

Threads

2009



Threads is a journal of student writing and art published by
The English, Modern Languages, and ESL Department at
Hudson Valley Community College
Troy, New York

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2009 Editors

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Special Thanks to:
Maria Palmara, Department Chair
The Graphics Department
The Print Shop
McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

Sunset
By: Christopher Gregory

The crisp salt and sand.
Little gulls stay and away.
Indecisive sky....



View of Tampa from Apollo Beach
By: Sarah Burger

Summer Wild Flowers
By: Sarah Burger



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. While reviewing student work, we were often moved to laughter and tears, and this year in particular contains many pieces of personal reflection. 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. The personal essays and the creative pieces—poetry, fiction, 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 email your work to threads@hvcc.edu

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peaceful resolution in his identity search that preserves his parents' heritage and his life in America.

Works Cited

- Engles, Tim. "Lee's 'Persimmons.'" *Explicator* 54, no. 3 (spring 1996). Literature Resource Center. Web. 17 February 2009.
- Li-Young Lee. Literature Resource Center. Web. 17 February 2009.

Lee describes a scene in which Mrs. Walker brings in a Chinese apple for the American children to taste. Engles refers to the cross-cultural tension found in the following scene.

The scene expands into the image of an Asian American child who declined the offered fruit because he knew “it wasn't ripe or sweet,” and “watched the other face.” Unripe persimmons are extremely sour and astringent, and Lee has sketched in enough of the scene to suggest those childish faces scrunching up and turning to the quiet Chinese boy who eats such strange terrible food at home.

At this point, midway through the poem, Lee's tone changes to one of sweet memories of his parents and the deep connections to them found in persimmons. He describes the warmth of the persimmon by using his mother's words golden and glowing. A scene is recounted of two persimmons found in a cellar that the author kept in his room waiting for them to ripen. Another experience surfaces of Lee's father, while going blind, is given a persimmon that perfectly personifies the bitter-sweet feelings of the evening.

The poem closes with a final recent memory of the speaker describing to his blind father a scroll found of a painting of two persimmons. His father's words of reply centering on the eternal memory of precision surrounding the permission enhance the cultural theme of Lee's poem: Some things never leave a person: “scent of the hair of one you love,/ the texture of persimmons, / in your palm, the ripe weight.” In the final embracing of the persimmon, Lee symbolizes his desire to hold on to the fading threads of his Chinese heritage amidst his union with American culture.

In conclusion, Li-Young Lee's poem “Persimmons” forces its readers to question the validity of America's reputation as a place of freedom from all racism and oppression. If this young Chinese boy found so much difficulty in his American classroom in Pennsylvania, how can America really live up to this reputation as he ages? As the poem continues, Lee makes it clear that this difficulty in being tolerated in another culture was not simply one experience, but rather a lifetime of internal controversy, only increased by external racism, between two extremely different world views. Thankfully, Lee is able to come to a

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THREADS WRITING AWARDS WINNER

India: Upon Regarding a Temple at Dawn

By: Samaria Corrales

Curry, curry, curry
gold, gems, glitz
flip flops, sandalwood, Bollywood
dirty water, coursing through the gutters,
sewage seeping into the cobblestone streets.
Beggars and their stench that
congests the already crowded air.
Rats nibble crumbs and crawl over
emaciated children with outstretched hands.
Oils seeping from the hairlines
under shade that does not stop
the heat.

Analyzing Li-Young Lee's "Persimmons"

By: Lindsey Hathaway

Li-Young Lee's "Persimmons" develops the theme of the difficulty of integrating into a society other than the one which he grew up in. Li-Young Lee was born in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 1957. His childhood began with much uneasiness as his father served as a personal physician to Mao Tse-tung. Mao Tse-tung, a prominent communist in line for presidency in China, had very different views than Lee's father, Kuo Yaun. Kuo Yaun was a Christian and a Nationalist in China's prominently communist society. The family emigrated to Indonesia, where Kuo Yaun taught at a Christian institute, until he was arrested in 1958. Following the arrest and 19 months of incarceration the family moved from Hong Kong to Macao to Japan, and finally to the U.S. In 1964. Settling in western Pennsylvania, the family seemed to meet only racism and disrespect. It is in this place that Lee's poem "Persimmons" seems to be set in (Almon.)

"Persimmons" begins with a scene in which the speaker, Li-Young, is being punished in a sixth grade classroom for mispronouncing the word precision. "In the sixth grade Mrs. Walker/ slapped the back of my head/ and made me stand in the corner/ for not knowing the difference/ between persimmon and precision." Lee paints that his teacher, Mrs. Walker, as extremely insensitive and uncaring about his integrating into an American classroom. He builds on this theme as he describes to the reader the pleasure he has in eating persimmons, fruits similar to apples and popular in Asia, peeled and cut in perfection.

The next stanza describes a sensual scene between the author and his white wife, Donna. In attempting to teach her Chinese, the author realizes that having assimilated himself into American culture, he has forgotten many words from his home country. The poet says, "I teach her Chinese./ Crickets: chiu chiu. Dew: I've forgotten./ Naked: I've forgotten." Tim Engles, a literary critic, suggests that this scene with Donna symbolizes Lee's growing detachment with his parents and their cultural heritage, as well as his growing attraction to life in America.

Allowing another flashback into his childhood, Lee, focuses on other words that he found difficulty in pronouncing after his immigration to America, describing the meaning of each word in his life.

Fade to Light

By: Adam West

The moon was hungry
The sun had turned gray
The wolf came out of his den and howled away.

The rabbits were sleeping
Chirping birds made no sound
Not a speck or an instance of light could be found

Night watchers were gazing
Big cats on the prowl
Little creatures snatched up by ravenous fowl

Excitement was coming
Dawn showing her face
A glow under the mountain lit up the whole place

A young fawn was bouncing
Birds floated at sea
A willow tree said good morning while waving at me

THREADS WRITING AWARDS WINNER

Hamlet's Hawk: A Villanelle

By: Jillian K. Pugliese

Along the quay, alone I walk
Hours until I am homebound
Seductive waves coo 'neath the dock

Miles away, the bell tower clock
Threatens with alarming sound
Along the quay, alone I walk

Above me flies a murderous flock
Shrieking; all other noise is drowned
Seductive waves coo 'neath the dock

Amongst the birds, one sordid hawk
The antagonist, he was most surely crowned
Along the quay, alone I walk

Splash and spray engulf the rocks
Battering the ground
Seductive waves coo 'neath the dock

I'm paralyzed when my eyes lock
On an Ophelia floating by, a lifeless mound
Along the quay, alone I walk
Seductive waves coo 'neath the dock

THREADS WRITING AWARDS WINNER

Friendship

By: Allison Smith

With an open hand, I reach forward and press my palm into my horse's neck; her veins are thick with adrenaline and excitement, but so are mine, and our energy melts into one. My nerves start to settle as we walk into the arena; still pressing my hand softly on her neck, she feels my breath, and we exhale simultaneously. My mind, saturated with a flurry of details, begins a monotonous rhythmic counting pattern.

The in-gate of a show jumping arena, sitting comfortably atop my well worn, faded saddle, is a familiar place for me. It is a home, where I matured and experienced a full range of emotions. Equestrian sport symbolizes an art form encompassing the ultimate in trust and friendship, reliance and loyalty, and a sport, done well, that requires balance, intelligence, and athleticism. Show jumping attracts dare devils and thrill seekers, little girls that dream of ponies, and aristocrats searching for royalty and grandeur, but in my case, the attraction is truly and unequivocally the horses.

Before the whistle blows, I pause; we move a few steps backward, grounding my thoughts and gathering the over-stimulated mind of my partner. As we begin to canter, I soften my arms, decreasing the restrictive pressure of my reins, and my mare excitedly increases the animation and athleticism of her gait. Her motivation and enthusiasm are evident to even the most inexperienced onlooker. The pattern of the jumps is vivid and clear in my mind. I often pretend that I am watching a video of the future, visualizing every movement in my course. In observing my mare's ears, pricked forward with certainty and keen focus, I follow her lead; my attention now infallible. My mind, like the focus feature on a camera, brings the first jump into my frame of vision. Carefully, I zoom in on the obstacle, blinking a few times, readjusting, and calculating until the frame is crystal clear. The energetic youngster beneath me gathers her stride, like the coiling of a spring, increasing her potential energy. I shift my body weight slightly to the back of my saddle, anticipating the surge of power at take off, eager to feel her front end explode upward with uninterrupted fluidity and power. My body reacts to the movement spontaneously; the

his face, and then I looked at my father. I was alone with him for the first time in weeks, but he didn't say anything. He was too pale and that's when it hit me. He wouldn't ever say anything to me again. I sat down on the chair and was instantly uncomfortable, so I stood back up. I took hold of my father's hand and started talking. I cursed God and everyone that got to live instead of him. I don't think I noticed how loud my sobs got until my mom came in and steered me out without much trouble. I sank onto the floor as a nurse hurried by with a tray of food. Not my father's food though.

I don't remember much past that day. The whole wake and funeral is still blur. I couldn't stand the priest who shook my hand. He talked of my father's time and of God's will. I wanted nothing to do with it.

I'm still not over my father's death and probably will never be. I don't go to church because I think it is a waste. I prayed and prayed and my father got worse and worse. What sort of a God would take away a girl's right to have her father walk her down the aisle? I don't disregard other people's belief in a religion or in a God; however, the events in my life had led me to a place where maybe religion isn't the best thing to believe in. Hope is something to believe in, and so is love. Religion based solely in myth is not. Without the help of anyone's God I have made it through my father's death and I am doing well in college. I hope to continue with college and be successful without the help of a church.

Losing Faith

By: Megan Aurelia

Sterile is the only word I can think of to describe the smell of the hospital. It didn't even smell like cleaning products; it was simply sterile. The room always had the blinds drawn and the sound of the television was just a murmur when he was expecting company. The room was cold with linoleum floors that made squeaking footsteps echo in the small space. He was tiny in the twin size hospital bed, and his bald head eased up with a great deal of effort.

This was the last day I saw my father alive. My father was forty-three when he passed away and my life changed so drastically. I was a junior in high school, and the only thing I should have had to worry about was prom; however, the better part of the year was spent in hospital rooms and running to vending machines for Cheez-Its and Pepsi. Dinner happened only on the days he had chemotherapy.

That Monday morning was just another morning, just another day of wearing black t-shirts and dark colored jeans, and just another day of waiting for the last bell to ring at school and waiting for my mom to pick me up and drive to the hospital to see my father. This was no ordinary day; this day was the day I got pulled out of class by a teacher with a somber expression. This was the day I was going to have to say goodbye to my father.

The sky was bright blue with just one little, lonely cloud. The drive took practically forever as I sat in the back seat, knowing every road we took. As the car stopped at the one stop light on the side streets, my mom turned to look at my brother and me. I didn't hear anything that was said; I didn't want to. My throat constricted and my cheeks felt wet, but I don't remember when I started to cry.

When we finally got to the hospital, the pity in the nurses' eyes was unbearable, so I ducked my head down and walked too fast for even myself. By the time we got to the room, the door was shut and my grandfather was outside. I knocked on the door three times, and my grandma came out and blew her nose, but never looked at me. I squeezed past her into the bright room, and looked out the window. Nothing looked right. The TV was off and the curtains were open. I went to the window and shut the curtains a little to keep the sun out of

thousands of hours spent in the saddle rehearsing this movement pay off. Just as we lift off, I relax my leg muscles. I maintain tall posture but bend forward, reaching my hands out in front of me, allowing my horse freedom to gauge the width and the height of the obstacle. I move my attention to the landing stride; time is of the essence.

Equestrian sport is defined by the ability of a combination of horse and rider to negotiate a specific course of obstacles as efficiently as possible. In world class competitions, a timed first jump off format is widely used, meaning that the combination with the fastest time and no penalties wins.

Aware that my balance upon landing will influence the accuracy of my turn and consequently the speed of my round, I prepare by pushing my feet in front of my body weight. I need to communicate our common goal, our route, before her back legs come out of the air. My eyes move through the turn. She knows right where I am, and with indescribable enthusiasm, she locks her vision onto jump number two. I absorb the landing in the joints of my ankles, knees, and hips, and make a soft clucking noise with my mouth, signaling to her to continue with the same resolve.

Beads of sweat form on my brow and run into my eyes. I blink quickly, repeatedly, ignoring the sting; I focus on the final obstacle. My mare is also feeling the heat and her body starts to fatigue; her heart beats throb into the lower part of my left calf. Drawing on each other's dwindling energy, we finish the course in good time; a flood of endorphins carry us out of the arena.

Every competition, irrespective of success or failure, I am continually reminded of my unfaltering love for horses. I marvel at their dream-like strength and beauty, and embrace their childish behaviors and quirky idiosyncrasies. I seek quiet moments in the barn, observing how they communicate, and I study the intricacies of each horse's character. Observations of horses in the wild indicate their capacity for sophisticated communication within the herd. Likewise, animals that are raised in barns for the purpose of sport develop a distinctive form of dialogue with their human counterparts. Horses respond to body language, even when the handler is unaware of the message being communicated. One's true intent is exposed and understood by the horse. I have been on the receiving end of friendships with horses that have enabled me successes in the show ring and in life. The magnitude of the bond created allows me to trust and believe in friendship even when the odds are stacked against me.

THREADS WRITING AWARDS WINNER

A Loss of Inhibitions

By: Tara Knable

It is impossible to forget, but I would not want to. My anger at both of my parents was, looking back, somewhat unfair.

In my mind, a normal upbringing is a myth. Everybody's family is dysfunctional, whether the person admits it or not, so I had as normal a childhood as anyone. I have three brothers, one older and two younger. My father worked all day while my mother cooked, cleaned, and drove my brothers and me around. It seems traditional enough, but it wasn't. My mom has Bipolar Disorder. Her moods swing like a pendulum; she has both extremes with very little middle ground. She would periodically end up in the hospital. When I was young, it was only once every two years, usually around the holidays. By the time I was sixteen, she was hospitalized every few months.

There were always some tell-tale signs that she was going manic. She would start to wear the most outrageous clothing: spandex and bandanas, and always in bright colors and patterns. Sometimes, she would wear two baseball caps at once. Another sure sign was when she "reorganized" drawers at 4a.m. She'd dump a drawer out all over the living room floor and proceed to sort it into random piles, all the while blasting classic rock like Duran Duran, Fleetwood Mac, and Jethro Tull.

Looking back, I feel so sorry for my dad. He worked so hard to support the six of us, and my mom would blow it in a few weeks. He could never get ahead. When she was "happy" she spent money like it grew on trees. She once spent a couple hundred on an antique piano bench. We don't have a piano, nor does anyone in the family play. I would try to get her to take me shopping. Then at least I was getting sneakers out of it, and all the money wasn't going to waste. Besides, I felt I deserved it. When she was in the hospital, all of her responsibilities fell on me. I did the dishes and the laundry to help my dad out. I couldn't hang out with friends after school because I had to look after my younger brothers.

So, can we survive such a devastating loss? A big fat yes! It's been seven months since my first English Composition class and my oldest son is in his second semester at Hudson Valley Community College enrolled in the Liberal Arts Honor's Associate Degree program, carrying a 4.0 average. My middle boy, Josef, is in the Honor's Program at his high school, and my youngest William is getting A's in his new school. And me? Well, I am also in my second semester at Hudson Valley Community College with a 4.0 average. I will not lie to you; it's incredibly hard sometimes, but if I look at just the day, it seems possible. There is hope for us and with that comes new-found life. We are a family again loving life and what it has in store for us. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life." Proverbs 13:12.

able to go to Paris, France for a weekend. He grew greatly from that experience and came home with a strong desire to write again.

Josef, my second son, was interested in video editing. He had been helping out at church for the youth group's Production Team. He started helping with the video editing and found he enjoyed it. Accordingly, I sent him off to Technical Camp at Ryder College, New Jersey for a week long course in FX Video Editing. From this experience he is now apprenticing under our production leader at church this summer.

William, my youngest boy, attended a Red Bull Soccer training camp for a week. He also went to a real MLS Red Bull soccer game at the Giant's stadium. Hope was becoming a reality for us with a future filled with wonderful possibilities.

In the third year, I found I didn't feel the need to prove myself, but instead to grow and develop somehow. I sensed that the next five years were crucial to raising my boys; they would be going off to college and living their own lives. I wanted to show them how to live life and to persevere even through hardship. Another fact was that I needed to find work within the next four years to support my family. I wanted to have a career that I would enjoy rather than just work for a salary. I heard about the career center at Hudson Valley Community College where they would help you decide what sort of career you would like to have. I took the career test, talked to a counselor, and knew I wanted to get my teaching degree. I loved teaching my boys and also the students at The Arbor. I had taught 3rd-4th grade History and 5th-6th grade History at the Arbor for the last two years. The career counselor suggested I work at getting a teacher's assistant certificate first, and then if I need to work sooner, I could work as an assistant teacher while I pursued my teaching degree. The great news about this was that all my credits would transfer for my teaching degree. I told her I was worried about going for a degree that would take five to six years full time to complete. She said I would be fifty-four with or without a degree. It was a simple statement, but incredibly profound. Yes, I needed to do this. Yes, it will be incredibly hard, but the rewards would be worth it. My boys will see me work hard at getting my degree—a valuable lesson in life. They will watch as I grow as a person. I might not be able to show them how to be a man, but I can show them how people can overcome an atrocity in their lives and demonstrate the value of perseverance. So here I sit writing an essay for English Composition 100, my first class at Hudson Valley Community College.

Aside from all this, there's the embarrassment factor. I didn't have friends over because I never knew what she might do. Once, I walked into the house followed by a friend, and there's my mother dancing around in her underwear. I remember going to a play at Russell Sage with her. We didn't even make it to the intermission. Apparently, mom thought she could do a better job than they were because she ran onstage and made a spectacle of herself. As security dragged her off, she kept yelling that it was my fault.

She's gotten my dad fired from numerous jobs. I don't know the specifics, but I can only imagine what she may have done. The best stunt of hers made it on the news. She jumped off the bridge by Fresno's in Troy. As she was being wheeled into an ambulance, she smiled and told a reporter she "just wanted to go swimming."

It actually makes perfect sense when it comes to people diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder. When she's in a mania, she loses all of her inhibitions. She doesn't see why she can't do whatever she feels like doing. My mom wants to go swimming, so she took a dip—what's the big deal? That's her mentality.

As if all that isn't bad enough, it's awful when she gets out of the hospital. She's very depressed and she doesn't remember anything she did; therefore, in her mind, being angry at her is unreasonable. She feels like a bad mother and my dad compounds the issue by telling her she "ruined everyone's life," which certainly isn't the case. Maybe she ruined his life, but not mine. Sadly, I would rather she be depressed than manic and that sucks. She's like a zombie from all the medication. I took a 200 milligram sleeping pill of hers once and I slept for almost two days. The doctor's had her on 1200 mg a day. It's a wonder she could move.

With all this going on at home, I never wanted to be there. When I was sixteen, I started to stay out very late and not listen to the house rules. I wasn't doing drugs as much as they thought I was. I just wanted to have a little fun, and I was sick of doing all the chores. My older brother, Jason, never helped out, and I was so jealous of him. He stayed out later than me and never got in trouble. It was around this time that my parents and I really started fighting. Not one day would go by without a shouting match.

I've visited mom in the hospital numerous times. One specific time when I was twelve she told me she didn't love me and asked why I came to visit her. My dad freaked out at her. When I was a child, I would cry after visiting her. As an adult, I still get upset—not at my mom anymore, but at the whole system. They keep these patients so overmedicated that they don't even know who they are. It seems that once they check in, they have no rights and it's no longer up to them when they can leave. When they get angry because they don't want to be there, the doctors say it's just more proof that they aren't ready to check out yet. It's a Catch 22 and it breaks my heart to see my mom caught in that situation.

Jason and I moved out and got an apartment together when we were nineteen and eighteen, respectively. Not long after that, my parents moved into separate residences. My younger brothers went with my dad. It was around this time that I really began to understand my parents. Having the responsibilities of paying bills and having an apartment helped me see their situation more clearly. My father must have been under constant stress trying to pay the bills, deal with my mom, and keep our family together. The last thing he needed was more worries.

My anger dissipated very fast. I just woke up one day and felt awful for the scenes with my mom and things that I'd said. It took a while to reconcile my relationship with my dad, but it was worth it. My mom forgave me right away because that's the kind of person she is. She always told me that all she wanted since she was young was to be a mother. When she's herself, she's loving, generous, and kind. These days, if we argue, it's because she lets people walk all over her. We talk on the phone all the time and I tell her she's a wonderful mom. I call her with unnecessary baking questions, so she still feels needed. When I see her face, it just makes me smile.

I think childhood is a learning experience. Our experiences and relationships with others shape our lives. They help us build character and develop morals. If I hadn't had as unique a mom as I had, I wouldn't be the person I am today. I have a vast amount of tolerance and understanding in difficult situations. At the same time, I can be honest to a fault. My friends often confide in me, whether for advice or just a caring ear. Over the past few years, I've learned that anger at those you love only holds you back.

ity. I wanted to avoid the strong pull, the temptation on the lonely days, when I wanted to roll over and say, "No school today." Joining the co-op forced us to get up each day and made us work hard, because the boys were graded at the co-op. This gave us stability and routine.

The second year came with a strong determination to prove to myself and others that we could survive this devastating part of life. I wanted us to not only survive but also have a fulfilling and satisfying life. I signed up to help in the youth group at church. Meeting with a small group of 9th and 10th grade girls once a week was a great opportunity for me to give to others. The girls were so hungry for encouragement and advice concerning their hopes and dream. They hungered to be spurred on to be all that they could be. It was so healing for me to give out like that—to give the very thing I needed most in my life. It was rejuvenating.

The leaders of the youth group had a meeting. I was unable to attend, but they discussed serving in the community and how important it was for our students to serve not simply get. The youth pastor asked if anyone was interested in leading a group of students in serving the community. One of the leaders, a good friend of mine, shared with the other leaders that I had a passion for serving. He knew I had served in the mission field before I was married. That weekend, our youth pastor came to me and asked if I would like to head up the group; I jumped at the chance. "United Serves" was born from a group of fifteen to twenty students dedicated to serving the community. Wanting to take a mission trip for myself and the boys, I thought maybe we could take some of the teens with us. I asked our church if we could take a few students with us, and we got the heads up. In August of that year, we headed down to Staten Island with fourteen students including my boys, two young adults, and me. We served at Project Hospitality for a week. It was a great time for everyone, and my boys want to go to Africa or India next time.

Going through my old emails from Rich one day, I found one about a creative writing class at Oxford Royale Academy in Oxford, England. Rich had wanted us to send Karl when he got older. Knowing my boys desperately needed hope for the future and needed to get out from under the shadow of their dad's death, I began to pursue opportunities for them to grow. I sent Karl, our oldest son, to Oxford. He took a creative writing class and photography class there. He was also

Can We Go On?

By: Barbara Hoenzsch

"He's gone!" screamed inside my head. Jumping up from the reclining chair I had been dozing in a moment before, I looked at my sweet wonderful husband lying in the hospital bed with tubes jutting out from all parts of his body. The male nurse ran in with a flashlight, looked into my husband's eyes, and turned to me shaking his head. I screamed in my head "Yes, I already felt him leave." The emptiness was huge. I felt the void as soon as his spirit left this earth. What do I do? How can I live without Richard, the one person in this world who knew me, understood me, and loved me? He was a gift. Everyone loved Rich. How can I go on? Do I want to go on? Our boys, Karl (13), Josef (11) and William (7), I have to think of them, it's bad enough they lost their dad; they don't need to lose me too.

Our first year was a blur. Numb with grief, we went through our days simply going through the motions. Just eating at the kitchen table was extremely difficult because it had been the hub of our family life. Without Rich it was just a place of painful memories, resulting in us taking our meals in front of the television. In the living room, we couldn't bring ourselves to sit in his big fading dark green easy chair. No one said anything about this; it was just so. We found home was not the haven it once had been; we escaped by visiting friends often and eating out.

The first three months passed, and I knew we needed hope to continue. I prayed and asked God to give me direction. Sitting at the kitchen table, I sensed him telling me I had a choice. I could choose to be married to a dead man, or I could choose to be a mom with three precious boys. The first would kill me, and the second would give me life. I chose the second. I began to see my mission in life. We needed to get through this. I alleviated the problem of not eating meals at the kitchen table and sitting in Rich's chair by moving furniture around and painting the walls a new fun khaki-green color. It worked. We began to eat meals at the table. It was our hub again. We could sit in the big reclining chair without thinking it was Rich's.

Having home-schooled my boys up till now and still desiring to do so, we joined The Arbor, a Classical Education Co-op. I knew for me to be a good teacher to my boys I needed some sort of accountabil-

Summing Up Zinsser's "Simplicity"

By: Amanda Barnett

When reading Zinsser's "Simplicity," it is obvious that the main theme of his essay is simplification, but there is also an undertone about a writer finding his or her own voice. It is important for a writer to write from the heart and use a style that is natural and comfortable. Zinsser describes the importance of writing in a way that does not use circular constructions, pompous frills and meaningless jargon.

We often write in a way that we think meets the expectations of others. For example, it is easy to get caught up in using those pompous frills when trying to impress a teacher or employer. Writers sometime feel that the more we say or put into words can make us sound more important. When you write in your own voice, it is natural and genuine. Your ideas will flow and not get jumbled up with complications and fillers.

I believe that both teachers and employers can appreciate when a writer uses his or her own voice when composing their work. When a writer uses his or her own voice, it shows their character and style to teachers, employers and peers alike. Reading work from a writer that uses his or her own voice is simple and uncomplicated. The work doesn't read like it is manufactured or constructed.

Many writers use their own voice as the motive for writing in the first place. Writing gives some the openness and clearance to truly be themselves. Often in society people feel that they have to fit in, whether it's in school, the workplace, or even within their own family. We are sometimes forced to conform and be what we think others expect of us. Writing can give us an escape from conformity. Writing inspires creativity and the ability to truly speak in our own voice, even if it isn't out loud. We do not need to inflate and thereby sound important as Zinsser points out that we often do.

Robert Frost Picture Poem

By: Eden Brand

The obfuscated sky meshes indistinguishably into the bleached nival horizon.

A single secluded navigator wades through the flood of crystalline flake.

His snowshoes are his paraclete, keeping him afloat on his wearying venture.

No destination in sight. No incentive to be seen.

The brutal wind lashes out, cutting into his accessible flesh.

His ambition emaciates with every strenuous footfall.

He fears he cannot endure any further.

His willpower breaks and it is apparent that the end is near.

No.

He looks to the trees for encouragement.

Their gray, undernourished bodies and naked arms extended in fight.

Stabbing at the sky, taunting Mother Nature.

Asking if she has become too lax, too lenient.

"Is this all that you've got?" they cry.

The traveler gathers inspiration from their voices.

He advances onward, forcing his will and body to work conjointly.

For realization has come, and he feels that Spring is just over the horizon.

memories are perfume for the eyes

By: Edward Rinaldi

noses

if given

the chance

to break free

from our bodies

would

ruling the world

from memory

so strong

that the eyes

give themselves

completely

to the brain

to make up

what they

could never see

to smell



Morning Shower
By: Sarah Burger

Saying No to Happiness: A Character Analysis of "Eveline" By: Lindsey Hathaway

Given a choice between the possibility of a cheerful future, and a current burdensome existence, most would choose the cheerful future. However, in the story "Eveline" by James Joyce our protagonist chooses the dreary burdensome existence of life at home with an alcoholic father. The question to be answered is Why?

For our protagonist, "Eveline," life consists of responsibility and fear. A promise made to her mother has left her with the responsibility of managing the house and taking care of her alcoholic father. She has two young children in her care. Her disliked job provides the majority of the income for the household, and still the money is not enough. Joyce characterizes Eveline's father as violent and a heavy drinker. Joyce says, "When they were growing up he had never gone for her like he used to go for Harry and Ernest, because she was a girl but latterly [her father] had begun to threaten her and say what he would do to her only for her dead mothers sake." At another point in the paragraph, our omniscient 3rd person narrator says, "Even now, though [Eveline] was over nineteen, she sometimes felt herself in danger of her father's violence. She knew it was that that had given her the palpitations." The sense of fear Eveline felt was so intense that she often suffered from panic attacks.

Frank, a sailor, is characterized as kind, manly, openhearted (Joyce). Having spent money on her and shown her the affection and love that she has never seen at home, Frank proposes an irresistible offer for Eveline to come to Buenos Aires and live with him. Nevertheless, the decline of this offer is communicated in a very telling scene. [Frank] rushed beyond the barrier and called to her to follow. He was shouted at to go on, but he still called to her. She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition. Joyce compares Eveline to a helpless animal. After hours of being torn between two paths, Eveline is helpless to make the choice that leads to a better life.

Perhaps the sense of co-dependency in Eveline's relationship with her father is one reason why she is incapable of choosing happiness. She needs to feel that the most involved person in her life is in dire need of her because that is the way it has always been with her father. Frank would not be dependent upon Eveline as her father is. Eveline, like a helpless animal, is unable to cope with the loss of mutual need (Joyce).

Eveline is also overwhelmed with the expression of love that Frank has shown her. All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. [Frank] was drawing her into them: he would drown her (Joyce). A lifetime void of the expression of love through affection or gifts has left Eveline confused and insecure. She doesn't know how to handle it and feels as though the love emanating from Frank is drowning her in emotion.

Remembering her mother's last words and their meaning, the end of pleasure is pain, Eveline is haunted by a deeper fear of the unknown. If she stays at home, she knows what to expect. If she travels to Buenos Aires, the security of home and the stability of her daily routines will be gone. Eveline questions if it will all end in further pain. Joyce elaborates on this idea in the fourth paragraph of Eveline.

Lastly, Eveline is not sure that she deserves a better life. After a flashback to her mother's last moments, we learn she stood up in a sudden impulse of terror. Escape! She must escape! Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love, too. But she wanted to live. Why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness (Joyce). Eveline asks these questions, and moments later painfully, but helplessly, declines Frank's invitation. The question that Eveline seems to really ask is, do I really deserve anything better? Apparently she reaches the conclusion that she does not deserve happiness.

The unfortunate cycle of hurt in which Eveline seems immersed is left heavy on the reader's conscience. Eveline's acceptance of a life of unhappiness is one that cannot fully and completely be resolved. However, it can be seen how a sense of co-dependency, fear, and lack of self-worth could influence Eveline's decision.

A Villanelle about Bacteria

By: Stephanie Ross

Bacteria surround us everywhere
Helpful to us in more ways we know
Planet earth is a place we happily share

Microbes live in soil, dirt, and air
More our friend than our evil foe
Bacteria surround us everywhere

They live on our teeth, tongue, skin and hair
Running with us when we are on the go
Planet earth is a place we happily share

Some ferment, digest, and put oxygen into our air
They get the least credit of anyone I know
Bacteria surround us everywhere

They do their jobs without a single care
Coccus, bacillus, spirillum, spirochete, and vibrio
Planet earth is a place we happily share

Call them germs if you may dare
Those sanitizers only make the good ones go
Bacteria surround us everywhere
Planet earth is a place we happily share

my entire past with females, you'd be proud. I've learned that relationships are two way streets and that I don't have to do everything to maintain them. The last and best thing that came from all the pain of my past relationships is that I am just fine today being by myself; that coming from someone who has been in a relationship since he was fifteen.

Last, but not least, was all the growth that was caused by me hitting my bottom. I was an active drug addict from the age of sixteen until twenty-three. At my bottom, I had lost everything: friends, family, material possessions, spirituality, and my will to live. I was homeless sleeping in random peoples' cars and random buildings to stay warm. Seven years of constant pain can cause a lot of growth. Since I ended the pain and started the growth, I have gained so much. My spirituality is the highest it has ever been. By spirituality, I mean the type of spirit I am in. I have learned that family is the most important thing. When things were at their worst, only my family was there to help mend the pieces. I am no longer afraid to try all these new things, and I'm finally ready to grow up.

As for the material possessions, I got most of them back as well; however, they don't define my happiness. I used to pride myself on all my material possessions thinking they could make me happy. I'm happier today than I was when I had twice as many material possessions as I do now. Meaning, all the pain has caused me to see that happiness is a state of mind, not something you can buy.

As for the friends that I've lost, they weren't around when things got their worst, and if they were, it was only because I had something to offer. I used to think I knew what friendship was, but once again, I was wrong. The friends I have now show me the true meaning of friendship. A friend is with you regardless of what you bring to the table, and when you need help, they are there with open arms.

Those are just a few examples of the way pain has caused me to grow as a person. Pain has been not only a great motivator in my life, but it has been the back bone of my growth as a human being. I believe that these growing pains are what made me the beautiful budding flower that I am today.

What Does It Mean to Be Black?

By: M-shamean Walley

"What does it mean to be black?" I asked my mother. She replied, "Beautiful." However, this is not the only meaning of black. They say ivory is one of the most treasures stone of all time. It's funny how some people relate their skin complexion to it. Black means strong, a struggle, a sense of ignorance, and forty acres and a mule. These are the things I think of when this word comes to mind. I know people have their own conception of what the color means to them. However, the dictionary defines black as, "color of coal is black; strictly the absence of all colors illumination." The word Negro in Spanish means black. The meaning of black can also mean entirely or relatively dark. Last but not least, it can also mean "dismal, wicked, evil and calamitous." Not many of these words are positive; others include "absence, a black day; or dishonor." The list of negative connotations goes on and on and on. My teacher, Rachel Bourn, told me that some words carry emotion with them. So what nature of emotion do you imagine would be felt by someone of the color described in these terms?

"If you tell a man he a dog so many times, it's only a matter of time before he start to portray a dog" is what my grandmother always told me. So I figure this notion is what we, as black people, were regarded as for so long. Somewhere down the line, we started to believe all the negative words that defined the word black. That was passed down from generation to generation. That has evolved into an illusion of its own sort of a front for culture that I am acquainted with today.

Till this day, there are still a lot of controversial issues over racism that thus far have not been handled; we as people must triumph over these issues together, someday. However, in my eyes, we are nowhere in the vicinity of that day. In addition to this, we are all supposed to be equal in God's eyes and in each other's eyes also. The pathetic actuality of the matter is it's not factual. Now on no account have I ever looked at myself as someone who cares regarding the next person's skin shade. My best friend that I knew for years, I consider as my brother. He is white and that being said, he gets treated better than I. For instance, I was driving one time and got pulled over for no authentic motive only going 35 in a 30 speed zone. The officer told me straight out and bluntly, "I would

have gave your black ass a ticket, but you're with somebody that's going somewhere with his life." When asked what that signifies, he told me, "It means you're lucky nigger." The sad part about it is that I'm used to getting hassled by the long arm of the law. Is it because I'm black? That just so happens to fit the description of every major drug dealer. Is this what it means to be "black"?

There is a secret sense of pride in being black, "Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud." Well, I'm not positive if it's a secret any longer. My aunts would tell me to "show off my skin color as if it was the Purple Heart award. 'Cause that precisely what your ancestor did. They went to war for us, so you by no means should be afraid to let it be acknowledged on every occasion you can." Is this what it means to be "black"?

We as African Americans have endured wars, segregation, boycotts, bombing and the KKK. Even through all of this, we still persist to segregate ourselves from each other: from the well off, hard working person to the underprivileged ones; if somebody is successful or better off than another. There is a dilemma with it, as if they made a mistake somewhere in the life. People make remarks like "Oh dat nigga wants to be a white." You hear this kind of pessimistic language from everybody such as comedian, actors, to people in your neighborhood barbershop.

To me, there has always been a secret sense of ignorance in being an African American. We all appear to bear it in certain behaviors, one or another. As if we are owed something in the world. As if our skin color should hold some type of superpower unidentified to man. Like we require a handout for something that we didn't hard work for. Not to articulate that this applies to every African American person in the world. However, it applies to some people in my environment, from what I was taught and from what I notice in other people as I grow-up. Is this what it means to be "black"?

I guess if you took Webster's definition of black and applied "his" def. to characteristics, all black people would be hoodlums, hoes, trifling dirty lazy sick morbid people destined for failure from birth. You know, the media portrays "us" to be that way too, as though the only thing all black people know how to do is steal, cheat, and make illegitimate bastard children. Is this what it means to be "black"?

brought me over because he wanted to see me. We sat in his room and talked for what seemed like minutes, but in actuality it was about four hours. Jason told me he was going to die, and he never wanted me to forget him. He told me I was the best cousin anyone could have asked for, and that he appreciated me visiting him every weekend. Jason died a few days later in his sleep, and with his death came more growth.

The growth I would experience at the young age of eleven is with me still to this day. I learned how to cope with loss, and that friendship never dies. Losing my best friend was one of the most painful things I have ever gone through, but all the things I learned then have helped me multiple times over. Since losing Jason I have lost two other best friends, my grandfather, and my friend Jesse. I don't want to say that death is something I'm used to, but it's something I respect. I live my life like every breath could be my last, and so far, it's led to a beautiful life with few regrets. These are all things I learned from the pain of loss.

The next life area from which I have experienced growth through pain is in relationships. I've been in three relationships that have been over a year long, the longest being five and a half years long; we were actually engaged. Her name was Kim, and the relationship was far from healthy. Our relationship went well for the first three years, but the last two and a half were torture. With every relationship there was a point that I knew things weren't going to work out, but stayed anyway. After I stayed the relationship got worse and worse, while I tried to make things better. I remember, on our four year anniversary I showed up to the party our friends threw for us ten minutes late. I was greeted outside by shot glasses being thrown at me. I dodged one, dodged the second. Then BAM! I couldn't dodge the punch. Kim was a fighter, and she spun me around and I fell back onto my car. When I explained where I had been, she apologized and gave me a few kisses. Now, you would think after an event like that I would have had enough. Instead, I stayed around for another year and a half of torture.

Due to all these trials and tribulations, I've grown in aspects of my life. Since being with her, if I get a hint that it won't work, I leave. That hint is me knowing that this relationship isn't going to go anywhere. Instead of staying around for another year or two to let things totally get out of control, I end it well before the major drama happens. I've also learned what a healthy relationship is, of which, if I told you

Pain Is Like a Flower

By: Tyler Haberkern

One thing in my life that has remained a constant is the saying pain causes growth. These growing pains all made me who I am today. It seems more and more that every time something causes me pain in an area of my life I grow in that area. Robert Creely wrote in one of his poems entitled "The Flower," "Pain is like a flower." Meaning, that as a flower grows it experiences pain, but eventually, it buds into a beautiful flower.

The first time in my life that pain has ever helped me to grow was when I was very young. My cousin and I were always best friends growing up. When he was around the age of twelve he was diagnosed with cancer. I remember the long grueling drives to Boston to go see him at the hospital. When you're ten years old everything has a sense of amazement. Boston was the first city I ever saw; the tall buildings and busy streets all fascinated me. I remember being so happy when I saw Jason and made sure to show him all the love I could. I remember sitting next to him on his hospital bed reading Calvin and Hobbes, our favorite comic strip. The grown-ups cried while Jason and I laughed and talked. After a few visits I wasn't allowed to go anymore. I was depressed and missed my best friend. My mother told me the reason I wasn't allowed to go anymore was because Jason was sick. She didn't want me to see him like that, but all I wanted was to just be able to see him. After about a year, Jason returned home, and we spent almost every day together. His cancer had gone into remission. We finally got to play baseball together, and do all the things we used to do. I was so excited to have my best friend back. A few months after Jason got home he was diagnosed with Leukemia and quickly went back to Boston. Once again, I was not allowed to go see him.

This is when all the pain of not being able to see my cousin caused me to grow in one way. If my mother wouldn't bring me to see my cousin, my father would. I learned at the tender age of eleven that where there is a will there is a way. I begged and pleaded with my father to take the trip to Boston, and without much hesitation, we were off. My father and I made that trip every weekend until Jason eventually returned home. Shortly after Jason returned home, my mother

First Time Voter Heading to the Polls

By: Lynda Jarvis

Lately, the public has been saturated with so many opinions and news stories about this year's candidates for the presidential election that it may seem difficult for first-time voters to sort out the truth from fiction. Many young people have registered as a result of pressure from various voter registration drives, but some didn't need prodding. On this day, November 4, Election Day, every single person who walks into that booth- first-generation American, the lawyer, the subway employee, black, white, Asian, ivy-league educated, junior-high dropout, gay-straight, disabled, skinny, fat, male, female - is granted equal say in our shared destiny. Vote, because we were raised on a lot of rhetoric about the American dream, but rarely had a chance to participate in it directly.

Being first-time voters will hopefully encourage those registered to become more informed citizens. This new right should be used as an excuse to become more involved with politics. It is paramount that the typically non-voting young people change their ways and submit those ballots so that our generation's views are not underrepresented.

Presidential elections only happen every four years, so to miss out on participating seems ridiculous and somewhat lazy. This particular election is unlike any other; it's making history with either political party that wins. We will see for the first time in the United States either an African-American president or a female vice-president. The underlying respect for those who vote regardless of which party you vote for is important. Your voice has the right to be heard.

We will vote because we know that while the president cannot save us from ourselves, he or she can be a powerful symbol of the best within us. American citizens make American what it is each and every day. The choices we make about what to consume, how to treat one another, and where and with whom we spend our precious time and energy, that is what adds up to the sum of our country. The president represents our best intentions. He or she stands before the world as a figurehead. His or her voice is the singular chorus of our collective notion of the country's future.

We will vote because we want to be a part of history. We want to sit down with our children and grandchildren as they hit the history books and tell them colorful stories about the election of 2008. Inspired by all of its unprecedented twists and turns, we will invoke the feeling in the air as we strolled to our polling place and got a “high five” as a first-time voter.

We will vote because we dreamed that we would someday “make a difference” in the world, and that our rent was hard to afford and our cigar-smoking uncles kept asking us what we are going to do with our lives.

We will vote because, though we are sometimes too cool for our own good, we’re also young and naive enough to hope. As Barak Obama himself has told us, “In the unlikely story that is America; there has never been anything false about hope.” Hope hard America, and write the true story of an American that stars you as the vote-casting, wide-eyed protagonist. You are almost certainly promised there’s a happy ending.

outside. Two branches of the Mohawk River joined us, as well as two majestic trees that formed a natural arch overhead.

Eleven months later Cella and I became husband and wife in our sweltering third floor apartment. Unknown to anyone at the *Big* wedding, Cella and I never signed a license, continuing to live in sin. Due to a number of legal close calls, we decided to make our relationship legal in the eyes of the courts. Our private service was one year and a day from our formal service of a year before. We had no air conditioning, and to say our service was hurried is an understatement. As with the other weddings, this had its own charm as well.

Due to 9-11, our next trip to Italy and our “Fourth Wedding” was delayed until 2003. That year I invited my parents to join us so that they could see Contignano. My father is 40 years older than I am, and I am a “JFK Baby”; you do the math. Anyway, we purchased our wedding rings in Siena. On our last day in Italy, Cella and I went to the Bocca della Verita Piazza, the Mouth of Truth Square. This square sits along the Tiber River, just down stream from Tiberina Island. There we sat alone, before the oldest building in Rome, the Temple of Vesta. We then exchanged vows. The only sound besides the unending Roman traffic was the gentle gush from the 1715 fountain to an ex-prostitute.

Since that warm spring night in Rome, Cella and I have continued to keep in contact with my Italian cousins. Continuing the circle of life, my cousins Marta Romagnoli, Fabio Benenati and his girlfriend are coming to visit us this coming April. Maybe Fabio will have his special spring night here in the States, but I doubt that he’ll be crazy enough to have four weddings.

stopped in front of an apartment house where an older woman was sweeping. She turned around and there was no doubt in my mind that I was home. I had promised myself that I would not cry, that I would remain stoic. As the Romagnoli's embraced for the first time since 1911, I wept for joy, and sorrow for my Nicolino.

The rest of the day was spent meeting the rest of the cousins that were not at work, as it was a Friday. Sadly we had to leave after a few short hours, as our flight to the States departed the next morning. By the time we arrived at the Hotel Marcella in Rome, Cella was feeling very sick. My original plan was to take her to the Trevi Fountain for our last evening in Italy. In the back of her head, Cella knew something was up, as she loves the Trevi, and I tolerate it for her benefit. We had a light dinner, and turned in to bed. In the darkness I said "I thought of a thousand ways to ask you this..." Cella then thought to herself "You son of a bitch, I told you I won't get married again!"

But before she could say what she was thinking, I said, "Will you marry me?" And without hesitation she replied, "Yes!"

Next, came what we call our Four Weddings: the Vermont wedding, the Cohoes Big Wedding, the Cohoes Little Wedding, and Italy. Each ceremony has its own special charm that we call our own.

The Vermont wedding was ironically held in New Hampshire. My parents had graciously arranged for a restaurant banquet room. Early in the morning of August 10th, 2001, a few brave souls piled into cars to drive from Cohoes, NY, to Charlestown, NH. Along the way we drove through the remains of a hurricane. The main reason we held the rehearsal wedding in *Vermont* was for my relatives that were too ill to travel to the Empire State for our main ceremony. It was a precious time, the last time I saw my best friend Archie alive. He was my uncle, my mother's brother, the black sheep of the family. We hugged for the first time, ironically for the last too. This wedding was his. Almost everyone he cared for was in attendance, his final goodbye, with none of us really knowing its finality. The next time I saw him was on September 11th, after the local police chief broke down his door, and grabbed me before I could fully see his corpse. The tears I weep are for my loss and for the preciousness of our last meeting.

Our formal wedding was held at a local banquet hall. It was a glorious day, with the sun shining, allowing us to hold the ceremony

Dreaming

By: Christopher Gregory

Oceans of my dreams.
Distant and disconnected.
Within them I swim.

Another Storm: A Sestina

By: Samaria Corrales

Hail hit the house during last night's storm,
clanging like cymbals in experimental music.
Hail fell from up high,
leaving dents so big my fists could fit!
Hail woke up the baby,
and now, overtired, he refuses his food.

Hours spent cooking and pureeing his food,
he tosses aside my efforts like a leaf in the storm.
Exhausted, trying to feed my baby,
with a sigh of exasperation I seek refuge in music.
Searching the stations for a song to fit,
but no luck today, my tension remains high.

Finally a good song so I crank the volume up high!
My fingers tap the counter and I set down the food.
Shutting my eyes, I let the song take me to a place fit
snuggly in my memory, next to the inspiration-storm
compartment, also triggered by music,
back to before I had my baby.

Back when He called me "baby",
afternoons we laid around getting high,
when all that mattered was the music,
and I was so impressed by His appetite for vegetarian food.
Before I ever heard of the ominous silence of a storm
that always preceded His berating me in a fit.

"I bet there's enough room in your tummy to fit
a big bite!" but no, stubborn like his daddy, my baby
clenches his gums, and I can see the storm
welling in his little eyes, a high-
pitched scream forming in his throat against his bane, this food.
A sound I can't drown out with music.

came to the States in 1911 and lost contact with our family due to the Red Scare of the 1950's. Tragically, *Little Nick* lost his eyesight to macular degeneration, before passing to the other side a short time later. And thus I lost my only contact to my Italian heritage at the ripe old age of eight months.

In February 2001, Cella and I set off for Siena. The only lead we had were a set of postcards sent by my Great Aunt Brunetta to my Grandpa Romano. The caretaker of these cards supplied us with a set of poor quality black and white photocopies to assist us on our quest. We also took my treasured photograph of Grandpa Romano holding me, the last time he got out of bed before he died.

Cella and I had searched the Internet to see if there were any leads, and the closest was a Roman gate outside the city of Siena. Shortly before our trip a friend at work suggested I look at the Rick Steves travel site. Rick Steves recommended a Sieneise travel guide, Roberto Bechi. Before leaving for Italy we set up a reservation with Roberto for a tour of the countryside surrounding Siena.

Upon meeting Roberto, he asked what my grandfather's vocation was. I told him that Grandpa was a farmer. Roberto replied that it was doubtful that Nicolino had come from the city of Siena. Halfway through our tour of the Clay Hills surrounding the city of Siena, Roberto pulled by the side of the road and asked to look at the pictures we had brought with us. On the back of one card was the word *Contignano*, he recognized the name as a small village south of Siena. Roberto then took one look at the photograph of Grandpa holding me and said "If I have to search until I die, I will find your family." During the rest of the tour Roberto kept asking me when I was going to make my Cella an honest woman. Roberto did not know what my plans were, as I died a thousand deaths of embarrassment.

That evening, we received an excited phone call from Roberto. He had found my family. Quite by accident he contacted the matriarch of the village, my cousin Irma Romagnoli Benenati. Roberto started by saying, "Pardon me, I gentleman from Vermont..." but that is as far as he got. She was screaming into the phone, "Nicolino, you found our Nicolino!" After she calming down she politely demanded that Roberto bring us to meet the family.

The following morning Roberto picked us up at the hotel. During the journey I kept telling myself that it could not be possibly true that we had found my cousins. After arriving in Contignano, we

Asking Cella to Marry Me!

By: Romey J. Romano

A fairly mundane title, but I cannot escape its simplicity. Before I delve into the story that follows, a little Italian pronunciation class is in order. Cella's full name is Marcella. In Italian it is pronounced "Marchella" or "Chella." While it sounds strange now, our four weddings that followed my asking Cella to marry me are as important as the days that led to that spring night in Roma, Italia. It all started with my carefully watching her, and not in a stalker kind of way.

I first saw Cella in the old Myth and Magick store on River Street. She was having a serious talk with my friend Christine. Cella wore a gold colored blazer, had a sweet smile and sparkling gray eyes. After she left the store I asked Christine, "Who is that woman?" Christine's response was, "Her name is Marcella, she is going through a divorce, and you need to give her some space." Following Christine's advice, I continued to play the field, while being sure to chat up Cella whenever we met. With each meeting our conversations grew. For the Halloween party of 1998 I went dressed as Jesus of Nazareth. I did not realize that the cute girl in the black mask with feathers was my future wife, Cella, smiling at my antics.

After a chance meeting at a dinner dance, Cella gave me her phone number. Much to her surprise, and mine, I called and set a *safe* luncheon date at Professor Java's. I brought postcards I had purchased during my trip to Portugal, and Cella brought photos she took while on an archeological dig in Pompeii, Italy. We had a pleasant time, bid adieu and went our separate ways. Little knowing what joy awaited us.

Over the next two years our relationship progressed rapidly. From a formal dinner date at Allegro's, to informal breakfast in bed, my apartment soon become a \$500 a month storage unit. In 2000 we took a trip to Rome, Italy. For me this trip was like going home to Vermont. Before arriving back in Cohoes at our small third floor apartment, I knew that I wanted to marry Cella.

Over the next year we made arrangements to travel to Italy, once again, this time to the heart of Tuscany, Siena. This was the home of my Grandpa Romano, Nicolino Romagnoli (Roman-oh-lee). He

Ascending to desperation, I begin to dance to the music.
Dancing used to be all I had to do to stay fit,
maybe it will work its magic on the food
and make it enticing to my baby.
I raise a spoonful up high,
and plunge it down into the eye of the storm.
My shirt is splattered with food, and my wailing baby
defeats the music, escalating into a full-blown fit.
How long will my patience stay high, as I wait out the storm?

I Wasn't Chris

By: Christopher Hotopp

My first daughter was such a delight in my life and altered me in a way that very few could. Being only 19 when she was born would have been one thing had I known of her existence. Unfortunately, my time with her wouldn't start for another 5 years. My life that I had at that point was an empty one filled with alcohol and heavy drug abuse. I held a job that was nothing more than routine and a marriage that was destined to fail. I was truly at a low point in my existence and found nothing to really matter. Time was as meaningless. Nothing or no one mattered, not even me. As soon as she came into my life it seemed she was being taken away. The day I met her at the airport, as she moved away for good, was one that I will never forget.

I met her at the airport and sat hugging her as much as I could until the plane departed. She was a beautiful girl of almost 7 with long flowing brown hair and blue eyes that sparkled like sapphires in bright light. Her nose would crinkle up when I made her giggle and dimples would appear that sunk in so deeply. It's hard to believe I have not even known her for 2 years. As we sat there I thought back to the time when I took her out shopping and watched her get all excited about getting something. Her eyes doubled in size that day as she stood on tippy-toes to see everything on the shelves high above her. Her little arms reached for the ultimate item. I then transgressed, in my mind, to going to the park one warm and sunny afternoon. I lay on the grass as she stood next to me with her kite reaching for the sun. With her eyes shielded by sunglasses and her arms swaying back and forth as she looked down, she called me by my first name and said she loved me even though she was my daughter and I was not her father. She had a step-dad and he had filled that role much longer than I. It was time so we walked to the terminal, and I got down on my knees so I could look at my precious daughters face. I told her I would see her soon and gave her a huge hug. She looked at me with those big doe eyes, wrapped her little arms around my body and gave me a soft warm kiss on the cheek and said, "I love you daddy." It was the saddest yet most joyful of any memories. It was the first time I wasn't Chris.

I kept putting off my travels to Washington to visit, and then, I got a call one day from my daughter's step-dad. He was sobbing ever so much and tried so hard to regain control as he pulled himself togeth-



Still Life 2
By: Hanti Liu

er to let me know my ex and my daughter had died in a car accident. I dropped the phone and wanted to die. How could I be such a small part of her life? How could I have let other things come between our relationship and our relatively short amount of time? More than ever, though, I wondered how I could keep putting off something as important as seeing her and not being what I should have from day one, her father.

Focus

By: Christopher Gregory

The koi of my mind;
Tiny fish calm as its air.
Rain may not disturb.

Like Father, Like Daughter

By: Beth Hazelton

"What do you want to be when you grow up?" As a child, when I was asked this question, my answers varied from a skater in the Ice Capades, to an artist, to a rock star, to a yuppie. However, one constant always remained. Even when I was not positive of *what* I wanted to be, I always knew *who* I wanted to be. After witnessing the work ethic, love of life, and love of family that my Dad possesses, I have always known that I want to be just like him.

My father always told me that it does not matter what you do, always give 110% to it, and if you can't show up on time, don't show up at all. Also true to his form, Dad never asks anyone to do anything he would not do himself. In turn, this has earned him tremendous respect from not only his peers, but the laborers that work for him. In my emulation of his work, I have created my own reputation within the workforce as an individual that will take on, and excel at, any task that is entrusted to me. My Dad and I have both carved out a niche in the corporate world, making good money based on our personality and skills, not a degree. However, now that I am pursuing my degree, though he worries about me "doing too much," he is one of my biggest supporters.

Dad has taught me to love life – you only go around once; better make it good. People say I am just like my Dad; our personalities and sense of humor are one and the same. A bit warped, but the same. From the time I was small I would watch my Dad, and wherever we would go, he would either know someone or make a friend by talking to a complete stranger. Just like Dad, I will strike up a conversation with anyone about anything. There is no such thing as a quick trip anywhere; there is always someone to say hello to, or a nice conversation to be had. I have met a lot of great people this way – why stand on pretension?

With this love of life comes a passion for singing. This does not necessarily mean good singing, mind you. In fact, Dad has been known to ingeniously make up not only his own words, but the entire melody of a song if the correct ones escape him. This is another one of Dad's traits that I inherited. Neither of us could carry a tune if you put handles on it, but we both *love* to sing. And look out if any ABBA tune

Metal Head Alys

By: Romey J. Romano

Our peculiar little cat, Alys
As Dr. Mela used to say
Opens a wary eye
As I click through my CD's
Something soft
Or heavy
Chuckling evilly
I make my choice
As Maine Coon Ralph
Runs to cover his oversized years
Alys readies herself
For the onslaught
As Nine-Inch-Nails
"mr. self destruct" begins.
Alys leaps into action
Her back curved
Tale puffed out
Our furniture her personal mosh pit.

When I was still a kid, my dad took me to the pool on the other side of that dam. We fished there around dusk on some weeknights. My dad always said the fish were looking for bugs floating on the water's surface, so we were sure to catch something. He was always right back then.

The dam was about 60 feet high. Once, a long time ago, we found three ducklings smashed to bits on the rocks below. Their necks were broken and dried blood covered their young bills. I was confused by it, not understanding how they met this end. Their feathers were still soft looking, yellow and light brown. My dad told me when the ducklings swim in a line behind the mom duck some of them get caught in the tow and get sucked over the edge.

When Benny angled the boat and punched it, I assumed he was aware of the edge. After all, Benny knew the Mohawk better than anyone. Joni's green spheres concentrated on me, widening as Benny lost control of the boat. We were headed for the edge, stern end leading. There wasn't a place to jump. We were trapped on board.

Benny kicked the engine into gear, trying to beat the current. The old Chrystler didn't have the energy to save us. The whole thing happened so fast, but never seemed to end. The Edmund Fitzgerald was pulled nearer to the edge until the falls below came into sight. No one said a word as we were drawn over the edge.

comes into earshot- we sing it loud and proud. Incidentally, my humblest of apologies to all who sat around us at last year's performance of "Mamma Mia" at Proctor's Theater. Our exuberance may have been a bit over the top, but we did have fun!

Above all of these wonderful characteristics resides my father's love for his family. He is never ashamed to share how much we mean to him and will tell anyone that we (his family) are his greatest achievement in life. Dad has always done whatever he needed to do to support his family, even if it meant tirelessly working three jobs. On the flip side, he has never asked for anything from us, only that we are happy, and that the three of us (my brother, sister and I) always take care of one another.

This example portrayed for me everything that I have always wanted to be for my children. I am right here for them and will always hold them accountable to not only themselves, but to each other as a family. I would lay down my own life for my family, just as I know my father would do. My children know that they can talk with me about anything, and nothing is ever more important in my life than our family. With the example that my father set, I know that occasionally this can be challenging, but nothing in my life will ever be more significant.

I am blessed for the presence of my Dad in my life. He has always told me that I can do, and have done, absolutely anything that I set my mind to. While I know that he loves and respects me for the wife, mom and woman I have become, sometimes he still sees me as his "little girl." This is fine with me, because in the end, he is the one person in the world that will still hold me tight when I cry and not ask for anything more in return than a hug.

The D-Day

By: Hanti Liu

"Who is this person in front of me?" I wondered.

It was a cloudy day in mid-spring, 1972—three days before the D-day. My mom looked very excited but a little nervous. She just got a letter from the post man, opened it, and read the letter very carefully. For a while, I could not tell if she was smiling or crying when she read the letter. But I guess she was happy after all. She folded the letter neatly back into the envelope and went to the kitchen to cook dinner for me, my sister, and my new-born brother.

The next day, my mom accompanied me to kindergarten as usual, but what made me curious was that before I went in the classroom, she went to my teacher's office. I stood in the hall way and watched them through the glass window. They nodded to each other courteously and started talking. I was worried that I had done something wrong.

Maybe the teacher reported to my mom about the boy I pushed right next to me two days ago?

It was a quick talk. The teacher came out with my mom.

"Hanti, your mom just asked a week leave for you. Enjoy your trip and I will see you next week, O.K.?"

"Hmm..." I was confused.

My mom courteously nodded to my teacher again and we left. We didn't go straight home from school. Instead, my mom called the taxi and took me to the department store. Even though I had a big question about this trip, I soon forgot all about that. I was as happy as a bird for the department store tour. She picked new clothes and some candy for each of us. On the way home, she finally told me that we were going to Taipei International Airport to greet my father in three days.

"Ba Ba Shian Tzai Tzai Na Li?" I asked.

"Oh, Ba Ba is in South Africa now," mom said. He will stay home for few months this time.

I only had a little memories of my father. Last time I saw him was two years ago, based on what my mom told me. I only saw him in the black and white picture and it showed only a bust.

The day of D-2, my mom was busy cleaning the house and planning the meals although we only had one queen size bed and one

sleeps in the shed behind my house. That's why my dad got so strict. He doesn't want me to get hurt."

"I got something from my brother's room before I left. It's just a joint. But I thought it might be fun." Benny always had a joint to share, or a beer. Something borrowed from his brother's stash. I was pretty sure his brother would kick the shit out of him if he knew. He would probably kill Benny if he knew we took the boat.

It was too windy to spark the joint until we reached Benny's favorite fishing spot. In between an island and the shore, the river forked off into a small bay. Benny cut the engine, raising it up so we wouldn't run aground in the muddy cove. The way Benny accurately operated the boat made him become part of its equipment, almost seamlessly. He seemed to know every rock and log that lay underwater, threatening the hull. He knew where the river ran out of depth, and how to maneuver the boat through any obstacle. With Benny in control, we could all relax and enjoy the river on this late spring day.

Finally, Joni lifted her shades and threw her piercing green eyes in my direction. They smiled at me, as only certain eyes could. I was high without the joint's help; stoned, simply from peering into the green spheres. I had to look away for relief, but kept her in my sights by way of the water's reflection.

Then, we were sucking on the joint, fingers touching fingers as it passed between us. Time also passed between us, as if we had been living on the boat our whole lives. We were like the seasoned crew of the S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald only our craft would surely remain afloat. The sound of the engine igniting shook me from a dream. My eyes drifted to Joni, reminding myself that somehow fate had configured Joni in the Edmund Fitzgerald with us. With me. We set off to explore the other end of the short expanse that by now had become our very own river.

In front of the dump we stopped to watch the nasty birds circle above the landfill. Behind us was the development they built a few years back. The houses looked big and the cliff was considerably greater on that bank, but from the back windows it was a clear shot to a pile of shit and garbage. Who would want that? A sizeable, rocky island interrupted the river, diverting it towards a lock through which boats could pass to reach the Hudson River. The river, not diverted in that direction, simply fell over the edge of the dam.

reach about 20 miles per hour. Not too fast, but for our small stretch of river, it felt pretty fast.

"Where is your brother anyways?" I asked Benny as we had chugged out of the little, shallow nook. We had to mind the rocks, made invisible by the shadowy water. Benny expertly navigated our way to the river's widest part. He didn't answer my question until we were in the clear.

"Visiting my dad at the mad house. He slit his throat ear to ear," Benny said quietly. "Did it about a month ago."

Joni's eyes were hidden behind sun- shades, but I could tell she was uncomfortable. I tried to think of a way to change the subject, without being dismissive to Benny. But he just revved the gears, and we took off.

The Mohawk was scattered with rocky, little islands. Some were nature preserves, and others appeared to be personal dumping grounds. Interstate-87 crossed the river on the Twin Bridges. Route 9 crossed it at a different spot, called the Crescent City Bridge. Between these roadways, the water treatment facility, and the dump, the river was pretty polluted. It was fine for fishing, but I could never be hungry enough to eat my catch. And although many fine homes lined its banks, the Mohawk River was a trap for swimmers. The razor-edged water chestnuts weren't friendly to bare feet, as they gorged a bloody wound when stepped on. I found myself rigid, hoping Joni's feet would make it home unharmed.

Joni sat in the Fitzgerald's bow-seat. It became a carriage beneath her. Her braid was a long, skinny lump underneath the yellow tank, as if tracing her backbone. My eyes were glued to tan shoulders, to pink bra straps, to a handmade rope necklace lifting off her back under the wind's persuasion. Her sun-browned hands gripped cleats, one on either side of the bow. The silver ring she wore seemed to shoot blinding shards of light directly into my eyes, as if daring me to look away. I wouldn't, couldn't.

Abruptly, the Fitzgerald came to a stop in the shade of the Twin Bridges. Two people, a man and a woman, sat facing one another on a concrete slab, part of the bridges' foundation.

"Junkies," Benny accused. "You can find all kinds of shit under the bridges."

Joni spoke for the first time since we left shore. "My dad's half-brother is a junkie," she offered. "When he has nowhere to go, he

dining table in one room. I could not even remember if we had refrigerator or not. In case we did, it must be very small. But all these were not more important than what I had to do on the actual D-day, to call my father "Ba Ba." That was the biggest mission for my mom, to make sure I would call my father "Ba Ba," not "Bei Bei," which means elder uncle.

I used to say "Bei Bei" because my father had an elder friend, Mr. Yan around 40s. They both escaped to Taiwan away from Chinese Communist in 1949. His wife died after they settled in and he never married again. When my father went overseas, he asked Mr. Yan to look after my family.

"It's Ba Ba, not Bei Bei." My mom had to keep reminding me of the word "Ba Ba" whenever she could.

It was the day before D-day, and it was still cloudy. The air was humid and moody. We woke up early to catch the train. My mom carried my younger brother and luggage. My sister and I followed behind her. We were all tired and my mom, too. We didn't take any sightseeing after arriving in Taipei, but I remembered there were lots of neon lights and cars on the street. We soon rolled into a pretty hotel.

"Tomorrow we are going to see Ba Ba. Are you happy?" my mom whispered to my ear before I went to sleep.

"Hmm... Yep." I thought she was just trying to remind me once more before the D-day.

The day finally came. We all wore new clothes, shined our shoes and waited in the arrival area in the airport.

"Here he is." My mom refrained her over-exciting voice and looked over to me.

"Who is this person in front of me?" I wondered. And without a second thought, I called "Bei Bei" in a very well-mannered way.

My mom knocked at my head and her face flushed.

"It's O.K. It's O.K." My father laughed.

My Shadow

By: Martin Ditmars

The dark shadow follows me relentlessly; I go forward faster but it stays close. I run to the left then to the right yet it's still with me.

I look up only to see dark clouds and no light, yet shadow is still with me. How will I ever lose this shadow of darkness when there is no light?

Ever searching for the light, I spot a rope hanging in the air. I approach the rope with shadow still close behind.

Should I grasp the rope and try to climb away? Should I give in and accept that shadow will be with me forever?

Escape is my only thought, my only way out. I grasp the rope with no end in sight and start to climb, higher and higher I go.

Almost too tired to go farther I look up and see a break in the clouds with a light beyond.

Out of the light a hand reaches down to help me up and end my long journey with the dark shadow.

I look down and see the dark shadow has finally been left behind.

I'm at peace in the light, all thanks to that one helping hand that lifted me up.

The Edge

By: Meegan Taddonio

I was tracing my hand in permanent marker on the cover of my math book, when I heard an excited rustling in the trees next to my dad's house. Before I could wonder what woodland creature crouched behind me, Benny Jackson appeared.

"Dude!" he shouted. "I got my brother's boat! Let's go."

I hesitated, though I knew not why. Benny was always getting his ass in trouble, and ever since his dad was taken away, it was always with his big brother. I didn't care though. My parents were never around. By the time they found out what their only kid was up to, at least a week had passed.

"Dude. Now!" he urged.

The path to the Mohawk River was next to Benny's house, which was next door to the Weller's. Joni Weller was perched on her deck wearing a yellow tank top. She looked beautifully bored, and I wanted her. Benny could sense this, I think. He asked, in between breathes, if she wanted to join us on an adventure.

I didn't speak; couldn't speak. I had always loved Joni, ever since the days of catching fire-flies and playing flashlight tag. But at fifteen, those after-dark games usually turned into making out. Except Joni's harsh parents never let her out after dark anymore.

I was surprised and nervous when she accepted Benny's offer, making sure we understood that she had to be home by four. If not, it would be our fault that she was grounded all summer long. When she said this, she was looking at me, not at Benny. I was filled with the undeniable responsibility to get her home on time.

Benny's brother's boat was called the Edmund Fitzgerald. He named it after the freighter that sunk in Lake Superior back in the 70's. He liked to tell the story of the crew who met their watery grave, and the families who chose to leave the ship where it rested. This could be a particularly unnerving story to hear as Benny's brother shoved off from shore with one foot. I would do anything to keep Benny from repeating the story to Joni. But by then, we were already scrambling down the narrow riverbank.

The Edmund Fitzgerald was a sixteen-foot Starcraft. Benny's brother had replaced the oars of our childhood with a 35-horsepower Chrysler motor. With the heaviest passengers in back, the boat would plane and

The Forest

By: Chris Lewis

The sky was dark and thick as oil. The clouds, like an eclipse, blocked any illumination attempting to light a path. The trees hunched over like old, brittle men. Their branches seemed to reach out luring their victims closer. A chill slowly creeps up your body as the wind pierces the skin like a needle through the flesh. The face cringes, the eyes turn away and the knees buckle as nature's inhabitants taunt and mock every step.

The ground was stiff and jagged attempting to unbalance any movement above. The leaves crunched and crumbled like walking on a trail of old bones. Each step echoed throughout the forest, bouncing off the trees and cracking through the air with hysteric laughter. The mushrooms, scattered throughout like land mines, released a powerful stench like that of rotten eggs and decaying fish.

The water flowed slowly through the ground, thicker than blood. Its smell was awful, mixing aromas like dead plants and rotten wildlife. It emptied to a pool of blackness that steamed and hissed with each drop. Bubbles leapt out rapidly as if trying to escape their dark prison. In the air, they snapped like the crack of a whip against bare skin and released a mournful sigh.

The eyes of darkness lay heavy like a burden on the shoulders tracking every movement. Like a knife through cardboard, it pierced the weak and fragile will testing one's courage. Like a hyena, its silent laughter probed the mind and robbed it of its sanity. It maneuvered the wind and trees like puppets on a string and cast dust and dirt into the air hampering vision. It partnered with the ground, decreasing one's footing like a drunken sailor returning home from the bar.

The moss drooped and sagged from the trees, caught twisted in the piercing winds. A heavy breath from the wind sent them flailing wildly and rapidly in the air like a panicked mother in search of her child amongst the crowd. They hung lightly in the air, but there core was tough and hard like that of a turtle's shell. Like a spider's web they wove a complex and deadly pattern preventing all from escape.

The Doer and the Thinker

By: Tom Howley

It is a cool autumn afternoon, the sun is bright, and I can feel the rumble of the ground and hear the sound of the excavator's tracks rolling across the unfinished gravel parking lot. It is sweet music to my ears. The smell of freshly excavated soil fills the air, a smell that is not pleasant to the senses, but to anyone in the construction industry, that smell is recognized as the smell of progress. I operate a design build construction company currently working on the construction of a three thousand square foot branch bank. We are getting close to wrapping the job up, aside from interior trim and some site work we are almost complete. Today is Friday and I have a meeting with my architect for a walkthrough and inspection. Rich and I get along very well, which is not always the case between builder and architect, but we both do our best to work together. The two of us together on the site resemble the stereotypical photos you see in builders and architects trade journals.

I am taking a break, sitting on the tailgate of my pickup. I am wearing some worn and dusty Carhart jeans a bright plaid flannel shirt, work boots that look like they have walked more miles than they were ever intended to and a baseball cap with the Dunn Builders supply logo. I look worn; I have my job weary blueprints at my side, clipboard in one hand with a list of issues I need to get by with Rich and a big Gatorade in the other. Rich pulls in, driving his pristine Toyota SUV, kayak racks on top and oversized grill on the front. Since it is Friday he dressed a bit more casual than usual, khakis and a button down shirt, with a cobble knit sweater right out of the LL Bean catalog and a casual pair of loafers. He is carrying a nice leather portfolio, a digital camera, and a cup of something which probably resembles coffee in a Starbucks cup. I greet him with a hearty handshake, "Damn Rich, You look like me when I'm on vacation... must be nice." He chuckles; we exchange pleasantries and head to the building for our walk through.

Rich and I share the same goal, to construct an attractive functional building that will facilitate the owner's needs as well as provide curb appeal for the community and perspective customers for the bank. The design build process is challenging, it requires a high level of coordination between, owner, architect and builder. Most times in a design build project, the building construction begins before the final drawings

are completed. This forces the architect to continue providing drawings for approval or revision while the building is being constructed. He must keep ahead of the construction schedule for the project, so not to cause delays in construction. Rich and I have been through this many times before. So today our walk through goes something like this:

Tom: "Rich, the trim details you gave me for the lobby aren't working out, I tried using the trim you specified in a couple different applications, but when I put it on the wall it looks like shit! We got a real problem here! If I can't use this trim detail it fucks up the entire millwork layout for the teller line!! My millwork guy is freaking out now, if he has to order new product for the teller line it could delay the job six weeks."

Rich: "Well Tom, I see what you mean, I agree we need to modify the design to make it work. I have a couple of ideas; I'll go back to the office and...."

Tom: "Whoa! I don't have time for you to go back to the office and draw the freakin' Taj Mahal! We gotta hammer out a solution right here. We have to be able to use product that is readily available too."

Rich breaks out a pad and pencil, we brainstorm, and we bring the lead carpenter over and get his input on practical application of our new ideas as well. Within a half hour's time we have come up with a solution to our problem. I breathe a sigh of relief, Rich tells me I need to relax and not get so excited. The rest of the walkthrough goes smoothly.

As we are wrapping up Rich says, "Tom, the place looks great!" I really enjoy working with you guys, even if you do keep me under the gun all of the time. I get to see things from a real time perspective that I don't always get to be a part of."

"Thanks man, I appreciate your flexibility, that's how we keep the train on the tracks. So, what are you doing this weekend, I see the kayak racks on the truck?..."

That is only one example of countless situations that arise on a design/build jobsite every day and how the parties involved learn to peacefully coexist and work together towards a common goal.

Gusts of wind. Cries from the ocean. Anger from the man. The starless sky. The ferocious night. They combined into an army of the lighthouse. No good could be anymore. They signed the contract, and now it was torched in the flames of evil. Blackness overtook the light. Screams and madness overcame the quiet and serenity. Death overcame life. Hell overcame the lighthouse.

He climbed to the top of the lighthouse. He stood next to the empty, faded, supposed light, and he flew. He flew from the lighthouse. He flew into his escape, into the black of the night, upon the sharp edges of the deadly spears of rocks and was washed away into the deepest depths of the sea he used to love. He leapt into the great unknown. He leapt right back into her arms.

and stretching its body let the couple know it was time for arousal.

"My bones are growing weak, my love," whispered the voice of a gray haired woman still holding onto what she wants to be known as youth and beauty.

"But, your heart and character are as strong as they could ever be. And they grow wiser every day," replied her companion of white hair and a cheery smile of reassurance.

She knew what promises they had made to each other and what damage would be unstoppable if those certain promises were broken. She held on to what she knew for a long, unforgettable time and pushed herself to grasp on tighter than ever before.

The lighthouse knew what was on her mind. It, too, grew weaker and more susceptible to darkness. The light grew slightly weary. And every day as the woman's breath shortened, the lighthouse lost light and security, for its own life line was that of the love and the infinite time that was bound within the man and his wife.

The sun began to settle earlier in the evenings leaving behind a woman's guilty conscience and a man's troublesome thoughts. The light was dimming as though leaving its wanted destination and casting itself farther and farther from reach.

The peaceful nights were becoming less and less peaceful. The sea could not seem to settle, unaware on what it before thrived. The waves crashed onto rocks in pain. The land was beaten by smacks of ocean, banging its toughness against it.

The man did not know what was wrong and did not know the secrecy between his wife and the lighthouse.

"My dear, I am so sorry, but my soul is letting go. My heart remains, but it does not want to. The skies are lifting a piece of me every day, and I am fading too quickly now."

"You cannot leave me. I am not of any existence without the comfort of your presence. I shall not be without you. The sunny days are disappearing. The silent nights are growing louder. Heaven is leaving earth and is being overtaken by Hell. Oh, this life is worthless without the life you share."

She half smiled and cried with her husband. She cried with the lighthouse. She cried with the sea, and the night, and today, and yesterday, and tomorrow. She cried for she had broken her promise and had damaged all that was perfect. She left heaven on earth and carried it with her to heaven in the unknown.

A Life Coach

By: Karen McGuiggan

There are people who come into our lives and then disappear without leaving so much as a tiny ripple in the ponds of our memories. When I look way into the past, at my high school days, there exist many faceless names and nameless faces. If we are fortunate, however, there are individuals who come into our lives and leave lasting imprints etched into our souls. They may have taught us something about ourselves or others, or they may have helped us find our way as we traveled on our journey through life. They become a coach, a cheerleader, or a shoulder. I was fortunate to have a woman enter my life just when I was in need of a coach, both on and off the field. Ms. Faber was so much more than just our gym teacher and coach. She taught us much more than just sports.

As a tall, skinny, gangly teen, I didn't quite fit in high school. I was 6' tall in a world of 5' 4" petite and perky little girls; this made me uncomfortable and unsure of myself. I dreaded walking through the teeming hallways, my head and shoulders always above all others. In an attempt to make myself smaller or even invisible, I would slump into myself as we strolled the halls with the throngs of other teenagers.

How nice it would have been to fit in somewhere. My friends and I were not part of any of the typical high school cliques. We weren't the hippies with their tie-dyed clothes, jumbles of beads dangling around their necks, and long waist-length shaggy unkempt hair. We didn't lounge in the hallways with the intensely musky odor of incense wafting around us as we listened to Dylan and Joni Mitchell. We weren't the cheerleaders or pep squad; we weren't pretty, perky, peppy, or petite. We weren't the geeky scholars, with "As" in math, or learning the new computer code, with all those ridiculous looking punch cards. We were normal, average, run-of-the-mill, clothes-off-the-sales rack girls. We were all white bread, bologna, and mayonnaise sandwiches, nothing special.

In my junior year, this new young, hip teacher showed up in our gym class. She was quite a curiosity for my friends and me. She was almost as tall as I was, not quite, but really close. Fresh out of college, she was close to our age. We didn't have to worry about not trusting her; she wasn't over thirty. There was a smile always just a breath

away playing on her lips even when she was shouting instructions from the sidelines. She always stood up straight with her shoulders back, almost statuesque. She radiated energy at all times. She never walked. She ran, her thin, wispy, straight, bleached blond hair billowing behind her. She never sat if she could stand. She was always moving. Her positive attitude was contagious. She encouraged all of us to always play to the best of our ability.

In gym class we were required to wear one-piece-army-ugly-khaki-green gym uniforms. Once outfitted in these uniforms, it didn't matter if you were pretty and perky or tall and gangly; we all looked equally atrocious. There were no curves, no tight tummies, no firm butts, we were all a misshapen green. Ms. Faber treated us all the same. The rich girls, the cheerleaders, the pep squad, the geeks, and the regulars were all the same in her eyes. We were there to play, to learn, to compete, to be challenged, and to win. It didn't matter who you were once you left the gym; in the gym we were all her girls.

Here was a place where I could fit in. Here was a place where tall was not just good, but great. I had always been active, but learned that I was athletic and athletic was good. Growing up with three brothers had taught me to play hard and stay competitive, and this, it turned out, was a good thing.

Ms. Faber taught me that being competitive meant playing hard, but fair. It meant giving it your all but keeping your sense of humor. It meant that if you were part of a team you competed as a team and encouraged each other to do your best. If I occasionally erupted because things weren't going my way, or if I forgot that I was part of a team and it wasn't just me competing, she would bench me. She would tell me to Chill out! Breathe. Take a minute. Refocus yourself and then: Get back in the game!

At the time, I had no idea that this would turn out to be a life lesson that would serve me well into adulthood. There are times in life, at home and in business, when I find myself giving it my all but losing my sense of humor. There are times when I start to believe that I am in charge and life must go my way. There are times when I forget that most of life is primarily a team sport. These are the times when Ms. Faber's voice comes back to me and I remember that it's time to take the bench. It's time to chill out, breathe, take a minute, refocus myself, and then get back in the game. I am very fortunate that I had someone come into my life while I was young and impressionable, but just mature enough, to hear what her lessons were actually teaching us.

Eternal Bliss

By: Michelle Zlotnick

The glow from the light made it appear as though heaven had fallen upon earth. The beams had cast brilliant sparkles of light across the purest blues of the sea mocking the night sky and the stars it was home to.

And the silence that surrounded was not that of an awkward silence, but more of the hush of a church full of believers in prayer. The silence of the night was comforting and welcoming. The only sound to be made out was the breaths of the ocean portraying the presence of the lord.

Peace came from the light and the pedestal it rested upon.

To live in a lighthouse takes much patience, kindness, and devotion. You need to be patient and await for possible arrivals of men in need for protection, guidance, and healing. You need to be patient to survive the possibilities of Mother Nature's rages and fits. You need to be kind to the life around you. You need to be kind enough to understand the history that lays itself inside and outside of your home. You need kindness to respect what your duties and purposes are. You need to be devoted to everything in view and of that in contact with the lighthouse and the effects it has on the world around it. You need devotion to keep your heart and soul alive. Without such qualities, you fail.

The lovers that believed in these responsibilities and sort of philosophies have committed themselves to growing old together, with one another, and the land, sea, and life the contract included that they signed in this gracious journey.

Today, yesterday, tomorrow, are the challenges of life. They are faced with a man and a woman, hand in hand with curiosity, questions, answers, morals, and strength.

Years of love have bound the partners of the lighthouse to eternity. One cannot survive without the other. They choose not to. Just as day cannot survive without night. Just as land cannot survive without sea. Just as stars cannot survive without sky. Just as life cannot survive without death.

The morning appeared with warmth from the sun and voices of birds, wind, and a busy sea. The creaks of the lighthouse opening its eyes

Opposite
By: Christopher Gregory

Mirrors reflect light.	Light is reflected.
Dark hearts are made without love.	Loveless hearts bound by darkness.
Two hearts may reflect.	Mirrored are two hearts.

The Incident
By: Paula Hopping

I was born in 1967 at All Soul's Hospital in Morris Town, New Jersey. As a child my parents often told me about the day that I came into the world, but the only part of that story that interested me was the name of the hospital. I was very interested in the word souls. I had many people explain their interpretations of that word throughout my childhood.

When I was born there were four of us me, my brother Robbie, Mom and Dad. My father was a lathe operator and made a modest living for us. We lived in an apartment that was really small, but cozy, and always filled with the morning sun. I always woke up with the morning sun shining right in my face, and it made me feel secure and happy. One day my father came home from work with good news. He had received a raise, and we could afford to buy a house of our very own, so my parents found a house for us in Dover. A few months later, we were all packed up and waiting for the movers to come in the afternoon. I had until then to say goodbye to my best friends, Christa and Theresa. I sat looking out my bedroom window waiting for Christa's father's car to pull in from her ballet lesson. I would not be able to say goodbye to Theresa at all since she was out of the state because her family member had died. We all had been friends since nursery school. We played together every day. I would miss them, but at seven years old I could not fathom how much. All my mother could talk about was the new house, daily, ever since they put the down payment on it. She said it was way bigger and I would have a room big enough to have a dollhouse in it. She said we could paint my new room any color that I liked. We went to the store and looked at swatches. I chose a light lavender color. My mother made it sound like we were going to live in some grand palace, where we would live happily ever after. I was really looking forward to the move.

When we finally moved it was wonderful. The house was really spacious. My room was huge, and my closet was almost as big as my bedroom in the old place. We had a big yard with lots of trees. We did not have trees in our old yard, which is why our apartment was always so full of sunshine. My mom painted my room and she bought me a beautiful giant dollhouse with furniture and a whole family of dolls, the only problem was that there was no one for me to share it with. I would sit looking out the window at the trees and wish that Christa and Theresa

were here to play Barbies or beauty salon with me. My brother had made friends with the only other children on our block. The Bonner's had three sons. My brother made it very clear that I was not welcome in their little clique.

I was in a hurry for school to start just to put an end to the boredom. Monday finally arrived and mom was going to walk us to school to show us how to get there. Robbie walked ahead of us with the Bonner boys, who were used to walking alone. Our mother told us that we were to come directly home at lunch time when school was dismissed. When I got to my new classroom it was not as I had expected. First of all the students were not like me. Instead, they were Puerto Rican and they spoke mostly Spanish, but they could speak English, too. I was amazed by the concept that there was another language besides English. The teacher Miss Alvarado assigned a girl named Nilsa Santana to show me around. We went down to the lavatory and then to the nurses office. Nilsa spoke both English and Spanish fluently. This was the first time I had ever heard of there being another language outside of my own, and I was so fascinated by it that when I got home from school that day pretended I could speak Spanish. My father was happy about it; he said if I pay attention I could learn to speak the language properly.

I got on really well with Nilsa. She sat next to me in class and made sure I was included in jumping rope on the playground. Even though the other children only spoke to me through Nilsa, they were always was nice to me. When Nilsa was absent I was very lonely because everyone ignored me and on the playground they only spoke in Spanish. After being in school for a few months, Nilsa and I became best friends. We always sat together during assemblies and played together on the playground. One day after a particularly fun time on the playground (Nilsa and her cousins had taught me to double dutch, the class was dismissed for lunch. I invited Nilsa to come home with me. I was hoping that we could play together sometimes outside of school. She said she could not because she was responsible to make sure her cousins got home alright. She invited me to go to her father's restaurant instead (where she and her cousins had lunch every day), but I knew that my mom would worry. Being naïve about the generosity of my mother, I said well why you don't bring your cousins with you to my house. I thought that only two or three of the children were her cousins, but there were at least eight of them. I had a feeling that it may

cause matters very little, for every human shares two things: their impending mortality and their lack of control over the numerous facets of life. Surely it is better to give reason to all the commotion of the world than to throw oneself to the wind. Whether or not this fear exists by divine implantation, one can never be sure. Somewhere in the heart of our protagonist a seed of envy and hate grew: "How blissful must ignorance be," she pondered, "to walk about daily life without fear or question."

With time, a nearly ineffable truth came to light in the dark recess of the mind of our protagonist. There is a flow to the world in which we find ourselves, questions breed only more of their own species and without a doubt isolation is a sorry fate. Since in the words of French chanteur Jacques Brel, "there are only two days in a man's life that matter," and since all the days of a man's life are spent preparing for those last numerals to fill our epitaph, it is best to go through the world embracing what we may rather than see it as a cold unseemly place. Each day we live could very well be chiseled next to our name long after that date has passed. On that note, we should give each moment the respect it deserves, as the ability to do so is no more than a loan. No matter what our fate, we are all bound to end up nothing more than one thing to be absorbed into the climactic equilibrium. Thus, we should ponder why we spend our living time trying to maintain such a state when it is bound to happen with or without our co-operation. It was shortly after this very insight, that the spiritual adventurer decided that complaining about the weather was not worthwhile. So long as she had the ability to feel the difference between pleasant and unpleasant temperature, things were not really so bad.

After this attempted connection failed, she was often filled with a sensation of dread that perhaps the others were all superior or somehow enlightened. This sensation quickly dissipated when their reverent dispositions faded and worshippers opened their mouths to speak, for out came nothing more than useless noise. When the prayers were recited, there was no feeling in anyone's eyes, very much like the average American recites the pledge of allegiance without giving any thought to what they are actually pledging. This again ritualistically would bring the girl a sensation of dread, to know that people would tolerate such a seemingly shallow existence. It was a rather vicious circle.

Nevertheless she continued to attend Catholic services every Sunday for no reason other than their familiarity. Eventually, the young thinker befriended another famished intellectual of her own age, as opposed to all the over-forties with whom she had always preferred to associate. In the past, she had acquaintances of her own age, yet she had never known a real friend. The world becomes a much lighter place when one is not alone amidst one's peers and ultimately more conquerable. Many hours were spent speaking of the only two things of any deducible importance: the soul and the senses. There is a certain type of courage the little sheep found that could let the mind be free, a type of courage that could not be found alone or sitting on a rock, rather in the convergence of two souls in quixotic pursuit of an understanding of the world. With her companion she explored many venues of religious conviction, and although she continues her journey to this day without having drawn any real conclusions, she has never felt truly alone as she did for all those years.

In more recent times the girl began regularly visiting a church, one of the many thousands of obscure protestant sects. It was there that she came to understand the concept of "peasant's faith," a reality she still cannot totally conceive and in periods of introspection despises for its simplicity and seeming inaccessibility. In her youth, she could not comprehend why people would attach themselves to something they could not understand. After hearing innumerable testimonies from "found sheep" and watching them go about life without a care, she began to understand. Most people do not dive into intellectual oceans because questions such as "Where did God come from?" can fill the mind, but do little for the soul. Either due to lack of personal character, or possession of more foresight than those who philosophize, the masses avoid such thinking and choose to accept the status quo. Regardless,

have been wrong to bring so many, but then I remembered something I had once heard my mom say, "the more the merrier" and we preceded home.

The door knob was too high up for me to reach so I banged on it, and when she arrived at the door her eyes popped out and her face took on a look that scared me, a look I had never seen before on her. She looked monstrous, and then she said, "What's this" then I said "these are my friends home with me for lunch." To my extreme shock and horror her face twisted even more, and she yelled at the top of her lungs "GET THESE SPICS OUTTA HERE!" I was speechless, and my friends looked at one another and at me. I was so shocked that I could not speak; finally, I said to Nilsa that I was sorry and that I did not know. They must have gone right back to school without lunch because it would have been too late for them to make another trip opposite my house and the school, which was between my place and theirs, and get back to school on time. I was so upset that I could not eat any lunch. I just sat there looking out the window watching as they disappeared from sight, with tears running down my face. My mother did not feel badly about what she had done. She just said that I had better not bring the filthy spics back here again or she would do much worse. I did not want to return to school after lunch. I went, though, and when I got there Nilsa would not speak to me or look at me. I said again that I was sorry for what my mother did, but none of them wanted to hear it. After that day, I was alone on the playground except for Nilsa's boy cousins who would corner me and kick my shins over and over. They were covered in bruises for at least a month and a few times they were bloody. When Nilsa happened by my dark corner of the playground one day, she saw them surrounding me and said something to them in Spanish that made them stop.

A few days later Nilsa came to me just before class was dismissed for lunch and invited me to her father's restaurant for lunch. I hesitated (thinking of my mother's instructions), and then I accepted. It was a long way down the hill and over the railroad tracks. I was very nervous because I was going into unknown territory, and after the treatment of Nilsa and her cousins from my mother, I was worried about how Nilsa's father would treat me. I was worried, too, about not going home like I was supposed to. When we got there, Nilsa's father came from around the counter smiling a big jolly smile and exclaimed, "Who have we here?" I was so nervous that I could not answer him so Nilsa said, "This is my friend here for lunch." Nilsa's father asked me what I liked to eat, and I

told him I liked hamburgers. Then he said, “OK we fixxa right upa for you.” He talked to us throughout our meal and made me feel very welcome. When we finished, he gave us ice cream to eat on the way back to school, and he told me to come back anytime I want. I thought that Nilsa and I were going to be friends like before, but the next day, I was by myself again. Nilsa did say hi whenever she passed by me, but her cousins never did, although they stopped kicking me.

It was a lonely time in school and out. Until that unfortunate day my mother was this compassionate, considerate, gentle, woman with an infinite capacity for kindness. She was the epitome of goodness. When I fell off my bike and cut my knee, she was the one who ran as fast as she could to me and picked me up from the ground and carried me inside, hugging me all the way into the house, saying in her gentle, loving voice, that everything would be alright while I cried at the top of my lungs. When we moved into the new house and I was afraid of the dark shadows the trees made on my walls at night, she was the one who laid with me until I fell asleep, convincing me that there was nothing to be afraid of. She was there for me when anytime something made me sad or frightened always saying don’t worry everything will be alright. Now, everything had changed about her. My mother was now the cause of so much hatred and fury. When those boys were kicking me in my shins, it was the most physical pain I had ever felt. Everyday those boys kicked me reinforced the hatred that my mother produced and the growing hatred I now felt for her.

After school I had nothing to do. I sat in my big, dreary bedroom staring right through my dollhouse windows through to my bedroom windows and wishing to see Christa’s driveway, wishing we were back at home in our sunny little apartment, but all I could see were those big sun blocking trees in our backyard. One day I decided to go out and climb one of the trees. I climbed up as high as I could get. I finally felt the sun shining on my face again. I stayed there until I heard my mother yell supper time.

Everyday thereafter, I sat or hung upside down in the tree. I brought my favorite things in the tree with me: a book to read, my dolls to keep me company, and sometimes a snack. As I sat there in that giant tree, I thought a lot about what had happened, and I realized that I had learned a lesson from my mother and from Nilsa that people are people, we all have souls, we all breath air and the only difference is how much sunshine each of our souls bring into all of the other souls we come in contact with, and I was never going to be like my mother.

Flagellation

By: Kerri Schultz

It had always been brisk winter days that depressed the girl with the dark green eyes that no one ever noticed, except when the sun shined in them. After learning the basic principles of physics this resentment grew, as it taught her that cold and warm are always trying to achieve equilibrium. This ultimately meant that the sensation of cold is quite literally the life being absorbed out of one, all in the name of uniformity. Despite this frustration she went about her daily activities, just like everyone else, all throughout life, carrying with her metaphoric bits of knowledge just like this that gave her new perspective and understanding. This perspective allowed intellectual separation from the flock, a nearly erotic indulgence that both isolated her socially and preserved what bit of intellect she could claim. Throughout her youth, when she spent time utterly engrossed in solitary contemplation, she never saw herself as alone, rather in the company of what she thought was the presence of the god of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was only during these times that she could bring herself to find any real sort of peace or clear thought. It was what she later realized all those countless hours spent in the pews were supposed to provide.

Since before she could comprehend the affair, the divergent little sheep would sit in church, the very house of God, and could not bring herself to understand those around her. These people spoke of truth and light during the mass and ran out as soon as they received communion or gossiped about one another as soon as the service was over.

The long embroidered service spoke words of blatant truth pertaining to justice and the way of God; however, this was hardly detectable under all the ceremony. She could hardly think that people understood what they were saying. After all how could they be exposed to such basic truths and not be more enthusiastic? Every week during this tradition our black sheep created her own. When all would bow their heads to pray, she would look out amidst her fellow parishioners wishing that she could make eye contact with another like-minded soul, and each week, she was disappointed and to this day continues to be so.

sunlight. It had become too much for me. Why didn't someone get some Bacitracin for her sores or wash her feet or comb her hair? My boyfriend had told me about her: a single mother of seven, a "welfare mom" who lived in the projects all her life, applauding misery. I wondered, how did this happen to her? I'm sure, like me, she wanted a home full of love and family. As I sat, a guest in her home, all I felt was emptiness and disdain.

I realized she had given up. When faced with the elaborate strain of life, she did not fight. She believed that life was meant to be sad and full of anguish. Like her, I struggle with that belief. Unlike her, I was given the opportunity to see the importance of battling through the negative emotions life can bring.

The Spill

By: Samaria Corrales

My love- with his affinity for all things rough and tumble,
gap-toothed grin, gears, grease;
mountain, track, road and tandem.
Frustrated by my toe-clips as I
whirled along behind him on unfamiliar
terrain and on an unfamiliar bike, pleased to catch up with him
on an even brick bi-way;
riding along side by side, locking gazes and leaning in for an embrace when a
harsh metallic shudder reverberates through my seat and

like weak Velcro, our bikes connected.
Sickening vibration rattles across my handlebars as
we skid into the abrasive ground
stirring up dust,
pebbles and concerned looks, after gravity is finished.
Borrowing my body as a sled for the bike, the circuits now thrown back and
pain surges to all the hot red patches of red I am just beginning
to take note of.
Before the dirt settles, my love again at my side,
his face full of fear melting into a soft tenderness.

He allows me to pout, gently attentive to my pitiful whimpers
gingerly steadying me, with one
weathered hand firmly in the small of my back, the other
clasping my free hand in his warm cracked palm.
Nervous eyes survey whether or not I had disassembled in the fall
as he pulls me on foals' legs to my feet. He is now
certain I shall live and no great tragedy has occurred
or expense incurred. In a split second he has assessed the bikes and
deemed them satisfactory; we are up and I follow him
mashing the pedals, pushing past the vulnerability.

What Writing Means to Me

By: Nora Salem

From age eight until college, I was a competitive swimmer. Swimming was one of the very few things in my life that gave me great joy, but swimming was equally very difficult. As I sit here and ponder what writing means to me, I realize that for me, writing is like swimming.

Swim practice meant I had to wake up early in the morning, five days a week. Sometimes, practice meant I had to be out of the water to improve other areas of my body, like strength training, flexibility, and conditioning. Even though practice was grueling, I knew it was necessary to become better. At around the same time I began to swim competitively, I received my first diary.

The diary was a wonderful gift because it allowed me to write down my thoughts with total and complete privacy. I quickly discovered, however, that turning thoughts into words and placing them onto paper was no easy task. Like swimming, I made time in my day to write or practice in my journal, and eventually, I saw progress.

Before a swim race, I swam laps to get my muscles warmed-up. If I did not warm up, I would be stiff and at risk for injury during the race, and consequently I would swim poorly. Writing, like swimming requires time for warm-up. Whether I am journal writing or writing for an assignment, I jot down the first things that come to mind. Like my swim strokes during warm-up, words come slowly and roughly. After some time of free writing, the words pour freely, and ideas began to emerge.

One of the most important things I used to work on during swim practice was my stroke. If my strokes were strong and clear, I knew I could swim faster. Writing, like swimming, meant I had to constantly work to perfect my stroke. I was always taught in my English classes that I needed to focus equally on what I wrote and how I wrote it. Grammar, punctuation, and a thesis were just a few of the strokes that would perfect and shape an essay, allowing the words to flow a little better on the paper.

Untitled

By: Syreeta Nurse

Depression is a natural part of life. Dealing with difficult times can cause feelings of hopelessness and despair. Everyday can become a struggle. When I met my boyfriend's mother, for the first time, I learned a valuable lesson. Though we did not share many words, she taught me the importance of enduring the troubles life may bring.

I was greeted by a ten-gallon garbage can, overflowing with the remnants of everyday life. The smell of bacon briefly comforted me, as I stepped over crumpled papers and plastic bags which cluttered the hard linoleum floor. A brownish gray sludge thinly sprawled across the walls and sucked all the light out of the small apartment. She sat on a small loveseat in her living room. We were courteously introduced, and I took a seat across from her on the big couch.

She was watching the news. A newscaster placidly reported the death of a twelve-year-old boy who drowned. I commented on how sad that was. She began to cry. Tears flowed down her swollen cheeks. She was suffering from lupus and her olive brown skin seemed to scream for relief from the water built up beneath it. She had deep gashes on her arms and face. They were dry and crusty, aggravated by neglect.

I became a bit uncomfortable, only because I often cried while watching the news, too. She talked of the Iraq war and how horrible the Vietnam draft had been. She spoke of her son's dreadful death and how terrible her stroke had been. She complained of the stagnant cold which hung in the air and my boyfriend's failure to visit sooner. I asked if she had any ointment for her sores; she said nothing could relieve them.

Her impetuous daughter, who diligently cared for her, served us lunch. The bottom of her ashy feet were blackened from months of shuffling from her bedroom back to the living room and then back again. I couldn't eat. The sight of her feet and the dozens of roaches that roamed the walls as welcomed guest, ruined my appetite. I ate anyway; fried Canadian bacon, fried eggs and rice.

I looked at her sores, her dirty, bare feet and her hair. Her sparse, brittle hair, that rose from her head like a plant desperate for

washed my hair, a lot more than the normal amount of hair would come off my head. Every week my drain was clogged with my long, stringy hair. Also about this time, I started throwing up or really feeling like I needed to throw-up after eating certain meals that contained too much fat for my body to handle. I remember one incident in particular: after going out with my friend for lunch and eating half a chicken Caesar wrap, I came home and I just felt like something was really wrong. I needed to puke. But I could not do it. I spent over an hour half asleep, laying on the cold tiled bathroom floor, and half the time hovered over the toilet ready to puke. All because I ate half a chicken Caesar wrap. There was something seriously wrong with me. By this time, I was starting to realize it.

By now, the lack of food had caused my energy level to drain completely from my body. It became very difficult to concentrate at school, if I had the energy to go. My grades started slipping. I was in danger of not passing multiple classes. At this time I also became severely conscious of who saw me eat and what they saw me eat. It was like some sick game to always need to eat by myself. I do not know why, but I thought that people were judging me based on how much I ate. I became fixated on food and thought about it constantly.

And then it happened. After spending two days in bed, barely eating and not attending school my mom finally screamed from the bottom of the steps, "You are either going to school or getting some help! You are not staying under my roof lying in bed all day!" So I had my options. I knew I needed help. It was time.

I cannot say that the path to recovery has been easy. Even under specialized care I lost more weight and became extremely self-conscious about the up-and-down motion my weight had on the scale. But in treatment, I met others who have struggled with the same or at the least very similar issues. I learned that I am not alone in my struggle to survive. An eating disorder is not something that ever goes away; for most, it is a life-long struggle. Every day, multiple times a day, everyone is confronted with food; it is everywhere. It is truly impossible to avoid.

But here I am, back to a medically proper weight range. It is a weight, that I do not know, but I have learned to live with. And although some days I wish I was thinner, I also know I do not want to be the way or weight I was. Lying in a bed or at the base of a toilet is no way to live. The most important decision I made was not to live that way. I got help.

Swim practice was one of the few times during my day when I life. I could submerge myself in the water and organize my thoughts while I swam laps. When I submerged myself in my diary, writing gave me the same comforts as swimming. Writing gave me clarity of my thoughts and calmed me. Like swimming, writing enabled me to be free.

Details, Details

By: Hannah Bewsher

Everyone has experienced a moment when they knew they were in real danger. Why do we always remember the details of those events with such clarity? Wouldn't the shock of the situation inhibit the absorption of details such as the shirt you were wearing, the weather, or whether or not your socks matched?

On a Monday morning in the first weeks of November, I walked across the bridge on the outskirts of the Hudson Valley campus. As I wandered back up the frosty hill, I was confronted with one of those moments. I was wearing my favorite shirt, it was about 37 degrees but sunny, and my socks were charmingly mismatched; one was red, and one was blue striped.

My weekly bird watching trip always ends far too early, and it was no different that morning; nine o'clock loomed nearer, and I was forced to head back to the main campus to take a psychology test. Walking fast, I strolled with my head bowed into the bitter wind and my hands tight in my pockets. I wasn't as observant as usual. The narrow footbridge spanned a horsetail marsh. The reeds stood at least three feet over my head, and they leaned over the bridge like a bower. There were usually black-capped chickadees flitting around in the reeds, but they were absent that day. The only bird that could be heard that late in the morning was a red-bellied woodpecker chortling and drumming in the distance.

The sound that made me lift my eyes and slow down was not the woodpecker, but something crashing through the horsetails almost ten yards away. The animal that erupted from the edge of the marsh was not one that I was keen on crossing paths with. It was a white-tailed deer, as stocky and muscular as a pony. Usually, I would appreciate such a close look at a gorgeous animal like this buck before me, but two things changed my opinion that morning: it was rutting season, and I was cornered on a narrow bridge.

I had narrowly escaped attacks by rutting bucks before. I didn't appreciate how lucky I was; as a rule, rutting deer are more dangerous than most black bears you'll happen across. My second problem was the place I happened to be standing. The bridge was not wide enough for two people to walk abreast, much less for an aggressive buck and a

Fake Control

By: Michelle Wang

Every day we make decisions that affect our lives. Some of these decisions are more important than others. What you decide to eat for lunch is not necessarily going to affect the rest of your life, or even your day. However, there was a time in my life when what I ate, or in most cases what I did not eat, affected the rest of my life and especially the rest of my day. One of the most important life decisions I have made is to seek treatment for an increasing mental illness, known as anorexia.

It all started when I was very little. My parents would always scream, yell, throw things, cry, curse out, and just about everything that could possibly make the other one furious. Somewhere in between their three separations I, rationally, felt like my life was spinning out of control.

My senior year of high school I started eating the school's cafeteria sausage and cheese bagels. Of course this massive, greasy, delicious mess did nothing for my waist line. I noticed that over Christmas break, with no school in session and no scrumptious sausage and cheese bagels, that I had miraculously lost five pounds. In one week, I lost five pounds by not eating. A little bit after this amazing discovery, I became sick. Unable to eat, I lost another couple of pounds. Of course this was around the time to pick out the perfect prom dress. And after I picked out my perfect white, perfect tiered, perfect beaded, and perfect stunning gown, I wanted to stay that way. Perfect. In order for it to stay that way I, of course, needed to stay the same size. Perfect.

The summer going into my freshman year of college, my parents started getting back together, for the third time. My inability to deal with it properly caused another five pounds to drop from my waistline. In addition the stress of a new, unfamiliar school, the loss of friends who went away to college and the overall expectations on myself, to do better than perfect, completely led to disaster. I started eating infrequently. In order to attempt to gain some self confidence, I felt the need to cut fatty foods from my diet and exercise to exercise-high levels. In my failed attempt to feel better about myself, I lost an additional five pounds.

Around this time other oddities started occurring with my body, which later I found out was due to my lack of fat. The first thing that happened was hair loss. Whenever I stepped into the shower and

Chief

By: Gregory Harbin Linton

The thick and empty fat
with the froth of alcohol
in the parasitic heat in some basement
where skin heads beckoned forth their white fathers
and feared the lingering black

And I prayed for my father and yours
I folded my hands
Pressed mine against ours
to see if they matched up

you'd be surprised

They sank their teeth deep in dirt
Lank tongue stingy with ruminations of a fruitless education

I kept my mouth shut tight
And prayed for them

prayed for their father and mine
if mine
if articulate and narrow

mine is yours
and all between

in that darkness between exclamations of heredity and awfulness

We heard his name and they swallowed their pride
kept their caps tight
as not to let the gleam of their scalp bare naked heat

surprised bird watcher to comfortably brush shoulders. My third problem was the huge pair of antlers seated on this animal's head; this was a ten-point monster. Though it didn't cross my mind at the moment, every hunter I knew would be drooling over this story.

It was so cold that I could see my breath. The buck had broken horsetails hanging from his antlers like a trailing laurel, which he dragged around the clearing. The thick fur on his withers and haunches stood on end. It was glossy, healthy, and glittered with frost. He pawed the ground agitatedly. To my horror, he walked up to the mouth of the bridge, lowered his head, and seemed to be preparing a charge. One hoof was on the pine-wrought bridge. He sniffed the railing. I held my breath.

I cannot list the things that went through my head in that moment; everything I knew that could possibly relate to this situation ran through my mind in fragments. My mind was a stream of questions: was the water under the bridge frozen? If he charged, could I jump the railing and hide under the bridge before he reached me? How fast can a deer run? Put simply, my mind was a whirl. In the moment that I was preparing to be trampled, out of everything else I could have noticed or done, I realized that a wet deer has a strong, distinctive odor not unlike lye or stale wool. It's not a smell I will ever forget.

Just as suddenly as it started, the buck turned away from me. He spent the next five minutes raking his antlers up and down a nearby tree. He left green gashes in the bark, which later ran with clear sap. The buck then turned from the tree, licked his black lips, twisted his ears, snorted, and crashed away back through the marsh.

It's unfortunate that we don't really see things until we are confronted with them; had I been at the crest of the hill looking down on the buck as I've seen them hundreds of times before, I wouldn't have seen the garnet-colored iris contracting around his oval pupil, or the tendons flexing in his limbs. Is this what it takes to make an impression in our minds? Until three weeks ago, a deer was a familiar shape I passed on the highway. It had four legs, big ears and froze in the headlights on old country roads. Now, ask me what color a deer's eye is, and I'll have an answer for you.

Just the Wind

By: Ken Towne

It's like remembering a scent
A cool winter's breeze
Something I can't explain
It comes in on the wind

My eyes close
I can hear my heart beat
I don't know what's happening
Yet I know exactly what it is

I see stars
It's dark out now
Just like it was then

I look down at my hand
Cold in the air
But I remember now
I feel it
A touch that keeps it warm

I'm walking now
It's like it used to be
My hand in yours
You're walking next to me

It smells of leaves
And it smells of snow
It's that magic time
Between fall and winter
And I swear I hear your voice

make me sicker. That's envy for you. I fumble to get my sun glasses on and head to the car. I open the car door and nearly fall into the seat from being in such a rush, slide the key into the ignition, and spit out another foxhole prayer. God, please let me have enough gas to get to the station. As I turn the key the car jumps to life, I wait for a few seconds hoping that the fuel gage will increase as if someone is magically siphoning gas into my tank in response to my prayer. No such luck. The needle is all the way in the bottom of the danger zone. Well, so am I, so let's go. I pull off and start up the road, lightly accelerating to conserve fuel, but that is difficult when you are in the race of your life. When you are dope sick, nothing really matters but getting well, and every second counts as well as hurts.

have allowed myself to become. What a wreck! How did I get here again? I cringe at the sight of myself and lie to no one but me. You don't look that bad, you're still handsome and intelligent enough to land this new job. You'll be all right. Bullshit. I don't even believe it, really, but the words still come mechanically out of my cracked lipped mouth on an emotionless and cold face. Before I'm through with my version of a daily affirmation, I have the overwhelming urge to vomit again. No, wait, this is going to be the other end. I sit on the pot with barely enough time to remove my drawers. The pain is intense. The cramps have me doubled over and sweat begins to bead on my face. Soon my entire body is damp and clammy, but I'm not hot, I'm freezing. Shaking, shitting, and sweating, I have a flashback to one of my trips to detox. The nurse rudely says, "What did you expect? You are in full blown opiate withdrawal. Everything you are experiencing, anxiety, nausea, cold sweats, and cramping are all part of it and that shaking is called tremors. Get used to it; it won't get much better for at least three days and you probably won't sleep.

Yep, I was yet again in full blown withdrawal on my toilet at 8:15am with no money, no gas, no hope, nothing but the primal driving force that is pulling the strings, and he will not take no for an answer.

I accept the fact that Steve is not coming. I can't get him on the phone, and he is now 45 minutes late. Fuck him, I say. Time to act, here we go. First, I have to make myself look as presentable as possible, which in itself would be a small miracle. No time, and certainly no patience for a shower. The beast has control now, and I have no choice but to do his bidding. I wash up quickly and try not to vomit again while brushing my teeth then race to the bedroom to get dressed. I have to be at this damn meeting, and that means full business attire. What a pain in the ass, I have no idea if I will have time to change again so I grab a pinstripe Armani and a French cuff Brooks Brothers shirt and throw it on, silk tie around the neck and lace up the shoes. If I dress up the outside, maybe they won't see the hideous beast I feel on the inside. On my way out the door, I grab the keys and whatever loose change is lying around. I don't even think I have enough gas to get to the station, but I have to make it work. Out the door and I am slapped with the sharp adjustment from dimly lit apartment into the sunny and warm 9am June weather. Anyone else would be pleased with this weather on this day, but not me. Just the sight of other people going about their daily routines with systematic clarity was enough to

The wind blows again
And I open my eyes.
The scent is gone.
My hand grows cold
It came in on the wind
It was just the wind.

Whistler

By: Ethan Nielsen

About 3 years ago a friend and I took a trip out to Vancouver Canada to visit my sister there. We spent a few days in the city, and then traveled up the Sea to the Sky highway, deep into the Canada's Coastal Mountain Range. We were staying at the base of the Whistler Blackcomb resort, one of the largest ski areas in Northern America. Excitement pumped through my veins as I sat watching the massive trees rolling by the window of our bus.

When we arrived the sun was setting down the valley that separated these two immense mountains, but about halfway up, they were capped with rolling clouds making it impossible to see the peaks. We carted our luggage and ski bags up to our room and then went out for dinner. Sleep came hard that night as I imagined what the mountain had in store for us the next day. When morning came I felt like the ski lift was the tree on Christmas day, and the shock I got was nothing less than that feeling. Riding up the chairlift I felt like the mountain was leaning over me as if it was challenging me. As we got off at the halfway point, I could finally get a clear view of the jagged peak and the chairlift that took the skiers over the gigantic cliffs like a rollercoaster.

That's when I told myself that I would make it to the top and ski down. However, Danielle said otherwise, feeling that she couldn't make it. So we made our turns and got our runs in for the day. The next morning I went out alone to conquer what I had set out for. As I got to the base of the chairlift that would take me to the top, my stomach dropped to my knees. Frozen, the chair came from behind me and knocked me into my seat and sped me up the mountain. I was going up so fast I felt the peak was pulling me up to it. I was headed straight for a cliff face, but it lifted me up over effortlessly, and then, I would watch as the bottom just seemed to be leaving me, as if I was freefalling upwards.

When I slid off the chairlift onto the peak my knees shook as my stomach fell to my feet. The wind whipped with ice that seemed to pierce my skin and snow that froze to every inch of my body. I slowly slid out to the edge that would guide me back to safety. My sensation of falling up didn't last long as I hopped over the edge and freefell to the feet of snow beneath me. My heart was racing, my eyes wide open,

My Hell Is a Place on Earth

By: Aaron Sylvester

I shoot up out of bed as if a bolt of electricity had just shot through my spine, eyes wide open and the first yawn produces tears that stream down my face. My stomach flips and knots with gas pains and anxiety. My leg responsively begins to shake in an effort to ease the discomfort. Today I have an important meeting at 11am at the main office of the bank that I just started working for. Today is my third day on the job, but it is also the third week of daily heroin use, and the addiction has me locked in. I must get the sickness off me before anything else. I will be useless if I don't get well. I look at the bedside alarm clock and it responds to me with a blaring red display of 7am. It has only been ten minutes since my master woke me, and it is time to do his bidding. Swiftly my consciousness flashes back to last night. My friend Steve owes me \$150 from our last trip to the city, and he promised me last night that he would be here in 20 minutes. I call him but there is no answer. In my head, contingency plans begin to formulate on their own, almost reflexively to satisfy some primal need, with a sense of urgency that will not be ignored. I fumble with the numbers on the phone as I call again, this time muttering to myself, you better not do this to me you bastard, you swore you wouldn't allow this to happen when I gave you my last bag yesterday. I promise bro, I will not let you get sick tomorrow, I know it is an important day. I have the money at home, and I WILL BE HERE BY 8am. I can almost hear his fingers crossing behind his back when I play the tape back in my head. Why am I such a fucking idiot I shout to the ceiling fan as I lay panic stricken in bed. As I was cursing myself, I escaped the ferocity of the sickness and forgot how bad it was, but only momentarily. Within seconds I am running to the bath, not knowing whether to sit or bend, just knowing that something is coming out somewhere and that is a fact. I decide to puke. At least I'll be on my knees, and while I'm down there I can piece together another foxhole prayer. Please God help me. Please let Steve get here with my money. I promise if you help me with this simple request I will stop using today. I just need this money to get one last bundle and I swear I will wean myself off. Please God, PLEASE! I stand up and wash my face and mouth and happen to glance in the mirror. I hate mirrors these days. I look like shit and can't stand what I

on the front of this album is two birds, one shown in white, and the other shown in black. The birds are shown together at the chest and struggling to get away from each other. Birds in ancient times were considered travelers with the gods, and so my struggle symbolized being influenced by something greater than myself. Having this tattoo placed in the center of my back just below my neck for me is my representation of a higher sense for the struggle between good and evil. Seeing my choices in a third-person point of view, I could tell the difference between the good choice and the bad choice. That struggle to me was always with conscience, but with question as to why I would make either choice and live with its consequence.

My final symbolic example is somewhat unusual in its representation to others. I tell them it's my initials, but they say it looks as though the design contains lines placed in a general direction. That, in fact, is my point. Nothing in this world is as simple as we want it to be, and it's not as direct and clean cut as people would like. I know a lot of people that get initial tattoos, and the only difference between them is the style of writing or even the placement. But my message, my initials, the person that I am, is hidden and not open for everyone to judge. Although the tattoo is not completely finished, the meaning of it to me is still as strong as it ever will be, and there is nothing more important to me. The symbolism of the colors of the tattoo is as important as the design itself. Black and white are associated with a solid core, my existence being simplistic, but hidden within.

Art can be a lot more than just a picture or a sculpture if people can feel the power of expression through music, sports, or even writing that is just as beautiful as a painting with a thousand colors. Some people would say they wish they never had their tattoos because they were not the same people they are now. They may even say that they were young and stupid. I, however, look at tattoos as a reminder. No matter how old I am, or the things I have changed, I was once that person and I should be proud of not only what I have, but what I had to change to become who I am today.

as I made a turn, then another. I skied for the longest 100 yards of my life before I took my first fall. The anxiety was replaced with excitement as I pulled my head from the snow, and I realized I had a smile on my face. That feeling of anxiety had been replaced with pure joy as I gawked at what I had just skied down. I patted the snow off of myself and made for the bottom. Turn after turn, it seemed like each would add a little bit to my smile as I floated down the powder filled fields. If there was ever a winter wonderland, surely this was it.

Eventually, I made it to the base of the peak with a gigantic smile on my face. I raced down the hill to meet up with Danielle at the room. I didn't bother telling her about what I just went through knowing that words would only make me look corny, but just kept that beaming smile on my face. Getting on the bus a few days later I glanced back up at the mountain that once made me sick to my stomach and smiled. It wasn't towering over my head now, it just leaned back as if it had taught me a lesson, and I looked back at it because I had left my mark of courage on it, or maybe just a smile planted in the snow.

Secret Romance

By: Karen McGuiggan

I remember the first time I heard it. My brother was driving his beat up old 1964, ugly green, boxy Rambler. We were driving down some back road somewhere, probably going nowhere just cruising. The bright warm summer sunshine was sparkling through the branches of the trees that sheltered both sides of the road. The patterns that formed were like dappled puzzle pieces of light and dark that covered the car and road. Sticking out of the middle of the dashboard was the newest craze, the boxy, bulky, yellow 8 track cassette, and coming out of this cassette was a low, deep, gravelly, voice lamenting, "I am I said."

That summer, I fell in love with Neil Diamond. It was the summer of 1970 and I was 14. It was a quiet, sweet, warm, secret love affair. This deep, dark, raspy Troubadour sang of loneliness, love found, and love lost. He was so sad and oh so romantic. His dark and brooding eyes looked out from behind heavily hooded eyebrows. He was dangerous looking. He wore tight blue jeans and moved gently and slowly. He made my heart beat just a little faster. I would get a warm tingling feeling deep in the pit of my stomach whenever I heard him sing. His voice was so distinctive. His songs could stir up a young teen girl's dream of romance. He was James Dean sexy, even though, at 14, I hadn't a clue what that meant.

As I grew and matured, I discovered that it wasn't cool to be in love with Neil. He wasn't a rocker. My peers were listening to rock and roll, and it was hard rock and roll. I needed to conform. My taste in music changed with the times and my own maturity. I listened to the popular, cool, accepted artists: The Who, The Doors, The Stones, even Janice and Hendrix. These are the artists whose vinyl records, cassette tapes, and CDs are prominently displayed near my stereo. I have some Neil Diamond records, and one or two of his CDs. But, they are well hidden. They are in the credenza behind the tablecloths and cloth napkins. My secret love for Neil is hidden behind the more acceptable passion for rock.

The Who, at some point, became my favorite. I own all their CDs, I can name the title of every Who song. In contrast to my sweet, warm, teenage girl love for Neil, I have had a long, steamy, passionate love affair with Roger Daltry. This love has survived the years. When I

Symbolism

By: Andrew Boyea

"My soul is my canvas, the colors are my story." Tattoos have always been a type of symbolism that marks a passage in my life. Symbolism is a key component that creates structure in our lives. My experience with art and its free expression has shown me that this particular form of taboo can show others not only my story and how I tell it, but can also inspire others to freely express themselves in ways they wouldn't normally show it. Tattoos are examples of how I express my individual creativeness, and the symbolisms of such tattoos are the foundation of my identity.

The symbolism of my first tattoo is significant to the beginning of my story. I had been planning this tattoo for as long as I could remember, considering this particular design has been essential to the representation of a turning point in my life. The tattoo I received was two nautical stars with tribal designs in the background strategically placed on both my forearms. The design represents guidance through life, creating a center of gravity for my life. The tattoo positioned in the center of my body represents my chi; chi is a life force and everything that makes a person special. Back when sailors were out to sea for long periods of time, they would get these nautical stars so that they would have a safe passage home. Sailors, such as my father and grandfather, used this symbol to ensure their safe passage. As a result, I have adopted this symbol to pay respect to their contribution to the safety of our country, as well as my own safety through my travel in life. The colors of these stars also represent a time in high school where I was very confused on what I wanted to do with my life. Drugs and music meant a sense of freedom, but that freedom resulted in a negative consequence. My ability to do well in my classes and stay focused on what was important in life was hidden behind late night drinking and five-minute drum solos. So with that in mind, I chose red with black shading, the red being my anger towards society and being drafted into the chains of the community, and the shading a reminder of that which I had destroyed, a successful high school career. I have since learned from my mistakes and with the reminder of that time period holding my center, I use it to my advantage every day.

The significance of the symbolism for my second tattoo is well represented by the art from the group *Poison the Well*. The art displayed

adorn it with neon greens and purples. Let her imagine a pink sky line and a gnarled tree. Let her turn that dirty, formerly white pick guard into a work of art; a work of love.

Secretly dream of being on stage. Dream about the neon lights of the venues you could play at; dream of the smoke filled rooms and the anticipation and notion that people came to see you perform something that you've made.

Immerse yourself in all the music you have hoarded onto your iPod. Analyze and decrypt every musical interlude, every hidden lyrical implication and allusion.

Play as much as possible and never ever let it get old. No matter how stupid it sounds out loud keep thinking it and liking the way it sounds in your head. It's a lofty dream, but it's a dream nonetheless. Tuck it in the back, behind all the realistic expectations, behind becoming a teacher and having a family and growing old and dying. Keep it out of the way, but don't let it fade into oblivion. Take it out and indulge it every so often. Do this because someday—no matter how according to plan your life does or does not go—someday it might be all you have left of your childhood.

This is my fear: "Oh, Hunter Share, the fat old man in the corner? Yeah, all he does is stare around all day. He looks like he's trying to remember something...remember what his fingers use to be able to do, what his lungs were once capable of. It's like he's trying to bend those arthritic claws into chord fingerings sometimes. I don't think he even notices he's doing it."

hear Roger belting out one of the old Who favorites, I am taken back in time to a Daltry in his fringed vest, his bare chest heaving as he blared out the words. I envision his wild blonde tangled mane blowing around him as he strutted across the stage toward Pete Townsend. He sweated and I sweated along with him. He screamed and I swooned. To this day, when one of those songs comes on the radio, I crank up the volume, roll down the windows and sing-a-long at the top of my lungs. Who cares if I know all the words or not? I love Roger.

My love affair with Neil has faded; it was warm and sweet while it lasted. He is there in my memories of my early teen years. There are times when my love for him comes out the closet, particularly at family weddings, when it is acceptable to sing along with Neil in public. My heart still skips a little beat when I see a picture of him from back then, looking out from under those dark brooding eyebrows. There are rare occasions when surfing the radio that I hit upon the oldies station playing an old Neil Diamond song. I am ripped backwards into the past, like zip-ping through the fastest rewind on the DVR. There I am, a gawky skinny teen, sitting in the front seat of my brother's old Rambler. My eyes grow soft, my mouth curves in a gentle smile, I glance around to make sure no one is watching, my hand slides over to the console to make sure that all the windows are rolled up tightly. And I sing along, gently and carefully. I know all the words to Neil's songs.

Indulging Yourself

By: Hunter Share

It all starts with your first guitar and the implications behind it. All the Rolling Stone articles and CDs in your room suddenly become more than what they were. They become something more meaningful: a tangible manifestation of your own impossibly foolish dreams...

The man at Faller Music in Bennington, Vermont gestures to something green over my shoulder.

"Or, how about something like that?"

My father notices how the green catches my eye.

"Oh no," he says, "You're not getting something just because it looks good. That's not what it's about."

"Well it doesn't look too bad actually," Kurt says in my defense stepping toward the guitar. "It is a strat but it's got a humbucker and two single coils—like mine. That'll give you a wider variety of sound."

Kurt is a strictly *Les Paul* kind of guy.

He steps over to it, picks it up, and begins to play. "Mind if we plug this baby in?"

The man at Faller Music, I think his name is Bernie, he plugs the "sea-foam" green Epiphone Stratocaster into a nearby amp. Kurt wails away the way he so easily does.

He is my guitar teacher.

My dad looks at me smiling. I smirk back. Watching Kurt play is always a treat for us... especially since all we usually do are boring scales.

Kurt looks up: "Try it out."

I take a seat and he hands me the guitar.

Suddenly, whatever they are all talking about—my dad, Bernie, Kurt, my mom—it all sort of dissolves into background noise. I hold the guitar and look it over in awe.

It is so green...so disgustingly, blatantly, unabashedly "sea-foam" green. It's almost what you might call "vomit" green.

After a few months the white pick-guard isn't so white so much as it is beige.

After a few years the volume and tone knobs are lined with grime and dirt.

After a while chips of natural wood can be seen through the paint from when you carried it outside, tried playing it over your head, accidentally smashed it in between the sides of the doorway.

Years of wear and sweaty fingers leave streaks dripping from beneath each fret, down the length of the fret board. Years of relentless bends, hammer-ons, and all around thrashings leave the metal frets disfigured and bent. Some are no longer flush to the fret board.

The strap pins fall out multiple times. How to fix it: fill hole with wood-glue; insert broken toothpicks; let dry; sand excess till flush; re-drill and affix strap-lock.

Grime, dust and hair, find their way in and around the pickups. The head stock becomes chipped.

Solution: remove strings and use cue-tip to wipe away dirt and grime from around the pick-ups. Use lighter fluid to dab away at the oily streaks around the frets. Remove the yellowed volume and tone controls and wash them in soapy water. Use a toothpick to scrape dirt out of the notches. Get your mom to buy as many "sea-foam" green looking nail polishes as she can find. Mix and match until you get the right color. Use this to patch the chips in the paint.

All the wear, all the tear, proves only one thing. It doesn't show misuse or negligence—it's all one big beauty mark. You have a brand new guitar. What do you do? You play it to death.

Fiddle away with what little you know. Learn how to make bar chords, how to play a few scales. Start making your own little chord progressions. Try playing it behind your head. Try playing it with your tongue. Bring it outside after school on warm spring afternoons and bring it out every once and awhile to play by the campfire on a summer's night.

Start playing for your family. Try singing and playing at the same time, just do it in private for a while. It takes forever to get used to in regards to coordinating movements, and it takes even longer to get over yourself and the way you sound.

Try playing and singing some songs by the Beatles, The White Stripes, Pixies, Fratellis, Sublime, Reel Big Fish, Neutral Milk Hotel, Bright Eyes, Say Anything...

Try writing your own songs. Then, after you've gotten up the courage to sing them, destroy them. Burn them in the woodstove, chew them up in your mouth and spit the ink and paper into the garbage and go write a better one.

Have the person you love paint the pick-guard for you. Let her