

Threads



2014

Threads **2014**



Be bold. Be a Viking.

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Threads is a journal of student writing and art published by the English, Foreign Languages, and English as a Second Language Department at Hudson Valley Community College, Troy, New York.

Special Thanks

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Cover: "Shattered" by Nick Guile

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 visual art — reflect the range of experience, culture and imagination of the Hudson Valley Community College 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 <http://threads.hvcc.edu> for more information.

Happy reading!

Contents

<i>Message from the Editors</i>	iii
<i>Contents</i>	iv
<i>Jamie Frankenfield, What Kind of Mother</i>	1
<i>Jason Gohra, The Red Noose</i>	3
<i>Rachel Berschwinger, Justice</i>	5
<i>Shawn Sutton, Home</i>	7
<i>Ainsley Bradford, Blend</i>	9
<i>Jamie Frankenfield, Lessons From My Father</i>	11
<i>Jason Gohra, The Letter; Not the Word it Aids</i>	13
<i>Rachel Berschwinger, Savannah</i>	15
<i>Kristianna Brickman, The Individual I Meets the Collective They</i>	16
<i>Melanie Douglas, My Brother Mark</i>	18
<i>Katie Marie Burns, The Midnight Man</i>	20
<i>Hilary Beck, Naïve</i>	22
<i>Brandi Ziegler, The Two-Story Lock-Box with a Missing Key</i>	24
<i>Maik Katko, Modern American Boy</i>	26
<i>Ganna Andriyanova, A Compass that Can't Find the North</i>	27
<i>Kerry Gneiting, Socially Awkward</i>	29
<i>Nick Guile, Over the Hill</i>	31
<i>Brigitte Chum, Virtue</i>	32

<i>Alicia Murray, Proboscis</i>	33
<i>Zach Whitford, Frog on the Glass</i>	34
<i>Rachel Kerr, Green Things</i>	36
<i>Cristin McIntyre, Nothing Left to Take</i>	37
<i>Edgardo Orengo, Death of a Main Street</i>	40
<i>Ken Shen, Scarlet Song</i>	42
<i>Luke Laupheimer, How To Rob A Bank And Get Away With It</i>	43
<i>John Quigley, Red Light Green Light</i>	45
<i>Shavonna Croley, Home Town</i>	47
<i>Patrick Joyce, Adventures in Social Anxiety</i>	48
<i>Alyssa Palladino, Not A Friend</i>	50
<i>Courtney French, Wish: After We Real Cool</i>	53
<i>Ivan Andriianov, What Do Programmers Dream About?</i>	54
<i>Paola A. Pelaez, American Girl</i>	56
<i>Anet El-Tohami, Send Love</i>	58
<i>Zachary Marshall, The Engaging Boredom of Car Rides</i>	59
<i>Racheal Guzman, Learning My Lessons</i>	61
<i>Endera Houze, More Than</i>	63
<i>Bettina Martin, Non-Believer</i>	64
<i>Daniel W. Hamm, Kenny's Dinner</i>	66
<i>Timothy Murphy, Spark: After "Elusive" by Fatima Hussein</i>	69

THREADS WRITING AWARD – FIRST PRIZE

What Kind of Mother

Jamie Frankenfield

What a terrible mother.
 No food to call our own:
 FB stamped on the top of each aluminum can,
 Labeled across the heavy bags of flour,
 Expired crackers and cakes,
 Juice without a name.
 Jiff peanut butter on a good day.
 What kind of mother would do this to her kids?
 Another car gone, towed into the abyss.
 It must be a new year again:
 Promises of change,
 Hopes of a house of our own.
 Leave the bags packed.
 Keep the doors locked;
 On the front window a note is pinned.
 What kind of mother would do this to her kids?
 Another game missed,
 Homework alone,
 No sitter at night.
 Don't answer the phone.
 If you get scared, call a friend.
 Keep the doors locked;
 Stand in the back of the line, don't stand out.
 What kind of mother would do this to her kids?
 Jump over the hole
 In the hallway of the rickety trailer,
 No bikes at sunset,
 Call your father if you must,
 Don't tell him we need money again.
 Keep the doors locked;
 Don't let his woman hit you again.
 She won't do that to my kids.
 A job, a job, a job,
 No car to make it on time,
 A trip to the food bank in shame,
 Braces to keep teeth in line.
 Alone with her girls,

Keep the heart locked;
Don't let them see you cry.
My mother did that for her kids.
No check in the mail again,
Another woman in his life,
Missed a baseball game at seven,
Remember pizza on Friday night.
Sleep on the couch again.
Keep the doors locked;
The girls must be safe at night.
My mother did that for her kids.
Power locked at the box,
Games by candlelight,
Heat water for baths on the stove-top
In a home I can't call mine.
Keep the doors locked;
Slip out only when they fall asleep.
My mother did that for her kids.
Battles endured together,
Meals not skipped at home.
Girls raised by their mother
Will never feel alone
Keep the secrets locked;
Don't let them see you cry.
My mother did that for her girls.

THREADS WRITING AWARD – SECOND PRIZE

The Red Noose

Jason Gohra

Insight emerges solid
Mutilate until squalid
Every drip
A drop
I cannot, will not
Stop
Until I reach bitter
I am a taste that will linger
Every word I utter
Every verb I slur
Sip on my acerbic poisonous solution
You cannot spit me out
I am foul
Stagnant
Hear to rot
Swallow my astringent—
Softly
Completion of thought
Battered and distraught
Rip apart, endure my chaos
Dwell in the temptations of an end
Bend to a parallel of evil
Fading light
Lines of morality obscured
Movements blurred
Squeeze and tear until fatigued
You dare to critique?
What's ripped can be stitched
But—your red ink
My lynch
Every circle, every line crossed
In bold letters
"Good start"

Represent depth with superficial means I will ramble with no direction I
will be relentless with redundancies I have a tendency to be wordy I will
use run-ons when I deem necessary!
I paint in a fog

Subtle phrases ^ a lock
I will not give the key
I write like me—
For me, not thee
But still the demand for clarity
Grade my voice, in the form of letters
You want better?
Pardon my suddenness of distraught
In vain, I will go against what is “taught”
When I sense flow, I will clot
What is sharp, I will dull

THREADS WRITING AWARD – THIRD PRIZE

Justice

Rachel Berschwinger

He tells me to empty my pockets. “Take off your hoody” he orders. I walk through the detector without a beep. Pushing open the door, I see lines of people standing; rows of people sitting. Counters with signs, doors leading to small rooms, fluorescent lights exposing my every flaw, but there are no windows. No way out. I stand, feet heavy, my heels aching through the floor. My back is stiff. Do I stand tall to show confidence? Do I intentionally slouch to blend in? I wait. The clock is un-moving. The line is un-moving. My soul withers.

I observe my surroundings. It is an art I have by now mastered: to see without watching, to hear without listening. Mothers who don’t deserve the title, telling their children to shut up, the way you would command a dog to stop barking. A child clings to his mother’s leg, his mouth creating a small spot of saliva on her jeans. She pushes her child away. “Git cho’ spit off me!” she yells. I clench my fists disgusted by the sight. I know I am better than this, but am I? I don’t belong here, and yet, here I am. I wonder if there is a single soul here who feels the same way. I wonder, if there is anybody here who has also tried to climb out of this abyss, only to get pushed back down farther at every attempt. As if, it is a greater sin to better yourself than to remain in the crack society has swept you into.

I pay attention to details, quickly passing judgment. The gym membership keychain worn by the woman in front of me. The Nike sneakers on the toddler who runs circles around the room, as the woman whom I assume to be his mother, pays all of her interest to her I-Phone. Luxuries. I mentally add this to the list of things that fuel my deeply rooted resentment towards the people behind the counter, who so callously deny me time and time again, over nickels and dimes that I earn. My last denial letter was over 75 dollars. Gross total. I cried when I received that letter. Right there in my driveway, as cars sped past me, the force of their speed ripping through me in the form of wind, reminding me I was substance. Reminding me I was indeed something. Something defeated. Something exhausted, of trips to the ER, because I could not afford the asthma medication needed for my son and I. Something overwhelmed, by the bills from various hospitals that cover what was once my kitchen table.

I never wanted this. I went to school, and for all of the long tedious hours I worked at my job, I spent many more dreaming of living instead of surviving. Thinking, and truly believing that by doing what

society told me to do, I would provide a better life. But they break you.

I observe these people. I try to create a story for them that may help me to allow room for empathy. "We are the same", I try to tell myself. "But we are not!" a much larger part of me screams. Society taught me these people choose to be here, because this life is easier for them. But not for me.

I think of the pain that poverty has caused me. Putting myself through high school, at a college prep school where it was clear I did not fit in. Academically, I worked my way through high school. Socially, I lied my way through high school. My life was a secret, because it was an embarrassment. The only common ground was the uniforms we wore—mine donated to me out of the school's lost and found. My school records display absence after absence, because my family had lost their only means of transportation. This is something the society I was surrounded by would have never understood or cared about. They still do not.

I remember the smell of crisp winter air filling my nostrils, as my father wrapped me up in blanket after blanket to keep warm when we could not afford heat. I think of the mistakes I made at such a young age. I strived to escape the dilapidated one bedroom house I grew up in, but every time I wanted better, it got worse.

I think of my son, and how I want so badly to give him more. I think of every night that I lay him down to bed, and wish I could re-do the day to somehow do better. I think of my daughter, of how I can remember her. The feel of her peach like hair, her pink little face. I close my eyes and try to imagine her smell, try to conceive how she feels. But, all I can remember is the pain. Closing my eyes as the doctors pull her out of me, turning my head as to not look at her as they hand her off to the couple who were to be her parents; the couple who could afford to give her the life I had already failed to give one child. "This is what poverty has brought me" I think.

This place, it is broken. The people in it, we are broken. And perhaps, in that way, we are the same. Perhaps, these people did try at one point, and got so beaten down and tired, that they began to use their poverty as some type of advantage, because they had no means of advancing otherwise. It is this thought that flips the switch. They are like me. The line inches forward, and I get two steps closer to the food stamp line. Bryan Stevenson said, "The opposite of poverty is not wealth, but justice," and as I stand in this line, embarrassed, and heavy with guilt I do not deserve to feel, I cannot agree with him more.

THREADS WRITING AWARD – HONORABLE MENTION

Home

Shawn Sutton

It was early fall of 2010 and we were well on our way to setting up our new home. The rain stayed heavy and the skies stayed gray as if foreshadowing the dreary routine this area would bring to us. It rained just long enough to flood the ground with several inches of dirty water, turning the powdery sand, which would normally have the light consistency of flour, instead into a thick paste covering the entire area. The sun would fight its way through the clouds and cook the mud pudding into dried clumps of concrete that had to be scraped off boots and clothing. When we moved in we took the place of the animals which once walked freely throughout the cramped walled in yard. The sun cooked the animal droppings scattered about, and soon you could not escape the smell of rot that you would expect in a stable left unclean for years.

The rooms were dark narrow rectangles with no light and no windows which formed a prison to trap the air and dust. The air was filled with enough dust that you could feel it as you pushed through, like a plane cutting through clouds as it descends on a dark landscape. The dust had a taste of bitter stale and you could feel it as it thickened the air flowing deep into your lungs. It never took long before you could feel it grinding between your teeth like sandpaper and collecting in the soft tissue of the corner of your eyes forming wet clumps of filth.

The walls were about two feet thick, made mostly of handmade clay bricks, stacked and covered with mortar made from mud and cow manure. Crumpling underneath the weight of years of neglect and we wondered if they'd meet their final day with us beneath them. Most our water would come from an old fashioned well about sixty feet deep of blackness with a bucket made of worn out tire rubber sewn together and a frayed rope that was rotting from endless exposure to the dark wet of a muddy hole. But this was home, and we were happy.

We were able to buy some pillows from the locals, handmade and filled with human and animal hair. They were dusty and shot spores of dirt into the air around them when they were hit, but still they were soft and kept us off the ground. The rooms, though dirty, kept us out of the blistering desert sun. So we settled in to our new home, a few miles east of the Helmand River.

The river was the artery, giving life to the valley which split the desert plateau. And just as we were at war, so too was the thick vegetation, fighting to survive amidst a sun bleached rocky desert. We put our back against the mountain which cut sharply towards the sky before leveling out to vast desert nothingness in all directions. On the frontlines of the valley the mountain fought back the vegetation and strangled the soil so no water could penetrate to give life beyond it. The west side of the valley was a mirror of the east with the green growth unable to grow beyond the rock face of the hills.

Spilling out from the river like veins carrying the lifeblood of water through the land, canals were dug connecting every spot of flat fertile ground back to the river. Tree lines formed along the canals where water was most plentiful creating the only shade in the valley. Set against the pale sandstone mountains and desert; the lush green fields of opium and marijuana looked more like a wild jungle than the grids of farmland they were.

Like the crops and plants that grew fighting to survive in the arid desert, we too fought to survive in the infamous Sangin Valley. Baking in the brutal and unforgiving Afghan sun, and then boiling in our own sweat, we fought a faceless enemy amongst the clusters of mud huts huddle together throughout the landscape. This was our home.

THREADS WRITING AWARD – HONORABLE MENTION

Blend

(Inspired by the poem “Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid)

Ainsley Bradford

Wake up.
Get Ready.
Black top. Black skirt. Black stockings. Black boots.
Foundation. Powder. Blush. Eyeshadow.
Too dark.
Blend.
Blend.
Blend.
Liquid eyeliner. Wing tip.
Too high on the left eye.
Kleenex.
Mascara. Smudge.
Time for eyebrows...
This is how you look surprised.
Try again.
Drive to school.
Window down.
Light a cigarette. Inhale.
Change the radio. Turn it up.
Exhale. Smoke.
This is how you get cancer.
Park.
Walk across campus.
Find Room. 201.
Sit near the back.
Blend.
Blend.
Blend.
This is how you take notes.
This is how you get an education.
This is how you get a good job.
This is how you make money.
This is how you become part of society.
This is how you blend.
Blend.

Blend.

This is how you fold laundry.

This is how you smile and pretend.

This is how you wash the dishes.

This is how you hold back tears.

This is how you change a diaper.

This is how you swallow pain.

This is how you cross your legs.

This is how you please a man.

This is how you blend.

Lessons From my Father

Jamie Frankenfield

I can remember the very first time I heard the word “coon.” I can also recall that it wasn’t the last time either, and I didn’t realize it was a bad thing until I used it myself. My father, who many outsiders would refer to as a “hick” or “redneck,” sat at a large wooden table with his friends while they all played poker. I can remember that it was 5 Card Draw because the men were teaching the 3 of us girls how to play. We sat on their laps and sipped Kool-Aid while my father and his friends slurped Coors Original and smoked Camels. My father asked us silly questions like, “so, who’s your boyfriend” and “are you doing good in school?” He always asked the same questions, to which we would always reply, “no one” and “good.” A line was clearly drawn between us and our father, and even though he failed to learn anything about us, he taught us plenty.

“I want to marry Michael Jackson.” My sister Frannie spoke right up from her hidden chair at the table, and the poker players went silent. My little 8-year old sister gleefully picked at her cards while she swung her feet back and forth underneath her chair. “No daughter of mine is going to marry a god-damned coon.” My father’s words didn’t faze my sister as she studied her hand. “No, I said Michael Jackson, not a raccoon.” Bridgett and I noticed my father’s face as he stared at our younger sister. “Coon. That’s what he is, and you aren’t marrying someone like that. If you bring one home, I’ll hang you both.” I can recall him talking about gangsters and an animated story he told about a bar fight with a “coon.” I didn’t understand what was so funny about the word, but the table roared with laughter, and my little sister Frannie slowly started to sink into her tears as my father’s friends strutted around the kitchen like gangsters, talked funny, and beat on their chests like gorillas. It all seemed so funny to everyone— except for Frannie.

According to my father, “coons” stole, raped, and murder girls like my sister. We were to have no part of that, and he was certain that if God wanted “those people” to belong with whites, he would have made them white. I was convinced that my father was correct because I had a best friend who was black. Michelle’s mother was black, her father was white, and all of her siblings were black. My father had to be right; her mother must have married a white man for a reason, and not a black one. It was an issue that I would resolve with my friend because I felt like I had the knowledge to understand why her mother and father were black and white.

“Did your mom marry your dad because black guys are coons?” I brushed the hair on her white Barbie’s head as the two of us sat on a mattress near her bedroom wall where a blue sheet hung like a curtain

across the window. "A what?" Michelle never raised her voice, but for the first time in our relationship, I heard sadness. "No. We aren't coons. We aren't niggers either. We are just people, and my mom and dad love each other. That's why they got married." I continued to comb the Barbie's hair while she talked. "Is it weird for him that you are all black and he isn't? You don't look like his kids." I was asked to call my mother a few minutes later, and I haven't spoken to Michelle in the 20 years since that moment.

According to The Racial Slur Database, the term "coon" may come from the idea that raccoons steal things; this definition is synonymous with my father's teachings. As I read through the list of derogatory terms, I realize that my father stamped my mind with many hurtful terms for blacks: gorilla, darkie, lawn jockey, Mr. Bojangles, nappy head and porch monkey. I heard them so often when I was around my father that I didn't realize it until the website pointed it out to me. It makes me sick to see these words flow from my fingers as I type them and they stream across my screen. I never thought I would ever see a day when I would use or hear those words again. Fortunately, my father only allowed us to visit him every few months, and as we became teenagers, he had no desire to see us at all. My mother encouraged us to be friends with people from all different backgrounds and cultures, and her teachings have flushed out the hatred we learned from a hillbilly we used to call, "dad."

The Letter; Not the Word it Aids

Jason Gohra

I perfectly place every P
I will swing until fatigued
Against the tree
Remove the bark; expose the core
The flow; the pour
Scorn the oozing sap
To peel is to unwrap
My P's
My personal blade
I will wield, until insight fades

I raise every T
Stra-T-egically
For place of rest
I attest my will of best
Not from body blows
But the mind's woes
A cross; I hang willingly
Soothing breath; my tranquility
My rest from tormented infinity

I place all my sorrows in my D's
Between a rock and a soft place
They started as O's but so overfilled they bowed
I know not to hold!
But, misery I see as bestowed
My gift; what a beautiful bow
To hide the disgust of guilt
A prison for my demons; I built
Location for flowers to wilt
Selfish desires; jealousy
The density of my enemy
Oh what lovely glow; how heavenly
Before the dry; the flow of tear shed cries
Brilliant glimmer of black suffocating wet ink
My capital D's my personal shrink

My A's are my fortress of orbit
Mobility of frame; I adore
My A's I absorb
Defense of life's blades
Blinding light; my thick stitched shades
Salvation in its symmetry
Sympathy for thinking dimly
Mighty against all infantry
What form; pyramid structure
It will hold; never rupture
My A's
My ladder to higher thought
I will climb; never to fall

Oh dismal day
Treading more and more in the gray
The red of stop fades
But still it portrays
Wrong way, wrong way
Urgency of my k
The escape of the K-turn
I yearn for
Affection to letters; not the words they form
The fade to gray; loss of color painted norm
Pen strokes to create figurative twists
Unfortunately most will miss
Including this

Savannah

Rachel Berschwinger

I am missing her again.
I wonder what her hair smells like
Sweat, when waking from a nap
Grass, when playing in the sunshine.
I am missing her again.
I think about her smile
Will she have one dimple, like me?
Does her laughter erupt from her lie it does in my dreams?
I wonder which teeth popped through her gums first
And which one will be the first to someday place beneath her pillow.
I am missing her again.
I dream about her feel
It is long gone from my fingertips
Long gone from the inside of my belly
But I sometimes, I can imagine the feel of her hair on my cheek
The warmth of her chest against mine
Her fingers squeezing tightly around mine
As I sleep with the blanket she was swaddled in after birth
And I wonder
if she sleeps with the one I made her.
I am missing her again
I am missing her laugh,
I am missing her love,
I am missing her life.

The Individual I Meets the Collective They

Kirstiana Brickman

Kindergarten

They didn't want me to enter kindergarten. They were the principal and his team of educators at Our Savior's Lutheran School. According to the collective they, I would fall behind socially and academically and thus feel uncomfortable and distressed. Why? I couldn't read or write my name yet. The collective they wanted to deny me the start to my education because I did not yet know what they were supposed to teach me. I got in anyway even though according to them I was unprepared.

That same year, the same month, terrorists hijacked planes and crashed them into the twin towers and the World Trade Center. The country erupted. The 'Democrat they' cried that President Bush was nowhere to be seen and cried about everything that was going on. The 'Republican they' cried that he was working out of harms way, following protocol, and they cried that it was time for war. This of course is how I remember these things happening. The details may be vague; I was an illiterate child after all. But according to me, it seemed that the grand collective they were unprepared.

Second Grade

By second grade I could read and write. The national news was reporting on desert storm and Al Qaeda. We had each risen to the occasion. I learned how to learn in a classroom, and they had begun to teach their soldiers Arabic and how to fight in the sand. The crisis had become the norm. But at home, we were unprepared.

At home, my grandfather, Poppy, had come to live with us because he was sick. I would sit on his bed, talk about things he must have not cared about, and eat all of his candy. On these days he would crank up the heat on his heating blanket and time how long it would take for me to drift off to sleep. He passed away in the early spring. When everything else was returning to life, he was drifting off to sleep. My mother was now an orphan. I realized one day I would be an orphan. We saw it coming, but when death came, we were unprepared.

Seventh Grade

By seventh grade I was at a public school and very literate. My grades averaged in the upper nineties. I had learned how to prepare myself for school. I thought I was prepared. That year I had a new lesson. That year I learned about politics and nonverbal communication. I had had four friends in the afternoon, and in the morning I had none. They were my

new collective they for my next life lesson. They stopped talking to me. They still talked to each other. Why? Politics; in order to have a group identity, someone needs to be stepped on, someone needs to be less. I did nothing wrong, except for be too easy to step on. I was unprepared.

Ninth Grade

By my freshman year of high school, I had life cut, quartered, and planned. I knew the politics, I had made new friends, and I had grown my backbone. In those two years the collective middle school they had made poor decisions and become poor people, and I had grown closer to God, expanded my horizons, and perfected the art of learning. I felt confident to a fault. The next summer I got into a situation I thought I was ready for, but ultimately was unprepared.

Tenth Grade

I had spent a month of my summer in Uganda during the rainy season. The Christians I had gone with had poor doctrine standards and poor standards all around. A new collective they to loathe. I spent in a nocturnal cycle with lower grades, lower levels of faith, and lower personal standards. I spent that year thinking of all the ways that they were wrong. They were bad. They were not properly prepared.

Eleventh/Twelfth

This is the year I woke up. I got over my loathing of 'they'. Every 'they' from age six to sixteen was irrelevant. I did not trust, but I did not loathe. This year I graduated from high school, got accepted into college, and worked three jobs to prepare for the economic responsibilities ahead. I would love to return to that principal and set of teachers and tell them that that girl, the one who could not write yet, graduated at sixteen. I had a counselor who helped me mentally prepare for what was next. I would sit in her office and rant and rave about standards and doubt. Eight months passed away and I ranted and raved about returning to faith and my heart breaking as I saw how unprepared my peers were. My friends cut up their arms and starved themselves to feel, to control, and to be loved. I still wait for them to realize that they are worth more than that. Time elapsed as I matured and accepted reality. What was my education? We are never prepared for what comes next or the collective 'they' that we will face, but we are capable of rising to the occasion.

My Brother Mark

Melanie Douglas

In third grade, I was an only child. In fifth grade, I was an only child. In fourth grade, I had a brother. Cailin's older sister was cool and protective, while Stephanie's little brother was cute and talkative. I was just me. I could feel my popularity fading, and I was convinced that my lack of siblings was the reason. I had to do something.

I felt an older brother would be best, but due to my parents' lack of reproduction before me, I had to turn to adoption. I knew my parents, though generous, would never agree to adopt a preferably fifteen or sixteen year old male of my choosing, so I was temporarily stuck. Finally, the perfect idea came to me. There was no reason for my friends to ever meet my brother, right? We were only school friends. So there was my solution: an imaginary brother.

I spent about a week thinking of my story before the big reveal. Mark, my fifteen-year old orphan brother would arrive at my house on Thanksgiving, the best surprise of my lifetime. He'd attend the high school, and I'd have a great story to tell my friends on the first day back.

Sitting in class the day after vacation, I wrote two lookalike notes and passed them to Cailin and Stephanie: "I have a brother now."

At recess, I explained the story of Mark, my Thanksgiving surprise to two very shocked faces. We drew a crowd. By the time we went back to class, everyone knew. It felt like the whole school had questions.

"What does Mark look like?"

"Do you two get along?"

"Was the food at the orphanage as bad as our cafeteria food?"

I shared as many details as I could think of off the top of my head. Suddenly there were no empty seats around my desk.

This went on for the next couple of days, and I was loving my rise in popularity. Mark was doing great in school and we were adjusting to our new home life wonderfully. There was just one thing I overlooked: girl scouts. Stephanie and I were in the same troop, and my mom was the leader. It just so happened that during Mark's first week at home, we had a community service project and Stephanie carpooled with us.

We talked about our teacher, our friends, and the fun we had that night at the food bank. Then, out of nowhere, Stephanie said it. "You should bring in a picture of your brother to school tomorrow so we can all see him." And there it was. I could feel the blood draining from my face. She said it innocently, and why not? My mom would know about my adopted brother. This wouldn't be a big deal. If I weren't a liar.

"Yeah, yeah, I'll do that," I whispered, scanning my brain for other conversation topics. It was probably too late, but I wasn't going to blow my own cover if my mom was going to keep silent. When Stephanie got out of the car, my mom didn't say anything. But it didn't matter. This scare was enough to jolt me back into reality.

The next day in school, I walked into class with my head down low. Brooke, one of the most popular girls in my class, came up to me looking concerned. "What's wrong, Melanie?"

"It's Mark. He found his birth mother in..." I looked around the room, where my eyes landed on a map of our state of the week. "...In Ohio. He left this morning and he's going to live with her now."

"Oh, Melanie, that's awful." She put her hand on my shoulder as we walked toward the cubbies. "I'm so sorry."

"I'm just going to miss him so much." I think I even managed to squeeze out a few tears. I wondered if there was a professional lying service I could someday work for. It wasn't that hard.

News spread around the classroom, and by the end of the following week, Mark was just a distant memory, along with my popularity. At lunch, with only Stephanie and Cailin to sit with, I often drifted away from the conversation and daydreamed about what Mark might be doing right then, off in Ohio with his birth mom. I didn't have to wonder long; I could probably figure it out if I thought hard enough.

The Midnight Man

Katie Marie Burns

What you know now, you didn't know then.
The Midnight Man was never your friend.

He crept into your room and slid under your covers
Next to your teddy bear, he became your first lover.

You can still feel the wet that he left in your bed.
You can still smell the sweat that dripped from his head.

You can still hear the sound of his breath in your ear.
You can still see his smile as you shed your prayerful tear.

The words that he whispered told you "Shut up! Be Still!"
The Rumble in your stomach welled, and soon you were ill.

His body was rank and rotten.
It stifled your breath, until nothing was left –
This memory not soon forgotten.

The soul of a child is a delicate thing –
Wound it once and give it wings.

Cry naught- For no one will hear.
Endure the pain, despite your fear.

You told someone once, but they told you you were wrong –
That it was all in your head and you should move on.

Days flew past. Years crawled by.
All the while, war raged inside.

Before you knew it, you were all grown up.
Jaded by life, a soft girl turned tough.

And you told yourself these things:

Just spread your legs, and then they'll see:

How huggable,
How loveable,
How good you really are.

How special
How worthy
How you've worked really hard.

What you know now, you didn't know then.
That sex doesn't equal love, or mean you're a friend.

But this was the lesson you learned on that first night,
And this is the wrong you've tried all you're life to right.

...And so you write.

Naïve

Hilary Beck

Being a teenager provided me with what I believed was perfect and euphoric freedom. I could wake up when I wanted to and go to sleep when I wanted. There were never rules enforced and to me that meant I had the best mother and father. This carried on into school, too. I'm not quite sure how many classes I even attended. I can still see myself in the principal's office in those hard oak chairs and him telling me how I had detention again for being truant. How great it was to be able to do whatever I wanted, and never think about the future. As a teenager, I thought I had the greatest parents ever, but as I grew older I began to realize my opinion of them was one of a naive girl.

My ignorance was so powerful that it never seemed like failing tenth grade would come with negative consequences. As I opened my report card, a feeling of relief and tension lifted off my shoulders. Although I had F's in everything, it was summer time and I could feel the warmth of the sun and the lake calling my name. Walking towards the yellow school bus, I tossed my report card into the green garbage can and headed up those black stairs for the last time that school year. My friend just looked at me in wonder and as I read her face, she was telling me how awesome it was that that piece of paper didn't matter. My older sister, being far more annoying than my real mother, asked me for my report card. "Trash," I said, with a huge grin on my face, and I ran to the last seat on the bus with all the cool kids. As the bus came to a stop, I flew past everyone not saying a word, hopped into my boyfriend's white mustang convertible and headed off. I pulled out my pack of Marlboro reds and my zippo and lit up. We drove off into the sunset almost like a fairy tale.

Abigail was born in 2003. She had dark hair and dark eyes and as little as she was, she may have helped me to see my parents' true colors. I spent every waking second with her, and I couldn't get enough. She got everything and anything she wanted, even a little brother in 2006 that she would think was her own. Over the last ten years, I've watched them grow and blossom into great children with amazing morals and values. They have proven to shine above most children academically. When we started the school process with signups and open houses, I flashed back to the trailer and my childhood. I handed my mother the paper from my backpack as she sat on our ugly green furniture. It was covered still in plastic to prevent messes from the eight of us. After she read it, she handed the sheet back and as she blew a puff of her Salem cigarette in my face, she responded, "I'm too busy." At the time this was no big deal but as I flashed back into the present, I started to wonder.

As Abigail has rounded up her elementary years, I've been elated at every above average worksheet, test, and report card she come off that yellow bus with, the same yellow bus that I too came off of with failing grades. At every parent teacher conference, sitting at the little brown desk, I go over her work with her teachers and they show me page after page of excellence. Her teachers thank me for reading with her every night. As I flash back again, I can't recall one book in that trailer during my childhood. Not only that, I can't remember a time when I curled up on my blue mattress with the fonzy sheets and a slight smell of urine, and got cuddled and read to.

Thomas has followed suit in academics, his teachers being amazed with his sense of numbers. Every day he flies through the door after getting off the bus and literally plows me over to give me a hug. With a smile so big it should hurt, he asks, "How was your day at school mommy?" My mind begins to wander back to my youth. As I came through the door day after day, walking on the dirty linoleum, no one was there to greet me but my annoying four brothers and the kitchen table made from plywood. I question myself internally as to when my parents were even home. At that moment Thomas flips over the arm of our red couch, bringing me back to reality and says "Look mom!" He dumps a backpack full of papers on the couch and instead of imitating my father and screaming at him, I pick them up and we look through them together. He grabs a pencil and flies through his homework. Then he hands me his library book and says lets find Waldo. I knew Waldo when I was a kid, but did my parents ever help me find him? Not that I recall.

It's funny how a few years can change perspectives so drastically. I often question if I had the right parents if I could have been as successful as my kids already are. I look back and with frustration blame my parents for many things, but also thank them. I thank them for teaching me how not to be as a parent. To this day, they don't know I failed tenth grade, repeated, doubled up my classes and graduated on time. They are so naïve, like I once was, that they will always pat themselves on the back for raising eight wonderful children and giving them the tools to be great parents. What they don't understand is that we are all so wonderful because we do the opposite of what they did.

The Two Story Lock-Box with a Missing Key

Brandi Ziegler

When you think of a locked box what comes to mind? To most people it's a small metal box that holds your life's most important pieces of paper, or a square hole in a wall of the bank to store your "millions". I grew up in a small town where everyone knew each other and their families. We all went to the same school and played on the same hills, which to us were larger than life. We lived on a one-way street where we all could run up and down the street with no worries. On one side of the road there were woods and a hill that gave us millions of pretend towns and different worlds to disappear to. When the trains would pass by on the tracks down by river, we could hear the whistle blow as if we were standing right there next to them.

The house I grew up in, I guess, was a nice one; I mean it must have been nice enough for my parents to want to raise two kids in. We haven't lived in that house for over thirty years, and to this day, I still can only remember certain things. To be honest, I really don't remember it at all. Years after we moved out of that house, I would walk by all the time and try and picture what it was like inside or even just try to remember anything about what happened in that house. But I guess deep down, I know what happened, but I never really understood why. I was only six. For as long as I can remember, even to this day, we sit and talk about what it was like for me growing up in that house. With all the pictures and all the stories, I still knew nothing.

After a while the house became run down and nothing like I pictured it. I remember one night lying in bed almost sound asleep, and this picture of a house popped in my mind. I pictured myself walking through the front door for the first time in almost thirty years. I could see the living room and right in front of me were the hardwood stairs that led to the second floor. I saw myself walking up the stairs and at the top of the stairs there were three bedrooms. The one on my left at the end was my parents', and the one in the middle was mine. I could tell there was one more bedroom, but for some reason I couldn't bring myself to look around the corner and look inside. If I had, maybe I would have found out the reason I can't remember anything about that house. Could it be the fact that the only things I know are what I have been told? I guess at six, you don't really understand the meaning of certain events. I was told that one morning in February of 1980, I went to wake my brother like my mom told me to. Instead of waking him, I came downstairs and told my mom he was cold, so I covered him up and went about my business like any other six year old would do. Everything after that is all a blur; there was a chair flying through the living room, and next thing I knew I was sent to stay with relatives for

two weeks, still not fully understanding what was going on. Who sent me away and why? Why were my mom and dad so upset? And why were there so many people in my house?

As I got older, I sort of understood what had happened. My four-year-old brother had passed away in his sleep that night from pneumonia. But in my mind, I didn't even know I had a younger brother. I only knew because I had been told. When I was older, I remember being out campaigning with my dad because he was running for local judge. Of all the houses we had to stop at, we had to stop at that one. My stomach dropped as he knocked on the door. I had that not so right feeling, like something was wrong and there was a reason why I blocked out that house. When the new owners opened the door, it was like a huge shock to my system; it was the chance to see what, if anything, I could remember. The only problem was when I was asked by the owner if I wanted to see the house, I couldn't bring myself to walk through the door. Instead, all I could think was, "how could you ask me that?" and turned and walked off the front steps.

To this day, I never went back inside that house. As the years went by, the house became run down and was eventually condemned. It got to the point where the village had to tear it down. Inside that house there were things that I would never be able to have. The memory of my childhood, and the time I spent with my younger brother before he passed away. I will never understand what happened that day or why. The only thing I do understand is that house is like a locked box that to this day still holds my most important memories, and now the key to it is gone, never to be opened again. Today there is nothing more than a slab of concrete with a pile of pieces to what could have been the key to unlocking my past.

Modern American Boy

Maik Katko

Pull out the oil meter, check the level and fill it up; do this every Saturday, but never on a Sunday; get up at 6 a.m. every morning and do your workout: Do your pushups, your sit ups, your pulls ups, and your shin ups, but always make sure to stretch: Don't stop, don't give up, don't become the modern american boy your friends have always wanted you to be: plan your day, housework first, schoolwork second, and yard work third: time is a fickle phantom and the moment you think you have it, it's gone: don't waste your time; don't play videogames; don't watch tv; don't read comics, read books; *books are outdated, I don't need to read to learn*; If you want to learn, read biographies, get to know people who were smarter, wiser, and faster than you are now; don't settle for mediocrity; modern american boys think that etiquette is for girls, it isn't; always eat your salad before your main course; hold your fork in your left hand and your knife in your right hand; don't munch, chew with your mouth shut; never stand up to get something across the table, ask the person near it to pass it down; don't act like the modern american boys your are so fond of; always find something to do with your hands; take apart clocks, rifles and tvs and learn how to put them back together; *but I don't even know what a clock is, and I've only seen a watch once in my life*; stop staring at your phone every two seconds, and use a watch; people will hate you, break you, and make you, do not neglect them; relationships are the blood in the heart of a happy life, do not destroy them; learn something new, then teach someone how to do it; *I tried that yesterday and it... actually worked*; don't ever listen to the advice of people your own age, seek it from those older than you; don't listen to those modern american boys, don't act like those modern american boys, don't become a modern american boy; become a man

A Compass that Can't Find the North

Ganna Andriyanova

My mother was born in a small, remote village in the woods. Nature has endowed her with the ability to perfectly orient in any terrain and never ever get lost. In the depth of the unknown forest, she, with amazing ease, could find any path leading in her desired direction. Moreover, she did not need to look at the location of the sun or the stars; her sixth sense never let her down. Unfortunately, it has been said that with the second generation Nature rests; I have a complete lack of any sense of direction, and I can get lost no matter where I am.

At the age of thirteen, I decided to take the aforementioned issue into my own hands and enrolled in an Orienteering club. After weeks of theoretical training, the day of the competitive games in the real woods came. Equipped with a map, a compass, and a trainer's instructions, I rushed to conquer unknown trails. Initially, everything seemed so fun; accompanied with the slight rustle of leaves, I, with a great enthusiasm, was looking for "clues" and "hidden treasures". Soon, "clues" and "hidden treasures" imperceptibly disappeared, and all that remained was the rustle of leaves. When I saw the lake that should not have been on my route, I, with sadness, realized I was lost. My first impulse was to try to find the way back to the camp but on reflection, I decided that the lake was a good benchmark and, more likely, to find me here would be much easier than if I were going deeper into the forest in the wrong direction. So, I stayed beside the lake waiting for help.

Time passed slowly. Being a daughter of the big city, I enjoyed the cheerful chirping of the birds, the quiet lapping of water, and the placid whispering of the forest. After a few hours, it was beginning to get dark. The insensibly cheerful chirping of the birds had ceased to be heard, whereas from the lake I began to hear suspicious loud bursts as the initially placid whispering of forest turned into creepy rustles and creaks. This adventure dragged on. I was scared and wanted to go home. To digress a bit, I tried to guess what kind of fauna would live in this forest and how hungry it might be at this time of the year. I really did not like the picture that my imagination drew. Fortunately, my imaginary scenario was not realized because soon I heard the voices of the people; the organizers and participants of the competition were seeking me. I was certainly glad that all ended so well, but my feeling did not compare with the feeling of the people who found me. They cried and laughed, alternately hugging me and each other. Finally, the top places of the competition were awarded to the other teams. Our team consoled itself by the fact that we were leaving with the same number of the participants that had arrived, which in itself can be considered a little victory.

Being a little girl I was bad at orienting myself, and after growing up and improving other qualities, I still get lost. What happened to me a few years ago once again proved the saying that “one who is born to crawl cannot fly”. Living in Spain and touched by homesickness, our family decided to spend a vacation in our homeland, Ukraine. To do this, we had to overcome 3,000 km. between Spain and Ukraine, passing through France, Germany, and Poland. France we crossed uneventfully, probably because my husband was navigating, and I was driving. In Germany the tables turned; my husband took the wheel, and I picked up a map. It should not be hard to guess what happened afterwards. It was our strategic error to assign me as a copilot, because a few hours later, the drivers passing through the winding forest road vehicles could see a car standing alone on the roadside, and beside it people with a look of despair on their faces; it was our family. We ended up in that place after passing a couple of hundred kilometers and had not seen any gas stations or recreation areas. Our family found ourselves in a difficult situation because we did not know where we were, our tank was empty, and our knowledge of the German language was limited to a few words gleaned from the movies, which were Guten Tag, Auf Wiedersehen, and Frankfurt.

Only a miracle could help us, and it happened! Suddenly, one of the cars that drove by stopped near us. Then a woman came out, and without any introduction, asked us if we needed any help, talking in perfect Spanish. Due to a puzzled look on our faces, she decided to clarify things: she was born in Spain and married to a German man, she saw that the car had Spanish number plates and couldn't pass by without stopping to make sure everything was ok. When we complained that there weren't any gas stations along the road, this time the puzzled look appeared on her face. She said that there should be a countless number of gas stations along the road we were coming from, and it was impossible to not see them because there were even a bigger number of road signs telling you what exits you should take to find them. Our eyes were as big as silver Eisenhower dollar coins. Who could think that a traffic sign, instead of the regular gas station symbol, would “clearly” state “For the next gas station take the exit five”, in German. As it always happens when you ask for directions, whatever you are looking for is exactly in front of you; we found our station at the next road turn. After that, we resumed our trip, this time with me occupying the back seat and leaving one of my sons in the role of copilot.

It's very important to know one's weak sides, as in my case the total lack of orientation, and if it is possible to work to improve it. But, if after trying multiple times, there is nothing else that can be done, the only solution is to learn to accept one's limitations, be aware of them, and just in case, have a GPS always with you.

Socially Awkward

Kerry Gneiting

Last night I dreamed I was running through the crisp fall air. I was moving free with a herd of other athletes. The sun was just crawling over the frosty horizon. The world was silent and the only noise was the thudding of our hearts, which matched the rhythm of our shoes. As I ran I felt the wind in my hair. It teased around me. In my dream we all had tails.

Her voice cuts through the glow of the sunrise, and I am returned to the front seat of her car.

“Please don't embarrass me. I hate it when you do.”

I'm not entirely sure why she is bringing up my behavior now. It is not like she is taking me to meet her friends for the first time. I already met them. They got drunk and decided to share their scars with me. All of them were cutters. None of them thought it was weird that they were compelled to pass on their emotional baggage to me. They only remember that I fell on the floor and tried to drink a beer while lying flat on my back. Which I now know doesn't work. First impressions established.

“It is difficult to take you out in public, I swear.”

I look at her sidelong. Her words bite, but I won't let on. She has decided I am socially awkward. I'm really not. I just sometimes get ideas. Like the time I walked into a pillar at the mall. Mostly because I knew I would get a reaction from her. Partially because the pillar was basically telling me it needed a hug. Just kidding. But that was the explanation I gave her.

“The only reason I let you get away with stuff is because I think you are attractive.”

I shrug, staring out the car window, pouting at the trees.

She always barbs her compliments. I don't know how I have been with her this long. We still aren't official.

“Don't take this the wrong way, but you are not relationship material. The only reason we work is because you are not connected to your emotions.”

Personally I think those are qualities, but whatever.

I continue to ignore her, focusing instead on the golden trees spinning by the car.

It is the ash trees that turn color first. I wish I knew why. I was just thinking about it because she really likes the way they turn so yellow and jump out from all the green. I think leaves only put on such a good show because they are dying. It is a last minute call for attention. And the ash trees, being attention whores put on a loud display early on in the fall. Mystery solved. When all the gold sinks to

the ground they become cold scars haunting the roadside.

She reaches over and laces her hand with mine. It is supposed to be a nice gesture, but I want my baby finger in between hers and her ring finger. It just kind of hangs off to the side all alone. As if it were a tail. Which reminds me of my dream. I smile. She thinks it is because of her cute little gesture. Really though I am thinking how great it would be if we had tails. I think I would look good with one. Nothing too big, just something sophisticated, like a jaguar's tail. It would look pretty great if I ran track or something. Which I don't.

We are at a stoplight now. She leans over to kiss me.

"We should only be separated by our styles of tails."

"You are so awkward."

Whoops I must have said that last part out loud.

"You can never just have a nice moment. You are just too awkward."

Hey, I think, I didn't ask for you to try to kiss me right now. But I don't say that out loud.

Just because I am a literalist and apparently can't read facial cues does not make me socially awkward. I know I am normal. Though normal is relative, right? Not everyone dreams of tails.

I have never tried to harm myself. I never slit my wrists. All her of friends have. Compared to them I am the odd one out.

I mentioned to her that my brother tried to kill himself a few months back. He had just given up and wanted to escape from the pain. He stood on the side of the road and tried to jump out in front of a tractor-trailer.

"I didn't have the balls to do it," he laughed bitterly, recounting the day.

He held a half kicked bowl in his hand. It was starting to turn black from all the resin, but the gold swirls in the glass still shone through. Waning beauty, like the ash trees. He sparked it. The embers in the bowl glowed gold then faded, leaving cold grey ashes.

"Do you want a hit?"

I shrugged.

I haven't seen him sober since his attempt. The life just drifted out of him.

She dismissed my account, "Don't we all go through that phase?"

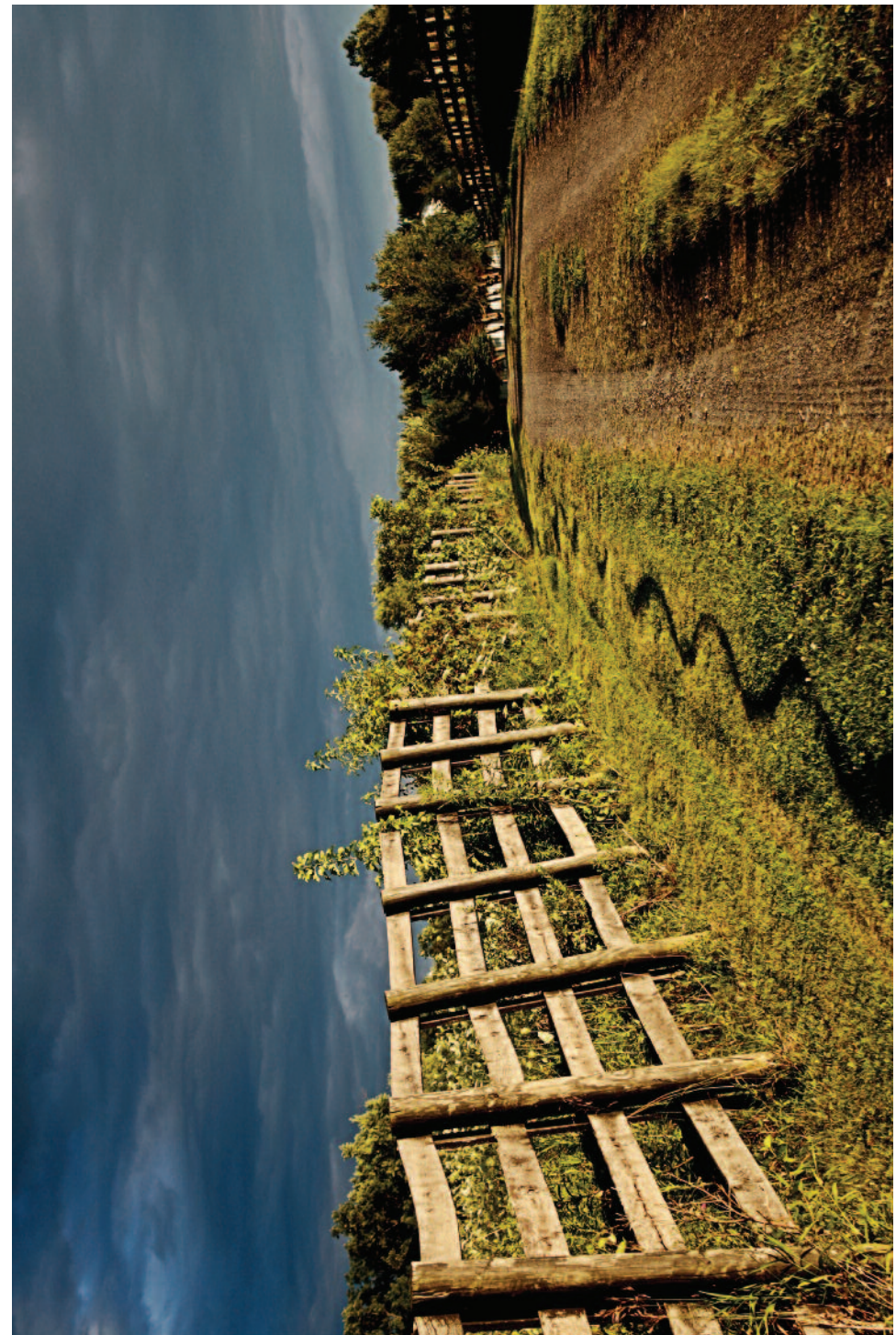
I didn't.

My mind slides back to my dream.

"If you had a tail, you would be a perfect ten."

"Good Lord. You are so odd."

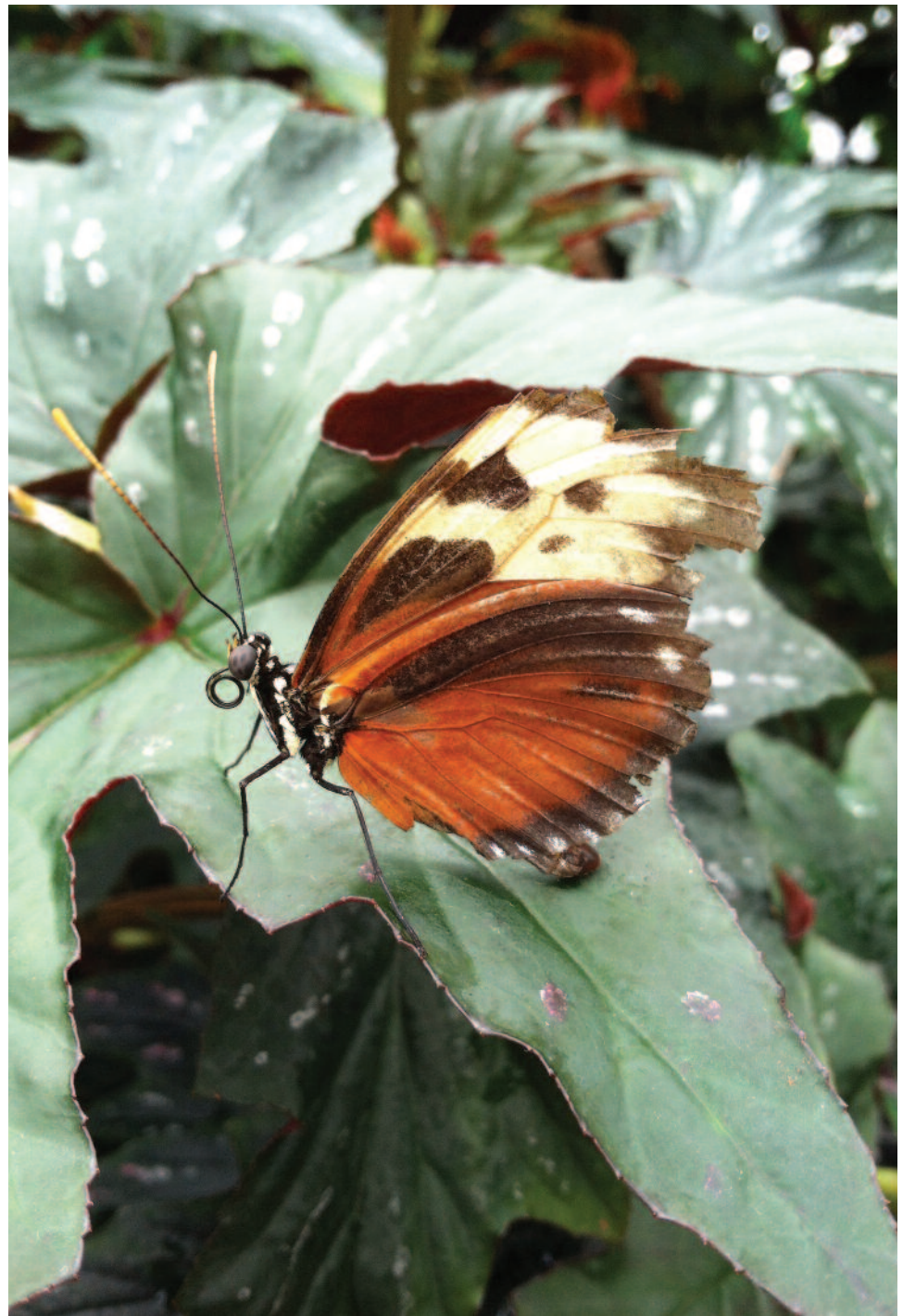
I hadn't meant to blurt that. But she doesn't get it anyway. She will never be a ten. That is the point.



"Over the Hill" by Nick Guile



"Virtue" by Brigitte Chum



"Proboscis" by Alicia Murray



"Frog on the Glass" by Zach Whitford

She pulls up to park and we get out of the car.
"Remember please don't do anything stupid," she pleads.
Who is she kidding? Me plus alcohol always equals
embarrassment. For her, anyway. I always have a good time. Spinning
tales. Maybe I can share my tail dream with her friends tonight, so they
can really have something to feel superior about. I duck my head a little
and trot after her, scuffing my feet through the crispy leaves on the
sidewalk.

Green Things

Rachel Kerr

When I was small, my dad was a sunrise. I saw him on the rare morning I woke up in the still darkness of the big house. I could creep down the spiral stairs and peek under the splintering banister at a hasty breakfast and exit. I watched the white cracked storm door close behind him. I had to go to bed before he swung that door back open after work. When I was older, I didn't have to be tucked away so early. He fueled the photosynthesis of green leafy thoughts and ambitions in me. He filled up the sky of my little world. When I was even older, he was a reliable tool of navigation. He was as reliable as if he rose in the east and sank in the west for all time. When I was a little older, but not very old at all, he died. He died and the sky got darker.

Trying to picture him is trying to catch pollen floating in the air. It's all around me, coating everything and making my eyes water while I try and fail to collect it back into the original plant. All the pieces are still there, but they'll never look or feel or smell as they once did again. How long can I keep someone alive in the cramped confines of my skull. The file of him is going to be more and more compressed as I keep living and adding new memories and with each compression, I lose resolution. He'll just be grainy images and distorted audio files. He'll be data corrupted by every change in me. With no original to copy, no way to restore what goes missing. An out of print VHS that deteriorates with every viewing.

He can't experience the world anymore. A dead flower that's been pressed and preserved in a book can't grow or change. My memory of him though can still evolve; it can be reinterpreted added to with stories and perspective. I can display that pressed flower in new lights and arrangements. Though change may bring me farther away from the reality of what he was to me when he was here, I think that element of change and adaptability is the thing most like living he does now.

Nothing Left to Take

Cristin McIntyre

You know, I should've seen it coming. Nick hadn't been himself for months, but he just brushed off everyone's worry with a grin and a dismissive wave of his hand. And now, here's my best friend, saying words like "cancer" and "chemo" and something about getting his brain fried. He means radiation, though. Nick's never been the brightest bulb- probably the bleach he puts in his hair. Still, it's unreal. Nick's only 23, for god sakes. Isn't that something old people get?

"It's not that kind of cancer, dumbass," he says, like I'm the idiot.

"Who are you calling dumbass, dumbass?"

"Guys," a tired voice interrupts, and I notice Nathan for the first time. Okay, that's not true. I just pretend he doesn't exist.

Don't get me wrong, I don't have a problem with the gay thing. Nick and Nathan are one of those couples that are so in love it's sickening, but they're happy, so good for them. The thing is, though, is Nathan's so stuck up. He thinks he's better and smarter than everybody else, and he's gotten a free ride because his old man runs a major company. Whatever. I hate the guy's guts and the feeling's mutual, but as long as he makes Nick happy, I'll keep my mouth shut.

"Everything's fine," Nick says. "They're gonna work their magic and I'll feel like crap for a while, but then I'll be back to normal."

"Isn't it more complicated than that?" I ask.

He shrugs. "Come on, like I'm going to let something this lame get me?"

"You're not taking this seriously," Nathan frowns.

"I'm taking this plenty serious, I just don't want to talk about it forever," Nick tells him, then looks over at me. "So Jake, what happened with that girl you took out the other night, anyway?"

Normally I'd call him on such an obvious change of subject, but I don't want to talk about it either. The rest of the visit is bullshitting, and when I leave the hospital, it's raining.

—

The hospital starts treatment and releases him. I visit him every day, at first, but it seems like he looks sicker every time I go, like I'm bad luck. I don't stop going, but I cut back to once a week. I want him to get better. And if I'm honest, it's too hard seeing him like that. I know it's not fair for me to act this way, but there it is. We never talk about what's happening, it's all stupid crap, and meanwhile he's getting thinner- he was chunky, pre-cancer, but he hasn't had the extra to lose for a while now. His eyes are different too. They were green before, but now they're a dull gray. It's like he's doing his best grim reaper impression, and it's creepy as hell. Every visit, it gets harder to pretend like everything's normal. I start going once every other week.

It's a couple of months later when I find a missed call on my cell after work.

"Hello. This is Nathan. Nick's in the hospital again. You... should get down here."

So fine, I'm a shitty friend, but you better believe I floor it all the way there, even though I damn near kill myself because it's pouring and bad weather makes people stupid. When I arrive they won't let me in. Nathan's sitting in a chair in the waiting room, staring at the floor and wringing his hands. I settle down next to him since there's no other place to sit. Up close, I notice the shadows around his brown eyes, the black stubble on his jawline that's usually smooth. I shift in my chair awkwardly, unsure of what to say.

It wasn't always that way. We were best friends in elementary school, even though we didn't have anything in common. That's how kids are, they play together once and they're glued together. Then in seventh grade, the Madisons moved into town and every other word out of Nathan's mouth became "Nick." Now I get it, but then it pissed me off that he was abandoning me for this new kid. I ended up punching Nathan and we haven't been able to be around each other without supervision since.

"I hate coming here," Nathan says. "Whenever anything happens, they kick me out and call his parents. It's like I don't exist."

"What happened?"

"I found him unconscious in the bathroom this morning. There was blood everywhere. I think he hit his head."

I nod like I understand, but I'm not a doctor, so how am I supposed to know? I worked all day and it looks like I'm going to be here a while, might as well get comfortable. I stretch and slouch in my chair.

I'm jerked awake by a shriek. Nick's mom is red-faced and pointing at Nathan.

"This is all your fault!"

"What?" Nathan looks exhausted. I suddenly feel guilty about napping.

"If he'd gone to the doctor sooner, this wouldn't be happening. You should've made him go."

"I tried," Nathan says. There's an angry edge to his voice. "I told him there was something wrong. I even made appointments for him, but he ignored them. I've been the one taking care of him full-time since he was diagnosed. Don't you dare tell me I haven't done enough."

"Wait, what's going on?" I ask.

"His body is shutting down," Nick's dad says. "He's fought this longer than they thought he would be able to, but now..."

"I thought he was going to be fine."

"He never told you?" Nathan asks.

"Told me what?"

Nathan doesn't say anything at first. "It's an aggressive cancer, and because he waited so long to go to the doctor in the first place..."

He doesn't finish. We all wait in complete silence. It seems like forever until a doctor comes out.

"Mr. and Mrs. Madison?"

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry, but your son didn't make it."

Nick's mom bursts into tears, and the doctor is still talking, but I'm not listening anymore. Nathan's hunched over with his face in his hands. I don't even think about it. I put my hand on his shoulder.

Death of a Main Street

Edgardo Orengo

Bad decisions. When you make a bad decision it affects you, maybe the people closest to you. Beyond that no one really gets hurt. But what happens when the people you elect make bad decisions? It affects a whole city. The Amsterdam Mall in Amsterdam, New York was one of those bad decisions. At its conception, the Amsterdam Mall might have seemed like an ingenious idea, but over the years it has proved to be one of the city's biggest disasters.

Amsterdam, in the 1960s, was a thriving city and like all cities had a bustling Main Street and downtown (see Figure 1). It was full of store fronts for window shopping, quaint diners and coffee shops for grabbing a bite to eat and several movie theaters for catching the latest movies. Main Street, especially downtown, was an amazing place; you would think that Petula Clark was singing about Amsterdam in her hit song "Downtown". Main Street was always decorated for the holiday or event that was taking place. During the Christmas season, all the businesses would decorate their store fronts with beautiful wreaths and garland. The city would string lights for decorations across the street and holiday music would be playing from speakers hung out in front of the stores. The feeling of excitement to witness such splendor as a child was magical. It truly was a wonderland. Amsterdam's Main Street was booming with business as well. There was Mortan's clothing store for the guys, Holziemer's clothing store for the ladies, Gabay's clothing store for the kids and Woolworth's for everything else. Carmel's Diner was an ideal place for a meal or if you needed something catered. Marotta's coffee shop was perfect for on-the-go foods. If you wanted to see your favorite actor in their latest motion picture you had your choice of The Mohawk, The Tryon and The Rialto theaters. Many of the businesses that originally had their location on Main Street did so because of the convenience of the area. Route 5 ran the length of Main Street, while Route 30 came down through Market Street and Route 67 ran along Church Street, connecting to Main Street two blocks from each other, making downtown an intersecting point of three major New York state highways. Because of this, not only were the stores and eateries getting local business but they were getting traveler business as well. Main Street was the heart of the city.

In 1976, the bad decision was made. With the backing of the local politicians, the Amsterdam Mall was built right in middle of Main Street severing not only the street but the heart of the city. The best thing I can about say about the mall is that it was a novelty. With the construction of the mall, many of the stores left Main Street and moved into the new shopping center. Some had no choice but to move into the

mall because of the destruction of the buildings that once held their stores. Others chose to relocate to the mall, opting to move with the times. Mortan's, Holziemer's and Gabay's became the anchor stores in the mall (so people felt accustomed shopping there). With the stores gone from Main Street, there were no shoppers left to stop into any of the diners and coffee shops. Furthermore, with the new four screen cinema that came with the mall, all the classic single screen theaters closed down. Slowly Main Street lost all its businesses.

During the holidays, the mall also had its decorations and music playing but it just wasn't the same. Out on Main Street there were no decorated store fronts. Actually now there are no store fronts left to decorate. There are little to no decorations put out by the city. Main Street has lost all of its character. The city planners decided to reroute all the highways to make room not only for the shopping center but for the four story parking garage that went with it. Market Street and Church Street, along with the highways that ran along them, were rerouted away from downtown, cutting off what was left of the downtown area from the rest of Main Street, isolating it. Also the newly rerouted highway system contained mainly one-way streets which made it too difficult to get to downtown, killing any hope of business in that area.

Amsterdam, New York had one of the most prominent main streets in the area. It had character, it was a major financial life line, and it was the social center point of the city. But now all that is gone (see Figure 2). No more excitement. No more beauty. No more wonderland. Did anyone stop to think what would happen if the Amsterdam Mall failed? Well it did just that and it is all gone because of one bad decision.



figure 1



figure 2

Scarlet Song

Ken Shen

Red
As the blood-let sun
Red ravage upon ruinous men
Wreathed in wrath and reckless sin
Red treads treading in
Red-dressed dread
As lifeless life ran red and rife
Red seas parting for rage-red strife
Red-born blossoms of ravenous rend
Rests the red-wrested
Rest and repent
To red-flushed maidens
Red rains of grief
Red-roiled sons with
Red-clutched seeds
Of blood red vengeance
For ruinous men
Reaping red in wrath
And reckless sin

How To Rob A Bank And Get Away With It

Luke Laupheimer

All of us have money problems from time to time. It is not easy paying rent and utilities, a mortgage, a car note, or making student loan and credit card payments on time. Given the seriousness of imminent financial ruin in a capitalist society and the disinclination of lawmakers to soften the blow, certain extralegal methods are called for. This is where bank robbery comes into play. Bank robbery is an American tradition that predates the American Revolution and many notable robbers like John Dillinger and Willie Sutton have become immortalized in our history books. This is not a deed limited to lone stick-up kids, having been performed by political and religious institutions such as the Symbionese Liberation Army and The Covenant, The Sword, and the Arm of the Lord. If you feel an unpleasant pang of guilt at the prospect of robbing a bank, just remind yourself that banks are not actually people, even if the government tells you they are, and thus do not deserve any real rights.

What you will need in order to be a successful bank robber is a mask, some friends who are disinclined to follow the law, an automobile that cannot be traced back to you or any of your friends, and a few guns to get the point across when you show up intent on making a very large withdrawal. Naturally, step one is to acquire these things.

Step two is to establish a coherent plan for entry, capture, and departure. Case the place. Look at where the cameras are, the arrangement of the building in relation to the street, and of course where the vault is. Establish who wields the guns, who controls the customers and the tellers, and who grabs the money. Set time limits to make sure you scam before the police can show up. Make sure everything about the plan – who does what, and when, and why — is crystal clear before entry, not afterward.

Step three is to get the money. Make sure you are fast and efficient. The point of this operation is not to harm the tellers, the customers, or to attract attention to yourself. Of course police will be called, so you need to get the money as fast as possible. Don't hesitate for one second to hit people if they act up since order is imperative, but avoid murder unless it is absolutely necessary; murders in a bank robbery will result in more funds being allocated to your investigation. Once the money is acquired, do not hang out, leave immediately. Abandon the car you used to obtain the money. Leave your cell phones at home to create an instant alibi when the police check the GPS records on your phone.

Step four is laying low. Cease contact with your co-conspirators. Depending on just how machavellian you are, you might want to kill them and dispose of their bodies; after all, four men can keep a secret if three of them are dead. Spend not one dime of the money stolen for a full year. Then, once that year has passed, begin laundering it. Start a business and cook your books, listing quite a bit of cash purchases that never took place. Since the money is stolen, using it to purchase and resell contraband such as drugs or firearms might also be an effective way to dilute the connection to yourself.

That is pretty much it. However, a word of advice before you go gung-ho: every detail counts. In the words of Sun Tzu, "Now the general who wins a battle makes many calculations in his temple ere the battle is fought. The general who loses a battle makes but few calculations beforehand. Thus do many calculations lead to victory, and few calculations to defeat: how much more no calculation at all!" In other words, do not slip up, pay attention. Always ask, "How can they find out it was me that did this?" Speculate. Be paranoid. The consequences of a false positive on the government's capabilities are always better than the consequences of a false negative.

Happy hunting.

Red Light Green Light

John Quigley

It's 2:30 am on a Monday morning and I slowly ride up Central Avenue. It's unusually warm for an early autumn morning and I have the windows down. I've been driving a taxi in the city now for 7 years. Business has been slower and slower for the last few years as evidenced by the empty streets.

I am on block that was once lined with bars and cafes. Pink neon glittering to the back drop of live music played to the early morning hours and the sound of laughter and footprints of people hurrying across bustling streets has been replaced by the drone of my tires as I approach the red light in a section of town now known as Little Baghdad. The neon and music have been replaced by plastic signs, some half hanging offering Falafel and Fries for \$5.00 and Molson Ice 22 oz. \$1.99. Long gone are the eclectic cafes with brightly painted flower boxes. They have been replaced by 99 cent stores, cash checking joints, chicken spots, and a Payday Loan store offering "honest" terms. I had my first paying gig here in 1979 at 11 years old. I swept the floor at the Last Chance Saloon for five bucks on Sunday before church. Thank God my parents never found out. I can almost see the owner's, Old Man Clancy's pearl white beard, but the light changes and I pull away leaving him and the memory behind me.

Driving further along the desolate boulevard, I chuckle to myself as I think it would not surprise me to see a tumbleweed blow down the street or come across a vulture dining on some unfortunate soul. I approach an intersection, and the light turns red. I'm right in front of my old church, that like most other things around here, just hasn't survived the times. I was baptized here. I try to think back to my parents holding my infant body in their arms, but the memory isn't there. Instead, I see the bright red poinsettias of Christmas and the snowy white lilies of Easter. I can taste the distinct blandness of my First Communion wafer and the heaviness of the sacramental wine. I was an Altar Boy here. My friend Steve and I would pull the heavy thick ropes of the church bells at 10 am on Sunday. You could hear them all over the city, and we would laugh when Father Connell would say in his heavy Irish Brogue, "come on laddies lets see how many drunken Irishmen we can wake up!", knowing full well our fathers were probably two of them. We buried Steve's mother here. Mine, too, right across the street at Zwack and Sons Funeral Parlor that is also now closed. In this church, we saw each other through the good times and the bad: births, marriages, and death. I can hear the voices of the choir raising above the organ bellows as the light changes and the memory fades into the darkness.

As I take the left on Robin Street, I am approaching the neighborhood where I lived. Zooming by are memories of Tony the Barber, the corner store, and Granville the butcher. Once thriving shops that boomed with pride of ownership have been replaced by dark, cold, empty shells mostly burnt out and windowless. I remember walking down this street on snow banks so high they towered over cars and seemed to ring the entire city. Approaching the intersection, the light turns red and I am reminded, in my business, we affectionately refer to this section of town now as Gunsmoke. The window is cracked, and I can smell the water from the small progress the street sweeper has made. The people who walk down the street are faceless, silent, and cold. The only sound is a man on the corner begging change from any passersby. He is standing in front of what was once Phil's Bakery, and the smell of the pollution is abated by the memory of fresh cakes and breads baking in the springtime. The now litter strewn streets are replaced by the sight of little leaguers marching in full uniform to their games on opening day. Little girls with lemonade stands hawk their wares and a horse drawn cart offering vegetables from a local farm all come into view. My nostrils are filled with the smell of freshly cut grass, my eyes water from blooming lilac trees, and butterflies soar as my ears ring from the laughter of children, a ball hitting a bat, and the sound of my mothers voice. I hold tight to this memory, but the light turns green and I am forced to go.

Street by street, light by light, I drive down the avenue of my youth. Memories I've made on every corner fade away with the changing of each light. People long gone step out of shadowy doorways and say "hi" only to disappear when the light turns green. Like a dying loved one, you try to hold on knowing, at some point, you have to go. This is the city where I grew up and what it is now, light by light. Did I forget to mention I hate red lights?

Home Town

Shavonna Croley

Sunlight beaming through the swings at the playground,
Children running hand in hand to the merry-go-round,
But the big kids are stingy and cruel with the turns—
They'll let you have one-at-a cost
Parents in the distance, conversant
Unable to see what the children face
In this game of terror,
My brothers are with me; swearing to protect
Courage in the pit of my chest
Surging through my veins,
I move toward the battleground—
A child is off to the side, crying
Sitting in the grass, his eyes filled with sand.
The big kids are laughing,
Winning the terror of another.
I approach the death trap—
Children are hanging on
To the bars as if their lives depended on it—
The merry-go-round is whirling so fast,
Almost faster than the beating of my young heart—
Their bodies are in mid-air.
All you see is a blur of muted colors,
All you can hear is the screams of youngsters.
The bullies arms are crossed.
The only way you can get off the ride is to let go.
Around the merry-go-round lies a pit of sand.
Bodies lay covered with grit—
They are sick, they are bloody, they are beaten,
Tears running down their swollen faces
The big kids are smiling and laughing.
I walk pass the brutal line,
Preparing myself for what was about to occur, I ask,
"Can I have a turn?"
Brothers who once stood behind me, are now in front—
They stand my ground.
Still a child, still in childhood, I go around and around.

Adventures in Social Anxiety

Patrick Joyce

Kindergarten

It's the day where everyone gets to dress up as their favorite storybook character. My mom spends the whole day before putting together a Peter Rabbit costume. Everyone is in their own costume, and it's not like I'm the only person in ridiculous clothing and face paint, but I'm embarrassed for some unexplainable reason. I'm hiding in the coat rack, rubbing the paint off of my face, while everyone else is playing around like nothing is different. It's the first time I've felt truly self-conscious about something. It was my first experience with social anxiety, though I wouldn't realize that until many years later.

Fifth Grade

I moved to a new neighborhood last year, and I've made no friends. I'm on the bus, trying to fit in, but they're all ignoring me. If I actually do get their attention, they'll throw a dismissive remark my way and act as though I'm invisible. My attempts to get their attention will land me a visit from the principal after accidentally hurting someone. The original principal recently retired and the temporary replacement is a high school history teacher. He doesn't know how to deal with little kids. He drags me out into the hall after class and tells me I'm required to sit in the front of the bus by the driver until he says I'm allowed to the back again. He even tells me if I do anything ever again he'll expel me. His words cut right through me and my heart sinks. People are walking by, staring at me as his glare is melting what's left of my constitution. Not only am I now in trouble, I'm being publicly shamed. Months later he would leave the school to make way for the new principal; he never released me from my sentence.

Eighth Grade

It's English class, and I'm distracted. I hate writing journal entries, because I never know what to write. All the things I'm thinking are either inappropriate for school or off topic, or both. The teacher sees I'm not writing and isn't happy. He gives me the same unfair statements that kill me every time I hear them. "Your brother was never like this." "Your brother always did well." "Why can't you be more like your brother?" My brother is a born businessman; charismatic, outgoing, focused. He can pitch an idea, debate, and his speech is flawless. I can't convey ideas in a logical manner, can't remember facts to help me support an argument, and I stumble over all my words. Why am I not like my brother? Because I'm not him. I'm never going to be like him. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but that's just the way it is. Inferiority complexes are a bitch like that.

Ninth Grade

High school is a place to start new, right? That question should always be met with hysterical laughter. It's the first day of school, and we're making sure our lockers work. I turn to the girl next to me, who is one of the many spoiled rich girls in the area, and I make an innocent comment on the location of the lockers or something. She turns to face me, gives me that classic bitchy stuck-up rich girl look, and says with the most disgustingly condescending tone "Why are you even talking to me?" I had spent all of middle school dragging myself out of depression, and I had suppressed my social anxiety long enough to make one comment, and what do I get from my efforts? The verbal equivalent to getting shot in the face. I never spoke to that girl again.

Eleventh Grade

It's after one of my finals and I'm standing in front of the school. I notice a girl I knew all the way back from elementary school. She changed a lot since I saw her. An enthusiastic outgoing girl reduced to a lone goth sitting behind a column in front of the school, listening to her MP3 player. I want to go up to her and talk to her, to ask her how she's doing and to make sure she's okay, but an invisible force holds me back and keeps me from moving. Why can't talk to people; just walk up to someone, someone I knew for years, no less, and just strike up a conversation? It's a cruel paradox that I can't escape.

Twelfth Grade

I've come to terms with my inability to fit in at this point, and I've become a sort of social drifter. Before classes start, all the students grouped up in their cliques all around school. I don't really fit into any of the categories, so I tend to go between three or four of the groups, talking with a few people, getting a few minutes of conversation before they're distracted by one of their other friends. Wouldn't it be nice if I could be the one distracting them from the other friends for once? It doesn't matter to me anymore, really. Sure it doesn't feel good to be pushed out of a conversation, but I understand now that I'm not going to be the successful charismatic natural born leader that I really wish I was. If anything, moving between these groups has allowed me to be more open minded and accepting than most of the other people in high school.

Prologue

Someone asks if I want to go to a big party at their house. There's going to be food, girls, alcohol, and questionably legal substances. I politely refuse and say I'm busy with school and work. If somebody asks why I don't have a girlfriend, I'll answer the same way. The untold truth is that almost all of my free time is spent playing video games online with a friend. As a recovering social recluse, having a job at a convenience store is taxing enough on my sanity; all I want to do when I get home is escape reality to a more enjoyable place.

Not A Friend

Alyssa Palladino

I had been the babysitter at many houses before. The kids always loved me. I usually like having the responsibility of being both their entertainment and caretaker until their parents returned home. But not this time. I was at a house that I had never been to before. Calling it a house may be an understatement; it was more of a mansion. It was the house of a single mother who had a young son that I believe had just turned five. Little John Grayson was cute, but he was distant. He didn't want to play games, he didn't even want to watch a movie with me. All he wanted was to be alone in his room.

"Are you sure you don't want me in here John?" I asked him through the door.

"Yes." He simply stated.

"I'll be in the playroom if you need me, okay?"

He didn't respond.

I went into the playroom only because it was the room next to John's. I felt wrong leaving him alone while it was my responsibility to watch him. His mother told me he can be unsociable with others but I didn't think he would be this difficult. I plopped myself into a large bean bag chair and looked around the toy filled room. This kid has so many toys, and doesn't even want to play with them. Brat.

No one knew how the woman had such a nice house and so much money. Her husband had passed away nearly three years ago, and she was just a secretary. I didn't put much thought into it. Why should I care anyway? If she has a lot of money then I'll probably get paid well-regardless of how she earned it.

I stared at the ceiling and hummed a song out of boredom. I like playing with kids. Not leaving them alone in their room while I sit with all of their toys. The sound of John's laugh interrupted my thoughts.

"No I don't think so." I heard him say. I stood up from the comfy seat and listened.

"That's silly." He giggled. I exited the room and walked to John's door.

"John?" I knocked. I waited to hear his voice but there was no answer.

"John, open up the door please." When he didn't respond to me, I shook the knob until the door pushed open. John was standing in the corner of his bedroom. His eyes focused on me.

"Is everything ok?" I asked as I looked around the room.

"Can I have juice?" He asked me.

"Who were you talking to?" I began to walk toward him. He looked away.

"Do you have a friend?" I tried to hide the smile escaping my mouth. I always thought it was funny hearing kids talk about their imaginary friends.

"He's not a friend." John nearly whispered.

"Then who is he?"

"Can I just have my juice please?" He seemed angry now. Maybe I shouldn't have asked so many questions, but I didn't think it was a big deal.

"Sure. Do you want to come with me?" I smiled at him. But when his eyes squinted at me the way they did I knew it was a no.

"Of course not. Stay here." I walked out of the room and began to make my way down the long hallway. The house was so huge that it was hard to remember how to get to the kitchen. Coming near to the stairs I heard little feet walking behind me. I smiled, maybe John was finally starting to like me.

"You changed your mind?" I giggled.

But when I turned around no one was there. I looked to my left, to my right, and then to my left again. Empty. I ran down the stairs a little quicker than usual, and miraculously found my way to the kitchen. I searched the cabinets for a cup that was suitable for a five year old, but every cup was glass. I picked a smaller one and placed it onto the marble counter. I opened the fridge and grabbed a carton of orange juice. When I closed the fridge door something caught my eye. There was a picture of John with his mother and a man, which I assumed was his father, that had been stuck to the fridge by a hot pink flamingo magnet. The man looked so familiar to me. I stood there, lost in thought, holding the carton of orange juice, and staring at this picture.

My thoughts were disrupted yet again. A loud bang shook the house. The chandelier above the mahogany dining room table swung back and forth. I poured the orange juice quickly and shoved the carton back into the fridge. I ran through the mansion, up the stairs and down the hall until I reached John's closed bedroom door. My right fist pounded on the door as my left grasped his juice.

"John? Open the door!" There was no response. I didn't want to scare him, but I just needed the door to open so that I knew he was okay.

"I have your juice." I calmly said, hoping this would bribe him. It worked. John opened the door as slightly as he could, revealing only one eye as he reached his tiny arm out to grab the glass of juice. As his arm pulled in, he began to shut the door. My foot prevented his action.

"Not so fast." I pushed the door open as John tried to push against me. Funny how he thought he stood a chance on that one. I looked around the room and there was nothing.

"What was that noise?" I asked the dark eyed boy.

"What noise?" He sipped on his juice.

"Oh gee. I don't know. Perhaps the loud noise that just shook your entire house?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." He placed his juice on his dresser, and turned around to face me. I walked over to his window and pushed the curtain to the side. There couldn't be an intruder. This place has the best home security system I've ever seen. I looked at the dark sky and watched a crow land on the house across the street. Suddenly I heard movement behind me and felt the floor shake. I jolted around to see John still standing by his dresser.

"What the hell was that?" I asked the kid. When he blankly stared at me I stomped past him, making my way towards the rooms exit. Standing in the hallway, I looked to the right. Nothing. As I looked to my left my eyes widened, and I gulped. I tried to get the words out but they left my mouth broken in stutters.

"Mr. Grayson?"

Wish: After We Real Cool

Courtney French

I tire endlessly. I
wake early. I
rush perpetually. I
take classes daily. I
am in unrelenting pain. I
go to the doctors. I
do physical therapy. I
get injections. I
feel hopeless. I
wish every night for good health. I
push on through the pain. I
work full time. I
get home after dark. I
wake unrested. I
do it all over again. I
am run down. I
dream to sleep late.

What Do Programmers Dream About?

Ivan Andriianov

Probably everybody as a kid dreamed to become someone interesting when he would grow up. Some people dreamed about becoming an astronaut and going to space, others liked to help people and therefore, envisioned themselves as a policemen, doctor, or even firefighter. Maybe a few wished to become a dinosaur tamer. Also, many parents over decades motivated their children to grow into a president and lead the nation. For me, the role model was my uncle Vlad, whom I considered the most interesting person in the world. He was a computer programmer and I thought that if I could do what he does, I would be as “cool” as I saw him, by extension.

My unusual childhood expectation to become a computer programmer began when at the age of six, my parents received a package from my uncle, the programmer. I remember how the delivery guy unloaded two huge boxes from his truck. It was summer of '96, the day was very hot but windy. The green treetops of the apple and pear trees from our front yards were oscillating heavily letting some fruits fall on the ground. The delicious sweet aroma from crushed mature fruits was mixing with the refreshing smell of the recently cut grass from the neighbor's lawn. This aroma made me feel hungry, but the curiosity about what was in these mysterious boxes didn't allow me to leave before I discovered what was in them. Finally, my parents brought the boxes into the house to their bedroom, where as in every Ukrainian bedroom for some reason there always was a carpet on the wall, and opened them. Inside the first box was the monitor screen that looked like a normal TV but in white. It was about a 17" square screen and almost two feet long, with multiple small holes in the back part. The remarkable thing about the monitor screen was the additional screen piece, which consisted of another screen whose function was to protect the user against the ions. To me this piece was as useful as the umbrella for a fish, because everybody knows that there is no better protection against ions than a small cactus near the screen; this is just common knowledge. The contents of the second box were more interesting. From the cardboard box my dad pulled out another box. The new box had black metal sheets on the sides. The posterior part contained an infinite number of short round, square, and rectangular projections with protruding tiny metal sticks. Later I learned that those strange projections were used to connect cables to the computer and transmit power and information. The anterior part of the box was divided in two purple parts. The superior part slid down when you pressed the inferior and discovered the drive for CD's and the notch for diskettes. When someone would insert a CD in this tower, it would start making a howl

as a plane that is about to takeoff. Yes, this was my first computer, an old Pentium I with the processor of 166MHz and three additional hard drives that had an incredible memory storage of 9 Giga-bytes. I loved it.

My first step towards my dream I made when I was fourteen and I tried to study programming by myself. One cloudless summer day I bought a huge, yellow manual for C++ programming and the study began. I spend the next three days studying as hard as a fourteen-year-old boy could study, and I didn't get through the first five pages. I took it as a sign from beyond that I was not ready yet for a dream come true and postponed the C++ manual until better times. After this first taste of programming at fourteen I came back to the yellow book at sixteen and then at eighteen, all with the same sorrowful result.

A year after my last assault on the already shabby but still undefeated C++ manual in '08, I had to choose where I was going to go to college, and what I was going to do there. For some reason computer sciences didn't attract me anymore, perhaps for the unpleasant aftertaste after vain, unproductive previous experiences or maybe it was a fear to definitely fail in what had been my life goal since I could remember. Nowadays I'm about to start at a Nursing School. In the end, even a dinosaur tamer doesn't always find the dinosaur to tame.

American Girl

Paola A. Pelaez

An angel, she must have been. She had such delicate little features unlike any other. Beautiful blonde curly locks that surrounded rosy pink cheeks. Her lips plump, but not too plump with a pretty pink that coated them. Her eyes, an immense ocean of icy blue. Two gems that could pierce and cleanse your soul. Her body, tall and slender, posture immaculate. The way she walked, as if she floated. Never made a noise. Her scent, some sort of fruity lotion, but not too strong. The way she carried herself, with such poise and elegance. The garments that covered her perfections, fit for royalty. I envied her, I wished to be her.

Her father was the owner of a very prestigious company from the U.S.A. that decided to expand all the way here to Colombia. Many Colombians hated the idea, claiming that it was imperialism. Others praised their arrival. I saw them as divine figures. I was both afraid and amazed by them. I'm always afraid and amazed by everything. I feel the same way about nature especially fire. From a far it's beautiful, the flame tranquil with a sense of sensuality and desire. But if you get too close it becomes lethal. It can burn you to the very core of your sins.

Oh but this creature couldn't be fire, maybe her father but not her. She couldn't possibly hurt anyone. How could those lovely porcelain smooth hands cause trouble? Her hands, without an imperfection. All of her, free from faultiness. She was a dove, white as virgin snow. No sins could be committed by her. Unlike me. As I walked down the street to my broken down home, I looked down at my hands, a clayish color. I was not a dove. I looked at my clothes, they were not fit for royalty. I walked with a certain slouch. I tried imitating her posture.

As I walked with what I thought was poise, I noticed across the street local vendors. Sitting down with hopeless, run down faces. They kept on smacking around trying to kill their only companions, groups of flies. I kept looking around, saw kids covered in dust picking up smashed bottles. That was their future in front of them. My eyes kept looking around at the depressing surrounding. There was a mal-nourished horse eating weeds beside its owner, a man that I had seen more than once. He was just sitting there eating scraps of moldy bread with his right hand. His only hand.

I looked up at the sky, grey. It was about to rain. I quicken my pace. I thought to myself, why was I here? Why couldn't I have been born in the land of the bald eagle, which spreads and flaps its immense wings without fear and with great pride? I arrived home. I was greeted by an overwhelming amount of cockroaches in the cabinet. I counted them out of curiosity, there were exactly 38. Some were hard to find, they were within and behind books. I only saved one book. The only book that could save me and possibly let me reach the status of the angel I met today.

I don't know whether to thank my mother for taking me to go to work with her today or not. While I praised this girl highly, and found her a mystery, I envied her. Not only her beauty, not only from the empire from which she came from, but her perfection. My mind was consumed by her image as I put the holy book down and made my way to the backyard to bring inside the laundry. Worn down pants hung on wires with very much visible holes. White shirts, turned yellowish swayed back and forth with the wind. I folded them all up, with slight disgust. I walked to the room which I shared with my mother. I stared at the mirror for quite some time. I had dull, lifeless dirty brown hair that drooped down my face. My cheeks covered with freckles. My eyes, brown. Nothing happened when you looked into them. My lips were thin and tan. I was not tall and slender. I was short and skeletal. I looked weak. I did not glow. The smudges on the mirror didn't help either. Rage overcame my body. I tried cleaning the mirror, the smudges wouldn't disappear. I scrubbed harder and harder till the mirror fell off of the single nail it was held up on. It smashed into hundreds of pieces. I stood there staring at them all, reflect every single part of my body.

Each piece was laughing at me. Putting my flaws on the spotlight. The same way my mother would laugh and drag me down when I tried to overcome who we were. Evil laughs and poisonous words that would try to degrade me. But I never let her get to me. I knew I was to be someone great. No, I wouldn't allow to be laughed at. No one would ever dare laugh at the beautiful American girl. I began smashing the pieces into smaller pieces till it became nothing more than grains. I looked at my hands, covered in gushing bloody cuts. She has porcelain hands. I need to have porcelain hands. I can't have the devil's mark on my hands. I walked around the house. I just spread misfortunate through out the house. It began to rain. Yes rain. Rain was the answer to cleansing this body. She is like water after all. I must be water too. I scrubbed my body multiple times, each time harder. No. No. No. red is not the color of perfection. Red is not the color of the beautiful American girl.

I must also be a dove. I must also be an angel. I must also be porcelain. I must be like the American girl. I kept scrubbing myself.

Send Love

Anet El-Tohami

Help her, Mother! Help Her!
Wearing sore red now, she
Dances on charring coals, in the street.
A single mother, a lifetime of being
a miscounted statistic.
Often, there are many fires starting and
stopping—inside her soul—some
just won't grow old. Evenly, soaked
in holy water, they just won't wash.
Burning while standing, *and* in prostration.
Angelic faces staring into boiling places
of searing volcanic hot ice, molten lava
sing and sizzle their candy hearts, and baby fat.
They cry: Art. Thou are my mother.
Art. Thou are my mother.
Help her, mother! Help her! This road is too long to
travel fast and alone, often blocked.
Allow her re-united with the wedded flame
that fireflies make when in need of love—brighter.
Once re-lighted, together, their glow travels farther.
Help her, mother! Help her! Send love. We sacrifice,
life for life, love for water and vice versa.

The Engaging Boredom of Car Rides

Zachary Marshall

I spent my youth in the back of a minivan. My parents' work takes them on the road quite frequently, and as a child, I always traveled with them. Some people say that car rides are a drag, or downright tedious. I frequently get texts from different friends saying things like "ugg I'm driving to the city and I'm soooo bored! When will we ever get thereeee?" and I just smirk and shake my head, because I believe that with the right attitude and a sense of humor, long car rides can be among the most interesting (and entertaining) experiences of one's life.

The first things I noticed as a way to pass the endless automotive hours were road side billboards. Billboards say a lot of unique things. I've seen wonderful ads for family run gyms, complete with pictures of sweat-less, good looking, midlevel celebrities who all seem to share the treadmill, weight machine, and enormous water cooler at the "Beef Cake Ranch" in Eastern Wyoming to keep in shape. Is it not a depressing reflection on our society that in order to effectively advertise, companies must acquire Joe Pesci, Will Sasso and Laura Wilkinson, or some other ensemble of vaguely familiar faces, to pose for drive by posters? Welcome to America.

The loveliest billboards are the advertisers for edible products. While rambling down Route 66, I looked out the window, and saw the delicious sight of Sonic's (the fast food chain, not the punk hedgehog) new product, the Peanut Butter Bacon Shake. I enjoy bacon and I appreciate peanut butter...separately. In their culinary place, they both have potential to be delicious. But combined with milk, sugar, and a dash of gooey chocolate to concoct milkshakes? You can't be serious.

I saw another delectable advertisement as I yawned my way through Texas: Fried Coke. The ad elaborated with a picture of what looked like fried dough in a Diet Coke cup crested with whipped cream, shaved chocolate, and a maraschino cherry. Upon a speedy Google search (shout out to 4G), I discovered that some brilliant 5 star Texan chef decided that Coke wasn't unhealthy enough for his customers. He created the all-American dessert (widely popular in Texas): deep fried beer batter sauce garnished with a liter of Coke. It is no wonder to me why the American stereotype is fat and unhealthy. My only hope is that someday, this culinary masterpiece will make its way onto one of the step by step tutorials on the cooking channel.

Another great way to make the endless journeys pleasant is to people watch. In my many travels, I have deduced that we live in a wheezing cohort of ignorant obesity and potential psychopaths. When you look out of your car window and see an animated piece of blubber driving a VW bug, you can't help but wonder where that individual is

headed and what their life story is. I have spent many an hour pondering these people with more chins than dollars in the bank. This isn't meant to be rude to my fellow Americans who have taken the fast food lingo of "Supersize me" too literally, I just think they should hang out with Will Sasso at the "Beef Cake Ranch" for a while. Maybe lose a few pounds.

Then there is the other side of society. When looking into a car window on one of my many multi hour automobile excursions, I noticed two things. First, every seat had seat covers that look like a Jackson Pollock painting using bile, blood, and off color semen. Second, I noticed that the driver, clearly listening to some sort of heavy metal cacophony, was repeatedly slamming what appeared to be a jackknife into the dashboard to the beat of the melodious melodies of the hit single "Kill Your Mother Rape Your Dog" by Dying Fetus, or such of the like. I always find this sort of person weirdly intriguing. Where did he come from? Where is he going? What kind of friends does this individual have? Where did he get those seat covers? There are always too many questions to consider.

The best way to avoid boredom on trips from here to there (in my humble opinion), is through interactions with others. There are countless car games a group of people can play to pass the time. A few months ago, my dance company drove to Ohio for a weekend of performances. Fourteen hours in a van with nine other people has the potential for an unwanted insight into their lives. It also has the potential to be a jovial blast if looked at the right way. The ten of us spent countless hours (and by countless, I mean fourteen) singing songs and telling stories to each other to pass the time. The fourteen hours flew by, and we are all definitely better off for being a part of it.

A life on the road has the potential to teach something if you are open to learning. As the entire world rushes to get from here to there, focused only on the beginning and outcome, no one stops to enjoy the journey. Don't ask the tired questions "How much longer?" and "When do we get there?" Take the time to do what the overstated and underutilized saying tells you to do: stop and smell the flowers along the way. Read those billboards. Watch all those you pass and those who pass you, for they too have stories to tell, and most of all, talk to those in the car with you and make that travel time a worthwhile experience. Enjoy life as it happens. Don't spend it focused and stressing on the outcome. Life is a blessing and can be a joy with the right attitude and a sense of humor. Have fun with it. But seriously...a Bacon Peanut Butter Shake? That's ridiculous.

Learning My Lessons

Racheal Guzman

I was 27 years old, a wanderer looking to find myself. I valued independence, in myself and others, above all else. I did not want to be taken care of, nor take care of anyone else. Thousands of miles from family and friends, I settled in the southwestern desert and just knew I had it all figured out. Little did I know, I was about to learn some of the most important lessons of my life—lessons about total selflessness, the value of support, and most importantly, the knowledge that a pure, all-encompassing love can change a person's life in unimaginable ways.

In January of 2012, my boyfriend and I decided to make our long-distance relationship a little more permanent, and he joined me living outside of Las Vegas. For a while, everything was perfect. Both of us had good jobs that we absolutely loved. We had everything we needed, and most of what we wanted. Life wasn't perfect, but it was pretty close. We were happy. Unfortunately, in March I became ill. I was sick every day. Nausea, vomiting, headaches, body aches, you name it. I couldn't stay awake, and had no energy to speak of. I was terrified. Cancer runs in my family, and that was my first thought. Time went by, and by August, I had developed strange abdominal cramps that alternated between sharp jabs and a fluttery sensation. I could also feel a lump developing in my abdomen. Finally, on August 28th, I mustered up my courage and went to the doctor. After some preliminary questions, I was given a routine pregnancy test. "No big deal," I thought. I was diagnosed with PCOS at the age of 17, and was told I would never have children. I was getting frustrated. I needed to know what was wrong so we could fix it, and they were wasting time. After an endless wait, the doctor came in and changed my life forever. "You're pregnant" he said. I politely shook my head. "No, that's a mistake. I can't have children." He returned a kind smile. "You're definitely pregnant. Are you ok with that?" "Um, I don't think you heard me. I can't have children." I was boiling mad at this point. Against my better judgment, I made an appointment for an ultrasound on September 4th. I went home, and my boyfriend and I laughed over how stupid the doctor was. Inside, though, I was hurt. I was so sick that whatever was wrong must be horrible, and instead of figuring out the problem, the doctor was teasing me with what could never be.

On September 4th, I got up, got dressed and drank as much water as I could hold. The ultrasound clinic was on the other side of Las Vegas, about a forty minute drive. I got angrier the closer we got. What a waste of time and money. And the thing I hated most was a small part of me kept saying, "Well.....Maybe...." and I did NOT want to get my

hopes up. We arrived at the clinic, and the technician put the transducer on my belly. A big empty circle appeared. "HA! I told you so!" was my first thought, followed by an unexpected twinge of disappointment. "This is your bladder." The transducer slid over. "And this is your baby!" Wait, my what? There was a whole person on the screen! Not a little grain of rice, and certainly not an empty womb, but my baby! Not only was I actually pregnant, I was already six months along with a healthy baby boy. I cried. I began to believe in miracles.

We went home in a state of wonder. I was euphoric. I had created life. I felt whole for the first time in a long time. Reality slowly began to set in. While we had everything we needed, we had almost nothing a baby needed. While our jobs were awesome, neither provided health insurance. And I couldn't even find a doctor who would see me. I was considered high-risk after going so long without prenatal care, and no one wanted to take me on. And what would happen when he got here? We couldn't afford for me to stay home, who could I trust to help? And what if something bad were to happen? Who would be there for us? I knew what I had to do, and I hated it. I hated it with every fiber of my being. I had to give up everything I thought was important, everything I had worked so hard for, and go home to my family. I had to learn to ask for, and accept, help, and put my own needs last. So we quit our jobs, gave away everything we owned, packed four suitcases and the dog and came home. I never resented my son though, and in hindsight it was a small price to pay for my miracle.

Today, I am slowly getting back on my feet, and doing everything in my power to give my son the life he deserves. Life is much harder, but so much more rewarding. My son is surrounded by family to help and love him, and has everything he needs to thrive. He is happy and healthy, which is all I can ask for. As for me, I now believe in love. The love of a mother for a child is the most pure and beautiful thing in the world. I believe in miracles. I believe that being independent has nothing on being somebody's everything. The one person who (for now, at least), can make everything right in his world. And at the end of the day, those priceless smiles and drooly baby kisses let me know I'm right.

More Than

Endera Houze

The locks cascading down your back
The curve in your waist
The bend in your brow
The fullness of your lips
You are more than
The size of your foot
The thickness of your thighs
The sparkling of your teeth
The way you bat your eyes
You are more than
The stride in your walk
The lightness in your step
The protruding of your backside
Or the scent you leave behind
You are more than
Those oh so tight jeans
Those red bottom shoes
That wreath of diamonds and gold
Or the lacy undergarments worn for foreplay
You are more than
What you desired yourself to become
You are more than
You are more than
A figment of someone else's fantasy

Non-Believer

Bettina Martin

"Now it's the supernatural. I wonder how long this one is going to last?" I grumbled to myself.

My mother, sitting in the driver's seat of our blue Toyota just ignored me. So it had shifted from aliens to ghosts. My mother's interests shifted quicker than the wind. One day she was dead set on horseback riding, then it was breeding birds and now it was calling spirits. I was waiting for her to suggest skydiving or bungee jumping or some such insane venture next. Naturally whatever she came up with was turned into a "family" affair. Which basically meant me. The rest of my family just magically disappeared, nowhere to be found. So here I was in the car listening to my mother ramble on about ghosts. I had agreed to accompany her to a titanic exhibit that supposedly showed some items recovered.

"I bet with my psychic sensitivity I'll be able to communicate with those ghosts!" my mother said excitedly.

Unlikely, I thought but held my tongue. Encouraging her delusions only made her more intent and more exhausting to deal with.

"I'm serious! I had a dream the other day that something bad was about to happen. Then I got a call from Stephen telling me his friend's mother passed away. I have a gift!" she exclaimed after she caught my exasperated eye roll.

It took us a good twenty minutes to find a parking spot before we managed to make our way to the entrance of the museum. It was pretty crowded so we had to wait in line, which meant enduring Chilean summer heat. Just as I was about to tell my mother that I couldn't handle it for another minute it was our turn to pass through security and into the building.

A blast of ice cold air hit us the moment we crossed the threshold into the first section of the exhibition. The square room had a large open doorway that led to the next section. In the center of the room was a large model of the Titanic with little sections cut out. An information plaque was attached to the pedestal. In the corner was a massive crusty anchor.

While I started reading the information, my mother slowly strolled towards the second section of the exhibit. After a few minutes of reading I gave up and followed her.

"You know, the reason one comes to these places is to actually look at the stuff," I remarked when I caught up with her.

"Well I guess it depends on what one comes to see. Can't you feel it? All this suffering. I can feel it. The water it was so...cold..." She responded almost in a whisper.

"Mom, the AC is blasting in here! It's not suffering you are feeling it's the cold air coming out of the vent next to you!" Again I rolled my eyes at her.

She kept walking, ignoring my snippy comment. My word but it was freezing cold in here, I thought. Shivers were running up and down my arms and I had goose bumps. For a moment I could even smell the ocean. Great. Now she had me all caught up in her nonsense too. Of course it would smell like ocean. They had an original anchor from the sunken boat and other items that had been stewing in the ocean for years before they were recovered.

The second section of the exhibit held more general information about the tragedy, the ship and its route. Since my mom had moved on to the next section already, and I was getting really cold, I decided to just follow her. I found her standing in front of one of the glass cases that lined the last section of the exhibit.

"I can feel them! They are here!" She said cryptically.

By now the fine hairs all over my body stood up. The case held various knick knacks such as brushes, watches, and more from the victims of the disaster.

"Stop, ok? I've about had it!" I sneered at her.

She turned and gave me an irritated stare.

"You know, just because you can't see it doesn't mean it doesn't exist. You really should keep an open mind!" With those words she abruptly turned around and quickly walked away.

Maybe I shouldn't have been that rude. I looked into the case. My eyes traveled as if pulled by a magnet to an old photograph, the face of a young female stared back at me. I could almost imagine her on the deck of a glorious new ship.

It was cold and the air was saturated with the smell of the ocean. My heart sped up and I could feel beads of sweat forming on my forehead but I wasn't warm at all. If anything the cold had gotten worse. My breathing became heavy and the sound of the other visitors began to dull. The murmur of the crowds turned into screams for help. Wait, did something happen? Why is everybody screaming? My chest hurt, breathing hurt, panic! I need to get away before it's too late! Too late for what? What is happening?

"Come on we don't have all day!" my mom grabbed me by the arm and shook me slightly. I snapped to my senses.

"Yes! Sorry mom. Let's go!" I stuttered, still a little dazed, but I allowed her to drag me towards the exit.

We left, heading straight toward the car. Of course my mom hadn't noticed my odd behavior, or if she had she just wrote it off as teen angst. I apologized for my rudeness but omitted that strange moment with the photograph. I didn't want to worry her with my anxiety and over active imagination.

"Hey Mom! How do you feel about bungee jumping or sky diving?"

Kenny's Dinner

Daniel W. Hamm

The air was quite festive and it was filled with the smell of cooked and cooking food. It was Thanksgiving dinner and Kenny was home from another tour of duty in Afghanistan. Kenny is a medical doctor who serves in the Army Reserves. The rooms of the first floor were filled with the rich aromas of Puerto Rican food, but also with people both friends and members of the family.

The nutmeg from the pumpkin pie swirled about the rooms each time the front door opened for the newly arrived guests. The apple cinnamon pie sat high on the dinner table in a pie rack. It seemed to say that it was king of this party. Although there were other tasty deserts and treats, the well roasted meats did not take a back seat for they salted the air with their aromas. There was baked turkey, roasted pork, and baked ham. The guests swirled about the room with lively conversation holding a glass of apple cider, eggnog, or wine in one hand while at the same time reacquainting themselves with each other.

Thanksgiving dinner may have been more meaningful this year than in previous years. Usually, the families would take turns having the dinner at each other's homes. This year it was at the older sister's house because Kenny was her son, who recently had recovered from a terrible car accident the first week he returned home from Afghanistan.

The real occasion for rejoicing was not so much the traditional Thanksgiving dinner of giving thanks for all the blessings bestowed on us during the past year. It was because Kenny had survived the accident. Kenny is a doctor, a professor, and a cancer researcher. He was heading to work at the hospital in Florida on highway 95. It was his first week back in the USA and his first day back at work.

Prior to the accident he had returned from a three months tour of duty in Afghanistan. Kenny told us that the flash of ammunition and the sound of dropping bombs were a constant reminder that he was in a war zone, performing procedures that would stabilize a wounded soldier's injuries for the trip to a medical facility where he would hopefully recover from his wounds.

Kenny had joined the Army reserve in his college days, to help pay for medical school. He would only go away for training for two or three weeks in the states. But since the 9/11 terrorist attack, his medical skills were needed and he was being called to duty more often and for longer periods. He had been twice in Iraq and this was his first tour in Afghanistan. Every time he was called to service it was in a combat zone.

My wife, his aunt, would mail him batches of her home baked cookies to share with his fellow soldiers. He said that the cookies would

arrive not a one crumbled, and that when he opened the package, their aroma would instantly remind him of home and family. The baked goods aroma would fill the area/facility he was in and the other soldiers would ask, "What you got there Doc." After receiving several packages during his stay, the other soldiers would also look forward to his goodies. They particularly favored the biscotti. One soldier when learning that Kenny was schedule to leave requested the recipe for the biscotti. My wife proudly obliged.

At this Thanksgiving dinner, the cooks were several, which was the tradition in this family. The prior Thanksgiving dinners were the usual standard meal of stuffed turkey, cranberry sauce, and all the side dishes, but this Thanksgiving dinner was different. Every woman prepared her specialty dish for Kenny. They were all rejoicing to have Kenny back healthy and able to go on with the work he loved to do. And the one way to show their love and gratitude was through their hands.

The oldest member of the women, my wife's paternal aunt, Ana, who flew in from Puerto Rico prepared pasteles in the old traditional style, which meant no food processor. This dish took hours of grinding plantains, potatoes and green banana into a mixture that would be filled with an assortment of prepared cooked meats such as sausage, chicken, beef, or pork. The filled mixture were wrapped in banana leaves and made into small bundles of two and boiled in water until pure delicious perfection.

Pasteles is a dish from Puerto Rico that is usually prepared at Christmas time but this was an exception. Those who prepare this dish are well known in the family, for pasteles are a welcome sight on any Puerto Rican plate.

Then my wife, called Maria, brought her specialty which I am proud to say that I participated in preparing as a good sideman in a jazz quartet. I was the "go for this" and "go for that" person. I drove to the "99cent" store, the Spanish grocery store (called the bodega), and two large supermarkets. I returned with all the right sizes of three types of sugar, foil pans, and a host of spices - nutmeg, ginger, cloves, cinnamon, and even molasses. She gave me a list so that I couldn't say that I forgot something. She would only accept, "It wasn't in the store, honey," if I came back without an ingredient or an item she wanted. All of this was the preparation of her annual favorite orange glazed ham which everyone loved. The young ladies of the family are constantly asking for her recipe. But my wife retorts that she is not near the grave and that they are just going to have to wait.

Then there was the roast pork which is truly a part of the Puerto Rican dishes. Her oldest sister, Millie, prepares this dish. The aroma of the roasted pork is unmistakable. The pork shoulder is rubbed down with Puerto Rican seasoning. Small cuts are made into the meat and

these cuts are filled with seasoning. Before placing the meat into the oven the skin of the meat is also well seasoned and is placed on top of the meat. It takes about two and a half hours to cook. The dish is called pernil and it is always a special day in a Puerto Rican household when pernil is served. The crackling skin of the pork when it is taken from the oven to everyone's delight, it is treated like candy on a stick. Everyone wants a piece of that hot and crunchy pig skin which has thoroughly absorbed the seasoning into an unbelievable tasty appetizer.

The youngest sister, Carmen prepares the sweet potato pudding which has both body and texture. It has the smell of well ground field sweet potato and the taste of a full bodied pudding that only the best sweet potato pies are made of. After making two rounds around the dinner table it is finished. But Carmen always makes a second pudding for guests to take home when they leave.

Oh, I forgot to mention that my wife's daughter, Toni-Ann always prepares the "arroz con gandules" rice with pidgeon peas for these gatherings. When she and her husband arrive, he is carrying a large pan filled with rice with her trailing behind him a big roar fills the room with laughter and warm greetings. And then there is Denise, Carmen's daughter who makes the best collard greens I've ever tasted and that says a lot. Since my mother is from the south and I considered her to make the best collard greens I ever had until I tasted Denise's. Toni-Ann and Denise are two of the youngsters who are always begging my wife for her orange glazed ham recipe.

When Kenny sat down for dinner this Thanksgiving of 2011, it was really a blessing. All of his aunts, brother, first cousins with their spouses and children, great aunt, his mother, high school and college friends were present as he started to tell us about his tour in Afghanistan and his near fatal accident his first week back in the USA. The first thing he said was " I could just see the headlines Doctor survives unscathed tour in Afghanistan but is killed by surfboard on highway 95 first week back in USA ." All of us started to laugh because it would have been so ironic had he not survived the car accident or had not recovered from his coma. How unpredictable that he was almost killed by a surfboard smashing through the front windshield while he is driving on a highway. The surfboard was on top of the car in front of him when it loosened and tore through his windshield striking his head and neck with such tremendous force, since both cars were going at least 60 miles an hour, that Kenny was almost decapitated. Kenny continued to say that he wasn't even close to a beach although he was in Florida.

We laughed some more, but laughter had the under tone of sorrow, fear, relief and that silent prayer of thanks. All of us at that table realized that our loved ones can be taken from us when we least expect it. But this Thanksgiving we were all here together safe in a room filled with love and laughter and for that we were truly grateful.

Spark: After "Elusive" by Fatima Hussain

Timothy Murphy

I am here.
Behind this translucent skin
And aging heart.
I am that Spark you seek.
Run no farther
The wonder that courses through you
Shimmers in your eyes
We feel it too, in ours.
The Falcon and the dove,
Reaping the wind for chase and escape
In their endless temple,
They feel in in themselves
And beg for forgiveness
When they steal it from their prey.
When clouds pain your sight,
In search for your own fount,
Tear your gaze from the heavens.
Look through eyes
Rather than stained glass.
We are not a congruent species,
Each of us an angle or side
Starving to see the whole jewel.
Heel those animals within
That clamor for reason.
Running against the gale
Will always leave you here
Sitting in the wind,
With us, your fellow sparks of the divine.



Be bold. Be a Viking.