

Threads

A silhouette of a person with long hair, seen from the side, holding an open book. A bright, circular spotlight illuminates the person's face and the book, creating a strong contrast against the dark, textured background. The overall mood is quiet and focused.

2012

Threads is a journal of student writing and art published by
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2012 Editors

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Cover

Front cover: "By Nightlight" by Aimee Lefebvre

Back cover by Kamran Zamani

Message from the Editors

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

It is important to note that *Threads* reflects works that are not necessarily perfect in their format and composition, but exhibit insight, creativity, social awareness, and a unique perspective. These works—of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and photography—reflect the range of experience, culture, and imagination of the student. The editors relish the opportunity to travel 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 **threads.hvcc.edu**, or e-mail your work to **threads@hvcc.edu**.

Jaime Barrett
Noah Kucij
Ethan Roy
Sara Tedesco

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THREADS WRITING AWARD WINNER

Unreal Ghazal

Fatima Hussain

These men we call delusional, the crazy, the unreasonable
their eyes see what we fail to see, all this insane reality

My flesh has tired of its weight; these legs can carry this no more
For how much more will I go on in this mundane reality?

The urge to live, the drive to eat, my nature's unrelenting tug
each little thing is so absurd in this inane reality

A dying joy, a living pain, the earth is high, the sky is low
No scientist nor philosophe lived to explain reality

One plunging knife, one final breath and finally, farewell to thee,
soldier of sacred battleground, today you've slain reality.

THREADS WRITING AWARD WINNER

Have a Good War

Evan Hotaling

The contemporary take on War is that War is something people don't want to talk about: its conversational taboo. Somehow most of us know that only a child would walk up to a soldier returning home and ask him how many people he's killed. The truth is War IS poetic; the things men go through are unique and dramatic. The subject is delicate, and dialogue about it should be approached with sensitivity, but Wars are real, and real things always make the best stories.

One aspect of war that is hard to convey to someone who hasn't been is the boredom that can set in, the never-ending internal battle to fight off complacency. Some situations can leave men feeling helpless, and feeling obsolete on the battlefield is demoralizing, because the feeling can linger and affect a man even when he is able. This reality was shown to me the summer of 2010, in Afghanistan, wild country.

We held our ground north of our main Patrol Base- It was an Observation Post on top of a small mountain overlooking a big sweeping valley. The OP was about 2.2 clicks away from the patrol base and out of earshot of the lieutenant and the other higher powers most of the time, so we could be more lenient with ourselves than on patrols through the town or while "relaxing" on the main base. We didn't have to "set an example" for our Afghani counterparts who were lacking some of the basic military proficiency and discipline that we were so well known for. We weren't ambassadors like we were down there in town. We were madmen on a hill. Although danger was always imminent, we were relaxed; on those days we knew we had the high ground. There wasn't much to do unless you were on post or we were getting mortared. We didn't have to stay clean shaven or time our naps in between patrols, but we got mortared a lot, so we would lie filthy in the sun and tan with socks on our dicks waiting for the steel rain. Getting mortared is frustrating, but not being able to do anything about it is heart-wrenching, and that was the scenario most of the time we were mortared. So we found our own ways to relieve the stress. Sometimes we shot our rifles, which still did nothing, sometimes we shot the Mk19 grenade launcher, which also did nothing. TOW gunners would

sometimes shoot missiles late at night into the valley, sometimes at nothing. All of it was therapeutic but for the most part effectively futile.

Down in town, and while on patrol, I learned that getting mortared isn't the only time an M16 can feel useless in your hands.

While on patrol through town one day, the Afghani Army had sent their own separate patrol north of us and drawn contact from another village. Playing big brother- the Lieutenant (from the safety of the Patrol Base) instructed us to go assist the Afghanis in their firefight. When we got there, we were thrown into a fiasco of a fight. The Taliban had them pinned down with machine gun fire in the open terrain. Our squad stayed back, found safety in some abandoned foundation digs for mud huts and decided to wait it out for more ass (backup). We had a light patrol scheduled and we didn't have any weapon system with the range that we needed to return fire on the machine guns. We stayed low and tried to get the Afghanis to come back to us but they were unorganized and spaced sporadically throughout the waddi system. It was almost comical watching them try to return fire on the machine guns that were keeping us at bay. They told us that we were being weak- that Marines were supposed to be these brave warriors. Another Sergeant calmly told them that we were going to fight smart, not dumb, and they needed to get cover too. So we played our part strategically, and spread out and hunkered down in our little foxholes.

In combat, men come up with curiously clichéd ways to deal with death when they don't have the capacity to deal with it at that moment.

Unfortunately, in my experience, some people can take the coping mechanism too far and replace it with delusion- but the middle of a firefight is no place for delusion.

5 minutes in one of the serendipitously placed foxholes with bullets whizzing over our heads, a Lance Corporal, the Navy Corpsmen, and myself heard the call for the Corpsmen: "Corpsmen up". One of the Afghanis had been shot in a foxhole a few hundred yards away and they wanted medical help. So when we heard the call, the Lance Corporal and I got up and put rounds down range, cover fire. Our bullets were impotent from this range, but mentally soothing. We moved "Doc" to the wounded soldier, and when he got there, the assessment was easy. The man was dead as a doornail. Shot right through the head and clearly killed instantly. The Proof: two big holes on both sides of his grape. His friend was holding him and seemed shocked by the simple diagnosis. "Doc" told him he should carry the body to the rear because he was "fucking dead". And I didn't feel sympathy, we were all angry at the man for risking our lives because he wasn't prepared for the ugly part of

war. He should have been ready- at any time- to send his buddy off to Valhalla or wherever the Muslims go when they die. And that's the burden all warriors must know and carry with them always.

Groups of elementary students sometimes send letters to deployed troops in an effort to boost morale. One such heartfelt letter, written in blue and red crayon, simply said, "Have a good war!" Well I'm still here, so I guess I did. Thanks Kid!

THREADS WRITING AWARD WINNER

Greek to Me

Heather Harrington

"Get in the car," he says. His thick accent coats his impatience, but doesn't hide it. I look at my mother; watch as her eyes flick quickly between his faded, cracked ID card and his rough, scowling face. She turns to me, her face confused and hesitant. I raise my eyebrows, a silent request for direction. The hesitation in her eyes fades, replaced by determination, and she nods slowly. We get in the car.

The backseat of the car is already crowded, occupied by half filled water bottles and empty packs of Karelias cigarettes. We manage to squeeze in. I am still searching for a seat belt when I notice that Athens is now flying by my window. The speed of the car turns the shops and houses into white smudges. The lights in the doorways and windows are dots that are quickly stretched into lines of illumination as we speed by them. The scowling man shouts loudly in Greek at other drivers, smoke pouring from his nostrils. It rises up to the roof and falls back down again quickly, sucked out of his open window, mimicking the hilly streets we are racing over.

My mother, also without seatbelt, leans close to me and whispers, "This is our adventure. Isn't it thrilling?" She rubs my arm vigorously, perhaps attempting to wipe away the anxiety that occupies my face. She giggles like a little girl who has just heard a prized secret, interrupting the foreign curses that are pummeling us from the front seat and causing me to question which one of us is the adult here.

I realize then that this is so much more to her than a mother-daughter vacation in Greece. She came here to remind herself that she was alive, not just a secretary or an officer's wife. She was more than a mother, more than her carefully put together outfits, more than her coupons and scrapbooks. In this moment, she is a woman of the world. She is free and anonymous, the wide-eyed foreigner, giddy with uncertainty and hungry for the unknown. I take a deep breath, a pleasing mixture of summer air and salty smoke, and smile, pushing the worry under the surface. "It's fantastic, mom."

The car thuds to a stop in front of a small taverna. We escape from the vehicle and our temperamental guide escorts us in. He

practically shoves us into the arms of a nearby waitress and plops himself down at the bar, his hanging black hair tickling his freshly lit Karelias. We leave our mystery guide to his smoky mutterings and take our place at a long, sturdy, wooden table. Almost immediately, plates piled high with unknown fare are thrown in front of us by the beaming, braided waitress, who gives my back a good-natured slap before scurrying back to the bar. I look around at the other patrons at our table. Each hand holds a mug or goblet, each mouth cycles from chewing to laughing to shouting. I turn to my mother, my mouth full of inane questions. She is saved from my banal assault by a sudden burst of music.

A man, standing at the center of the taverna, strums a lavouta, and is soon joined by several other musicians, all playing instruments for which I had no names. The melody is at once foreign and lovely. It is punctuated by shouts of "Opa!" and although it begins slowly, almost seductively, it quickly evolves into a frantic revelry of notes and rhythms. The music spikes my appetite and soothes my fears. I ask my neighbors what we are eating and they answer in Greek and laughter. To this day, I have not a clue what I consumed at that taverna, but it remains one of the best meals I have ever enjoyed.

I have forgotten my mother in all the music and food, but she steals my attention abruptly when I notice that she is no longer by my side, but at the center of the taverna, a blur of twirling skirts, clapping and dancing right along with many of our dinner companions. She spins and skips, laughs and shouts "Opa!", and waves frantically to me. I wave back to her as a smile skews the sip I'm stealing from her small glass of wine. She is radiant and graceful. Her joy is echoed in every clap and captured in every ripple of her flowing skirt. She dances over to me and shouts above the din, "How do I look?"

"You look Greek!" I exclaim, winking and settling back in my chair. She is off again, arms waving and sandaled feet stomping. My mother, not a secretary or an Army wife, but a Greek goddess dancing with the mortals, glowing like the moon. I glance over at our enigmatic guide. His cigarette is held by a smile now, instead of a scowl. He catches me watching him and emits a full and thunderous laugh. "Get up and dance!" he bellows. There is no impatience in his voice this time, though. I get up and dance.

THREADS WRITING AWARD WINNER

And My Heart Broke Open

Bryan P. Beckman

Outside the streets are blanketed in snow. Soft and airy, it muffles the sounds of the city. Light from the street lamps is jumping through the shadows of the early dawn. "Wash your hands and bring me the bag of supplies I had you prepare." With a smile and no sense of urgency the midwife utters this simple command, and almost as an afterthought, "looks like you are my assistant." The first hours of the night have passed slowly and for a moment it seems the Earth is no longer spinning, or hurtling through the cold blackness of space, but still. A moment fixed in time. I look down the hallway and out the westward facing windows that are taller than most men, stretching nearly to the nine foot ceilings of our apartment in a Civil War era row house, the annulus of the rising sun is mirrored in the windows across the way. I breathe and time starts again.

"So Nancy is on her way" Ellen's tone is calm and reassuring, "But this baby may get here first." Slowed by the snow and surprised by the speed of June's labor she is still thirty minutes away. The midwives we hired have delivered scores of babies both together and alone and have other colleagues, whom we have met, on call. It is not out of worry that I hope for her arrival; for June and me Nancy has been the soul of this venture for many months. We want her here. Ellen, ever calm, coaches me. "My job is to make sure mom and baby are ok, and so far everything looks good." I am lulled a bit by the sound of the baby's heart, distorted like a Hendrix riff through the low fidelity speaker on the monitor, as she continues, "Your job is to catch the baby, but before that I need you to tell me what you see. When you see crown say crown, when you see head say head. Be ready. After the head the shoulders pass quickly, and then everything all at once. Don't fumble." She smiles wryly, payback for months of my ironic and sarcastic humor at her expense, but also a sign of the friendship we have all forged as we prepared together for this event.

It was a series of fortunate events that brought us all together. After learning of the pregnancy, one we had not planned but could have

foreseen, my girlfriend June and I agreed to live together, and began to look for an apartment. We looked at dozens. Each of us in turn, like Goldilocks, found some fatal flaw with one place after another. In one the rooms were too small, in another the rent was too high, still others were too far from transportation or other amenities. Walking past the building on her way to view another apartment, June bumped into the landlord as he was putting a "For Rent" sign on the door. This one was just right. We were unaware of its proximity to the center run by Ellen and Nancy. June had found them in the phone book searching for prenatal classes; we had an appointment later that week. We would soon learn that one of their colleagues had delivered my brother's children, and that Ellen had delivered his wife's sister's children. We had stumbled into a community that would nurture us for years.

I hear June cry out from the bedroom: a long, low, rumbling grunt more than a scream. Moving under its own power, legs and arms in alternating synchronous movement, my body is propelled toward the closet. Time is racing as if to compensate for that brief moment where everything was at rest. Like a photograph, the reflected sunlight casts an exposure across my mind, and nothing outside the frame exists. My mind is still. It is time to act, not think.

Things have progressed quickly since the first contraction: fitting metaphor, perhaps, for our time together, from inception to conception and conception to contraction, a span of just twenty two months and some number of days. The first contraction came around midnight, clearly not a Braxton Hicks. Ellen arrived around two at four little had changed and by six this baby was coming. I return to the bedroom with a bag sealed with tape. "Put on gloves and arrange everything neatly over there." Her tone reveals no sense of emergency and leaves no room for argument as she points to a row of sterile pads that she has laid out in the corner of the room. Carefully I open the bag and deposit the towels washed in hot water and bleach; the hemostats and surgical scissors, which had been baked on the foil into which they are folded; the unopened sterile scalpel, swiped from the doctor's office; and several boxes of gauze pads. Gathering the supplies according to the midwives' instructions is the extent of my training.

I think of that day, just ten months ago, when I had learned of my new life. Two or three weeks prior, perhaps a month, we had decided to part company. It was amicable enough, just a sense that we were moving in different directions. She had called to say that we

needed to talk, it was important. "I'm pregnant," she said quietly "I'm going to have the baby." I let out a sigh, long and slow, and stood there silently while my mind tried to take hold of all that this would mean.

"Head," I say. The steadiness and calm of my voice surprises me, a contrast to the audible pounding of my heart. The sun has now moved along its low winter arc, and the steely light of morning quietly illuminates the room through two south facing windows. It was the light that caused us to take the place all those months ago, the light that eased our uncertainty about this union born out of pregnancy. It was the light that warmed us to possibility. "Got her! Here she is!" I shout and sob and giggle at once. Filtered through the dense foliage of myriad plants, this light, on this morning, brings this moment into relief: a baby, my child, alive and in my arms.

THREADS WRITING AWARD WINNER

Die Katze

Mary Clement

It was a bright spring afternoon. April in southern Germany. Sweater weather in the sun.

I was a young new mother on my way home from somewhere. Maybe a four week, well baby check, for Simon. Maybe shopping for little boy things.

I had turned onto our street. I was thinking that If I didn't waste time, I could nurse Simon, change him, put him in the stroller and take a walk before the sun started down in the sky.

I didn't sense movement. I didn't register that something had run into my path until I felt the lump pass under the front tires beneath my feet. A thud I could feel radiate through the steering column.

A shock in my hands that ran up my arms where it split, down my spine, up my neck, and resonated around my head and through my whole body. Stiffening. My hands squeezed hard on the wheel, yanking. Trying to pull the weight of the car up, I think, trying to lift the car up off this lump.

Then I heard the cry, of a cat. A cry that jolted my every nerve, before my nerves short circuited.

In Germany, the people walk more than they drive. Throughout all the little towns that scatter the countryside, people walk to the stores, to the post office, to the farm next door to pick up eggs, to the bank, they walk, just to walk.

So naturally there were people on the sidewalks this day. People that called to one another and hurried to the cat before I was even out of my car.

A woman came running. She halted, "Die Katze," she cried, and stumbled to her cats side.

I turned the car off. Restarted it, pulled to the curb, turned it off again, jumped out and rushed to the crowd encircling the squealing cat.

Everyone was yelling. But in German, I thought they were yelling at me for hitting the cat. Didn't they know it came out of nowhere? Didn't they know I couldn't have avoided it? "Oh my baby."

Were they yelling because I had left the baby in the backseat?

I turned around and returned to my car. They yelled louder. I didn't look back or try to explain. I reached into the car and lifted my new son from his seat. I turned back to confront the chaos. Maybe they weren't really yelling. Maybe it was more of an urgent roar.

I had lived in country nearly three years by this time. I knew the language pretty well. I could share pleasantries with my neighbors. I could shop and order meats and cheeses at the butcher.

Converse with bartenders and waitresses in between ordering a meal and paying the check. Get a haircut, pay a utility bill, ask for directions. For all these things, I had words. I didn't have words for hitting a cat. And I certainly couldn't comprehend all this flurry of German spitting around me now. What were they saying? The cats...back...was broken? What was I to do?

I couldn't remember anything from the "Driving in Germany Manuel" about responsibilities after hitting an animal. I couldn't remember anyone addressing such a thing in my "United States Army in Europe" prep classes. There was no instruction for a young American girl living in Germany and running over a cat. My country had neglected to prepare me for this situation, in this country, full of law and order.

A sturdy looking man, a local farmer I think, and two others were together now, taking control of the situation. One man left and returned. He was carrying a hammer.

I should not have been shocked. After two years of living in Germany, if I had learned nothing else, I had learned that the people were practical, no nonsense, direct kind of people.

The cat needed to be put out of its misery. Of course they would do whatever needed to be done. Even if it meant taking a hammer and giving it one swift blow.

Silence. The cat was silent. The people were silent.

In the stillness I could only hear myself sniffing.

The strong stoic Germans didn't cry. Only I did.

Now what?

One of the men picked the cat up off the road and disappeared behind the nearest barn. Another man addressed me. Calmly he spoke to me but I didn't understand. I was barely listening. My mind was unable to translate.

"I'm so sorry," I stuttered, "Ich bin leid."

He put his hand on my back and led me to my car. "Nach Hause gehen," he said, "Go on home."

I was supposed to go home and do what?

Besides, I was home. I could see my apartment from where I had

parked. These were my neighbors. I had hit my neighbor's cat and then the farmer from my street had finished the job.

I imagined walking my baby the next day with whispers following me.

"She's the girl who hit Frau Schmidt's cat."

"That's her, that's the American."

Maybe I didn't go anywhere for a few days. I don't remember exactly. I think I hid out, inside.

But eventually we needed milk. We needed some food. We needed some fresh air.

I dressed myself and dressed my baby and walked down to the market to buy my groceries.

No one pointed. No one whispered.

Someone stopped and admired my baby. Someone commented to me on what a perfect day it was.

Life went on, here on my street, in my neighborhood, in another man's country.

THREADS WRITING AWARD WINNER

Viva Brasil

Theo Adam Zegers

Pastel vibrations coat stucco walls,
The sun says goodnight in Brasil.
Crimson clay pathways are veins in the hills.
You will find me in Rio.

Moonlight's white vessel will launch in our name,
This brotherhood is bound for Brasil.
The drums and the flutes seem to tango to heat.
We're demi-god beauty in Rio.

Spices and laughter pack lofts of warmth,
She shares chardonnay in Brasil.
Hummingbirds, dragonflies and us all as one,
My bones tend to whistle in Rio.

Waxy-aloe palm-leaf eyes—
Are accustomed to winks in Brasil.
Portuguese, though gorgeous, evades my lips.
We will speak with our bodies in Rio.

One Awesome Morning...with Bacon!

Robbin Dzembo

It had been that kind of a night. A tossy-turny, awake more than asleep, almost guaranteed to be a bad day kind of night. She came to consciousness slowly, becoming aware of the sounds and smells of the house before she was aware that she was not asleep anymore. Surprisingly, she felt pretty good.

The sunlight streamed in through the big picture window over her large and oh-so-comfy bed. It warmed her face, which she loved, while making her eyelids that annoying glowy red, which she hated. She stretched her legs, one at a time, languishing in the feeling of the well toned muscles and their strength.

She smelled breakfast. Now, that she loved. She swore sometimes she could eat and eat and eat until she exploded. Food was most definitely among her best friends. She enjoyed practically everything – no one would ever consider her picky by any stretch of the imagination, but there were surely things she liked better. Meat. She loved meat. Delicious, tasty meat. Hot, right off the grill or cold, straight from the fridge. It mattered not, so long as it was made of meat.

She tentatively sniffed the air to see if she could discern exactly what was for that glorious first meal. Well, really, all meals were glorious – and the most glorious? The upcoming one, of course! She smelled..... OMG! BACON! Bacon was most definitely meat. Smokey, salty, crunchy and MEATY! Her mouth started watering and she decided that getting up was a sooner, rather than later kind of thing.

She stretched one more time for good measure, letting out a jaw-popping yawn and crawled out of bed. She shook a little to get her equilibrium, not that she would have ever thought to call it that, but nonetheless, tipsy was not a good morning thing. She crossed the room, taking in all the sights – the sun puddle on the floor in front of the window which made that particular part of the floor warm on the bare soles of her feet, the cushy chair in the corner that was so perfect for curling up in when no one was around, the small cobweb in the corner that had her hair caught in it.

She padded quickly through the house toward the kitchen and that intoxicating smell. The hall was much dimmer than the sunny bedroom, but she had no trouble navigating it. She knew every nook and cranny of her beloved house. She proceeded down its length,

picking up a little speed – not running, necessarily... but really? There might be BACON involved – she simply had to hurry!

She turned the corner and nearly galloped into the bright, beautiful and oh-so-yummy smelling kitchen! There, before her, were her roommates and best friends, who started a bit at her sudden entrance and then laughed. “Hey, girl” said one. “You want some bacon?” queried the other. She almost smiled and went to the table to get her share.

She listened to them chatter on about the weather (sunny) and their jobs (boring) and the upcoming week (too long between Saturdays!) while enjoying her breakfast. She didn’t have much to contribute to the gloomy conversation going on around her – she was usually always happy. Her desires were few and easily satisfied. She wanted a comfy place to lay her head, her beautiful house to live in, her best friends around her and enough food to fill her belly with the occasional addition of bacon. She listened for a moment more, then wandered out into the yard.

She looked around in renewed wonder at the view before her. She took in the small tree in the corner that her roommate had planted when he had buried his cat there. (Sad to say, she didn’t miss that wretched creature AT ALL – all claws and hissing and just, cat-like). Her gaze wandered over the grass that needed a trim and the big pot of “patio tomatoes” that were struggling to grow. She saw the mangled Frisbee lying in the corner by the fence... but wait.

What was that noise? Oh my God, it was whistling. She hated whistling. It was probably that damn mailman. She hated the mailman. Not because he brought the bills that he hated or the flyers and catalogs that made her a bit grumpy, but because of the damn whistling and well, because he was a mailman. She took one last drink from her water bowl and wagged her tail. Barking happily, she ran toward the front gate. She was hopeful, this time, she might just be able to bite his leg!

True Memory

Roland Van Zandt

In grade school, teachers always ask you to write or draw a memory from when you were younger. Some people can remember back longer than a few years and even less remember before they were 4. It's been said that a traumatizing event can trigger your memory. It would be an experience so dark and painful, that it burrows deep into your long term memory. But sometimes this experience, as scary as it may be, defines who you are for the rest of your life.

It happened late one Sunday evening in September with the family. I was a few weeks shy of 3 years old. My brother, already 7, was challenging me to physical activities high above my capabilities. We made an "obstacle" course in our living room. The course consisted of the couch, a table, a recliner, and two Fischer Price toy trucks. Our goal was to move along this "J" shaped path without touching the floor, starting at the top of the "J" on the couch. We would end after the second toy truck and right beside our fish tank display.

This big display consisted of two tanks, one on top of the other. The 55 gallon on top held 20 to 30 random, colorful fish while the 35 gallon on the bottom held 15 or so African Cichlids. They were so amazing, colorful, and fast. Their image was vivid, still is.

We rough-housed and climbed all over the room with ease. My brother and I made it around the course a few times, each time getting braver. The last one before we sat down to eat dinner was the true challenge. My brother had gone before me, and spread out the two trucks at the end. He spread them far enough so that it was just further than I could jump. But being the younger brother, I had to show off what I could do. I had that compulsion to "be like big brother." So off I went, on this course with no thought of what would result of my thick headedness.

I remember jumping and landing with one foot, thinking I had made it without a hitch. Then the truck began to roll and I felt my body tip to one side as I lost balance. My head struck the glass and I went right through. I began to cry and clinched my eyes closed. The stinging pain of glass in my forehead kept growing.

I opened my eyes to find myself in the kitchen. I was on the floor being held by my mother as she tried to stop the bleeding. Everyone was running around; the dog was barking like he'd seen my ghost and my

brother ran to open the door for the EMT's. I closed my eyes again, trying to stop my salty tears from getting in the cuts.

Everything went dark.

The next thing I remember is waking up in the hospital. My father was to my right, a nurse to my left and I could see my brother and mother in the hall. My mother's stomach couldn't handle dealing with her "baby boy's" blood anymore. My father told me, "Roland, the doctors have to get the glass out of your head. Some is wedged behind your left eye. You are going to be awake when they do the surgery. But you won't feel anything, I promise. And I will be right here by your side." Shortly after, I was wheeled down to the operating room. There I remember the cold room and being strapped down. I was locked in place while the doctor was above me, shadowing me from the light. I didn't feel any pain as I watched a needle come down to my forehead, but I cried and screamed nonetheless. I was not even 3 and a doctor was putting a needle through my head. I fell asleep with my father holding my head and the doctor stitching me shut.

I woke up crying. I didn't know where I was. I was alone in a cold, unfamiliar place. But I could see the wall painted with fish tank scenery. The scenery only made my crying worse. The fish seemed to be swimming back and forth and all around the room. My parents were brought to me. They had relieved looks on their faces to see me alive and well. The surgeon brought my parents up to date on my recovery; I was given an orange juice to relax, a lot of orange juice. I don't know why I wanted so much. I never liked orange juice very much and still don't. Shortly after finishing my fourth juice, I was released from the hospital.

It was dark when we drove home. One of my last memories of that night was being carried into the back door, which was located by the fish tank that I had taken a head on collision with. I could see the fish tank and the glass was shattered; a hole remained where that glass once was. My mother laid me down in bed and no sooner did my head hit the pillow and I was asleep.

It's funny, actually. People say that a person's true memory starts around age 4. But mine, mine is more than a year before that age. A tragic accident is what defines my life and me as a person; it's what truly makes my mind, damaged or not, unique.

A Shelf Life

Alicia Randazzo

Buying a jar of pickles at a Food Lion in Fayetteville, North Carolina, was how I gained a bit of perspective. Living in the South in 2005, war was so personal and it was everywhere. Wherever I went, the war was only a few steps behind me. It was at the grocery store, the gas station, and even the most intimate of places: the bedroom.

It was a Sunday; I remember because I sat in traffic as the Buffalo Presbyterian Church had just concluded their first morning service. Unholy and wretched, I honked as women in their Sunday best walked their exuberant children across the street to a dirt parking lot. A few men smoked cigars while lingering under a thirty foot tall Longleaf Pine that provided little to no shade from the southern sun. Above us, helicopters making their way to Fort Bragg created a comforting backdrop. I lived within a reasonable distance from the Army base which it had its perks, but the sound of soft rumbles in the night seemed comparable to hot cocoa on a wintery day.

On a normal Sunday, I would shop at the local market. On this particularly warm February morning, I decided to treat myself to a deliciously smooth iced coffee, laced with caramel swirls and sweet whipped cream. The nearest coffee shop was forty-five minutes away, so I followed the choppers' route to the All-American City.

I bought and finished my coffee in less time than it took the barista to make it, and before I knew it, my shopping cart was half filled with avocados and pomegranates that would only rot before I had the time to ingest them. I lived alone ten months a year. I was nine months into his second ten month deployment and still hadn't learned that buying a head of lettuce was like throwing \$5 away. I placed the lettuce in my cart anyway.

Pickles, though; pickles have a shelf life of two months after being opened. That seemed worth it to me, since my soldier would be home safe before they even expired. Perfectly plump and tightly packed, I scan the shelf for the most supreme gaggle of pickles. I bumped into a woman who was reaching for the same jar; perhaps thinking the same thing about them. I let her have it since I felt rather sacrilegious after honking at those church-goers. A cell phone rang and, instinctively, patrons close enough to hear it checked their pockets; just in case. She didn't say much, but the sound of her exhale was loud

enough to cause all of Aisle 11 to hush their children, remove their hats, and stare. The jar fell from her hands. Her two sons ran up and down the aisle collecting coupons from dispensers, as she sunk into the floor; landing atop the glass that cut her like jagged shrapnel. I knew right then and there that her soldier was gone.

In that moment, it was as if I could reach out my hand and touch war. War was slumped over in front of me; defeated and alone. Cell phones became an instrument of destruction; instilling in me a fear of hearing Death whispering his name. War followed me home and crept inside my bedroom at night; as if my pillow formed a callus and it was no longer soft and accommodating. I avoided eye contact with soldiers in dress uniform, plagued with the idea that they were commissioned to only bring about bad news.

I turned 21 that week. While my friends back in New York were worried about what shoes to wear to their first legal bar experience, I sat in bed with a vat of ice cream and a bottle of Malbec; praying to whichever God would listen that I wouldn't have to place an American flag atop an empty casket, like the woman who dropped the pickle jar had to do. War wasn't just a page or two in the daily newspaper anymore. It became a part of my life; as if I were on the front lines defending my basic and natural right to be a part of this world.

Anyway; perspective is a funny thing. Some may stare at a vast ocean under a starlit canopy, or stand at the highest peak overlooking valleys and hills rolling in and out of each other before crashing into a horizon. I found mine in Aisle 11 of a food market. I had realized that day that everything has a shelf life; even my love for a soldier in a green beret. Seven years have come and gone; flown by, really. He made me promise two things as we crammed one last box into my Honda: To devise my life as I see fit; with purpose and humility, and to never stop buying pickles.

Good Harbor Blues

Cameron Rivers

I went out on the ocean to see if I'd drown
Uncle Nemo said he could take me down
To Davey Jones' locker I could hang my hat
Better than Hell I can tell you that
No fire or brimstone, just a little humid
And if you get lonely you can call up Cupid
He's got a mermaid I'm sure you'll want to meet
And if you like seafood it's all you can eat

Jumped out of an airplane to see if I could fly
Little birdie came along and said "Mister, are you high?
Cause that airplane ain't, it's sitting on the ground
And you're on your head, upside down
I didn't know what to say I was a bit confused
I paid good money and I felt I'd been used
Jumped to my feet and said "Hey! What's up?"
Birdie said "I am, and you didn't pay enough."

I walked in front of a train but it went the other way
Shot myself with a gun but the bullet went astray
Took out my knife but it was much too dull
Like my sense of humor which is virtually not at all
So the purpose of my life will remain concealed
I'll be the last to know, the fat lady revealed
I'll have many years to go before she sings
Glory! Hallelujah! For thee the bell rings
So if you're contemplating the end of your own life
I wish you better luck at getting it right
What will you live for? What will you die for?
Surrender and/or strive for
You may be full of joy, you may be full of remorse
In the end Death will take its course
So the moral of the story is certainly plain to see
Under no circumstances should you listen to me

Dying For A Drink

Romey J. Romano

The bus ride home was peaceful. I'd left my first beer Russian roulette in Pigeon Park, a six-pack of American pilsner bottles, one of which tainted with ground castor bean. Before you laugh about some bum, called a homeless person as of late, crapping him/herself on a park bench, ground up castor beans create the poison ricin. Slow acting ricin mimics the effects of long-term alcohol abuse.

This all began as an idle thought. A few weeks ago I had been looking forward to sitting in the park with my lunch and a paperback. At the park the homeless people had taken all the seats and they made it obvious that I was not wanted. There was space available on one bench. As I made my way to it the vagrant sitting at one end put his leg up on the seat and glared at me.

"Whattaya goin to do banker?"

At a loss for words, encircled by laughter, I made my way out of the park and back to my office. I'd been taught to have compassion for those less fortunate than I. My lunch bag and book sat neatly on the desk. It was bad enough that I had to face abuse at home and at work, but to have a toothless leach of society give me the boot was too much.

My lunch and book were dropped into the bottom drawer of my desk, and I went back to work proofreading the newest batch of drivel from on high. In the back of my brain I seethed, my ears were burning, and I was beginning to see spots. I got up and locked my office door. I tried to empty my mind, but I kept hearing the jerk say, "Whattaya goin to do banker?"

The rest of my day at work was uneventful, as was the drive home and the meal cooked by my wife. The kitchen shark cats got their treats, and I got my ice cream.

My wife was looking through the list of shows available on cable and there it was, *Poisonous Plants* on the garden channel. Being an avid gardener, my wife was not surprised when I asked her to DVR the show. She began to watch a Lifetime Channel movie from the DVR, so I sat back to watch it with my eyes, but not with my mind.

I kept replaying the scene from "American Psycho" where the killer stabs the bum in the alley, and thought of that stinking, toothless bum bleeding out in the park. Yeah, that'd be smart, stab him in broad daylight and wait for the cops to take me away. Christ, will this movie ever end?

"I'm going for a walk."

"Well, take out the garbage, and you might as well do the litter boxes while you're at it."

So much for a peaceful start to my walk. After my tasks, I wandered up our suburban street. The flicker of televisions basked the front lawns with their private light shows. Crickets chirped. There was a beer can in the gutter. I kicked it, caught up to it and kicked it again. I stopped. The streetlight overhead popped on and I basked in the inspiration.

Poison, some sort of poison. I walked back to our house, put up with the last twenty-eight minutes of her film and claimed the remote. Cued up my show, and settled back to see what I could use. That was when I learned all about the castor bean.

Then came the hard part. For the next month I did a bit of shopping at one of the immigrant run shops downtown. I started with chewing gum and a soda, and by the end of the month I was up to the required two bags of groceries and one bag of beer.

I also started to take the bus, under the pretense that I was saving money on gas and using the time on the bus to read. As the amount of groceries increased, I'd have to stop in the park for a quick rest and to shift my load.

Back at the house I took my six-pack of beer to the cellar. I put on rubber gloves and my painting respirator to protect me from the castor beans. Using my mortar and pestle I ground the beans, transferred the powder to a beer bottle and resealed it.

The next day I went to work with my lunch and a bubble wrapped bottle of beer in my messenger bag. At the store I picked up my groceries and beer.

Damn. Where do I make the swap? I couldn't do it on the street. As I approached the Catholic Church I said under my breath, "Bless me father for I have sinned," and laughed. I entered the church, sat in a pew and made the swap.

In the park I stopped at a bench and sat down with my messenger bag and a grocery bag on my left, and the beer bag and other grocery bag on my right. The seconds ticked by. I had to wait long enough so I'd have to rush for the bus.

A bum said, "Hey bud you'd better hurry or you'll miss your bus."

"You're right," I said, got up and left the bag of beer on the bench.

Their laughter followed me out of the park, except the joke was on one of them. Taking my seat on the bus, as I looked out the window a

mix of exhilaration and paranoia raced through my body.

I got off the bus at the end of my street and walked home. I wondered how many times I could forget a six-pack of tainted beer at the park before anyone caught on. Would a new cretin pop up to take the place of the fallen comrade? I entered the house and my wife asked, "And how was your day?"

I kissed her on the cheek and said, "Killer."

The Pool Hall

Heather Hanrahan

I reach my arm out to the coffee table, searching for my cell phone and check the time. 4:37 p.m. I rub my eyes and sit up on my friend's couch. I've been sleeping here for the past couple of months, since my mom kicked me out of her house. Fortunately, she still pays the phone bill. It's not bad here, but it's not great, either. I grab the orange and lime green bowl from the table and light up the remains from last night. Inhale, hold it in, and exhale. The smoke fills the room for a second and then disappears. I look around the living room for a clean shirt to wear. I bend down to smell the white tee closest to me lying on the floor. It smells alright so I throw it on over my head and pull it down to my stomach.

The apartment is quiet. Kyle and Dylan must be at work already. Kyle is a waiter at a restaurant down the street and Dylan works at a warehouse nearby. I guess I have no motivation to find a job when I still have a year of high school left. Lucky for them, they graduated four years ago and can afford to live on their own. Unlucky for them, they have to deal with me. They said it'd be alright for me to stay on their couch when my mom kicked me out. Guess she didn't like me staying out all night and coming in at the crack of dawn reeking of alcohol and weed. I know it's got to be a bummer sometimes having a seventeen-year-old under your roof when you're twenty-one and all you want to do is get drunk and laid. They don't make too much of a fuss, though.

I don't really have any plans or priorities for the day, much like any other day during the summer, so I decide to go for a walk around town. I grab my keys and lock the door as I step out into the beaming sun. It feels like it's 90 degrees out. There's not much to do around here. I reach into my pocket for my cigarettes and notice that I only have one left. I light it and head to the convenience store a few blocks away. The only reason I have money is because my dad sends me a check every month because he knows my mom won't give me shit from the child support he is paying. He pays for my cigarettes, weed, and some food, so I'm content with that.

"Yo Marky," I say to the cashier as I walk up to the front counter of the convenience store. "Gimmie a pack of them Marb reds."

"Where's your i.d., kid?" he responds like he always does.

"Come on, Marky. You know I'm only seventeen. Gimmie a break."

"Yeah, yeah. \$10.70," he says as he rings up the pack of cigarettes.

"What? You're killin me, Marky!" I reach into my pocket, pulling out a crumpled-up ten-dollar bill and some change, throwing it onto the counter.

"No, no. Them cigarettes are killing you."

"yeah, whatever, Marky. Have a good one," I yell out while walking out of the store into the hot summer sunshine. Almost too hot. I decide to walk back to the apartment to play some video games. I walk through the door and plop myself on the ratty couch. I turn on my Sony Playstation 3 and play a few rounds of Socom. A few rounds turned into several and before I knew it, the bright summer sky turned dark. I checked my cell phone and read the time: 11:56 p.m. I noticed a few missed calls and a text message. I must have not heard it while lost in a trance of video game playing. Just then, my phone began to buzz in my hand. The caller ID read Kyle.

"Hey. What's up?" I said into the receiver.

"Yo man, where have you been?" Kyle asked frantically.

"Just been playing some video games," I replied nonchalantly.

"Oh, I should have known." He let out a laugh into my ear.

"Heh, yeah. What's going on?" I replied, unamused.

"Nada. Just got out of work. Heading down to the pool hall to meet with some people. Wanna' go?"

"Yeah, sure. That sounds good. I'll meet you there." I hung up the phone and started out of the living room, grabbing a hoodie and my keys, locking the door on the way out. Kyle was always so hung up on locking the door. I didn't think it was a big deal. We were just in Waterford. What happens here? But it's his place, so it's his rules.

The pool hall was right down the road so I decided to walk there instead of taking the bus. There was a nice breeze there and I didn't mind walking. I arrived within fifteen minutes and saw Kyle walking through the entrance of the place. I started toward the door but got distracted by a mysterious girl leaning against the brick wall. She was beautiful in the most simplest way. She was smoking a cigarette and staring out into the plain sky. I felt my fresh pack of Marb reds in my jean pocket and ignored them as I approached the unknown girl.

"Hey, can I bum a cig?" I asked her.

She responded with a soft "yeah," never turning to look at me as she pulled the pack from her purse and handed me one. I grabbed it

from her delicate hand and lit it up. She seemed like she was in another world. I was curious to know what was so importantly engrossing her mind.

"So.....what's your story?" I straightforwardly asked, without hesitation.

I watched her as she slowly inhaled her cigarette and exhaled the smoke swiftly to the sky, observing it as it drifted away into nothing. She looked up at me with the saddest eyes I have ever seen and parted her red-stained lips.

"My twin sister just died in a car crash," she bleakly responded, looking straight into my eyes. I was shocked. Not just by the horrible news she informed me of, but more by her honesty. Her utter bluntness of telling a complete stranger about the awful tragedy taking over her life right now. Stunned, I didn't know what to say. I was speechless. I managed to catch my breath and mutter a pathetic "sorry."

She looked at me with her vacant eyes and shrugged her shoulders while continuing to puff on her cigarette. I thrust my arm out, offering to shake hands, while I introduced myself.

"I'm Gavin."

She reluctantly grabbed my hand and shook it. Her hand was so small and fragile in mine. I felt like I could break it if I shook it too hard.

"I'm Cassie, " she subtly responded.

Then I proceeded to offer the only thing I could think of that would help in this kind of situation. The only thing that helps me in a bad mood or worried or upset, or anything, really.

"Wanna smoke a joint?"

She thought for a moment and then agreed. She followed me to the back of the pool hall, where we sat on the ground with our backs against the wall and shared the joint between us, along with our life stories; well, most of them, anyway. Laughing and talking until it was light out again. Maybe things were starting to look up. Maybe everything would be ok, or even better.

What Is It Like To Be a...Wolf?

Cameo Ray

What is it like to be...me, you ask? Well my fleshy kin, ask yourself this in return: Do you still possess the instincts to comprehend our lifestyle? Do you have the guts to stomach our existence anymore? For you see, I know of only one of our brothers who still understands us. But you, the now civilized, two legged tamed dog, no longer knows what it is like to be *Wa-ya*¹, a free-roaming child of the moon. If you wish to return to your origins, to live amongst the rest of your siblings, then cast off your cloaks of evolution and come, run with me my brother...

... Through this world of savagery and beauty!

But first, tell me *Da-ni-ta-ga*²; do you still recall *our* birth? How *A-le-u-tsi*³ *Ga-u-wa-tlv-yi*⁴ brought us into this world, and licked us clean of the bloody tatters that are *our* beginnings? You and I, we cried out a harrowing, chilling song upon the first gasps of the sweet, midnight air. We told the world in triumphant chants "we have arrived", and our *A-ni-wa-ya*⁵ joined in unison, with their shouts of celebration. *Ga-u-wa-tlv-yi* wrapped herself around our bodies to shield us from the cold that could have very well been our demise. She then gave us warm nourishment that filled our bellies, and soon after, we slept closely huddled together against Mother. That night, an orchestra of echoing hearts, beating with various tempos of splendor was shared amongst the clan, and they filled our dreams.

...Can you still hear the melody?

Are you struggling to keep up with me, *Da-ni-ta-ga*²? Seems like the society which you left us for, your *A-ni-wa-ya*⁵, has altered you more than either of us imagined. So, you chose to forget about the hunt? Ha! Not I, I never will, unlike you, who finds the pathetic civilized system of obtaining daily food more enjoyable. Have you become that lazy, *Da-ni-ta-ga*², or is there another reason; perhaps shame? Maybe you no longer see the thrill that once made you giddy and anxious, as your paws begged you to glide through the vast landscapes; our playground?

C'mon, I know you want to do it again. I can see a glint shining out from your eyes that wishes to revel in the ecstasy of our shared history once more. So, free yourself then. Don't hold back any longer!

I demand that you run with me!

Feel the earth underneath your paws, its texture moist from the dew of the night. Her soil is strong for it does not collapse under your

weight, yet also delicate, because you kick up clumps of dirt as you race through the forest. Listen to the symphony of sounds that play, and make your ears twitch about. They are so peaceful and calm, yet they invite the spirit to fly unhindered above the clouds. Do you feel your heartbeat, with its strong, aggressive melody? It complements the symphony and lifts the spirit higher and higher!

Keep going *Da-ni-ta-ga*², don't stop! Concentrate on the prismatic atmosphere. The flowing wind that envelops your anatomy; how the cooler temperatures combine with warmer ones to make your hair stand on end, and, your skin react in ways parallel to a lover's touch. The aromatic air; fill your lungs with its abundance, as you continue to savor the wispy caress of the summer night's breeze. Now, taste the mist that dances on your tongue; a motley of flavors that make you drunk, sending your mind reeling. Let your senses drown in the dark, lustful, and frenzied pleasures.

...They lure you further into reuniting with your wild side.

Ah, yes! I can sense the connection we share returning within you, growing stronger every minute. Wait, stop! Look to your left...did you see it? A plump rabbit skips through the damp leaves. Do you see his puffy tail, bouncing as he prances around the towering trees? He has presented himself to us *De-ga-ne-li*⁶ *ka-na-ti*⁷, as a live sacrifice. He is showing us respect, but we must first prove ourselves worthy. We must catch him, that is our task.

...We must honor his wishes!

Go; honor the rabbit's unspoken request! Chase him through the obstacle course of bushes, streams, and boulders. Soar through the air my *a-gi-ga-u*⁸ *De-ga-ne-li*⁶; outwit him when he tries to trick us! Faster, we mustn't fail our mission, for that would bring shame upon our *A-ni-wa-ya*⁵! Stay your course *De-ga-ne-li*⁶ *ka-na-ti*⁷, while I flank him from the right so we can trap him. We're so close...just a little further...wait for it..., JUMP ON *TSI-S-DU*⁹ NOW!

...A single bite, and a quick snap to seal our victory.

Follow me brother, let's bring our prize to the moonlit water's edge, through this clearing behind us. Sit beside me, *Da-ni-ta-ga*², and together we will enjoy the spoils of this wonderful sacrifice, for we deserve this gift of the hunt. Let us pay attention to the wisdom that *tsi-s*¹⁰ teaches, as we feast on his corpse. The rabbit's hot blood paints our faces with the mark of the *da-nu-wa-a-na-li-hi*¹¹. He gives us sustenance for both our body and soul, restoring them.

...Has the thrill of the hunt returned to you now?

*Da-ni-ta-ga*², take a glimpse of your reflection in the water. See

how your glow with a mesmerizing light, cast by the *Ga-u-wa-tlv-yi's⁴ a-tsi-la-ga-lv-ka-we-ti-yu¹²*? At last, the ritual of reunion is complete! You understand what it is like to be *Wa-ya¹* again.

...You are a *Wolf* once more.

Source for Cherokee word references:

American Indian Council *Manataka*©2011 visited 3rd of March, 2011
Website

¹ *Wa-ya*: Cherokee; means Wolf

² *Da-ni-ta-ga*: Cherokee; means Brother

³ *A-le-u-tsi*: Cherokee; means Mother

⁴ *Ga-u-wa-tlv-yi*: Cherokee; means Moon

⁵ *A-ni-wa-ya*: Cherokee; means Wolf Clan / Wolf Pack

⁶ *De-ga-ne-li*: Cherokee; means Brother

⁷ *Ka-na-ti*: Cherokee; means Hunter

⁸ *A-gi-ga-u*: Cherokee; mean Beloved

⁹ *Tsi-s-du*: Cherokee; means rabbit

¹⁰ *Tsi-s*: Cherokee; means rabbit

¹¹ *Da-nu-wa-a-na-li-hi*: Cherokee; means Warrior

¹² *A-tsi-la-ga-lv-ka-we-ti-yu*: Cherokee; means Sacred Fire / Sacred Light

[http://www.manataka.org/page123.html#SPIRIT & COSMOS](http://www.manataka.org/page123.html#SPIRIT%20&%20COSMOS)>

Islam Will Stand

Marzia Niazi

Bismillah-hi Rahmani Rahim.
Al-Humdullilah-Hi Rahmani Raheem.
Muslim teens,
Others feen.
We cover our face,
Yet we're a disgrace.
A disappointing case.
We are being chased.
They're making us feel like such a waste.
Fingers are pointed at us,
Being told we are not to trust.
People say we're wrong.
We try to bond,
Yet, they put us on the news,
Telling people we are bad news.
Just because we dress different?
Look different?
Believe different?
They try to knock us down,
They'll try to push us around,
But our Islamic Nation will stay strong.
Islam will go on, until the final day.
We'll all stand together and say,
Bismillah-hi Rahmani Rahim.

I Believe That Love Does Change the World

Wai Kit Chan

People can sometimes be so cold. In “Thirty Eight Who Saw Murder Didn’t Call the Police” by Martin Gansberg, there was a lady who was murdered by a killer who returned to stab her three times in thirty eight minutes. During the returns, none of the witnesses called the police, and this resulted in tragedy. Tragedies can be avoided and a better society can result if people are polite, thoughtful and help each other. If we live with the idea that we need to try to help, we will all share the greatest world.

I have been in the USA for two years, and I have not witnessed the lack of concern for others displayed in Gansberg’s article. There is one thing that is so touching to me: people open the door or hold the door for the person behind them. One day, when I was going to the BTC building at school, I noticed the kind manner. There was a gentleman who held a door for the lady behind him. After the lady went into the door and found me walking on the way to the entrance, she held the door for me. It may not seem important for the people who live in here. However, as an outsider from Hong Kong, I feel the power of the transferring of love between people who can help others like that, even though they do not know each other. Sometimes, they wait for a while to hold the door just for a stranger. I don’t feel like I can connect with people in a big city because it seems like everyone has some kind of emergency as if they are about to give birth. A tiny circle from their feet is the only thing that concerns them.

“Thirty Eight Who Saw Murder Didn’t Call the Police” also reminds me of the day that occurred four years ago, when I was in a bus station in the morning. It was just like my usual day, and I was trying to study as much as I could for an upcoming exam. I was rushing to a last-minute review, which was better than doing nothing. Frankly, God may have thought it should not be a good time to study. Thus, he was going to give me a lesson. I was focusing on the test material and attempted to find out the possible question my teacher would ask. Meanwhile, “bomb!” a big noise, which sounded like heavy baggage was dropped on the floor, was made next to me. I put down my paper and turned my head to where the sound came from. My mind was empty at that moment. I saw a girl was lying on the floor and shaking all over. I knew this must be some kind of sickness. I felt embarrassed. Fortunately, I was

not the only one frozen without motion. The shaking body reminded me; I recognized that I needed to do something, but I was so shocked and did not know what to do. I regretted that I did not learn some emergency skills or take some ambulance courses, even just as a summer interest class.

I looked at the shaking body on the floor and looked around. A lot of people were there, but no one tried to help. "Let someone call the police!" I yelled at them. I thought about what I could do for that girl. There was a voice in my mind that kept telling me to help the girl. If I did not, I knew I would have regretted it for the rest of my life. I therefore attempted to move her body around. I remembered a show called Junior Police Call on TV in my country. In one episode, I learned that when we meet some emergency, such as a person passes out, it is inappropriate to move the patient. This may possibly cause a worse condition. The episode told that we should lift the body with the face on one side in order to allow breathing and to bend her legs for better blood flow. I saw the legs of the girl were overlapped. Based on the episode and the need to help, I grabbed her legs. Suddenly, a man came through and said to me that the ambulance was coming. I knew that I was done with my mission and stepped back.

By that time, a bus came and stopped. I returned to being a student and went back to my normal life. I didn't know how that girl turned out; but I do know that I did try hard offering not the best help but the most I knew how to do. Regardless of my help, I found that I care about people, even not knowing them. If people are in a bad situation, they will hope for help. I do too. Otherwise, the incident of "Thirty Eight Who Saw Murder Didn't Call the Police" will happen continuously. The next victim may be you or me or someone we care about. In order to build a peaceful community, we all have to practice the love between us. Once we share our love, the power will amaze every one of us. I believe that love does change the world.

The Cost of A Career

Katie Dedrick

In the middle of the darkness that goes along with two o'clock in the morning, the still air is pierced by a wretched squeal. The people in the neighborhood open their eyes to see a bright red pattern dancing on their ceilings. The siren fades into the darkness and everyone returns to slumber. Other than their sleep getting interrupted for a brief moment, their lives are unaffected. No one cares to think for a moment about the members of that ambulance crew that went whizzing past. No one thinks for a moment about the situations they go into, the paychecks that get them by from week to week, or the countless hours they spend away from their families.

The ambulance rolls to a stop and the crew hops out, in a two o'clock in the morning sort of way. They seem tired because they are. Their shirts are half tucked in and their hair is a mess. There is no time for vanity when rolling out of bed to go to an emergency. As one EMT grabs the gear bag, the other bends down to tie the laces of his boots. The gear bag gets hurled onto the stretcher and the crew hoofs in to the front door of the apartment building. They fumble to find the correct key within the massive collection of keys that aren't labeled. The crew squeezes the stretcher through the narrow doorway opening. They locate the correct apartment and proceed in.

A hefty, elderly woman is sitting on the floor, leaning against her bed. The crew asks the woman what happened. She snips that she slid down while trying to get out of bed. She claims she feels fine and is not injured, but she really needs to get to the bathroom. The crew lifts and heaves in an attempt to get this woman back to her feet, but to no avail. They break a sweat and try a few more times. The female EMT finally decides to step out into the hallway to call the paramedic who is asleep at the station to ask for his help at the scene. The other EMT takes the woman's blood pressure and pulse rate; it shows no signs of any abnormalities.

While the crew waits for the medic to arrive, the woman again voices her need to use the bathroom. With one of them on each side of the woman, the EMTs squat down and lift with all their might. The female EMT gives up and lets out a sigh. At about the same time, the young man she is working with gets a horrified look on his face, covers his mouth with one hand, and points with the other. The only words he

can utter are, “Your boot!” The veteran EMT moves her head, almost in slow motion, to look down at her boot. And there it is: the EMT’s brand new boot is hidden beneath a pile of shit.

Disgusted and agitated, the female EMT goes to the patient’s bathroom to clean her boot the best she can. Upon returning to the patient’s bedroom, she sees that the patient is now white as a ghost. They check the woman’s vital signs again, only this time it’s in the toilet (no pun intended). The paramedic arrives and confirms what the EMTs have found. He looks at her heart with a cardiac monitor and says that they need to get to the hospital as soon as possible. The EMTs and the medic struggle to get the woman onto the stretcher. They bundle her up and trudge through the snowy parking lot, taking extreme caution to avoid flipping the stretcher over. Everyone gets into the ambulance. Off they go, lights and sirens, for twenty some odd miles to the emergency room.

The crew turns care over to a bitchy nurse at the hospital. They clean their stretcher, replace the equipment they used, and wander off into the darkness. The only way the crew will ever know what happens to this patient is by going to her apartment for another emergency call or by reading her obituary.

The crew returns to the station to attempt sleep once again. One EMT needs sleep in order to go from one job to another because this EMT can’t make ends meet. The other EMT needs sleep in order to care for his children in a few hours. The opportunity to sleep is there, but the EMTs are still riled up over the way they were treated by the patient and the nurse at the hospital. The patient’s stench is embedded in their noses. Neither crew member has seen his or her family for more than two out of five nights this week. This seems to drive a wedge into their relationships while acting like Velcro between the crew itself.

Anyone who can handle all of this deserves more than twelve dollars an hour.

“Life is not fair.”

Kaitlyn Sandberg

Ever since I was a little girl, I’ve grown up knowing my life was a little different than everyone else’s. When I was in 6th grade I would wake myself up and get ready for school all by myself. I would often walk to school by myself and made sure I made it to class on time. I know people who are now in college who still get rides to school from their parents. Why didn’t I? The correct answer is because life is not fair.

After my parents’ divorce when I was nine years old, money was always an issue or just simply non-existent. I would bring my bagged lunch to school while all the other kids were able to buy freshly made, hot food. There were many times in high school I wasn’t able to eat lunch at all while others had two or three servings. I went to Catholic High, a private school, so field trips were always either paid for by fund raising done by the students or paid for by the parents. Many times I could just barely make enough to go. If I was able to go, I was never able to buy any souvenirs because money was so tight we couldn’t waste it on luxuries. I often watched students in my graduating class receive brand new cars as Christmas and birthday presents. One classmate even had a 2008 Porsche Boxster that he drove to school when it was nice out. I drove a 1994 Dodge Neon to school on the days it decided to start.

You can find unfairness even in the places you would expect fairness the most. My boyfriend is currently going to family court to fight for custody of his young son. Unfortunately, the family court system seems to be the most unfair system I have ever seen. Simply because he is the father and not the mother, he does not have physical custody. Even after Child Protective Services became involved, the mother still seems to have the upper hand. I understand the importance of the mother in a child’s life, especially one only five months old. However, I also understand the importance of a father and what it feels like to live without one present and actively involved. Some court dates he does fantastic while others the judge will believe every allegation the mother throws out there. It all depends on the judge’s mood and how hard the public defender is willing to work that day. It’s unfair how his relationship with his son and the future bond he will have with him depends on if the judge woke up on the wrong side of the bed that morning. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. once said “This is a court of law,

young man, not of justice". This statement rings all too true in my life.

On October 26, 2010, I lost my cousin to leukemia after having known about it only about a year. She was 22 years old and the mother of three young children. I remember one of the first feelings I felt the day I found out of her passing was anger. Why did it have to be her? When she passed, people like Osama Bin Laden were still living but she had to go. I don't see any fairness in that situation. Rapists, thieves, murderers, kidnappers all live out their life (hopefully in jail) and never seem to go before they are ready. My cousin was young and innocent. Her biggest offense was smoking non-medical marijuana while taking chemotherapy treatments. She was willing to give up anything to make sure her children had everything they needed and she was forced to give up her life. Why? Unfortunately, no one can answer that question. In situations like that, unfair is brought to a new level.

Because my mother is a foster parent, I meet kids who have been dealt a terrible hand of cards. Most were abandoned by their parents and often have no one else to rely on. There is nothing fair about a child not sleeping at night because night terrors shake them awake. There is nothing fair about a child living on the streets because they have nowhere else to go. Some people live in mansions while others live in cardboard boxes. Some eat caviar while others eat out of garbage cans behind McDonalds. Life is not fair. You never know what will happen in life but, from my perspective, it probably won't be what you deserve.

Realization

Ali Aftab

I am a native Pakistani and was fortunate enough to attend one of the country's best schools in the 1990s, the time when the country, like me, was in its own state of adolescence. When I was little, I was always told to become a doctor like every other boy. It seemed like everybody was in a race to become a doctor, an engineer, or a pilot. In the beginning, it did not feel frustrating at all; it was a norm of the society, so no one ever thought of becoming something else, at least children of my age did not. However, as years passed, things started to change and so did my ideas of what I actually wanted to be. Life was not turning out as expected and I experienced a wave of slow and soft realization.

When I was in primary school, I was the best student in all of my classes. I was my teachers' favorite student and everyone's best friend. Things remained the same until the seventh grade, but with a gradual school pressure and a great change in the country's economy, I started to lose grip of everything in my hands. My rich friends started to get better and better in all the subjects, but I found it extremely difficult to gain focus. My grades' graph started to fall down, and eventually my peers started to avoid me. I was in a state where it felt like I had lost everything, and I would always pray to God to make me Superman so I could get A's in all of my subjects or maybe because I wanted to fly away from all the distress I had.

Despite my prayers, nothing was happening; it felt like even God had turned away from me. My teachers would get angry at me for all the so-called "right" reasons. Even my parents would not pay attention to any of my educational or extracurricular activities, or whether I was doing well or not because they were busy handling the day to day economic problems we were facing. They gradually stopped caring about my grades; but would always tell me that my bright future will one day come. Since there was no one to look after my school report, I experienced a dramatic fall in all of my courses. Hope; it was all I had.

But hope also deserted me one day in the ninth grade when during my chemistry class, my math teacher came in. He looked red hot like a tomato and yelled out my name. I got frightened and started to shake all of a sudden. "Yes, sir!" I said. He held my arm really hard and dragged me into the class he was teaching. He stood me in front of everybody and started asking me questions. I was already in a shock and

then, I remember the words on the board looked like they were all dancing and mixing up with each other. My mouth remained half open and half closed and I was in a state when I could neither hear him yell at me nor could I read the question on the board, as if I got deaf for that very moment. When he did not get any sort of response, he slapped me so hard that I hit the door. That was the most humiliating moment of my life.

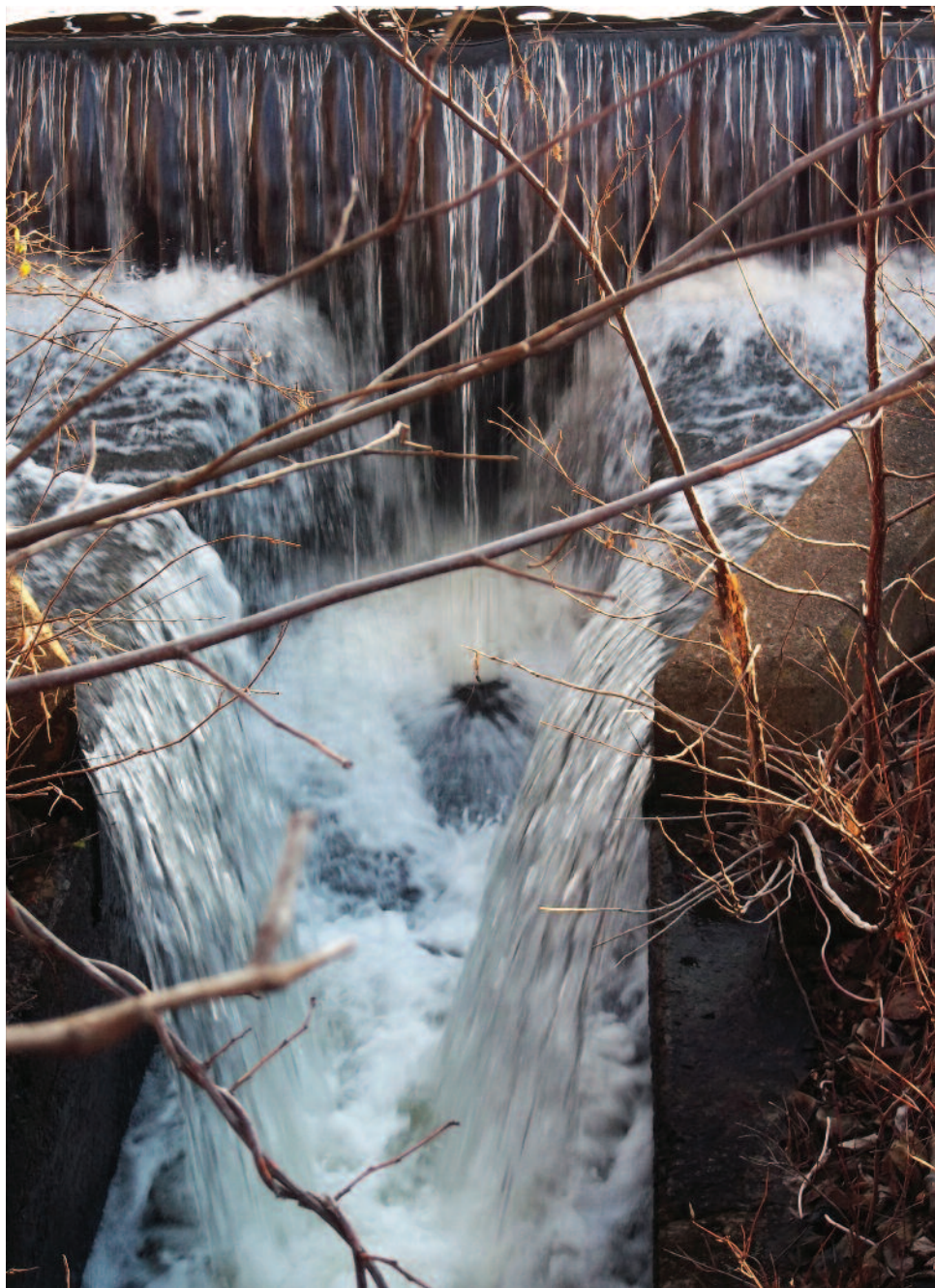
I knew why he called me out. It was because I was the worst student in my class, and he would quite often get angry at me for reasons he never cared to talk about and I never bothered to explain. That slap was the outcome of his anger and impatience, and my getting bad at studies. How could have I explained? How could I tell him that my parents also would not talk to me because of the financial crisis they were facing, and my deterioration was the result of my family's crisis? Even though I was a bad student, at that time, I did not deserve to get slapped in front of another class. No one deserves that. He, instead of pouring out his anger, should have shown the courage to talk to me since I was a distressed child, and figure out a solution to the difficulty that I was facing. Things had gotten worse than ever. Hence after the humiliation, I could not look my parents and friends in the eye.

I could not get back to where I was for the next four terrible years of my life because that slap left an invisible red mark of humiliation on my face, and it had hammered me deep down in the ground; but after four years, that slap turned into a realization. At that moment of change, I realized that the present was all I had. It had changed my life, not because I got slapped in front of 30 people in the class, but because I realized I was much more gifted and talented than that teacher and all the people in the class who laughed at me. I was wrongly judged and humiliated and did not want to become a doctor any more. If I had not realized that that slap had unleashed the hidden potential within me, I would have ended up as any other programmed boy who is still in a race to reach his never achievable goal. I discovered my super power.

In the years that followed while I was attending college, I studied and read a lot about mathematics, the subject I used to hate those four years, and became a math lover from a math hater. I found new dreams that were acceptable to me. Even though I had been a biology major for almost two years, I changed my major to engineering sciences. I had to leave the city of comfort and go into the wilderness of my intuition. What I discovered was wonderful. What I discovered was myself.



"Morning Sky" by Annette Hoult



"Ann Lee Pond Spillway" by Kathleen Nellegar



"Glisten" by Gabrielle Asadorian



"Crystal Encasement" by Gabrielle Asadorian

Why Are We Stopping By These Woods On A Snowy Evening?

-From The Horse's Point Of View-

Emily Griner

I am just a hungry horse
Waiting for my hay
The snow and ice keep falling down at the end of the day
We suddenly stop, I give a shake
This has got to be some kind of mistake!
There is no farmhouse near, I began to fear
Will we ever get home?
Why are we sitting here all alone?
It is almost too dark to see
My owner has abandoned me
There it is, a light ahead
I can see my nice warm bed
I knew my owner wouldn't bail
and oats and sugar cubes filled my pail.

Finding Meaning

Zebediah Girvin

I have never seen my father drink. This may come as a surprise to many, because of how our society revolves around alcohol, but in my life there's no seeing Dad drunk. I just listen to the countless stories of what alcohol did to him and all the other people I've met through Alcoholics Anonymous. My dad has been sober for twenty-six years, and one drink is all it would take for him to be back to square one. I remember going to AA meetings when I was younger and rummaging through the rooms of the church cellars with my younger brother, Zach. We would play games or draw on the chalkboards; basically anything to keep us entertained while the meeting was held. We didn't go often, but when we did, it seemed like an eternity. On the way home, Dad would always stop and get us an ice cream cone, which always made sticking out the meeting worthwhile to Zach and me. I can't tell you a lot about the meetings I went to with my dad as a young kid, but the people in the rooms still remember Zach and me.

As I grew up, I still attended an open meeting every so often, and I began to understand the basics of AA. I knew my dad went to a lot of meetings, I knew he needed to so he didn't drink, and I knew they always put him in a good mood. But I still had no idea how much of an impact this program would have on my life. I would learn priceless life lessons, be exposed to the hard truth about what alcohol could do to anyone, and meet the most amazing people that would shape me into the person that I am today.

By the time I was fifteen I had heard about all the crazy stuff my dad had done in his past, but it wasn't until I heard his story at an anniversary meeting that I truly understood how much alcohol had screwed him up. He went through it all at that meeting, and this time I wasn't running around the church, but instead listening intently. He started at the beginning talking about his life before he drank, and then proceeded into everything alcohol did to him. He talked about quitting school, being forced into the military instead of serving jail time, multiple DWIs, and high-speed motorcycle chases. He talked about being homeless and having nothing. It was then I really understood why my dad went to so many meetings. It was because he didn't ever want to return to his past life. He loved his sober life with his wife and kids; the life where he went back to college and got a Master's degree, the one

where he had a house, a job, and could ride his Harley without worrying about the cops chasing after him.

I've now just turned seventeen and I not only see what AA has done for my father, but all that it has done for me. I would never have thought that a program for alcoholics could do so much good to someone who didn't have a problem with the bottle. Going to these meetings has made me a well-adjusted and successful person. AA has taught me that people make mistakes, and you can mess up in life and still be very successful. It has taught me to believe in second chances and not to judge people. But, most of all, alcoholism has been kind of a blessing to my father. It took a lot of opportunities away from him and made him go through a lot, but if he wasn't an alcoholic my brother and I wouldn't have been exposed to AA and all the lessons that have deeply impacted us. My dad has taught us to learn from his mistakes so that we don't make the same ones and have to go through what he already experienced. AA has allowed my brother and I to be exposed to the harsh realities of what alcohol does to people; something that many people my age never get to see. It's one thing to hear a story about a drunk driver who hit a tree at 100 mph and died; it's another thing to go to a meeting and listen to that drunk driver's story told first hand. I got to see how real it was.

It's truly mind-boggling to think about how as a young kid I would have never thought AA would do anything for me. I now know that I was very wrong indeed; AA has done as much for me as it has for my father. So although I have never seen my father drink, I am blessed that he is an alcoholic.

Becoming Me

Emily Goldstein

She was thin, with blue eyes and long blonde hair. A passerby would have immediately known she was Jewish, although not necessarily that she was part of an ultra-Orthodox sect known as *Chabad Lubavitch*. Lost in her own little world of traditions and laws, she was content.

Her name was Chaya, the Hebrew word for “life.” Anyone would agree that Chaya was a bubbling personality with a sunny disposition at all times. Although she was a bright child, Chaya was naïve, almost to a fault, never really understanding that there was more out there than just her home life and school life.

All that changed when she went to Israel as a foreign exchange high school student. It’s kind of ironic, really, since Israel is the home to all Jews, and that is where Chaya started rebelling against her religion. After she mastered the Hebrew tongue, Chaya began hanging out with her Israeli friends in nightclubs, cafes, and just about anywhere that was not on school campus.

She kept this part of her life private from the other exchange students in her dormitory. On the outside Chaya still appeared to be a devout God-fearing Jew who got excellent grades in class. However, Chaya was drifting, and she knew it.

A lot of people ask me why I decided to shed the skin of my birth religion, and what people don’t generally understand is it’s not that simple. It wasn’t like one day I woke up and decided I wasn’t going to eat Kosher or keep the Sabbath anymore. It has to do with faith, and when faith gets lost, the skeleton of religion dies with it.

For Chaya, it was the small things, like not being allowed to wear pajama pants in her own bedroom, or being told she couldn’t have an iPod as there might be non-Jewish music on it. One thing led to another, and she had enough. She went out, partied, experimented with drugs and alcohol, all the while still practicing Judaism on the outside.

Chaya managed to keep her actions a secret from her superiors in school, but when she went back to America for a vacation, her mother noticed a difference.

Afraid her daughter was going to leave the religion, Rivka, Chaya’s mother, decided not to send her back to Israel and had to complete her senior year of high school at home.

But it was too late. The curiosity of the outer world was ignited inside of Chaya, and she was itching to discover what existed outside the boundaries she was raided in. She let go of the name she was born with and became Emily.

I rebelled in a big way; I would go so far as to say that I am an enigma in my community. When they, and by they I mean my neighbors and friends, look at me, they wonder what went wrong. I disagree with these people, and feel like for once in my life something was right.

It was difficult at first, drifting from my religion. In order to become a new person I had to shed my old identity completely. I didn't know who I was, or where I fit in society. So I searched. I went to college and started making friends but quickly realized I couldn't live in my mother's house any longer. I moved out and began living as Emily in a new place where no one knew me. It was refreshing and that much easier to find out my own identity.

I cut my long blonde hair, and stopped wearing skirts that went down to my ankles. I wore shirts that didn't cover my collarbone, and short sleeves. Slowly, I cut my hair even shorter and stopped wearing skirts altogether.

I came out as a lesbian; probably one of the worst things an ultra-Orthodox woman can do. The community can forgive you, even pity you, for leaving the faith, but gays are specifically not okay. And it's not like I am keeping it a secret; when I go back to my hometown people point me out to their children and warn them not to become like me.

It hurts a little, but my lifestyle is my truth. Being an observant Jewish woman, getting married at 22 and having children until my body could have no more, wasn't my truth. The box known as *Chabad Lubavitch* was not my truth.

I like to think of Robert Frost and his poem "The Road Not Taken." As a child, I always wanted to try everything; I never wanted to leave anything not experienced. I feel like my truth is to take the road less travelled, less traveled by the community I grew up in. They don't look at forks in the road, they just keep going straight. I love to wander and get my hands dirty in the mud, pick the pretty flowers a few feet to the right or left of the path. And if there is a bunny on the other side, I will go over there and take a picture.

Day Dreams

Tommy Williams

Based off Nikki Giovanni's poem "Dream"

when i dream
i see the world
not over but
under my feet
when i dream
no boss giving me orders
but i
give the orders to what he needs to do
for me
when i dream
i see Superman branded on my chest
saving all
from destruction of a drug infested
militant world
in my dream
i bring hunger to a stand still
always with plenty of nourishment
then when i come down from the clouds
i realize that if i dream
of being a powerful man
and make powerful moves like a
man would when he has power
i would have a revolution

Polymaths

Troy Viscusi

At a time where talent, education, creativity and the betterment of the world for future generations takes a backseat to beauty, celebrity, shock value and money, we are in need as a culture to rediscover the value of being a polymath from both a personal and collective duty standpoint.

Defined in the dictionary as “a person of great and varied learning”, polymaths have changed the world as we know it and see it today. They were able to do so only after a life time of constant striving for personal improvement, having a firm dedication to the arts of life and a hunger to become experts in a number of fields. From the Mona Lisa that still captivates art lovers after nearly 500 years since its creation, to the scientific discovery that lit the way for new standards of living and millions of new innovations that we enjoy today, these are the Polymaths and their accomplishments that changed everything.

Leonardo Da Vinci - Painter, sculptor, architect, inventor, musician, scientist and writer. Just a small sample of the many job titles for the fields in which this remarkable man made an impact. Leonardo Da Vinci epitomizes the term Polymath in every conceivable way. His never ending curiosity sent him on a quest through life, to discover what is, and why it is. Along the way he also managed to create some of the most beautiful and iconic works of art the world has ever seen such as the “Mona Lisa” and the “The Last Supper”.

As well as his artistic creations, Leonardo had also drawn up blue prints for what would have been the world’s first tank and helicopter. Being ahead of his time also hurt Leonardo, from ridicule to just being flatly ignored, the world just wasn’t ready to accommodate him yet. It was blue prints like those as well as medical discoveries like cholesterol that would go without use and become lost, only to be discovered and realized as genius after others had discovered these things at a later time. They all would have just added to a resume that belongs to perhaps the most productive and accomplished human being who ever lived.

Benjamin Franklin - Ironically being known to many as the man on the \$100.00 bill, money meant little to this revolutionary man. Perhaps no greater tribute to that assertion exists than the fact that Franklin refused to patent the Franklin stove, a creation of his that heated the

homes of many in his day and is still in use now. His refusal came due to the fact that he just wanted to improve the lives of others. The Franklin stove is just one of the many accomplishments as an inventor; he was also a politician, a writer, and ambassador and a scientist. Benjamin Franklin is the man who tamed lightning, secure foreign aid to free a people from a powerful parliament, aided in drafting the founding documents for the new nation and helped to build it with things like the first fire department, the first lending library and the University of Pennsylvania during the country's infancy. Benjamin Franklin's bifocles helped people see clearly, his discovery of electricity helped people see light at night and his diplomacy helped the colonists see the beacon of liberty.

Galileo Galilei - A Roman Catholic living in Italy under the watchful eye and powerful hand of his own church, condemned him for "vehement suspicion of heresy" for what he also believed in: science. Galileo Galilei did not invent the telescope, but he did invent the modifications to the telescope that allowed him to learn of earth's orbit, and corrected previously held scientific beliefs like the law of falling bodies, which was incorrectly taught by none other than Aristotle and carried on as fact for many years. It was with those discoveries and the encouragement of math being used for future scientific discovery, that led to Galileo being called the father of modern science. Many would dissolve either their pursuits or their beliefs in the face of such pressure, but Galileo had the courage both mentally and spiritually to sustain his faith and make mind boggling discoveries.

Thomas Jefferson - President of the United States, author of the Declaration of Independence, lawyer, musician, architect and farmer. Thomas Jefferson also spoke five languages, none which he spoke more fluently than the language of freedom. In contrast to the other Polymath's classified in this essay, Jefferson didn't practice discovery but instead concerned himself with mastering many skills and later the study philosophical and governing variations. As valued as Jefferson's ability in those other fields, Jefferson began to find his calling after studying new ways of thinking, like that of John Locke who inspired Jefferson to think about the government and its rightful place in peoples lives. It was with that frame of mind that Jefferson penned the Declaration of Independence, who many people believe to be the greatest document ever written and is also the basis of the United States of America. For a man who seldomly spoke due to a speech impediment, Thomas Jefferson's words spoke to an uprising and still speak to and inspire those who enjoy and pursue freedom today.

Leonardo Da Vinci, Benjamin Franklin, Galileo Galilei and Thomas Jefferson could all be classified by the term few earn but all should strive to be: a polymath. Their fields of expertise intersect at times but each individual accomplished something unique and extraordinary that everyone could appreciate. Whether it's poor priorities, higher demand for specialists in one field or cultural laziness, the pursuit to be a polymath has generally diminished. The question to be asked is are we better off? Better off having individuals stay in the one field in which they specialize as opposed to having the ability for our best and brightest to cross field lines and lend a helping hand to discover and improve. If the answer is no, then when and where will the next great polymath come from?

Valentine's Day

Karen Sicard

For every season and holiday the decorations change accordingly. I can remember my mother unpacking and packing away the symbols of each holiday; pumpkins in October, cornucopia in November, poinsettias in December and now hearts in February. There was always a card and a present on the kitchen table wrapped and decorated for each occasion. This Valentine's Day a box decorated with red curled ribbon, pink tissue paper and a handmade card sat on the table where it had been many times over the years.

Today was no different than any other day of the week. I made the coffee, turned on the news, dressed the kids, and packed the school bags. The list of classmates was sent home from school, the Valentine cards were counted and signed, goody bags filled with sweets, and my three children dressed in their new Valentine outfits from Nana, my mother. By 8:30 a.m. everyone was in the car ready to be dropped off for the day.

At my first stop of the day I dropped my oldest, Jake off at school with his Valentine cards and candy to give to his classmates. Included was a bag of Sugar Daddies for his special Valentine. Like a bus, I pulled away to drive to my second destination, preschool. Max scurried out of the car dressed in his new pajamas and slippers from his Nana, to attend his Valentine pajama party. Seventeen three year olds dressed in their favorite pajamas and slippers danced around with valentines to handout as I slipped out the door.

With my little Valentine baby girl, Emma, dressed in red I stepped into the kitchen of what once was home to me. There on the table was a box decorated with red ribbon and a small package delicately wrapped in pink tissue paper. The French door windows were decorated with pink and red hearts, and there stood my mother in a red sweater with her Valentine pin. The traditional chicken pot pie was cooling on the counter. The smell of chocolate lingered in the air as she dipped strawberries and pulled out a tray of brownies.

With homework still to be done and bills to be paid I pulled out my computer and silently typed. My mother danced around with her granddaughter singing made up Valentine songs. I could not concentrate and asked her to take her in the other room, but the sound of laughing and happiness were impossible to ignore. At that point my

two hours had come to an end and the next pickup had to be made. Nana, my mother, came along for the ride.

The air was still as we drove back to her house except for Max who wanted to stay at his Nana's. There was not enough time to have a Valentine lunch because I had too many things to get done. As she went to shut the door, I could see her holding back the tears.

With Max crying in the car, I drove down the street feeling a slight tightness in my chest as if my heart was making a fist. I looked at the unopened box with the pink tissue wrapped present that sat on the floor of the car. All the heart stickers placed carefully on the tissue, the curled red ribbon and handmade card reminded me of all the Valentine Day gifts I had received throughout the years. Not one was forgotten.

A few minutes later with a small pot of violets and a red balloon Max rang the door bell to Nana's house. With my youngest in my arms dressed in her Valentine outfit from Nana I walked back into the house to have that chicken pot pie and eat chocolate memories.

That moment I realized how important it is to value those that put forth the effort to make my day a happier one. As a mother she made sure all of my Valentine Days were special with a card, present or dinner. The decorations that change from season to season and holiday to holiday are important to my mother. They are important to me when I return to my childhood home and remember the memories spent with her. There is always something to look forward to when the decorations change color. I did not need to open the box to see what was inside; chocolate covered strawberries, heart shaped brownies individually wrapped, a Valentine doily, and lots of love.

Today was Tuesday, February 14, just another day of the week of getting kids ready for school, doing homework, running errands and making a Valentine's Dinner for my family.

Walking the Beat

Bob Spain

When you walk down the street, how often do you really pay attention to your surroundings? It seems that nowadays, people tend to go about their normal lives without really stopping to smell the roses. It could be because they have more important agendas, which they must attend to. I can remember so many missions conducted through the military, each different from one another. As a trained Combat Soldier, the opportunity for me to see the outside of the wire of the safe haven of the base was very common. I was able to experience more when on combat operations than just sitting at a desk and giving orders. Compared to every day walking on the streets, I believe that due to the current danger that I am in, all of my senses are heightened in one way or another.

It's time to begin another patrol out to a place where evil lurks around every corner, and the feel of the heat on your body is unforgiving. That's right folks, it's time to conduct combat operations. Just before we start preparing for our patrol, I sit in my rack and I can here crunch, crunch, crunch. The sound seems to get louder, and I begin to feel my head throb and I sigh for a moment, knowing that my leader is coming for me. The gravel is so loud and so constant that it would wake a man up from a dead sleep. He finally gets to my door and I clench up tight as a drum, hoping he does not make me go do something stupid before mission. He says, "Go get ice," and then my body goes from a stiff board to a limp noodle, not because of relief, but of dissatisfaction of what I am told to do. I perform the task while everyone else is kicking back to the soft tunes of their IPOD, basking in the jams they truly desire.

The patrol begins with the start of the vehicles and mounting the guns. As I wait a few seconds before the glow pugs warm up, I sit patiently in hopes that this vehicle will work smoothly. The time is up as I turn the ignition; it begins to turn over but not wanting to go all the way. The sound it makes is like a gnarly cat, which is groaning at you because you did something to piss it off. Then finally, the engine starts as the dust is picked up by the power of the exhaust. Now this baby purrs like a kitten that just got its favorite catnip toy.

We roll up to the market and my face begins to scrunch up as my ears feel like hearing nails on a chalk board, as the vehicle comes to a

stop. "Dismount" the truck commander says, and I am immediately caught off guard by the blaze of the hot sun. I feel overwhelmed as I notice my sweat is evaporating faster than I can keep it. The heat might as well have been coming from a blow torch grilling me up to well done. As we are walking through the market, I look around to see so much disorganization, with one business on top of the other. The streets are filled with trash and sewage water lays stagnant as the mosquitoes hover around it. There was no point in sweeping the sidewalk because all it did was lift debris into the air; all these tiny particles that made me sneeze.

I take a deep breath and I smell fresh bread being made at the bakery. It reminded me of when mom would bake cookies and how I could almost taste it because it smelled so good. A "local" comes and offers a sample of this glorious item that we have been thinking about. Our meals up to this point have been like eating a cardboard sandwich. That first bite is like a slice of heaven, as the fresh fluffy dough is consumed by my hunger. It fills that little void as my face lights up with satisfaction.

Even with this treat, I still feel like I am under a microscope by the overwhelming crowd of citizens. The market is so loud; it felt like I was working at the stock exchange trying to yell over all the others to get the product my company desired. In the distance, I hear cracking sounds and I think it could be shots fired. My eyes are scanning the road, as I look up high on the sand colored buildings searching for those who look upon us through their red and white head wraps. Someone stares at me and I wonder what his intentions are. My right hand lays ready on my dust covered weapon, with my thumb ready to select from safe to semi. As the crowd gets larger, my stomach begins to twist into a knot and my eyes begin to widen while my head is moving around like a baseball bobble head. It's now time to leave the area, and head back to the safe haven we call our home away from home.

As I mount up into the sand painted vehicle, and hear the loud tinning sound from closing the massive armor plated door, I think of how I could be back home. I ask myself at times, "When I get back to America, will I be on the edge of my seat, with my body going into a panic mode?" When I first did return home, like many others, I often saw a tiny object on the side of the road and would immediately scan the area looking for a trigger man keeping a watchful eye. Eventually, I was able to readjust back home, and able to walk down the street, feeling the warm tropic breeze of Hawaii, and feel the mist of the crashing waves on my face, as I began to experience peace once again.

Lis
Rita Mefford

So distant we are now.
never thought we'd leave each other behind.
That then will never be again.

Actions hit like thunder
rolling around, making me blind.
So distant we are now.

Lying awake, making me wonder
what is to come; can I press rewind?
That then will never be again.

So many things to consider.
So many things left to unwind.
So distant we are now.

Absent are the calls of banter,
to which we've resigned,
that then will never be again.

Our memories I will gather
for time will remind,
how distant we are now.
That then will never be again.

What Happened?

Toshena Haynes

Growing up, I watched the dynamics of relationships in my family. I watched my mother with my dad, aunts with uncles and close family friends. The men always had other women, sometimes even women in the same circle. The women were friendlier with their partner's male friends and family when their man wasn't around. They also had male friends that couldn't be discussed around the men. These issues would come to a head once there was a get together or an occasion and they had "grown people juice." The men and women would cuss, fight and scream. Family secrets were revealed and hurt feelings were exposed. Whosever house it was would kick everyone out, including the children. We didn't know which was better, the long train ride home or the remainder of the night. They would continue the argument until dawn and "make up" until we were about to awaken. We would all lie there quietly thinking and hoping they had some cereal. From early on, I felt ashamed and embarrassed. I told myself I would not be a sneaky woman, and I would not be with a lying, cheating man. I've come to see that sometimes the behaviors witnessed become the same behaviors practiced whether consciously or unconsciously.

I began dating with this in mind. When I met my husband, he smelled like fresh laundry. He looked like a crisp hundred dollar bill, and his lips reminded me of a soft red blanket. He walked with such confidence, as though the ground was waiting for his steps as to confirm his movements. He spoke with clear dialect and made me feel like I was the only one in the room. Our conversations, no matter how trivial, were always refreshing and his words captivated my mind hours after we were done talking.

Over time I fell in love. I wanted to spend all my time with him. He was in the "life" and although I didn't agree with his lifestyle, I couldn't leave him alone. We would drive for hours and never turn the radio on. We loved to party, dance and have a good time. We had bad times, but hey who didn't, right? We never argued. If he did something I didn't like, I would hold it in and never speak about it. If I did something he didn't like, I wouldn't see him for a couple of days. This was frustrating to say the least, but I still loved him. I thought the good outweighed the bad, not realizing it all counted.

This pattern of dysfunction continued for twelve years. We were together or should I say, I was with him for all of my twenties. Within this time we had three children and raised one of his eldest daughters. I have

forgiven him for everything under the sun. In this chaos we've had plenty of break ups and make ups. There were periods in our life which involved infidelity, and one time he even brought a baby home. I would cry and he would buy me gifts. Or he would leave for weeks and return like nothing happened. When he wanted to, he would go out drinking instead of paying bills. If he called home for a ride, he would expect me to get out of bed to pick him up from wherever he was. If I refused, he would want to fight when he came in. He introduced me to family violence through emotional, physical, and mental abuse. I truly have firsthand knowledge on the dark truth about dysfunctional situations and relationships.

Recently, however, I woke up. I realized I had become exactly what I was trying to avoid. I was in a relationship just like the ones I saw growing up. I was truly unhappy. In looking at my life, I realized, each time I forgave him and took him back without consequence, I let a piece of me go. I would overlook the suspicious phone calls and not complain about staying the night out. I began somehow cosigning his infidelity and lowering my own standards. We began to have big explosions and then make up whenever. These days the gifts weren't good enough, and the discussion couldn't be avoided.

I began not liking myself. I was starting to question who I was. All of my morals and values had been challenged by his actions. My decision to stay with him undermined all of them. I was left wondering, who am I? What do I believe in? And where was I heading? I let my determination to not become my past make me exactly like my past. I justified this with keeping my family together. Not realizing we were already broken apart. I wasn't a sneaky woman, but I was the forgiving woman with a low self-esteem and barely any standards. I once heard and now believe, if you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything.

We recently separated because I could no longer love him more than I loved myself. I felt like a lot of good in me was being down played. The fear of becoming the insecure woman, or the woman that "took him back again" was what I was. I was the woman who was dying in order to save her family that was already lifeless. I realized my reactions weren't good enough. I needed to act according to my value system and lead myself where I wanted to be. I needed to follow my heart and mind. I recognize I am the best person for me. I know best about what I want and what feels right to me.

I never knew that in being with someone you can lose yourself and become who they have made you. I never want to give someone, control over my life again. I would much rather live in an empty house alone than to live with someone in a nice home and feel empty.

Tea by the Fire

Eisha Dow

She desperately wanted reality to pump its breaks. Everything around her seemed to be moving ten times faster than she was. So immuned to misery, simplicity seemed too farfetched. Her government name was originally Sally Sue Parker. Although she never admitted this, she changed her name to Tameka Lynn Parker solely so that she would be more socially expectable. Typically, I would frown upon that idea, but she had been through so much already that I just granted her my sincere sympathy anyway. Tameka was not the girl you could ever put your finger on simply because she was remarkable exclusive when it came to expressing her feelings. If Tameka's sadness were portrayed in a portrait, it would show her depression constricted inside forty ounce bottles of Heinekens. Happiness would be a snapshot of emptiness leaving the negatives figureless.

Being a twin is not a walk in the park. Tameka hated it, but I blissfully found refuge from it. Yes, we are twins. I don't know. I just always felt untouchable, sheltered, and protected knowing that I had her by my side. Nothing could ever separate us when we were young. Ring around the rosy, hopscotch, gravel between our toes, the whistling wind dancing in our hair. What changed? To be honest, I just think reality sank in. From hopscotch to coming to realization, we found our hearts dangling like a child's tooth.

I do not know why I keep beating around the bush, let me just cut to the chase! Most twins either have their fathers in their lives or out. Painfully, Tameka never gained the ability to grasp the fact that my father was involved and hers was not. Let's just say our mother got around, and in spite of it, there were two fathers after the paternity test was taken. In the murk of not knowing who our father was, our mother strayed. There were two different fathers. It was this little thing called Heteropaternal superfecundation which is when two different males father fraternal twins. I guess its sarcasm when I say it's a little thing because it changed our family for the worse. How else can I cope?

Elementary was difficult for us. Kids knew we were twins, but were too young to understand why we did not look alike. Our mother was black and white. My father is white, so my complexion looks white. Tameka's father is black, so her complexion looks black. After our mother strayed, our grandmother took full custody of us. Grandma

always told us that everyone would love us just the way we were. I realized that grandma was sadly mistaken. Dressing us alike, and doing our hair in the same style just made things harder. Kids were confused, asked questions, and eventually we got tired of answering.

Middle school was the worst. No one wanted to be tolerant, cliques were formed, and people were taunted. I desperately tried to hang with my sister, but Tameka was adamant in her refusal to hang with me, insisting that we had grown apart. It was only a matter of time before Tameka began skipping classes, drinking bottles of Heineken. Black students never conversed with whites, but I kept persistence. Everyone seemed so distant. Some didn't acquaint themselves with white people simply because their friends did not. I never took anything in middle school personal because I knew that most students were under peer pressure. Tameka, however, took a toll for the worse because of it. Tameka was told that she was a white girl in a black girl's body and should have resembled me. Apparently, Tameka's appearance had not given her a greater chance for social acceptance. Too bad I was her twin sister.

Many failed attempts of trying to get close to my sister started making me lose my head. Grandma insisted that everything would be fine, but that was her answer to everything. After high school grandma forced Tameka to go to my graduation even though she had not graduated with me. This was a horrible day. I walked the stage, listened to the applause, and watched my sister give everyone an attitude. I was fed up! I screamed, I cursed violently, I threw my diploma in Tameka's nonchalant face, and worse of all I screamed at the top of my lungs that I wished she was not my sister. This was a horrible day. I could not sleep that night. The sky was dark. The tree branches were smacking my window as if they were trying to speak to me. If they spoke they would tell me to wake up, but they did not. I just rolled over. I was cold, but it was scorching hot that night. When I walked passed Tameka's bedroom she was not there. Ask me if I cared. This was a horrible day.

Thank you all for coming. Her casket is beautifully decorated, but does not give her justice. Tameka was lost, hurt, sad, depressed, hopeless, angry, alone, and I refused to pay any attention. I knew that I was fearless of what people thought, but people put fear into my sister. She was afraid to live, be healthy, happy, comfortable, and full of hope. Instead, she felt out of place. She was not comfortable in her skin. I failed to recognize it. I guess I just wanted that twin who played hopscotch and wore the same barrettes as I did. I guess I thought we were the same. We had two different personalities. What hurt me was different than what hurt her, what made me happy was different than what made her happy,

I live to hear people opinions, but people's opinions are what caused her to take her own life. Wow!

I was no sister to her when she needed me most. I cannot imagine how that rope felt on her neck as she ended her life quickly, but I can keep her legacy going on forever.

The Lone Wolf

Emily Hart

The air that morning felt cold in his throat and chest making him aware of the parts of him were exposed to the eliminates. The sun over his shoulder was trying to compete beginning to warm anything that faced it but the wind had the upper hand and was winning. He stepped from the painted cement stair onto the paved driveway, leaving the metal screen door to flex and slap back into place. He came to his motorcycle and examined the cold machine taking the sleeve of his navy blue sweatshirt over his right palm and used it to wipe the wetness the night had brought off the black leather seat. He treated his bike like an old friend. It was always there for him, waiting there. A friend that needed caring for from time to time, never expecting of him but loyal just the same.

As he mounted the bike, a 1973 Triumph Bonnieville Cafe Racer, he swung his right leg over the seat. He had bought it used when he got out of the military, it was the only posesion he had ever cared about, at the time people had called him a Rocker with his skull cap helmet with Ace Cafe and the 1% patches on his jacket. Now he tried not to associate himself with any group. He put on his worn black leather jacket, so contoured to his shape it felt like his own hide. He squeezed the clutch with one hand and the brake with the other, tapping his foot to shift into neutral. Then he turned the key and opened the choke. He jumped down on the kickstart, at this, the motor coughed and spat. It barked and growled, making known it's feelings about starting in the cold. He slowly let out the choke. When the beast was calm and began to idle he pushed up the kickstand, shifted into first gear, and began to roll back the throttle picking up his feet as he was picking up speed. He turned right out of the driveway and began his ride.

He loved the road more then most people love their pets. As he leaned into corners he could feel the road lean back. The woman who he just left had repeatedly called him a "lone wolf". That's not who I am, he had thought, wolves prawl and stalk. He thought of himself, as anything that flew for pleasure, disappointed when the destination was reached.

His beard had grey patches in it. He was getting older and it showed. He wasn't afraid of anything including aging or death. He assumed he would live independently as long as he could and then

spend his last days in the veterans hospital. The only age he had ever been afraid of turning was 18, because of the draft. In the end he was sent, sent a world away to help people who hated him, to kill people who would fight him into the after-life, selling their souls for the greater good of their people, their land and their country. He and his friends had fought the good fight and he was of a few to return. The movies show a man being shot in the arm and then the abdomen dying in the arms of his friends talking about the home he'll never see again, and the sweetheart he'd left behind. That is not how it happened in what is now Johnny's darkest nightmares. Those boys who died on that hill could've been in a different galaxy from anything that resembled a positive thought of the comforts of home. If they had last words, no one could hear them. Some people say, the only people who see an end to war are the dead. Some people talk about how much they gained from their military service, Johnny gained an uneasiness in crowds. He had seen death and it stayed with him. A shadow beyond his eyes that only those who've seen it could decipher.

He had a five year old son he named after himself and his father. The boy had been conceived in a station wagon parked in the back of a towny bar next to small lake. The boy's mother's name was June. She had walked up to him that night and with a slur in her step and a stumble in her speech and said "you bikers are all the same, the problem is you all how cowboy complexes, you'll pillage and scam anyone who'll let you just wishing to be an outlaw or a sheriff so you can carry a gun on your hip." Johnny waited a moment and clinked the ice against the glass of his Jack on the rocks, he looked up at her face and said "no ma'm, I'm no cowboy. I'm more like the horse."

He had been working at a bike shop for a few weeks when June walked in and told him she was pregnant. He said nothing after that. He looked at her before he would respond. "Fuck" she said.

He worked 12 hour days, 6 days a week for 5 years and 7 months. Until the day he left, in the cold morning air. At first he wasn't sure how far he would go and just let the road take him. Eventually he knew he was headed someplace far from that brick cape on Cold Water Tavern Road that held a family that was better off without him. He rode, heading South until there was sweat between his shoulder blades, the wind had become warm and the pavement was sticky under his tires.

He stopped at lopsided diners and dirt floor bars for over a week weaving his way towards a different life. The scenery changed from rolling hills with huge pine trees, to great long straight aways with fields on either side, he rode until the earth was red and mountains had

flat tops instead of pointed ones. He stayed in dimly lit motels, listening to Bob Dylan on the radio while rubbing saddle soap on his worn leather jacket.

Sometimes before bed he would read poetry by Robert Burns, and tried to understand what it all meant.

He ended up staying in Albuquerque New Mexico, seeing Los Alamos, and Santa Fe. He got a part time job at a bike shop and a small apartment with a half size refrigerator. He made a few friends and they would go on long rides together winding their way around the Rio Grande. They would pass huge mesas and he would think about how insignificant one man's life is compared to the earth's. He had seen such dark days and yet there was peace here.

Once while they were riding it began to sprinkle, and then grew harder. With huge raindrops barreling down on them they stopped on the side of the road to wait it out. The people he was with had seen this before and walked over to a cliff that was over the canyon and waited. Johnny didn't understand what was happening, until he saw a small waterfall across the way. Then without warning the entire canyon turned into a giant waterfall, with hundreds of spouts spaying over the rocks and plunging hundreds of feet down. He felt exhilarated at the beauty, the randomness, and the magic of this place. His friends were cheering but he began to cry, in the rain, during a flash flood, in a desert, in the middle of the afternoon. He cried for the people he had lost, who never got a chance at life even though they wanted it more than he did but also for the people he had pushed away and left. Then, just like that the sun said the fun was over and came out from behind the clouds. Within a few minutes there was no evidence of what had happened.

That night he laid in his bed and studied the cracks in the ceiling, thinking over the events of the day and thinking about his son, wondering if he was happy. It hurt his soul that he couldn't be the father that his son needed but it just wasn't him. He never saw himself as a leader or someone to be emulated. The idea of someone who loved him without restraint was unknown to Johnny and he didn't handle beautiful things well. He thought maybe he would send his son a letter detailing his pit falls and explaining himself. No, he thought, I'll wait until he's older.

Before and After

Fatima Hussain

Indeed there was a day of many moons,
a longest era of prosperity

Spirit swam in the clearest of all ponds,
nothing yet to taint the soul's purity

An easy life, free sustenance, hours
spent living on my mother's charity

No tax on time, slumbering at leisure,
such luxury was my reality

Up above, down below, all was the same...
I knew neither pain nor hilarity,

just one floating bubble of fluid and love,
a space I maneuvered with dexterity

Ignorant life in the realm after heaven,
no knowledge of the earth's vulgarity

Blissfully naive to what carnage lay
beyond that fragile womb's security

Then came the knives, the pliers, too, and ripped
me from my home. Oh, what temerity!

Nine months being the royalest pain – then
tossed into flocks of Adam's posterity.

The Emotions of a Future American Soldier

Shauna Anderson

My friend who had enlisted in the National Guard, Joshua Doremus, taught me the meaning behind the words “American soldier.” I knew very little about the fears, doubts, and passions of the young men and women entering the military until the September night that I sat talking to a soon-to-become soldier.

Sitting curled up on a cozy green chair in my bedroom, I held my computer on my lap and talked to my friend Josh on Facebook. Curious about what goes on in the head of a young man approaching a world in which normal, everyday life is suddenly replaced with strenuous training and sleepless nights, I asked him how he felt about going to basic training in two days. He told me that he was “freaking out.” When I asked him why, his response nearly brought me to tears:

“I’m going to a strange place with people I don’t know thousands of miles away from home to do things that will turn me into a trained killer and be forced to do painful, unpleasant, and often dangerous acts during training, that will most likely leave me injured. I will be deprived of sleep, food, and mental stability. I will be pushed to the absolute edge of physical endurance and sanity. I will have men in brown hats screaming at the top of their lungs inches from my face, while I must remain motionless. All in the name of defending the freedom that 99% of the population enjoys.”

Josh was painting a vivid picture for me of an experience I had hardly thought about before – what it means to be an American soldier. This wasn’t a news story where men, who I felt compassion for but never really knew, fought and died every day miles away in Iraq or Afghanistan. This was a close friend who was confiding in me genuine fears for what he was about to become.

As I sat there talking to him, I wondered why soldiers-to-be would willingly put themselves in a situation where fear permeates everything they do. From the little information Josh had told me about “basic”, I quickly recognized the many fears that soldiers had to face. According to Josh, the greatest fear of the young men and women entering training was the gas chamber exercise, where people proved their ability to handle stressful situations by entering a gas-filled building and breathing in gas for a few seconds before stumbling outside. I also knew that Josh had a fear of heights and so was exceedingly nervous about the tests that were performed high above

ground. How could young men and women willingly choose to face not only their personal fears but also the fears, like the gas chamber and the prospect of injury or death, that all soldiers have to bear?

But as I considered Josh's personality, I found a reason why individuals would decide to follow this new life. Josh had a great passion for the military. It was all he would ever talk about. Josh answered my curious military questions with bright, eager eyes and enjoyed talking in military jargon that made little sense to me. I remember once when we went to Barnes and Noble, for what I thought was a social outing that we could share together as friends and book enthusiasts, he spent the majority of the time by himself looking at military books. The military was his life. I could even go so far as to say he was obsessed with it. Because he had devoted much of his life to this passion and also to his love for his country, his fears paled in comparison.

But despite his interest in the military, I thought the decision to enlist must take immense courage. I knew I had only been given a glimpse of the fears numbing Josh's mind right now a few days before basic. Just being able to step into training where he knew he would face his greatest fears must take an amount of courage I could hardly comprehend. When I told him this, he contradicted my statement with a seriousness and sincerity that struck me cold. "I don't have courage, Shauna. Courage is having a grenade land at your buddy's feet, and shoving him away and jumping on top of it, ending your own life like a young Marine Lance Corporal did. Courage is being impaled on a bayonet by a Japanese soldier, and continuing to lead from the front. THAT's courage."

I couldn't find the words. I was just an eighteen-year-old girl who loved writing and talking. My simple life didn't include any experiences like the ones he was telling. The fear and bravery that I had only heard about from the soldiers in songs and movies seemed so real and raw through the eyes of a friend. I sat in my chair stunned and emotional.

Through Joshua Doremus, I had seen a soldier-to-be who I knew and cared about look towards his new life with fear and ambition. No longer did "American soldier" represent history or a war being fought in another continent; it represented the new life of a close friend.

Before Josh departed for basic a month ago, he left me with these words:

"When you're out somewhere and you see someone missing a leg, or another appendage, or someone with a military cap that denotes

that they served just walk up, and say 'thank you'. And I don't count. There are thousands like me that have done FAR more for this country than I ever could. On Memorial Day, walk out into the woods some place quiet and peaceful and plant a small flag there, in recognition that that flag was painted red with the blood of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines. That very quiet, peaceful spot is the way it is because my brothers and sisters stay awake at night, ready to visit violence upon those who would do you harm."

The Cost of a Thrill

Anthony Restaino

It was a late night in Troy, and very few people were around to notice the four black-clad figures slinking along the sidewalk, let alone ask them what they were about to do. Undeterred and armed with spray-paint, they closed in on the alley they had marked several days ago and had been watching since.

Old brick buildings surrounded the alley, which had fire escapes hanging out the upper story windows like black metallic snakes slithering from their dens. The brick was worn and clean, the alleyway was quiet, devoid of any animals, pests or pets, and the only sign of life was a window three stories up, lighted and partially open, but unnoticed by the artists. At the end of the alleyway was a high wooden fence, a barrier between those in the alley and the next block.

The artists had ensured that the cops did not visit the area often, so that they would not run into any trouble as they painted on the walls, and satisfied with their prior surveillance of the neighborhood, they set to work, covering the walls of the alley with their stencils and spray-paint. Michael started in one corner with a giant Goliath beetle stencil, spraying it onto the building's decrepit brick wall, much as the ancient Egyptians painted on the walls of their tombs. Several feet away, his brother, Adam, "tagged" (the street word for graffiti) an enormous stencil of a Velociraptor, an extinct carnivorous dinosaur the size of a man. Although the meaning of these paintings was unclear, they may have had something to do with the large rainbow-colored squares Jackie painted opposite them, which protested the gray censorship squares workers paint over scrawled graffiti.

As the smell of aerosol and the sound of the criminal-artists' voices drifted through the air, they became careless; so careless that their black clothes did little to hide them, because their voices betrayed them. The artists had failed to notice the open window.

Then suddenly from the darkness, a siren pierced their ears. Instinctively, they fled to the fence at the back of the alley and began to climb the fence, until they realized that Jackie, the shortest of them, was unable to climb the barrier more than twice her height. Now blocked in the alley, the artists scrambled for hiding places. Nimbly, Brian climbed one of the fire escapes, hiding himself high in the tangle of metal, while Adam took refuge behind a garbage can that left him partially exposed.

Michael and Jackie foolishly tried to hide behind the bottom stairs of the skeletal fire escape, but the slatted metal stairs looked more like a prison than a hiding place.

A strobe light swept the alley, and four hearts pounded as the lights carefully combed every corner, trying to see where the vandals were hiding. It seemed like hours that the police shone the high-powered light on the alley, but finally, either too lazy to enter the alley or convinced that they had escaped over the fence, the cop drove off.

Still afraid that someone would find them, the taggers remained, silent as the night, frozen in their hiding places and aching to move, but too afraid to stretch their cramped muscles. An hour later, after they were sure there was no danger, they crept slowly out of the alley.

They slunk back to their waiting car, not in the same confident manner that they had entered the alley, and drove away, silent and stunned by their escape, unsure if the thrill of their escapade was worth future risk.

Distress

Jacques Meehan

The sailboat swayed back and forth precariously, pitching and rolling in waves that could at any moment capsize the tiny vessel. The boat strained under the tremendous weight on deck, threatening to spill its cargo into the sea and let nature decide the fate of its occupants. The mast of the sailboat did nothing to blot out the wicked horizon, which currently featured plumes of thick black smoke and dust; high into the air the clouds of chaos rose, as if trying to escape the lick of the flame at their heels. Having escaped to water when a devastating earthquake destroyed all they had known, twenty-three Haitian men, women, and children now prepared themselves for a new reality, one that took place on a vastly overcrowded sailboat amidst a maze of vicious swells.

A mile away, looking down from our perch some twenty foot higher, the tiny vessel appeared anything but seaworthy. Foam from the sea had gathered about the hull, a frothy cappuccino-like consistency laced with bits of garbage and refuse. Bobbing like a sea buoy anchored far below, the rickety vessel struggled to maintain buoyancy. As the vessel danced dangerously with the sea, those aboard were a putrid shade of green; the terror-stricken faces of her crew were contorted in such a way that family members would struggle with recognition. Mothers held children with a grip so fierce that the neither the pull of the sea nor god himself could separate them. The despondent crew clung to vessel's rails with a white knuckled embrace, their silence radiating to us at a volume louder than the crash of the sea. As we drew nearer it became obvious that without assistance the vessel would founder, the only variable being time.

Once within range, the crew of the Coast Guard Cutter WHEC-715 sprang to action. Boarding teams donned rescue gear with electric speed, praying for the best and preparing for the worst. The task of transferring a person from one craft to another on the open sea can prove dangerous on the most timid of days; when tension is high and fear is tantamount, rescuers can become victims in an instant. We watched with our hearts in our throats as our eighteen-foot rigid hull inflatable boat (RHIB) nimbly sliced through the swells towards the teetering vessel. The acrid smell of diesel fuel wafted through the salty air leaving a trail for our senses to follow as the black and orange craft leapt from crest to crest. In what must have felt like a lifetime for the crew of devastated

Haitians, our boarding team traversed the undulating seascape and began the transfer process.

During the first of five trips between the two boats, not a soul dared speak. Tension seemed to squeeze the breath from our lungs as the boarding team skillfully transferred women, children, and men from the faltering craft to the safety of their own. The additional weight to its ranks made the RHIB struggle in the churning seas, doubling the time it took to return to the cutter. Four more trips back and forth across the frothy and unforgiving water gave testament to the determination of the boarding team, never missing a beat, and safely delivering their precious cargo to refuge.

Summery

Theo Adam Zegers

Drizzle, drip. Angle.

Try angle.

Find internal rhyme, combine one dash of time.

At birth I flew and fell above the sky —

Zapped, warped, sucked through,

A portal no one (but me) has seen,

And I was too drunk to remember —

Two months past December.

Impressionable!

Back then I was tender.

Flesh malleable.

So I pubercized.

And my body broke the treaty it had made with the land:

The promise of hairless underarms —

The longitudes and latitudes which prohibited female entrance.

It was the suburban scrape, flag-football-fruits and innocence,

That were washed away with Spring —

Muddied in mystic potholes;

A dew in the morning, much adieu.

But the girls came in Summer,

Sobering.

Dizzied, tripped and tangled,

Sobriety left me re-birthered, no —

Re-angled.

So I threw out a line,

With hopes to sail and float above the sea,

Coasting, soaring, slicing through,

A star-crossed sea breeze,

That Summer could see,

And that I was too sober to forget.

Amazing Bays

Sherman Coonradt

There are many beautiful places in the world, and many of them are near the coastline. The ocean is an amazingly vast and powerful force that draws people close for many reasons. I am drawn to the ocean to fish on the open sea, but the scenic voyage out of the bay is just as amazing as the sport I come for.

Getting ready for a fishing trip usually starts the night before, searching the empty supermarket isles for drinks and snacks for the long day ahead. The bags crinkle and the cart rattles as we fill it with salty pretzels, rich cookies, water, soda, and subs. We then pack our coolers so they are spilling ice the whole way back to the house. The night before can be sleepless with anticipation, and sometimes we stay up too late, so the morning comes as brisk as the morning ocean air.

We wake up before the sun and hope everything has been packed as we step out into the darkness. The air climbs under your shirt and bites at your skin. I breathe in the crisp, salty air and sigh with a smile and a shiver. The ride to the boat gives you time to wake up slowly, but when we get there, it's time to work. We lug the coolers onto the docks dragging over the boards with a quick thumping sound. After the boat is loaded, we untie the ropes wet from the fog, and jump on just before the gap between the boat and dock is too big. The water would be paralyzing to fall into. The bay is as flat as a skating rink, and the motor purrs quietly as small ripples project off the boat while we drift slowly away onto our journey. Leaving the dock feels like freedom from life's worries, and I can breathe easier floating into the cool moist air.

The first time I went out of Hingham Harbor I was astounded by the multitude of breathtaking views. When we round the first corner, still in the "no wake" zone, we creep between two deserted islands with eroded sand cliffs protruding upwards. As we speed up, we go through the small bay sometimes passing the ferry that carries morning commuters to Boston. The buoys are a mix of rust, red, and green, bobbing in our wake. When we approach the narrow pass into the mouth of the ocean, there's a tranquil windmill with its three blades as still as the morning sunrise. Across the channel there are the remnants of an old church and brick army buildings on a rocky beach that can be recognized from the movie "Shutter Island." The channel is always choppy with angry waves because of the rush of water coming in and out with the tides and current.

It's the first part of the trip that you may feel your stomach jump up your throat, and your legs must become rubber to adapt to the constant motion. Some people would rather turn around here than hang over the side wishing for land's steadiness under their feet later.

When we make it past the channel, we get the first glimpse of Boston only six miles away. The array of buildings reflect the orange and fiery sunlight like mirrors back across the harbor full of mysterious islands. Its peacefulness hides the traffic jams and busy trains that we are lucky enough to have escaped. Boston Harbor is speckled with island parks containing old stone forts built into the hillsides looking impenetrable to any cannon fire. One island is a big green hill expanded from all of the dirt dug when putting tunnels under the city. A bridge spans across to another island with a diverse history including conflicts from the Civil War to the Cold War. These islands stand firm to protect the city, not just from the waves of the ocean.

We turn away from the city view, and I am immediately awestruck by the lighthouse just a few hundred yards away. It is tall and mostly a dirty white with a black roof and five thin black rings. It is simple, because it is one of the oldest in the country, built on the site of the first lighthouse in America that was destroyed by the British. Scattered on the island, there are small outbuildings, wooden fences, and a little house with a tattered roof, all matching the lighthouse. I think about how it would be to live there; hearing the low roar of tugboats and the high strung whine of speedboats going by all day, and to guard the rocky islands with the light's warning. Underneath the lighthouse are bleached grey cliffs that look stronger than the old fort's walls. The seaweed that lines the bottom of the rocks looks soft and pungent, but you could never get a boat close without cracking the hull against the hidden rocks that have littered the bottom with wrecks. Across the water, there's a hill covered in houses that all have decks covering the entire front side so they can stare at the view all day. I wouldn't be able to get off the deck if I could live there. The lighthouse floats away bobbing like the buoys while we pass the last group of rocky shoals. Finally, I can rest my eyes because I haven't blinked in twenty minutes.

Now it is time to relax before we have fun fishing. The ride out can take an hour, and we don't have to ready any fishing gear until we're close. I usually like to nap during this time, so I can rest before the long day in the sun and try to compensate for lack of sleep. I don't think I could ever nap until we get out into the ocean though. I still get the same feeling every time we go out, and I could never miss the views along the way. I hope I can keep going back, but I would never forget this part of the trip even if I could never return.

Witnesses

Mary Clement

I don't think we were supposed to see him jump, but we did.

While traveling on a ferry boat from Germany to Switzerland, shortly before we were to reach shore, but still in deep water, a little round man jumped off the back of the boat into the frigid waters of the Bodensee. And no one saw him but my husband and me.

He had so clearly taken a leap, but a moment passed before we registered what had happened and yet another before we sprang into action alerting the crew, in the best German we could muster, that there was a man overboard.

It was May and it was chilly standing at the rail on the deck of the boat. It must have been bitter in the water. But more chilling than the cold was the fact that this man did not surface swimming. He surfaced struggling. He was decidedly not going to swim or he did not know how.

It is no quick thing to turn a huge ferry boat around. Surely, too much time was passing. We frantically kept our eyes on the man in the water. We could not allow the thoughts of why this man was in the water to cloud our sight. We had to keep him in view if there were to be any chance of saving him.

The crew outside the captain's booth were all preparing for the rescue. Finally we reached the man, not struggling; he was floating now in a face-down position, a lump rising and falling with the boat's currents. Like a wave, our worse thoughts came crashing down on us. I prayed out loud as the rescue team entered the water and maneuvered to get the body on the boat. Other rescuers went to work on him. It did not look good.

The ferry turned again and raced for shore. Emergency personnel were waiting there for us.

A new crew went to work pumping and breathing, pumping and breathing. Nothing. Another pair took over, relieving the exhausted workers. In the crowd that had formed around the scene, some people murmured words of finality. Some were numb. Some galled.

Pounding now. And more breathing. Pounding, breathing. And then...a weak, quiet sort of cough. And then another. And the entire crowd held their breath. And then another cough, stronger this time. And then a lot of coughing and spewing of water. And vomiting.

And the crowd cheered.

But we were hushed by words of fury. This man who lay on the pavement where he had just been saved found his voice and damned those who saved him for doing so. I felt that we were included in this because we had set the rescue in motion. Confused and shaken, we turned and left.

We moved on, with this man, this incident overshadowing most of our holiday and many days afterward.

And I think that sometimes we believe that our lives are our own and that what we do doesn't affect others. But I think we are wrong about that. We all witness things in life....sometimes not by choice...and they stay with us.

They do affect us.

Who Would Have Known

Helen Willett

He's having trouble breathing. His respirations are becoming more rapid. I decide it's time for some more Roxinal. I squeeze the syringe into his mouth and gently lift his chin, so it doesn't run out. This is the moment I realize it's almost the end. I pull up a chair and sit next to the bed. I hope he can hear me, because I have a few things I have to say. I hold his hand and tell him he doesn't have to keep on fighting. I tell him that his family will miss him, but they'll be okay. I ask him if his wife is waiting for him and his expression changes. I know how much he has been missing her and I tell him to go with her. I believe that is exactly what he did. February seventeenth used to be just an ordinary day until a year ago when I held my friend's hand and watched him take his last breath. I lost a boss, a mentor, and most of all my best friend.

When I met John he was just returning home after a stay in a local nursing home for rehabilitation. He was eighty-four and basically did everything for himself, except his weakness made him a bit unsteady on his feet. He lived in a retirement community with his wife Virginia. They were one of the first couples to occupy the place and were known as part of the "Dirty Dozen." I never got the pleasure of meeting Virginia. She was just diagnosed with cancer that had spread throughout her body. She ended up dying later that month on their wedding anniversary. John and Virginia's two daughters are from California and their son lives in Rochester. They stayed in town after their mother's death, but eventually had to return to their homes. That is where I came in.

Some people thought of me as John's aide. I didn't think the title fit and preferred to be known as his assistant since he preformed most of his activities of daily living by himself. I ran errands, did household chores, and I became his driver when his family decided he was no longer safe to drive on his own. His family came to visit, but mostly it was just him and I.

John was an engineer with a degree from RPI, and he profited from his work on airplanes. He also served our country in the United States Navy and was a plankman on the USS Midway that saw battle in WWII. He had a baseball cap from his years on the Midway that he took great pride in wearing. He said it was a good conversational piece. I now have the pleasure of owning it and proudly wear it in his honor on Veteran's Day.

In 1982 John had a triple bypass and was told he had seven to nine years to live. That goes to show you doctors don't always know what they're talking about. In the end his heart was not the problem. The problem was a tiny cut on his foot. His circulation was bad and the wound didn't receive the nourishment it needed to heal. It became infected. The infection got into his blood and he became septic. His kidneys shut down and he spent many months on dialysis. Miraculously, his kidneys began to function well enough for him to stop dialysis. Still his wound would not heal, and instead of a little cut it was now a gaping hole that engulfed his entire shin. Tissue in his foot was dying, and his toes went gangrene. Every day I would change his dressing and wait for the day his toe came off with it.

John was tough. Up until the last month he only took Tylenol for pain and continued on with his life as if nothing was wrong. He played billiards and loved his weekly bridge tournaments. He was on a three week "winning streak" once and wouldn't let me wash his "lucky pants" until he lost. John was a well dressed man and every night he would wash up, put on dress pants and a neatly pressed button down shirt. For special occasions he would step it up with a suit and a tie. After he passed I was listening to the radio while cleaning out his closet when ZZ Top came on singing "Every girl's crazy 'bout a sharp dressed man." Was it coincidence? I believe it was a sign.

If we disagreed on something he would bet me a nickel that he was right. I recall winning most of these bets. The day before he passed he gave me three nickels and said "I owe you these. Don't spend them all in one place." I never spent the nickels. Instead I carry them in my purse. It's comforting to know I have a little piece of him with me.

If you had asked me a year ago "Who is John?" I would have answered, "He's an old dude I look after." If you asked me now I would tell you how an eighty-four-year-old man became my best friend. I'd tell you at four p.m. he enjoyed a cocktail and liked wine with his dinner. I would talk about how he was not just on time for everything, but ten minutes early. I would speak of his unconditional love for his family and his work. I would also say how much I miss him and would have loved to have had more time together. I dedicate this to my friend, John P. Andes. He always told me I was smart and encouraged me to continue my education. I know he's proud as he looks down and if not for him I may not be here today. For this I say, "Thank You."

So Do You Want To Know

Robbin Dzembo

So what do you want to know, sweet? Do you want to know how hard I sobbed and how terrified I was that first morning? Do you want to know about the *thirty-two* doctors I went to in a vain attempt to **not** be blind? Do you want to know how mortifying it is to have to be a grown woman tossing away her last shred of dignity to ask some silly little college kid to help her across an icy sidewalk? Or how humiliating it is to fall fourteen times in one winter at school – or to be so paralyzed by the fear of falling that you just stand in the middle of the walkway and weep? Do you want to know how just plain gross it is to have to sit in a public restroom without being able to check the seat first (ask a woman)? Do you want to know how incredibly frustrating it is not to be able to help my eighty-year-old mom like I always have? Do you want to hear about how we’re probably going to lose our home because I can’t work and don’t qualify for any sort of disability? Do you want to hear about how I feel so fucking “less than” all the time and that I am so overwhelmingly frightened that someone else will see it, that I am nearly unable to breathe sometimes? Or how desperately I miss the strong, competent, capable, assured woman I saw myself as back then?

Or would you like to know how my faith in the entire human race had been somewhat restored by the myriad of small kindnesses shown to me on a daily basis? Shall I tell you about David, the most amazing blind man on the planet who has bent more rules than we thought possible to get NYS Commission for the Blind (CBVH) to pay my tuition and books? How he listens and understands and just *gets* it when no one else does? How when I call him and say, “Davis, I just can’t **do this** anymore – I’m done. I don’t wanna’ play anymore,” he emphasizes and cares and listens and talks, but *never pities*? Do you want to hear about the amazing love my husband has shown every day – in the beginning helping me learn to tie my fucking shoes and where things were in my own damn house? Or the insane amount of hours he has to work to make up for my not being able to? How he leaves work early to drive both my mom and I to her doctor appointments so I can feel useful? Do you want to hear about my best friend June who almost literally dragged my self-pitying ass out of my house and forced me into life again? How she has spent countless hours sitting across from me in diner booths listening to my bitching and whining? Or how she is the *first* person to tell me I can do anything? Do you want to tell me about my good friend Neal who sends me magnificent photographs of amazing

things just so he can ask what I see? Or how he helps me sometimes walk without my cane, so I can be free – even for a few moments? Do you want to hear about the amazingly funny and warm group of people that I am fortunate enough to call my friends at school: my irreverent, sarcastic “mentor” Nicole who showed me my future and cares for all her students – even the dumb ones, all the professors and students who have touched me, inspired me, or just changed me – who I would have never met if it were not for this disability? Or the staff of the DRC, who as much as I would have liked to feel ashamed to *have* to go and ask for help, would never let me? How Pablo and DeAnne and the rest all made it seem like going out of their way to make me whole was what they wanted more than anything? Shall I mention that for the first time in 45 years, my dad told me that he was proud of me at my Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society induction and that when he *stood up* and cheered when I walked off the stage I thought my heart would burst? Do you want me to tell you that I have learned more about love and the real meaning of the word in the last two years than ever before?

I could try to describe the blurry world that I inhabit...how what I miss most is the definition. There are no sharp lines, no definite edges. I miss knowing the difference between black, brown, navy, and hunter. I miss seeing my friend’s eyes when they smile at me. The only time a woman is truly beautiful is in the eyes of someone who loves her – and dammit, I miss that feeling. A lot. I miss hand gestures and funny billboards and private glances. Oh, I pretend – and I am a friggin’ master at that. I know where your head is, so I can figure out where your eyes are and thank God, I am just quick enough with the “Oh yeah, smile now: cue in my head that I don’t seem too off... but it is fucking tiresome to have to *think* about this stuff all the time.

I could tell you that an even 50% of the time when I am making self-effacing “blind lady jokes,” *I am dying inside*. I could mention that the other half is really funny shit – and that I firmly believe that my sense of humor and the senses of humor of those around me (I’m looking at you, Joe Leo!) – may have saved my life. I could tell you that without my *heart* – the one part of me I know has not gotten reduced, I couldn’t have done this.

I can’t tell you “how to survive going 96% blind at 45 years old” – I can only tell you about my day-to-day. It sucks. And it’s awesome. I have a huge, stupid, horrid handicap that I cannot recover from and did nothing to earn. I also have a huge, fabulous supportive “family” who love me like there’s no tomorrow – that I did nothing to earn. Fair? Not even a little. But whoever said it was supposed to be, lied. Most days I will tell you that I am a damn lucky lady – and mean it with all my heart.

If it isn’t fatal, figure out how to kick its ass.

"Empty Trees Stand Silent"

Stephen Furlong

Empty trees
stand silent like skeletons,
bare and delicate.
Easily shaken
as the wind
cuts through
like a dancer
closing in on the heart.
Leaves spill
on the ground-
a blood of many colors.
Fading,
the sun goes down.
Closing one eye
and raising is the other;
a moon.
Unblinking
it watches the trees
and stares,
shining with happiness.

The Last Round

Kyle Garrett

"He still up over there?"

Through the swimming lights, he saw Danny look over his shoulder, across the ring. His trainer frowned, furrowing an age-worn brow.

"Yeah, he's still with us. Now listen, Tommy, what we've got to do is..."

The veteran's voice was lost in bright lights and swirling thoughts. The stool under him was hard and uncompromising, the bag of ice pressed to his head damp and bitterly cold, keeping him just a little more alert. Fires of pain erupted from all over his body, lances of heat stabbing at him from his arms, his gut, his face. He couldn't make a fist with his left anymore; it had broken somewhere in the fifth, and he was pretty sure it had taken Butler's jaw with it. A worthy sacrifice, and not one he was going to let on to. Not when he could smell victory.

Victory, huh? Could he really do it? Breath was an effort, drawn in and expelled with relief. The urge to tear out his mouth piece and take in huge gulps of precious air was almost irresistible. Had his nose gone, too? Sweat and blood ran down his face in tiny streams, and when he drank the offered water and spat it into the bucket held to his side, it came out red. Almost pure blood. Nobody important saw, or this might have been over by now. It probably would have been when the stirrings in his gut began; the nausea and spinning in his head. How many of those punched had gone unanswered in those last few seconds of the previous round?

You could have ended this anytime, a voice in his mind said. Just show the referee, and you'd be on your way to a hospital. Then home.

Home, where nothing but humiliation would have waited. He saw the dark, pitiless eyes of the television camera at the corner of his vision. It stared, damning in its neutrality. He agreed to this, hadn't he? The entire nation could see him, either droning in the audience around him, or at home, safely distant from the barbarity. All he had to do was see this fight through, and the world stage was in his hands. He couldn't go back to Denton, to its dirty, hopeless streets. To broken people robbing and killing each other in the dark. To ritual duels fought over a few square feet of ground, the pretension of honor the only thing stopping complete anarchy.

What was pain, really? He had felt the fists of larger men, fled from gunfire, seen his own blood. This man, #12 in the world, was nothing compared to that.

"Seconds out!" cried a voice. He stood, shakily. His support disappeared. Two warriors approached the centre of the ring, looking into dark, battered eyes. They understood as only men of the same dark background could understand.

It was time to finish this. The bell rang.

