by the advice from one of the political science professors. He advised that no matter which issue you are learning about, even if it seems impossible, you can make an impact. Walking out the classroom, I felt rejuvenated. I knew that my political literacy would allow me to change the world, even if it's just in a minuscule way.

In my life now, I still don't know as much about politics and current events as I'd like. I don't think I'll ever be satisfied in that area. I am, however, ecstatic with the growth I've made in my civic knowledge. I used to think political beliefs were genetic, and not based on individual life experiences. I'll forever be thankful for extemporaneous speaking, though I don't participate in it anymore, for forcing me to do something about my ignorance of world affairs. My journey in political literacy has taken me from not understanding political events at all, to feeling for the people they affect and wanting to do something about it. Fortunately, this literacy journey is far from over. In two short years, I plan to be studying it at a university. Before that, on Tuesday, November 5th of this year, I'll cast my first-ever vote in the U.S. Presidential Election as an informed, empathetic citizen.

SOUR BEHIND HER TEETH

Haley N • Student, Academic Transfer

She is a mirror
That does not reflect.
Eyes that shine
But never speak.
A delight so sweet
Hide a travesty.

A force so great
Even the guilty break.
The webs she spins,
The words she stains,
With the goal to take
That treat of life.

A yacht
Adrift at sea.
Her mind a valise,
The stem of herself.
Never lost
But can't be found.

A twisted spirit.
She lifts away each breath
And vanishes into the wind.
The honeysuckle
Behind the teeth,
The sour after the sweet.

CRISP AIR

Erica Howard • Student, Academic Transfer

In the peak of dawn, when the frost kisses leaves,
The air turns crisp, a magic wand it weaves.
Each breath a crystal, sharp and clear,
A whispered promise of autumn near.

The sun peaks through the mist, arrives a golden hue,
As if painting the sky with morning dew.
The world is woken, shivering and bright,
Inhaling the chill, hearts taking flight.

Leaves crunching underneath our feet, a symphony so sweet,
As footsteps dance to nature's beat.
The scent of wood smoke, a cozy embrace,
Invites us closer to the fireplace.

The sky, a canvas of blue,
Where geese in formation carve paths anew.
Their sounds echo, with a wild, ancient call,
Guides them southward, as seasons fall.

Let's savor the brisk, fleeting grace,
The crisp air kisses upon our face.
For in its chill, we find renewal and song,
A reminder that change is where we belong.

BIRTHDAY FIREWORKS

Wendy Carr Weitzel • Instructor, English

March 7, 2021 was my 39th birthday. My family of six had lived in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, for nearly four years. That birthday marked a full year of on-again, off-again Covid quarantines and a strict closed-borders policy that kept COVID-19 mostly out of the Kingdom, but it kept us in.

My birthday gift from the government was the first dose of AstraZeneca, a prickly hope that things might change. My gift to myself was a sour cream chocolate Bundt cake with dark chocolate ganache. The cake was a tradition, six years running. After dinner, we gathered around the cake, reverential, in our approach—there's a reason I make the same cake every year. I lit my "Saudi" candle, which burned more like a firework.

Then came the Allred birthday song, named for my mother's family, who, for five generations running, has added an extra verse, one per generation. The song lasted over two minutes (and for people hunkering over a cake, that can feel like an eternity). It started with a verse of "Happy birthday to you," followed by a slight pause while all surrounding the cake shared sidelong glances, interpreted as both, "Are you ready for this?" and "Isn't our family the best?" I had exchanged those glances hundreds of times. That moment, less than a second long, contained a feeling of closeness, held only by us, and sung only for the ones we loved the most.

My husband, to his credit, joined in singing the Allred birthday song the first time he heard it. Fifteen years later, on my 39th birthday, he led the charge.

"Happy, happy birthday, we'll sing loud and cleeeeeeeaaarrrr," he belted, while my four children outshouted him to see who could perform the worst impromptu operatics. Twenty seconds later, the song took a dark turn with the verse added by my generation, nearly thirty years before: "There is sickness in the air, people dying everywhere, but happy birthday."

As I sang the words (yes, I always sang along with my own birthday song), I felt a devious delight in this verse in particular. True, COVID-19 had taken over the world, but somehow those lyrics allowed me to subvert its deadly power for just a few moments and turn that sorrow into joy. In a birthday song, even a global pandemic made me smile.

"It's been a good day," I said after the song, dishing out four equal pieces of cake for my four equally-loved children, to avoid the inevitable complaint that "Their piece is bigger!" It seemed a silly argument on that day, because everyone knew I would get the biggest piece.

BIRTHDAY FIREWORKS

At 7 PM, together, happy, and filled, my family walked up the stairs to bed, a picture of satisfied tranquility that was well-earned, after a full year of too many people being stuck in too small a space. This was a good day, the kind that had chocolate cake.

A light streaked across the sky that lit up the window.

"Fireworks," my son exclaimed. "For your birthday."

Then thunder rumbled through the house, rattling the glass in the panes and knocking our family pictures from the bookshelf. Two thoughts struck like simultaneous lightning: "Missile attack," and "How do I know that?"

I tucked two kids under each arm and pulled them back downstairs. My husband ran outside.

"He should know better," I thought, obeying my impulse to hide, shelter, and protect. He followed his own impulse to investigate the threat, protective in his own right.

I had read the monthly Embassy emails that instructed us what to do in case of missile attacks: stay inside, turn off the lights and close the curtains, wait for further instructions. But I had become complacent. The Embassy's emails were an accepted normalcy of living in the Middle East; I didn't even read them anymore.

But in a moment, my solid ground gave way to the slick slip of animosity.

In the living room, I closed the drapes. I moved the couch to the middle of the room, brought blankets and pillows, and stared into four anxious sets of eyes. "We're having a sleepover in the living room tonight. For my birthday."

What else could I do?

"Who's bombing us, mom?"

"Are they going to do it again?"

"Where's dad?"

"I don't like this."

Twenty minutes later, I ran outside. My husband stood on top of the sabkha formation across the street—a hardened sand hill that usually acted as a playground, but also provided a view to the northeast. A smoke plume rose behind him, revealing the missile's landing site.

"Did they hit the gate house?" I asked.

"If they didn't, they got very close."

BIRTHDAY FIREWORKS

Neither of us knew who “they” were. It didn’t matter. At that point, nothing mattered except the four kids huddled in the living room. And the fact that the gate house was only half a mile from our house.

“Do you think they’re okay?”

This time “they” meant the guards, who, on a normal day, waved their loaded guns at me without a second glance, indicating that I could enter the compound. They knew my face, and I knew theirs. Were they safe? Were they alive? Were they protecting our compound, or running into their offices and closing the drapes?

Texts flooded in from neighbors.

“Is everyone okay?”

“Why didn’t the sirens go off?”

Apparently, we weren’t the only ones surprised by the attack.

My bones still ached from the explosion because my house, my family, and my life stood directly in the missile’s path.

But we didn’t hear the sirens because there weren’t any.

We didn’t hear the planes because we were singing happy birthday.

GREEN GAZE

Olivia Schwickerath • Student, Music

Into your eyes
Like swirling pools of murky waters
I lose myself.
Deep in their longing,
Oh, I am tossed at sea,
And they capture my soul
And won't set it free.
I'm locked into your green gaze
Your eyes sing to me
And I know that the rest of my days
Wherever you are
Is where I'll be.

ENCHANTMENT

Harsh • Student, Academic Transfer

Only she gets me.
Every dark embrace,
Is my remedy.
Removes all haze,
and my enemies.
No answer hid within her phase,
Nothing forbid by her reflected gaze.

Truth is stars,
They have much to say.
Something of art,
can be found in their waves.
It was Sartre
who found dreams fade,
if you believe the sounds of everyday.

Her cloak though holds
what you might believe.
If you see that gold
isn't found in sieves,
but in stories told
Of great heroes and beasts.
That's where I go for a little peace.

SOLIPSISM

Erin M. Rengan • Student, Dual Credit/SENCAP

A lonely existence
Just self-subsistence

How miserable it must feel
As if nothing is real

An empty belief
With no sense of relief

Alone
Without love to be shown

When one lives like this
They live without a sense of bliss

ISOLATED

Makenna Standley • Student, Early Childhood Education

“No snow. Lots of rain.”

Mid-December.

Subzero day in and day out.

White specs have yet
to fall from the sky.

An abundance of individuals
like no snow.

No closed roads,
covered in a blanket of white.
No shoveling the driveway,
when it grows too high.

Yet I know nothing good will come
from a winter with no flakes.
The chill will have more potential
to slice through your bones.
The wait for the flakes to show
will drive one mad.

Rainfall from dusk till dawn.
Freezing the moment
it greets the ground.
Creeping its way onto
everything left out.

Leaving no surface safe
from the hazard to come.

THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR PRESENCE

Lizzy Massey • Student, Academic Transfer

On September 11th, 2019, I found myself in a car on a winding country road heading to what seemed like the middle of nowhere. But it wasn't headed too nowhere. In addition, I wasn't on my own; my family and I were making the short trip from Vermillion, SD, to Centerville, SD, a humble small town. As we drove, I began to think of all the other things I could have been doing with my adventurous cousins, swimming, hiking, or kayaking. We were always able to have a good time together. At the time I was fourteen and my cousins were seventeen, fifteen, and eleven. However, I was begrudgingly headed to a boring small town in the middle of nowhere nursing home. Despite my hesitation to visit my seventy-five-year-old grandpa in a nursing home I was going anyway because I loved him. I wasn't thrilled that my grandpa had to move into a nursing home because he had dementia. My grandma couldn't take care of him all by herself anymore. She had done her best for a long while but, it had become just too much.

We arrived at the nursing home, a long brick building with multiple wings branching out and a fenced garden, if you could call it that. To me it looked more like a cement path with sparse grass in between. Walking in, I was hit with the familiar yet unappealing scent of disinfectant and musty sort of old house smell. Me, my mom, dad, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, cousins, and grandma entered looking like a parade with grandma the leader. Walking past I noticed a few residents sitting in chairs along the wall watching television or just saying hello to anyone around. I concluded, not much was going on. I kept walking and as I passed thought how boring it must be to sit all day and watch tv, eat soft food, and maybe have a conversation with anyone who happened to pass by.

We entered a small room with two beds inside and a curtain between them. There were two beds because my grandpa had to have a roommate in the nursing home. This was because of how full they were. There was a window that cast a decent amount of light into the room, so it wasn't completely gloomy. But then my gaze fell on my grandpa sitting there alone in his wheelchair. His snow-white hair looked even brighter in the sunbeam. I studied his face with its many wrinkles from laughing and his kind blue eyes. His face lit up when we saw us immediately radiating more joy than before.

My aunt asked my grandpa, "How are you daddy?"

My grandpa replied, "As well as I can be."

Things seemed dismal to me in the small, shadowy, beige room. However,

I had brought my ukulele so I suggested, “We should sing a song together.” I played some of my favorite songs on the ukulele. Then we sang some traditional hymns such as my grandpa’s favorite, “I’ll Fly Away”. Everyone seemed to enjoy this even my brother because it seemed to make grandpa happy. I thought at least I can lighten the mood somehow.

Sometime later though I needed to escape the beige of the nursing home so me my cousins and my siblings decided to venture out and visit the nearby river. The water churned below us as me and my cousins joked around like we often did. Looking at the river I remembered how much my grandpa had loved the outdoors, especially the river. We had spent so many summers out on the water together. All our family had enjoyed numerous hours together outside in each other’s company. I realized that is why disliked the nursing home so much. It was such a drastic change from all our previous times spent together as a family. It saddened me now to realize that grandpa really couldn’t go back out there on the water with us.

The nursing home was his residence currently. I asked myself, what I could do about that? It occurred to me that my grandpa couldn’t go to the river anymore, but he could still see the people who he had made so many memories with there. I understood that is what really mattered. Seeing the people, he loved so dearly. When we returned to the nursing home doors that day my thoughts on the place shifted. It may not be somewhere I wanted to be, but I certainly needed to be there to bring joy to the life of my grandpa. As we drove back home on that country road something in my mindset had shifted. I watched the fields of corn and soybeans fly by while I promised myself, I would not forget that even though I did not want to visit my grandpa he needed me, and I loved him.

Now four years later I look back on this time of visiting my grandpa. I would not change any of it for anything. Even though I grew a loathing of nursing home food and that distinctive smell. Those days of visiting him in the nursing home may not have been easy to accept but now that he is gone, I appreciate them even more. I learned to be more attentive, slow down, let go of what you could do, and be where you are present without distraction. It saddens me to remember my visits there and never seeing hardly any other visitors. Maybe that is why we seemed to be such a spectacle. I encourage you to go out and visit your elderly relatives as they may not be here when you get around to it. Even if you do not have relatives in the nursing home you can still visit them. The people there are all so friendly. Many nursing homes have visitor programs where you can come visit and do a craft or join in singing a song. I hope you explore these options further in a nursing home near you. I hope we can make visiting a nursing home a commonplace happening together.

FOILED PLANS

Hailey Morris • Student, Academic Transfer

Orange after orange bottles stack high anti-depressants pile.
The stove sizzles.
Flip, crisp, flip, repeat.
Counter jug of grape juice, he chugs the bottle whole,
takes his meds, and eats.
Glances back at family photos.
His wall of memories.
Nostalgia, reminiscence, sleep.
Daily he repeats this routine.

Orange after orange, his favorite color,
more than halfway full, brinks at the edge.
He swings the skillet, hits the bottles, and they scatter.
Flies swarm the cluttered kitchen,
and swallow the bottles,
steal the food,
and in the chaos of it all-
he falls to the floor,
cries a lot, stares at the wall.
Nostalgia, reminiscence, sleep.
For the first time in a decade.
His schedule-
is ruined.

THOUGHTS OF YOU, AT 33

**Uyen Nguyen, MA • Staff, Administrative Assistant I,
Financial Aid**

Here I am at 33.

I lie here reflecting as I sip on mango green tea.

The aroma calms me as the tears roll down, thinking, I will try my best,
but the thoughts of adulting are like failing a test.

How has it been 30 years? Time zooms by, and it is getting harder to keep track.

Where did the time go? Why aren't you here? Slow down, world. Cut me some slack.

Like a discombobulated foal searching for mom,
as my zodiac sign fears, galloping off, trying to stay calm.

Are you still there to continue to guide me?

I am helpless without you, my poor vision like a blind bat trying hard to see.

Out searching for guidance but invisible to trace
thinking everything is a meaningless race.

The Japanese cherry blossom scent from our fancy coats shown in the photos I see,
so many adventures together, with our big family tree.

Why is it so hard to say goodbye?

Life's uphill battles, searching for an umbrella as the clouds begin to cry.

Remembering our mother-daughter moments, out having fun
bathing at the beach and chilling in the sun.

Help chase away the storm to help me succeed,
time and time again, searching for jobs on Indeed.

Just mindlessly working and not getting smarter,
working like robots, like needing to know the ABCs to file boxes, are not any
harder.

Thank you for the sign; I needed a new job.

Stress-free and drama-free, trying not to look like a slob.

THOUGHTS OF YOU, AT 33

I am studying my best as a creative writer to make you proud.
Some fields needed more than a bachelor's degree, with too much competition
in the crowd.

So here I am, reaching for the stars to complete my Master of
Arts degree.

A second chance at a better college experience may not be a breeze.
Watch and see. I will write a book and achieve my goals. Create better
opportunities.

Here I am at 34, with a thirteen-month-old daughter, my sweet Vivianna

The last four letters, -ANNA,
represent your biblical namesake

My new little blessing is the one who alleviates all heartache.

Please continue to guide Vivi and me as I graduate with a 4.0 GPA.
Help me be a good mom as I balance my writing world to publish that
book someday.

Fill Vivi's bookshelf with a children's book series by me.

Just wait and see.

Like rainbows in the skies and the clouds hovering above the
sky so blue

Once my book of poetry is complete, I will dedicate it to you.

FUTURE AS IT TURNS INTO THE PRESENT

Erin M. Rengan • Student, Dual Credit/SENCAP

A path with an unknown destination
Full of fears including annihilation

No shortage of trials and tribulation
With very few moments of relaxation

Life continues on without a care
Leaving me wondering if I was ever there

It isn't real, that's what some say,
But I believe they've been lead astray

-future as it turns into the present

THE HUNT

Vincent L. Litle • Student

Early morning getting ready for the hunt, it was my first time going out hunting. I was flooded with emotions of anxiety and excitement, bouncing off of everything. I was ten years old trying to get ready before my friend Boston's dad came to pick me up. I had to get my rifle, ammunition, coat, boots, gloves, overalls and my orange hunting vest. I checked not once, but three times to make sure all my gear was ready. Roger showed up at 4:30 that morning making sure that we would have enough time to get to our spot where we were going to be hunting.

Roger wasn't your typical deer hunter. He didn't like using blinds or tree stands. It wasn't as exciting as tracking your prey. So it was going to be a learning experience for me. I only had the basic knowledge of tracking which I found out was not much other than being able to point out the different animal tracks.

It was a chilly morning; frost covered the ground and my breath mist in the air. We got to our hunting area around five o'clock. While I started getting our hunting gear ready, Roger gifted me my first set of antlers. This wasn't our first time out here. We scouted the area days before, so we knew that there were deer in the area.

Roger pointed out the tree line that we would enter to start our day. I wanted to know why he chose to enter this part of the area. Roger said it had a small trail that led to a water source. He then explained to me that it was a game trail, one frequently used. That's why there were so many different animal tracks; the small trail was more dirt than grass.

On the way he would point out tracks and ask what they were and if I knew where they were heading. I spotted racoon, squirrel, rabbit, and fox tracks that I had a little trouble identifying. Once we got further in, Roger got really quiet, waving at me to do the same and to step carefully. The hunt was on.

He showed me some scratches on some of the trees where bark had been scratched off. Said it was deer rub. That they do it to rub the felt off their antlers. He also pointed out the deer droppings. Roger was training me on how to track them and to tell how old a track or sign might be.

Then it was my turn to take the lead. I started to squirm like a worm because of my nervousness. I tried not to make a sound, but to my ears it sounded like I was walking on bubble wrap. I tiptoed around, pointing out the different signs. This made it slow going because I had to ask Roger

questions and for help. I asked why some of the deer tracks weren't as deep as some of the others. Roger said the ground could have been harder when the deer came through here or the deer that made those tracks didn't weigh as much. At one point, Roger had to stop me because I didn't notice that I walked us in a circle. I could feel the heat rising in my cheeks from embarrassment, hoping it wouldn't show through my already rosy cheeks.

He helped me get back on the right track. We could hear what we thought was movement close by, but the foliage from the bushes and trees hampered our line of sight. We found out a little later that it was just dead branches falling out of the trees. About a half hour later, we could hear running water, so we slowed to a snail's pace listening for any sounds of animals. All we could hear were the birds waking up, chirping and fluttering their wings letting us know that dawn was upon us.

We looked around for the perfect spot to sit and take a break. Steam came off our heads when we took our hats off because of the trek through the woods. We took sips of hot cocoa to warm our bellies. While taking a break, I looked around for signs of deer. I could see faint deer prints heading toward the water, so we picked up and headed out slowly.

We followed them and came upon the stream. The prints here looked more recent. There were no deer in the area, so we fanned out looking for where the deer might have gone. I gave a small whistle to get Roger's attention. I found tracks that looked like deer crossed through the stream, so we found a better way to cross. There were a lot of depressions on the ground. At first it was hard to tell what they were. Following the trail, it looked like multiple deer went through here. We finally came to a clearing with tall grass that swayed in the light breeze.

We stayed hidden about fifteen yards inside the tree line, looking out over the clearing for deer. I saw movement to the left side of the clearing but could not identify what it was, so I slowly raised my rifle up enough to look through the scope. I still couldn't see what it was, but the grass was moving. We took up positions about ten feet apart and I pulled out the antlers to make it sound as if a new buck was coming into the area. I rattled the antlers together to see if there would be any reaction. The sound was like a rattle. I waited a second or two and did it again. A few heads popped up. I could see a few does and a fawn.

Movement caught my attention. One hundred yards out in the trees, I could just make out a rack of a buck but couldn't tell how big it was. Slowly the buck started to come out, and I could tell it was massive. When I counted the points, I almost stopped breathing. My breath caught in my throat. I started shaking. It was a ten-point buck, the biggest I've ever seen in person.

I pointed this out to Roger who gave me a thumbs up. He pointed at his

THE HUNT

rifle and then at me to take the shot. I was flooded with adrenalin. Time just seemed to stop. All my senses were in overdrive. The sounds of the birds, swaying of the grass were clear and crisp; the brown, green, and reddish orange colors were more vibrant. I could smell the moisture in the air and the musky odor of the buck, as well.

I raised my rifle to take aim. In my rush to get the shot, I forgot to chamber a round, so I slowly pulled the bolt back while keeping my eyes on the buck, pushing the bolt forward. When I locked the bolt in place, it clicked. The buck stopped, head popped up. It heard me. It started looking around for threats and listening for any sound out of place, alert for any sign of danger. We were down wind, so I knew it couldn't smell us. I held my breath hoping that the buck wouldn't get spooked and run away. I waited. It felt like forever. Since the buck didn't sense any danger, it turned and started eating the grass.

I let out the breath I was holding in. While it was turning, I remembered where to aim, the spot behind the front shoulder, and took aim. I took a few short breaths to calm my nerves. I squeezed the trigger slowly and fired. I saw all the deer jump and run into the trees. I couldn't tell if I hit the buck or not. Roger came over saying he didn't have a clear shot to help bring it down.

We went over to where the buck was when I shot it. We found bright red, frothy blood on the ground and spray on the grass. Roger helped me track the buck. While following the blood trail he told me that I got a lung shot which is the reason for the color of blood and the frothiness as well. I got a lucky shot because the buck only ran about twenty-five yards into the trees then dropped. I was so happy I cried. But I was also sad that I took the deer's life.

I sat on the ground by the buck petting it while tears ran down my cheeks. Roger told me it was okay, that feeling the way I felt meant I had a kind heart and that this was the life of a hunter. The hunt was over.

GOLDEN SKIES

Olivia Schwickerath • Student, Music

Soaring for hours
Lost in your eyes
More lovely than flowers
I can't disguise
How I feel about you...
Dreamy soul
Sparkling intensity
Can't let you go
Feeling the pull
Never will I leave your side
Even if I've died.

CRAQUELURE

Harsh • Student, Academic Transfer

It was a crime nobody told her,
That she did not have scars,
On her it was craquelure.
That she was not marred,
It is part of her allure.
The place where stars peek through the clouds.
Where her guard slipped and let her heart shine proud.

It was plain, no small hint to me.
That all that glowed,
The Japanese call Kintsugi.
Seams of gold that ran to her bones,
Told stories of sin and the holy.
Making her known to those that cared,
That it's not what she owns but what she can bear.

A word was all it takes.
To tell her the strongest metals,
Require the hottest flames.
That we must lose our petals,
To bloom in Springs.
But our greatest battle is often with silence.
Solitude being the death rattle of giants.

BEYOND WORDS: THE BROAD ADVANTAGES OF DUAL LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Isabella Minatti • Student, Academic Transfer

Did you know that bilingual education structured as we know it today is a relatively new thing in the US? Bilingual education was always talked about and, at a certain level applied everywhere, but it was just after the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) implemented in 1967, adding to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that classes as we know today came into the picture. The act did not enforce anything, but it highly encouraged schools to implement bilingual classes. Those classes were initially to help non-native students transition into English-only classrooms. “The premise of BEA was to provide part of the instruction in the student’s native language to ease the transition into mainstream English classrooms.” (Polanco and Luft de Baker 425). It started with part of the instructions given in the native language, but the main goal was to facilitate the transition into an exclusive English classroom, today called Transitional bilingual (TBE).

It is important to point out that according to Polanco and Luft Baker’s article, both with PhDs from Southern Methodist University and background in education and bilingual education, “Goal of the transitional bilingual education program was to use the native language (L1) of the students to develop the new language (L2)”. (425). The reason for those classes was not to develop a bilingual student, who would communicate and have social and academic skills in both their first language and English, but to ensure proficiency in English, looking forward to putting that student in an English-only society. Despite efforts and government guidelines to improve education for people who don’t speak English as their first language, the Federal Education Policy sticks to the idea that using the learners’ native language (L1) can help them shift to English. The goal being to make sure they can actively take part in the job market. This rule applies no matter what method is used. (Polanco and Luft de Baker 425). There is still not an exclusive method that schools need to go by, but many of them go off the traditional TBE or Transitional Bilingual Education, developing just English speakers, not bilinguals. However, schools and society are losing a big opportunity in this situation.

According to Jim Cummin’s theory discussed in Polanco and Luft Baker’s article developed in 1970 “The development of competence in L2 is partially a function of the type of competence already developed in L1 at the time when intensive exposure to L2 begins” (427). This acknowledges the idea

that for a person to learn a second language is more advantageous if the same already has knowledge in their first one, an option to be considered is dual language classes. Dual language classes should be implemented in schools, as they not only facilitate the development of English proficiency for non-native speakers but also offer the advantage of bilingualism for both non-native and American students, which can contribute to brain and developmental changes while also providing significant health benefits.

The most used method nowadays is still Transitional Bilingual Education which has its problems. The method is not designed to form bilinguals but to help in the transition between languages. Its main goal of providing English Proficiency has proven its success with more than 67.8 million people in the US speaking more than English at home according to the U.S. Census Bureau report by Dietrich and Hernandez. This method gives people the capacity to participate and contribute to American society, while also giving them the 'English tool' that is going to help with economic opportunities, such as jobs and bond connections, easing into establishing a good life for themselves and their family. In the words of Polanco and Luft de Baker "TBE programs address the fundamental promise of education as a tool providing access to economic opportunities and social mobility in the American society" (427). It takes care of the English, but it leaves a gap between learners and their mother language.

A solution to this problem can be the implementation of Two-Way Immersion (TWI) also known as Dual Language Education. This immersion uses English and any alternative partner language - Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Russian, French, etc. – in the same classroom to teach diverse subjects in both languages for both native and non-native speakers. The difference between this model of bilingual education and other immersion programs is that "It promotes an environment of equity that values the language and culture of all students in the classroom." (Polanco and Luft de Baker 428). It doesn't just focus on the non-native but also on the Americans and the English language and culture. The approach doesn't only target non-native speakers; it also considers Americans and emphasizes understanding both the English language and culture. TWI (Two-Way Immersion) not only encourages the use of both languages but also focuses on how learners engage in academic and social situations and dialogues in both English and the partner language. It doesn't replace one language for another, but rather help non-natives achieve English proficiency and stay in contact with their mother language while doing the same for natives to the partner language.

The most used models for dual language education programs are the 90:10 or 50:50 model. The 90:10 model works by teaching the kids in the partner language 90% of the day and the other 10% in English. Many programs use this one for the beginning of the program when classes contain just non-native speakers, and they are still developing and learning the first language. It can be used before introducing English and English

native speakers in the classrooms, but the ratio will gradually change. The final goal is to get into the 50:50 model when half of the day kids will be taught in English and the other half in the partner language, according to the toolkit “Two-Way Immersion Education: The Basics” by Howard through the Center for Applied Linguistics. This method “Give all students the opportunity to maintain and develop oral and written skills in their first language while they simultaneously acquire oral and written skills in a second language.” The outcome of two-way immersion is bilingualism and biliteracy for all the participants in those programs, American and non-native students. Which can be beneficial for their brain development and function but also for their health.

Being bilingual or multilingual not only helps you communicate with different people in different languages but can also bring beneficial changes to your brain and cognitive skills. Since bilinguals are forced to switch between languages a lot, for translating something or even daily, having two languages in their brain forces them to work extra hard and some areas of their brains can show differences when compared to brain images from monolinguals as stated by Polanco and Luft de Baker. The dorsolateral prefrontal cortex is “The brain that plays a large role in executive function, problem-solving, switching between tasks, and focusing while filtering out irrelevant information.” (Nacamulli) and can be strengthened with this switching game happening in bilinguals’ heads. Not just this area of their brain but the anterior cingulate cortex, the bilateral supramarginal gyrus, and the left inferior frontal gyrus can get stronger. Those are regions focused on comprehension and production of language, and it is involved not just in linguistic but also non-linguist cognitive control according to Polanco and Luft de Baker’s article.

Having proficiency in two languages also improves their subcortical brain areas associated with sensory processing as shown by studies discussed by Marian and Shook. In an experiment with both monolingual and bilingual, they listen to simple speech sounds, such as syllables, without any background noise and watch how their brain responds to it. The experiment concludes that “Bilingual listeners’ neural response is considerably larger” (Marian and Shook 6) which means their blood flow was greater than the monolinguals’ in response to the sound. That means their neural activity was greater than monolinguals’. Concluding that not just cognitive control mechanisms affected by bilingualism, such as the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex talked about previously, but also the sensory processes. In addition, bilingualism can affect the brain’s structures. The most correlating and known one is having higher gray matter volume in the left inferior parietal cortex, according to Marian and Shook this acquisition is due to higher and earlier proficiency in an acquired language (7). Gray matter volume helps them control movement, takes care of memory and even emotion, moreover, can help in the task of balancing the two developed languages.

Learning a second language not only changes our brains and improves

their functioning but also develops our speech, writing, and reading skills. Participating in a Two-Way Immersion program brings oral proficiency in both languages being used. On the English side, both groups will progress and develop the English language in equal amounts since both will have a background in the language, that way improving in the same direction and consistency. Now for the partner language, Americans will certainly have higher growth, but that does not mean they will be better in the partner language than the non-natives, but that they started a step lower in the partner language proficiency and will be catching up with natives. The study conducted by Howard, Christian, and Genesee in 2003 analyzed exactly this: Spanish and English oral language development.

The study was performed with 131 Native Spanish Speakers and 118 Native English Speakers in 11 Spanish/English TWI programs across the United States. They used a modified version of the Student Oral Proficiency Assessment for students between third and fifth grade. The study showed that oral English proficiency of both groups got scores in the mid to high 4 range – on a scale of 0 to 5. In Spanish both groups progressed but Native English Speakers showed greater growth since they started with a much lower Spanish level.

Not just oral but writing development will occur in students attending a TWI program. The same study by Howard, Christian, and Genesee also covers writing progress. This shows that English speakers tend to have a higher score in English writing than in their Spanish writing, while “As a group, the native Spanish speakers appeared to have much more balanced writing skills in the two languages, while the native English speakers were more dominant in English” (Howard, “The Development” 20). Showing that TWI programs can be more beneficial for non-native speakers’ writing skills than the opposite. But that is not bad nor surprising since most non-natives come from a bilingual home environment, while English speakers mostly speak just English at home. Lastly participating in a TWI program can help the reading development of those groups. English speakers will be better at English reading than Spanish reading, and the opposite is true for non-native speakers according to Howard, Christian, and Genesee’s study. Being slightly better in their mother language than the second one is reasonable, thinking about each kid’s community context, how they interact, and what language they speak more outside of the school environment.

In summary, assessing developmental changes in both groups shows that for this study the Spanish speakers had a more valuable advantage in their development. “Taken together, these findings lend support to the notion that the native Spanish speakers in these programs tend to have more balanced biliteracy skills than the native English speakers” (Howard, “The Development” 25). That can be explained because non-native speakers who participate in a bilingual community and household are more likely to use both languages at school and outside of school, while native speakers will use just English outside of school. It can also be considered the literacy

practice, or the kids' ability to read and write, will vary at home. Thinking again about the context in which native and non-native speakers are and socioeconomic differences it can be discussed that English speakers' parents might engage in reading and writing activities at home, while the non-native speakers' parents might not. That can determine a gap in English speakers' literacy abilities in the English language and the partner language. While Spanish speakers without literacy practice at home can have a similar level of literacy ability in both languages.

Exercising the brain your whole life with a second language does not just bring benefits at school and in the early learning process even physical to your brain, but also your health. "The heightened workout a bilingual brain receives throughout its life can also help delay the onset of diseases, like Alzheimer's and dementia by as much as five years." (Nacamulli). Learning a second language can contribute to your brain's "cognitive reserve" which is the brain's ability to use different mechanisms and improvise to find other ways of functioning to cope with brain damage, which happens during aging. Bilinguals can keep that improved memory and executive functioning - flexible thinking, self-control, and memory - longer than monolingual people.

Being bilingual also can potentially delay the onset of diseases such as Alzheimer's and dementia by "5.1 years later than the monolingual average" (Marian and Shook 8). Even sometime after that later onset, bilingual's brain atrophy is equal to monolingual bilinguals', and they showed better physical signs than them, proving that learning a second language can help your brain with coping skills for aging brain damage that way leading you to have a better physical response to Alzheimer's.

In conclusion, the incorporation of Dual Language Programs in schools could be beneficial not only for non-native students' proficiency but also for American students' bilingualism. It can bring not just fluency in two languages, but bilingualism and biliteracy to improve kids' development in speech, writing, and reading for both languages. Also improves brain functioning, expanding cognitive control mechanisms and sensory processes, which can lead to delaying the onset of degenerative brain diseases such as Alzheimer's and dementia by 5 years.

But there are lots of things that keep the implementation of this program in school and one of them is how American society sees foreign languages, especially Spanish. America is an English-only country right now and that is due to the hesitation in supporting bilingual programs because of judgment in people who cannot speak fluent English. This way of thinking depreciates the language and makes it not a prestige to learn. In Canada for example we all know that the bilingual programs for English and French worked, and the country is considered a bilingual country with both English and French as official languages. That is because both languages were seen as a prestige to know in society. Now in America Spanish is seen as a less prestigious

language than English which makes it difficult for bilingual programs to grow and develop, because it needs participation from both parties, Americans, and non-natives, to work well.

Another limitation of this program is teaching staff and professional training. The goal of the program is bilingualism so consequentially bilingual teachers would be preferred. But finding bilingual teachers for each subject can be hard or even impossible and paying for a translator in each class can also be a challenge. In addition, staff would need professional training regarding how the program would work and how to be efficient and set the kids up for success.

The implementation of a Dual Language Program might be challenging, but, but the outcomes make the effort worthy. The long-term results can be advantageous not just for the students but for the American society as well. It would help achieve proficiency for non-natives, as well as bilingualism and biliteracy for Americans and foreigners and that would bring a health and development advantage transforming the society into a more culturally aware and intellectually advanced. Future studies and research are necessary but bilingual education is valuable and worth the challenge.

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HOPE

Nicholle Aileen Soukup • Student, Transitions

Not alone, although yet so lonely.
Here but way far gone.
Having knowledge which is the better path,
Although not sure how to get back on.
In the same town I have always lived in,
Yet never felt further from home,
Sometimes fearing I'm not capable of making it on my own.
Looking for the brighter side, trying to find the sun.
Wondering when all the action, stopped being so much fun.
To live the life I have longed for, with no more tears or sorrow,
Hoping to discover a new and happier tomorrow. ❤️

I wrote this about 23 years ago. It still Stands True Today.

STRANDED AT SEA

Hailey Morris • Student, Academic Transfer

A fallen angel lies-
in a hole, surrounded by soil.
Amongst widespread grasslands,
bodies of bright greens sway,
vengeful like tidal waves-
of the open sea.

Her body hates her,
as she tries to flee.
She feels trapped,
like a bird in a cage.
Light scorches directly-
in her beady black eyes,
she tries to fly.
But is left to die, slowly.

Wings that swept too high,
led to her fall in defeat.
She sank far beneath.
Like a stranded boat,
who floats at first,
only to exist in vain,
before sinking.

A PICTURE'S WORTH

Natalie Duchesneau • Student, Academic Transfer

It is late June in 2011. It's so hot that it felt like I was being smothered the second I stepped outside. Our parents wanted a picture of us kids by the backyard garden but decided the living room would work. Mom says the green couch cover is ugly and the walls are too white and the carpet isn't white enough. But it'll have to do.

Dad messes around with a cheap disposable camera while Mom tries to get everyone to smile. "A nice smile," she says. "No scowling." My younger brother is the first to obey and flashes his baby pearly whites at the camera. His curly blonde hair sticks up in all directions like he stuck silverware in a light socket. He dangles his legs off the couch and swings his feet inches above the gray-white carpet. Our new box fan blows hot air around.

My twin sister sits crisscross applesauce on the floor next to our older brother. He slings his tanned arm over her shoulders and gives Mom the sly grin he reserves for family pictures. He knows she hates it, and he knows she'll let it slide. His Red Sox baseball cap casts a shadow over his bright blue eyes. My sister drops her pink plastic sunglasses into her lap and smooths her sparkly shirt. The box fan blows her hair back as she smiles her nicest, prettiest smile, hoping she looks like a princess or a movie star. She does.

I push my sweaty bangs out of my face and kneel on her right. I woke up sad again today and I don't know why. I never know why. A shadow in my mind takes away my sad memories, but it still leaves the sad feelings behind. I don't think I can do a nice smile today. I can't do any kind of smile today. But I have to try or else Mom will complain that she doesn't have any decent pictures of us. I force my mouth into a crooked grin. It'll have to do.

JUDGEMENT DAY

Nicholle Aileen Soukup • Student, Transitions

My fears are all too real. Usually, I'm confused about exactly how I feel. Not sure I want to be included in the whole deal. Watching others buy, beg, borrow and steal. Wondering who's going to squeal. Whose secrets will they reveal.

Temptations are always near. I cannot escape my many fears. Wiping away the tears. Wishing I could change a couple things about the last few years. Trying to hold close the things that are important and dear. Sometimes I can't recognize the real reflection staring back in the mirror.

Where to turn, which way to go? When will I learn or ever stop feeling so much concern? Dazed and confused. When will I realize I've got too much to lose? I'd really like to drink some booze. Watch out because soon someone may blow a fuse.

Truth or lies? Who are these fucking guys? Who's wearing a disguise? The circle is so big, it seems impossible to break all ties. Who should live and who should die? Can anyone make these judgements, should they even try?

I wish I had wings so I could fly, although all I can seem to do is sit here and sigh. I sometimes feel as if I'm watching my life pass me by. Well, so far, the only limit is the sky.

October 1999

Written in the basement with
three meth cooks a few
months before I got federally
indicted.

(Although, as time has passed,
I believe it has a much deeper
meaning.)

IN YOUR NEW LIFE I HOPE...

Angelina P. Miller • Student, Health Sciences

You got nothing but happiness
in your next life—
I hope to meet you again
that you got everything—
Everything you deserved

Know: we miss you
loving you still
From your past life
The spiked hair
unforgettable laugh
I hope you packed it
Took it all to your next life
Where you find the love
the happiness
You always deserved

ISOLATED

Roads close for days at a time.
Frosted leaves, stuck
within the cracks of the sidewalk.
Lakes stilled
frozen in time
unable to shift.

Businesses, schools, transportation.
Each temporarily shut down.
Nowhere to go.
Isolated.

In my house I will stay.
Blankets within every room.
Until the cold becomes
too much to bear.
For the thing that heats my home.

PRAISE YOUR PAPERBACK

Reagan Winsor • Student, Human Services

I peer into your eyes
I read you like a book,
Investigating and interpreting,
Careful not to rip the edges
Of this fascinating work.

Each word
Unique and exquisite,
Like greek gods and goddesses,
Who have distinct divergent domains,
Ruling over the worlds,
Sometimes battling one another,
And are prayed to with fine
Zeal, passion, and emotion.
Creating a sentence...

Each sentence
Describes a moment,
Like a puzzle piece
Locking into place,
Molding, shaping, forging
True purpose and great future.
Creating a paragraph...

Each paragraph
Comes together,
Forming articulate thoughts and questions,
Like the great philosophers,
Who crave existential answers
That ultimately raise new questions.
Creating a page...

Each page

Expresses raw emotion,
Like admired psychologists,
Unraveling the sentiments,
Explicating the feelings,
Utilizing intuition,
Organizing theories
To establish the description of meaning.
Creating a chapter...

Each chapter

Defines a segment of life;
Components coming together
To shape identity and purpose,
Like the evangelical god,
Converting and praying,
With reverence and devotion,
To guide and protect
The destiny held within each being.
Creating the novel...

The novel itself

Is natural and concrete,
Full of the past, present, and future,
Like the slowly spinning earth
And the society held within,
Always discovering and changing,
With emphasis and vehemence,
Whose mysteries are waiting to be discovered.

BURN

Harsh • Student, Academic Transfer

For some a spark is what they lack
Well I need a damn pyromaniac
I need hell and high water
someone to lace the aquifer with Firestarter
A refreshing blast from the furnace
Drown me in fire so I can surface
Eat all the oxygen so I can breath
It's not enough to just drop a match and leave
Come on start a countdown I'll listen
I need that promise of ignition
Please just give me your heat
Its so cold I'm not sure my heart's got a beat.

CRACKING THE HUMOR CODE: COMPARING FORMS OF HUMOR IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Wendy Carr Weitzel • Instructor, English

Understanding humor at a microscopic level is essential for any writer hoping to crack the humor code. E.B. White said, "Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the purely scientific mind" (Farber 139). While this may be true when explaining *The Office* to a ten-year-old, dissecting the tools of literary humor piece-by-piece proves invaluable to any observant writer. The tools of literary humor can be defined by language humor, situational humor, and character humor, and just as authors hone their writing skills with a specific audience in mind, these tools for literary humor must change depending on the age of the intended audience.

Language humor includes irony, textual intensification, exaggeration, and all forms of wordplay. Character humor evolves from the characters themselves, or the reader's expectations of the characters, and includes archetypes, parody, cultural references, status flips, and character subversion based on cultural expectations. Situational humor derives from scene, setting, and environment, and includes shock humor, intensification, juxtaposition, grotesque/body humor, madcap and meta humor.

Because children's authors are faced with the unique challenge of adapting humor tools to the appropriate cognitive ability and life experience of their audience, further discussion of these devices can be useful in defining and investigating the nuances of children's literature.

LANGUAGE HUMOR

PICTURE BOOKS

Written primarily for an audience ages 2-8 years old, picture books are classified as:

"A story intended for the youngest of readers, in which the illustrations and the text work together to tell the story. Picture books are usually read to children, not by children. They are meant for children who are not yet able to read, and help them develop a sense of storytelling, plot, and language recognition" (Vitale).

B.J. Novak's *The Book With No Pictures* contains multiple examples of

language humor. The book has no illustrations, and thus leans heavily into wordplay, including nonsense words, puns, rhymes, and ungrammaticality. It employs irony in its use of silly phrases that the accompanying adult (dual narrator) is required to repeat aloud, giving the child the impression that they are taking on a trickster role. And it engages in effective textual intensification, using tools such as varying fonts, text sizes and colors, and redundancy, exclamations, and effective use of white space.

The poet Jack Collom states that “children take a special delight in odd or pretty sounds...they are very playful with the sonic side of language. Experts say their learning of new words is a process of wonder, laughter, and punning” (Collom). Novak plays into this language learning process, and his text includes several nonsense sounds, like “glug glug glug my face is a bug,” and “gluurr-ga-wocko” and “blaggity-blaggity glibbity-globbity.” This language is silly, nonsensical, ungrammatical, and meant to be read aloud. The sonority of the words is important, as is the expectation that the reader will be an unsuspecting adult, cajoled into reading by the clever child.

In opposition to these nonsense words, the book presumes a narrator who is pristine and proper, who prefers not to use such words, by narrating contrasting text (in sans serif type, insinuating a serious tone), such as “Please don’t **ever** make me read this book again! It is so...silly!” The presumption and overt use of a dual narrator is an example of dramatic irony, whereas the adult understands their role (to look silly and be made the fool), but the child presumes they have forced the adult into the position, and therefore have assumed a role of power.

The carnivalesque nature intensifies as the silliness builds. Italics, bold lettering, colorful text and changes in text size contribute to this intensification, as well as text that encourages the reader to talk like a robot monkey, and sing silly words. The intensification is capitulated by a denouement in the last few pages where the narrator pleads for a reprieve from the silliness, only to end on one final note of nonsense, with the word “Bonk” on the last page, followed by “I didn’t want to say that,” in the narrator’s typical sans-serif font.

The humor in this book encourages repetitive reading, supports a dual narrator (a child-adult cohesion), and uses simple, accessible language, which leads to literary confidence.

MIDDLE GRADE

Middle grade readers include children from ages 7 through 14, generally targeted toward readers between ages 8-10. Louis Sachar’s *Sideways Stories from Wayside School* is an excellent example of middle grade language humor. Like Novak, Sachar also employs language humor through wordplay and intensification, though the techniques advance as the audience ages. While puns are still prevalent, wordplay shifts to include more complex

language constructs, such as hyperbole, placeholders, portmanteau words, homophones, and logical impossibilities. Wordplay in middle grade often engages a lengthier setup, which the older audience will easily follow and in fact, relish.

In “Chapter 7: Calvin,” Mrs. Jewls sends Calvin to deliver a note to Miss Zarves on the 19th floor. The problem: there is no Miss Zarves, and there is no 19th floor:

“As you know, when the builder built Wayside School, he accidentally built it sideways. But he also forgot to build the nineteenth story. He built the eighteenth and the twentieth, but no nineteenth. He said he was very sorry” (Sachar 36).

Calvin engages in a thorough back-and-forth with Ms. Jewls, his teacher, because he insists, “There is no nineteenth story.” When Calvin returns to the classroom, Ms. Jewls rewards him for his obedience, to which Calvin responds, “It was nothing.” This last line of chapter 7 is clever wordplay. As Calvin didn’t deliver a note, his words were literal. But he employed a common phrase, a litote (a negative phrase meant to have the opposite intended meaning). But Calvin was being literal, and Sachar provides an intentional litote-reversal.

The joke continues when the book reaches “Chapter 19: Miss Zarves,” as the text simply reads, “There is no Miss Zarves. There is no nineteenth story. Sorry.” This is a pun on the word “story,” meaning both level in a building, and chapter in a book.

This type of wordplay relies on the increased cognitive ability of the readers to understand the nuances. While younger children might appreciate the complexity of a thirty-story building, and Sachar’s tone, the double meanings and intentionality of silliness are best appreciated by a slightly older audience, spot on for middle grade.

Sachar also uses intensification, specifically madcap humor. In the very first chapter of the book, the teacher Mrs. Gorf turns a student into an apple. This isn’t questioned as absurd, but accepted as entirely probable. As students protest, they are one-by-one each turned into apples. Finally, Mrs. Gorf is tricked into turning herself into an apple, and is subsequently eaten by the school yard monitor. Young readers may be surprised by the madcap silliness, but find delight in the level to which Sachar pushes the joke to extremes. After all, the story ends with the teacher being eaten (and then returning as a ghost, only to disappear when she is hugged by a child who is excited for an early Halloween).

The book is rife with logical impossibilities, even among the adults. The new teacher, Mrs. Jewls finds the class and thinks they are monkeys, because they are “horribly cute children” (Sachar 16). She only changes her mind when the children convince her that “we’d know if we were monkeys,

wouldn't we?" (Sachar 17). In Sachar's madcap world, that's the only logic that works on the otherwise terribly normal teacher.

A similar level of illogical intensification occurs when the school yard monitor Louis kicks Terrence over the fence (literally) in retribution for Terrence kicking other students' balls over the fence (Sachar 108). Sachar's novel provides ample evidence of age-appropriate language humor and delightful silliness.

YOUNG ADULT

Language humor in YA shifts from vignettes into scenes, storylines, structural decisions, and themes, to once again accommodate the older audience. Psychoanalyst Martha Wolfenstein stated that "the joke that seems funny to a child may not seem funny to adults, or to children of different ages. The general rule seems to be that as you grow older the forbidden wish or emotion is gradually more disguised, and the joke that allows it expression becomes more complicated" (Lurie). While similar elements of humor are used in all age ranges, as an audience ages, so does their ability to appreciate humor nuances. For example, irony is a commonly-used tool of language humor in YA. But as picture books and middle grade rely on dramatic irony (a separation from what the reader understands and what the characters understand), irony in young adult writing trends toward sarcasm.

Michelle Knudsen's *Evil Librarian* exemplifies this maturing of humorous sensibilities.

Evil Librarian could be classified in the horror genre, except that it is consistently funny. The book tells the story of Cyn, a typical love-struck sixteen-year-old who discovers a demon librarian at her school. Cyn is tasked with purging the school (and her captivated best friend) of the demon, and convincing her love interest that she's not entirely insane for believing the demon exists. When Cyn's crush (Ryan) finally sees the demon (Mr. Gabriel), the moment hangs heavy with anticipation, but also with the clever usage of irony, as manifested through sarcasm:

"But you're—you're not—" Ryan stops, swallows, starts again. "You're not human," he says. He seems to feel it is very important to point this out. Perhaps in case Mr. Gabriel was not aware. Mr. Gabriel's terrifying grin grows even larger, stretching impossibly across his face. He begins to laugh. Then he stops laughing and winks at us. "Strangely, the job description did not specify that as a requirement" (Knudsen 75).

Both Cyn's narration and Mr. Gabriel's response are, in this moment, sarcastic. This remains consistent throughout the text, which is appropriate to balance the power between Cyn and Mr. Gabriel. Readers are drawn to Cyn because of her irony, but readers can't ever manage to truly hate Mr. Gabriel due to the same literary tool employed by Knudsen, that of irony as sarcasm.

Irony in YA also often takes the form of dark humor. Knudsen references the school musical (which she aptly chooses to be *Sweeney Todd*), and when Cyn needs a break from all the demon business, she finds relief in working on the scenery and props for the play:

"I can go to rehearsal and see Ryan and think about the play and the chair and not about demons or best friends who have gone crazy or anything else besides murderous barbers and pie shop proprietors and dead people being cooked into meat pies. Fun things. Just for a little while" (Knudsen 210).

Another example of irony parading as sarcasm is when Cyn learns that Mr. Gabriel wants to take her best friend Annie as his demon bride. "Oh, Annie. It's okay, my brain reminds me. He's not going to kill her. He's going to make her his demon bride and take her away forever. Right. Thanks. So much better" (158).

Evil Librarian also uses wordplay in the form of puns, based around the premise of a demon librarian. When Cyn agrees to let another demon intervene, she says, "I feel strongly that I should not agree to this new addition. But I need her help. Annie needs her help. The whole damn(ed) school needs her help" (201).

Language humor evolves per audience age, while still relying on similar tools, adjusted accordingly for an audience's cognitive capabilities.

CHARACTER HUMOR

PICTURE BOOKS

Character humor in picture books includes the use of archetypes, stereotypes, status flips, and parody. The use of archetypes relies on calling back to cultural references, well-known to adults, but possibly not to children. An expectation exists, then, that the accompanying adult (dual narrator) will explain the reference to the child.

For example, in Mo Willem's picture book, *That is NOT a Good Idea*, a duckling frequently comments on the interactions between a seemingly innocent duck mother, and a wily fox, trying to have the ducks for dinner. In the end, the duck traps and cooks the fox, and the duckling reports, "I told you that was NOT a good idea." This book works because it recalls Aesop's fable of the wily fox and the doomed duck, yet it serves up a much different ending. The story is a parody, with a hint of irony, and a subversion of typical animal character tropes. This short story engages reference humor, parody, irony (dark humor), and character subversion.

A child reading the book may not understand the reference to Aesop's fables, or the subversion of the archetypal characters (flipping the fox's and the duck's roles). But while children may not be able to state why

the book is funny, they can still enjoy the surprise ending, because children understand the stereotypical nature of animals: A fox is a wily hunter, generally set out to eat unsuspecting animals. A duck is weaker, unprotected, and does not typically eat foxes. The duckling's repeated phrase "That is NOT a good idea," may seem to be a warning to the mother duck, and even a cautionary tale to readers, "Do not follow foxes into their dens."

But the reader is surprised (and subsequently delighted) when the duck traps and eats the fox, because their expectations are subverted, and the meaning of the book's title and the duckling's refrain changes. Instead, children are to understand that they should not trust their instincts, that danger can lurk in unsuspecting places, and that the weak-appearing character isn't always a fool. As children are often cast in the role of "fool," this particular hero-villain status flip proves delightful, and a championing of the underdog, or the young reader.

Novak's *The Book with No Pictures* also contains a status flip. As the premise of the book relies on the presence of a dual narrator (as stated in the text, "It might seem no fun to have someone read you a book with no pictures"), Novak relies on that element to put the child in a position of power. To the younger audience, the accompanying adult will be made into a character in the book, and thus transformed into the butt of the joke. This type of humor is a status flip, where the role of child and the role of adult are in contrast to the norm. The child joins with the author to put the adult/narrator into an inferior position, which provides the humor.

MIDDLE GRADE

Character humor in middle grade employs stereotypes, parody and status flips, but also uses reference humor, with characters that are relatable and familiar to an older audience. Middle grade readers recognize classic archetypes and stereotypes, and status flips often appear in the form of pranks. Middle grade authors can flesh out characters, so the humor often comes because of the characters themselves, acting either according to (or counter to) type.

Roald Dahl's *Matilda* contains examples of archetypes and stereotypes, status flips, and plenty of reference humor. Dahl's characters are instantly recognizable stereotypes: a dufus father, a flighty mother, a negligent brother, an abusive school principal, and an overtly-loving teacher. And then there is Matilda, who subverts stereotypes as the child genius with streaks of magic.

Dahl establishes each of his characters with clear-cut, recognizable traits. Each of his villains is obviously villainous, and each of his heroes is to be championed. As Dahl's book addresses darker themes (like child abuse), his creation of clear villains is necessary to set up Matilda's frequent status flips, in the form of pranks.

Early on, Matilda's father, Mr. Wormwood, teaches his son about swindling customers at his used car dealership. Matilda accuses him of dishonesty, only to be berated. She decides her father deserves to be taught a lesson (and the reader will heartily agree). The reader despises her father, and possibly recognizes his less admirable character traits in certain adults they know. After Matilda superglues Mr. Wormwood's hat onto his head, she feigns innocence and asks, "What's the matter, daddy?...Has your head suddenly swollen or something?" (Dahl 33). Her pretended innocence capitulates the trickster status flip, where Matilda regains some power from her controlling father.

Dahl establishes Matilda's character and the nature of the status flip while simultaneously justifying her actions:

"The only sensible thing to do when you are attacked is, as Napoleon once said, to counter-attack. Matilda's wonderfully subtle mind was already at work devising yet another suitable punishment for the poisonous parent" (Dahl 41).

Dahl sets rules for his characters and their world, which is necessary for the humorous tool of character subversion. In short, Dahl makes rules so he can break them. For example, "The fact remained that any five-year-old girl in any family was always obligated to do as she was told, however asinine the orders might be" (49).

Dahl also uses reference humor when Matilda's mother tells her, "I'm afraid men are not always quite as clever as they think they are. You will learn that when you get a bit older, my girl" (65). This statement is ironic because Matilda already understands this, though her mother may not, and it's reference humor because it is (at least for women) universally relatable.

As a character, Agatha Trunchbull stands supreme. Dahl describes her as "a gigantic holy terror, a fierce tyrannical monster who frightened the life out of the pupils and teachers alike" (67), and as one who can "liquidize you like a carrot in a kitchen blender" (69). Trunchbull's extreme personality sets a clear expectation for readers as to her actions. She is in stark contrast to both Matilda and the mild-mannered Miss Honey. All three personalities allow for continual character reference humor, as Dahl warns if you should meet Trunchbull, "You should behave as you would if you met an enraged rhinoceros out in the bush—climb up the nearest tree and stay there until it has gone away" (67).

Character humor in middle grade engages more complex forms of character reference humor, while still employing character humor tools such as stereotypes and status flips.

YOUNG ADULT

Character humor in YA also relies on stereotypes, status flips and reference humor, but includes, and often requires, the addition of a strong voice. The length of YA books allows an author to more fully establish a character. When a character is distinct, their voice can lend to humor in the way that they speak, in the jokes they tell, and in the inherent nature of being themselves. If a YA author is successful, their character can be funny by either acting exactly as the audience expects—or counter to that—because the author has established the character well enough for the audience to recognize the difference.

In *Evil Librarian*, Knudsen's protagonist, Cyn, has a distinct voice, as established from the very first page. She is sarcastic and smart, passionate and lust-driven. In many ways, she fits the stereotype of a lovelorn high school female, and Ryan Halsey fits the stereotype of one to be loved. Here she talks longingly about Ryan:

"He's one of those boys that you just can't quite believe is actually real. I know how that sounds, and I don't mean to be all pathetic and ridiculous, but—he's so beautiful. At least to me. Maybe not, like, French underwear-model beautiful (although I would certainly enjoy seeing him in said underwear—or, you know, without), but definitely worthy of serious visual appreciation" (Knudsen 1).

Cyn uses understatement, often as veiled sarcasm, as an internal aside in a conversation. Knudsen magnifies this sarcastic tone that carries Cyn's character and voice through the novel. When Cyn describes her burgeoning relationship with Ryan to her friends, her internal sarcasm provides the humor:

Leticia asks, "But there might be kissing?"

To which Cyn replies: "God, I hope so."

Then her internal dialogue: "Once we get past the whole demon-killing thing" (136).

Knudsen consistently reminds readers that the story is not strictly a romance; there is a demon lurking the hallways, threatening to destroy everything. This drastic shift in tone from romance-to-horror allows Cyn's character to transform from helpless romantic to demon-butt-kicking heroine, subverting readers' expectations of Cyn's character in the best way.

Cyn doesn't shy away from exaggeration, especially in her descriptions of Ryan, emphasized often in run-on sentences with punctuation that drops off as it escalates:

"I swear he's moving in slow motion like some stupid sequence in a

bad summer movie, one hand reaching up to run through his perfectly tousled brown hair, head turning to smile at something one of his buddies has just said, the sea of students parting automatically before him, the pigeons outside the window cooing his personal theme song and the team banners on the wall gently waving in time and the sun shining down in targeted rays to illuminate him in a glorious halo of glowing enchantment" (5).

Similarly to middle grade, YA humor involves reference humor, where a character encounters a relatable situation. Often for Cyn, that is pure desperation and lust, which is relatable to most teenagers (and adults) reading the book. At one point, Cyn imagines a love scene from *Les Misérables* starring herself and Ryan, and she casts another girl as Eponine, only "I make her dirty and dressed in rags with noticeably unshaven legs and underarms, though. Also, there may be some lice" (Knudsen 37). This is reference humor because it's completely relatable for girls to wish ill on other girls they see as competition, and because most readers will recognize the love triangle motif from *Les Misérables*, and likely have a strong emotional connection to that story already.

While character humor in YA relies on the same tools as picture books and middle grade, it also requires the use of a strong character, established and maintained by a clear voice.

SITUATIONAL HUMOR

PICTURE BOOKS

Situational humor in picture books includes intensification, juxtaposition, grotesque/body (potty humor), and madcap humor. *Stuck* by Oliver Jeffers could be a master class in intensification as humor, while also providing excellent examples of juxtaposition and madcap humor. Jeffers' forms of intensification occur mainly in hyperbole, logical impossibilities, and textual emphasis.

From the first page, Jeffers creates a recognizable problem: Floyd, the protagonist, gets his kite stuck in a tree. Floyd's first reaction seems perfectly reasonable and relatable to any child: he simply throws his shoe into the tree in an attempt to dislodge the kite, but the shoe also gets stuck. These first pages establish a frame of reference for the reader. They understand the situation, it feels familiar, and they understand Floyd's logic. Creating a world that feels familiar to a child is the first and most vital step in situational humor. Children can relate to the frustration they imagine Floyd feels, but they do not feel frustrated as they read. The building of "common experiences that audiences can relate to" is the power of situational reference humor (Big Think).

After Floyd throws his other shoe into the tree (and it gets stuck), Jeffers

jumps off the reference baseline he created and subverts the audience's expectations for the story. "In order to knock down the other shoe, Floyd fetched Mitch." Readers see that Mitch is Floyd's unsuspecting cat. Before readers turn the page, they may expect Floyd to send the cat climbing up the tree—something young readers will know and expect in such a situation. But Jeffers surprises the reader when Floyd instead throws Mitch into the tree, where the cat also gets stuck. Subverting readers' expectations is a common tool of situational humor, and part of Jeffers' intentional intensification.

Jeffers created a relatable situation and a rational character, then surprises the reader by having the character make an irrational choice, thus changing the situation. This triggers a series of increasingly-surprising actions, in which Floyd fetches a ladder, only to throw it in the tree. He then fetches a bucket of paint, a duck, the kitchen sink, the family car, the milkman, a rhinoceros, a house, and a curious whale (to name a few).

Once Floyd throws a firetruck and its accompanying firemen into the tree, the element of surprise is gone. The humor device shifts to hyperbole, which Jeffers achieves not only by Floyd throwing increasingly ludicrous items, but by the logical impossibility of how many objects actually fit into a single tree.

Jeffers also employs situational irony at the end of the book when the kite becomes unstuck, *because the tree is full*. The reader then understands Floyd's logic (though the reader might view it as flawed), that once the tree was full, the kite would fall down. "And that was it! There was no more room left in the tree and the kite came UNSTUCK" (Jeffers). This subverts the reader's understanding of logic. Jeffers' victory here is that he flips the position of superiority when he reveals Floyd's hidden agenda: to fill the tree until the kite released on its own.

Situational humor in picture books takes many forms, most often that of intensification, juxtaposition, and madcap humor.

MIDDLE GRADE

Situational middle grade humor evolves from scene, setting, and the world the characters find themselves in. This includes juxtaposition, shock humor, madcap and meta humor. Roald Dahl's *Matilda* can be described as dark humor, as it includes tragic storylines like murder, corporate greed, and child abuse. Dahl uses these situations to create humor by making the innocent characters the eventual victors, and engaging the storytelling in such madcap extremes to border on the carnivalesque.

Situational humor often comes in the form of subverted expectations, or a juxtaposition to reality. Indeed, a thread throughout Dahl's novel is that parents think too highly of their children:

"Parents never underestimate the abilities of their own children. Quite the reverse. Sometimes it was well nigh impossible for a teacher to convince the proud father or mother that their beloved offspring was a complete nitwit" (Dahl 91).

This type of language shocks a reader, as do many actions taken by the more deplorable characters. Hortensia (known prankster and idol to Matilda) tells one example of Trunchbull's shocking actions:

"Only yesterday the Trunchbull...flung him clear out of the open classroom window. Our classroom is one floor up and we saw Julius Rottwinkle go sailing out over the garden like a Frisbee and landing with a thump in the middle of the lettuces" (110).

In reality, this situation is horrible. Yet it is made funny by the sheer madcap extremity of it. In situational comedy, hyperbole falls under the umbrella of madcap, and serves as a common situational comedy tool, as does understatement, like when Hortensia follows Matilda's question about whether Julius broke any bones by saying, "Only a few" (110).

The nature of grotesque/body humor in middle grade varies wildly with what is found in picture books. In picture books grotesque humor centers around potty humor, while middle grade grotesque humor involves pre-pubescent anxiety about their changing bodies. Middle grade readers squirm at their own discomfort, but they relish in exposing that same discomfort in others. Thus any talk of bodies or bodily functions in middle grade can be used for comedic effect, because it's happening to the character, and not to the reader.

One of the most iconic scenes in *Matilda* is when Trunchbull forces Bruce Bogtrotter to eat an entire chocolate cake:

"Many were guessing that it had been filled with pepper or caster-oil or some other foul-tasting substance that would make the boy violently sick. It might even be arsenic and he would be dead in ten seconds flat. Or perhaps it was a booby-trapped cake and the whole thing would blow up the moment it was cut, taking Bruce Bogtrotter with it. No one in the school put it past the Trunchbull to do any of these things" (126).

This scene employs grotesque humor (the idea of Bruce eating so much cake and possibly vomiting), shock humor (the reader is surprised, along with the characters, at Trunchbull's chosen punishment), and madcap humor, as no one expects that Bruce can accomplish such a feat. But because the scene is set up with such awful anticipation, the moment is all the more triumphantly humorous when Bruce emerges victorious.

Dahl also uses meta humor, such as when Mrs. Wormwood tells Miss Honey that "Looks is more important than books, Miss Hunky" (97). Matilda's mother uses incorrect grammar, calls the teacher by the wrong

name, further emphasizing her ignorance (dramatic irony), while she is herself a character in a book. Middle grade situational humor increases the cognitive expectations of the audience in its' use of humor tools.

YOUNG ADULT

Situational humor in young adult includes intensification, juxtaposition, grotesque and madcap humor, and melodrama. Knudsen's *Evil Librarian* creates humorous situations mainly through intensification and melodrama, often leaning into the complete unlikelihood of success on Cyn's part to escape her circumstances. The plot itself intensifies, and yet to use it as a humor tool, Knudsen once again relies on Cyn's internality, when Cyn rambles increasingly long about her most inner thoughts.

Cyn's clear voice (an established tool of character humor) lends toward humorous situations when paired with the tool of juxtaposition. Her internal dialogue reveals her character's pure and relatable desperation, the length and honesty of it landing it firmly in the field of intensification:

"I love you. Let's get married and have a million babies together, right after we both graduate from Ivy League schools on full scholarships and have fulfilling and exciting careers. You are the most perfect creature on God's green earth. Love me. Love me right now. Please" (Knudsen 3).

Then Knudsen immediately follows it by, "He walks away." This juxtaposition between Cyn's internal longing and the boring, realistic reality around her proves a striking and hilarious situational contrast.

The situational intensification caused of Cyn's inner monologue is also emphasized by Knudsen's creative punctuation. The intensity trends toward madcap humor, as it is silly to the point of being unreasonable. This passage also highlights YA's version of body humor: sex. Teens are entranced by any talk of sexuality, and innately find it uncomfortably hilarious. In this scene, Cyn is frustrated with Ryan:

"I still want to tear his clothes off, but now I also want to punch him until he sees reason. (And no, FYI: I'm not advocating violence as way to solve your differences. Just because I want to punch him doesn't mean I would. [Just as I am not, alas, tearing his clothes off just because I want to.] But he sure has been making the idea tempting today. [The punching idea. The tearing-off-his-clothes idea is always tempting.]" (222).

This type of internalization of Cyn's reality is essential to keeping this book funny. Her situation sounds ridiculous, she knows that, and realizes that Ryan will think she's crazy if she says it out loud (and when she does, he does). But Knudsen ties it into Cyn's other rambling thoughts, and the result is chaotic and quick and funny.

The situational humor tool of melodrama often appears in the form of

ironic understatement. When Cyn is in the demon world and about to die, she realizes that she only has two options: "...get my textbook/shield up in time to catch his blow, or die horribly. I like when choices are easy like that" (320). Both Cyn and the reader recognize the gravity of her situation, so having her explain it in such drastic understatement of projecting only two choices for Cyn, and also her saying "I like when choices are easy like that" flips the scene from horrifying to funny, and helps to maintain a steady supply of situational humor throughout the book.

SUMMARY

According to Matilda Wormwood, "Children are not so serious as grown-ups and they love to laugh" (Dahl 81). In all three age ranges of picture book, middle grade and young adult, well-employed humor will achieve its noble purpose. From the wordplay of picture books, to nuanced middle grade characters, to sophisticated irony and reference humor in young adult, when an author understands how to employ humor for their intended audience, the young reader remains blissfully unaware of the strategic literary devices. What the reader experiences instead is solely a vibrant (and hopefully hilarious) engagement with the carefully-constructed words of an informed author.

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LOSING A FRIEND

Erin M. Rengan • Student, Dual Credit/SENCAP

I had gifts for you
Under my bed
Waiting
For the right time
To deliver them
Christmas
Birthdays
All past but I could never find
The right time to send them
I wondered when it was
But that time has since past
You changed
And so did I
That fact couldn't be compromised
So we did nothing
You grew apathetic to even the thought of me
Whereas I thought of you and smiled
I always reached out first
You occasionally would respond
Curt, blunt and with little thought
I stood there
In the background of your life
Always taken for granted
I never minded
"Life isn't about what you take,
It's about what you give"
So I gave
You never did
You barely even thanked me

LOSING A FRIEND

When receiving
The gifts remain
Under my bed
Waiting for the right time
That I'm now sure will never come
As I bow out of the room
Without even a goodbye
You would never notice I left

COLORFUL CANVAS

Erica Howard • Student, Academic Transfer

In the silence of the trees, sunlight weaves,
Leaves are collected, like friends at ease.
They tell secrets to the wind, their parchment frail,
A symphony of russet, amber, and golden veil.

Each leaf, telling a story, etched in time,
Whispers of seasons past, of roots like lime.
Some will be sour, while some be sweet,
Their veins are like ancient rivers, mapping of fleet.

Oak leaf, sturdy and steadfast, clings to its bough,
A sentinel of memories, a vow unbroken now.
The maple leaf, flamboyant, twirls in reckless glee,
A confetto of dreams, set free in jubilee.

When the frost descends, they flutter down,
A carpet for the earth, a quilt of faded crown.
They rest upon the soil, their final sighs released,
Leaves, once vibrant, now cradle autumn's peace.

Let us honor these guests, their fleeting beauty,
Their whispered quests.
For in their gentle fall, we find life's sweet refrain.
A reminder that all things change, yet beauty remains.

ASIAN FUSION WORLD-DREAM FICTION

**Uyen Nguyen, MA • Staff, Administrative Assistant I,
Financial Aid**

Haruka-Vy Pham, 30, is a half-Japanese and half-Vietnamese mixed Asian with shiny black and brown hair and varied strands of blue peek-a-boo to match her eye color of blue contact lenses. Haruka looks out the balcony towards the stars across the beachy night sky. She looks ahead to when she will graduate and regain her confidence. Lunar New Year is rapidly approaching, and it is when Haruka feels like she has the most challenging time battling through life as she thinks about her mother daily and wishes for her mother to be there with her in person to help guide her through all obstacles. Thankfully, her mother's spirit lives on through Sakura and the half-Japanese side of her identity.

Haruka faces her dog Sakura, a special Pomeranian dog whom Haruka believes is the reincarnation of her biological mother, who loses her battle to the demon named Leukemia. At age two, Haruka is too young to understand reincarnation until a strong presence gives life to Sakura when Haruka is five years old. The spark connects Sakura with Haruka.

Haruka pets Sakura calmly as she shares her daydreaming fantasy.

"Sakura, one day, all my dreams will become a reality without our crazy Asian fusion family drama getting in the way of our happiness."

Haruka pets Sakura, and she starts panting happily and barking proudly. She continues to listen to Haruka speak.

"Who's my sweet dog? The only one who can make me smile and feel less invisible. Someone I can talk to and listen to when I need to vent, right?"

Flashback to 14 years ago in California

Haruka receives the opportunity to audition for Asia Entertainment at sixteen. At the time, Bao Ngoc Ho, 48, from central Vietnam, is Haruka's wicked, evil stepmom, who often mistreats Haruka. Her family and Haruka's biological father make up the half-Vietnamese side of the family.

Bao Ngoc marches angrily toward Haruka's room with a letter in her hand. She waves the letter wildly in front of Haruka, almost giving her a papercut near her right eye.

"What the hell is this? Who do you think you are?" Bao Ngoc yelled at Haruka angrily.

"Do you honestly believe you can pass an audition?" You can't even read sheet

music or play an instrument! You can't even sing!" She exclaimed snobbishly.

Haruka grabs the letter in shock when she sees the heading from Asia Entertainment.

"You don't have the right to take this away from me!" Haruka yells back.

"Do you not want me to audition with Asia Entertainment in their upcoming talent search in Dallas?"

Haruka's father, Cao Van Pham, 54 at the time, from Southern Vietnam, is an anti-communist and second lieutenant during the Vietnam War. He has PTSD from his days in the concentration camp and feels the urge to take control of every situation and have everything done his way.

"Why are we screaming?" He grabs the letter from Bao's crusty old hands.

"What is this?"

"What does it look like to you? It's a letter from Asia Entertainment inviting me to audition for their talent show. Unlike you guys, they think I have potential!" Haruka argues back as she begins to hold back her tears.

"You think you have potential and what it takes to become a Vietnamese singer? How dare you talk back and go behind our backs? Your 16-year-old brain is too childish for stage life, and you'll just be embarrassing us." Cao responded narcissistically.

In tears, Haruka races out of her bedroom and shoves everyone out of her way. She heads towards the bathroom, slams the door as loud as possible, and cries alone.

Back to the present, in Haruka's room

Haruka faces Sakura with tears in her deep blue eyes as tears start rolling down her face.

Haruka's husband, Kai Tae-Sung, 30, is a half-Japanese and half-Korean mixed Asian with shiny black hair and blue eyes from his daily contact lenses. His appearance looks very anime-looking, which always mesmerizes Haruka whenever she looks deep into his eyes.

Kai walks into Haruka's room and gazes at Haruka. He admires Haruka's gorgeous face with her blue peek-a-boo hair highlighting her shiny, raven black and brown wavy long curls.

Kai gives Haruka a big smile, a cute wink, and a Korean finger heart to show affection.

"Tomorrow morning, I will make you a heart-shaped croffle, so you better feel better!" Kai said as he got ready for bed.

The next day, Haruka puts on her running shoes as she prepares for her morning routine outside, walking along the cool beachy area to relax and feel the cool breeze blowing her beautiful wavy curls with a strand of fishtail braids hanging along the sides. She waves goodbye to Sakura as she exits the door.

Kai follows Haruka out the door; he kisses her on the cheeks and presents her with a lovely clear box. Inside the box sits a pair of mini heart-shaped croffle with smiley faces made of chocolate chips and a side of strawberry syrup.

“How are you feeling?” Kai asks with a warm smile on his face.

Haruka smiles back and responds, “You’re a sweetie.”

“Before work, I like to walk around the beach to reflect on life and jam out to my music to drown out all obstacles.”

Haruka gives Kai a finger heart, raises it to her lips, and blows him a cute kiss.

Kai heads towards the door and shouts, “Enjoy your day, okay? No more Crying!”

Haruka and Kai exit the door as they both go their separate ways.

Outside, along the calm beachy waves, Haruka watches the beautiful sunrise as she turns around to see Kai’s father walking Sakura towards her.

Moon-Sang, 62, is from Kai’s Korean half of the family. He walks Sakura towards the sight of Haruka’s shimmery blue peek-a-boo waves blowing in the wind.

“My dear, sweet Haruka-Vy, what are you doing here so early? Do you have work today?” Moon-Sang asked.

As a sign of respect, Sakura bows her head down and greets Moon-Sang with a big smile.

“Annyeonghaseo” (Hello in Korean)

“Yes, I have work, but I still feel invisible, like I’m not good enough. I need to refresh my mind before I tackle my day.”

“Hang in there, Haruka,” consoles Moon-Sang.

“Listen to what your music lyrics tell you, and you will succeed through life. ‘You never walk alone,’ right?” Moon-Sang said encouragingly.

Thankful for Moon-Sang’s kind words, Haruka bows her head proudly.

“Gamsahabnida.” (Thank you in Korean)

Then she heads off and waves goodbye to Moon-Sang in Korean.

“Annyeong! I’ll talk to you later! I need to head to work now. You made my day

much brighter so I could be productive.”



At the Office, Haruka walks into the office with more confidence. She greets her coworkers with a big smile. Haruka’s mentality is that she is happy as long as she is helping out, getting the work done, and making people happy. Music keeps Haruka’s day moving throughout her working day.

As Haruka drives home, she feels content with herself and jams along to her favorite songs.



Later that evening, Haruka-Vy faces the shimmering twilight and starts looking down on her reflection from the sparkling beachy lake. She holds her head up high as she reflects on her accomplishments and thinks aloud to herself with Sakura sitting nearby.

Haruka starts flickering with the mood lamp to change colors as the stars dance around her ceiling in sync with her music playing in the background. Haruka gets up and starts dancing with Sakura, standing on her hind legs and paws up to dance with Haruka.

Sakura watches Haruka in admiration as Haruka gestures the movements of spreading her wings and flying.

Haruka sits back down and starts typing her one-sentence reflection on her laptop to keep her moving and read aloud to Sakura Proudly.

Sakura, remember to always live for today and learn from yesterday’s mistakes. Those without support or who want to stand by can watch us from afar.

Kai proudly walks into Haruka’s room as he hears those inspiring words, sits beside her, and starts rubbing Sakura’s belly. He flickers the lights to change the colors to purple and blue and changes Haruka’s background song to *Outro: Wings*.

“My family and I will always stand by you. No matter what. Spread your wings, and let me see you succeed. Go on, and I will watch you take off and fly!” Kai said admiringly.

Haruka hugs Kai as she sings along to the lyrics and dances with him.

She starts telling him her plans in an exciting sing-song voice to debut her writing to the world and explore exotic places together. She will finally leave California and escape the toxic half of her Asian fusion world.



MOONLIGHT ON ALASKA

Kal O'Bryant • Student, Academic Transfer

The sun stopped shining
Forty-six days before it happened.
I saw it on the news the next morning.

Red and blue lights bounced off damp streets.
Numbered tags dotted the ground.
Thin orange strips blocked her off.
Sterile blue tarp strewn over cold corpse.
Her hand, purple and still,
Hung out her wet, olive coat sleeve.

Strangulation, they said.
I choked down hot, bitter coffee between
Photos of her swollen neck,
Speckled with black and blue blotches.

They showed a picture of
The woman and her family,
Flanked by side hugs and
Thin-lipped smiles.

My eyes met her face.
Every hair shot to attention.
I knew her.
It was Maggie.

Last Thursday she wore lavender scrubs.
I sat with her at lunch.
Sad wrinkles folded across her brow.
She talked about a boy she saw.
Seven years old. Third degree burns.

MOONLIGHT ON ALASKA

Her voice wavered like the
Buzzing cafeteria lights overhead.

The sun still won't be out for a while,
But I'm not sad about it anymore
Now that she's dead.

SYNC

Harsh • Student, Academic Transfer

She eased our connection, made it lighter.
Grabbed the dark and chose wrong my hearts too heavy, wait!
Like a boxer who stepped one too many times into the ring around her finger.
Right next to where she has me rapped.
The place where she puts rimes into mouths.
My silver tongue's cold now.
We kissed and became stuck it seams.
The thread she uses to sew my hardship.
A boat we now share and so we sync.

FROM DARKNESS TO DREAMS: A MODERN FAIRY TALE OF RESILIENCE AND REDEMPTION

Ashley Bosco • Student, Health Sciences

Under the scorching sun, where pavement burns,
In an apartment, no escape from harsh turns.
Sweat, smoke, drugs, and alcohol's foul blend,
Seven years of life, too tough to comprehend.
At seven, I should have been full of glee,
Yet malnourished and small, like a withered tree.
Barney pajamas, my only attire,
In a home consumed by addiction's dire fire.
With needles and bottles littering the floor,
The shadows of neglect loomed more and more.
My mother, a monster in my young eyes,
Her rage, her addiction, a relentless guise.
Locked in my room, her absence one day,
A brief taste of freedom, if just for a stray.
But caught by her fury, by belts, I was torn,
Screaming, pleading, my innocence shorn.
A leap from a window, a leap from despair,
Running from demons, running from their snare.
A girl on a bike, a flicker of hope,
A new beginning, a new way to cope.
But monsters lurked, in the guise of kind guise,
A plot to steal innocence, a soul's demise.
Officer Dan, once feared, now a saving grace,
Rescuing from darkness, from a vile embrace.

A journey fraught, with twists and fear,
From abandonment's grasp, to find safety near.
A new family, with warmth in their gaze,
But danger lurked, in deceptive ways.
Betrayal stung, from those thought to be good,
In a world where trust was misunderstood.
But a glimmer of hope, in an angel's embrace,
Guiding me toward a brighter place.
Atlanta bound, a destination unknown,
With Aunt Cheryl's love, a seed of hope is sown.
In her arms, I found solace and peace,
A haven of love, where fears would cease.
Wrapped in Barney's embrace, a beacon of light,
In a world once dark, now shining bright.
Fairy tales do exist if you just believe,
In the power of love, and the strength to achieve.
So, here's to the journey, the trials we've faced,
And to find our way, with courage encased.
For in the darkest of nights, a star will gleam,
Guiding us home, to our truest dreams.

MIRROR, HOPE, DIVIDED

Erica Howard • Student, Academic Transfer

As a kid, I look in the mirror,
feeling hopeless, I am extremely in fear.
From my family, I feel really divided,
Simply to them I am blindsided.
Every day I mope. Why?
Everyone says there is hope. Nope.
My family seems to not care,
Because to them still not here.
I still look in the mirror, and think, am I still divided?
Or is there really hope?

MY BIGFOOT STORY

Richard M. Hadley • Instructor, Communications

I've always been a bit embarrassed to mention my Bigfoot Story, but after half a century of keeping it inside and knowing now there are other "Big Footers" out there I feel a bit more compelled to create this written documentation of my experience with an unexplained creature. While there are some who will scoff, as I often have upon hearing these stories, there comes a time when you want to just put it out there, to put it out there.

When I was a child, my father was a big believer in having his children experience as much of the world as possible as we were growing up, including seeing as many of the wonders and beauties of America as possible. Most of these trips included my sister and I fighting or sleeping in the back seat of whatever type of Buick he had at the time. It was with this mindset that we took a trip across America driving to Cheyenne, Wyoming, then taking a train to San Francisco, and then flying to San Diego. The primary purpose of this trip was for his children to ride the railways before they were gone from the American landscape. They are still around today.

It was with this ideology that our family of four, my 10-year-old self, my 12-year-old sister, and our mom and dad (no clue how old they were but my sister could tell you) set out on a canoe trip to the boundary waters between Minnesota and Canada.

We were setting off from the American side at a place called Moose Lake, the four of us and a 16-year-old guide-in-training named Dave. We were heading out for a five-day, four-night excursion. I'm not sure what my father was thinking, realistically we could have easily died. No training, no real camping experience, no idea.

Most of the trip remains buried in my mind as faded recollections that I'm not quite sure are true or not. Some of my vivid memories that remain include Dave also almost getting his toe bit off by a giant snapping turtle as he was sitting on a rock with his feet in the water. My mom fell down quite a few times much to the delight of everybody. I remember crying on multiple occasions. We had to pack in everything we would possibly use and would have to portage on multiple occasion carrying everything with us from one lake to the next.

We drank lake water. We would boil our water and mix it with a powdered concentrate, essentially our water intake consisted of drinking warm Tang. Dave was not fond of Tang so he would drink directly from the lake like any other animal in the Northwest would. There were multiple designated camp sites along our path, which consisted primarily of a cleared area, fire pit,

picnic table, and a bit farther off a wooden box with a hole cut in the top which was essentially an outhouse without walls. I have blocked out most bathroom activities out of my memory.

One of the memories I will never forget was on our last night of the excursion. We found a spot to set up our camp. We put up our tents, built a fire, had something to eat and drank some of our warm Tang. We were planning on having some roasted marshmallows later so we left the pack of marshmallows on the picnic table. I'm not sure if it was the Tang or not, but nobody was feeling great after eating, so we decided to take a walk to maybe help everything settle. This was also one of my dad's great pieces of wisdom.

While on our walk and looking at the lake, it then came to our attention that we might actually have set up camp in Canada and not on the American side of the lake. Dave was worried that if a Ranger would find out or stop by our camp, they could actually take us into custody for being in Canada illegally so we headed back to camp to pack up and move. On our way back to camp from our walk, we were taken back by a horrible smell like we wandered straight into a skunk's outhouse; we just assumed it was because we were too close to the designated potty area. As we got closer to our camp we heard rustling or something. Some sort of noise.

Ironically I had recently seen the movie "The Legend of Boggy Creek" which had to deal with some sort of creature. My ten year old self found myself to be extremely hilarious by continuing to "see" bigfoot behind that tree, bigfoot swimming in the water behind us, bigfoot at the potty area. My family was not amused. So as we approached camp I could see through the trees something hunched over at the picnic table eating marshmallows. My family of course didn't believe me. I wasn't sure what I saw, but it was something. So I was very brave and started jumping up and down flailing my arms about crying, "There IS something! There IS something!"

We all stopped on the little trail we had been following, and there was indeed something. Some sort of dark mass shoveling marshmallows into its mouth. As it sensed our presence or probably more likely, heard my ridiculous yelping, it lumbered off. None of us had any real response to such a sighting. My father just muttered, "Oh my." I can't really remember what my mother did or if she did anything I think she was hiding behind my dad. Dave had picked up a big rock and was holding it just in case. My sister was able to take two quick photos before the creature wandered out of our site and sight. Of course, as every photo of bigfoot is, these are blurry and through the trees. The instamatic cameras of 1974 didn't help much either.

As soon as the creature was out of sight, I wouldn't say frantically, but with expediency, we put everything into our canoes without really packing it up and headed off to the American side of the lake to find another camp site. I really have no recollection of what our new campsite was like as the

MY BIGFOOT STORY

fear, disbelief, excitement of seeing “Bigfoot” was the only one that was ingrained in my memory.

While I never talked about the experience much, with the fear of being teased or ridiculed about it, my mom had no problems telling everybody about our canoe trip.

My mom loved to talk, and loved to talk to anybody. I was always a bit embarrassed when the checkout lady at the grocery store or a random teacher at the school would mention some piece of information to me that I found deeply personal, yet my mom felt the need to tell whoever she ran into. The running joke in our family for years was asking my mom every time she talked to anybody was, “Did you tell them about the Canoe trip?” So even though I kept my secret for years, the secret was out there. Ultimately, over the years the story, like the memory, has faded.

I have held my voice for the past 50 years, but finally I have concluded it is now time to mention my experience with Bigfoot to provide the world with this undeniable and definitive proof of the existence of Bigfoot. You’re welcome!

Also, it might have been a bear.



CROWN PRINCE

Mathew Chilcott • Student, Academic Transfer

GRAND PRIZE WINNER, ARTWORK



KISS OF LIFE

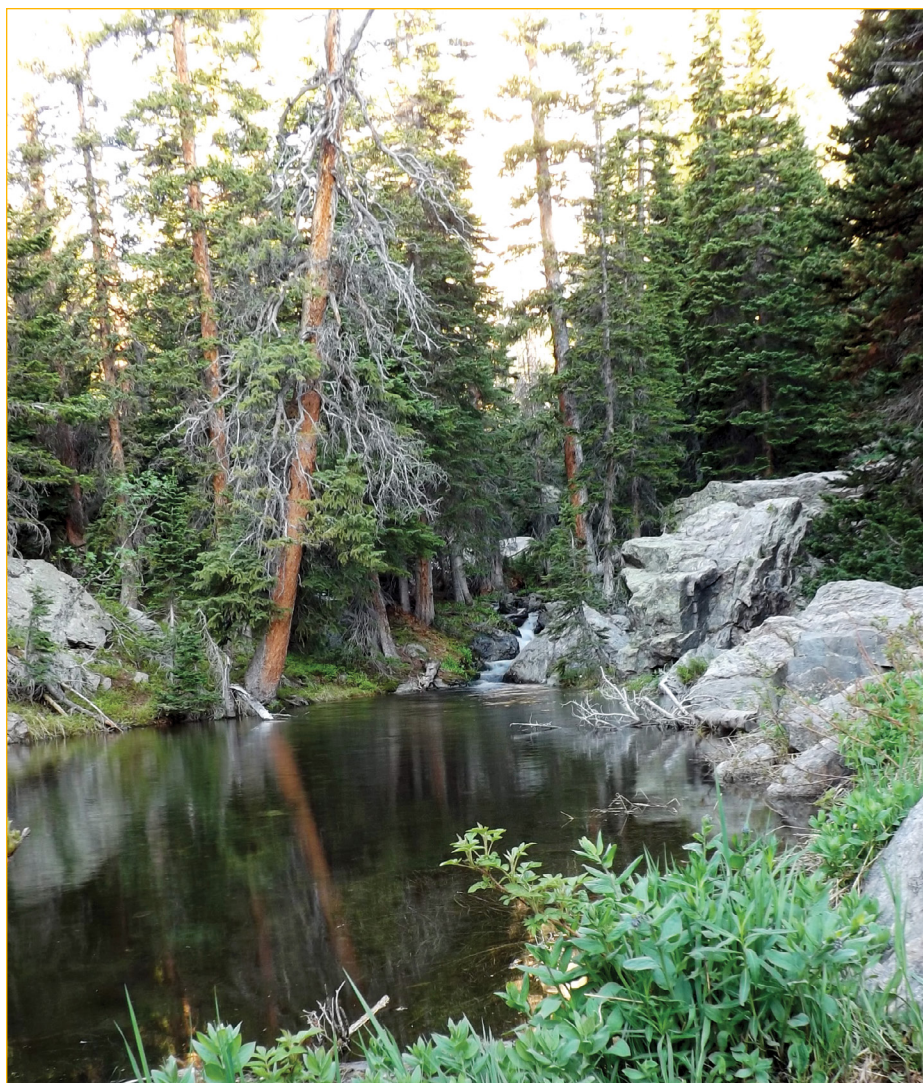
Bryan Emanuel Ortega • Student, Academic Transfer

RUNNER-UP AWARD WINNER, ARTWORK



FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



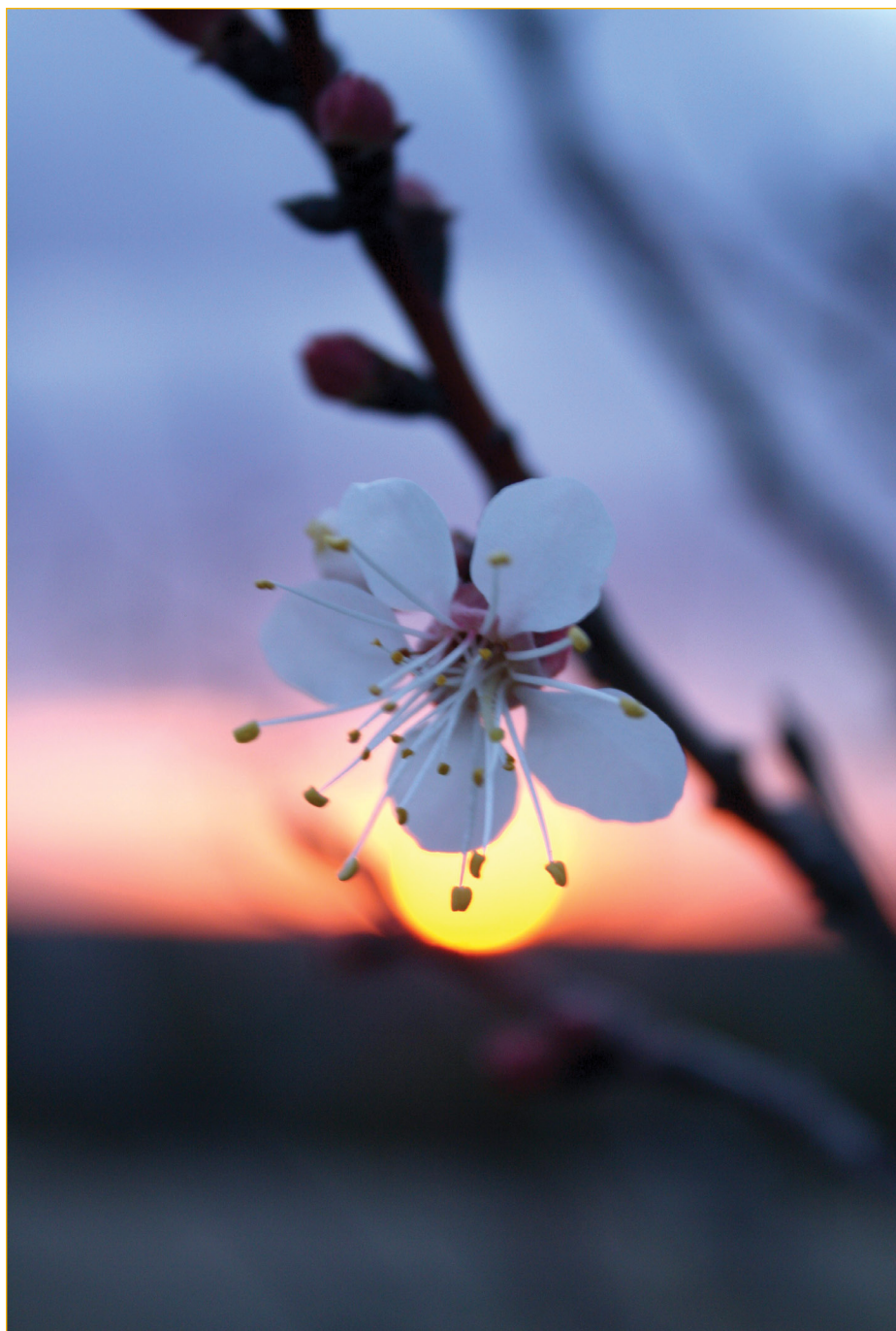
DANCER IN BLUE

Emma Waack • Instructor, Art



APPLE BLOSSOM AT DUSK

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



BUMBLEBEE

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



EYE OF THE BEAST

Hayle Yoakum • Student, Business



BUTTERFLY ON A LEAF

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



PEACH PEONY

Mathew Chilcott • Student, Academic Transfer



CENTRAL PARK

Cheney Luttich • Instructor, English



SEA AND SKY

Tanya Hare • Staff, Student Accounts



TYNDALL CREEK WATERFALL NEAR EMERALD LAKE

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



A GIFT TO MY YOUNGER SELF

Hayle Yoakum • Student, Business



FLOWERS SERIES

Lynda Heiden • Continuing Education







DREAM

Abbie McCoy • Student, Academic Transfer



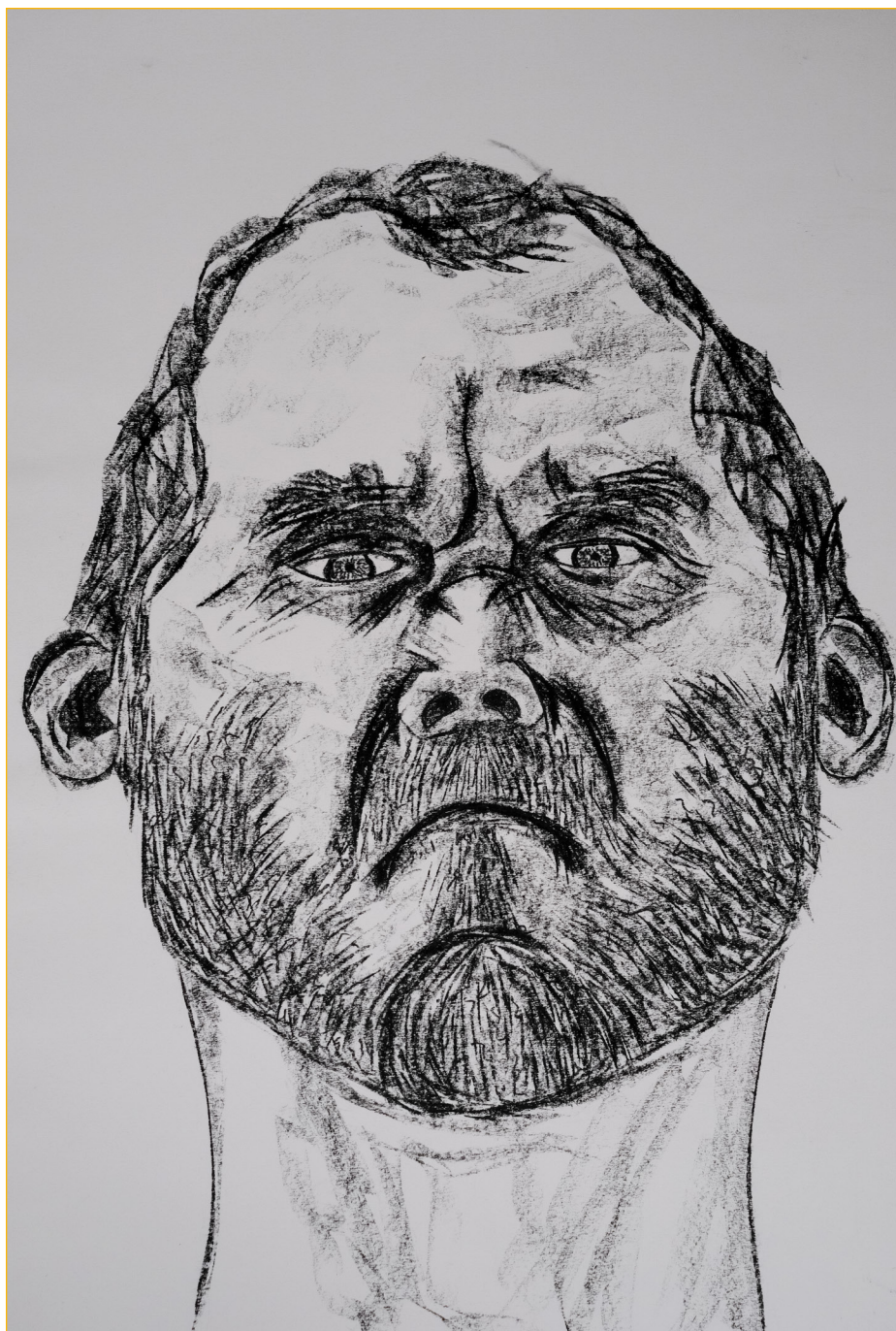
THE SPIDER AWAITS ITS PREY

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



ANGRY INDIGNATION

Mathew Chilcott • Student, Academic Transfer



FOXY SIP

Linda Hartman • Program Chair, Business



SILHOUETTE OF A POWER LINE

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



PARMANEAN BRIDGE

Susana Schmidt • Student, Baking and Pastry



WILTING PEONY

Mathew Chilcott • Student, Academic Transfer



YELLOW COLUMBINE

Mathew Chilcott • Student, Academic Transfer



SUNRAYS

Richard M. Hadley • Instructor, Communications



SUNRISE OVER THE NIOBRARA RIVER

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



THE REGAL EAGLE

Lynda Heiden • Continuing Education



STATUE OF LIBERTY

Cheney Luttich • Instructor, English



THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Hayle Yoakum • Student, Business



WOLVES VS. BLOODIES

Angel Aviarre • Student, GDMA



UNDER THE SEA SERIES

Lynda Heiden • Continuing Education







BLOWING BUBBLES WALL ART IN IOWA

Tanya Hare • Staff, Student Accounts



OBELISKS SINCE AD 80, EYEWEAR SINCE 1956

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



HOW DO YOU SEE WITH SUCH LONG BANGS

Lynda Heiden • Continuing Education



POPPY UNABASHED

Mathew Chilcott • Student, Academic Transfer



FLOWERS

Hayle Yoakum • Student, Business



PORTRAIT WITH FLOWERS

Emma Waack • Instructor, Art



FOOTSTEPS LEFT BEHIND

Richard M. Hadley • *Instructor, Communications*



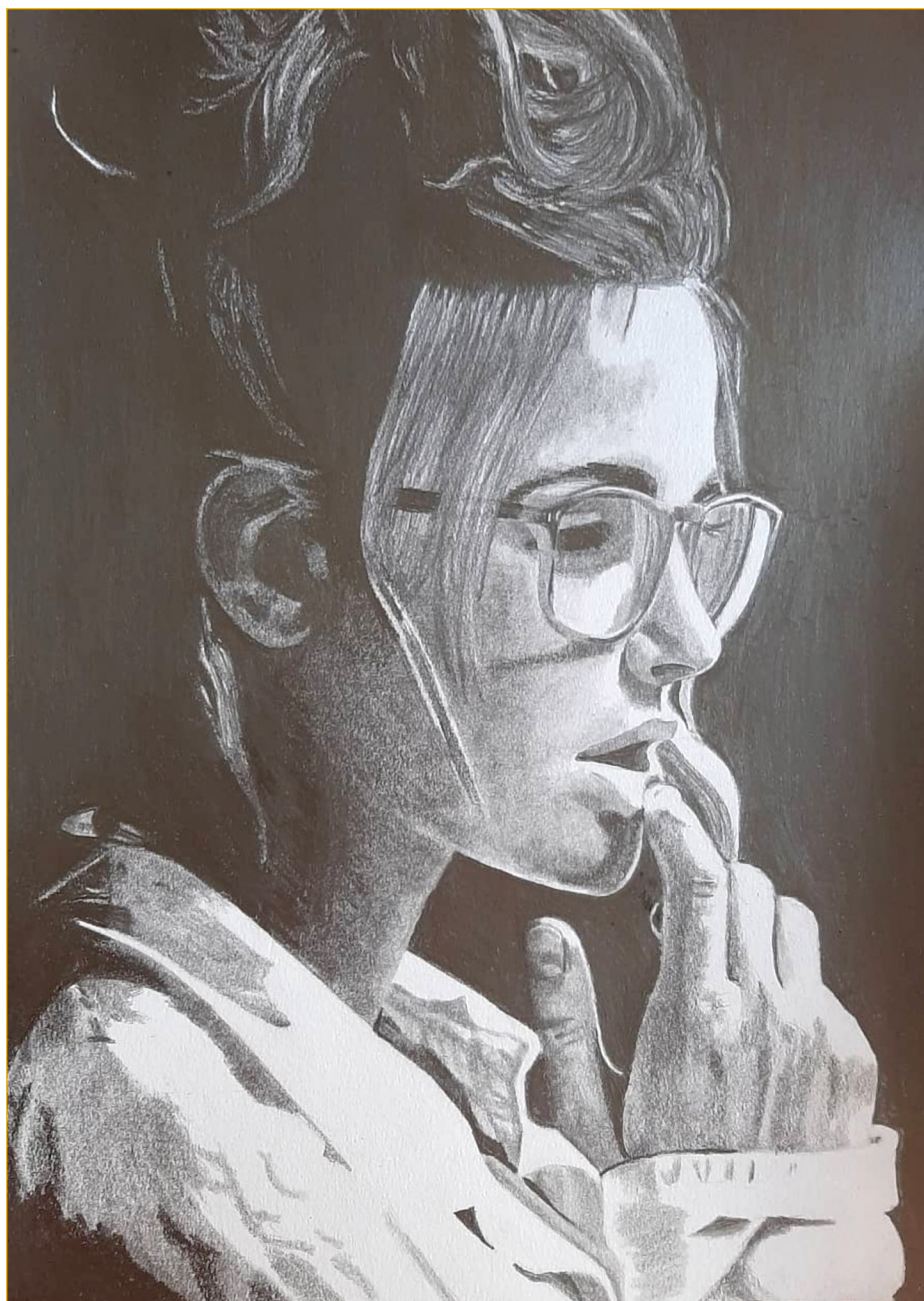
RED PEONY

Mathew Chilcott • Student, Academic Transfer



PORTRAIT WITH GLASSES

Emma Waack • Instructor, Art



GEOMETRIC

Hayle Yoakum • Student, Business



INTERSTELLAR

Linda Hartman • Program Chair, Business



WILDFLOWERS AT THE VILLA BORGHESE

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



STREETS OF PARMA

Susana Schmidt • Student, Baking and Pastry



THE SPANISH STEPS

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



RED POPPY

Mathew Chilcott • Student, Academic Transfer



DANCER IN JEANS

Emma Waack • Instructor, Art



SNOWPOSTS

Richard M. Hadley • *Instructor, Communications*



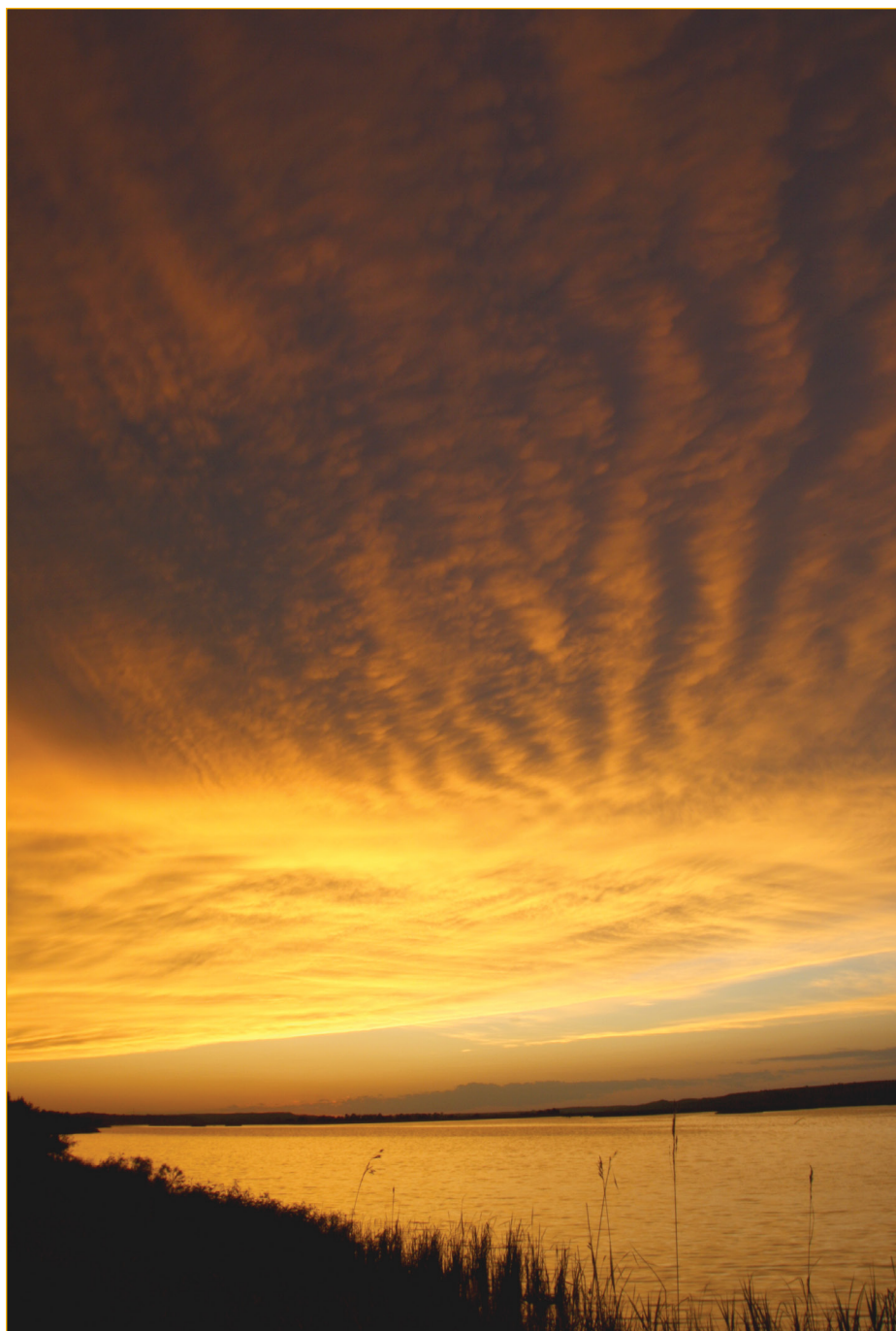
RIOMAGGIORE

Susana Schmidt • Student, Baking and Pastry



SUNRISE OVER THE MISSOURI RIVER

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



THE FARMER

Kal O'Bryant • Student, Academic Transfer

Scratching leaves and
Cricket cry woke me.
I slunk into earth-caked boots
Sat on a muddied mat
Under the empty coat hook.
I trudged into the field
Wood door cracked shut.

Grey-black sky spread above,
Pierced by pearly moonlight.
Sour dew on soybean
Caught the wind and
Crept into my nose.

Sheets of orange and pink spilled
Into the black void overhead.
The sun woke and clawed
Every inch of skin I showed.
Sweat gripped me tight.

THE FARMER

My back rung as I stood,
Wiping my gleaning forehead
With my baked wrist.
I crunched dirt with steel-toed steps
As I walked to my
Sun-dried wood porch.

Tired stairs shrieked at my ascent.
I lumbered toward my dark
Splintered rocking chair,
Palming the edges of its arms
And sighing away pain as I sat.

I stared out as far as I could,
Past my fields and the gravel roads,
Watching the sun tearing teal
Paint off the top of the water tower,
And melting that line
Where the sky meets the earth.

APATHY AS IT RELATES TO THE PASSAGE OF TIME

Erin M. Rengan • Student, Dual Credit/SENCAP

The pendulum would swing
side to side, side to side
nothing changes
nothing obtained
nor anything lost
as far as I know
An empty repetition
as time ticks on
slowly and
without remorse
The only thing
left with
any regrets
as time ticks
forward, endlessly
hopelessly,
without care,
is me.

-Apathy as it relates to the passage of time

MOONLIGHT

Harsh • Student, Academic Transfer

She was the night,
in all that she'd do.
It was her right,
wherever she'd move.
Each step alight,
through the dark and the Gloom.
Was like seeing the stars dance with the moon.

Her smile shone,
a crescent promise.
That even alone,
her memory is solace.
A melodious tone,
through the heart you eclipse.
Says your late start will end at her lips.

She too could see,
through eyes that behold.
What might be,
if you hear the untold.
It was her decree,
through pages we'd fold.
That we will age, but never grow old.

WILD SOUL

Olivia Schwickerath • Student, Music

Let me dance in the rain
Washed clean of my pain
The disease in my brain
That drives me insane.
Let me catch dew in my hair
Without a care
Even if there's no one that moment
To share
And it's too much to bare.
Let me dare
To drink the world in
And be lit within.

BRIDGES THAT CONNECT US ALL

Ruqaya Raji • Student, Health Sciences

The twelfth chapter, “Supporting, Not Shifting, the Conversation,” in Kate Murphy’s book, *You’re Not Listening*, emphasizes maintaining focus in conversations and shows the importance of genuine listening. Murphy argues that active listening fosters stronger interpersonal bonds. In the chapter’s introduction, she explores how certain responses redirect the conversation towards personal experiences, detracting from the focus on the other person. Murphy then talks about how the importance of asking questions aligns with the idea that curiosity and clarification contribute to a more profound understanding. She discusses gender stereotypes related to listening skills and underscores the connection between these skills and personal experiences. Murphy suggests that people should be more aware of others’ feelings rather than offering immediate solutions. She asserts that individuals tend to be more receptive when they explore their emotions instead of being told what to do. Furthermore, Murphy conveys the significance of setting a positive tone in interactions, laying the foundation for more connected and meaningful relationships. She says those who excel in the skills of listening and asking questions are collectors of engaging stories. Finally, she closes the chapter by mentioning that listening to diverse stories enhances the understanding of life, making others more intelligent and better at connecting with people from different social circles. The author’s purpose for writing this chapter is to illustrate the power of active listening and fostering the development of meaningful relationships.

I share Murphy’s perspective that the exchange of diverse stories goes beyond simple connection. Dive into the vibrant mosaic of life, where the richness of human connection unfolds through the art of genuine listening and curiosity. Imagine curiosity leading you through the different stories of human experience. Suddenly, strangers are not so unknown, they become storytellers, and in those tales, we create bonds that can not be undone. The twelfth chapter, “Supporting, Not Shifting, the Conversation,” in Kate Murphy’s book, *You’re Not Listening*, emphasizes the significance of active listening and nurturing meaningful connections through shared narratives. I learned the importance of active listening through befriending my Iraqi Jewish neighbors, whose stories of resilience and cultural diversity turned apparent differences into pathways of mutual understanding. This experience has improved my interactions and broadened my perspective of life as a young individual.

When you live in a metaphorical box and are unwilling to engage and truly listen to the diverse tales of others, you will never understand the

vast beauty and contrasting depth life has to offer. Growing up in our diverse neighborhood, I had the privilege of befriending our Iraqi Jewish neighbors, who graciously opened up about their experiences. Their stories, filled with resilience in the face of challenges, offered a window into their cultural richness. As we discussed religious practices and discovered both differences and shared values, it became clear that these conversations were shaping my understanding of people and religion on a profound level. Listening to their stories about the Arab-Israeli war allowed me to see beyond surface-level differences, appreciating the unique experiences that shaped each person. The religious distinctions that once seemed like dividers transformed into bridges of understanding. Given my Muslim background and their Jewish faith, this firsthand exposure taught me the importance of actively listening to diverse stories, breaking down assumptions, and creating deep connections with those whose backgrounds initially appeared different from my own.

By breaking stereotypes and encouraging understanding, these experiences demonstrate how diverse stories can connect people and contribute to a more unified society. I was presented with many different meaningful discussions that illustrated my neighbors' way of life and the trials and tribulations they faced. Where people are only exposed to information and opinions that reinforce their existing beliefs, creating a narrow worldview, Kate Murphy's twelfth chapter in *You're Not Listening* acts as a beacon, illuminating the transformative power of active listening. Had I chosen not to engage and actively listen to those pouring their heart and souls out, I would not have understood the meaning of their values as they relate to their Jewish experience. In a world where genuine connections are often drowned out by the noise of self-centered conversations, curiosity sparks the magic of genuine understanding. It is time to trade assumptions for stories and turn everyday conversations into bridges that connect us all.

Works Cited

Murphy, Kate. *You're Not Listening*. Celadon Books, 2021.

CONSUMED

Harsh • Student, Academic Transfer

My eyes were blue once but faded,
No they aren't green they're jaded!
Like what happens to a soul that feels it is hated!
The cold steel of an engine Unsatiated!
Rusting in a rain that never dissipated!
Took everything thrown at me and ate it!

Filling my heart, leaving it weighted.

So that everyone can get their pound of flesh.
Don't bother counting, leave nothing left!
Don't run with knives, so he went and lept!
Live by the blade, die on their lips!
Breaking news! A kid lost his breath!

A juvenile lost, by trying to be truest.

The child inside me's not yet dead.
My blood is still burning and read!
Like all the books that fill up my head!
A mind that devours that's how it was bread!
The food for vultures that pick at what's said!

You can consume me, but will choke on what's bled.

FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

Richard Barnes • Student

War could bring fear even to the mightiest of warriors. Some of the most elite soldiers that were ever trained came home broken, physically, and mentally, scarred for life. Is the fear of unknown even really worth it? I chose it for myself while shedding blood, sweat, and tears for freedom and my country. Everyone else will need to choose for themselves to serve or not, but the fear of the unknown will always be there to those who do make the choice to serve.

While being deployed to Iraq and witnessing the bravery firsthand of my brothers and sisters in arms, I could relate to their fear. By my own personal experience that war would be harsh for anyone is an understatement as you would never return as the same person you once were. This comes down to life and death decision: in a matter of seconds that need to be made. Fear of the unknown is in the back of all our minds.

The six of us from my company were attached to grey registration unit. We were to protect the battlefield hospital and assist with the dead bodies. None of us were experienced in this field, but they needed help and we were it. I am the only one who had some medic training and the ability to speak limited Arabic besides the crowned prince of Kuwait who came to be an interpreter. The day before we were in a massive fire fight as the Marines pushed the Iraqi Elite Republican Guard out of Kuwait right to us (One click from the Kuwait border near Bosra). Its highway had been named Death Valley for not only the men we killed, but from the thousands who died fleeing our air attack.

The captain briefed me early, and I inspected the truck very carefully. I need to make sure we did not have any mechanical problems in a war zone. We hauled frozen Iraqi and allied troops that do not take long to thaw out in this heat. They were to be treated with respect as if they were all Americans. Headfirst going in and headfirst coming out. The French military police escorted us to an airfield in Saudi Arabia. We took bottled water and MREs with plenty of ammunition and we cleaned our weapons. Private Love was still with me and she had very little experience and looked afraid.

We were loaded and started south as our escort wanted to stay behind us as I took the lead. I played music from my boombox that I bungeed to the roof so I did not have to listen to this most annoying lady next to me cry about everything. That is when I learned that she developed a yeast infection.

Me: "Why in the heck are you out here?"

Her: "Because I wanted to stay with you."

Me: "I understand, but you need to take care of yourself."

Her: "I'm sorry! Can I drive?"

Me: "Later."

We moved on and as I scanned the area I could see bombed bunkers, wrecked cars, dead bloated bodies, and Bedouins so we need to be careful and ready for anything just in case. It's hotter than hell! I started to think about my friends. Are they ok? Where are they? Where is the rest of my company? What are they doing? I wondered where my brother and the Nebraska Army Reserves are at. I hoped he was okay and back behind enemy lines at King Klad Military City (KKMC) where I found him before the start of Desert Storm. I played rock music as the Iraqi people did not know what to make of it. They seemed afraid and ran off as we watched Ozzy Osborne blaring from the boombox.

We could see trenches filled with black gold spilled from barrels and not lit. The Iraqi people had an unfathomable look about them. Most were poor and dressed in rags that looked real old. These very poor Shiite Muslims were treated really bad by Saddam Hussein (Sunni) over several years. I threw an MRE to a small child who looked hungry. The government here does not care about their rival Muslim sect. Private Love threw an MRE as well and hit a kid in the head.

Me: "Nice job."

As we moved along I heard a sound from the Cummings engine and pull over. The French military police seem to be worried as I pull up the hood. Then I tried to get in closer by crawling under this truck and saw a problem. When I got up I saw a burned car. I walked over to it and pulled the dead body out. (Burnt and burning bodies is the worst smell.) As I looked around, I grabbed Iraqi music tapes and tools that I found. I walked back to the truck and fixed the problem.

French MP: "I'm glad you know what you're doing."

Me: "I learned a lot from my dad."

French MP: "He's a mechanic?"

Me: "No! He used to be a coal miner, farmer, and a foreman for the Department of Roads in Nebraska. My brother and I helped him to overhaul our 1966 Ford 3 speed on the column pickup."

We turned and a family of Shiite Muslims came to beg for food. We had our picture taken with them. Then, of course, here comes a Bedouin with a donkey. He wants a cigarette so I trade for a picture riding his ass and the

French MP's feel I'm taking too many risks. I cleaned up and we ate when I asked if they have any French coins as I collect foreign currency. I even have Saddam Hussein on some currency. The oil well fires in the distance burned and filled the air in a choking but breathable oxygen. The weather turned hot so I took off my bullet proof vest and told everyone we needed to get ourselves back on the road. We were to make several trips baack and forth in a war zone.

We started again and we could see the old Soviet Union tanks used by Iraq destroyed high up on an elevated plateau. I started to think how fortunate I really have been as I've actually got to meet the President George H.W. Bush of the United States at the Royal Air Force Base in Saudia Arabia (and again in New York City at the Ticket Tape Parade). Wow! I stood right next to my Commander in Chief. Even more amazing is meeting the Crowned Prince of Kuwait on a battlefield in Iraq. Then, by chance, find my big brother right before I left for Iraq. Then my cousin who retired from the Air Force and works for ARAMCO oil company found me. Amazing!

There was plenty of time for me to think since I then allowed Private Love to drive since her vociferous complaining. My eyes were always looking around for danger. I decided to take the fastest route so she turned and took the highway as directed by me. I looked behind us as the French MP's followed us. Now I started to think about my girlfriend who got deployed as well. I missed her and I try hard not to think about it.

We pull up on the airfield in Saudi Arabia to unload. They sign for the cargo so now it is their problem. We turn around and head back to Iraq as we needed to do this quickly. Private Love is still driving and surprisingly well. I trained her and others who joined the company over here. Most of us were trained in other MOs and placed into areas of need. Once we pulled off the highway, we pulled over so everyone could take a bathroom break and switch drivers. I gave a quick check on the truck and it looked good.

Here we go again. I could see the smoke from the oil well fires not far off. Off to our right I could see several camels wandering in a herd with sheep. Where is your herder at? I thought for a moment. The next thing I knew we were turned sideways by something that just hit us really hard and loud. Somebody asked me if I was okay and I couldn't answer. What just happened? Where is Private Love? Is she okay? My foot is caught in the steering wheel as someone tried to pull me out. I need to get up, but I can't. Why? I hear them say that they could not get an air lift for me. This is totally my fault! I should have been more alert to that herd. Wait! I can think and see, but time stalled as if it were in slow motion. I look up at the sky and saw dark cloudy smoke from the oil well fires and heard men yelling as weapons fired when the sun peaked through the grey smoke. I heard someone say to me that I'd be fine as they picked me up and loaded me into a Humvee on my side. Something is wrong with my left side as I see blood.

FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

The ride became uncomfortable and seemed long. I tried to urinate into a jug which felt embarrassing. They told me that my wounds were not serious. Were they just saying that to keep me calm? I thought. I hoped they didn't notify my family and scare them. Where were they taking me? My back arm hurt.

We arrived at a hospital in Saudi Arabia. The doctor explained that my foot became stuck in the steering wheel which allowed the truck to drag me on the road. My whole back had no skin and there were lacerations. They had to remove metal from my back left arm and my left shoulder became dislocated. I'd stay in the hospital about two weeks and be able to work again. Private Love broke her right arm and had some lacerations. Two French MP's and my Lieutenant came and said it was not my fault. General Marks came to award me.

While being deployed to Iraq and witnessing the bravery firsthand of my brothers and sisters in arms, I can relate to their fear. War does bring fear to the mightiest of warriors because I witnessed it and felt it. Kuwait became liberated by our actions. Wouldn't Ukraine deserve the same respect? Maybe it could be just about oil? What I do know is found in the Bible at John 15:13. "No one has love greater than this, that someone should surrender his life in behalf of his friends." I have witnessed this myself and I shall never forget their sacrifice. Fear of the unknown is my war and will always be.

CREATIVE BLOCK

Erin M. Rengan • Student, Dual Credit/SENCAP

What comes naturally
Just doesn't

My mind, a desolate, empty void

Like the ocean
Waves of inspiration crash to the shore
But then, all of a sudden,
The water is gone

As if it was never there to begin with

What was once easy to drown in
Is gone
Missing

A different kind of drowning
One where art is the air
I breathe
Until I can't anymore
Until it's gone

The tides have receded

And I wait
For their return

-creative block

MOTHER'S DAY

**Uyen Nguyen, MA • Staff, Administrative Assistant I,
Financial Aid**

Today is the day— I think about you most.
It is Mother's Day; I wish to make a toast
To all those times when the memories remain.
Flashbacks rushing by me never could restrain
those falling tears
I remember the years
When you still held
me in your arms, even when I
yelled.
Your voice calms me like the waves at sea.
your motherly love,
caring for me, like a
dove spreading the
peace.
Your last words and strength before your decease
you left a legacy in my world,
making me very proud to be your little girl.
We prayed for you each and every day.
I feel your presence and wish you could stay.

MOTHER'S DAY

Looking back on my writings, those songs and poems I dedicated to you.

I look back at pictures, all the videos, and singing, too.

Days I feel sorry, days I feel blessed,

Days of overwhelming thoughts and even a little stress.

I wear the guidance from you around my neck. The sparkling sterling white gold Cross reminds me that you'll always be my light.

Missing you always, your warm, gentle touch will always be my guide.

Hold my hands closely, and stay by my side.

The feeling you've given me— showing me I can move on.

All I have to do is hope— and think about our strong bond.

Forever and always— you'll live within me.

Like strong waves splashing at us or hidden seashells by the sea

I always stay true to who I am and where I stand.

The negativities in life, I won't give in to such commands.

You taught me to love—you taught me to care.

I felt sorry for myself all those times, but I have to believe you will forever be there.

STRAWBERRY STARBURSTS AND WHITE SPOONS

Dylan Lester • Student, Academic Transfer

The last day of school for the week came to an end, meaning it was time to go to my dad's house for the weekend. Being a child of divorced parents was hard, but I remember always loving my dad and the excitement to get ready to leave for the hour-long drive to his house. Each week, I would pack my bag as quickly as I could, often throwing whatever random shirts I could find into it.

"Don't forget your homework!" my mother yelled at me from the living room.

Her reminder echoed throughout the hallway as I yelled back, "I don't have any this weekend!"

This weekend was no different, except that my mom took my siblings and I on a drive before going home to pack our bags. My newborn brother, only 2 months old at the time, was having a hard time going down for a nap. His screams filled the backseat of our large suburban, where I sat directly next to him.

"Dylan, will you give him his bottle?" my mom asked me.

I looked around for it, and when I finally found it, it was already empty. "Mom, there's nothing in it", I reply.

A long sigh told me all I needed to know.

Just figure something out, Dylan. Play with him, I thought to myself. I reached my hands into his car seat, digging through a mountain of soft blankets to try and find his pacifier or rattle toy. Something. Anything. What I found instead was a pink Starburst wrapper. The artificial smell of strawberry lingered ever so slightly on that wrapper, its age unknown. The heater blasting down onto where I was sitting pushed the smell around, and I started balling it up in my hand.

The sound caught my baby brother's attention and he slowly stopped crying as I balled up the little wrapper. I noticed he was watching me and I smiled at him. He started crying again, his wails louder this time. My mom stopped the car abruptly and turned to look at me.

"Can't you help your brother?!"

I looked down, avoiding her stare.

She slammed herself back down into her seat, putting the car in park of

the side of the road. We were only a few minutes from our house, so we could go back to get him a bottle.

My older sister turned to me from the front seat and quietly said, “Just play with him. Do something, help Mom out.”

I thought I was, but I guess not. I looked back down to my crying brother and started reaching for the seat pocket in front of me to discard the wrapper I still had balled in my hand. The sound of the crinkling wrapper caught my brother’s attention again and he quieted down. I caught on and started rolling the wrapper around in my hand some more.

He was quiet the rest of the drive home. At some point, I misplaced the wrapper and couldn’t find it. He started crying again as we pulled into the driveway.

“Just go get your bags ready, your dad will be here in 30 minutes,” my mom said.

I jumped out of the suburban, landing on the gravel driveway with a light ‘thud’. I ran inside, packed my bag, and waited quietly in my room as my mom threw things around in the kitchen, trying to get another bottle put together quickly enough to satisfy my brother. My older sister came into my room, rocking our brother back and forth softly.

“What did you use to make him quiet in the car?” she asked.

I told her about the Starburst wrapper. She nodded and walked away. I heard her and my mom talking in the kitchen and then immediately recognized my mother’s stomping as she quickly made her way to my bedroom.

“Did you give him a Starburst wrapper?!” my mom yelled. Her eyes were wide open, and she was leaning all the way down to be eye level with me on my bottom bunk. The already small room in our trailer home suddenly felt even smaller with her blocking the exit.

“No, of course not,” I whispered.

“Then where is it? Did you throw it away?”

I do not know why my mom believed I gave it to him. It must have been something my sister said, but I am not sure what she said about the wrapper to our mother.

“I dropped it, I couldn’t find it.” My response was timid, and I refused to look her in the eye. As soon as the last word left my lips, curse words started leaving hers.

“WHAT THE FUCK?! WHAT DO YOU MEAN?! HE COULD HAVE SWALLOWED IT!

ARE YOU FUCKING STUPID?!”

I tried not to react, clenching my jaw and continuing to study the threading of my bed sheets. They were *Cars* themed. I loved Lightning McQueen. I didn’t answer, scared that any response would further the rage I was already having directed to me. I knew my mom was tired. I have autistic siblings, there was a newborn, and she had to deal with making sure she had us ready for our weekend visits to our dad. It was a lot. *She was just tired.* She was just tired. I told myself that to soothe myself from the overwhelming anxiety I had as she continued her rampage.

My mother left my room, my sister on her heels. The thuds down the hallway told me she was not finished with this conversation, just needed to go do something else for a minute. Or at least, I thought she was going to do something else for a minute. Instead, she came back down the hallway faster than she left. It was like she had never even the left room. Coming back into my room, she had one of those plastic white mixing spoons in her hand. Her knuckles were white around the long handle as she placed the hand holding the spoon on her cocked hip.

“I’m going to check his car seat and if I don’t find the wrapper there, that means he swallowed it. If he swallowed it, you’re dead to me,” my mother warned.

You’re dead to me. Her words echoed in my head. How could someone say something like that to a child? It was not the first time, and ultimately would not be the last time, I heard those words from my mom. It was almost as common for her to say to me as “I love you.” The thought of saying those things to her own children, especially a seven-year-old, was not something she shied away from. It was like a greeting, something she could say on demand without a second thought.

“Mom, I swear he didn’t. I dropped it somewhere in the suburban, I think,” my shaky voice said, trying to defend myself from the punishment I knew was coming if she didn’t find the wrapper.

“YOU THINK?! Dylan, if he swallowed it, he could die! And if he dies, it’s your fucking fault!”

The thought of being responsible for my baby brother’s death shook me to my core. I loved him so much; he was my second younger sibling, the first one I would be able to remember being a baby. My younger sister was born less than two years after me. We were growing up together instead of me watching her grow up. I would be able to watch my brother grow up. I didn’t want to be responsible for never getting to see that. I knew he couldn’t have possibly swallowed that wrapper, right? It was impossible.

My mother started tearing apart his car seat. I could hear the clinking of the buckles as she took out all the blankets and moved them around,

desperately trying to find the wrapper. She didn't find it there; I know she didn't because of the screams of anger as she headed for the suburban to look there.

I was shaking, my hands cold and sweating. I began frantically replaying the moments before I dropped the wrapper in my mind. What was I doing? Which hand was it in? Did I check under my butt? Did I check under the car seat base? My cuticles began bleeding as I picked at them, trying to focus on anything else besides my mother's rage for me.

"Dylan, did you let George play with it? Just be honest," my older sister said softly. Her appearance in my doorway surprised me as I hadn't heard her walk down the hallway. She was still rocking my brother, who finally had the bottle my mother was preparing earlier.

I shook my head no, adamant that I wasn't as dumb as they were making me seem.

"Dallas, I swear to you, I didn't," I started. My voice broke as tears welled in my eyes. They always burned from the saltiness at first, making me wipe my eyes quickly. "I promise, he never had it in his hands. I don't know where it went."

"Well, I told Mom you were playing with him with it, and she thinks you gave it to him because you couldn't find his binky."

That made sense, at least now it does. I just don't get why my mom was so angry. He was fine. He was alive and breathing, nothing obstructing his airway or making him choke. I still don't understand my mom's line of thinking in those moments, and I never will.

"DYLAN!" My mother's screams terrified me. She was back inside, and based on the tone of her voice, she did not find the wrapper. "He's probably inhaled it! He's going to die because of you!" Her yelling got louder as she made her way down the hallway quickly.

As soon as she entered my room, I knew I was done for. This behavior from her remained predictable as I grew older, always being the same. She would hear something, take it out of context, and become so irate that she would refuse to think logically or hear others out. She got tunnel vision and stayed that way for hours.

Upon entering my room, she pushed my sister out of her way. Raising the spoon she had grabbed earlier, she brought it down on my face. A whistle rippled through the air from how quickly she swatted me with it.

"DID YOU LET HIM EAT IT?!" she shrieked.

I was completely sobbing at this point, the sting from the first hit radiating throughout my face. I held my hand to my very red and hot cheek.

I shook my head no, too frightened and crying too much to speak. My hand was soaked from my tears in seconds.

THWAP. Across the face again. This one hit my nose a bit, too.

I screamed out in pain, tasting blood as it dripped down into my mouth. I put my hands out to defend myself, but my tears blurred my vision and all I could see was the red of my mom's shirt as she stood in front me. I had no idea where the spoon was. As far as I could see, it had disappeared into the white of my walls.

SMACK. Another, this time from the other side of my face. The burn from the hits spread from the right side of my face to all over. Another smack and my lip started bleeding. The taste of blood was overwhelming now, a hint of the salty tears peeking through. Spit, snot, blood, tears. It all collected on my face and in my mouth. The distinct taste of it all haunts me to this day. Coppery, salty, gross. The left over taste of my lunch washed away with this new mix of flavors.

SMACK. THWAP. CRACK. SLAP. The assault from the spoon continued, the wails of pain continued.

"YOU FUCKING IDIOT. I FUCKING HATE YOU. YOU KILLED YOUR BROTHER. I HOPE YOU'RE HAPPY. DID YOU JUST HATE HIM THAT MUCH?!" my mom screeched.

I couldn't see her, but I knew my sister was standing there watching; whether she watched in horror or sadness is unknown, but I do know that I heard her start shouting over my mother.

"Mom, Dad will be here in 10 minutes!" she shouted.

"SHUT UP!" our mom responded, opting to continue with beating me.

I felt like I was choking, unable to cry and swallow all the blood, spit, tears, and snot at the same time. I wasn't breathing but continued to try and hold my hands up in defense. My mouth remained open in silent screams, both from trying to cry out to stop her and from how puffy my lips had become. I had been hit so many times that my lips were bleeding and bruised and severely enlarged.

"Mom! We have to go! He can't see Dad this weekend unless you want him to call the cops! You have to stop!" my sister tried again. Our brother was also screaming now, and she was trying to soothe him. My sister must have started adjusting the way she was holding our brother because she found the wrapper.

"MOM! STOP! I FOUND THE WRAPPER!"; she exclaimed.

I finally felt the hitting stop as my mom turned to see what my sister was

talking about. The momentary relief was quickly overcome with pain as I held my face and finally felt able to breathe again. My vision was still blurry as I sobbed into my hands and ran for the bathroom.

“You are so fucking lucky, Dylan,” my mom said as I left the room.

No sorry, no running to comfort the child she just heavily abused and traumatized. Just that I was lucky. The resentment I harbor over that statement is overwhelming. My mother and I’s relationship has never been the same since.

A soft wad of tissues was held on my face as I stared into the mirror. I was still crying, but not as much. My vision wasn’t as blurry, and I saw the black eye that was forming. I was in so much pain that I didn’t dare touch it. I started shaking even more as I heard my mom walk towards the bathroom.

“Dallas, get your siblings in the car. Dylan,” she paused, “you stay here. And get yourself cleaned up.”

The look of disgust on my mom’s face as she said that broke me a little. She looked at me as if it was my fault that she had just done that.

“I’ll tell your dad you aren’t coming this weekend because you’re sick. We’ll see if you can go next weekend.” With that, she and my siblings were out the door.

I heard the front door click shut and I walked myself into my room. I sat on my bed, still crying, but feeling a sense of relief that she was gone for a few minutes. I looked down at my shirt. It was one of my favorites, a blue and white striped t-shirt; now it was stained with blood in several spots. I hated that I had to get rid of it, but I had no choice. It was too ruined, and my mom certainly wouldn’t want to try and salvage it for me. I tried to stop myself from crying much more, knowing that it would be bring more beating if I was still crying when my mom returned.

It would be nearly 10 years before I got an apology from my mom for what she had done to me. I missed my dad that weekend, wishing I could run away and live with him instead of her. This shaped our relationship, and I would grow up to try and distance myself from my mother as much as I could. I resent her for this and many other things, and she will never take true accountability for anything.

When my mom returned, she looked at me before ordering me around.

“Throw that shirt away, I can’t clean it. And why didn’t you wipe your face off? Quit holding the tissues there, you’re not bleeding anymore.” A string of small things like this continued to flow from her. Instead of anger, it was annoyance; like she was upset that I hadn’t gone ahead and made it look like the whole thing never happened.

She took me to the kitchen after I changed my clothes. She wet some paper towels and wiped the snot and blood off my face.

I was quiet, studying the patterns in the wood on our cupboards. I didn't dare make eye contact with her, I didn't want to anyway. As she wiped my lip, I felt stinging again. I winced as she pushed at my lip to get all the blood off.

"Quit being a baby," she ordered me.

I didn't respond. As she stood up to throw the paper towels away, I looked at the floor. The cold of the linoleum flooring snuck through my socks, and I wiggled my toes. The sun was starting to set, and the kitchen had an orange tint throughout. The sound of the freezer door opening grabbed my attention, and I looked over. My mom was pulling a bag of frozen peas out.

"Put this on your face. You're gonna have to do this every day. We'll see if you can go to school on Monday." She pressed the peas against my enlarged lips before sending me away.

I spent the rest of that evening alone in my room. I remember getting into my pajamas and going to bed relatively early. I skipped out on dinner, partially because I didn't have the energy to eat, partially because my mother didn't make me anything and I was seven, so I couldn't exactly cook for myself just yet. As I laid in my bed, tucked away into my *Cars* comforter, I tried my best to forget what happened before drifting off to sleep.

FOR EZIO

Angel Aviarre • Student, GDMA

Ezio

In a field where flowers sway,
New fingers find a dandelion
His tiny hands softly bring it my way,
“Mama, Flower.”

Though I’m weary, scared of the future, love prevails,
In this terrifying world
In his gift, my heart inhales,
A simple bloom, the purity of love
Keep us in this moment forever

Never grow up
Never change
Stay mine, small, and blissful

But you are not mine
You belong to the stars
You will change this world one day

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education

Young Supernovas

8-Course Lute

T 1 1 3 1 1 1 1 0 1
A 3 2 2 2 3 2 0 3 2
B 4 3 0 0 0 3 0 3 0

Vocals

E # # # # # # # #
B # # # # # # # #

Lute

T 1 1 0 1 3 1 3 1
A 3 2 0 0 3 0 3 0
B 3 3 0 3 2 3 0 3

Vocals

B \sharp \sharp O Sara O Sara My wayward Princess I've loved you so dearly So truly so deeply

Lute

T 0 1 1 1 3 1 1 1 0
A 3 0 2 0 0 2 2 0 0
B 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

Vocals

That I must confess O Sara O Sara O Sara O Sara I've traveled

Lute

1 3 1 3 1 1 1

3 2 3 0 0 3 2 0 3 0 0 3 2 0 0 3 2 0 3

so far Crossed seas and great mountains But rest not will I ever Till I've found where you are

Vocals

2

33

Lute

Vocals

O Sara Sweet Sara Don't look so forlorn One day I will find you

41

hammer on / pull-off

Lute

Vocals

One day I'll return O Sara O Sara I hope you'll

48

Lute

Vocals

revive The love you once bore me Or mayhaps we both died By the Dragonlord's sword

55

Lute

Vocals

O Sara O Sara Please know that I'm yours In life or in death By the Dragon

THE DRAGONLORD'S SWORD

3

62 *hammer on / pull-off*

Lute

T 2-2-2-4-2-12 11-9-7 1-0 1-0 1-3

A 0 0 0 0 0 0

B 3-3 3 3 3 3 3 2 0 3

Vocals

Lord's sword O Sara O Sara By your very kiss did

3 3 3

68

Lute

T 1 1 1 0 1 8 1

A 3 2 0 3 2 0 10 2

B 3 2 3 2 3 3 9 3

Vocals

I die You were always so fine So sore is my memory That I drown it in wine

75 *hammer on / pull-off*

Lute

T 2-2-2-4-2-7 6-4-2 1-0 1-0 0-0 1-3 0

A 3 2 3 2 3 3 3 2 3 0

B 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 0

Vocals

O Sara O Sara I do miss you so Every night ev-

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

82

Lute

T 1 0 0 1 1 2 0 1 0 3 1

A 3 2 3 3 3 0 3 3 3 2 1

B 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

Vocals

-ery morning It's my greatest woe

THE DRAGONLORD'S SWORD

4

90

Lute

The lute part consists of three staves. The top staff has letters T, A, B above it. The middle staff has numbers 1-0-0-0-1-3-1-1 below it. The bottom staff has numbers 3-2-3-2-3-2-3-2 below it.

O Sara O Sara I hope you'll revive The love you once bore me Elsewise we

Vocals

The vocal part is on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It begins with a whole rest followed by eighth notes for each syllable of the lyrics.

98

Lute

1 1 1 1 3 1 1

0 3 0 2 0 0 0 2 1 2

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

Both died by the Dragonlord's sword O Sara O Sara Please know that I'm yours

Vocals

105

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system shows the Lute part with a tablature on a six-line staff. The letters 'T' and 'B' are placed at the beginning of the first and second lines, respectively. Fingering numbers (1, 2, 3, 0) are written above the lines. The second system shows the Vocals part on a five-line staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics 'In life or in death' and 'By the Dragonlord's sword' are written below the staff. The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes with rests.

IT ALL BEGAN

G.C. Hughes • Student, Academic Transfer

Long ago in a town not far from here, it all began. I was born. The feeling, tasting, seeing, hearing, and smelling exploded to life accompanied by my vigorous crying. It hasn't stopped since. I thought maybe it would never stop. It was a thought not a hope. It was a troubling thought. It was a fear. In all honesty, it was like viewing a great landscape and fearing the travels as stretching infinitely before me. Each step was a great loss. Each new sight would soon be abandoned forever. I would know all there is to know and experience all there is to experience, only to forget. Then I learned of the globe. The landscape did not stretch forever. It simply loops back around to this very spot if you are patient enough. Then, it all began. I stepped for the first time with the whole of my foot. I breathed with the full expanse of my lungs. I looked with every detail plain to see. None of those fleeting and dule moments of pleasure held me back in places I must pass. I was free. My soul could sing if it wanted, and my brain could dance to the music. I was alive. I walked south, then east and west. Eventually I walked north, and south again. It is confusing, but I wasn't lost or searching. I didn't know where to go next and I was looking for something. They are different. They feel different. Soon I came upon a grove of trees. A young man was crying in its heart. I sat with him. In the shade of the leaves, we wept. Our moaning traveled the hillsides for us, while we held each other desperately clinging to life. When our wails petered to a whimper, I stood and struck out for the east. "Where are you going? How can this be fixed? Where are your answers old man?" he called. I laughed. My deep chuckles filled my sunken sad chest and cleaned my eyes with new tears. He stared in shock. The joke had missed him as it left his mouth. He'd hear it one day, and it would begin.

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES IN ABC'S

Uyen Nguyen, MA • Staff, Administrative Assistant I,
Financial Aid

As time passes through my lens from the '90s to the year '24, I reminisce about the good times.

Beginning with the days when my biological mother was with me.
As the years pass like a time

Capsule, my childhood memories collide with *Ninja Turtles*, *Donkey Kong*,
and *Mario*. The

days when the Nintendo64 was popular. With

every flashback, I look back at *Street*

Fighters and *Mortal Kombat*. Kirby
Avalanche, with childhood friends I

grew up with, always

happy, cheery, and never
sad. Summer days, like

ice cream dripping
as the leaves turn to
all.

Joyful days of living on the wild side and always trying our best, like reading
from a

Kindle and gaining inspiration. Adulting gets rough, but I strive to give 110%
of my all.

Look at the world from multi-colored lenses and a rainbow
scent of Skittles cotton candy.

Motivations and acknowledgments as we move up
the spiral staircase.

Nostalgic events with friends are warm and wonderful. Continuing to move forward as we

Open the door to newfound opportunities. Always think
positively as we see the world like a beautiful abstract painting of sunshiny faces.

Quietly reading and studying to succeed. Taking nice relaxing breaks as we

reflect on the memorable moments when we were kids.
Childhood connections, like

S*ailor Moon* and *Pokémon*. Living life without regrets.

The times when we forgive but will never forget. Introducing myself as

Uyen (win), as I try to spread positivity and good

Vibes to the

World. But at thirty-four, I learned like a

Xylophone playing a suspicious spy song. Follow the sounds of Do Re Me, and do not let the

yak-itty gossip and misconstrued manners get a third or fourth chance. Time

Zooms by as feelings remain unchanged. Live for today, and not let the past ruin the big picture.

AI'S POWERFUL IMPACT ON MY COLLEGE EDUCATION AND REPUTATION

Ruqaya Raji • Student, Health Sciences

In a world where artificial intelligence (AI) is engulfing our education system, one wonders how these progressive tools would have affected the great minds of the past. Would the famous poet, William Shakespeare have been able to unleash the great tales within his mind had he had access to the same AI tools readily available to us students today? These thoughts raise severe questions on whether the advancement of artificial intelligence is aiding students or holding us back from our true potential. While I believe that AI in education has its benefits, it can create a decline in critical thinking, raise ethical concerns, and hinder the ability of one's true potential. These contemplations lead me to question the balance between the benefits and potential drawbacks of AI in education. Therefore, I am cautious not to rely entirely on it, recognizing the importance of nurturing my own critical thinking skills and creativity.

I have seen how AI can make education better, but I have also learned that I need to be careful about how I use it. When it comes to using machine learning, I have mixed feelings. On one hand, AI can make learning more tailored to my needs, helping me understand complex topics in my science and math classes. For example, in my biology course, I recall learning about a very complex subject, the process of cellular respiration. It is a process that breaks down sugar into usable energy, in order for us to survive. After being very stressed, I asked a machine on my cellphone to explain it to me in simple terms. I was fascinated by how it could do that in seconds. It broke down each step for me in simple terms in just a matter of seconds. This helped me comprehend the material more effectively and improved my academic performance on my exam. Similarly with math, a subject I struggle with, AI has been a valuable help. Numbers and equations are just not my thing.

However, when it comes to courses demanding critical thinking and text comprehension, such as English, my experience differs. I have read multiple times that AI makes us lose our voices in writing and I also share the same belief. While using it can get tasks done faster, I will feel unaccomplished and even guilty. Hence why, I have mixed feelings about its use. AI can generate an outline, ideas, or even entire pieces of writing, but I believe that I do not need to rely on it as it can disrupt my unique way of choosing words in writing and expression. Our minds are still developing and AI can disturb the critical thinking skills that I have developed. Therefore, I value my brain's capacity over the potential for machine-generated errors.

When it comes to using AI, I make sure I keep things transparent and accountable. I try to use AI in a way that is honest and fair. For instance, I use Grammarly, an AI writing assistant application, to level up my writing and make sure it is on point. With Grammarly's help, I can polish my writing and punctuation. But it is not just about fixing errors; Grammarly teaches me along the way, showing me how to write better and more effectively. While it is ethical to acknowledge my use of Grammarly, I have encountered numerous instances where it caused unexpected issues, flagging my papers as if they were machine-generated. This is frustrating, especially when I have put in significant effort and creativity into my writing. This is where I see the challenge begin to arise when AI detectors fail to differentiate between genuine human work and text that has been enhanced by AI tools like Grammarly. It is like my effort gets lost in translation. In the future, how can I trust that my work is being evaluated fairly and accurately if AI detectors can not tell the difference between human creativity and automated assistance with grammar and punctuation? It is a serious question that is begging for some serious answers.

When I search for a topic that I need to expand my knowledge on, Copilot pops up on the side and is ready with answers and websites showing where the information came from. Yeah, this might be helpful to some at first, but what happens when it provides false inaccurate information? Doing traditional research is best for me, and I will carry on to use what my teachers and professors have taught me throughout the years. I believe AI should not replace traditional learning methods like lectures, textbooks, class discussions, and physical assignments. For me, hands-on work is where I learn best. There is something about actually doing things, whether it is conducting experiments, building projects, or solving problems, that helps me understand and remember concepts better. It is the hands-on experience that truly sticks with me and deepens my learning in a way that AI cannot replicate. So, while AI has its benefits, I think it is crucial to remember that it is not perfect and that human engagement is still valuable in education.

As I reflect on my positive and negative experiences with AI, I am reminded that technology, while incredibly powerful, is not without its twists. It is easy to be captivated and allured by the convenience and efficiency that AI brings to the table, especially when it helps me navigate through complex subjects with ease. However, alongside these benefits, there is a nagging awareness of the potential drawbacks and ethical considerations that come with relying too heavily on AI. It is important to remember that AI is a tool, not a replacement for human interaction and critical thinking. In the ongoing nature of education with technology being incorporated, let's not forget to ask ourselves, are we shaping AI, or is AI shaping us?

LETHAL

Harsh • Student, Academic Transfer

You can find me nine millimeters from a hole,
That was six feet deep when I was twelve years old.
From such heights i can see my days measure a few,
More than can be said from kids who live by 7.62.

And what's worse than a child who knows how to fight?
Except those that refused preferring to fly.
So why are you surprised by faustian deals?
They've only ever known humanity as something that kills.

I'd be terrified too, of the human condition.
An abyss consuming light, don't risk them.
Hell we're all scared of the dark,
The truly lethal thing is searing it into our hearts

MEMOIR ESSAY

Desmond Hauser • Student

Let me start this story where I'm riding down the interstate with drugs and gun in tow. I can't remember the last time I've slept. I'm on my way to see Allison, my girlfriend. She has been in Kansas City for the last month now, after being emergency flighted from our home in Lincoln, NE. She went into labor 2.5 months early with our second son, Liam.

I was at work when Allison called me; she said, "I'm on the way to the hospital in the ambulance." She calls twenty minutes later and says, "I'm getting in the helicopter now."

The doctor says it's "Fetal Hydrops." I had to Google it because I had never heard of it. What I found out is, it's a condition where one or more of the organs fills with fluid. Only ten percent of cases the fluid is created when the mother's blood type conflicts with the baby's. The other ninety percent, they have no clue why. Ninety percent of the ninety percent have no clue cases are fatal.

When I read "fatal," that's when the switch flipped. I was supposed to be staying at home with our five-year-old son, Keaton. But I couldn't take the weight of the stress crushing me like an elephant. I disappeared into methamphetamine for the next month to forget my troubles. I would remember every moment of the next week tho!

During this month-long drug binge, Allison had been staying at the Ronald McDonald House across the street from the hospital.

Liam is fighting for his life, on life support, and from what I'm being told is progressively getting better, but the doctors are still unsure, so I finally built up the courage to go see him.

After a long, nerve raking ride on the interstate, that I paid Rachael for with drugs, I was at the hospital parking lot calling Allison to ask her where to go. I got directions and proceeded to walk into the hospital when I see metal detectors at the door. I tell myself, "SHIT! What am I going to do with my gun?" I called Rachael to come back and get my gun, but she was already back on the interstate so it took her awhile. When she got back, I reluctantly gave her my gun not knowing if I'd ever see it again.

I finally got up to the room and Allison yelled at me. "Where have you been? You called an hour ago." I ignored her and saw Liam lying in an incubator with all types of tubes hooked up to him. I slowly walk over to him and I'm in shock. He looks like an alien, all purple and blue, blotted beyond recognition. The severity of the situation crashed over me all at

once, like a huge wave. I was flooded with feelings, emotions, and thoughts of “I’m going to lose my son. WHY ME?”

After my first visit with Liam, Allison and I walked across the street to where she’s been staying. The tension is thick and I can feel the anger and hatred swelling inside her. She’s waiting till we get to the room so she can explode on me. When we get in the room she unloads on me. A month’s worth of “Where have you been? Drugs are more important, huh? You don’t care about me or our son,” etc. Needless to say, I slept on the couch.

The next day I awoke after my first sleep in at least a week. Everything is the same as the night before. Allison is still mad and yelling at me. Then she gets a call from the doctor. I knew when I seen the expression on her face change from anger to disbelief, the news of the call was not good. The doctor told her, after a month of progression, Liam had taken a turn for the worse. The machine is the only thing keeping him alive and nothing more can be done to help him.

Now we have a decision to make: 1. Watch Liam suffer. Or 2, pull the plug and let God take control. A decision I felt I was being excluded from due to her anger from my absence. I called my parents and Allison called her mother to let them know the horrible news. The next day our parents showed up and they brought Keaton with them. They all got a hotel room.

The next couple days seemed like a bad dream I couldn’t wake up from. I was feeling shunned and excluded from everyone, some of the worst hurt I’ve ever experienced. I just kept telling myself, “This isn’t real.”

I had been in Kansas City a week now watching my son fight for his life. The day was overcast and gloomy. This morning Allison made the choice to pull the plug on Liam’s life support, a choice I disagreed with!

Both of our parents, Allison, Keaton, and myself met outside the hospital that morning to face the judgment day for Liam. I turned from the group to say a prayer for the first time since I was a kid. I looked up to the sky and the clouds parted, a bright ray of sunshine warmed my face, and I prayed, “God, if you’re real, please let me take Liam’s place. I’m just a piece of shit drug addict who’s lived their life. PLEASE! LET HIM LIVE! AND I’LL DIE!” We all turned to go inside and say our goodbyes, but I was still holding on to hope and wishing God would accept my plea offer. I walked into the hospital feeling like no one cared how I felt. They all just kept comforting Allison. And I was just a fly on the wall.

I watched the doctor explain to Allison how she would be holding Liam, and how he would be listening to his heartbeat, then let us know when it beat no more. The doctor then led us to a room I can never erase from my memory. It was like I walked into a huge white box with nothing but some chairs set up, a rolling stool for the doctor, and a huge old hand clock, the kind with a “red” hand for the “seconds” like you would see at a track

meet. Allison and I were set in one corner of the white box, my parents and Keaton set in the corner directly across from us, facing us. The huge “clock of death” was hanging on the wall above them.

At that moment time seemed to stand still. It’s hard for me to describe the feeling in words. It felt like I was awake but dreaming at the same time. All I can say is it was like a weird out of body experience, like a puppet being controlled by strings.

The doctor walked in with Liam and handed him to Allison who was sitting on my left, he then sat in his rolling stool and moved in front of Allison. He placed his stethoscope on Liam’s chest. I waited in silence for what seemed like eternity, waiting for my son to die in his mother’s arms.

The doctor didn’t even have to tell me when my son died. I felt it! I was washed over with an overwhelming feeling of comfort, then my entire peripheral vision was flooded with the brightest of white light. I was watching the doctor’s face and his expression only confirmed my feelings. He looked up with regret and said, “I regret to inform you his heart has taken its last beat.” He then noted the time and excused himself.

Allison began to wail hysterically. “My Baby, My Baby.” For me it was unreal, some other worldly power had me in its comforting clutches.

I don’t remember how long we all sat in the “white box” afterwards or when they came and took Liam from Allison. I was being puppeted and had no sense of when the strings got cut.

I had no clue at the time what all those strange feelings were when Liam passed, but now looking back, I think I felt God’s angels coming to comfort me and escort my son’s soul to peace with his eternal father, whatever his name might be.

PRODUCTION

Makenna Standley • Student, Early Childhood Education

“The population decreases slightly each year.”

Generations.

An odd word for a country
which no longer makes them.

Fear. Hatred. Death. Murder.
The four things which caused separation.

Power. Money. Politics.
The three things which started
the end of production.

Pain. Death.
The two things which stopped
the existing population.

War.
The one thing which hurt the living.
Breaking a piece of them
with every bullet, slice, and bomb.

A government which feels empowered
by all of the decisions made.
All roads taken, leading to a dead end.
An end that turns the world
against those that could help.
Those who would have helped.

A government which makes decisions
but sends others to fight the wars.
The wars that were created
by bad choices, and crude words.
Powerful people sending others to fight a battle,
with which they had no say in.

No longer does a human being
want to feel the pain.
The pain of losing the people they love.
The pain of watching the young fight.

Fight for them to have a voice,
a chance to have a future.
A chance to make a life.
An opportunity to prosper.

Those who fight against the politics
fight against their neighbors.
They fight against the individuals
fighting for power.

Fighting for freedom.
Fighting for truth.
Inflicting pain on those
who hurt them first.

In turn the country rebelled.

Stood up for their beliefs.
Explaining within little words
their thoughts on the matter.

Amidst the unnecessary
suffering being inflicted.

The people did
the only thing they could control,

the country stopped producing generations.
Only watching the old die.
Never the young.

Fighting with all they have left.
In the broken,
cruel world.

RELATIONSHIP SUCCESS

Elsa Johnson • Student, Academic Transfer

Within an intimate relationship, the adoption of efficacious communication skills is indispensable. On one hand, if one companion is synergetically incompetent with their partner, then this may be a prescription for various misunderstandings. Loving relationships can become extinct without communication comprehension. By displaying a mastery of one another's conversational style, a deeper connection will initiate. On the other hand, if there is diminutive output of interactional synergy within an intimate relationship, then there may not be any dilemmas instantly. However, this could produce complications in the prospective relationship. Conclusively, if one is composing a brand-new affectionate relationship, then it is not a cheap concept to master communication comprehension; by employing empathy, bypassing bitter language, and recognizing your companion's verbal, and nonverbal cues.

Empathy proficiency can be a cultivated accomplishment. In 2008, Connolly and Sicola elucidated how lesbian relationships prospered due to their application of compassionate communication patterns. Additionally, Connolly and Sicola professed that the adoption of compromise, rather than the use of combative language, resulted longer-lasting relationships (2008). While this article parades bias in relation to new or short-term relationships, empathy is a profitable facet to utilize in various intimate relational situations. Empathy is an obtainable skill. It can be cultivated by presenting questions throughout common communication. This, in turn, will fabricate an emotional bond within any type of loving relationship—even brand-new ones. By exhibiting empathy to your partner, you are executing communication competency while presenting a level of emotional understanding. This respects their sentiments. Similarly, ask questions fueled from curiosity to understand your partner. When you verify, and present said verifications in an interpretable manner, then you and your partner will sense a sentimental connection establish, enhance, or sustain. This is dependent upon the type of relationship at hand—brand new, short-term, or long term.

People who master one another's communication styles have robust relational ties. Perez, Watson II, and Barnicle articulated that tennis players practiced communication expertise via employment of reciprocated understanding of one another's communication styles (2019). When tennis players welcomed each other's communication styles, as Espana et. al. discloses, the conclusion is a healthier interpersonal kinship (2019). This applies to several types of interpersonal kinships—not just one amongst tennis players. If two people in an intimate relationship have differing

meanings behind verbal and non-verbal cues, then the result is an absence of understanding one another. If two parties invest in each other by scheduling a time of day to experiment with their communication comprehension levels, then the result is a more fulfilling relationship. This applies to several different types of intimate relationships.

Communication comprehension is one of three psychological needs that, if met, will ensure success within an intimate relationship. There is a theory that elaborates further regarding those relational needs. Vanhee, Lemmens, Stas, Loeys, and Verhofstadt characterize this theory as the Self-Determination Theory ('SDT') (2018). Vanhee et. al. reveal this as a theory that defines these three psychological relational needs as, "autonomy, competence, and relatedness" (2018). This backs my previously stated claim regarding that mutually exchanged comprehension will result in a significantly more compassionate relationship. On the contrary, this is not true if the three needs remain unmet. Partners in intimate relationships need to attain and maintain communication comprehension to ensure the relationship remains positive, fulfilling, and worthwhile.

Communication comprehension, like any other skill, can be learned. The simplest method is learning by asking question. Goldman justifies that asking questions and communication comprehension go hand in hand. (2019). By asking questions within an intimate relationship, this sets a worthwhile fundamental level of understanding one another. If curiosity is not present, then it will be hard to formulate questions regarding an intimate partner's communication style. However, as previously stated, comprehension can be learned using one's curiosity to fuel and formulate conversational questions. This does take a significant level of mental effort to achieve; nonetheless, the cost is miniscule compared to the conclusive benefit.

Overall, a compassionate relationship that possesses the facet of secured relational comprehensive needs will result in higher self-esteem. An investigational study was concluded after researchers analyzed communication comprehension in a population of college students. These were traditional college students who were in their early 20s. In 2010, Bouchev discovered that, after surveying numerous college students, they had significant relational differences when compared to their equivalents. Those who were involved in comprehensive intimate relationships had a noticeably higher level of self-esteem. Even though the examined college students did not directly report this, the investigator noticed the differences. This is not surprising. When we are invested in a compassionate relationship, and when we feel recognized by our partner, we as humans, present a noticeable level of pridefulness. Others around us will notice.

Several relational dimensions previously explained are monumental. Regardless, communication competence is key. When contemplation of potential involvement in an intimate relationship arises, one must

remember that a relationship is traumatic without reciprocated comprehensive mannerisms. When we begin relationships, it is important that we utilize previously stated skills to achieve a healthy, and successful, relationship. After all, when we set aside time to ask questions, and learn from those questions, we can truly comprehend our partner's conversational styles. Conclusively, we can-over time-learn and utilize empathy, which will bring two people closer than ever before.

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CLICHE

Harsh • Student, Academic Transfer

One word to tell you why I like your smile?
How I'm impressed with your guile.
The way you capture the world with dance.
Or how I love it when you share your laughs
I know exactly what makes me feel this way,
But the heart is a cliché.

One word to tell you how I wrote you that song?
How I found the right words to help you stay strong.
The source of all the poems I send.
And everything else that comes from my pen.
I know exactly where I get what I say,
But the heart is a cliché.

One word to tell you how I knew it was you?
Who did I ask so that I could know it was true?
Did I pray to a god for all the answers?
When I didn't even know what to ask her?
I know exactly why I found you that day,
But the heart is a cliché.

THE GUNSLINGER

Hunter Weaver • Student, Academic Transfer

“You’re as green as a frog’s ass!” the retired witch-hunter shouted at the gunslinger. “You ain’t no witch-hunter, you’re barely a man”. The gunslinger just stood there and took it. He knew the old man was wrong, that he could be a force of good in this god-forsaken west. “Yella-belled pipsqueak without so much as a scar on his face. Thinks he’s hot-shit just cuz he killed a witch or two. I bet them were just fetchlings, nothing more than shooting a babe and calling yerself a marksman. Well, I tell you what, if ya fought the beasts I felled you wouldn’t be standing here hogging all my shade”. The gunslinger regrets trying to make conversation with the man while his gun got cleaned. Only a few more minutes and then he can be on his way to his latest hunt. Plus, he thought witch-hunters were supposed to help each other anyways, god knows no one else would. “Come-on ya old coot, just cuz your beards gone gray don’t mean you got nothin’ to teach me.”

“My beard gone gray?!” The old man lets out a low growl and starts to gather spit in his throat, hocking a ball of phlegm onto the dirt road right by the gunslinger’s feet. It bubbles for a moment before fusing with the ground around it, the gunslinger just stares and fights the urge to vomit. “More than just my beards gone gray, both you and me both know the things these witches can do. I can tell you’re witch-touched son, everyone can.” The gunslinger winched at the thought of what he’d seen. He remembered the great balls of fire that came out of a witch’s fingertips and burned a young farmhand alive. The great swarm of insects fly out of her mouth and devour an older man alive with thousands of tiny bites. The very stone beneath your feet coming alive and crushing one of the would-be witch hunters’ legs into dust. He commanded his thoughts to stop when the memories of what happened to his arm began to invade his mind. He grabs his left arm, checking to make sure that it was covered under his poncho. The old man stares at him hard. “See, this is what I mean. A real man, a real witch-hunter would wear that arm with pride. You ain’t fooling anyone with that tiny cape of yours, we all see that you’re a freak, just like the rest of us.” The old man peered into the gunslinger’s soul with his one eye, “I wear my curses with pride, ain’t no hiding this ugly thing”.

The left half of the old man’s face had been transformed into a bee’s hive, with a complex honeycomb pattern taking shape where a pupil and iris should be. It buzzed with a maddening constant drone, as insects flew in and out of the small holes. They climb around the old man’s face in search of food. Earlier in the man’s life he would swat at them in protest of the buzzing, but now he knows it’s in vain. The sound is always there, even when he sleeps.

"Come-on son, show us yer arm." The old man says as he sucks down a cigarette, blowing smoke and ash into the gunslinger's face. The gunslinger fans the smoke out of his face before swallowing hard and hesitating for a moment before revealing his left arm. Thick spines as long as the Gunslingers index finger jutted out at odd angles. The skin was tough and overlapping, forming large scale-like patterns all the way up to his shoulder. A sickening greenish-gray color had replaced the sun-burnt red of his natural skin. Each digit of his hand had fused together, making it useless for anything more complex than opening a door. The joints popped and crackled with every movement, like the bones just beneath the thick surface could not handle the additional weight. The gunslinger looked at it in disgust, but a crazed smile grew upon the old man's face. "Ooooo she got you good boy, what did that witch call that there beauty?"

"Cactus skin" the gunslinger said defeatedly "She shouted cactus skin and twisted my arm into a useless lump. I can't even cut it off, the skin's too tough." The old man's wide smile grew even wider, revealing stained teeth and bloody gums. As the old man stares at the misshapen lump that replaced the gunslinger's shooting arm, he begins to laugh a dry, heavy, smoke-filled laugh. The laugh dries out the gunslinger's throat instantly, making him search for his water pouch. The joy on the old man's face quickly turned into pain as the roar of laughter morphed into a coughing fit. The coughing lasted for a good few minutes before the old man lights up another cigarette in order to ease the burning sensation in his chest. "Well, I hope ya thanked her for the improvement boy, she could've done much worse. Have you heard the stories kid? Of what they do to you if they catch you?" The grin suddenly dropped from the old man's face, replaced by a dark seriousness. "Dying a privilege for the lucky. Most of 'em will keep you, twist you, change you. That's why you always gotta save one bullet for yerself. They can do almost anything, but they can't raise the dead. You won't be a pretty boy once they catch you, that's for sure." The old man pauses his rant for a moment, staring up at the sky. "Do you wanna know what they do?"

The gunslinger swallowed hard again, feeling the spit crawl its way down his throat. The old man leaned in closer. "One of my buddies hid in a crate meant for holdin' meats during a hunt that got the best of him, but the witch sniffed him out like a bloodhound huntin' a rabbit. She casted a spell that melted his very skin and bone, reshaped his entire body into a cube. The only thing she left was an eye to look at himself with, a mouth to scream from, and a single hand to drag himself through the dirt. The witch used him as a footrest. He's still alive today, she won't let him die. Says he's too comfortable to let rot." The gunslinger had to once again fight the urge to vomit, this time from fear. "That ain't even the worst that they do, I'd say the old bastard got off pretty easy. What do ya say boy, still want to be a witch-hunter?"

"Want? WANT?" The words screamed inside the gunslinger's skull, trying

to claw their way out through his mouth. No one wants to be a witch-hunter, they're forced too. Those marked by witch's curses are seen as bad luck, having to live on the edge of cities because of the old wives tale that witches can smell them from 20 yards away. The only way for a curse-marked man to gain any standing in society was to hunt the witches that made them that way. His grandfather had come to the west for opportunity, to create a small farmhouse and give his family the life he never had. The Gunslinger stays to hunt witches because there is nothing else for him to do. The gunslinger readies himself to spit venom and hate at the old man, but he is interrupted by a woman exiting the shop with the gunslinger's weapon, freshly cleaned. He accepts it with a smile.

"Well old-timer, hope you're happy baking in the sun. I guess you can never get too lonely, what with all those bugs crawling in your ears. Is that why you don't got no one? Or is it cuz you're old and mean?" The gunslinger remarked as he started to walk away. "Keep those bees good company, ya hear?"

"You ain't gonna get far son. If ya go out there and try to put her down you're gonna find something worst than death. I know it, I've seen men like you before. A dead man walkin'."

"Well, I hope I didn't spook ya too bad" the gunslinger said with a grin as he inspected his gun, counting the three bullets. Money had been tight recently and a man's gotta eat, but it's fine, he only needs one to put this witch into the ground. "Have a good day old-timer, hope you make better conversation with the next sorry sonuvabitch that has to get his gun cleaned". With that, the gunslinger was off into the barren ravine that the witch had been spotted in.

The hot sun beats down on the Gunslinger as he sits upon a large boulder. He's been sitting there for hours now, watching and waiting for his prey. He's careful not to be spotted, hoping to get the element of surprise on the unexpected witch. It was always smart to sit and wait for the prey to come to you, at least that's what he has heard. His throat was as dry as the riverbed he was over-looking. He reaches for his waterskin, only to find that it was down to its last drops. He must've drunk too much early on in the trip. That's fine, he could get some more with the spoils of this hunt. The people of the small town that hired him didn't have much, but they would give every last penny to him if he could solve the problem. He readjusted his left arm, the hard stone slowly numbing each digit. The thorns dig deep holes into the poncho as he repositions himself to rest on his back. He deserves some much-needed rest. He shut his eyes for but a moment before hearing it, the echo of a cane along the cavern's stone walls. The gunslinger shoots up, spotting her. A figure dressed in black from the apex of her being to the soles of her feet. A large hat hides all her features, basking them in shadow. Large talon-like nails tear the skin on each of her hands. The Gunslinger's heart fills with a mixture of rage and fear as he gazes upon her neck. Around it hangs a thick metal ring, displaying the

trigger-fingers of other witch-hunters she had bested. Each in different states of decomposition. One was very fresh though, with blood still leaking onto the dry canyon floor. He knew she was a grand witch, a prize that would put the old man to shame. He cocked his gun and aimed for the center of her large hat.

He pulls the trigger and a shot rings out, making him wince. The witch seems to fall over a moment, then lifts herself back up as if she was a puppet on invisible strings. Her head snaps to look at the Gunslinger as a low murmur can be heard. Now that he could make out her face he recognized her instantly, her face was blue and bloated like a water-logged corpse. She had been the one to ruin his life. The gunslinger became blinded by rage, cocking the hammer and firing another shot aimed at the witch's heart. This shot missed its target completely, digging a small hole into the soft sandstone of the cavern floor. He went to ready another shot, hoping to find the witch's phylactery in order to put her down for good. As he aimed for the witch's heart for a second time, the ground began to shake. The sudden movement frightened the gunslinger, misfiring the gun into the air above him. The gun had been too close to his right ear. He expected to hear ringing, but there was none. There was nothing on his right side, he could hear absolutely nothing. It felt as if his brain had exploded in his skull, everything was spinning. He couldn't fight the urge another longer, he vomited onto the sunbaked stone he was standing on. He shook his head in order to center himself and cocked the hammer back once again, but the very rock he was standing on began to move as if it was bear awakening from hibernation. The rock flings itself in the ravine below. The gunslinger held onto his weapon for dear life, knowing it was his only way out of his ravine.

As he hits the ground he felt a sharp pain in his lower back, but none in his legs at all. Dust clouds fill the air as the witch slowly walks towards him. His vision grows blurry and filled with little black dots. The witch stands a few feet away and contours her face into a broken smile filled with yellow teeth. She slowly approaches, taking deliberate steps to make the gunslinger's heart race. Her smile growing wider with each step, until it seems too big for her face. The gunslinger summoned every ounce of courage he left in his body to raise the gun one last time. The witch stops in her tracks and stares, almost taunting the gunslinger to do it. He holds the gun in his shaking hand, gritting teeth so hard that they could break. He stares into the witch's eyes, cursing her under his breath. This stand-off lasted for only a moment before the gunslinger whips the heavy steel weapon towards the side of his head and pulls the trigger.

"Click". The click of the hollow gun echoes across the stone walls. The witch's expression grew even wider, to the point where the skin on her lips tore and blood begins to pour down her face. The advance towards the gunslinger began once again. "The old man was right..." the gunslinger chokes out with tears welling up in his eyes. He was at her mercy, but she had none.

NAMES OF THE FORGOTTEN

Hailey Morris • Student, Academic Transfer

No one visits the graves like I do.
I pass clumps of weeds and search deep-
through overgrown grass left uncut for decades.
I find the dirty headstones, almost unrecognizable,
to remember the forgotten-
and keep memory of their names.
Grief hangs over me,
rain of pity that seeps.
To think of the people who get overlooked
or never seen.
These graveyards are visited by no one else,
no one visits the graves like I do.
As if they don't mean anything, to anyone.
Even I can't seem to care as much as I'd like.
Love is hard to come by,
and I never knew these people, so how should I?
How can I weep for stories untold?
Should I feel sympathy toward the dead?
More specifically, the forgotten?
I think I should-
They know what it feels like to be alone and forgotten.
So when I sit there and talk or think of songs,
I pause and pretend they can at least hear,
Or sing along.
Because even among a whole lot of dead bodies in a abandoned graveyard,
It's hard to find anyone who wants to listen at all.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LAND OF DREAMS

Shadan M. • Student, Health Sciences

Homestead National Historical Park is a memorial that is located in Beatrice, Nebraska. According to the National Park Service, the Homestead Act occurred in 1862, a law passed by President Abraham Lincoln that granted 160 acres of free land to citizens and noncitizens who were living in the United States. The purpose of the Act was to give 10% of the United States land to people living in America. This gave many Americans regardless of their gender, immigration status, formerly enslaved men and women to have a chance to get a “free land.” According to the National Park Service, to be eligible for the land, citizens and noncitizens would have to live on the land for five years before they could “prove up” the land. This gave a lot of people the opportunity to have a land of their own, but also made the indigenous tribes move across states and leave their land. The purpose of the Homestead National Historical Park is to educate and demonstrate the Homestead Act and give an illustration of how people lived during the Homestead Act. Because it includes people walking and talking about their lives in the past, the film “Land of Dreams” influences visitors’ way of seeing the Homestead National Park.

For someone who is not familiar with a memorial, it might not have a lot of impact on them. For example, someone like me who never understood the purpose of memorials might not be able to get the message. When I think of a memorial, I think of a place that is going to be historically filled with statues and a lot of words explaining an event that occurred. It is always a lot of words and information that I do not understand and am not familiar with the names of. Going to a historical place is not something that excites me a lot because it is filled with a dark side of history that I and others do not want to know; like war, an act, or something similar that occurred in the past that affected people in a bad way. The Homestead National Historical Park was something very similar to what I imagined it to be, and it had a history tied to where I was standing.

As I was walking toward the entrance, there were state flags with their names written in small words naming the states. The building was surrounded by land that was flat with tall grasses except for a trail where the grass was cut down. I did not know what that meant and what it was representing, but when I walked out of the building, I could not stop thinking about how there were so many names of states that were part of the Homestead Act. Upon entering the building, visitors are given a chance to watch a short film, “Land of Dreams,” which gives a quick background of what the Homestead Act was, and after gaining knowledge, looking at the pictures, clothes, objects, and the house, it gave me a chance to be able to

get a sense of how people lived long ago. This would not be as effective if I did not watch the film.

In Homestead National Historical Park, there were mostly photographs of how people lived during the times of the homesteaders, the challenges they faced, and how they lived their lives. There were not a lot of photos or information about the Indian tribes, so the film was very helpful because I could make a connection and see how this was not only about the people getting the land but also there were people who sacrificed their land for others to be happy. This not only affected the tribes, but also the people that were trying to make the new land into a home. The intention of presenting the tribes is to show the other side of the hardships people faced and it was not only about the positive side. The presentation of the memorial was effective because if I had not watched the short film, I would have left the memorial thinking that this was mostly a positive experience that happened.

For example, as I was walking down the stairs, the first thing that was in front of me, was a picture of the tribes that had to leave their land because the government gave away their land for free. The picture was so powerful that the message was within the picture without having to tell us about the effects that the Homestead Act had on people that originally lived there before other people came and claimed it. I could imagine those people walking in the snow and the picture became a reality. The words on the placards were becoming a voice to mind. I could hear the dialogue of the native tribes talking in the film, mentioning how they lost their culture, language, and land. But now those voices are talking in the picture of the tribe looking at me in the artifact.

There was a small house next to the building. A house that was a remodeled version of a house during the years of the Homestead Act. It was made of wood and looked very small that had a living room with an upstairs, which I could not go to. It was just a studio room. At first, I thought that it was just a small lovely house made for a couple since the dining table had two chairs, two plates, and everything that was on the table such as the plate, and fork was only two. But, after I read the placards, it mentioned that twelve people were living in it. The film “Land of Dreams” also helped me understand the memorial because, in the film, there were people talking about their houses. As I looked around at the equipment used, I could see an image of the people working every day as a farmer trying to make a living. Looking at the structure of the building, I could not imagine being able to walk around the house with 12 people living in it. The rhetoric of the house worked because I could imagine the hardships they faced trying to make the land into a place to live in.

The Homestead National Historical Park is a great place to learn more about the history of the Homestead Act. If you are someone who does not have a good connection with only viewing objects, and placards, the

THE IMPORTANCE OF LAND OF DREAMS

Homestead National Historical Park's film is a great way to get a better understanding of how the history of the Homestead Act changed the lives of the homesteaders and the Indian tribes. The film, "Land of Dreams" is a great way visitors can connect with Homestead National Historical Park.

References

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THANK YOU EARTH FOR CLEANING MY SOUL

Angelina P. Miller • Student, Health Sciences

Earth began to fill my cup like a faucet that never turns off, and is forever flowing like a waterfall. You filled my cup as it continued filling up to the brim until it began to overflow and turn into a river. This river rushed down every crevice, leaving no land untouched. Roaring down its path, it paved the way for all its liquid gold to follow. The water smoothed out the sharp and ridged edges of the land. Finally the water that was once clear and blue came to the edge of the land, now murky brown.

As it reached the end, it began to flow over the edge, once again, feeding back into the ocean.

The murky water back
home once again from its journey
returns back to blue.

FIRST TWO BREATHS

Eugene Prochaska • Student, Associate of Science

Smells of sanitizer, soap, and a sterile field of fresh stress sweat filled in the medical mask. My distraught eyes barely open, gazed down at her bulging stomach painted violet. The protrusion deflates suddenly with one body voiceless, and the other body high pitch chirping. What twins? Now nurses stomping steadily to the beat of a doctor's strict commands. The littles balanced carefully in warm, humid plastic bubbles, protected for a moment.

My eyes now wide open to reality:

Boy girl, yin yang, relief stressed

Two smiles, what luck

Arms full, heart throbbing, lovely

THE POSTER

Shaghayegh Rouhi • Student, Academic Transfer

I hung up the posters on the white wall behind my bed in my tiny studio. It's right in front of the entrance door, and upon entering, it's the first thing I see. There were six posters in total, and I just had to hang up the last one, but I didn't know if it was better to leave an empty space on the wall or display this poster with all the memories and mixed feelings. I bought them during a poster sale event in front of the UNL city campus Union. They hold this event every year around the same time, at the end of August, for a few days. After hanging up the posters on the wall, I slowly walked back with that final poster in my hand, staring at the now-cozier wall decorated with posters, which had warmed the wall's cold white color.

I sat in my chair, holding that single poster in my hands, gazing at it. I was very familiar with this image, knowing every single detail by heart. I could close my eyes and describe it to someone who had never seen it, as if they were experiencing it in the present moment. The poster showed Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and war, with her dark, flowing hair covering her half-naked shoulders, and her gray eyes sharing the same pierce and color with the blade of her sword. It was a resemblance of beauty and power. However, as I kept looking at the poster, a flood of memories rushed back to me, transporting me precisely one year into the past, about a week after my new roommate had moved in. The day when, she had entered our room carrying a large bundle of posters she had also purchased from the same poster sale event. She opened them and began decorating her side of the room with the posters. Among them all, one poster stood out to me, a digital painting of Athena, breathtaking, delicate, and powerful making a lasting impression on my memory.

She kept urging me to go to the poster sale and purchase some posters for my side of the room.

"Your side looks empty; it makes the room look boring," she kept telling me.

She was right; when I entered the room on the right side, it felt warm, cozy, and comfortable with posters, pictures on the wall, study lamps, a big mattress, cushions, pillow pets, snacks her mother sent her, and lots of clothes and shoes. On the other hand, my side of the room was half-empty, and the white wall color made that area feel cold. It was almost the same as the day I got the keys, with just a pillow, a thin blanket, and a few clothes hanging in the closet. It was true; I could get a few posters to add some color to that lifeless white wall. Maybe with a desk lamp, a soft and cozy blanket, and some pillow pets, I could make it feel cozier. But that was the

last thing I was worried about.

I left the room and, while walking toward the library or a place outside to study, opened my banking app to check if I had enough money to buy a poster for my room. However, I only had enough for my meals. Meanwhile, I was passing in front of the Union building, observing the students at the poster sale area. As I walked and sat on the grass in front of the poster sale area, thoughts of my room back at my parents' house flooded my mind. I had adorned it with pictures and paintings I had collected during my travels. Now, I didn't even have enough money to purchase a simple poster.

"The world is a strange place," I whispered to myself.

While sitting on the grass and observing people in the poster sale area, the words that I had been trying to avoid for over three weeks finally gained courage. 'Was it worth it?'

It's not easy to be all on my own, let alone the deep regret that exists deep in my heart when I recall how I had to leave everyone I knew and everything I had. And those sad, disappointed eyes of my parents, who were my entire world, looking at me in the airport. This feeling is mixed with the understanding that it was the only way to take control of my own life.

The ringtone of my phone interrupted my thoughts; it was my parents.

"Hi Mom, Hi Dad," I said, forcing a fake smile.

"Hey dear, how's it going? How's college?" My dad asked, placing his hand on my mom's shoulder.

Her eyes were slightly red, and I knew she had cried before calling. I couldn't help but feel responsible for her tears, but at the same time, I knew that if I hadn't taken this step, it might have been me with red eyes in a white dress. I struggled to determine if I was being selfish or not.

"It couldn't be better; everything is going great," I replied with my fake smile, holding my breath to keep my voice steady and blinking to prevent my eyes from tearing up. My mom had always been able to tell if I was lying, but this time, perhaps for the first time in my life, I had managed to hide my true feelings from her, just when I needed her support the most.

After a brief conversation with them, I went to the library and stayed there late into the night. Not to study, of course. It was the beginning of the semester, and especially as a freshman, I didn't need to spend that much time in the library. But I found it more comfortable than my room. I returned late enough that everyone was already asleep. While walking back, that question still remained on top of my mind, and even thinking about it would shake my entire being and keep my cheeks wet with tears. I kept asking myself, 'What if I made a mistake?'

I opened the door, and the faint light from outside cast a dim glow in the dark room. The first thing I noticed upon entering was that poster. It showed Athena, perfect, powerful, courageous, and strong. I used my sleeves to wipe away my tears, while gazing at the poster. Athena stood tall in the middle of a dark and vague background, as if she knew her place and purpose with steady certainty. She held a sharp sword in her hand, her head held high, her face bearing a grave expression filled with glory and beauty. In her presence, I decided to become a strong woman like her. That night, as I went to bed, I made promises to myself.

Throughout an entire semester, I would glance at that poster almost every day. Each time, I saw a woman in control of her life, confident in her actions, free from guilt, disappointment, or sadness. I kept reminding myself that I could be like her. This perspective helped me silence the nagging doubts in my mind, at least until the Christmas break of that year, December of twenty-twenty-two.

The first semester had come to an end, all my roommates and friends went back home, leaving me alone in the entire building. At the same time, due to the ongoing protests in my home country, the internet service had been cut off nationwide for weeks, and I hadn't heard a word from my family in more than two weeks. It was Christmas Eve, and I decided to warm up a frozen bacon and cheese sandwich in the microwave. I sat on my bed, intending to read an online novel on my phone.

I took the first bite, the bread was warm, but the middle part of sandwich remained hard and cold, as unpleasant as one would expect from a cheap frozen meal. After that unpleasant bite, I wasn't hungry anymore. I put the sandwich aside, tried to bite my tongue as hard as I could, took a deep breath, and kept my head up so the tears didn't fall on my cheeks. But I couldn't take it anymore. My chin started trembling, and teardrops found their way down from my eyes tickling my cheeks, and as my sobs grew heavier, breathing would become more difficult, and each breath felt like a struggle to fill my lungs. I hugged my knees and broke into tears, crying until I could feel my body needed more water. I stayed in that position for a little while, as if I was invisible and no one could find me. Eventually raised my head, staring at that poster once again.

"I'm nothing like you!" I whispered my first words after three days of being all alone and not talking to anyone.

How could I even compare myself to her? How could I imagine being a strong woman when I was spending Christmas Eve in the loneliest possible way, uncertain about my life's direction, and just pretending and kept telling myself that I was happy, and that everything was going great? But in reality, it wasn't. I had faced a lot of challenges to get where I was, but it didn't feel right, and it wasn't even getting better. Still, I felt the world was crashing in my head, but this time in a different way.

I stood up, walked toward the poster, staring into her eyes as she was staring at me, she wasn't perfect. In fact, she was far from being realistic, the face was more realistic than the rest of the painting and the shadow wasn't in the right direction. I stared at her more and more. She was not perfect, but the imperfections made her look more beautiful and stronger. Because of her realistic face, every time looking at her, the eyes would center toward her face, and the shadows would make her dress glow more beautifully. I stared at her a little longer,

"Maybe I am you!" I whispered.

"A few days after Christmas Eve, I moved out of that apartment, and I didn't see that poster again for more than eight months. It was a long journey after that; I went through two apartment changes until I finally found a place that felt comfortable and homey – a tiny studio in downtown Lincoln. It took an entire semester, but I eventually formed meaningful friendships. I managed to make a decision about my major, set life goals, secure a better part-time job, and increase my working hours without a negative impact on my education. I kept my close relationship with my parents even with thousands of miles distance and received their forgiveness for leaving them despite their wishes.

It was the beginning of August, when I heard about the poster sale event. That week, I put in some extra hours at work and saved up a bit of money, imagining my empty white wall becoming a cozier home. This year, instead of watching the event from afar on the grass and dreaming of a new poster, and a comfortable house, I could actually attend and purchase a few posters.

While looking at the posters, I came across this one, the same one my roommate had owned. Even though my choices were mainly based on colors and genres, I could not resist this particular poster. Without overthinking it, I left the event, heading back home with six posters in my hand, which one of them was the very same one. Now, I couldn't keep my gaze away from it, sitting on the chair in front of my wall that had been missing one spot for the sixth poster, debating about my emotions toward it. But now I could see a different vision. Despite the sword she carried and her serious expression, there were two innocent eyes staring back at me. I smiled and whispered, 'Yes, it was worth it.' Then I stood up, walked toward the wall, moved one of the posters that was already there, and hung this one in the center, exactly in the middle of all the posters. 'I am like you,' I thought, 'not perfect, but I'm me.'

Author's Notes

I began my first draft of the essay about a few days after I hung up the posters on my wall. My studio had a new feeling, and I was so happy about them that a couple of times a day I stood in front of that wall, and I kept looking at the posters for a few minutes. The exact same day that I wrote my first draft, I was walking around my room and trying to brainstorm some ideas. Like every other day, I stood in front of the posters and looked at them. It was at the time I realized there was something deeper behind them for me. I remembered the day that I was hanging them up the wall and my debates about that very specific poster of Athena. So, I decided to write about it.

This essay is about the combinations of thoughts that were always passing in my head but putting them all together in such order made me take a better look at my journey in the past year and made me prouder of myself, and more confidence. From the material that we learned in class many of them helped me in the writing process of this essay. The main one was showing rather than saying that I tried my best to use it. Also, the readings that we have about people who tell their stories and writing about their life journeys were an inspiration to show my point of view. Journaling, which is my favorite assignment, helped me to write the first draft without overthinking and putting limits on my thoughts.

The challenging part of this essay for me was using different times and jumping between them. It made it a challenge to use correct verbs and the correct order to describe events without confusing the readers. The Feedback was a very important part of this essay, my favorite feedback was the instructor's feedback, it gave a lot of details that helped me to learn and at the same time improve my essay. Also, peer review helped to get more confidence about my essay and gave some ideas and perspectives to use in my writings.

SWAYING TREES

Erica Howard • Student, Academic Transfer

Within the deep forest, secrets reside,
The trees sway in rhythm, their branches untied.
They dance in the wind, with a leafy ballet,
Their roots anchored deep, yet hearts in sway.

Underneath the gazing sun, they bend and bow,
Their leaves are like green confetti, fluttering now.
Each rustling sound, a woodland refrain,
As if the trees converse in wind-kissed strain.

They tell tales of storms, of seasons gone by,
Of birds nesting high and clouds passing by.
Their limbs, like dancer's arms, reach for the sky,
A choreography of life, never really asking why.

When twilight descends, they slow their dance,
Their shadows elongate, a twilight romance.
The moon peeks through leaves, a silver glow,
As the swaying trees murmur secrets, we'll never know.

So, let's listen, with hearts attuned to their song,
To the ancient wisdom these trees prolong.
For in their gentle sway, we find solace and grace,
A dance with eternity, in this sacred space.

HUNGER

G.C. Hughes • Student, Academic Transfer

To be read aloud

Handsomely I ate alone in one tungsten light. A large loaf of bread was eviscerated. My dirty hands shoveled the shreds which pooled between my gums and cheeks like a chipmunk. I could not find the strength to swallow. My chest heaves. I must throw my head back excitedly struggling for air. I chewed furiously and enjoyed the rush of sudden nourishment. It beat against me like warm waves. Still, I did not swallow. I savor the thick gum filling my mouth and holding me close to asphyxiation. Necessity coaxes it down the back of my throat. As more and more sludge left my mouth, tears paved a stream through the dust on my face. The void filled my mouth inevitably. My throat constricted. Long moans escaped. The burnt crust crunched in my teeth as I wept.

REVOLUTIONS

Natalie Duchesneau • Student, Academic Transfer

Longing lies deep
for who my older brother was.
His buzzed scalp, sly grin
the sparkle in his eyes
that brightened when he laughed
at his own jokes

The downtown farmer's market
hummed and murmured
early birds getting their worms

One morning I tripped
hands and knees met concrete
sky-blue Band-aids covered raw skin
My brother held my hand
until my tears slowed

A vendor handed me a cup of ice chips
for my sore hands
My brother carried our market finds that day
green beans, spinach, strawberries
He didn't complain once.

Fifteen revolutions later.
Same buzzcut, stony face
hard eyes that regard
unfeeling, detached.

I remember melting ice
wrinkled Band-aids on my skin
the way my brother looked at me
making sure I was okay.

THE RABBIT HOLE BAKERY: A PROFILE

Sarah Lange • Student, SENCAP

Strolling on the street-level pavement of downtown Lincoln, Nebraska, you might never see it. But if you look just under the surface, just under the street-level bar, you'll see the bakery. The Rabbit Hole Bakery is a uniquely decorated small business made to serve a variety of people looking to escape the noise of downtown Lincoln. Its upstairs neighbor is the bar Topsy Tina's, and it is located on a busy street corner. On March 12th, I visited the Rabbit Hole and documented my experience there. I went with my mother. We both chose baked goods and sat down to observe the place for about an hour. Many unique people stopped by and the whole place truly felt like a wonderland.

If you walk down the few cement steps outside the bakery you'll be greeted by a sign: come down the rabbit hole. To the right of the doorway sits an artistic, colorful chalkboard menu with bakery items ranging from the raspberry-filled French cream puff to the famous Rabbit Hole avocado brownie.

As you step inside the Rabbit Hole, there's a wall of ornate vintage clocks and timepieces. A large clock behind the bakery bar counter serves as the centerpiece of the L-shaped room. In one of the corners, a couch is surrounded by three upholstered, cushiony chairs, covered with Alice in Wonderland-themed patterns. Opposite the couch is a gray wall with a black rabbit, clock, and other wonderland-themed decals on it. That wall is lined with small circular tables, each with two black, metal chairs.

If escapism were a movie, it would be Alice in Wonderland. If it were a place, it would be here. Concrete absorbs the sound of cars zooming by aboveground and people rustling around, and because the bakery is nearly empty, the sound produced in the rabbit hole is rather insignificant.

The place evidently isn't very busy on weekdays, so only one employee is tasked with running the front-of-house operations. The employee appears to be bored. I imagine it would get boring when the place isn't busy. When she notices that my mother and I are walking into the bakery, she lights up and registers a polite "hello."

Selecting which baked goods to purchase, especially given a wide swath of options, is no easy feat. Four different types of cake sit on the top shelf of the glass case attached to the bar: spiced carrot cake, gluten-free chocolate cake, and mocha cake. The second, and bottom, two shelves hold the raspberry-filled French cream puff, individually packaged tres leches, a vibrant mint brownie, and more creations. Separate from the bakery

bar area is another glass case of desserts, this one containing avocado brownies and various other types of desserts.

Aside from the baked goods, the Rabbit Hole also has drinks like coffee and tea. The drink menu is directly above the counter and to the right, hanging from the ceiling. Drinks with themed names, like Alice, March Here, Wonderland, We're All Mad Here, and Down the Rabbit Hole. I don't drink coffee and I find most tea tasteless, so none of the drinks sound appealing to me. However, if I did enjoy specialty coffees and teas, I suspect that I would find this menu intriguing. Near one of the glass baked goods cases, there's a case of Rabbit Hole merchandise. T-shirts, sweatshirts, mugs, and more line the glass case. I make a note that this would be a good place to purchase birthday gifts for family and friends.

After perusing both baked goods cases and the drink menu, I'm still eyeing the mint brownie. It has three layers: a brownie layer, a bright mint frosting layer, and a chocolate ganache layer with a zigzag of mint frosting on top. As a person living with celiac disease, my mom was thrilled to see any gluten-free options. She quickly selected the gluten-free chocolate cake as her afternoon dessert. After thinking some more, I chose to purchase a mint brownie.

My mother and I finish placing our order, and we walk over to the themed couch with various chairs around it and take a seat while waiting for our names to be called. The place is still empty, so there's no confusion as to whose order is whose.

The bakery would truly be a wonderful place to do homework. Such a quiet environment can easily put one's mind at ease.

Just a few moments after the order was placed, the barista called out my mother and I's orders. I walk up to the counter and grab the ceramic white plate with my mint brownie at the center. I return to my chair and set the chipped plate and fork on the table, and I take my first bite of the brownie. The brownie layer is slightly dry, but the thick layer of mint frosting certainly makes up for it. As I take a second bite, I realize just how sweet of a treat this is, perhaps a bit too much. I take a sip of water to dampen the intense sweetness.

As I screw the light on my water bottle tight, I notice the Rabbit Hole door has just been opened. Two new customers, a woman and a young boy, presumably about five, enter the bakery. While making polite conversation, and small talk, with the barista, the woman reveals that the state basketball tournament is what brought her here. Sports can be irritatingly loud, it's no wonder why she wanted to escape the noise for a bit. The woman and young boy scour the bakery shelves just as I did. The young boy appears to be very excited for a sugary treat, giddy even.

Once the two place their orders, the boy catches his eye on a small cubby shelf directly in front of my chair, about fifteen feet away. He strolls over to the cubby shelf, filled with board games for customers to use, and reaches to the top cubby to grab the game “Sorry.” He carries the game back to the center table where he and the woman are sitting, and she tells him that they can play but only for a little bit. I suspect they have to get back to state basketball.

The boy opens the board game box and starts to set up the pieces. The woman is back at the bakery counter, this time speaking to a different employee. The new employee comes out from behind the counter to sit with the woman and the boy. She doesn’t partake in the board game but instead continues to talk to the woman. I’m within earshot of them, and I can tell they are talking about purchasing a cake for the boy’s birthday.

The barista at the bar counter appears to be counting money, but her eyes are glued to the woman, the other employee, and the little boy on the high-top chairs. When the woman asks the boy what theme he wants his birthday cake to be, he enthusiastically suggests Charlie Brown. The woman and the other employee finish their conversation by exchanging phone numbers about the cake. The barista is still watching them intently.

The two customers, the woman and the boy, walk out the door. As soon as they leave, the barista walks to their table and grabs the board game “Sorry” that the boy got out. She promptly puts it back on the board game cubby. When she does that, I notice a paper sign written in black permanent marker urging customers to use the board games responsibly: please don’t lose any pieces and remember to put games back after use so everyone can enjoy them! Evidently, the little boy didn’t heed the directions the sign spelled out. They did seem to be in a rush, so it’s understandable.

My mother and I are the only customers in the bakery again. In this silence, I notice the faint background music. It’s tuned to the radio I assume, though I don’t recognize any of the songs. It’s at the perfect volume: I can really hear the music if I want to, but it’s quiet enough that I can also ignore it just as I had before. The stereo is almost directly above me, on the ceiling with exposed pipes and beams that have been painted black.

A few moments later, another group of customers, a large group I notice, comes through the doors. They look about the age of high school students, all wearing suits. They are in awe of the bakery, and make note of how beautiful it is: I agree. The group of about ten scatter to look at the two glass baked goods cases and the specialty drink menu. One by one, they all order various drinks and pastries. The one man in the group who definitely isn’t in high school, possibly a teacher, pays for the entire group order. After the orders are placed, they all choose to congregate in the corner of the room next to a table. They converse about the day they’ve had so far.

THE RABBIT HOLE BAKERY: A PROFILE

The timer on my phone, signifying the amount of time I have left on my parking meter, ticks down. I can't help but wish I had more time. This place is so calm, I feel so calm. With a unique combination of music, desserts, pleasant people, and friendly employees, the ambiance is incredibly relaxing. Still, I don't want a parking ticket, so I place my brownie plate and fork on the dish return tray. My mother does the same. We pack up our things and make our exit. As we open the door to the city, I notice the sound feels like it's multiplied since I last walked outside. When you get used to silence, the noise gets louder.

All of us, as humans, need quiet. We need quiet to think and feel clearly. The Rabbit Hole Bakery provided that for me, and I could tell that others appreciated the escape as well. The decorations in the bakery are no doubt eclectic, but they aren't chaotic. The little boy and the woman sought out a zen environment after being at state basketball, and the teenagers and teacher in suits were likely doing something important that they needed a break from too. The Rabbit Hole Bakery is a diamond in the rough, but those of us who spend time in downtown Lincoln know, it's a wonderful place for peace, quiet, and a dusting of whimsy.

I HATE CHRISTMAS

Kate Gonzalez Mireles • Student, Cybersecurity-CIT

The emptiness I feel on the 25th

I hate Christmas

Here comes the round of meaningless hugs

I hate Christmas

I look at the time, how much longer

I hate Christmas

I look at the lights just adorning the Christmas tree

I hate Christmas

I hold her in my arms in front of the Christmas tree

I love Christmas

I look at her small face and she shyly gives a dimpled smile at me

I love Christmas

I look at the Christmas lights and I feel the warmth

I love Christmas

The best gift bestowed upon me

I love Christmas

RAY OF SUNSHINE

Erica Howard • Student, Academic Transfer

In the morning's gentle kiss,
Sunshine wakes the world from light sleep.
Golden fingers touch each leaf,
Chasing shadows, bringing relief.

Dewdrops sparkle, diamonds rare,
Caught in sunlight's warm affair.
Birds stretch wings, their songs ignite,
A symphony of the day's first light.

Across the field, flowers bloom,
Their petals reach for the sun's perfume.
Butterflies dance, their colors ignite,
In this sun-kissed realm of delight.

And when the day begins to wane,
Sunshine paints the sky again.
A canvas of oranges, pinks, and gold,
A masterpiece the heavens hold.

So, let us bask in its warm embrace,
Chase away the shadows' trace.
For in the sun's eternal glow,
We find hope, love, and dreams aglow.

MY GOD

Olivia Schwickerath • Student, Music

My heart aches
My soul fractured and missing pieces
My eyes are clouded with confusion.
Yet, I will sing, sing sweetly
For i love thee, my sweet melody
My sorrowful symphony,
My Lord and my God.

THIRTY-THREE YEARS

Richard TerKeurst • Student

Every single living human being is a result of their lifetime's collected experiences. We're built by everything that we see and do, what we're told, what is done to us. I am wretchedly aware of this.

As a child, my small family lived in a great many places. One memory that stands out from my early life comes from 1991 while we were living in Florida. North central Florida, to be precise, which is not "The Sunshine State." North central Florida has no beaches or theme parks. The weather has only two modes, "Boiling swamp with violent thunderstorms" or "Frosty cold with 110 percent chance of hurricanes." This is a place that no sane person would willingly choose to live, so of course, we moved there.

My family was small and strange. We consisted of my mother, Janet, who was a tall, solidly built blonde haired and blue-eyed nurse in her late thirties. My brother, or more correctly, half-brother, Stephen, was the "skinny" person in our house. "Steve" was athletic and at the height of his high school career, always off doing wrestling or ROTC stuff. Myself, "Ricky," "The Baby," I was a copy of my mom, blue eyed and blonde, a cherub child at seven years old.

Which brings us to Earl, Janet's third husband. Not father to either Stephen or myself but Master of our home. In his authoritarian, Southern Baptist mind, he was God's will made manifest on earth. Earl was a giant Dutchman, six foot four inches tall and built with a barrel chest and broad shoulders. Iron grey-blue eyes peered out from his ever-furrowed brow. Short cropped, chestnut hair on his head, and a clean shaved face that never smiled. Earl made his living as a corrections officer. Working at Florida State Prison, a maximum security, "death row" prison famous for being the site of Ted Bundy's execution.

Our house was off "Pine Street" which was in the actual middle of nowhere. A lonely little street with a house on every other lot, six in all. Three old colonial "cracker box" houses, one brick and two built out of cinder block, we lived in one of the block homes. I kept wondering when "The Big Bad Wolf" was going to show up and show my neighbors the folly of building with wood. Our ranch style block house was modest, but mostly comfortable with its three small bedrooms, a small living room, and tiny kitchen. Unfortunately, our little house had been invaded by Bill who was Earl's "big little brother." Bill was six foot eight and where Earl was a stoic, iron faced "man of God," Bill was a trashy, loud, petulant, obnoxious child. Bill stomped about like he owned the place. Eating all of our food, monopolizing the TV, and running a gigantic up a god damn long-distance

phone bill talking to his girlfriend down in Coco, not Cocoa Beach, just Coco.

The man was a plague upon us, but nobody could say a word to him. To Earl, family was all. Bill was his brother, and so long as Bill was under our roof, he would be treated as an honored guest. I can tell you, Earl hated his brother more than any of us, but this was a matter of pride. After living in the brick house a number of months, we were all worn thin.

One evening, while Earl was gone to work, I was enjoying a rare treat. My brother and his friends were in our home. This gathering was impromptu but very welcome. Stephene and his friends were my heroes at that time in my young life. On this night, being included in a viewing of “The Hunt for Red October” meant the world to me.

In barged Bill with no regard for what we were doing. He stepped on Sean Connery’s iconic line, “One Ping Only.” I fired out an “Oh shut up, Bill!” like a whip-crack. He stood stunned, stupefied. Then, my brother and his friends and even my mother, burst out laughing. The combo of my seven-year-old voice, the look on his face, and months of stress were released. Bill was mortified. We literally laughed him out of the house.

Mother tried to run damage control, to try and shoulder some of the blame, to shape the narrative in our favor. That woman was like a Cold War propagandist. Earl assured her that all was well, waving her down with sweet words. Like most successful long-term abusers, Earl could be a charming liar when it suited him. But I knew the truth. I could see it in his cold, hard eyes. Earl was going to kill me for this embarrassment, this disobedience.

Days went by. Bill moved out to a duplex across town. Earl came and went to work, feigning indifference. Then, one morning, I woke to a silent house. It was Saturday morning. I wandered out of my bedroom and down the short hallway. No sound of my mother talking, I realized that she must have gone shopping without me. Stephen was nowhere to be found.

The house was cold, my bare feet felt numb on the tile floors. Then I heard his voice, “Ricky.” Earl’s basso, a low rumble, it carried through the kitchen, almost gentle. I saw that the side door was standing open, the morning air was invading our home. I followed the voice outside to find Earl, sitting out on our gliding swing off the car port. My stepfather, the only father I had ever known, was in as relaxed a posture as he ever took, casually dressed in a faded old blue, crew necked cotton t-shirt, sweat shorts, and flip-flops, his hair was not styled and the morning’s coarse black stubble still showed across his strong jawline. For all his simplicity, the man was every inch a king on his throne. Earl beckoned me to him even though every part of me knew that this was all planned, he’d arranged this, it was an ambush. But, he was Dad, and I had to obey. So I shuffled over the rough concrete, over to him. He hit me so hard then that I couldn’t tell

THIRTY-THREE YEARS

exactly what had happened. I couldn't get air into my lungs, my stomach, his fists, Earl's giant fist was buried in my body. He was holding me up by my hair with his other hand holding my face close to his. He said quietly to me, "I will kill you. I can kill you and your mother and your useless faggot brother and get away with it, too. If you ever embarrass me in front of my family ever again, I'll do it."

He left me there then. I don't know how long. My cat came along, and I sat with him in silence until Janet came home. I never told her for fear that Earl really would kill us all.

That was thirty-three years ago, and I still wake up in the middle of the night worried that this is the night that he has chosen to break into my home and kill me in my bed. Thirty-three years and counting.

MY DAUGHTER, UYỄN

**Uyen Nguyen, MA • Staff, Administrative Assistant I,
Financial Aid**

My dear Uyen,

I'm battling leukemia like a flock of hungry seagulls attacking me with their bill.

The circumstance is worse than the greedy aunts removing you from my will.

No matter what happens, I'll always be there, like a mama bear nurturing her cub; I care.

I love you with all my heart. No matter what happens, we will never be apart.

Every step of the way, I shall watch over you every day.

Right here from heaven and above. I will be there, forever showing motherly love.

When you were born, your bright smile was pure perfection.

I know I will take care of you with such great affection.

Your bright red lips and happy face, my eyes lit up like the twinkling lights at our place.

But one sad thing makes it hard to say: I knew the cancer would take my life away.

I couldn't bear to say goodbye. The thought of leaving you always made me cry.

Before I leave, I will not forget. I needed to spend every waking second with you before I regret.

You'll see the photos like we are characters in a show.

The enormous person dressed as Doremon and the tiger scared you, so we had to go.

The family photos show us having so much fun, relaxing at the beach, and bathing in the sun.

Time went by like a rabbit moving at warp speed, and I didn't get a chance to see you succeed.

MY DAUGHTER, UYÊN

Three weeks after I passed away, you left Vietnam at a time when those memories will stay.

Picture perfect moments, captures of you, Dad, and me, like a rare hidden puzzle invisible to see.

Before I turn those pages, look at the swan paddle boat as we can ride for ages. I wish that I could spend another day. But since I couldn't, there's something I must say

Remember me as I tell you this, "My dear sweet child, you were only three
As you grow up, always think of me. Your beautiful smile and face of joy
A wonderful person, a presence no one can destroy. It's a strict culture, but
respect your elders' finish your rice. Get an education and always think twice.
Don't lose hope, baby; don't cry.
You will achieve as long as you try. Cherish the album of us in Vietnam.

- Love, Mom

FROM FANDOM TO FLUENCY: HOW LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE CHANGED MY LIFE

Isabella Minatti • Student, Academic Transfer

Ever since childhood, I built a deep love for American culture. My memorable TV shows included *Wizards of Waverly Place*, *Lazy Town*, *The Adventures of Jimmy Neutron*, *The Fairly Oddparents*, *iCarly*, *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* – I still hold a huge devotion for the actors, particularly for the twin brothers. Now for movies, *High School Musical* was one of my favorites. So, imagine my surprise when, twelve years later, I first arrived in the U.S. for high school, only to find out that basketball team captains didn't keep hidden talents for singing and acting. Neither start randomly singing on top of lunchroom tables, it was very disappointing. However, this passion for American TV culture later became passion for the English language itself. Today it feels almost surreal that I can talk and write in English with ease, but the journey upon proficiency achievement was undeniably hard. Learning English as a second language has transformed my life in many ways, growing from childhood fascination with American culture into a passion for the language had not only given me proficiency but also opened doors of opportunities and experiences that I wouldn't have otherwise encountered.

Everything began after a school winter break, in July, when after endless previous attempts to learn English by myself I started begging for my mom to put me into an English class. I was 13 at the time and had started this journey a long time ago with free online courses that gave me useless words and phrases that I would never need to use in a daily conversation. What I wanted was to be able to have a conversation with a native speaker and to understand what those actors from the TV shows that I watched since I was a baby were talking about without needing to put subtitles or watch dubbed. And the internet wasn't helping me at all. I watched countless YouTube videos of Brazilians that got fluent by watching Netflix shows with subtitles in English, or playing American video games, so I tried. I started with movies that I already knew in Portuguese so would be easier to connect what the words in English meant; I watched *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* for two weeks straight and couldn't understand half of it still. I tried with other movies too, but it wasn't working very well. When I'd tell people about my struggle, they would say, "Oh honey, its normal you need to keep going" or "It's okay, eventually you'll get it", but they weren't the ones who was getting more and more frustrated, and almost giving up on the dream of learning a new language.

Therefore, my last shot was the in-person English classes. After me begging my mom for a couple of weeks she finally realized that I really cared about that and I was invested in learning the language, so I started the class in August of that year. It was a hard journey. But with the discipline that I already had from playing sports since a young age, and the motivation of wanting to learn the language so bad, I finish the class in 2020. My initial plan was taking a trip that the English school offered for the students to the U.S. after they finished the course so I could practice my English with native speakers. But then Covid hit and that didn't happen. Still, I didn't give up, I started watching American tv shows and movies more regularly and without subtitles, my go to was always: *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother*. Also rewatched *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and understanding the whole thing was one of my proudest moments. Then in the end of that year, out of nowhere, I got the amazing opportunity that I've never thought I'd get it: I was offered a scholarship to finish my last two years of high school and play basketball for a small private Christian school in Lincoln, and I said yes without hesitation. That was everything I was waiting for. At that time, I still didn't feel that my English was a hundred percent prepared to the real world, so I started taking private classes with one of my mom's friends that was an English teacher until a month before I left. And let me tell you, it was so helpful, gave me much more confidence for this new adventure that was in front of me.

Coming to the U.S. the first time was the most exciting and at the same time terrifying experience I've ever had in my entire life up until that point. Watching my favorite movies and TV shows that made me have the motivation to learn the language and be there, in the airplane going to my exchange program in America, was surreal. But at the same time, I was alone on a ten-hour flight talking in a language that I've never talked in outside of a classroom. I was adventuring myself into foreign airports and having to find my gates wherever they were. I had been to an airport and into an airplane before, but never by myself nor out of the country. I spent endless hours walking, talking to strangers to find out where my gates were, getting into little trains that may or may not be taking me to my terminal and much more. But passing through TSA was the most terrifying, that's for sure. Buff six feet tall guys with security uniforms and guns on their pockets yelling for you to take your laptop out of your backpack and put your shoes on the x-ray mat is not the most fun for a foreigner or any conscious person. After a total of 18 hours traveling, counting on and off airplane hours I got to Lincoln.

When I think back then everything is just a blur of mixed feelings. My first day at school was nerve racking, my first step into the school I was shaking and so nervous thinking that nobody would like me or wouldn't be my friend, but today I can say I'm a well-known and liked person at Parkview. My first practice was cruel, in the first hour I was dreading in sweat due to the hot humid breeze of July. But getting to know each of my teammates

and their strengths and weaknesses and learning to play together was incredible. My first game was such a useful experience, everyone learning each other's rhythm while smashing the opponent team and having fun felt pretty good. My first time watching an American football game, how confused I was because the boys were hitting each other, and the excitement when I first saw the cheerleaders yelling on top of their lungs shaking the pompoms as much as they were capable to. The first time I was part of an American student section in a state game, on a ginormous court packed with people, cheering to the dances I had learned from the cheerleaders. The first time I watched a Nebraska Volleyball game, feeling amazed to cheer beside some random stranger. The first time I went to ask something to a teacher, and they understood what I said, or when I started a book in English and got even more addicted to reading, showed me how much my English had improved. All those experiences made everything on this journey worth it. But still, everything feels pretty much a dream for me, everything that I watched on my TV at home turned into reality and I still can't believe it, all because I learned a second language.

When my senior year came, I experienced the same anxiety Troy and Gabriela felt in *High School Musical 3: Senior Year*, deciding what to do after high school. What college am I going to? What college will give me a scholarship? Am I going to play my sport at college? What major am I doing? Am I going to pursue my love for theater and music or am I going to play basketball to make my dad proud? No, that was just Troy, but one thing I was sure of, I wanted to play basketball at college. After lots of college visits, that I didn't even know were a thing before my exchange years, and talking to lots of coaches, I received a good amount of offers from colleges everywhere. But my journey led me to a community college in the same city that I graduated high school, which means I'd still be in touch with friends and family from Lincoln, all thanks to my knowledge in English.

My journey stands as proof of the power of dedication and the great impact a second language proficiency can have on one's life path. Learning another language is not just about the language itself, it's about new connections, new possibilities, new worlds. At first coming to America and studying here, talking in a foreign language wasn't really my goal, but just because I took the time to learn the language, doors opened for me. Now every day I feel like I'm in a TV show, like the ones I watched as a kid and later as a teenager. With me being the main character of course. The eighteenth season of this show was just released and now I live every day for a new episode.

Take me up there and hold my hand
Let's fly into the clouds beyond the land
Over the houses and stillness of night
Not a care to be thought of
Just your presence in mine
Nor a word to be spoken in this state of mind
A glance at your glossy eyes that shine
Let the wind sail us over the tides
Rising and floating through the twilight
Breathe in and don't look at the ground
Over the snowy mountains
I don't want to come down
The clouds are fading and beginning to blur
I didn't think this would last forever
Only your photos and memories remain
I was pulled back down into the pain

TERMINAL

Harsh • Student, Academic Transfer

I was young when I lost my deity.
A kitten at the cosmic crime scene.
The cat who exists in curiosity,
And caught a case of velocity.
It's terminal

I'm already Dead Sea.
Like all the religious texts testing me.
I'm down to challenge their atrocities.
Burn the world down in an act of heresy.

Got up in front of everyone at mass.
Not the church, that one burned fast,
The media, where we all learned to lose class.
Screaming through the screens at your illness.
It's terminal.

Your choice, grave or defiance.
Hands shot up from dirt like ants.
Now everyones joined my riots.
A league of legends that doesn't serve a red giant.

You know the one that fell to Jack and the beanstock.
Did I say bean I meant NASDAQ the one in the U.S pocket.
The same place where time has you kept.
Two hands keeping a noose around your market.
It's terminal.

TERMINAL

The land of the free enslaved by debts.
But it's better than serving in a third world tarpit.
Where for pennies a day you can bad the corporate wallet,
And all our children will serve from their ball pits.

This might as well be euthanasia.
The young can't fight through youth aphasia.
You killed god and chose to replace her.
Like you're the last one that gets to use the speaker.
It's terminal.

Lambs to your slaughtering ego.
We got an idea to come bearing our vetoes.
It's not just in our head, it's everything, says Hugo.
So chop away... We sing for our ghosts.

THE MEASURE OF A DOG

Kale Riley • Instructor, English

Angus lived on a farm, but he wasn't a farm dog. Angus wasn't much of a dog at all. He was short and low to the ground. His eyes were the size of marbles and he had no nose to speak of. He wasn't lean and athletic, more pudgy and soft. He didn't have an intimidating bark, more of a "yabba-yabba-yabba" sound. His ears were floppy, his tail curly, and he didn't always smell real great. Still, Angus had a good life on his farm. He woke up at eleven, when Mama started cooking lunch. He napped in the sun on the porch until the sun moved behind the house, then Angus migrated to the barnyard. Somedays, he'd chase the chickens around for an hour before he got tired and went to bed. The farm animals teased him and called him names. The cat even told Angus he wasn't a real dog. But Angus didn't care, at least that's what he told everyone, and himself.

One day, Angus decided to go wandering, beyond the farmyard. He walked away, just a little at first. He just wanted to see what was on the other side of the fence. Once he crossed the fence, he went a little farther. Then he went farther, and farther, before he knew it, Angus was a long way from the farm. He stopped beside a creek and thought about what to do. Should he turn back or keep going? If he went much farther, Angus wasn't sure he'd make it back to the farm.

Meanwhile, back on the farm, an old black bear had wandered down from the woods. The bear was hungry and there wasn't anyone guarding the henhouse, so he headed towards the farm. The chickens squawked, the cat hissed, the horse brayed, the cow mooed, and the goat bleated, but the bear just kept coming.

Down by the creek Angus' floppy ears heard something. "Was that squawking?" He didn't know what it was, but it sounded scary. "Maybe I should cross the creek," Angus thought. But he did miss his bed, and the sun on the porch, and Mama cooking lunch. "Maybe I should find out what that noise is," Angus thought, "if it is something scary, I can always run away again." Angus turned and jogged back to his farm.

When Angus reached his farm, he saw the old black bear smashing a hole in the side of the chicken coop! The bear was going to eat the chickens! Angus did not think. He started barking as loud as his pudgy, noseless face could bark. "Yabba! Yabba! Yabba!" He barked as he charged at the bear. The old black bear stepped away from the smashed henhouse and the chickens scrambled off in terror. The bear stood on his back legs and pawed at the rising moon--almost slapping it from the sky. "Yabba-yabba-yabba!" Angus kept barking, not backing away even when the bear roared back.

THE MEASURE OF A DOG

The bear dropped to all fours and lowered his head until he was eye level with Angus, but the dog didn't flinch, he just stared back through his marble eyes. Finally, the bear snorted, turned and jogged away. Angus watched the bear go, and every time the bear slowed his pace, Angus barked "Yabba!" Until the bear vanished into the woods.

After that, Angus never wandered away from home again and even the cat agreed having a dog around was for the best.

SUICIDAL IDEATION

Erin M. Rengan • Student, Dual Credit/SENCAP

You weren't always loud
But there isn't a day
When I'm left alone without you
The subtle lullabies you sing me to sleep with
You know they'd be happier without you~
Sometimes it's night terrors
Disorienting mirages
From the worst depths of my mind
But it's worse, isn't it? It's when it's pleasant
Such a sharp contrast from my reality
Sometimes I dream of you
Senses of relief swirl across my mind
Until I wake, only to be reunited once again
Some days you're quiet
I cross the road, without looking both ways
Some days you're screaming at me
You know they hate you, why must you make them deal with your presence?
And sometimes I can't resist you
So plans are made to see you
I'm at ease, happy even
But when the plans get suddenly canceled
I realize that
I ought to hate you
You've taken so much from me
But here we are together and inseparable
You aren't me, I say
But as we coexist, it seems impossible to tell us apart
People contain multitudes, they say

In the end, you're simply a part of me
Struggling for control
Something I will never grant
I wish to expel you from our home
But you crawl back
Every single time
And convince me to take you back
I wonder when
I'll be able
To reject you
Once and for all...

THE NEVER ENDING FIRE

**Uyen Nguyen, MA • Staff, Administrative Assistant I,
Financial Aid**

Flames of fire like a sniper burning ash
I am the phoenix growing stronger as I rise from your flames
like bruised strawberries with too many holes to uncover the rash.
As the torch ignites, the wild demon is still running untamed.

The red planet Mars, I'm rising from that ash.
Who is the damn arsonist trying to cover for your ass?

That anger in those eyes and those emotions igniting,
adding fuel to the flame, always fighting.
Watching it, burn, burn, burning bright.

Can you hear the sizzle? The sizzling sound of the scaley rattlesnake,
the gross slithered tongue sticking in and out,
always running about trying to put our lives at stake.

My zodiac sign is the horse trying to gallop away,
but the more you chase me, the more I'll never stay.

Fire, fire, burning bright. Trust no one; stay out of my sight.
Never once seek love or guidance from your mistrust.
What is your definition of red? Will the actual color ignite?

THE NEVER ENDING FIRE

Orange-red flames are burning instead. The heart is constantly yearning.
Like a trapped mime in a box,

I stayed silent as a fox and tried to get out but did not return.

The fire-breathing dragon reeks as it adds to his flame.

It is so super toxic, and I'm sick of the blame. Stop it with the endless mind games.

The fireproof firebird is fighting fire with fire.

The volcanic lava exploded towards my desire.

Why listen to what he has to say?

When it haunts me day after day,

I'll rise from the ash, a reborn phoenix rising from the pain.

The flames, the fire, his hateful heart will keep burning until it remains
toxic and uncured; I won't stop running until you've matured.

WILTING

Makenna Standley • Student, Early Childhood Education

Memories are like a field of flowers.
Some already in bloom,
fighting for their life to stay alive in the mind.
Growing toward the sun
in the hope of being deemed most important.

Each color represents a different story.
A different choice.
A different memory.

Blue showing the sorrow of
losing the one loved most in your life.
Red to show the frustration of being cheated.
Yellow showing your happiest day,
your safest day.
Or pink to show the creativity which
peeks through your hobbies.

Some flowers however,
are only buds.
Not even beginning the process
of being in full bloom.
They are simply a figment of the imagination.

WILTING

Lying in wait for their moment to shine
as bright and new as all the others.

For some,
their memories are an unruly curse.
Standing wilted, un-watered, and sunburnt,
within a sea of other flowers.
No longer having the strength
to stretch upward.

Slowly wrinkling further and further
toward the surface.
These are the memories that sneak up
in the back of your mind.
They tease you with déjà vu,
Then strike with venom when you least expect it.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Angel Aviarre: Angel is a first year college student, as well as a first time mom as of 2024. She enjoys the GDMA program for its digital techniques and its capabilities. Angel likes to sketch ideas and enjoys feedback on her art from her peers and family.

Richard Barnes: Richard Barnes is a 54-year-old veteran of Desert Shield/Storm. He graduated from Plainview Public Schools in Plainview, NE in 1989.

Ashley Bosco: Ashley Renee Bosco's life began in the shadow of adversity, where every day felt like a battle against the darkness that engulfed her home. Born into a world tainted by addiction and neglect, Ashley's childhood was marred by unimaginable hardship and cruelty.

At just seven years old, Ashley bore the physical and emotional scars of a life no child should endure. Malnourished and abandoned, she found solace in the familiar embrace of her Barney pajamas, a gift from her loving grandmother amidst the chaos of her surroundings.

Living in a two-bedroom apartment with her two younger brothers, Ashley's days were filled with fear and despair. Her mother, Ann Leslie, consumed by addiction, inflicted pain and suffering upon her children with a ferocity that knew no bounds. The presence of a man named Randy only added to the nightmare, as he subjected Ashley and her siblings to unspeakable horrors.

Despite the constant torment, Ashley's resilient spirit endured. In a moment of desperation, she seized an opportunity for escape, leaping from her second-story window to freedom, leaving behind the horrors of her past.

Her journey to safety was not without its trials. Encountering Officer Dan, a figure she once feared, Ashley discovered an unexpected ally in her darkest hour. Though initially taken aback by his presence, Ashley soon realized that beneath the surface of his imposing demeanor lay a heart of compassion and kindness.

With Officer Dan's intervention, Ashley was spared from a fate far worse than the abuse she had endured. Rescued from the clutches of those who sought to exploit her, Ashley found herself on a new path, guided by the unwavering support of her aunt Cheryl.

Embraced by a family who offered love and protection, Ashley's journey toward healing began. Though the road ahead was fraught with challenges, she faced each obstacle with courage and determination, knowing that she was no longer alone in her struggle.

With the love of her newfound family and the strength of her own indomitable spirit, Ashley emerged from the darkness of her past to embrace a future filled with hope and possibility. In the end, her story is a testament to the power of resilience and the enduring promise of a brighter tomorrow.

Mathew Chilcott: unknown

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Natalie Duchesneau: Natalie Duchesneau is a graduate of Southeast Community College who aspires to become a teacher. Her writing has been featured in Illuminations before, and she previously received an award for one of her works. Natalie believes in reading, writing, and changing the world.

Richard M. Hadley: Richard enjoys looking at the witty observations of life and believes in certain undeniable truths of the world such as Godzilla is King of the Monsters and is mightier than King Kong, Bigfoot exists possibly maybe somewhere, Ric Flair is the greatest wrestler of all time, Daredevil is the most underrated superhero, Ben Affleck is better than Matt Damon, the meaning of life can be found in the cartoons of Calvin and Hobbs, and the Oxford comma is overrated, antiquated and elitist.

Tanya Hare: Went to SCC for Bus Admin and 6 years later came to work at SCC. I have been here almost 29 years. and love almost every day. Love helping families.

Linda Hartman: Linda has been at SCC for 24 years and enjoys serving in a variety of roles with the college. In her free time she enjoys any outdoor adventure and traveling.

Harsh: Harsh is an aspiring writer who is still getting a feel for the literary world and where he fits into it. Poetry has been a long-time hobby of his and after encouragement from one of his teachers here at SCC has chosen to submit some of his works.

Desmond Hauser: Desmond Hauser was born and raised in Lincoln, NE. He graduated from Lincoln High in 2003. He has two sons and is unmarried. He's been in prison since 2016.

Lynda Heiden: An SCC former employee for 41 plus years; retired in early 2021.

Erica Howard: Erica is a student pursuing a writing degree and is currently working on an Associate of Arts degree. She wants to become a writer and have her books published.

G.C. Hughes: He's young and faceless scribbling away in a hole just off campus. Everything is so beautiful. Life is simple in this college town, but there's a feeling. A gray haze sits low over our heads. Even on sunny days, it clouds our eyes. He hopes to point to it, then we could say, "You rain cloud go away! Don't drip water in our eyes on this summer day. We should see light and laugh and pray." This is a high hope. The more he digs there only more beauty to be found. Nothing explains why water drips from ours on such shiny days.

Elsa Johnson: Elsa Johnson is a focused student here at Southeast Community College. She has made Dean's List on a few separate occasions, after deciding to take a second shot at college. She is a non-traditional academic transfer student. Also, Elsa is a STEM-Connect scholar. She is an aspiring physicist, as science greatly interests her. After completing the necessary education requirements at SCC, she plans on transferring to UNL.

Sarah Lange: Sarah Lange is a student at Raymond Central High School who is taking dual-credit and online courses at SCC. She has three older sisters and lives with her parents on an acreage near Raymond, NE. In her free time, she reads the news, cooks, watches Nebraska Volleyball, or reads a book. She enjoys reading and writing both fiction and nonfiction, and she aims to work in public policy in the future.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Dylan Lester: Dylan was born in Colorado, where he lived until he moved to Hamburg, Iowa, at the age of 16. Dylan graduated as part of the Class of 2019 from Sidney High School in Sidney, Iowa. After attending Peru State College from Fall 2019 until Spring 2021, he left school due to financial instability. Since then, he has worked full-time in a variety of positions- including Tax Professional with H&R Block, moved up from Barista to Store Manager with Scooter's Coffee, and held two positions with the Nebraska Department of Education: Front Desk Representative and Coordinated Student Support Services Associate, respectively. Starting with the Spring 2023 semester, Dylan returned to school part-time while continuing to work full-time. He graduated from SCC at the end of the Fall 2024 semester.

Outside of work and school, Dylan is a proud member of the LGBT community and lives in Lincoln full-time with his husband. He has a large family, including a staggering 11 siblings. A passionate Swiftie and board games lover, Dylan spends much of his time with his husband and friends listening to music, seeing concerts and playing a variety of board and card games.

Vincent L. Litle: Vincent Litle was born in England, August 28th, 1985. Both of his parents are from Fremont, Nebraska. He graduated from David City Public High School in 2004. He joined the Army in January of 2005 and was deployed to Iraq in April 2007. He returned in July 2008. He was married on July 11th of 2006 and is still married.

Storm London: Storm London was born in Texas and is a former U.S. Marine who grew up on a ranch in the Texas panhandle. While he was in the military, he was deployed twice to Iraq and twice to Afghanistan. He moved to Nebraska for a new start and fell short.

Cheney Lutlich: Cheney Lutlich teaches English at SCC. In her free time, she sits with her family at her daughter's volleyball tournaments or sits on the sofa watching TV.

Shadan M. : Shadan is a recent graduate of Southeast Community College. She moved to Lincoln during Covid-19 and started at SCC in 2021.

Lizzy Massey: Lizzy Massey is a freshman at SCC. She grew up in Eagle Nebraska and has been a Husker fan all that time. She enjoys time spent outdoors, hiking, kayaking, or just going for a walk in the neighborhood. She has two cats and a great love of aquariums. She thinks time spent with family is always a good time.

Abbie McCoy: Abbie is a single mother with a love and passion about art.

Angelina P Miller: Angelina Miller, is pursuing a degree in Biomedical science, but also has a creative side, and hopes some day to be a published poet. Along with expressing herself through writing, she has a career goal of changing FDA policies and restrictions. Her poem, "In your new life I hope..." was inspired by the loss of her cousin. She highlights reincarnation and the hope of our loved ones carrying the things we love about them into the next life.

Isabella Minatti: Isabella is an international student from Brazil enrolled in the Academic Transfer Student at SCC. She plays basketball for the school, she's interested in Biology and English and her hobbies are free journaling, reading, and spending time with her family. This semester she went deep down the subject of bilingualism and found some interesting information that will be presented in her essays.

Kate Gonzalez Mireles: student, CIT cybersecurity & Academic Transfer.

Hailey Morris: Hailey is an SCC student who plans on transferring into a four year college such

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

as UNL or UNO. Her life revolves around using her imagination, creativity, and learning various forms of art.

Kristine Morris: Just a creative soul and always dreaming. Inspired by flowers, mountains, seasons, and the moon.

Haley N: Haley was born in Lincoln, Nebraska and has lived here her whole life. Writing is one of many pastimes she enjoys.

Uyen Nguyen: Uyen Nguyen (Win-win) just completed grad school for her Master of Arts Degree in English and creative writing on May 4, 2024, with a 4.0 GPA at Southern New Hampshire University! Her writing goal is to publish a book of poetry and memoir in honor of her mother, who passed away from leukemia when she was only three and a half years old. Another dream is to publish a children's book series one day to read to her one-year-old daughter and add to her children's book collection. Uyen aims to inspire and spread positivity to her readers. Documenting life through video blogging is a way to promote her writing skills by reading aloud her poems and story ideas. Uyen is putting herself out there to build an audience to share her stories and positive energy. Through her writing and earning her master's degree, she is gradually boosting her self-confidence by enhancing her writing and public speaking skills.

The poem submissions for Illumination are a selection of some of Uyen's poems from a third of the best work written in her English and Creative Writing Capstone course as the ending chapter of Uyen's graduate school journey. In hopes of publishing a book of poetry in memory of her mother, depending on how many more poems she needs to compose to finish her book of poetry, she has high hopes that her poems will appear in school literary magazines or a poetry anthology debuting her poems in her mom's memory.

Kal O'Bryant: Kal is 20, and is the second oldest of four kids. He has two sisters, one older one younger, and one younger brother. He was born and raised in Lincoln, and started writing for the Creative Writing course at SCC. He hopes to pursue journalism at UNL.

Bryan Emanuel Ortega: Bryan Emanuel Ortega is an Academic Transfer student at SCC, with plans to attend UNL in the near future. He is an aspiring photographer with a dream to have a career in Graphic Design, designing and creative directing for his own clothing brand and other publications. His motto in life is that anything you want to achieve, you can achieve if you manifest it for yourself.

Ruqaya Raji: Ruqaya, a passionate writer from Iraq, crafts captivating stories that blend her cultural roots with creative flair. Her love for writing shines through in every word, offering readers a unique and engaging experience. She was raised in San Diego, California, and moved to Lincoln to further pursue her education, aspiring to become a dental hygienist.

Erin M. Rengan: Erin M. Rengan was born in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and moved to Lincoln, Nebraska in 2019. She enjoys any creative medium including art, crochet, writing, as well as composing and playing music. Erin graduated from Pius X High School. She currently attends George Washington University in Washington, D.C., where she is majoring in International Affairs.

Kale Riley: Dr. Kale Riley is an English professor on the Milford and Lincoln campuses, and feels that the Community College setting is the best place to teach. He has been an educator since he was 16, he's been a certified teacher for over 20 years, and has worked for SCC since

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

2017. Kale Riley is also a trivia show host, a member of the Nebraska Writers' Guild, a husband, father, grandfather, cat-dad, and a writer.

Shaghayegh Rouhi: Shaghayegh Rouhi is a dedicated individual with a passion for writing. She was born and raised in Iran and moved to the United States for higher education and independence. She is pursuing a major in data science with a minor in economics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This piece is part of her journey in her first year of college as a first-generation international student.

During the warmer seasons, she enjoys taking long walks in the park with her partner. During the colder months, you can find her at home creating whatever she can out of various craft supplies.

Susana Schmidt: Susana Schmidt was born in the heart of South America, speaks fluent English and Spanish, and has traveled the globe since. She is 20 years old and loves baking, listening to music, and hanging out with her friends and family.

Olivia Schwickerath: Olivia Schwickerath loves Jesus, adores her cat, Quinn, and is an avid reader and writer. She also enjoys singing and eating ice cream.

Nicholle Aileen Soukup: I was born and raised in the Midwest nearly all my life. I am in recovery from trauma, addiction, grief and loss, depression, anxiety, PTSD and cancer. I'm either in the process of, or have overcome the obstacles which life has thrown at me, searching for healing and peace.

Makenna Standley: Makenna is currently studying Early Childhood Education, working toward a teaching degree. She likes to write within her free time, loving the idea of creating new people, places, and worlds. She has always loved reading, pushing herself into a new creation with each new book.

Courtney States: Courtney is a mother of 3, stepmother of 2, and a grandmother of 3. She enjoys spending time with her family and helping with her grandkids anytime she is needed. She has 3 dogs that she enjoys taking on walks and playing fetch with. Courtney is a fulltime student at SCC in Beatrice. She also likes being a member of PTA and being an active member in her community.

Richard TerKeurst: Richard TerKeurst is a southern-born writer and nontraditional student living and working in Lincoln, Nebraska. Rich can be found in various places of learning and fitness on any given day. He also loves his family, cats, and Star Trek (in that order).

Emma Waack: Emma Waack is the Art Instructor on the Beatrice Campus of SCC. She has been drawing and creating art since she was able to hold a pencil upright on a piece of paper. Her focus has been on portraits and figure studies in graphite and pen for the last few years.

Dillon Walker: Continuing education.

Wendy Carr Weitzel: Wendy holds an MFA in Creative Writing for Young People at Lesley University. She teaches English at SCC. She is an award-winning middle grade author, and

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

also writes picture books, chapter books, and nonfiction essays about her time living in Saudi Arabia. She enjoys running (slowly), climbing mountains, and sampling new types of candy.

Hunter Weaver: Hunter Weaver is a young man that was born and raised in Lincoln, Nebraska. When he was a kid he spent most of his time sitting around and daydreaming about dinosaurs and magic. Now he sits around daydreaming about monsters and horror. He was always a paranoid kid, something that influences what he creates today. Life has taken him to Southeast Community College and he is very happy to share his work with you today.

Chelsea K. Wilson: Chelsea Wilson is studying at Southeast Community College and plans to complete her bachelor's degree in psychology at the University of Nebraska Omaha. Wilson grew up in a small community which didn't offer many resources for those struggling with mental illness. Through her own personal battles and the suicide of her father, Wilson has developed a passion for understanding and overcoming mental illness.

Reagan Winsor: Reagan Winsor is a twenty-two-year-old finding her purpose in a big world. The Human Services program is part of fulfilling that purpose, helping individuals grow into the best versions of themselves. Winsor loves all things that spark creativity. Her passions include poetry, watercolor painting, and crocheting.

Hayle Yoakum: Hayle is a business student, transferring to Nebraska Wesleyan to study accounting. Hayle hopes to become an accountant. Hayle has always enjoyed painting for as long as she could remember, although she is not pursuing a career with painting she hopes that she can always turn to it as a creative outlet.



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"I stared out as far as I could,
Past my fields and the gravel roads,
Watching the sun tearing teal
Paint off the top of the water tower,
And melting that line
Where the sky meets the earth."

Kal O'Bryant
"The Farmer"



"I reached my hands into his car seat, digging
through a mountain of soft blankets to try
and find his pacifier or rattle toy. Something.
Anything. What I found instead was a pink
Starburst wrapper."

Dylan Lester
"Strawberry Starbursts and White Spoons"

"So, here's to the journey, the trials we've faced,
And to find our way, with courage encased.
For in the darkest of nights, a star will gleam,
Guiding us home, to our truest dreams."

Ashley Bosco
**"From Darkness to Dreams-A Modern Fairy Tale
of Resilience and Redemption"**

"He placed his stethoscope
on Liam's chest. I waited in
silence for what seemed like
eternity, waiting for my son
to die in his mother's arms."

Desmond Hauser
"Memoir Essay"