



Threads

2010



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2010 Editors

Jaime Barrett
Noah Kucij
Ethan Roy
Sara Tedesco

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Message from the Editors

We would like to thank all the students who submitted their work to *Threads* this year. We received many quality submissions, and we continue to read with pleasure the enthusiasm and creativity each submission presents. Of course, all pieces have merit, and we would like to publish everything submitted, but the limitations of space will simply not allow it.

It is important to note that *Threads* reflects works that are not necessarily perfect in their format and composition, but exhibit insight, creativity, social awareness, and a unique perspective. These works — of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and photography — reflect the range of experience, culture, and imagination of the Hudson Valley Community College student. The editors relish the opportunity to travel to and explore the territory each new issue stakes out.

Every year we are extremely pleased to highlight the exceptional work of the students at Hudson Valley Community College. Please plan your submission for next year.

Please submit your work to *Threads* electronically. Visit us at <http://threads.hvcc.edu> or e-mail your work to threads@hvcc.edu

Table of Contents

TITLE	AUTHOR	PAGE
Swain's Wing: Preface	Hannah K. Bewsher	6
Battle Buddies	Carol Walkley	9
Ruin	Robert Clyde Anderson	11
The Question	Rick Spataro	15
On Writing	Ben Greenman	16
A Quick Tale of a Long Summer	Andrew Horning	19
A Dear Old Friend	Lauri Anderson	21
From the Heart	Lindsay Clark	23
Sunday Journal Thoughts	Steve Adelman	25
A Personal Experience	Nicole Monsees	26
Movie Magic	John Lyden	28
Sprint	Brandon Adams	30
Ode to a Woman	Rick Spataro	32
Downtown Albany: Best of Both Worlds	Shaniqua M. Jackson	33
The Marked Woman	Laurie Kime	35
Taking the Risk	Jona Favreau	37
Untitled	Lindsay Clark	40
Old Tow Truck	Lindsay Clark	41
Untitled	Nathan Rohrer	42
The Detailed Life	Nathan Rohrer	43
Deploying the One I Love	Amanda Barnett	45
ID HID	Lisa Ann Ford	48
The Case For Cats	Robert Clyde Anderson	49
At the Truck Stop	Audrey Pade	52
Driving Fear	Dan Stevens	54
There Are Two Kinds of People	Katy Pinkham	56
Andy's Judgment	Romey J. Romano	59
Together	Brittany Stallwood	61
Roarke	Ross Wooding	62
Turn the Page	Adriana Fraioli	65
My School Vacation	Philip A. Stewart	68
Vosburgh Rd.	Mitch Dewein	70
Old Bag of Bones	Michael J. Walker	73
Fall	Marilyn Jarosz	76
The Oak Tree	Chloe Barker-Benfield	77

Swain's Wing: Preface

Hannah K. Bewsher

I tore pages from the book, and threw them to the ground. They fluttered gently no matter how hard I threw them. Again and again, I tore it. I tore it from the binding, deep inside the book where threads snapped. I tore the pages out by the roots, leaving loose and frayed stitches...Cradling the empty shell of the book, I turned it inside out like a rabbits' hide and looked at the spine of shredded paper.

Flexing it, I saw red blood smeared across the gray, cardboard cover. There was a paper cut on the pad of my finger, nothing visible but a bleeding sickle. Finally finished, something within me satisfied, I tossed the cover on to the pile. I watched it land with a dry thump. Mutilated pages leapt up in their death throes. I ignored them and read the cover. The title was printed in embossed, silver lettering: Swain's Wing. Breathing heavily, I didn't wonder about the title or what the book had been about. Closing my eyes, I hid for a moment in the relief I found from my anger. After taking a few deep breaths, and feeling the tension in my arms melt away, I turned calmly to the window, and threw it open. The breeze was nice, but just a little cold. I stared hard through the screen, listening to the paper shudder around the room.

It was when I felt the breeze stop, and the paper continued to move, that I finally glanced over my shoulder. The edges of the pile were moving continuously, orbiting the mauled book cover. One half page lifted off the floor in erratic, strained flight. I stood up questioningly, inspecting the crack under my door, looking for a draft. When I didn't find the source, I straightened up and looked down at the paper, bewildered. I stepped back. My heel bumped the wall.

The page that had taken flight, seemingly with a mind of its own, was circling my bed, flapping like it had wings. The rest of the ruined book was swirling at knee level, like a whirlpool. I could barely see my floor.

The airborne page gave a loud snap, like a knuckle cracking. It was adding folds. Every time it fell and circled again, it had another dimension to it. Soon, it was flying in wider, smoother circles, swinging close to my face. A defined wingtip clipped my nose, and I flinched, turning away.

As it came swinging around the room, passing just above my head, I could see that it was a bird now. It opened a twofold beak and gave a cry that sounded like vindictive laughter.

Screee! Kaka ka-ka! Now, you'll pay.

It flapped hard, lifting its minute body high. Crooking its tiny, white wings, the eagle stooped, cutting a dramatic dive across my window. There was a mason jar on my bedside table that held, among other things, a pen. The raptor took this as prey; knocked the pen out onto the bare wood.

With nothing but its paper beak, the eagle severed the vein of black ink. I watched as it bowed its head to drink. The ink poured down his throat and chest, coloring his white body from the inside out. As it drank, the eagle's dry body let the inky color bleed out, and soon it was heavy and dark with ink.

The little creature ruffled his feathers and sent drops of ink splattering up the wall. For a moment, we looked at each other. The sound of the hissing whirlpool was the only thing to be heard. Blood pounded in my ears, and these alien sounds were lost on me.

"What do you want?" My voice sounded desperate, fearing an answer. The eagle blinked, running a long wing feather through his beak. No answer. Feeling ill, I looked down at the swirling paper. My legs were starting to feel heavy, (like they were submerged in moving water), and I dreaded what might happen next...

Afraid to leave the safety of the wall, I hesitated a moment, but I was sure the open window was my only escape. Throwing myself into the current, I began wading across my room. Scuffing with my feet, I could barely feel my floor. The pull of the current was so strong, that I struggled to stay on my feet.

The surface was at my waist, and a cold wave slapped me in the chest, knocking me back. I staggered, sputtering.

The eagle was gladly watching my struggle. It gave another hollow laugh. It was the last thing I heard before losing my footing and plunging below.

Looking around, I was shocked to see that what had been my floor was now akin to a shipwreck. There was earth strewn about, and strips of paper danced like seaweed in the current. I exploded through the surface and swam for the window. I latched onto a bedpost and hung in the water for a minute, catching my breath.

All around me, growing up the walls, were vines made of paper, their leaves printed with fine, green text. It was a forest, ripping my walls apart. My window pane landed with a splash. I looked back at my calcified door, now covered in crystal-like growths. There was no way out.

I scrambled onto my drifting bed, the heavy quilt drifting just beneath the surface. The eagle landed heavily on my shoulder. Now the size of a crow, it leaned down and looked at me with a real, functioning eye. I swatted at it, and the inky feathers left a black smudge across my hand.

“Get away!” The bird flapped off, and I saw it off with a hateful stare. The vines breached the wall, letting the captured sea surge into the outside world.

I clung to my bed, staring out at the water. Because, finally, that’s what it was. The eagle soared high above me as I found myself adrift at sea.

Battle Buddies

Carol Walkley

Germany is supposed to have a temperate climate. But this year was different. In a twelve month span we had a flood in August of 2002, a blizzard in January of 2003 and then in August a record heat wave. I was fortunate; my husband was still home because of an injury and our kids were having a typical American summer with family. But no air conditioning and husbands at war tend to make women cranky. A simple task like packaging care kits for the deployed soldiers required as much planning and strategy as an air raid. Neighbors and best friends would bicker and fight over who was packing the toothpaste and complain about how the other woman couldn't even pack a lunch so why did she think she could pack a care kit. Gossip and rumor mongering were the newest pastimes, and I believe that the words thrown around by these women were far more deadly than any bullet could be. I went to lunch with other wives in the unit and shopping in Frankfurt with a couple close friends, but my housing area was made out of dry kindling and primed with gasoline. The coming blaze was inevitable.

I remember getting a phone call late that afternoon from Jeremy, my husband, who was the acting Rear Detachment Commander.

"I won't be home for dinner and if I were you," he said, "I wouldn't watch the news today."

I knew enough not to question him. We both remembered the emotional overload and aftermath of 9/11 and how watching MSNBC and CNN for hours on end rendered me an emotionally drained yet still depressed zombie. Always looking out for me, he would call whenever he felt something on the news had the ability to zap the life out of me. But he never said to stay off the internet, so I logged on. After all, reading the news is different from seeing moving images of destruction. The image that greeted me on the splash page of CNN is one I won't soon forget. There was *our* armored vehicle, there was *our* colonel, there was fire and chaos, and there was loss. *Our* loss, something this small Cav. unit in Büdingen Germany would have to help each other through, something that might just unite us and diffuse this scorching, tense summer. Shaken and restless, I logged off the computer and walked to the window. Staring out into the hot summer evening, I jumped when I recognized the melodic tinkle of the ice cream truck. A marvel in its own right, the ice cream truck was nothing like our Good Humor Man. No, this was a traveling ice cafe, or local German ice cream shop. You could get all of your favorite ice

cream concoctions delivered right to your neighborhood. It was a welcome sign of normalcy; I grabbed some Euros from the miniature flowerpot on the window sill and flew down the stairs. I approached the line and smiled a greeting at my neighbors. Now, I was expecting a lukewarm greeting at best, for in the group of moms were my downstairs neighbors Mrs. Busy and Mrs. Body. You know the type; everyone's business is their business, and if you aren't as miserable as they are, you must be a bad mother, wife, person, etc. I was perpetually in the crosshairs of Mrs. Busy and her rumor grenades and ever since Mrs. Body had moved in, the two of them were battle buddies in an effort to make the neighborhood safe from "that crazy Carol" or at least that's how I saw it.

"What do you know? Is everyone OK? What Company? Was it Delta? CNN said only one dead, but the other two were hurt? Who's hurt? Did they die at Landstuhl? Who's dead? Why haven't we been notified?"

The questions flew at me fast and furious as if my husband's job title meant that I, too, had all the answers they were looking for.

"All I know is what I read on CNN," I replied. "One killed and two injured have been transported to Landstuhl." I couldn't take the way they all looked at me. As if I knew more than I should. I ducked my head and took a spoonful of ice cream.

"Well, I've already made a phone call," declared Mrs. Body, using her considerable size advantage to intimidate me. "We don't want to EVER see YOUR husband leaving the house in his class A uniform. We'd all wonder if he was leaving to come right back and tell us our husband was dead. So **you'd** better make sure **he** takes them somewhere else."

Her words implied that life and death were in the hands of my husband and his well pressed uniform. I wanted to laugh at the absurdity of this image and cry at the heartbreaking events that led up to it. Considering the worried and unfriendly faces of my neighbors, I realized there was nothing I could do. Their minds were made up. They had found their common unifier, and they would hang it around my neck like a scarlet letter. I shook my head and shrugged my shoulders.

"I'll make sure to pass the message on." I replied, sidestepping Mrs. Body.

"She'll never suffer like the rest of us." A stage whisper from Mrs. Busy followed me down the street. "She'll never understand our pain" replied Mrs. Body as the ladies formed a tight knit circle of support.

My ice cream sat heavy in my stomach and I pitched the rest of it into a garbage can as I headed out of the housing area. Sometimes the only thing worse than being right, is being half right: this loss was a definite unifier and I walked alone in the blazing summer night

Ruin

Robert Clyde Anderson

When I was twelve I had the best bike. It was white with chrome details, ten speeds, hand brakes, and 34 inch wheels. It was a teenager's bike, not a kid's. It was my freedom for the next few years until I would learn to drive. I loved the feeling of the wind on my body, of being so close to the road, of nothing but the wheels and the frame and the propulsion forward, away, escaping. Every afternoon, the trial of school over and done for one more day, I could go, on the bike, down the drive, out onto the road that wound past the played out farms and ugly new ranch houses, turning at old Mrs. Crawford's into a dirt road beside the peeling white house with its tung-oil trees and its shabby barn where she still milked her own cow twice a day. Sometimes, she raised her scrawny arm in a half-hearted wave, enough for a child. Sometimes, she was bent over her cucumber vines and I slipped by unseen.

I rode down the road of gravel and red dirt, dusty or muddy as the weather determined, down until the pasture gave way to woods and the big pines rose, bare-trunked like columns in a temple of some ancient place. I rode over the little wooden bridge, across the branch not much bigger than a ditch, still, brown, overhung with buttonbush and elder. Just there the woods opened up. The sky was immense above acres cut over by the timber company and replanted with tiny wisps of pine. The ground was rough and wild, a prairie pocked with sink holes where the stumps still lay twisted and gray like driftwood stranded far from an ocean. Some days I might get off the bike there and wander a bit on the cutover, looking for who knows what, but often finding something: the carcass of a deer, a piece of quartz as smooth and iridescent as an opal ring, a bog full of pitcher plants.

Back on the bike, I pedaled hard now, young legs pumping toward my goal. Another half a mile or so and I turned to the left, off the main road, onto the logging track that was only two lines of dust cutting through the grass. A ways on, and the trees closed in again, the shadows longer now, more thrilling. Down into the deeper woods, cool and humid, alive with the shrieks of birds, I rode. Birds with wild voices called; not the tame, soothing songs of the larks and bluebirds that nested in the hayfield around the house, but desperate

cries of alarm and outrage at the strange intruder on the spinning machine. Pedaling, pedaling, there was a mile more of just the birds and the dim heavy trees and the singing of my bike's wheels. Then another turn, angling to the right, past the rotten ruined posts that had once been a gate, and I was there.

It was called the Old Hudson Place by everyone thereabouts. Young and old all knew of it though it was seldom visited, except by the occasional hunter in bird season or by the timber markers looking for prime lumber. Not once in all my years of going there did I see another human. The lane that led in was even less defined than the logging road, hardly more than a fire-break now. Huge mudholes, yards across, slowed my progress. I walked the bike. At the end of the lane, in the clearing where the buildings had been, a great tulip tree rose, the last and only survivor of what had been a thriving place, a family's pride, the work of a lifetime. Crows nested there, cawing a warning as I approached, circling overhead while I pushed the bike through the knee-high grass in the deserted lane.

The place had been a dairy, cleared out of the virgin woods sometime in the early years of the century, when the price of milk was strong, the demand was high, and the mills were running day and night, employing hundreds to cut and haul and saw the great yellow pines that seemed to cover endless miles in that hot flat corner of Louisiana. For a generation it was profitable, but then the depression came. The price of milk dropped, the forests played out, and the mills closed down and moved on. All the hard work, the sweat and muscle and pain that had built the place, all the sunrises and sunsets of milking, feeding, haying, all the building of fences and the planting of trees, all the millions of pitchfork loads of steaming, reeking dung, all the meals cooked and the babies bathed and the miles of laundry hung to dry in the scorching sun, all this and even more couldn't save the farm. And so in time, the dream collapsed, the Hudsons moved on as well.

I never knew whether the buildings burned or whether they were blown away by a hurricane years later. Most likely some enterprising scavenger tore them down to get the good pine timbers, the cypress clapboards that never rot. Nothing remained except the foundations. To the right of the lane, the first and largest had been the barn and milkhouse. I could find the gap in the chain wall that had been the big door, wide enough for a farm wagon, and enter onto what was now a spacious court, etched across in all directions by straight fringes of tan, seams in the concrete where grass and weeds had taken root to

grow only as long as the rain was generous, and then, when the summer's heat set in, to stall and falter and dry up. Here and there storms had washed pebbles, bits of eroded concrete, and tiny sherds of window glass into sandbars of debris. Grasshoppers as big as sparrows, lacquered black with vermilion legs, shot across my path as I walked over what had once been the cool dark cavern of the barn. Now the light was blinding, glancing off the foundation relentlessly, heat rising in wave after crinkling wave. Dropping the kickstand, I left the bike and passed through to the milk house, one step down, to where the ruins were more interesting. Great long troughs where the cows had been fed, dished of cast concrete by skilled hands, now held only a dribble of sediment, patches of bitterweed, and an eddy of rusty nails.

I hopped up onto the highest part of the foundation, a wall that ran parallel to the troughs and must have supported a line of windows. I balanced myself, arms out like a high-wire acrobat, and stepped carefully, one foot in front of the other, down the length of the wall to the end where the milkhouse had turned out into the barn lot and the foundation fell away eight feet below. There, in the open space of grass laid out before me, was an enormous blacksnake. It seemed all wrong, like a mislaid new toy, so glistening, so fresh in this place of dust and weeds.

I jumped down from the wall to the floor of the milkhouse to get a little closer. I could see only its body, big as my arm, parting the lush grass with its weight. All was still. I clapped my hands and the great head rose, curious, wide as a man's hand and twice as thick, eyes on me now, tongue searching, flicking the river of humid air for my scent. We held each other's eyes for an endless minute. I moved my body to the right; the snake mirrored me. I leaned forward a bit. The snake reared to its full height, five feet off the ground, challenging. We danced together, silently, responding to the other's moves, a slow and stately pavane.

And then, with aristocratic unconcern, or boredom, the snake turned away. It launched itself through the grass, head still high and haughty, whipping its great mass effortlessly, swiftly, silently. I followed. Across the old barn lot, through a scrap of rusted hogwire that marked the boundary of what had been the kitchen garden and on toward a pair of cedar trees flanking the path to the house, or rather where the house had been. Now only three steps and a stoop remained, a ziggurat of flaking brick barely held together by the dusty mortar.

The snake mounted the steps in two strokes of its great body, turned its head to check my position, and dove into a crevice in the pile. Still captivated, I approached. The creature's tail protruded from the crack, two feet or more, just a fraction of its length. The late-day sun beat down hard, but the sides of the crevice looked cool and damp and were cushioned with pea-green moss and silvery lichen. The tail lay motionless in the sunlight, and as I drew near I could see the scales, glassy as beadwork, reflecting the hard blue of the sky, pink iridescence, a sheen of jade. Inches from the snake's tail I knelt in the soft grass fringing the stoop. All around was silence and stillness. I reached out with both my hands, grasped the strong tail tenderly, and held the weight of it. A moment passed, perhaps a minute. And then, fearlessly, unhurriedly, the snake slipped between my fingers and drew itself, with calm superiority, into its cool, deep home.

The Question

Rick Spataro

When it is late in fall
and I am walking home,
Sometimes I breathe once or twice
and suddenly, so vividly, notice
how different cold air feels
inside me than it does outside
and I, for some reason,
imagine what it would be like
to squeeze a woman that liked,
just as well, to squeeze me.

and then I unbutton my jacket
and breathe again once or twice,
the same as before.
I lift my head and
pose a question.

But I do not wait.

I walk all the way home,
not knowing who was listening,
but only, that I am happiest because
no one will ever answer.

On Writing

Ben Greenman

"There's nothing to writing. All you do is sit down to a typewriter and open a vein." – Red Smith

Writing is not easy at all. My ninth grade English teacher, Mrs. Smith, whom I did not like very much, understood things better.

"Writing is hard!" she told us. "Writing is really difficult!"

At the time, she was telling us a story as she sat in front of the class on top a desk in the front row, with her feet on the chair. Of course, there were students sitting in the first row, but she would still pick an empty desk and sit right on top of it, almost as if it was center stage in an amphitheater.

That quote itself is the only part of the story she told that really stood out to me. I believe it was about a little boy who wanted to write something, but he couldn't come up with the words he wanted and finally yelled out in frustration to his mother, though I don't know for certain if that was the exact story because I wasn't really paying attention. I figured this was just another big waste of time like all the other ones we got in that particular class, where the teacher would rant about something that wasn't really so important for the majority of the period. She would describe the old golf course her husband loved to play at, talk about her infatuation with Tobias Wolff, and counsel us on life decisions. She once spent an entire class period denouncing suicide.

I suppose I already knew that writing was tough before that year. Maybe I knew that I enjoyed writing or felt that I was good enough at it, but I know for sure that I never thought writing was easy. Writing is difficult and takes time to do well. Following the grammatical and technical rules is hard enough, but then there are ideas to be invented and expressed within a work. I would consider myself extremely fortunate if I was to get to the point where writing is as simple as bleeding on paper.

After my ninth grade class assignments arrived, my older friends and their parents told me to watch out for Mrs. Smith. They shared past experiences, insisting that she was critical and opinionated, telling me how she was an awful teacher. One friend told me about how she painted her nails during oral presentations. They told me to

switch teachers as soon as possible- to get out while I still could and fit into another class with a different teacher. Any other would do.

On one hand, I did not listen to them and follow through with changing classes; however, I did not look forward to going to or participating in English class either. That teacher certainly lived up to the expectations I had for her. Every little thing she did was offensive: the high-pitched squeal of her voice, her perfectly molded hairdo- even the way she conducted class sitting on top of a desk in the front row. The classroom itself seemed blank and uninviting, white and empty walls free of posters or decorations, filled with students like myself who did not want to be in it. Worst of all, the only clock in the room was situated behind the desks. Checking it discreetly was impossible. My idea was to just get through each day- put up with this teacher and let that be the end of it. I couldn't stand to listen to that "English Teacher from the Black Lagoon" for any longer than was absolutely necessary. I hung out in the background, simply reading the books and completing the assignments as was necessary to maintain the proper grades.

That was easy enough, at least until the day of the English 9E final exam. I was working on my essay, among my fellow students inside the large gymnasium, so that I could finally leave that class behind and move onward to the tenth grade, where a new and mentally stable English teacher was waiting to meet me. The gym was full. Everyone was silently writing, working hard to finish on time. Suddenly, I noticed footsteps behind me and felt the presence of a figure leaning in over my shoulder.

She spoke quietly to me with that same high-pitched exaggerated tone she always used, "I just *loooove* how your writing has developed over the year! There has been *such* a great change in your work! It is just fantastic! Keep up the good work!"

I responded as politely as I could, shocked as I was that she would point me out and try to hold a conversation with me, out of anyone else in the room, here in the middle of the last, most important English test of that year. For over a minute, we held a miniature conversation in the center of a swarm of desks. I glanced left and right, hoping, maybe to make eye contact with someone- to get a chance to shrug my shoulders or roll my eyes, but no one looked at me. Slowly, I came to the realization that finally, at the very end of the year I was now forced to go face-to-face with this teacher, the teacher who, up until that moment, I had avoided so successfully.

At the time, I was certain that my work had not changed as a result of her efforts. I believed she was late to recognize that she really did like how I wrote for that class all along, that the first few grades she had given me were really more mistakes than anything else- forgivable mistakes for a teacher who has a reputation for paying more attention to her fingernails than her students but mistakes nonetheless. I could not have learned from her because she did not have anything to teach me.

It wasn't until the following school year, after another summer, that I simultaneously remembered and realized for the first time some of the lessons she taught that stuck with me. Things like how to vary sentence lengths, vary sentence beginnings, insert quotes seamlessly, and use semicolons: little things that I had memorized subconsciously, lessons hidden within all those seemingly pointless stories which were, in reality, tools to make writing easier.

With such a small amount of effort on my part, I had unknowingly gleaned a mountain of information and had actually improved my writing as a result. How much more could I have learned if I'd paid full attention? Would I go so far as to agree with Red Smith if I had fully listened to everything Mrs. Smith had to say? How much of that class did I miss? How many pages of This Boy's Life, Durable Goods, Great Expectations, Of Mice and Men, A Raisin in the Sun, and Anti-gone did I ignore? Was there actually a structure behind her incoherent and unorganized lessons?

I can't say for sure. Maybe I got everything I needed from that class, and maybe I ignored a valuable experience. The important thing is that I discovered the terrible sense of guilt associated with a missed opportunity. How much I really missed will remain a mystery; perhaps this was the most frightening lesson she could have ever taught me.

A Quick Tale of a Long Summer

Andrew Horning

It all began with a spontaneous desire to walk. More specifically, to walk the path through the dense woods which cloak the backside of our very own Greenwich Central High School. It may have been the gently swaying trees, or the occasional ray of sunlight penetrating the shadows of the forest that first caught my eye during a particularly dry lecture in US History. To tell the truth, I am not sure from where my desire to explore the uncharted territory sprang, but spring it did, and soon my friends and I were boiling over with a desire to take off into the woods unnoticed and without objective except to walk.

After school, my good friends Ethan and Jordan waited impatiently for me to finish cramming the last of my textbooks into my overburdened school bag. We had been itching all day to get outside and at two thirty, rather than meeting the rest of our friends at the Panda (our local Chinese authority on food), we set out through the double doors and across the grounds to see where the forest path would take us.

After two hours of smooth sailing, it took us straight into a swamp. Rather, our feet took us straight into a swamp. You see, we had left the main path an hour and a half before and decided to make a break for the wild. Crossing two gushing brooks on makeshift log bridges and stone fords, we passed through miles of open farmland and densely wooded areas of underbrush. After some time, we ended up separated from a country lane by only a large swampy area and thickets of wild thorns. Arrogantly determined and stubborn, we passed through this area not by any brilliant feats of navigation or ingenuity, but rather at the expense of our once semi-fashionable school clothes. Still, walking along the country lane back towards town that evening, we moved with a certain sense of pride and spoke in jubilant tones of our recent adventure and plans for future escapades.

In the aftermath of the hike, the summer passed like a whirlwind of unexpected events, twists and turns suddenly decorating a life

that once seemed like a freeway, always looking straight ahead, waiting for the right exit to get off at. Spontaneity became a greater part of my life, and midnight trips to the quarry coupled with philosophical discussions at three am in the middle of Academy Street ruled supreme that summer. Also unexpectedly, Ethan, Jordan, and I found ourselves making new acquaintances in the oddest places and seeing some old ones in a completely new light.

Although we shared this summer with many new faces and conversation ranged from serious debates on beliefs to conspiracy theories to unusual stories about feral midgets, by the end of the summer there were a few of us that just always seemed to return. Doubtless we scared away many with our unusual taste for imagination and adventure and general quirkiness, but in the end, like a condensed solid found at the bottom of some liquid chemical concoction, those of us who shared a kindred spirit, or perhaps several similar spirits, coalesced into a group of friends who regardless of what may lie ahead, will never forget that life is an adventure if you want it to be.

A Dear Old Friend

Lauri Anderson

Okay it's time; out with the old and in with the new. As much as don't like doing it, I have to face the fact that we just aren't a good match anymore. When we first met, it really took awhile for me to feel comfortable with you, but as time wore on, and I wore you, we worked so well together. You were always there for me when I needed you. At the end of a hard week, I knew I had you to look forward to and found so much comfort when I slipped you on, one tired leg at a time. As I drew you up over my thighs I liked the initial snugness against my skin, knowing full well that within an hour you would loosen your grip and our moves would synchronize together perfectly.

Now as I head to the mall for a new pair of jeans, I have decided we would have at least this one last rendezvous. So I take a good look as I slip the button through the perfectly sized buttonhole, which has conformed flawlessly over time and use. The dark hue of midnight blue, and dense weave of cotton fibers that once characterized you, has morphed as you have been thrown into the jaws of the front load washer and dryer over the past couple of years. The material on your thighs are threadbare, to say the least, and the skin on my knees has made its way to full exposure to the elements now. What once was a nicely edged hem, securing my ankles, is now a line of frayed strings of different lengths and thicknesses. How often am I reduced to seeing a stray which must be yanked, to keep some sort of a neat appearance.

As I enter my favorite department store, I know I am headed for a fight with the clothing racks, the mirrors, the dressing room and my self esteem. To begin with there are all those choices; stretch denim, stonewashed, faded or indigo. There are low rise, classic rise, mid-rise, and hipsters; flared, distressed, boot cut and skinny. We can pick wide leg, super leg, weekend or curvy.

So as I narrow my search, with great hope in mind, I head to the dreaded dressing room with a pile so high I have trouble maneuvering my way toward the back of the store. The clerk is there to greet me with a warm, assuring smile and begins to count my load, at which time I am informed that I am over the limit and she will put a few pairs aside. Her demeanor gives me the confidence I need to embark on this insurmountable task. As the door closes behind me and I get a glimpse of myself in the mirror under those blasted florescent lights, I am filled with dread. Here we go!

I slip off my shoes, unclasp your button and slide you down. I sigh as you fall to the floor in a heap and quickly lay you across the bench. On with the first pair which look promising, but as I tug and tug, I remember that the last ten pounds are why we are here in the first place. At least you have grown with me. Discouraged already, I make my way through the pile and peak my head out the door summoning the clerk for a trade.

After a bit, I make my choice, straighten myself out and climb back into my clothing. As I catch another look at myself, I see the weariness of the battle, roll my eyes with my new pair in hand and saunter to the check out. As I pay the clerk, uncertainty fills my being. I know that this choice is a crap shoot. How many pairs of jeans line my closet shelf, collecting dust, because they just don't measure up to my expectations like you do, my dear old friend.

From the Heart

Lindsay Clark

There have been several events in my life that are very meaningful, but there is one in particular that led me to a pivotal realization about myself. This incident was especially significant to me because it was the first time I realized the degree to which I could rise above adversity. Recognizing my resilience at the age of sixteen forever changed my perspective on life. It began with a head cold. Along with the common cold symptoms, my heart rate was very rapid and sporadic; I felt dizzy, and when I closed my eyes, I could see tiny white dots whirling around like algae under a microscope. I did not mention it to my mother; perhaps I thought it was just another cold symptom, or maybe I was just plain scared. After several ineffective doses of Robitussin and Tylenol, my mother decided to take me to the Emergency Room.

A nurse took my vitals upon my arrival and was alarmed when she took my pulse and couldn't count my heart beat. I was admitted to the hospital instantly. As puzzled nurses swarmed around me, fear quickly took over my curiosity as I glanced at my mother in hopes of finding comfort. She appeared to be in shock, which is understandable given the circumstances: one second she was bringing me to the hospital for a common head cold; the next, nurses were admitting me into the hospital for heart problems. The monitor recorded my heart rate at an unbelievable two hundred and twenty beats per minute; I more than doubled the average heart rate of sixty to one hundred beats per minute.

The cardiologist on call, Dr. Finnerty, entered the room and it was undoubtedly clear we had interrupted his golf game. Proper golf attire covered his sunburned skin, proof of an afternoon in the sun. After several x-rays and echocardiograms, Dr. Finnerty concluded I had supraventricular tachycardia triggered by an extra fiber in my heart. Unable to control my heart rate with medication, I spent months in and out of the emergency room; meanwhile, my friends were playing sports and participating in extracurricular activities, as usual. Dr. Finnerty explained a procedure called a heart catheterization that could cure my

tachycardia: three catheters with lasers on the ends would join together at my heart to burn the extra fiber. He cautioned that the fiber was one millimeter away from my aorta; one false move and I would need a pacemaker for life. My parents and I decided we had no choice but to proceed with the heart catheterization, despite the risks,

Three weeks after the procedure, I was back in the hospital with another episode; the procedure did not work. My frustration and disappointment had to be set aside; what do we do now? Dr. Finnerty suggested Children's Hospital in Boston, one of the best children's hospitals in the country. We set up the appointment for August 8, my sixteenth birthday.

After I was put under the anesthesia and I underwent the procedure, I woke up to the nurse nudging my shoulder. "Wake up, Lindsay. Everything's okay, but we couldn't go through with the procedure. Our machines failed after we put you under. I'm so sorry." My only response: "So let's reschedule it." I was devastated, but I knew I had to move forward and stay positive. I felt my parents looking at me with pride; "You're being very mature and strong through all of this," they told me. I have no choice, I thought with tears in my eyes. In between the lousy meals and the local news for the next day and a half, we devised different ways to entertain ourselves. I took the monitor stickers with buttons off my chest and stuck them to my hospital slippers and tap danced for my mom. One of my other favorite tricks was to raise and lower the bed while making funny faces and striking different poses. The most fun we had was when I found out holding my breath for a minute would make the monitor call for help. After the nurse entered, I'd exhale, bringing my heart rate back to normal. We silently laughed as we shrugged our shoulders when the nurse would look at us for answers. After she left, we burst into laughter and tears. I returned to Boston two weeks later in an ambulance for the last heart catheterization, which proved to be successful. Every now and then, my heart will skip a beat, startling me at first; but then I realize it's just a reminder and my heart's way of saying, "Just kidding!" I will remember that event for the rest of my life - the swarming nurses, my cardiologist's sunburned nose, the clicking sound of my tap dancing, and the painful IV needle pricks in search of new space; but most of all I will remember the insight I gained into myself at the age of sixteen: I am resilient.

Sunday Journal Thoughts

Steve Adelman

While the world happens outside

rain

war

stripshow

Nostalgia LSD sounds coming from

the radio

I write my poems in my own mind first-

then yours second

O soulful boys and girls of the city

your worldly thoughts &

ripped blue jeans make me write

Come all together now

we're lovers of the great work

Unexpected secret blackmail death

count to ten & hold your last breath

While I pray to Allah or Kingdom come

hoping to see god

under the red sun

But if my prayers fall

& my soul don't fly

I'll dig myself a grave

crawl in & die

A Personal Experience

Nicole Monsees

It was a brisk morning in mid September. The sun had not yet reached the highest point in the sky and there was a slight breeze. The grass was still wet with morning dew. Everyone was talking with excitement about the upcoming event. President Obama was scheduled to address the nation at the Hudson Valley Community College. Invitations were of limited quantity and high demand. Through perseverance and much consulting with White House staff, I gained the required press credentials to attend President Obama's speech.

When I first entered the building, it was not what I expected. The building had been remodeled to accommodate the President, Dr. Biden, key area politicians, reporters and camera crews. As I looked around at the sea of people, my eyes were wide in disbelief that I was here. Camera crews were setting up and reporters were moving around, searching for prime reporting locations. There was a sense of unpredictability or rather controlled chaos.

My head was spinning as I dodged TV cameras and reporters. This may have annoyed some people, but I found it exciting. With this excitement, came the realization that I was a journalist in action. As things quieted down, reporters worked interviews with local politicians and other "important people," while still others mingled amongst themselves. I used this quieting down period to speak with some of the reporters, an opportunity to interview the professionals. Being a journalism major, their words were enlightening and encouraging. I soon found myself reflecting on my decision to pursue a degree in journalism.

As I pushed my way through the crowd, heading back to my seat, the lights in the spacious room flickered, signaling the President would soon begin his speech. Prepared with a note pad, pen and recorder, I sat in anticipation. Emerging from behind the curtain, the President greeted people as he made his way to the podium. After the

crowd settled, he began to speak. My recorder was running, capturing every word for detailed scrutiny later that evening. Known for his elocution, I immersed myself in his speech, writing down what I believed were the most important points.

The speech lasted forty minutes and ended with a standing ovation. I switched directions in pursuit of collecting quotes from other participants. After interviewing an array of students and the college president, I headed back to the newspaper office.

While working at my computer, afternoon turned to dusk and then quickly into night. This article had to be flawless. Looming over me was the pressure of the paper's deadline. The paper was scheduled to go to press the next morning. I diligently worked the hours needed to create a front page news story. The chaos, pressure, and challenge to be creative culminated into an experience to remember. An experience during which I realized that journalism was the career I wanted to pursue.

Movie Magic

John Lyden

The screen was flashing before my eyes as bright as the sun on an August afternoon. The audio had a charming, scratchy, slightly static sound to it, similar to an old record player. I looked around the theater and noticed every single soul was staring at the screen, lost in the power of film. As I recall this scene for you, I realize that I have had so many wonderful and joyous childhood memories. But the one memory that is the most clear to me is my first trip to the movie theater.

I remember excitement running through my body like blood running through my veins. My mom held my hand tightly as we walked to the movie theater. I woke up that day wondering what going to the movie theater would be like. All of my friends had told me seeing a movie on the big screen was a magical experience. I wondered, "How could magic happen in a movie theater? All there is in a movie theater is a screen and people. There is no magician or anything." Soon enough, I would understand the magic my friends were talking about.

As the bitter February wind hit my face, I tried to keep myself warm by thinking of how comfy I would be in the movie theater. I kept thinking over and over about the same things: soda, popcorn, candy, and that magic thing my friends had talked about.

The fresh smell of popcorn entered my nose as soon as my mom and I walked into the lobby of the theater to buy our tickets. I felt my cold body gradually warming up as the heat in the lobby hit me. I felt as if I was a frozen meal thawing out.

My mom and I walked over to a large, rectangular desk near the concession stand to buy our tickets. An elderly man sat behind the desk. As we walked over to the desk, the man smiled. His voice sounded old and fragile, but, at the same time, kind and optimistic. As my mom bought the tickets, the man looked at me and asked, "Are you excited to see the movie?" I nodded my head and smiled. The man laughed and handed my mom the tickets. I suddenly heard the words I had been waiting to hear all day: "Enjoy the show."

As my mom and I began our fast paced walk to the theater, I noticed a bunch of old movie posters on the wall. They stood in chronological order, starting from the oldest films going up to the most

recent films. I looked at the posters and could not recognize any of the movies. I felt slightly intimidated since I could not identify one of the films. I figured I would have to do a lot of movie watching to catch up with the number of films that have been done. I thought to myself, "Why can't they teach movies in school?"

Suddenly, I noticed my mom opening the door to the theater. I felt a chill of excitement run through my body as I walked into the darkened theater. As we looked for two open seats, I noticed that there were many other kids my age in the theater. I looked into their eyes and could tell they were in complete awe of the movie theater. Most of the kids I saw just sat, ate popcorn mindlessly, and stared at the movie screen.

My mom pointed to two empty seats a few rows back from the screen. We walked over to the aisle, sank into our seats with ease, and took a deep breath. It felt good to sit down and relax after the walk to the movie theater.

Excitement began to run through my body uncontrollably as soon as the lights started to dim and the screen lit up. My legs kept swinging and I could not keep still. I kept wondering, "How could there be magic in a movie theater? It's not like the film is real!" Suddenly, the previews came onto the screen with booming sound and stunning graphics. The film looked pure and, at the same time, had an old fashioned feel to it.

As I sank into my seat, I began to feel the power of film sinking into my body. The audio sung to my ears as the graphics danced before my eyes. I became so engrossed in the story that I would feel an occasional bit of drool roll down my chin. The fact was that the cinema was creating another theater addict. Popcorn, candy, and soda sat around me, but I was not even tempted to reach for any of it. I feared that I would miss an important part of the film. I was going to make sure I gave the film my undivided attention.

As the screen flashed before me, I felt safe and warm, just as I had hoped to feel when I was freezing outside. I finally felt like I was beginning to understand the magic of the movies.

Sprint

Brandon Adams

“Attention!” I perked up as soon as the order rushed through my head. “Today you fight for your country!” The engine from the landing craft made it near damn impossible to hear. The only two words I actually heard were “fight” and “country”; but that’s all I needed to hear.

As I looked up I could see the beach in the distance about 100 yards away. I took one last glance at the ocean, hung my head and closed my eyes. I thought about my past. About my training and how I missed my home. If being able to go home to see my family and see Jenny one more time meant fighting for my freedom...then so be it. I knew all of the men around me felt the same way.

We were nearing the beach now...I could sense it. Explosions and the sound of gunfire rang throughout the sky. I opened my eyes as soon as the boat hit land. As my eyes scanned around me I was pushed from the boat. Immediately I headed for cover. Bullets rained down like a fierce hail storm. The explosions from the grenades sounded like huge bursts of rapid thunder.

I ran as fast as I could to the nearest tank trap. Bodies littered the ground. The once golden sands had adopted a scarlet red tint. Blood soaked the ground where kids used to come and play. I heard the shrill screams of wounded soldiers fill the air. It was only about fifteen seconds before I spotted the nearest piece of metal to hurl myself under.

I remember hitting the ground and a split second later I heard the ringing of bullets littering the tank trap. The ringing in my ears didn’t stop for a decent amount of time. As I surveyed the battlefield, I could see machine guns tearing apart the boarding infantry. Soldiers were being shredded in half as if they were pieces of paper. I turned to the cliff ledge where I could see the bunkers occupied with MG42’s.

Quickly and without hesitation I leaped from cover and dashed across the blood stained sands to the beginning of the ledge. I looked up to find a soldier ushering me up a rope dangling from the side of a cliff. In that split second I watched as the rope swung gently in the breeze. For a moment everything went silent; as if the rope was ushering me to my own demise. I hesitated at first, but overcame the feeling that just took me over almost as if I ignored death itself.

Grabbing hold of the rope tightly I started my way up. I looked up to see a bullet hit the soldier in front of me. At the same time his body went limp and he fell from the rope, hitting the sharp and rugged rocks on the way down. I almost had to dodge his lifeless body as it flew past me.

As I looked down and watched the body ravine down the cliff side to the bloody beach below, I heard someone behind me screaming to keep moving. I grabbed the rope; harder than before and summoned all my willpower as I climbed to the top of the ridge. Surprisingly, I was not alone. I expected to get torn up by Germans waiting there on the top of the cliff, but instead I saw a group of soldiers huddling around a map. The bullets that were flying through the air seemed to calm down. Just as if a swift storm had ceased.

I ran over to the group of soldiers to get caught up with the next step in the battle plan. For some reason, I gained a boost in confidence as I met with them. It was still incredibly hard to hear even though most of the enemy bunkers had been cleared. I looked on as one of the men pointed in the direction of a small village. "We do this quickly and correctly! Got It!?" one of the soldiers bellowed. "You!" as soon as I heard it I knew I was the one he was talking to. "You're with us now! Let's Go! Move out!"

Ode to a Woman

Rick Spataro

Like blood, I ran
down a mountain of skin
stopping only to catch my breath
and admire the fertile woman
who saved me
like tightly packed ground
saved crooked trees

and I buried myself,
to grow and grow.
to keep growing
until she and I both knew
that the frost of the mountain
and the ice,
oh! the ice,
did nothing but make
the Earth seem warmer.

Downtown Albany: Best of Both Worlds

Shaniqua M. Jackson

In Albany, New York, the city may look the same. May even smell the same. However, it's not. Albany has two different worlds that the ignorant refuse to see or acknowledge. One green world holds large office buildings of hopes and wide elevators of dreams. The other gray world is packed with forced "home-stay-at" mothers and clean street thugs begging for new opportunities and lazy for silver change. The mysterious tour of outside day workers, and evening residential life begins.

Downtown is filled with uptight bankers and busy black and white suit professionals who worship their black brief cases and make love to their cell phones. Cell phones that whisper sweet fantasies of a bonus, or a joyful meeting, or anticipation of meeting a lover. State workers cherish their half smoked cigarettes. Like a deadbeat father that refuses to work, they toss it away and mutter quiet profanities before entering their small office cubicle. The color of orange and brown lights up the smells of spicy and tangy sauce from the Chinese restaurant, the pink sprinkled sweet smell of Dunkin Donuts, and the fresh brown grains of Subways fill the professionals' noses. With their crisp green dollars thrown away, or shining American Express cards, they savor the taste of afternoon lunch. As a junkie needing their "last" fix, they hurriedly take their coffees from an underpaid and overly annoyed food server and rush out. Cars uncomfortably introduce themselves honking a cheerful song passing lanes and stealing parking spots. Some lucky cars receive small yellow awards on their windshield congratulating them on illegal parking.

A few "blacks" later, dark noises of loud hip hop are constantly disappointedly thinking of how the stereo system is worth more than the car vibrating the cracked sidewalks and potholed streets. Huge silver rims are shining as bright as a star on a dark night. The rims flaunt through layers and layers of traffic temporarily blinding mothers pushing baby carriages to the Moms and Pops store. These mothers wearing gray and blue striped sweat pants with pink and black silky scarf's cover their ragged hair from by passers rushing into the store. The tiny store with tight mini aisles smelled of sour milk and cottage cheese. Buying cans of Enfamil, and maybe even a turkey and cheese sub packed with oil, old green lettuce, slimy red tomatoes, and clumpy mayonnaise, she flashes her fashionable "credit card" used to

buy any food of her desire. Meanwhile, street thugs wear blue faded baggy jeans and heavy white t-shirts with an icon such as Sean John or Phat Farm. Sometimes these kind gentlemen carry large silver medallions around their brown necks. They reside day and night in front of these corner stores until their friendly blue uniformed neighbors encourage them off where they return to yet another moms and pops store.

Up the block from one of the moms and pops stores were breathtaking red brick historical houses. Down the four gray concrete steps is a small storage space with a dark green trash can and blue recycle bin beside it. Down the tiny hallway was the living room with a medium sized sparkling gold and red designed rug as royal as a king's carpet in a castle. A 52 inch black widescreen television set stole the spotlight with silver lining surrounding the sides with a silver DVD player. The walls are as white as a black baby with colors spread in a variety of colors such as black, green yellow, and blue like a disoriented rainbow. Baby artists practiced their penmanship through displayed pen marks and dark small fingerprints. Three steps from the living room were black and white tiles for the flooring in the kitchen. Depressed from the destroyed color that once was as white as now, the white tiles blend in with the black tiles that had glimpses of grape kool-aid stains and black gum stains. The master bedroom is as neglected as a kitten stranded in the icy cold winter. The black dresser with gold handles was misaligned from the constant abuse of pushing and pulling violently on the handles in finding the right outerwear. The wide wooden entertainment center was crafted in such a way as a blind man making a doghouse. Painful to the eyes, the touch or gentle pushing of this would give out and delightfully collapse. The gifted artists retire nightly and their pink and white rooms that smelled of strawberries with a white mattress that doesn't exactly fit the bed with an identical pink cover. In the corner is a blue bin filled with half dressed dolls, ripped coloring books, purple and pink jump ropes, and other desires little poor girls dream and red roses. The small white toddler bed sits lowly on pink princess sheets and covers with white protective handles on the side. The bed adjacent to this is a wide blue racecar bed with four black wheels on all sides.

The Marked Woman

Laurie Kime

I find that I have often been a judgmental person. I have found that in the past I judge a human being by the cover that they wear. As unfair as this may sound, it has been a personal truth of mine.

Last summer my personal life was in a shambles. I was struggling through divorce number three, attempting to settle into a new, smaller home after ten years, adjusting to a new vehicle after I had just totaled my reliable family van, and trying to convince my teenage son that starting over in a new school in the fall would be exciting knowing full well his fear and trepidation.

I was feeling as if my spring of eternal hope were more akin to a trickle of doubtful maybe.

I had fifty dollars to my name at the end of a long day of errands. It was a hot, humid, sticky July afternoon. I was really trying not to feel down and out. I decided to provide my trooper of a son to a special surprise and opted to purchase him a fast food treat. Very rare in our home of health food organics. Nevertheless, I looked the other way this afternoon as I turned into the Wendy's drive thru. I placed our order. As I turned my car away from the drive thru window, I pulled into a parking space to check our order, when I realized I was just a few feet from a young woman. She was standing on a grassy patch in front of Wendy's. She was in her twenties, and although she did not know it, she was about to change my entire life. She mesmerized me.

The young woman stood about five feet eight inches tall, average build dressed in khaki colored, cargo shorts, and dark brown combat boots covered her feet along with once white socks which now were covered in a layer of grime that followed all the way to her knees. She wore a non-descript men's crew neck t-shirt, the color I do not recall. Her medium length, dark caramel colored hair was pulled back in a loose ponytail, and short bangs whispered kisses upon her forehead. Her bright face was striking and it was completely covered in a thick, heavy, black, tribal tattoo. The marking itself followed down her long slender neck, and each arm. Every inch of her upper torso appeared to be marked in the tribal tattoo. Her hands embraced a sign stating, "will work for food." The ornate artwork appeared all the way down to her fingertips.

While the busy highway never lacked for cars, aside from stares, not a single car stopped to help the young woman.

As I turned my car away from the parking space near the woman, I made a beeline for the drive thru, again. I ordered the best quality items and drink. Paid. Pulled my vehicle into an empty space near the young woman, and once again honked my horn hoping she would notice me.

Several beeps of the horn later, she came to my car. I handed her the food that I had purchased for her, and my last twenty dollar bill. I wished her well. She smiled a brilliantly beautiful smile at me and walked away into the now setting sun.

I have never felt better about being broke in my life as I did that day, nor have I ever returned to my once nasty little habit of judging others based solely on outside appearances. I will always remember the quiet, marked woman with the brilliant smile.

Taking the Risk

Jona Favreau

Imagine hearing the sound of fists pounding on your front door. And then as you slowly make your way to the door, apprehensive of who is pounding so impolitely, you here this person. Screaming for your help. You can hear the desperation in her voice; she is begging for you to help her. But you don't know who she is. Or what is making her fear the outside world. Would you help this woman if she came pounding on your door?

Martin Gansberg, the author of "Thirty Eight Who Saw Murder Didn't Call the Police," tells the story of how thirty-eight people witnessed a crime occur but did not take action. It states the reasons why a few members of the community did not react, such as "I didn't want to get involved" and because one witness "thought it was a lovers' quarrel" (Gansberg 122). He never states the exact reasoning as to why no one reacted, just personal excuses. It is up to the audience to assume that no one reacted because they assumed someone else had called the emergency into the police.

I can remember it was the middle of July, very warm and light out until at least nine-thirty in the evening. It was a typical Thursday for me at sixteen- I had just finished my morning shift at a local veterinary clinic and had three hours for lunch until I had to be back to work to finish the day. Because I only lived about a mile and a half down the street, I rode my bike to and from work if it wasn't supposed to rain. It hadn't rained that Thursday; in fact it was probably about eighty-five degrees. I was looking forward to being home to eat and relax by the pool for a few hours. On my bike I climbed with my cd player attached to my hip; the ride was almost all up hill and the music made the trip less painful.

I was less than a half-mile down the major roadway home when I realized that there was a car slowing down beside me, but on the opposite side of the street. I glanced back and didn't recognize the vehicle, so I continued on. That feeling as though I was being following kicked in, so I looked back once again to see the car stopped with a man hanging out of his rolled down window. He had been calling for me but because I had my music, I couldn't hear him. I took my headphones off to hear him ask me if I wanted a ride home. I didn't want to tell him that I was fairly close

so I simply declined and said thank-you. I went to get back on my bike to start peddling again when I noticed he was getting out of his car to cross the street in my direction. No. He was running in my direction.

I tried to pedal but the fear inside of me won, but only for that moment. I immediately dropped my bike and ran. I ran as fast as I could up into the woods. I knew from riding that route each day that there was a driveway approaching and that it led up into that wooded area. There had to be a house up there. I was praying that there was a house up there. I could hear him shouting for me to stop and I think I remember him saying he needed directions. But the fear had turned into a strong intuition to run, and to do it as fast as I could. I had never been a runner but something made me continue until I saw that house.

I don't know if it was the sight of that house that made the man fear the outcome of what was going to happen to us, but at some point he turned to run back to his car. He had chased me a good three-quarters of a mile into the woods. I didn't hear him stop, so I continued to run up to the house. The minute my fists hit the front door tears began to pour down my face. I didn't think that I could speak until I heard words shouting for help. I don't remember what I had said, only that they got louder and louder the more I realized it was me shouting, and not the man following me. The next thing I remember was sitting in the living room of this house in the woods with the woman who decided to open her front door.

The police came and I formally filed a report against this man who had stopped to offer me a ride. The officer later gave me a book of men to look at to see if I would be able to identify him when I had to return to the station with my parents. I immediately saw the man who had chased me. He was tall with brown hair. He had been wearing a pair of jeans that reminded me of my father; maybe something from the tractor supply store and not American Eagle. Except his were too large for him. And a blue t-shirt. They asked me to look again through the book but I knew it was him. After two days, the man was arrested for attempted kidnapping. That was when we found out that he had been charged for rape on two other occasions within the past five years. He was a local of my community living only twenty minutes from my work and home.

Unlike the thirty-eight witnesses described in the short story written by Martin Gansberg, the woman in the house reacted and opened her front door to me. Although she didn't know what she

would encounter when did respond, she still took the risk. I never asked her why she had opened the door to me, nor do I feel I need an answer. Why shouldn't a human being help out another human being when in need of help?

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"Untitled," Lindsay Clark



"Old Tow Truck," Lindsay Clark



"Untitled," Nathan Rohrer

The Detailed Life

Nathan Rohrer

Who could imagine that a deep, aquamarine coloring that can only be described as pure, unadulterated magnificence could be caught within the circumference of one water droplet, nestled in the crease of a leaf? Turn back the clock a few years and I certainly wouldn't be that person. However, thanks to the fact that two years ago I took advantage of the opportunity to learn a beginner's knowledge of the basic functions of a camera, as well as the rudimentary skills necessary to capture a moment in time on film, I am now the eye behind the lens. I was fascinated by the way in which a camera could be used to capture so many varied aspects of life in the world around me, so I started proactively searching out opportunities to learn more and expand my base of experience. Starting with a category I knew to be full of delicate features and vivid hues, I explored the area of still life nature photography and focused especially on flowers of all shapes and sizes. I loved stopping to gaze at the beauty of a splendid gem of nature, and then taking the time to capture the breathtaking phenomenon inside the circuit boards and memory chips of a digital camera. From vibrant, red roses and glowing, yellow tulips to seemingly frail, eggshell white baby's breath and delicate lily of the valley I relished in this completely new and exciting world that I never knew existed. I felt like I was six years old again, tumbling about the woods in a backyard I had never been in before, smelling, touching, and examining every new object my glittering eyes could set their sights on. I spent several summer months delighting in every successfully captured vivid spot of color. Some of my favorite photos were those that captured each individual flower petal perfectly framing a starkly contrasted center, while others displayed vast fields full of flowers stretching away to the horizon line.

Over time I began to become increasingly aware that it wasn't just a matter of enjoying taking pictures, or being an avid flower watcher of sorts, but rather I realized my true passion was in the unique. I realized that when my heart gives a quick extra beat at the moment that someone who has even been with me when I spot a small flower and worked the magic of the camera to capture it's delicate intricacies, is blown away by the vivacious details that had escaped their roaming eyes. Being able to see and catch that view of life, or an intricacy that no one else has seen and then watch their joy and excitement when I can

show them something they never imagined existed is what makes me love learning and grasping for more ideas and knowledge to pursue as many different areas of photography, no, of life as I can.

This lesson of not taking anything in life for granted, especially the small yet important details, comes from the rather unlikely source of a simple hobby. However, it is a lesson that I am so incredibly grateful to have learned as I now realize how it has made such an impact of all areas of my life. In just this last year in which I was a senior in high school, myself, my family, and even my friends have all noticed that there have been many differences in my personality and outlook on life in general. I have met more new people and made more new friends in this last year than I have for most of my life. I have traveled by myself to places I've never been before, when I had never even been more than an hour away from my parents before. I have gone to a student conference in Virginia, joined a youth service organization, raised money to help eradicate polio, and been a part of more different activities than ever before, all because I took the time to pay attention and watch out for those often subtle golden opportunities that can be missed oh so easily.

So many times these details and opportunities of the truly amazing world around us simply go unnoticed and trodden underfoot with barely a glance in their direction. Life often seems so completely streamlined with every next activity happening before you've caught your breath, but my hope and goal is that my simple act of seeing the often neglected areas of life might just make someone else pause and take a second look as they rush through time.

Deploying the One I Love

Amanda Barnett

I never knew how much one year could completely change my life until I became the spouse of a soldier stationed in a combat zone. I knew my husband would have experiences that even his extensive military training could not prepare him for, but I never considered how his deployment would influence my own life. The preparation and anticipation of sending the person I loved most away to a foreign and dangerous war zone outweighed any consideration of my own experiences safe at home.

Just a few months after being stationed at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky, news of the division's inevitable deployment was already looming over our heads. The reality didn't set in until the day Nick came home with printed orders that his unit would be deploying to Balad Air Force Base in Iraq, sometime in the very near future. Deployment orders never have exact dates on them. From that day forward, we spent our time packing Nick's military belongings and purchasing any of the items he might need immediately upon his arrival in the desert. The weeks of anticipating the phone call that would announce the unit's departure took their toll on our emotions, knowing that each day could be our last constantly weighed on our morale. With only twelve hours notice, Nick was told that it was time to go.

Trying to describe how difficult it was to say goodbye to the one I love, knowing that I might not ever see him again, is a hopeless pursuit. I tried my hardest not to cry, I really didn't want Nick to worry about me, but it was impossible to hold back the tears. After our sorrowful and emotional goodbyes, I had to watch my husband, dressed in his uniform and flak jacket, walk away for at least a year, maybe forever. I knew that I would miss Nick terribly but I had not anticipated such a powerful feeling of loss. I tried to stay positive, constantly reassuring myself that everything would be just fine, that Nick would return home safely.

After coping with the initial shock of his absence, I finally felt brave enough to put away the items Nick left behind and wash his dirty

clothes and the pillow case that his scent had slowly worn off of. I have found it hard to explain why it was so difficult for me to part with those items. They seem trivial but it felt like moving them made Nick's absence permanent, that if he didn't have a towel hanging in the bathroom then he wouldn't return. While Nick was away, he faced many dangerous adversaries, but back at home, idle time was my greatest foe. I started a new job at a local day spa and worked as often as possible. I worked with forty-two women, half of which also had significant others deployed to Iraq. Working not only offered a retreat from loneliness but a support network of women who also worried about their own soldiers away at war. Our managers were more than understanding, letting us keep our phones with us so that we never had to miss a call from our husband. Missing any call from your soldier was excruciatingly unbearable because they were so infrequent. I never knew when I would hear from Nick again, which left me time to fear the worst. I was always so relieved to hear his voice and know that he was safe. Nick was assigned to a special unit and the phones he called me from were monitored. Every time he called, he had to state a disclaimer notifying me that our conversation was being recorded; this also meant that he was not able to discuss anything about where he was or what he was doing. The unknown made me worry, but I'm absolutely sure I would have agonized over Nick's safety even more had I known what he was really going through. We never lied to each other, but we both spared telling one another anything that could possibly be distressing.

A crime wave had made its way through our neighborhood and there was a string of armed robberies and break-ins. I tried to keep Nick informed, but I never let on about how bad things were or how scared I was. I needed him to stay focused on his mission and his safety, not my troubles back at home. Sometimes the news of tragedy was unavoidable. Nick was a flight engineer on Blackhawk helicopters and every time the media reported the loss of an aircraft, I held my breath until I heard his voice again, reassuring me that he was still alive and well. We mourned the loss of those who had not survived, especially anyone we knew, no matter how close they were to us. A co-worker

who had become a friend lost her husband, a Blackhawk helicopter pilot, in a tragic crash. The memorial service was agonizingly painful to attend, especially with the couple's six-year-old son explaining to everyone how his daddy had died a hero. It was incredibly important to show support and be available for anything their family could possibly need even though being there made me miss Nick more.

On September 22, 2006, my Nicholas finally arrived home completely unharmed and we celebrated surviving the most difficult year of both of our lives. Even though my emotions and threshold for inner strength were tested and stretched to their breaking point, I can appreciate what I gained through my experience. Although reflecting back still tears at my heart, the year that Nick was away taught me a lot about myself. I learned that I have the determination, strength, and perseverance to accomplish and overcome any future challenges that life will inevitably lay before me. If I could survive sending the one I love to a combat zone for an entire year, everything else seems so much less arduous to endure.

ID HID

Lisa Ann Ford

Always faithful companion, creative flame
To Elektra and Oedipus, one and the same,
ID, now hid

Hermaphroditic shape shifter
In the light of day spoke,
Power now broke?

He to run naked, master the forest
Survey sheltering caves
Hunt, ride waves

She to attract bears, sweet scent of honey
Elicit bees with their stingers,
Bestow yeas and nays

To cast a spell, of not to tell
Now what of both hunter and prey?
Recalculate aim and field of play\
Lick your wounds, Come back soon...and stay

The Case for Cats

Robert Clyde Anderson

Okay, I know what you're thinking already. A cat lover. Equals kook, nut-job, at the very least, eccentric. Clothes covered in cat hair, pictures of self with cat on Facebook, probably has at least five, right? But let me contradict you: I don't even have a cat anymore, though I share a house with a cat owner. I don't have any pictures of myself with a cat online, and my clothes are relatively hair-free. I just feel the need to say a few words in favor of cats in the face of the tsunami of dog ownership we seem to be experiencing in this country.

Is this just my imagination, that dogs are everywhere now? I don't think so. On a recent trip to Cape Cod, my partner and I could scarcely walk down the street in Provincetown without being tripped Up by a leash. There were dogs on the sidewalks, dogs in the restaurants, dogs in the shops, dogs on the beach, dogs in boats. I've been there many times before, and let me assure you, this epidemic has reached apocalyptic proportions. Now don't get me wrong, there are plenty of cats there too; after all, lesbians are notorious cat lovers. But now they've all got dogs as well, out on the street. Huge dogs, sniffing up strangers, making prodigious poops and Looking for any likely place to raise a leg. At least the gay guys carry their fluffy little mutts in their beach bags, out of sight. And it's not just a problem in the gay community, oh no. Just the other day in Manhattan I saw ample evidence that every heterosexual who hasn't yet spawned a child owns at least one gigantic canine. So don't get me started.

With my totally scientific survey in mind, let's look at some of the facts. Most dog owners will tell you that dogs are more loyal than cats. This is a misconception perpetuated by dog owners' delusional idea that their dogs would not survive their deaths. On a call-in radio show about pets, I heard one guy ask the dog expert if he should put his dog to sleep soon, since the caller had a fatal disease. The expert practically burst into laughter, and told him something like, "Let me feed your dog for two weeks and he'll never remember you walked the earth." Yes, it's true that cats love best those who feed them. But so do dogs. And so, for that matter, do babies and old people in nursing homes. Face it.

What about cleanliness? Obviously, cats are cleaner. In fact they spend most of their waking hours, which aren't many, cleaning themselves. It pays off: you will never find a cat that smells anything like a dog. Even the most effete breeds of dog must be bathed and groomed relentlessly to cover their natural reek. If you think dogs smell good, you've been sleeping with yours too much. And let them get away from you for five seconds and they're off to find a dead animal to roll in, thwarting all your efforts. Have you ever seen any cat wallow on a rotten carcass? I think not.

And how about the widely held belief that dogs are smarter than cats? If willingness to please humans is a sign of intelligence, perhaps. Or maybe it's just pathetic, like the geeky kid in high school who always tried to suck up to the jocks and prom queens, only to be kicked around for their amusement. Weren't the smarter kids going on about their business, concentrating on their studies and aloof to the petty goings-on of the popular set? Dogs' eagerness to please is legendary and well documented: any low-rent carnival sideshow has a dog act, the pitiful creatures dancing in tutus, rolling beach balls and jumping through hoops of fire, to be rewarded only with a pat on the head and a stale doggie treat. Does this suggest high intelligence? Try to get a cat to jump through a flaming hoop and all you'll get is a withering look that says, unequivocally, "Are you fuckin' kidding me?"

If you need further proof of cats' superior decision-making abilities, consider their diet. Now cats have a reputation for being picky eaters, but that's actually an evolutionary advantage. Cats, unlike dogs, won't eat anything that's the slightest bit off, and actually prefer eating something they've just killed. In this respect they are the original locavores. Dogs, on the other hand, are just scavengers. In human terms, would you rather be the person in the grocery store choosing the most freshly baked loaf of bread or the wino out back, fishing moldy bagels out of the dumpster? Yes, dogs will eat just about anything, which brings me to a topic that shocks even most dog lovers: Stool Eating. Let me repeat that: Stool Eating. This is such a well-documented behavior in dogs that there's even a technical term for it: coprophagy. Whole websites are devoted to the discussion and treatment of this canine aberration. Apparently dogs enjoy many kinds of excrement; some prefer that of horses and other large animals, some sneak into the kitty litter box for a quick

snack, and others just scarf down the leavings of any other dogs they might encounter. Honestly, do you think any cat would ever, ever eat fecal matter? Gentlemen of the jury, I rest my case.

Now please don't think me a dog-hater; I'm not. I've had a few dogs as pets in my lifetime and I enjoyed them as much as the next guy. Owning a dog is an experience everyone should have, something like a cross between slavery and parenting a retarded child. So I want you to have all the evidence in front of you before you run out and get that darling little Great Dane puppy or that irresistible Teacup Poodle. An informed decision is a smart decision. Get a cat.

At the Truck Stop

Audrey Pade

Living in Upstate New York has made me naive to the truck stop culture. I did not realize the abundance of truck stops in our country and the lack we have of them in New York State until I hit the road in a big rig myself. There are vast arrays of items to be bought and sold at truck stops. How very interesting and entertaining they are or maybe I have a simple mind.

A lot of truckers avoid the northeast for many reasons such as high tolls, more expensive fuel, and the biggie, no place to park due to a lack of truck stops. To further keep truckers out of New York, the state has a law not allowing trucks to idle, so when it is cold and truckers need rest, New York is the last place they want to be. According to The Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State Environmental Conservation Law (ECL) prohibits heavy-duty vehicles, including diesel trucks and buses, from idling for more than five minutes at a time. "You may be fined from \$375 to \$15,000 in the case of a first violation" (NYSDEC). That's enough reason for your average Joe trucker to not visit our lovely state.

Truck stops are a league of their own kind of business compared to your local diner or gas station. All basic and unbasic necessities can be found there like, showers, food, clothes (mostly men's), movies, music, a barber, bill payment kiosks, toiletries (not many feminine products or makeup), preachers, doctors, any kind of white trash nic knack you can think of, and of course drugs and hookers. It's almost like home but not.

Traveling through the country, especially down south, there are massive truck stops. Sometimes there may be three to four massive truck stops all at one exit. These were always the ones I enjoyed going to because it was so much fun listening to everyone argue with one another on the cb radio. A few miles before hitting the huge truck stop colony, one can hear a muffled faintness of voices all in disagreement with each other, talking crap to one another, or maybe looking for lot lizards and there is always that one trucker trying to force the Word of God on everyone else. Having a big cb radio is definitely an advantage

when entering one of these places. It gives you an advantage to have your voice be heard and walk over the people with smaller radios.

One time I was in a truck stop just south of Atlanta, Georgia. It was a little redneck town and everyone had that southern, ignorant sounding twang going on. Me being a northerner had a very different accent. I was feeling a little lonely and horny so I got on the cb and asked, "Are there any good looking black men out there?" Multitudes of southern truckers replied back with racial comments. Of course that only fueled my fire so we did some back and forth stating how terrible the other one is. Then a little trashy southern girl gets on the radio saying she wants to fight the "nigger lover," in her words. So I grab the radio and say, "Well bitch, I'm in the back row, in a red Peterbuilt, come tell me I'm a 'nigger lover' to my face." All the truck drivers were all going nuts wanting to see a girl fight. All the rednecks were placing bets on the southern girl and all the northerners were placing their money on me. I was prepared, with my hair pulled back and glasses off. So the chick turns the corner and drives off, not even dropping a gear, what a pussy. It was a good adrenaline rush and I showed those southerners who really has balls.

A lot of crime happens in truck stops. There are many drug dealers, pimps, bums and lot lizards that make truck stops their homes. Some parts of the country hire security guards to keep the crime down. I had to show id many times to prove to law enforcement that I was not a prostitute.

Truck stop culture was something I was totally unaware. A trucker needs a place to get clean, rest and eat, and a truck stop provides that. But day after day, mile after mile, I began to feel empty. It is also a pain to have to wear flip flops when showering out of fear of bacteria and I had near misses peeing on myself trying to make it to the lady's room in the morning. Calling a truck my home was taking its toll on me and I began to appreciate Troy, NY a lot more than ever before. Truck stops made me realize how much I adore my home, my mom and family and animals. It made me take a second look at what is important in life, which is love and not money.

Driving Fear

Dan Stevens

Fear can be defined as an emotional response to some kind of threat. I lived in a quiet neighborhood in Rensselaer, New York. I lived with my family, mother, father, and sister. We had a good life, nice house, with a huge yard, even off-street parking. The back yard had many of the amenities a family with children would have; a swing set, a couple of big wheels, but what really set us apart was the concrete platform in the back yard. It was a raised section of the yard that was filled with concrete, so we could roller skate on it. It was my favorite part of the yard, until one cold day in October. Fear was just one of the many emotions I felt that day. .

It was about 5' o'clock that I decided to go outside and mess around. I zipped up my sweatshirt, and went down the back steps into the yard. My mom and dad were inside cleaning up the dinner mess. I wasn't supposed to be outside for I had a ton of homework to do; I was a kid, I didn't care. I went toward the shed that housed my skates, and I laced up. I saw my friend Cameron coming down the street, he waved. He proceeded to the back entrance of the yard and let himself in. We exchanged very few words because I did not want my parents to know he was here, he was "one of those kids" my parents would say.

As I started to skate around the platform, Cameron stopped me. He said, "Dude I have an awesome idea. Let's push each other around on the big wheels, and see who can crash the hardest." I thought to myself, "no friggin way", but I said "ok." Cameron was up first. He climbed on the biggest bike he could find. I pushed him up the sidewalk toward the top of the hill. I shoved as hard as I could and sent him flying down the side of the house. It was a good thing he put his feet down, he probably wouldn't have had too much fun. Then it was my turn. He had the same idea, push me up to the top of the hill and let me go. I didn't put my feet down, I had something to prove.

I skidded out of control and my face smashed the pavement on the side of the house. It felt as if someone took a cheese grater to my face. My first instinct was to stand up, bad idea. I went right back down, my ankles killed. I felt this warm goopy substance running down

the side of my face, followed by the salty iron taste that was my own blood. I screamed for help but no one came. Cameron had taken off as he was too afraid to deal with it. My parents were not coming.

I kept screaming for help. There was a car coming around the corner. I was laying on the pavement in plain view of every car that passed. He slowed his car to a crawl, but decided I was too bloody for him to touch. Soon after another car passed, same thing. I stopped counting after seven cars. I decided that I was going to have to fend for myself. I crawled up the back steps towards the door, of course it was locked. I pounded on the door until my mother came, I will never forget that shriek. I went to the hospital and received some stitches in my head, and a sprained ankle. All the while wondering why these people didn't stop to help.

I came to the conclusion that these people were feeling the same emotions I was. They were afraid, just like me. Martin Gansberg wrote, "...Thirty-eight respectable, law-abiding citizens in Queens watched a killer stalk and stab a woman in three separate attacks in Kew Gardens." My ordeal was obviously not this severe, but numerous people just drove by while I lay there struggling. I often wonder what was running through the heads of these people. If it was me, I would stop in heartbeat to help those in need. The only thing I can come up with is fear. They don't want people to get the wrong impression. For instance, if I help this guy, his parents are going to think that I'm involved with what happened. People need to conquer this fear inside them, and speak up when something is wrong. Fear is an emotional response to stress. Turn it on its head, when someone is experiencing distress, respond.

There Are Two Types of People

Katy Pinkham

Part 1

The people you are surrounded by have the greatest impact on the person you become. There are two types of people. There is type one. They make you feel smaller than a piece of dirt. Then, there is type two. They build you back up after type one has knocked you down. A type two is what I like to call a "lifesaver." At first you might think that your lifesavers are the only useful ones. However, even the scum of the earth that can be categorized in type one can have a positive impact on your life.

Many people don't understand why girls put up with abusive boys, and when I was younger I didn't understand it either. It's so easy to judge when you're looking in from the outside. To understand completely we must start at the beginning. I was a sophomore in high school and he was my first serious boy friend. His name was Matt and at first he was the perfect boy friend. I was head over heels. It is important to remember that he was compassionate at first. I think this is why I never wanted to give up on him even after he turned out to be a tool. A girl in an abusive relationship tends to think to herself, "I know it's in him somewhere. I know he'll change." The aggressor reels in his prey by pretending to be kind. It's all an act until his true colors shine fluorescently, but by then you're too hung up on him to break up with him.

It started off with him telling me I couldn't talk to certain boys. Then it turned into every boy. If he even saw me looking at another boy it would turn into an argument. I remember one time I had makeup on in school. When he met me at my locker he grabbed my face and said, "You slut, who are you dressing up for?!" I couldn't even look nice for my own boyfriend without him getting angry with me. I couldn't take his negativity and I expressed my feelings. He told me he would change, but it just continued to get worse. Instead of getting rid of him I would try to alter my behaviors to make him happy. This, however, was unsuccessful.

An abusive boyfriend is never satisfied. He wanted me all to himself. He stripped me away from all my friends so I was weak. He would tell me that all I needed was him. When I told him I wanted to break up he would say "Good, All the other girls want me anyway." I

honestly think he had me brainwashed. Before I met him I was an energetic, bubbly teenager. It is scary that abuse can overcome a confident teenager right under the nose of a very involved parent. If it could happen to me, it can happen to anyone under the right circumstances.

The verbal abuse eventually reached to physical altercations. It got to the point where teachers would notice his aggression in school. I never got called to the principal's office until my junior year and I will never forget it. I heard my name over the loud speaker and I thought "Oh geez, what could I have done?" The principal's face was elongated with sympathy as the words rolled off his tongue. He said he had gotten a complaint from a teacher that my boyfriend had been too rough with me. I told him the teacher must have us confused with another couple. "My boyfriend would never hit me," I lied. He must have known I was lying through my teeth as the tears streamed down my face. As he asked me if I had anyone to talk to, I realized that I didn't. It was at that point that I knew I had to turn my life around or I would eventually end up dead.

So, needless to say Matt is the example of the type one in this story. However, like any good story I had a protagonist that helped my story end happily...well maybe not ever after, but as close as it gets. My type two person came in the form of my math teacher, Mrs. Comi. The only easy way to describe this wonderful woman is that she always reminded me of Miss. Honeybee from the book Metilda by Roald Dahl. I had her as a teacher for two years and I frequently stayed after. We became extremely close and I began to see her as a second mother.

After I left the principal's office Matt followed me to after school help. I knew I had to break up with him in public because I wouldn't ever escape him behind closed doors. I told him what had happened and he was furious that I cried in front of the principal. Instead of apologizing for his actions he shoved me against the wall and began pinching the skin on my stomach. I told him I wanted to break up and he began threatening me and said, "I didn't even punch you. You're going to break up with me over a push? It's not even a big deal!" I remember watching faces glance in the opposite direction of us as they walked by. They were all too uncomfortable to impede and I was too embarrassed to call on them to help me.

Just as I was about to give up and take him back to make him stop hurting me, Mrs. Comi came out of her class room. When he saw her he stopped, but she could still tell there was something wrong going on. In a calm voice she said, "Katy, come on you're going to be late

for review.” She guided me to the classroom and as soon as I got in I felt safe. Her warm motherly embrace gave me the confidence I needed to follow through with this decision. If she hadn’t been there I might not have had the strength to end what needed to be ended.

Part 2

Looking back, many people might fail to see what positives I could obtain from this horrible experience. Although it was the most stressful time in my life I would not take it back. I have learned so much about myself and other people by being a victim of an abusive relationship. My past has helped me establish my future. I will now know what to look out for in an abusive relationship and I can put an end to it quickly. It has also helped me to appreciate boyfriends who have treated me better than Matt because it is so easy to take people for granted. Most importantly, I have learned never to settle for less than I deserve even if who I’m settling for tells me they’re the best thing since the creation of the wheel.

Mrs. Comi and I still remain in contact. She is truly a motivational woman. Mrs. Comi was my “lifesaver.” I always struggled in math until she was my teacher. Not only did she help me obtain a 95 average, but she completely restored my confidence when I needed it most. She may not even know how large of an impact she made on my life even though I thanked her constantly. I am so grateful to have had such a positive experience in Mrs. Comi’s classroom. She has inspired me to become an educator to help students like me overcome their struggles, whatever they may be.

As for Matt, he is a definite type one. Like I said, even type ones can have a positive impact on your life. When we went out I was in a deep dark hole that I eventually dug myself out of. Now, when an obstacle is presented to me I think of how far I had to climb to get out of that deep hole. I know I can overcome any of life’s challenges after overcoming that. Matt taught me that even the people you love can hurt you. They will make up excuses and it is easy to get wrapped up in the lies. It is up to you to say enough is enough and luckily for me I did. A life without obstacles is a life unlived. I thank Matt for presenting the biggest obstacle I have had to overcome.

Andy's Judgment

Romey J. Romano

Andy. He is a repeat offender, the kind that laughs at the judicial system. In fact, he'd bragged about it to me while we had a drink at his red neck watering hole. Usually I reserve my special interests to those who murder directly or indirectly, but I save a 'soft' spot for his type, spouse beaters, rapists, and child molesters. After a few drinks he went on to brag how he kept his 'old lady' in line and that he was planning on making her an example to his kids. He pulled a photograph from his wallet and showed me his family. Staring back was a mousy woman holding a baby and Andy holding a toddler. When I saw the photo I breathed a sigh of relief, his kids were too young to be affected by his example.

Leaving the bar, Andy climbs into his truck, starts it up, backs out of his parking space and starts down the street. My car roars to life as I turn the key and begin to follow my prey.

He reminds me of my first kill, a kill that was more vengeance than justice or even the basic need of the feed. I'm a vampire. Not your 'fru-fru' type of vampire popularized in novels, but a hard working contributor to society. My job is embalming and preparing the newly departed at the St. Francis Funeral Home in Troy, NY.

Andy is heading to Melrose, north of Troy with plenty of spots to pass him. We meander through the streets of Lansingburgh and make our way onto Route 40. After a mile I put my plan into action. First I turn on my high beams to get his attention. The response is immediate; he slams on his brakes without a warning 'tap' to flash his brake lights. I pass Andy and gave him a brake test in return. Then I race ahead waiting for him to catch up. As he comes up behind me with his high beams on I drive slower and slower, finally pulling over to the side of the road. He stops behind me. I leap out and start to walk back to him, hoping he'll pull his sawed off double barrel 12 gauge shotgun from under his seat, which he does.

"Okay mother fucker," he shouts.

I walk steadily toward him; he raises the illegal shotgun and pulls the trigger. The only sound is the click of the hammer on an empty chamber.

“Try the other barrel asshole,” I taunt him, knowing that I had removed the shells from the gun. With the second ‘click’ I am on him. In one fluid motion I grab him by the throat and lift him up off the ground. As I squeeze off the blood flow to his pea brain there is a startled knowing look in his eyes, a look I truly enjoy. Before his eyes glaze over I say, “Sleep,” to sedate him for the ride to my lair.

I carry him to my car, pop the trunk and toss him in. Then I go back to his truck, pick up the shotgun, replace the shells and place it under the driver’s seat. Next I take the keys and leave a forged note that briefly states how sorry Andy is and that he’d taken a one way swim in the Hudson River.

I go back to my car, which I call the ‘prey-mobile’ as it is a non-descript sedan with a three-body trunk. Generally I remove one person from society at a time, but the extra space in the trunk does come in handy.

As I drive I reflect on how blessed I am. Not only can I enjoy the fruits of the mortal world, as in light meals, light drinking, and as much sex as I can get, but I also get to revel in the elixir of my eternal life, blood in almost any form, though I prefer mammal, especially the most dangerous game.

And speaking of blood, I’m almost home to my private dining room. Our home, my mortal love and I own, has a carriage house in the back. There I can indulge in my hobbies, including my fine dining. Up the driveway I go, parking in front of the brick carriage house. I step out and unlock the large front door, open it, climb into my car and pull into the ‘prey-mobile’s’ berth. With anticipation and a growing hunger I climb out of the car, close the carriage house door, and expectantly open the trunk. Andy lies asleep, like a Judas Goat going to slaughter.

I’m not a big fan of a meal that just lies there, but it has been a long day. Andy snuggles into me as I pick him up, betraying his hidden homosexual lust that most wife beaters have. At this point I almost want to bleed him out and decant his blood into bottles for later, but I cannot resist the silken warmth of the blood flowing down my throat. So I indulge myself, then do the after dinner ‘dishes’ by preparing Andy’s shell for disposal. I make short work of cutting his body up and bagging it for cremation at work this evening. It is late. After making breakfast and lunch for my love, I go upstairs to bed.

As I slip into bed trying not to disturb her and our two cats, she whispers, “Did you have a good time tonight?”

I reply, “Yes, it was a good evening.”

With that she sighs and snuggles into me as I drift off to sleep.

Together

Brittany Stallwood

You wait for his letters, I wait for mine.

Two drifting life lines with no definite time.

You open yours with relish, savoring every sweet word.

I fall asleep holding mine, picturing his face.

We hold on to the memories, so rare and far between.

The days are bleak without him, the children keep on asking.

But we never have an answer for when he will return.

You try to be the glue. You are playing every role.

Holding everyone together, but whose holding you?

I stand at his graveside, the tears will never stop.

He fought for our freedom, his life given up. You kneel at his graveside, the letters in your hand.

We say goodbye. As we walk away, we leave our souls behind.

We move away feeling numb inside.

We are the wives of fallen soldiers, the mothers, the sisters, the daughters.

We live on different continents, we fight for different sides.

We are each others enemies. Yet we are still the same wives.

We have loved and we have lost. We are the very same.

Roarke

Ross Wooding

I am about to tell you about an event that shattered my life. I don't want to tell it. However, as I search for ideas, this one always budges its way to the top of the pile. It's kind of like a celebrity that keeps appearing in the news; you don't want to hear about him or her, but that person is there and you have to listen. So I submit to this damn idea that dominates my thoughts. As I sit down and begin typing, I feel my heart beat a little harder, and a little lump nestles into my throat.

It was the day after my birthday; I had just turned ten. It must have been a school day because I remember my older brother, Roarke, waking me up as he got ready to go to junior high. It was a rude awaking; I think he pounced on me or something like that. I was still in elementary school and didn't need to get on the bus 'till an hour after he. So I pushed him away, whined for him to leave me alone, and rolled back over to go back to sleep. I never was one for waking up early.

I think it was a typical day at school, not that I remember anything about it. I got home at my usual time; I think about three-thirty or so. I didn't see Roarke. He would get home earlier than me, and he would sometimes go over to a neighbor's house to play with the boy that lived there.

I live in a rural area with farms all around. Across the street from me is a big long field. The field was always flooded so the ground was always wet. It was no good for farming. Apparently it was dry enough to land a helicopter on, however, because that is exactly what happened shortly after I got home. I was pretty curious, and I watched a little bit. Nobody had ever landed a helicopter in that field before. It was a MedEvac chopper. I don't recall when it left.

Shortly after, a police car pulled up my driveway. Two officers stepped out of the car. They stood next to it for a short while talking to one another. They came to the door and my mother answered it. I didn't listen to the conversation; something seemed wrong and I didn't want to hear what they had to say. My mother came to me after the officers left. She had a stony look on her face. I remember what she said to me; her voice so strong and brave for the news she was bearing: "your brother has been shot." He died that night in the hospital.

I can hardly even recall the details of how Roarke was shot. He had found a gun lying on the side of the road somewhere. The gun belonged to a police officer. Not an officer like a trooper, but an investigator or something of the like. The officer had set the weapon on his car, forgot about it, and drove away. It obviously fell off the car, and it sat next to the road waiting for a young child to find it and take it home. Unfortunately, it had to be my brother.

So when my brother went over to the neighbor's house that day to play, they played with the gun. The neighbor boy shot Roarke in the head. Why? I don't know. When I try to read articles about it, I just end up crying too hard to do anything. I could ask my parents, but that would be no easier. The boy dragged Roarke into the woods after he shot him. It is unclear to me how the police were called.

I bolted up to my room after my mother laid the news on me. I was already bawling as my face hit the pillow on my bed. It was a howling cry, almost like an unhappy infant. From this point on, my memory of the following weeks, and even the following years, becomes almost nonexistent. My mind made no effort to take note of day to day life any more.

Family members came to visit and mourn. My aunt on my father's side flew in from her home in Washington. I saw my uncles. My aunt from my mother's side drove up from North Carolina with her kids. Friends dropped in to console us.

My mother, God bless that woman, was strong as a rock throughout all this. I don't ever remember her buckling and breaking down. She kept her wits about her, and prayed that God took good care of her son in heaven.

My father was absolutely devastated. He stayed home from work for two weeks after Roarke died. He didn't do anything, and that was not my father. He was always a very driven, active man. He would eventually return to something akin to what he used to be, but a paranoia of losing any of his three remaining children still grips him.

As I said, I hardly remember anything after Roarke's death. I stayed out of school for two weeks, and I would never completely catch up with the rest of my class on schoolwork when I finally did go back. I remember for a few short stretches being up to speed with the rest of the class, but I didn't stay there for long.

Roarke was a phantom in my mind; like the phantom pain a person who lost a limb feels. I would be watching tv, see something

funny, and turn to see his reaction, but he wasn't there. Not long after my brother died, I was riding my bike in the back yard. It was autumn, so there were leaves on the ground. I didn't see the plastic toy plane Roarke had been playing with only a day two before he was killed. I ran it over. A wave of agony came over me when I realized what just happened; I threw down my bike and ran inside crying.

Time passed slowly. After elementary school my parents decided to homeschool me again. (I was homeschooled from kindergarten to half way through third grade.) I remained homeschooled all the way through highschool. I didn't do much else other than race BMX. I was pretty fast. I spent a lot of time with a friend I made in elementary school. I could talk to him about anything.

Not much changed and I grew up.

Time doesn't pass as slowly as it used to. I still race BMX. Roarke used to race too, and I try to do good for him. I think that is why I am as driven as I am to race. My brain is beyond trying to cruise along on autopilot, not trying to remember anything. I still cry over losing Roarke. Once in a while I stop by the cemetery where his ashes are buried; it is only a little ways off my normal route to work. I say a prayer to him and let him know I miss him.

I was at the cemetery a few weeks ago saying a prayer; I hope he always hears me.

Turn the Page

Adriana Fraioli

If you had asked me years ago what I wanted to do when I grew up, I would have said go to college, have a career, and a family. I never considered not going to college. Somewhere along the line my life plans changed, and I did not go to college. Now here I am at forty four, studying to be a nurse, working on my degree, trying to finish a chapter in my life.

There was a time I thought I was going to be a doctor. It was the kind of farfetched dream and ambition we all had when we were young. I couldn't have been more than nine or ten at the time, but that is what I said I was going to be. That, of course, was before I had to dissect my first frog in science class. That was the end of the dream of becoming a doctor. I quickly moved on to another dream, which I cannot even remember at this time. My father, however, hung on to that dream forever. I remember being about twenty one, and hearing him telling his friends of my dream of becoming a doctor. I can remember his disappointment when he realized that was not going to happen. I went on with my life, married, and had a family. Always saying I would someday go back to school. I never thought it would actually happen. I am pretty sure my parents thought that too. My life progressed and my children grew up. I had one child who just graduated from college, one a college sophomore, and one a high school senior. My life was full and busy, working and raising a family. There was no time to think about going to school. Yet, the thought always lingered in the back of my mind. It was that unfinished chapter of my life. I never let myself dare say it out loud.

As irony would have it, I found myself working in the medical field for the past twenty three years. Working not as a doctor, as I had once dreamed, but as a medical secretary. A far stretch from being a doctor, yet there was something satisfying about being there. I grew to love my job, all the patients, and the lives I touched. I found it interest-

ing to learn medical terminology and was eager to learn more. I was dedicated to the patients, my coworkers, and the doctor I worked for. It was with their encouragement that I started toying with the thought of going to school. My children and husband quickly jumped onto this band wagon. They worked hard trying to persuade me to at least take one course.

Could I possibly do this? Was it too late? Then as if a light had suddenly come on, I woke up one day and realized that I had to do this. A medical secretary was not what I had dreamed of being when I grew up. How could I encourage my children to reach for the sky if I could not? How could I tell them to never give up if I just let my dreams slip away forever? It was on this enlightening day that I applied to HVCC. I knew I wanted to stay in the medical field, so nursing seemed like the obvious choice. There must have been some underlying reason for me staying in the medical field for all these years.

I remember my hands trembling as I filled out that application. Tears welled in my eyes as I spoke to admissions office. Fear overcame me as I waited, afraid of hearing I was too old. There was a point, during that initial meeting with the advisor, I was about to give up. After hearing how many courses I needed to take before I would even be considered for the program. She then said something that struck me. She said she was always amazed with what women can accomplish. Deep inside I felt overwhelming joy and elation at the thought of finally getting a college degree. Not to say that I didn't have that little voice in my head saying you're too old. There was a stronger, bolder voice saying you can do this, you have to do this.

I am now in my second year and loving every minute of it. I still work full time and still have a family to care for. It is hard work and some days I hear that little voice saying, what are you doing? For every time I hear that little voice, I hear the bolder voice saying never give up. My children are proud of me, they encourage me, and on occasion we help each other with homework. Most of all I am proud of myself.

I recently read a book that was put together by my employers to celebrate one hundred and forty years in service. This book was filled stories of how nurses, doctors, and various other professionals had touched the lives of patients, their families, and the lives of coworkers. As I read these stories my eyes filled with tears. This is the kind of impression I would like to leave behind. No, you do not need to be a college graduate to touch someone's life. I am, however, hoping my graduating from college after all these years can lead the way for someone else to be able to reach for their dreams. At the least, I hope my children will look back and see that it is never too late to accomplish anything. I cannot wait to see my parent's faces the day I cross that stage at graduation. Especially my father, I may not be a doctor, but a nurse is not too bad an accomplishment. Being a college graduate will be a proud moment in my life. It will be the completion of that unfinished chapter in my life, and beginning a whole new chapter.

My School Vacation

Philip A. Stewart

When I was seven years old, my mom and dad divorced. I think that being so young somehow protected me from the harsh reality of the situation. After that, my mom moved my brother, sister, and I from Alabama back to Tennessee to live with my grandmother. Even though where we moved was not that far away from him, the visits with my dad were rare.

Over the next few years, I began to see more and more of him. At first, it was for the weekend and then the weekend turned into summer break. My siblings and I refer to this period as the reconciliation period. It always seemed that there was a hint of obligation on his end when we went to see him. We also joked about him being thirty minutes late whenever we were to see him. At one point, we even went so far as to bump all of the clocks up those thirty minutes so he would be there at the correct time.

Up to the summer of 1993, waiting on my dad was the standard practice. During that summer, I became very ill at one point, nearly dying. Once I was better, we all began to see him more than we saw him when my parents were married. There were more weekend visits, more holiday visits and an increased attendance to personal activities. He also decided to move closer, which was nice since we were able to stay at his house during the week if we wanted to.

Now, my dad and I have always had the outdoors in common and during the summer of 1995 that common interest would bring us closer together than we had ever been. Earlier that year, we were looking through an outdoor magazine and happen to come across an ad requesting volunteers to help maintain the Appalachian Trail. It called for a two week commitment and they would provide everything you needed.

That July we found ourselves just outside of Hot Springs, NC. Every morning we would wake up to the sweet smell of breakfast rushing through the mountain air. The area where we had set up our camp looked like something on a postcard. The bright blue sky came down to meet the century old oaks that stood guard on the mountains. There was a waterfall and stream no more than one hundred yards from us that sent mist into the air which created a rainbow that

had any color you could imagine. It was hard not to think that this was God's country and everything in it, whether it be the granite faced cliffs or the small yellow finches that stayed with us all day. We called this home for two weeks, and during those two weeks, my father and I began to understand each other on a different level.

On our last day, my dad and I decide to walk the trail that we had just repaired. As we walked, we began to talk about events in the past and how those events had shaped our family. We continued talking about these things until we reached the point where our new trail reached the established trail. Without missing a beat, he turned to me and began to retrace our steps through words.

He said, "When we first started to work on this trail it was pretty messed up; it had been washed out and it seemed that we were not going to be able to fix it. But instead of giving up and leaving it how it was, we chose to do whatever it took to ensure that it was put back on track."

Now I would like to say that we stood there at which point I had some great epiphany, but I cannot. What I can tell you is that I remembered those words and over the years, I began to understand them. I understand that people will make mistakes and sometimes those mistakes are big. Over a two week period in the summer of 1995, my dad was my teacher. The words that my dad spoke to me that day were not meant to be an apology; they were meant to be a lesson.

Vosburgh Rd.

Mitch DeWein

When I was only about three years old, my parents moved into the house that I now call home on what was a quiet street in Halfmoon. Vosburgh road was a peaceful and quiet neighborhood in “Solartown USA” (Kennedy). It was a road that split farmland and most of the travelers were driving between farms or to the local farmers markets. Since I have lived here, though, Vosburgh Road has gone through a very extreme transformation. Being access to a great amount of the local farmland, Vosburgh road has evolved along with the town of Halfmoon to become much different than I remember as a young boy.

Growing up, my siblings and I were always running about the quiet woodlands behind my house. We would roam for hours through woods that seemed unending walking through fairly open woodlands, crawling across downed trees that we used as bridges over streams that felt like rivers. With the exception of our own voices calling for each other, there was very minimal noise from the outside world. It was not until much later that we would find that these woods had an end. As we grew older, this fascination with the outdoors led us to acquire a craving for riding four wheelers. After hours of riding we would lose track of time and race to get home before the sun came down, with callused hands that made it hard to grip the handle bars and mud from head to toe. My neighborhood was always a very welcoming place for us as children, because there was not a fear in our parents minds that we would be home for dinner and we were allowed to do most of what we wanted to. Our neighbors were all very nice; many of them old couples who watched out for us when we were riding our bicycles on the road or roaming through their back yards playing hide and seek. Vosburgh road always had a quiet and comforting feeling about it, with the only noise coming from the cars passing by on the street. However, after many years of living here, Vosburgh road has changed.

Although housing developments had been in the process of being built ever since the day that I moved into our peaceful little white

ranch style house with red shutters, I had never felt any difference in the way my neighborhood felt. It was still the same quiet homey road without much noise from the rest of the neighboring towns or roads. My house is located on a long straight section of the road between a large hill on one side, and a snake-like, winding section of the road followed by another large hill on the other side. This valley had kept my home and the surrounding houses that I consider my neighborhood a very peaceful area. I was about 14 years old when the first signs of change occurred.

I was out riding my four wheeler, racing to keep up with my older brother who had a faster and newer four wheeler. We were weaving through branches and downed trees, through mud pits, over culverts, and up and down hills in a race-like effort to reach our destination. I had finally started to catch up to him in the last wooded section of our journey before we had to cross over Route 146. I caught up, and both of us crossed the road. The hill on the other side of the road was my biggest fear of the whole trip, as it was very steep and it felt like it was too much for me to handle (hence my concern in catching up to my brother who might have had to help me!). When I made it to the top my brother, who normally would have blasted through what was once an empty farm field, was stopped with his four wheeler turned off and his helmet on his lap. What I saw next was shocking, and devastated me. The field that was once wide open grass and hay had dozens of trucks and large tractors that were working hard to level out the ground. This field that once was a playing ground for my brother and I had been sold by a neighbor of ours to a housing developer. In the weeks following this sight we witnessed many houses beginning to spring up throughout the field. This was the first sign I had seen of when the “farmland began to be sold and housing developments established” (Kennedy). Halfmoon had begun to change from the peaceful farm town into a bustling suburb of Albany, full of dozens of housing developments and new businesses.

This trend continued, as developments started popping up closer and closer to my house. The old farm land that it had once been was finally washed away when the last farm house left standing at the end of my road was torn down. In its place, a Stewarts Shop and an office building were built. Throughout this rapid development, my stretch of

Vosburgh road changed from being quiet and homey to being an over-populated road. Neighbors of mine are scared to let their children play outside for fear that the screeching tires of the passing cars will one day be the accident that kills their children. Slowly, the road has become a very highly traveled road that many drivers use every day to and from work. Although the memory of chasing my siblings through silent woods with only the sound of chirping birds and winding streams still remains, Vosburgh road will never again be the neighborhood it once was.

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Old Bag of Bones

Michael J Walker

On June 17th, 2000, in Ronkonkoma, NY, a twenty-four month old baby, Sabrena Beck, disappeared from her home (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children 2009). Of course at the time, we knew nothing about it.

It was a late spring morning in 2002. I was spelunking in Clarksville, NY with three of my closest friends, Wotzak, Ric, and Joe, and my sister, Karen. We had been to this particular cave about half a dozen times before, and at least three or four of those times we came across what seemed to be a hermit. I know it sounds ridiculous this day in age, but there was a legend of an old man who lived in the woods and spent his days trying to carve out another entrance of the cave to meet up with the main corridor. I believe this legend was true, because I'm pretty sure the old man that we saw so often was him.

It was almost noon, and we were on our way out of the cave. Wotzak asked "Does anyone want to bet if we'll see the hermit?"

If you know anything about Wotzak, you know he's kind of smug. He's one of those guys who are somehow right more often than he should be and he lets it go to his head. So, you just love to contradict him and hope that you're right so you can rub it in his face a little.

Within seconds everyone had chimed in, and the bet was up to ten dollars each. So, by the end of the day, Wotzak was either going to be forty dollars richer or forty dollars poorer.

As we grew closer to the exit of the cave, we realized that the day was still young. We weren't ready to call it a day. We had looked for the other entrances to the cave before and we found one, but it didn't go very far. So we decided to go off in search of the other one. Wotzak especially liked this idea, since it improved his odds of seeing the hermit.

Daylight, and no hermit. It looks, at least for now, that Wotzak may be out of luck this time.

We climb the steep embankment just outside the entrance to the cave. It's a narrow trail that twists its way out of the fifty foot funnel shaped entrance, with a giant oak tree dead in the center, as if there to mark the entrance. At the top of the embankment, the trail clearly splits

two ways, one that heads back to the car, and one that continues deeper into the forest. We continue on. Moments later, we are at the entrance to the cave that we've been to before. It's a twenty by seven foot crack in the rock that drops straight down for about seventy-five feet. There is a rickety wooden ladder that sticks up out of the top and goes all the way down. Aside from the ladder sticking up, you could walk right past this one and never know it's there. You have to wonder how many people have walked right over the edge. This is the entrance that the hermit is supposedly trying to connect the two sections of cave. Once down inside this entrance you will see some buckets, a sled, and some small digging tools that look like they've been there forever. Since we have been in this entrance before, and we know it doesn't go very far, we keep going.

It doesn't take long for the trail to dissolve entirely into the woods until there is really no trail to follow. We spread out and start combing sections of the forest for the third entrance. An hour goes by without any luck. Then Ric yells, "Hey everybody, come here!" He had found an area where the trees were thin, and the mountain underneath us was bare and exposed. Large sections of rock had varying size cracks in them, much like the second entrance. The only difference was that these cracks seemed to only be about one to two feet wide and three to six feet deep. We figured if there was another entrance, it could be in a section of one of these cracks. Again we started searching, this time focused on a much smaller area.

Another half hour goes by and we regroup to decide what we're going to do. While we are waiting for my sister to come over, I started poking around in a crack where we were standing with a walking stick I had picked up earlier. As I'm poking around at the build up of leaves and pine needles in the base of this crack I come to a three-way intersection of two cracks. They form a "T". *Crunch, Crunch, Crunch, Thud!* A distinctly different sound comes from the base of the crack, right at the "T". It's a hollow noise as if the ground opens up under the needles or there is something empty buried there.

"Did you guys hear that?" I asked.

Thud, Thud, Thud. I poked at it again, so everyone could hear.

"It could be buried treasure." I said, trying to be silly, and maybe a bit hopeful.

Everyone else quickly lost interest and continued whatever meaningless conversation they were having before I interrupted them.

My curiosity had the best of me. I began to dig away the leaves and needles with the stick and revealed a black garbage bag. I layed down on my stomach, and reached as far into the crack as I could, my fingertips just barely touching the bag. I poked a hole and started fishing around with my fingertips. I felt something solid. I grabbed hold and pulled it out of the bag.

Just then, a long scream pierced the woods. Not just any scream, but a scream so loud, and high pitched that if anyone had been close enough to hear it, but far enough to not know who it was, they would have surely thought an eleven year old girl was being hacked to pieces. The scream came from me. I like to think that the scream was only partly a reaction, and mostly a melodramatic over-reaction to try and invoke laughter from all those who heard it. But, who knows.

I held in my hands a bone. Though small, it resembled a human femur bone. Suddenly everyone was interested in what I was doing.

We all decided that it was best to not disturb anything else in the area, as it could potentially be a crime scene. We took the femur bone back to the car and headed off to find the police.

The local sheriffs' office was the nearest law enforcement agency, and I have to say, he seemed shocked to hear our story, even with the bone. He decided to investigate.

The sun was starting to go down now, and we took him back to where we found the bones. When we got there, I was surprised to hear him ask if any of us wanted to help him exhume the rest of the bones, and I happily took him up on his offer. He gave me some rubber gloves and one by one I started pulling bones out of the bag. Finally, I found a big one. It felt like the skull. It was buried quite deep and took a minute for me to dig it out. As soon as we could all see the skull we all knew. It was a dog.

We all felt a bit foolish, we had hyped it up so much in our heads. But the Sheriff insisted we did the right thing. "Better to play it safe, than be sorry", he said.

When we got back to the car, my sister reminded us that the day wasn't a complete loss, and we all left ten dollars richer, except for Wotzak.

Unfortunately, Sabrena Beck has yet to be found (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children 2009).

Fall

Marilyn Jarosz

Fall is just one of the four seasons that is meant to be thoroughly enjoyed by all, especially in the countryside in which I live. And in a very real sense, this is that season which best displays the reality of our own "dying away" in terms of majestic color and beauty.

Yes, when lived with a beautiful purpose, our own lives have the potential to parallel the true loveliness of this season. Like those magnificent leaves, just before they fall away forever, the brilliant splendor of our own lives is meant to be shared and enjoyed by all those who cross our path.

As summer nears its end, many think the best has come and gone. Yes, summer is a time of labor in which we prepare for the approaching winter, and winter will overcome those who have not made ready. But in between the heat of summer and the cold of winter, it is fall that allows us a moment in time to ponder the true richness of our lives before winter's last gust takes our final breath.

The true beauty of the fall season is meant to enrich our own lives, as well as the lives of those who stand watching. And it is true that we will reap in the fall of our lives, what we have sown throughout our own springtime and summers. In the end, I ask myself, "Will my own life enrich the vision of others before I drift away?"

The Oak Tree

Chloe Barker-Benfield

There was no tree-stump, no burn-mark, no wood-shavings, nothing to suggest there had once been a tall, strong oak in that field. One morning it was simply gone. It was one of those trees you might read about in a storybook. The branches were low and grew so that you could climb to the top of the tree as easily as you could climb a ladder. The shadow cast by the tree was wide and cool and made you want to sit in the middle of the field on a hot summer day and watch the clouds pass you by as the world slowly spun in space. I spent countless hours laying on my back staring upwards at the tiny spots of sunlight winking at me through the tapestry of leaves and branches above. Then one morning it was gone, as if the wind had blown it away.

I stood there, a breeze eerily tickling the back of my neck. My lungs stiff as if a weight had just fallen onto my chest; a wave of nausea swept into my stomach. The sun beat down onto my head and I felt tiny beads of sweat form along my hair-line and trickle down my forehead like ghoulish fingers. I felt frozen, as if the roots of my tree had not vanished and had now taken a hold of my sneakers tying me to the icy ground. Suddenly, my breath caught in my throat. In a desperate attempt to break away I bolted in the opposite direction. As I left that empty patch of land where that oak once stood, I felt something leave my body, as if I had just lost something that was more important than I could have ever imagined.

Throughout the sweltering summer day, I tried desperately to stay away from the field but something stubborn and intangible pulled me back.

Dusk blew in on the summer breeze. I stood dejectedly in the middle of the beautiful field that had become as empty as a desert. I felt a metallic ache run through my veins, I was convinced that I had aged one hundred years in a day. I was attending a funeral celebrating a life that no one knew existed, and mourning a death that no one knew occurred. I bowed my head, letting salty drops of icy sorrow run down my face and off the tip of my nose onto the ground.

I felt a gentle tickle on the back of my neck, I reached back and felt a green oak leaf resting on the collar of my shirt. I looked up and saw another leaf fall, then another. As I stared upwards into the night sky, I watched one thousand leaves slowly falling to the ground, silhouette against the stars.

