



"Poet's Walk #2" by Carissa Phillips



Be bold. Be a Viking.



THREADS
2015

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Be bold. Be a Viking.

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Cover: "Poet's Walk #1" by Carissa Phillips

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!

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This issue of *Threads* is dedicated to the memory of Brook Hobson, former full-time Assistant Professor of English and past co-editor of *Threads* who passed away in December 2014.

Constance Joy

Brook Hobson

We drive across the causeway
in the rented candy-colored convertible,
your blonde hair pulled back—
a style all your friends are wearing--
hands folded in your lap,
sunglasses shielding eyes like a doe's.
You said you would go with me
when no one else wanted to.
We left the others poolside
to drive to the coast
two hours distant.
I have to see the sea before I leave, I said,
and you said, so do I.
You are my sister's child,
a miracle who shares my blood,
tall, still fresh,
stretched as smooth as salt-water taffy,
teeth just freed of braces;
the rest you are just beginning to unleash.
Your center of gravity is settling in your hips,
and the rotation of that tidy planet
draws the attention of boys
who circle you like dim stars.

Truckies

Jonathan Schaefer

"Beep beep beep beep!" cried the pager.

Damn, always during dinner time I thought as I dropped my fork. I gave my wife a quick kiss before I ran out the door and jumped into my car. Quickly getting to the station, I threw on my gear, just making the last seat on Truck 14. On the way to the scene, the captain in charge of the truck gave out our instructions.

"We have a multi-level structure. Lt. Moss, you take Charles there and search the second floor; Keller and Walters, you guys take the first floor. Quick search, there are flames showing."

When we arrived, I grabbed a set of irons, and followed Lt. Moss, who had the thermal camera, over to where the door to the house was set to be opened. *All right, here we go; I hope there isn't anyone in there,* I thought to myself as I pulled on the mask to my air pack, *always better when there's no victims.* We checked over each other's gear, making sure everything was covered, then when we were set they opened the door and we clicked in our respirators and entered the house, staying low under the thick clouds of smoke. *Geez can't see a thing, not good, not good at all.* I struggled to keep my breathing under control as the anxiety of the situation built.

There were stairs right inside the door, so we carefully crawled up the stairs to the second level. It was even darker up here than down below. Lt. Moss leaned in close,

"Start a right hand search, I will guide you from here with the TIC," he shouted.

"Ok," I shouted back. Crawling along with the wall on my right side, I felt for things on the floor, and felt up along the wall looking for openings. After a short distance, I found what I thought was the edge of a door frame. "I found a door," I shouted to Moss.

"Wait, I'm coming over," Moss was then right up behind me. Carefully, I slipped the door open, making sure not to be directly in front of the opening. I went in and quickly crawled around the room while Moss watched with the TIC. *Good, no one in here, just a small office,* after I made it back out. Continuing down the side of the first room, I found a corner then another door. We followed the same procedure, and again the room was empty.

So far so good. Just past that room, another corner and we were heading back the way we came; just on the other side of what appeared to be a short hallway. I found another door, and as I slipped it open and prepared to enter, Moss suddenly screamed.

“Close the door quickly, and get back, now!” I slammed the door shut, and jumped back as far as I could back up the hallway. Just as we got clear, that door blew out, flames billowing out, suddenly setting the hallway ablaze. We were cut off from the stairs, our only known exit route. I was completely stunned, unable to decide what to do. *Damn, have to get away from here, now!* Moss grabbed me by the shoulder and yanked me back into the room at the end of the hall.

“Mayday, Mayday, Mayday,” Moss called on his radio, “We are on the Bravo side of the building, second floor, Truck 14, Lt. Moss and firefighter Charles, primary search team. Rapid fire extension into the second floor, flashover in one room, we are cut off from primary exit, looking for alternate exit.” *Now what do we do?*

“Charles, check the room again, see if there are any windows.” Moss shouted at me. I moved quickly, searching up and down the walls. My heart was pounding, my breathing very fast and swallow. *What was in this room?* Then my hand ran into a board sticking out of the wall. I felt around it. It was long and flat and there were two corners on each end that turned upward. *I found a window. Now I remember; this is the bedroom, two windows, bed in between.*

“Got a window,” I shouted to Moss. I felt forward, hand finding the bed. *There’s the bed, one more window just over there.* “One more window six feet to my left!” I smashed the glass in the window I was next to, clearing it out so I could bail. *Come on move faster!* I looked over my shoulder, and could see flames starting to come around the closed door. I hurriedly smashed about with my tool, grabbed the hook from my bailout system from my pocket, set the hook and rolled out the window. I jerked to a stop when I reached the end of the rope. *Ow, that hurt, but at least I am outside. Damn fire, you’re not going to get me today!* I looked right, and there was Moss hanging right next to me. We lowered ourselves to the ground, and others came over to help us to the rehab area. When we got our gear off, Moss was smiling.

“Well, that was fun,” he said. I could only shake my head. *Were we in the same building? Oh, well it takes all kinds to do this job.*

Prison Childhood

Daniel Hamm

There we were, standing before each other for the first time in almost two years. I had been away and he wasn’t there when I left. When he left, I was happy to see him leave. We were all happy because he was one of the guys whom we all respected. He taught mathematics in the red brick school house where most of us who were interested in learning went for at least part of the day and those who were lucky went all day.

As we stood there facing each other, the sun shone bright in the brisk October air. There was not a cloud in the sky. In the passage of time I had grown. I was back, not as a loser but a winner, and he and I knew it. But there was no arrogance on my part. What am I writing about? I am writing about myself and a person who was my mentor in prison. I use the word mentor with some care because this is prison and the wrong impression may be assumed.

He was someone whom I respected, who spent time with me talking about what we felt was the proper / correct attitude to be able to make it in the world beyond the prison walls. The ideas were wide ranging from one’s conduct with family, girlfriend, and friends to money management and the general building of useful and productive relationships

The one skinny maple tree was still holding on to now multicolored leaves that appeared to spin like pinwheels on the branches at every slight gust of wind. The air was chilly, not frosty, and the sun shone hot and bright. It felt good to be out of the cellblock housing and into fresh air. We greeted each other like comrades from the same boot-camp. Others greeted him, too, while asking him if he was going back to teaching math in the red-brick school house. This was Mr. Gardner, but affectionately known as Poppy Gardner.

We met nearly three or four years ago. He was the teacher in one of my math classes in Auburn Prison. He also taught mathematics in the prison yard, either one-on-one or in small groups. If you were having problems with a math problem or concept, he would spend time with you walking around the prison yard explaining the concept of the problem.

I was gone for about two years. My case was reopened and I had to go to New York City for a new trial. He was there when I left. Now I was back

with a new state prison sentence. I was no longer the lifer after nearly eight years of incarceration. I could see the light at the end of the tunnel, and I knew it and was glad.

Now I was back and I had my own sense of self. In Auburn State Prison, I stayed with the books. I did not have a lot of friends. Friends to me just meant a lot of trouble. It was a new world for me and I wasn't feeling very trustful. But in the red brick school house things opened up for me. I found a voice which I didn't know that I had and I found something I could associate myself with without fear of being set up or having the need to be cool or impress other guys my own age.

Many of them were always trying to impress each other with stories about what they had in the world beyond the prison walls. It was the usual things— cars, girls, and money. They were always hatching out new schemes of how they were going to come into wealth. It all sounded very impressive, but I didn't have an interest in anything that would require me to constantly be looking over my shoulders. I wasn't condemning them for their way of thinking, but that was not the life I wanted beyond these prison walls. The idea of always watching my back for the police did not appeal to me at all.

I guess that is why Poppy Gardiner took a liking to me. I did not have one of those get rich schemes going for me.

We stood there for a while just looking at each other. I saw an old friend who looked a bit downtrodden and yet was not asking for sympathy. Some of his pride was gone. He was my friend, I really did care, but our friendship had taken a different turn. We had always talked about how to stay in the streets, yet he was unable to do so. It seems that prison was a revolving door for him. Everyone talked about staying out there, but few people ever did.

We started our exchange and I immediately could see that he was now the kid who was looking for answers. I could not pretend. I wasn't the kid any more. My experience in the Tombs City Jail had changed me. In Auburn Prison, I focused on the books, but in the Tombs I was forced out of my shell and had to deal with all kinds of people. I was forced to share a jail cell with characters found only in the writings of Charles Dickens.

There were the junkies and the Bowery derelicts who had maggots festering in their sores. Junkies kicked the habit on the cold concrete floor of the jail cell. They would never sleep and wanted to talk all night. For the first two weeks, they ate nothing. Afterward, they ate everything they could get their hands on, but they never slept.

Then, there was the court system. That system and that ride in the metal box to and from the Manhattan Court, nicknamed the Tombs, was shameful. I was packed in a jail cell called the bullpen from eight in the morning to four in the afternoon. There were no windows and no fresh air. Then, there was the jail house riot that seemed to have swept the nation including the Tombs. The inmates had taken over several floors for nearly a week. I joined the negotiating team and was almost shot by the riot police in a narrow stairwell while attempting to negotiate for food and the release of jail house guards. You grow up fast if you want to survive in the Tombs, and I had evolved.

I realized that Poppy Gardner was no longer my mentor, but he was still my friend. Poppy Gardner couldn't make it in the outside world. Maybe the only place he felt he had some value was within the prison walls. And that was the greatest lesson he gave me. I was determined that I would not become a Poppy Gardner.

I left prison in 1974, and I have never been back!

No Chains

James Denney

Vacation. Road trip. Holiday. Long weekend.

The words bring a sense of anticipation and excitement. What is the word that best describes my state of mind when I hear them?

Freedom

But first, we must plan and prepare, sometimes well in advance. Scheduling time off, saving money, and making arrangements to keep the pets and plants alive in our absence. But even those tasks are lightened by the expectation of the upcoming adventure.

Then there is the stress of last minute decisions, logistics, and questions. Did we forget to pack anything? Did we pack too much? Did we pack too little? Will the checking account cover the auto-payments and debit card usage while we're away? Any kids left behind?

But then I leave home and ever since that long ago vacation departure when my wife did a happy dance, singing out "I'm on vacation, I'm on vacation," her tune rings in my head every time I start a new adventure.

A recent adventure was a road trip with my son James in August 2013. James was seventeen then and heading into his senior year of high school. We agreed weeks in advance that we wouldn't decide where to go until the first day of our adventure. On departure day we packed our bags and the car, keeping in mind that our attire and everything else was not required baggage, but optional. We had swimming trunks and hiking boots, golf clubs and boogie boards, keeping all of our options open.

We headed down the driveway, full of anticipation. I stopped the car at the end of the driveway and asked James, "Left or right?" "Don't you have to go to the Post Office and the bank?" he asked. "Yes," I replied. "We can turn left to Scotia or we can turn right towards Glenville," as they each have our bank and a post office.

This seemed to be a good time to commit to a first destination. One item in our family travel folder that we brought along was a brochure for Ausable Chasm, near Plattsburg. Neither of us had been there before, so I asked James what he thought about heading in that direction. It was fine

with him, so we took a right turn towards Glenville and after the errands we were on our way!

At some point I suggested to James that we should have one rule, which we would call *No Chains*. He quickly agreed. So we continued with the understanding that no chain hotels, chain restaurants, or chain retailers were going to a part of this trip. The motivation for our No Chains rule was to increase the opportunity to experience new things and the unexpected.

After experiencing Ausable Chasm we decided to stop at the Adirondack Golf and Country Club, which was James' first ever round of golf. With day one winding down, our No Chains rule seriously limited our lodging options. With the assistance of our smartphones we found a real gem, the Golden Gate Motel, on the shore of Lake Champlain, which had the added bonus of a small private beach along with beautiful views of the lake and mountains of Vermont.

We enjoyed happy hour and swimming at the beach with the other motel guests winding down for the day. We both agreed that we had found a nice place to use as home base so we decided to extend the room for another night.

Day two began with a trip to Whiteface Mountain, which we both had skied before, but this would be our first drive up Veterans Highway to the summit. We stopped at the pullover locations and then climbed the staircase to the summit, enjoying the spectacular scenery.

We then drove through Lake Placid and Saranac Lake, taking the back route to our Plattsburgh home base, keeping an eye out for someplace to get lunch. Somewhere beyond Saranac Lake we saw a little roadside restaurant and tavern, the Hi-Falls Lounge, and decided to stop in.

We enjoyed a leisurely meal of chicken wings and tavern food, spending time with Gary and Eileen, the married proprietors. We learned some history of the place from Eileen and she taught James and me how to play shuffleboard on a table from the 1950s. All the lighting and electronics still worked perfectly. Without our No Chains rule we likely would never have stopped and enjoyed a wonderful couple of hours there.

After happy hour on night two was another highlight of the trip. Out of the blue came a brief storm that created a rainbow that we could see

from the balcony of our motel over the lake. All the colors of the rainbow were clear and we could see the rainbow from end to end. Having lived in Hawaii for three years in my twenties, I have experienced some impressive rainbows, but this one is high on the list.

On day three we decided to head home through the Adirondacks towards Sacandaga Lake to visit with family friends at their camp. James and I both experienced many firsts on our No Chains adventure. The open ended length of the trip, no advance commitment to a location and activities, and plenty of room to pack items for most any choices we would make unchained us from most of the pre-trip stresses.

Frequenting only local establishments turned out to be easier than expected and exposed us to experiences we wouldn't have had with a detailed itinerary and advance plans. When we agreed to the No Chains rule we didn't realize that the philosophy behind it was embedded in our adventure weeks before when we decided to have our father/son trip.

No Chains is a state of mind that can be applied not just to a vacation, but everyday life as well. If people want to reduce the stress of everyday life, experience a road trip nowhere, or just be more open to the unexpected, then No Chains is the way to go.

Skydiving

Michaela Suits

I had always wanted to go skydiving, but I had to wait until I was eighteen years old due to the strict policies enforced by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Once I finally turned eighteen, I did a tandem jump where I was harnessed to my instructor from the aircraft exit through freefall, descent, and landing. Before I could get into the airplane, I had to fill out paper work and go through skydiving training. After I finished that, it was time to go and jump out of a perfectly good airplane.

During the training, I had to practice what to do when it was time to jump out of the plane. I had to lie down on the ground on my stomach while arching with my legs and arms up in the air. This is what I would have to do right after jumping out of the plane during free fall. I also had to know what to do when it came time to land. I had to pull my legs up so there would be no chance of them breaking when we hit the ground. After that, I got harnessed up. My instructor put my harness on really tight, which made it hard to walk in.

Along with the jump, I purchased the video package so I got video before, during and after the jump. I also received pictures of my jump. So before I got in the plane, my instructor interviewed me and asked if I wanted to say anything before my jump. I had nothing to say. I just wanted to get in the plane and go. We loaded up in the plane where usually four people squeeze in as well as the pilot. Luckily, it was a slow day so it was just the pilot, my instructor and me. My instructor and I had to sit backwards so that our backs were to the front of the plane. Everyone has to sit backwards on the floor of the plane due to safety except the pilot, who is the only one with a seat sitting forwards. It was extremely hot inside the plane and when the pilot finally started the plane, the roar was deafening. The plane is so loud a person can hear it from the ground when it's thousands of feet in the air.

The takeoff went smoothly and I was able to wave goodbye to my family on the ground and then see the amazing view as we started climbing. I could see the tops of buildings and houses along fields, trees, and bodies of water such as lakes and rivers. We had to get to 9,000 feet. While waiting, I got to watch the view and my instructor took more video and pictures of my excitement as we climbed. Half way up at about 4,500

feet, my instructor attached our harnesses together, getting prepared to go. We finally reached 9,000 feet and it was time to jump. I had to put goggles on so the wind wouldn't dry my eyes up. The pilot reached over and opened the door. The wind flew in the plane and this is when my stomach dropped. I had to sit on the plane ledge with my feet dangling outside. I had to hold onto my harness by my shoulders and arch my back towards my instructor.

Suddenly, we were out of the plane and I was arching like I was taught during training. The wind was so cold and the skin on my face was flapping. It was hard to breathe in during that first 30 seconds while hurtling toward the ground at 120 miles per hour. When we got to 6,000 feet, my instructor pulled the parachute. This was the relaxing part because the view was amazing and even better than the view from the plane. Instead of looking out of a small plane window I was now floating in the air seeing all the scenery below me. My instructor took more pictures and a video of us going in a fast circle with the parachute.

Before I knew it, we were getting ready to land. The parachute ride goes by fast – it only takes six to eight minutes to reach the ground. Right before landing, my instructor reminded me to pull my legs up and we hit the ground, sliding a bit on our butts. My instructor detached the harness and took a final video of me back on the ground on my feet. My family rushed over asking how it was. I had an adrenaline rush that lasted for an hour or so. That's when I knew this was just the beginning of my skydiving career.

Living the Dream

Tom Helin

As you make the right onto Ontario Street, you wonder how long you've been on auto pilot. It's that feeling of becoming aware of your consciousness. Where were you? What were you thinking? How is it that you are almost home, but cannot even remember starting the car? There is just so much going through your head. Too much. Work has been hell, but you are so close to getting out of there. You just have to find a way to hang on a little longer. Graduation is in May, then life will begin.

As you pull into the drive, your cell phone rings. It's your advisor. She tells you that there is nothing more she can do. The registrar says that your web design class does not count toward the required "degree applicable credits", therefore, you will not be receiving a TAP award this semester. No TAP award means no refund. No refund means you can't catch up on your past due child support. If you can't catch up on your past due child support by the end of October, then they will put a hold on your tax return. You need that tax return, things are already bad enough. Defeated, you thank your advisor for calling you back. "You can try to speak to the department chair," She says before being dismissed, "I can't promise it will do any good, but you never know." She has always been very helpful.

As you walk up the stairs, you begin to smell the wonderful aroma that is tonight's dinner. Beef stew, your favorite. She really does love you. You want so badly to provide for her the life she deserves. She will tell you that you do, but she deserves so much more than you can ever give her. "Honey I'm home," You say, as you always do when you enter the house. A cliché indeed, but not said as such. The cliché is a welcomed ingredient in the humor the two of you share. She finds you very funny. She greets you with a kiss. A sweet and simple, yet succulent kiss. You wrap your arms around her and squeeze. Trying desperately to convey your love for her through the strength of your embrace. "Wowzas," she exclaims, "what brought that on?"

"Just love you."

"Lucky me."

She is everything. Everything you have ever wanted. It took a divorce and several other failed relationships to realize what true love really was, to realize what you deserved from a partner, and she has it all. You are the lucky one, but she is constantly reminding you how lucky you make her feel. "Got some bad news today," you begin.

"Try this."

She lifts a spoonful of stew to your lips. The smell of beef stock and vegetables intoxicates, but is nothing when compared to the taste. The beef is tender and the vegetables are cooked to perfection. She is an incredible cook. "Mmmm," you manage, as you struggle to make some audible acknowledgement of her masterpiece. This is stew. Stew as it was always intended. "It needs salt," she says as she trots off to the pantry. She always thinks what she has made to perfection can be improved and regardless of how hard you try to convince her of its perfection, she will not be swayed. You love this about her. She never stops trying. Her motto is that fifty-fifty is a ridiculous recipe for a relationship. Both parties should always be giving a hundred percent.

Over dinner, you explain what happened with school and what that means, you explain the financial position that not getting this refund is going to put you in. She insists that you will make it through together, the way you always do. She is right. Everything always turns out fine. What if fine just isn't good enough anymore? What is worse, having nothing at all or having hope, dangling in front of you like a carrot on a stick? You are a good man, a hard worker, you always strive to do the best you can at everything you do. So why then is life always such a struggle? Why can't you have the life you want? You don't want much. You just want to be able to pay the bills and enjoy the blessings God has given you.

You realize how thankful you are for those blessings, as you watch her sleeping beside you. You spent so long dreaming of a girl like her. Just as you were beginning to think she didn't exist, there she was. Now instead of dreaming of her, you dream with her. You want to write, and she wants a bed & breakfast. Together you dream of a life that you spend together making your own living doing the things that you love, while being together. Always together. Some people may feel like that is too much time together, but not you. The moments you are not together are the only moments that need improving. Sleep finds you at last.

Darkness surrounds you. Everywhere is black. Everywhere except there. A light. It appears to be miles away, but it's there. A sparkle in a void. One star on the darkest night. As you stare at it, it begins to grow larger. You hadn't noticed until now because of the darkness, but you are moving toward it. Don't go into the light. Everybody always says that, but this is just another dream. The same dream. Always the same dream. The darkness is gone, replaced by the most brilliant white light. Blinding. You try to shield your eyes and suddenly wonder if you are squinting in your sleep. A face blocks the light. It's him. The doctor. You can tell by the mask over his mouth and nose. He lifts a blood covered latex glove to his face and raises his surgical magnifying glasses and stares into your eyes. He is yelling, but you can't hear him over the pain. Incredible pain shoots through your entire body. The pain splits you in two. You scream.

You shoot up in bed, gasping for air. Startled, she sits up too. "You're okay baby," she says, she is no stranger to the nightmares. She holds you tight until your breathing becomes regular. "Same Dream?"

"Yes."

"Well it's over now." She strokes your hair. You nod, though you know the relief is only temporary. This same dream has been plaguing you for weeks and nothing seems to shake it. She rubs your back as you try to find sleep again. She is so comforting, so good to you. Sleep comes. As you drift, you hope that peace, this time, accompanies.

Darkness. A sparkle in a void. Light. Magnificent blinding light. Him. He is yelling. "Mr. Helin, can you hear me?" There is no pain. There has always been pain. "Mr. Helin, if you can hear me, you are ok, you've been in an accident, but everything is going to be fine."

An Old Chevy

Ronald Craft

The wind howled in my ears as the car barreled recklessly down the hill. Trees whipped by in a green blur and a lone bird flew alongside the vehicle as if daring it to go faster. I gripped the door, gulped, and stared at the rapidly approaching bottom of the hill. With a sudden roar the engine came to life, my grandfather pumped the brakes and the old Chevy coasted with grace as the hill bottomed out. I sighed with relief and leaned back in my seat, but a small smile crept up on my face despite the fear I had felt a moment before. Looking back at my childhood, it was moments like this, spent in my grandfather's 1929 Chevy that I'll never forget.

Growing up around my grandfather meant many days spent underneath that car, our arms covered in grease, and a plethora of tools spread on the ground around us. It seemed that, in many ways, my grandfather and that car were a part of each other. To him, it represented a time of joy in his life, much as it does for me all these years later. I sometimes think that he and the car were reflections of one another. When one was dirty, so was the other. When one was clean, so also was the other. My grandfather took care of that car as if it were an extension of himself.

When my grandfather had a heart attack, and eventually passed away, only the old Chevy remained. The outside of the car was painted black and it seemed an appropriate color for the general mood of my family at the time. Without my grandfather around, that car went from a symbol of joy to one of despair for my grandmother. Much to my disappointment, she eventually sold the car. I was distraught at losing this last remaining piece of my grandfather. It had been my hope that the car would have been passed down to me so that I could continue working on it.

Many years passed, and the pain of losing the old car eventually lessened until it was all but forgotten. I returned to my hometown and visited the collector my grandmother had sold it to. A torrent of conflicting emotions roared through my mind as those old feelings rekindled themselves. It was there that I saw one of the most amazing sights of my life. My grandfather always kept the car clean and spent a lot of his time working on it, but I had never seen it like this. It looked brand new, almost as if it had just rolled off the assembly line for the first time.

The collector had not only kept the car intact all these years, but he had gone through an immense amount of effort to find parts for a car that had stopped being produced long before either of us was born. The collector hopped into the driver's seat and I climbed into the passenger side of the Chevy for the first time in over ten years. I was in a state of shock as he drove the old car through town with a calm assurance. I had always attributed the state of the Chevy to that of my grandfather so, for me, being in it once again was almost like traveling back in time. I almost expected to look into the driver's seat and see my grandfather there, his hands on the wheel and a smirk on his face as the car putted up the last few feet of the giant hill outside town.

My grandfather may be dead and gone from this world, but so long as his old car lives on, a piece of him will always remain. Perhaps someday another grandfather will find himself tinkering underneath the car, grease up to his elbows, with a wide-eyed grandchild standing behind him holding a wrench in his hand. And when that child grows up he'll know that a piece of his grandfather is still there riding through the winds of time inside that old Chevy.

Bombay

Sabrina Jones

The clock creeps towards sunrise,
ready for the new day, but a child
lurks among these wooden floors
As she mourns the emptiness
during this dawn, unaware of my
sleeping body cloaked under blankets

Her cries of loneliness fill the air,
and my ears feel her jumping
onto that one couch
There, her paws make contact
with the lavender curtain
Peering through the window
with no sense of time
There is only but silence,
until someone returns home

As the night falls upon us,
the shadows born under the
lights, become my greatest
enemy, and these eyes
may have become
afflicted with darkness

Black as the camera bag,
a ghost that hides in the
dark corners and becomes
the shadows, or the night itself
My hands pray to a God,
"Lord, please do not
let me step on this cat"
My prayers go unanswered

Among us, she stalks as her
midnight fur brushes up
against the blanched hallways
A spoiled royal princess, who
holds a constant ominous glare
if she has not fallen to slumber

If I am alone, in this darkness
Her breathing becomes deeper,
making her presence known
There, around the corner I
can feel the irritation of
a cat who was forgotten
by her caretaker
She will not let
me sleep in peace tonight

Autumn's Inspiration

Benjamin Johnston

Thanks for sending me the wrong package
On that crisp autumn day
That brown envelope
Battered like the dead beach leaves
That never fall from the trees
Trimmed in ruffled masking tape
And nervous cursive
Black permanent marker
Inside it you stuffed a thick paper towel
Wrapped like a warm winter blanket
Around a mound of oblong tablets
White like the meager snow piles
Lying about the fringes of my driveway
You were supposed to send small blue pills
Tiny shards of July's azure skies
I still don't know if it was
The honest mistake of a busy man
Or the contrivance of a clever crook
Either way I've not since

Experienced the silence of that day
The barren hole which my
Awestricken thoughts had vacated
The quiet defeat on the faces
Of my disappointed friends
Even the persistent autumn wind
Who howls through the faded ash and maple
Refused to lament on that day
Had I not been consumed by that silence
Like a mystic in deep meditation
The fog obscuring my thoughts
May not have dispelled
And like a caterpillar
Frozen in early December
I might never have realized
Or even desired
The capacity to
Transform my life

A Week in Soltan Kheyl

Mike Jarvis

Sunday

A day of rest and relaxation, in most places, but not here, not in Wardak province of Afghanistan. I had joined the army and been systematically broken and built less than a year ago. The drill instructors put in us a weird determination by saying things like “If you don’t make your bed correctly, you will die in Afghanistan,” or “If you can’t do this pull-up, you will die in Afghanistan,” It was funny to me now, that in the few months we had been living on this god-forsaken mountain, I had not once seen a row of pull-up bars and had been lucky to scrounge a pillow to lay my head on. Sundays back home would have been spent relaxing but here it was just another day of driving slow down the roads and poking at anything that looked like it may explode.

Monday

It was getting colder which didn’t mean snow coat season for the villagers, just that the ground had started to get so hard that it would be impossible to bury an improvised explosive device to try to kill soldiers. The statement now makes me laugh when somebody learns of my deployment and says “wow it must have been so hot over there.” Not for us, not for the 200 U.S. soldiers, 60 Czechs, and handful of Afghan army soldiers who inhabited the mountain side 8,000 feet above sea level.

Tuesday

We don’t get holiday time or sick time here, just one day per week if we’re lucky to bring our laundry down to the only female in the compound to be washed in an old shipping container, housing two washers, a dryer, and the ugliest female the army had to offer. After a few months she resembled a super model. She doesn’t like us engineers; being from a different unit she preferred to wash her own soldiers’ laundry before ours. On days we didn’t exchange hateful violent words with her we could expect to wear clean clothes in a week and a half.

Wednesday

A day like any other, up early, crammed into trucks and out poking things in the road with long sticks, or the hydraulic arms stowed on the

roofs of our vehicles. Again it makes me laugh when people try to argue that we should cut military funding, while I distinctly remember riding along slowly down the road with a truck held together by clothes hangers and ratchet straps. It was terribly cold now with highs soaring into the -30s. It would be nice if we had heat in the trucks, but the occasional dismounted patrol would warm us up enough to sweat, and then we would load back up into the ice box.

Thursday

Same old routine, but tonight it will be different. I saw the water truck load the infantry showers on the other side of the compound. After today’s mission I may be able to take a slightly warm shower, something that hasn’t occurred in weeks. Walking up the icy incline in pitch black to get to the shower tent is always fun. Soltan Kheyl, being so small, was to only use red lights after dark. I didn’t have one, so I navigated by feeling and by the generator noises all the way to the shower tent to find the pipes frozen, maybe another day.

Friday

Forget the shower tonight it’s been a while since I had spoken to my family. After our daily drive at 3mph for 8 hours, I make my way to the plywood shack that houses our six phones and few computers used to communicate back home. There aren’t any chairs in the room and when one soldier pipes up to complain, just for the sake of complaining, another answers back saying “They’re in the gym, for the memorial service of my fucking platoon sergeant!” That made my phone call seem insignificant, I stumble back to my room and run face first into a concrete barrier, the generator must be broken again.

Saturday

After waiting two hours sitting in the freezing morning cold, our mission gets cancelled, a deployment snow day. The cooks must have felt ambitious this morning. The chow hall is open, which is rare when it’s not dinner. It’s been the same every night, chicken, rice, and green beans. This morning it’s powdered eggs and left over rice, not four stars by any means but at least it didn’t come out of an MRE. After breakfast I finally find an open shower. It’s amazing how good a hot shower can make you feel after not having one for weeks. I know the refreshed feeling is temporary, but it’s the best I, or anyone else can do on this mountain; only seven more months to go.

Chasing the Red Dragon

Joseph Pitruzzella

It is midnight. She is still out there, patiently waiting in the dark by my uncle's door. My uncle has no plans of coming out that door and shooting the laser light around the yard. He has long since turned in. But she does not know that. Historically, he has come out of that door and shot the laser around. So, to her, there is a chance to get her fix. Bella, my miniature Dachshund is addicted to chasing the laser lights that they sell at the pet stores.

She came in to my life after my sister broke up with her boyfriend. The two of them having bought the dog together, broke up shortly after, bringing Bella in to my life. She is for the most part a normal dachshund. She likes burrowing under my blankets, sitting on laps, and "bye byes in the car." Her poison of choice, however, is chasing the red dragon.

When we first bought the laser it was fun watching her run up and down the hallway. She loved it and I loved it. I had never seen her more engrossed in something. Something was wrong though, I noticed. Whenever I put the damned thing away into the basket, she started whimpering and crying until I brought it out again. She would wait by the basket and glance up at it, and back at me. I felt bad hearing her cry all the time so I would play the laser light when she wanted to. It created family disputes. "Did you play the laser with her? She's gonna be up all night crying now." Eventually the batteries died out and we stopped playing the game with her. It is probably around here somewhere but we don't know where. Any time I go in the basket looking for a pen, or any time I go in a drawer or something that looks like a basket, looking for anything, there is a good chance Bella notices. She is hoping I bring out the laser. "We don't play that game anymore, Bella. It's silly."

She still chases any light source she can find nowadays, whether it be reflections of sunlight from a sun catcher or my uncle's watch face. She even notices those spotlights in the sky that they turn on when there is a grand opening of some important business, like the McDonalds in Cohoes. My uncle still occasionally will play the laser chase game with her with a laser of his own, shining it from his porch next door into the yard.

Overall, I think she might have had a happier life without ever meeting the laser. She used to enjoy chasing toys that I threw down the hall or around the yard, but they are no match now that she has had the laser. Maybe she is just getting older. Maybe I shouldn't be so heartless by depriving her of the laser. What is the harm in playing with it more? Maybe I just don't want to spend the time pointing it up and down the hallway, while she chases it ecstatically. Dogs have such short lives. She should be able to enjoy hers to the fullest extent. I think I might get a hold of another laser someday and just let her enjoy chasing the red dot. It's what she loves to do, and always will.

Walls

Joseph Stella

The glimmering of the sun,
Radiating off the white stucco walls.
Bestowing the gift of enlightenment,
Of what soon, will not be.

Tension rising, waiting,
Waiting to snap like a cable.
The light that once carried love,
Now delivers darkness.

Just outside these stucco walls
Rages a war, calling my name,
Yet I stay, hidden by these stucco walls
That scrape at my skin.

The war over, only two left to survive.
That room that once harbored light,
Now dwindles into a fiery pit
Letting darkness dwell,
Consuming all hope.

Forest Fire

Benjamin Johnston

On a smoldering cherry tree at sunset
A Cardinal, perched
Singing sorrow across the sea
Slowing livid waves
As they steam off the red coals
The yellow flames
The forest fire
Fizzled out
They're all gone,
The Goldenfinchs,
The Warblers,
The Meadowlarks,
The Wagtails
Dust, dragged off
Into charcoal shadows
By the moonless midnight tide

Loner

Ronald Craft

I was around ten years old when I was first introduced to the word “loner.” At the time I was sitting by myself in the cafeteria eating a PB&J sandwich when a friend of mine sat down across from me and said, “Stop being such a loner!” The manner in which he spoke wasn’t malicious, but it still made me wince. I couldn’t help but wonder if that’s how everyone else thought of me too. To my knowledge I was the same as everyone else, but for some reason there was an unsurpassable barrier between us. What separated me from them? This is a question I wouldn’t discover the answer to until much later in my life.

As a child this is something I had to continually deal with. My mother and I moved no less than a dozen times between third grade and my eventual graduation from high school. Add in the fact that she was working two to three jobs at any given time and I spent most of my time home alone in places where there were either no other children, or where I simply didn’t know anyone. I had no siblings, and so I often returned from school to an empty house.

The worst experience for me was changing schools at the end of third grade. Not only did I leave behind all of the friends I had grown up with, I moved to a school where I didn’t know a single person for the last five weeks of the semester. By that time everyone had established their own groups of friends, and so for someone new to pop in at the very end of the year made it awkward for me to find a place to fit in.

Time went on and eventually I did find some friends in later grades, but I always felt like I never quite fit in with the rest. Was this me wanting to be alone and separate from them? Not at all. One of the worst things that could happen to any child is to end up sitting at a lunch table by himself or herself. I clung to that group of people, even when I didn’t like them, because I knew that without them I would once again be the lone wolf watching from the edge of the darkness. Never part of the pack, but never far from it. When I was alone, other kids whispered about me in ways that made it obvious who they were talking about, food would be thrown at me, and bullying would resume. I desperately wanted to avoid that.

So long as I was part of the pack I was safe.

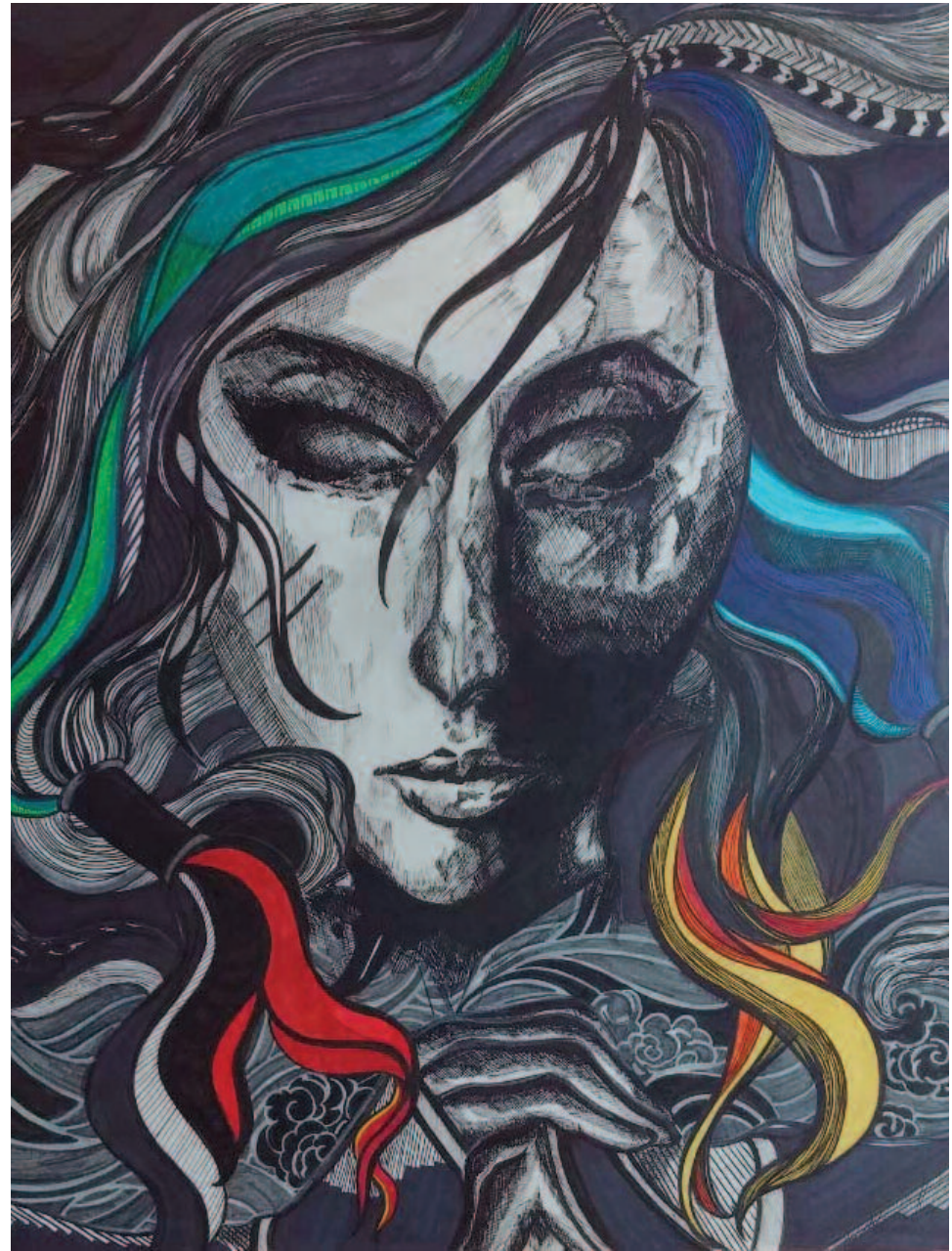
What is a loner? Is it truly someone who wants no part of other people? I don’t think so. Human nature says that we all desire companionship in one way or another and I feel that is true of most everyone labeled as a loner. It’s not that I wanted to be alone, but that I was forced into it by my circumstances. While before I was confident and popular, now I was socially awkward in a place that was unknown to me. I spent my days alone in an empty house and went to school with an empty heart.

And so, for me, that is the definition of loner. Not someone that desires to be alone. Not someone that doesn’t want the company of others. A loner is someone who, through circumstances beyond their control, has no choice but to be alone.

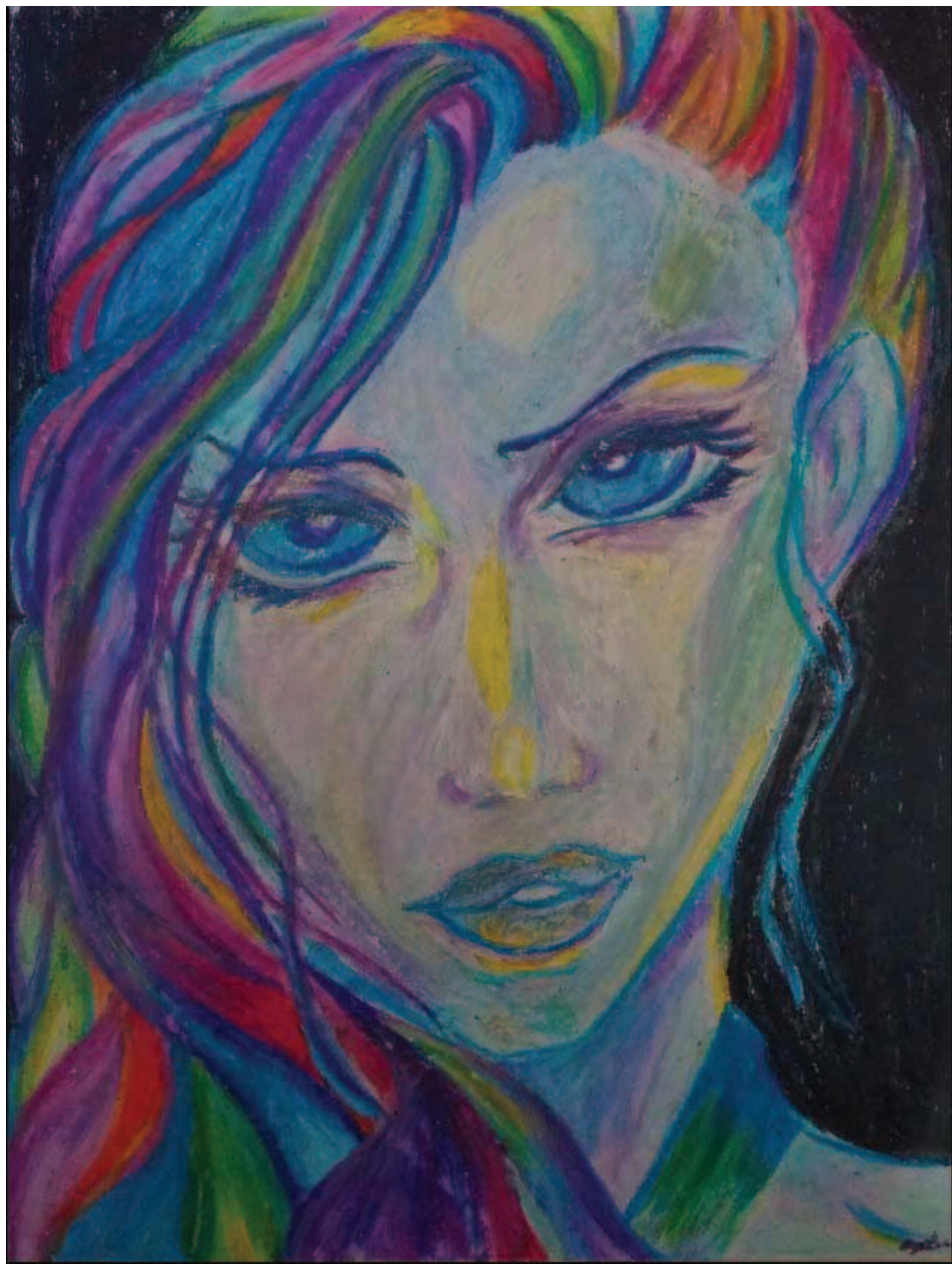
Ardent Fire

Brigitte Chum

I could swiftly spark legions of words, like the beat of a hummingbird's wings
I could breathe multiple characters into existence,
Their complexities like a spider's web
My fingers shift as my mind twists
Spurring my creations, churning my imagination
They burst forth like the rush of rain from violet gray clouds
But I struggle to formulate their stories, they evade me like wisps of smoke
Their movements are so rapid in my mind
It is equivalent in the attempt to grasp the wind
They find their way to my dreams, they keep me from my sleep
They laugh, they shout, they dance, they weep
I dream of their worlds, their dreams, their flaws, their strength,
their battles, their beginning and their end
They are the constructs of my mind
They are my companions when I am bored
And they tease me of forever stories
They are the words that form characters
The characters are the blocks that form worlds
The worlds are fragments of my world
And the world has created me
So the presence of my characters are fissures of my identity
An ardent fire that feeds my soul
And they burst forth like burning stars exploding into existence.



"Balance" by Brigitte Chum



"The Color of Beauty Sorrow" by Brigitte Chum



"Weep No More Amelia Pond" by Brigitte Chum

Malibu on the Rocks

Tom Helin

I am the proud owner of a 2001 Chevrolet Malibu. I purchased the car for \$2,500 from a used car dealer in January of 2012 and I believe I was swindled. Since purchasing the vehicle I have since put more than twice its purchase price into it for repairs and maintenance.

What was once a stunning white paint job is now mottled with tiny spots of rust that seem to be slowly eating away the paint like a cancer. The largest of these rust tumors trace the bottom of all four door frames and surround the fuel tank door. The interior, once gray, has become faded and yellowed over time to the point where its color if given a name now might be called putrefaction. The carpets and floor mats are forever stained a deep brown-black, the scent of which is enough to turn even a coroner's stomach. The carpets, however, are the least pungent among a variety of odors that the Malibu has to assault one's sense of smell. Between the smell of burning oil and gasoline fumes, you may also catch a whiff of what may be stale vomit, feces, or possibly rotten McDonald's beef patties from 2007, that are wedged somewhere between the back seats unable to be found and disposed of. These smells, hidden behind a clever pine tree that resided below the rearview mirror when I bought the car, attacked me as a lion might leaping from the weeds to devour its prey. The car yet held many surprises in store for me.

Under the hood, she boasts a powerful and magnificent 3.1 liter V6 engine that purrs like a kitten, if a kitten had tried swallowing thirteen marbles and a Christmas ornament. I have replaced the power steering pump and reservoir twice. Most recently, the power steering pump began to leak all over the serpentine belt causing it to slip and become shredded by the engine, all while producing a thick choking smoke that invaded every vent while filling the car like a gas chamber. Due to the rubber belt whipping around in the engine at incredible speed, it now gives off a lovely burnt rubber aroma and the hood is forever marred with beautiful black rubber slash marks and torn insulation on the underside.

The trunk leaks to the point that the carpet lining it is always wet, creating a breeding ground for unknown bacteria, mold, and other forms of life. The particle board, once used to hide the spare donut tire, has all but disintegrated from the moisture and has now become debris

scattered throughout the trunk space. The carpet has begun to take on the color of the rust that it hides beneath and I imagine that one day in the near future it will finally fade away as the bottom of the trunk rusts out, as a black hole, taking the spare tire with it.

Finally, the ding and clicking. I'm sure you have heard a car ding. Sometimes a car might ding to indicate that the door is ajar, the headlights have been left on, or that the keys have been left in the ignition. The Malibu dings randomly, suddenly, and incessantly. Married to this ding is the constant clicking that would be normal if accompanying a directional. This clicking however does not end when the directional is not in use. It continues. Without ceasing. Ever. It has become almost unnoticeable to me, and in fact, I find that I even miss it when in another vehicle. As a jest for new passengers, sometimes I enjoy putting on a few songs that I have found to match the beat of the clicking.

Like a bad penny, or a monster in a horror movie that just won't die, she lingers making life miserable. I attempted to sell her once, but my guilt over passing this curse on to somebody else was too great. When an interested party asked if it needed anything, I replied, "Yes, a nice home at the bottom of a lake." Needless to say, he did not purchase my demon with 6 cylinders. So for now, I guess I'm stuck with her, My Chevrolet symbiote.

In the Rear View

Emily VanLeuven

It is a cool crisp morning; the dew is placed on the grass like it has just rained. Stepping into the car and turning the key to start the engine, it roars to a neutral. Pressing slightly on the brake, you throw the car into drive and you begin the journey to grandpa's. You sit at the red light with the ticking of the left directional on, slowly releasing your foot off the brake to begin to take the turn. Quickly realizing this is not the way you should be going, you wait for the other cars to pass in the right lane and hop back over. Every other day you had to go left to speak to him and all the other ladies but today was not one of them. It gets tiring going there everyday, questions of the same origin repeating every day. Every day, you were waiting for that one-day to come that would end the rest.

Going up the road the wind escalated as you reached the top of the mountain. Wind pushing against the car felt like a force field keeping you to tell him what was really important. Dust began to fly into the sky encircling your car opening up at the blinding sun. You're almost there, only a couple more miles up the hill and you would reach your destination. You begin to cough, you feel it deep down in your lungs, each and every single muscle collapsing and releasing once again.

You see him sitting in his rocking chair, shifting his weight back and forth with his glass of sun tea sitting in the window behind him.

"Hi there Jess." You see his lips forming the words before you even open the car door. With lifting the latch to the car door you carefully step out making sure not to upset any of the dirt you will be covering.

"You haven't changed one bit," he states, clearly ignoring your baggy clothes that once used to fit your body perfectly. Walking up the steps you feel the floorboards shake. You wrap your delicate arms around his run down body and hold on for a second too long. Quickly you step back and bump into the coffee table knocking over all of your baby pictures. Picking them up you take a second to recollect on the good times you had here and how sad it was to know when it would be over.

"Sometimes things are cut too short." Surprised by his response you prop the pictures back up and sit down. Gasping for air you reach into

your purse for your inhaler. Too much commotion has been committed and fluid is filling your lungs. Pressing your fingers down on the trigger the steroids fill your lungs and you can breathe again. Only if this was a permanent treatment.

His eyes begin to fill with tears. You have scared him. He quickly looks away and you just stare knowing the truth. Maybe he knows too, shaking the thought out of your head literary a strand of hair falls out and falls between the cracks of the floorboard. Over an hour of small talk has gone by, this is it. It's getting dark and that long road ahead of you back to your home would be way too dangerous to travel in the pitch black. Standing up to leave, you stand looking down at him. He stands up too wobbling to stay steady on his feet. Now he is taller and looking down on you, you nuzzle your head into his chest and simply let the words leave your lips.

"Goodbye," you say, "I will be seeing you."

He watches you leaving the driveway into the only light that is left in the sky. In your rear view mirror you leave your favorite part of life behind you for the last time.

The Aquatic Breakup

Teasha Asheber

When I was a child that Olympic size pool was my very best friend,
Together like Kool-Aid and water we would harmoniously blend.
I spent countless hours in the bone chilling water, as the red hot sun
tanned my skin,
I would slap the water and watch the waves ripple with a big happy grin.
I would play for hours flipping, rolling and mastering the art of holding
my breath,
On a couple of occasions I scared my Mother into thinking I had finally
met my death.
Submerged in that world of constant splish splash and splash splash,
I was happy as a clam but indeed I was undoubtedly a fish.
I thought nothing on Earth could deter me from the pool,
Full of naivety about our relationship I was a childish fool.
I ignored the hunger pangs and the fact that my skin shriveled like a raisin,
My hair was kinky, and I was water logged but I was hopelessly brazen.
Throughout childhood I carried on the endless love affair,
My world turned upside down during my twenty third year.
I noticed hives and I had been itching for two days straight,
I started to wonder if it could have been something that I ate.
I went to the Doctor to gain some insight and satisfaction,
Immediately upon examination he replied “allergic reaction.”
To what though? The professional had no clue,

There was a questionnaire and some allergy tests to do.

A short time later he broke the bad news,

No more beaches or swimming pool.

I said, “Doc what do you mean?”

He replied, “You’re allergic to chlorine!”

The next time I went swimming it was a painstaking disaster,

I ran out of the pool quickly and still I couldn’t run any faster.

My legs were lobster red and my scratching caused a few skin rips,

I had blisters running from my toes all the way up to my hips.

I abandoned my life long friend that day,

My heart had been broken in a major way.

During the summer season I yearn to make up,

I haven’t come to accept my aquatic breakup!

Bring Me A Cookie!

Katherine Murphy

Coach Gene Gould was my tennis coach for four years during middle school and high school. We started our practices each year during August, and our season moved into the late fall. Coach Gould had gray hair and the bowed legs of many former tennis players. He could always be seen in a worn green baseball hat and stained white tennis shoes. Anyone who met him could tell instantly that his true passion was tennis. He wanted nothing more than to share this passion with as many people as he could. He took on hordes of junior varsity tennis playing girls year after year and never cut a single player. He nurtured his top players, while showing the basics to beginners. He wasn't like other coaches who would just boss you around then move on. I remember him once saying, "If you keep tossing that ball up so high when you serve, the hand of god is going to pluck it right out of the air." I laughed, but never threw it so high again. At the end of the day he would say to any player, parent, or fan who would stop to talk to him, "Bring me a cookie!" His gratitude was palpable those times that I did bring him heaping plates of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies.

While riding the bus to our matches he would always pass out articles and materials he had found helpful throughout the years. The subject matter ranged from honing technique, to how players from years past had lived their lives. He even organized an inexpensive bus trip to the US Open where we could see all of our favorite players perform. As a co-captain with one of my close friends, I worked very closely with Coach Gould going over schedules, our team roster, and organizing team parties. I even visited Coach Gould's home in Burnt Hills with my co-captain for a private lesson. Back behind thick, gnarled trees stood an old but sturdy tennis court. After our lesson, Coach took us to a small shed at the edge of the court. Inside were hundreds of mementos from his many years of coaching. I looked through decades of team photos dating back to the 1970s when even my aunt had known Coach Gould as her tennis coach. I could see Coach slowly aging through the pictures, until I came to the most recent one that I myself had presented to him. I was touched to know how much coaching meant to him, and that he never forgot his former players.

Eventually I moved on to varsity tennis with a different coach. However

during my senior year, Coach Gould asked me to manage the Boys Varsity team, which he also coached. The boys' season was during the spring, so I jumped at the chance to be involved with tennis after my season had ended in the fall of my senior year. It was great to be able to work with Coach Gould again, to get to know the boys' team, as well as to be able to hit the ball around during practices.

By the end of the boys' season, Coach Gould had been diagnosed with Cancer. He still attended every practice and match. He even came to our end of season party at a local pizza shop. Although by then, he had to be escorted by his son, and only stayed for under an hour. I never saw Coach Gould after that day, but he always remained in my thoughts and prayers.

One day this past August, I was leafing through the community newspaper, when I saw an article about a memorial service that had been held for Coach Gould. It turns out he had passed away about a month before. At first I was extremely angry with myself not only for missing his wake and funeral, but for missing this memorial service that had apparently been locally publicized. As I read on I learned that a permanent banner had been placed on the Shenendehowa tennis courts, and a high school girls' tournament would be held each year, both in memory of Coach Gould. I decided that I would attend this tournament every year I could. I can still go to the tennis courts, just to play for fun, and to remember my coach. He taught me the importance of not only following your passion, but of sharing that passion with others. Because of Coach Gould, hundreds of Shenendehowa alumni have come to love the game of tennis, and hopefully they will share that love with thousands more. I am not sure where Coach Gould is today, but I hope that he is surrounded by as many chocolate chip cookies as he can eat.

Somewhere in the Dark

Elisabeth Good

There is no reason to run.

The light that still remains at dusk is enough to see several yards away, and the trees are not yet dark and shadowy. Instead they are still and regal, like solemn giants standing straight and tall, kindly looking down and guarding the earth below from a gentle drizzle of rain. Their leaves whisper in the summer zephyr, but the strong branches are not swayed. The birds, their nests undisturbed, sing the forest to sleep. Squirrels and rabbits snuggle in their holes, contently watching as the moon peeks its face over the horizon, flooding the world with a silver sheen. No one can walk through this wood without feeling a sense of peace.

But she is running.

Her breath comes in short gasps, and she can never get enough. Her legs stumble on by instinct. Her feet tangle up in bushes and briars, and stumble over tree roots. Her eyes sting and her sight is blurred by the dripping sweat. The thorn bushes and tree branches leave blue blotches on her face, and even more thin red stripes on her hands and arms.

But she keeps running.

The scenery flies by. The birds twitter, and the squirrels chatter angrily. Her coming destroys the tranquility of the night, and her passing allows it again.

But she doesn't know why.

Behind her she sees It. It is there. Every few steps she glances over her shoulder, and every time It is a little closer. She tries not to look. She knows it slows her down. But she can't stop herself.

She can see Its legs; still shackled with the iron cuffs she had hoped would control It. There are flecks of steel on Its black fur, the remnants of the cage that had failed to contain It. Nothing had succeeded.

At first It was so small and weak It stayed in the corner by choice. But It started to grow. As It grew she hid It, to cage It, to forget It existed. And for a time that worked. But she still found it in the shadowy passages of her mind, lurking in the darkness.

She looks back again. The moon is cloaked in clouds, leaving the wood in darkness. She can only see Its eyes now. Its emerald eyes.

Suddenly she's flying.

Then she is falling.

The impact on the hard ground forces all air out of her. But she hardly notices that, or the throbbing in her head. She scrambles to get to her feet, but a low growl stills her. Her body freezes. Her mind is consumed by the fear of what lies behind her. She can't look. She won't.

She looks.

It stands still, watching her. Perfectly still.

She too, is still. She is done running. She's given up. She gave up a long time ago. So she cowers, a petrified relic of the light, waiting for the night to finish its work.

But It doesn't.

It is close enough to touch. It looms over her, still growling. But It doesn't move.

She watches It intently, straining her eyes in the darkness.

The birds are silent. There is utter stillness, as if the whole world is watching. Waiting, but not for It; for her.

It snorts, annoyed by her indecision. She looks into Its eyes, searching for what she's missing; looking for the key to solve the puzzle.

The clouds shift, and a tiny beam of moonlight escapes their clutches.

She lifts her face to the light.

And finally understands.

She has nothing to lose, nothing more to regret. She can lay down her head, and die the death of the defeated. Or she can stand and die alive... or perhaps not.

Something in Its eyes changes as Its patience snaps.

Time's up.

She steels her green eyes.

And stands.

Nightmares on Display

Danielle VanLeuven

The New York State Trooper G Headquarters has an autobody shop where they bring police cars and other vehicles as evidence. Behind this garage is a moderate sized parking lot less than half filled with cars, trucks, and other personal vehicles. With a wide variety of differences among them all, the only similarity was the fairly used quality that seemed to drape over them like a homemade patchwork quilt. Unfortunately, despite this modest display, something else spoke out with even louder silence.

On a stretch of grass alongside the parking lot, a group of vehicles rested in a single file fashion. Contrasting so differently from the parked cars, their uniting feature was the sense of fear and death that grabbed onto them with extreme lethal force. The ugly misshapeness of the poor monsters looked like the twisted insides of a demon possessed man already condemned to Hell; the things that were once deemed drivable will no longer live the same again.

The frame of each vehicle took to the form of what it struck. They flattened and crushed as the result of direct impacts. Twisted and bent, some appeared to have wrapped around an object. As for others, the damage continued up onto the roof, suggesting the possibility of an unfortunate rollover during the accident.

The glass especially took a hard beating. The condition of the headlights was certainly an obvious subject. Due to the damage of the bodies, the fact that many head and tail lights smashed wasn't even a guess. The windows, on the other hand, proved a more curious matter. Despite the harsh impacts they received during the crashes, the glass that became horribly cracked didn't smash into thousands of pieces. It warped instead, keeping the tiniest shards in place in a frozen wave of danger.

And in the midst of the chaos of death and destruction, one vehicle, a motorcycle, stood out of the crowd. This two-wheeler wasn't flattened and crushed or bent and twisted like its fellow line sharers. Strictly from appearance, the motor bike actually looked like it belonged in the parking lot. The reason for its place in line, however, was heavier and more devastating than any of the others. The motorcycle had stopped on a side road before driving onto the main street, and in a courteous

gesture, the driver let a young boy cross the street. Unbenounced to either the cyclist or the boy, a pickup truck came speeding down the main road. As the driver came around to turn onto the side street, he ran over the boy, killing him. Because of the death, the motorcycle was taken as evidence and given its place in the line.

Looking back, I now realize that many memories from that one moment in summer have faded into fuzzy images in the back of my brain. I even wish I had been more attentive in my observations. Though hesitation did play a role in the decision to watch from a distance, something else shot at my attention before the line of death even tried. Directly behind the garage, a parked flatbed truck carried a pickup decorated with bullet holes. There were bullet holes on every side of the truck and blood splattered bullet holes on every window.

In fear mixed with curiosity, I couldn't and didn't want to stop thinking about it. After asking the officers guiding the tour, they stated that they knew nothing about the truck. And to this day, I still don't know what happened. Then again, that might be a good thing.

Eternity

Laura Pierson

The wind is wet and tastes of salt. My feet pad shallow, damp imprints into the sand. There seems to be a tender anticipation in the way the waves lap onto the shore. They wait for the peace of the night and quietly wash the sand as they roll back to the ocean. The sun wavers almost impatiently above the horizon, the gentle reprimanding of a day weary to end.

To my left, the sky is the navy blue of washed out denim. It creeps slowly from behind the eroding cliff face, a patchwork of crumbling sand and webs of sea grass. Seagulls litter themselves across the beach, calling in their coarse voices and tossing themselves into the air, stretching their wings like kites. The breath in my nose stings with the lingering heat left by the sun that had pelted the beach during the day. The temperatures mix uneasily, cool air from the land and warm from the sea. They meet at the beach as if it is the reuniting of two friends and soak into each other, becoming entwined like the fingers of holding hands.

Clouds collect in the west and swarm towards the setting sun. The waves play softly beneath them, almost echoing the clouds with their snow-tipped crests. My feet hit the hard-pressed sand that has been swept by the tide. I cannot hear the steady thumps of my footfalls over the pulse of the waves. I can only feel the vibrations in my shins and thighs as each step is put down and lifted up again. A hazy line of beach stretches before me. It stretches behind me. It goes on for too long to see where it ends, or where it begins: billions upon billions of infinitesimal grains of sand, all with a specific place, shape, and identity.

Here is eternity. It is a taste of heaven, of living forever in that blank canvass of air, breath, and failing light. Because, really, what is death – what is life – in a moment like this, when God feels so close? His fingers are reaching towards me like the last bleeding rays of the setting sun reach up from the water to the sky. It is easy to believe that the other side of the world is nonexistent: that perhaps the sun is not even now rising across the globe, but that this really is an end. There is no fear in the end, in death. Behind me the crescent moon hangs in the black velvet of graying sky. The dark side of the moon does not exist, either. Its shadows are only black, empty holes. It poorly reflects the light of the sun, merely

a pale echo. It is accompanied by a scattering of pinprick stars, faraway and insignificant, like childhood friends half-forgotten.

The sun falters below the horizon. With sweeping brushstrokes it blends orange and yellow across the sky. The colors reflect off the rolling contours of the water and hide in the shadows of the crests. It blushes pink and soft orange on the white tips of the waves. The light seems to become more vibrant as the sun sinks farther away. It is as if it wishes to depart the world with one last, glowing, perfect memory. Before its soul leaves, it glints brightly in its eye. Its mouth opens and it breathes its last breath, but it is a sigh of relief, and on its exhale, scatters petals of clear pink throughout the clouds.

Darkness falls slowly. The world drifts to sleep. Its chest rises and falls. Its breathing is the steady ebb of the ocean. The sky over my head has been curtained with smooth, black silk. The stars are like the shimmer of moonlight reflecting off the fabric's wrinkles. Over the ocean there is a line of dusty orange, the last remnant of the setting sun. The majority of the clouds have dispersed, but the ones that remain stand over the ocean as majestic, gray pillars – or else, a stairwell that trips to heaven.

The unsteady cooling of the earth's surfaces has finally balanced out and even the wind forgets to breathe as everything goes still. The waves quiet further, as if the tides and currents pause to listen. All is silent; all is still. It does not feel like I am moving, just that I am swept up in the pulsing rhythm of the waves, and the murmur of the wind through my hair. It feels as if I am alone. But it is not lonely; the solitude is peaceful. The night air embraces me. It wraps its arms around my shoulders and expels the chill of the wind. Solitude is comforting.

I have to remind myself that I am not, in fact, totally alone on the earth. Somewhere in that unreachable darkness, other creatures breathe. It is easy, however, to push the thought of other living human beings out of my mind. I can pretend I am truly alone, truly departed. As the last shades of orange fade from the horizon I wonder finally what I am doing here. I wonder if I was waiting for something. Perhaps I am going somewhere. But there is nothing to wait for, and nowhere to go when treading the fencepost of eternity. Even so, I wonder how much farther I could walk before I met something, if, in fact, there is anything left to meet.

Gray

Wendi Farrington

My love for you is gray.

Gray as autumn that comes each year,

As misty mountain and foggy lake greet the day,

As wind blowing and chilling, make us draw near.

Gray as frost on newly fallen leaves, goosebumps on my skin,

As calm and peace inside my soul,

As raindrops and tangled sheets worn thin.

Gray as morning clouds, as time that takes it toll,

As steaming tea, and breeze; crisp and fresh,

As woolen blankets, just begun to fray.

Gray as frozen breathe, quivers down my flesh,

My love for you is gray.

Shrouded Thoughts

Zach Formica

I feel it,
With every new person I meet,
Every room I enter,
With exception given
To the room with my brothers,
My fellow warriors of summer,
No.
The seed of ignorance remains
Unplanted within our minds.
We fight,
We battle,
We scream, and yell
With passion and ferocity.
And as holds true with most
Lack of understanding
Breeds callowness
“tell me
How a man,
Can turn to an animal
For nothing but a boys game”
I see the words that sit
On their lips
But don’t dare come out.
We will work to change,
Change minds
Change perceptions
And with these scattered pieces
Of change
The jigsaw puzzle
Of knowledge and understanding
Begins to form.
The irony of being taught,
By a man
You thought could never learn.

What the Softball Field Has Taught Me

Karlee Shields

Throughout life we step foot in a lot of different places. Some of these places will be temporary and forgotten; others will be common and remembered for a long time. For me, this place became very common; I visited it almost every day for hours on end. This place has seen me at my best, and at my all-time worst. It has witnessed my first diving play, my first stolen base, and my first home run. It has seen all of my greatest accomplishments as well as some of my biggest failures, but for a while, I called it home because it was where I became most comfortable and learned patience, confidence, and to accept failure.

As spring approached when I was ten years old, I never would have imagined that my life would be changed for a long time. It was opening day of little league softball and it would be my first time stepping onto that freshly groomed diamond with a team and some coaches that would become my family for the years ahead. Each time I had practice or a game, there were certain things about the field that stuck in my mind. The crunching sound of my cleats running through the freshly groomed dirt, the smell of the fresh cut outfield grass behind me, the sun beating down on my face and arms creating streams of sweat that when the loose dirt would kick up you would soon be covered in it. The sound of my coach preparing us for what was about to happen, and during the game, the loud and sometimes not so nice yelling of the fans just beyond the fence. Although I remember these things like it was yesterday, it was the actual softball field that has helped me become the young lady I am today.

From hours of practice and up to four games a day, I have to say that the field, especially the batter’s box and the shortstop position has taught me patience, confidence, and to accept failure. Being the first person in the line-up means I am the first person that steps foot in the batter’s box. For me, that alone has taught me some important lessons that not only apply to the game, but to life in general. The first thing that the batter’s box has taught me is patience. It taught me to “Wait, wait, wait” as my coach would say. Don’t rush to swing at an okay pitch, wait on the ball and wait for that perfect one to come soaring down the center of the plate. In life, I have learned so far that you not only need patience with people, but with opportunity. If you jump on something just because it is there, it

doesn't mean that it's the right thing for you. I have learned that I need to "wait, wait, wait" and soon enough, good and the right thing will come my way.

Confidence was the thing that I struggled with most as a young girl. When I would be playing shortstop I would be extremely focused and ready to react at any time, but as soon as I made a mistake, especially one that would cost the team, my confidence would drop to zero and I would struggle for the rest of the game. My lack of confidence didn't last for a long time, but when it did last, it was bad, like coffee with no creamer bad. My coaches would spend extra time talking to me, trying to show me and tell me that I am "the best player out there" and that I need to show everyone else that I have confidence in myself. Although my coaches did help me get past this, it's right there in that rough, rocky, sunflower shelled ground that taught me how to become confident in myself. It showed me that when I made a good play to tell myself "That wasn't so hard. Hit it to me again." It also taught me that when I made a mistake, just bury it away. In doing that, I would take my foot and simply move it side to side in front of me. This would blow the dirt away that I just made that mistake in. It was gone. Think of the next play. My confidence was simply gained back just from doing that. In life, confidence plays a huge role. It is hard to have confidence as a teenage female, but I have learned that no one is perfect and having confidence in myself will help me get far in the future.

Lastly, and the most important lesson that the softball field has taught me is how to accept failure. In my many games played on the softball field, we have won more games than we had lost. That meant that when we did lose, it was as sour as a lemon Airhead. Failure doesn't only mean losing though. Failure could be as simple as missing a steal sign from your third base coach as you are standing on first. It could be not communicating with the other players, hence not making the right play, or it could be getting the last out of the inning leaving your teammate stranded on third base and not being able to score. All of these are failures in my mind and everyone deals with them in different ways. Since I am such a competitive person and strive for success, I never took failure very well. The field has taught me how to accept it. Instead of getting mad and blaming myself for things, it has taught me peace, second chance, and that nobody is perfect. Just looking at a field today reminds me of these things different values.

I don't think that there could have been another place in my life that has had the effect on me like this one has. Not only have I met some of the most important people in my life there, but I have met myself. I have been able to see what type of person I am and how the sport and being on that field has shaped me into the lady I am today. Everything that the softball field has taught me will never leave; in fact it will stay with me forever. If I could say one thing to that field, I would simply say "Thank you. Thank you for making me the strong, determined, passionate and confident person I am today."

Acceptance

Saba Shah

I can't do it Mom, I can't! Don't you see, I'm different? I can't do what normal kids do, I've tried... Mom, they stare at me blankly as if I'm not human... They mock me and they make fun of me, as if I am incapable of hearing them. They walk past me and give me looks that show that I am not welcomed in a place where they belong... Mom, during gym time, I can't even play the games they're allowed to play, because my legs simply don't have the strength to hold my body... And when it's time to go, I'm always the last one out. I try to be nice, I really do... But my efforts come crashing down upon me and each time it hurts even more... Mom, I can't block the kids out, I really can't. I can't simply look away at the next person who will stare me down as I stroll past them on the sidewalk next to our house. Mom, I can't stop the tears from falling when someone whispers quietly while pointing right at me and I, knowing quite well, what they are talking about. Mom, I can't help it if I feel bad for you waking up at the crack of dawn just to help me get up and get me dressed. It's hard Mom, it really is... Mom, I want to be "normal." I want to know what it's like when the wind is blowing on your face as you run to the finish line. I want to know how it feels to be swimming in a nice cool crystal blue ocean on a hot summer day. I want just one day, where someone looks at me, and says, "Hey, wanna join us for lunch?" or even asks me to be their partner for a project in school... But they never do Mom. The teacher always has to let another group make room for me, and of course, they all leave me out of it as if I'm not even there... But I'm different Mom, and I hope that one day the kids will accept me...

I can't do it Dad, I can't! Don't you see, I'm different? Dad, weren't you the one that told me love was blind? You told me that no matter what I do, you'd always be proud. Did you lie to me, Dad? It's hard Dad, it really is. I can't simply make my mind and heart want something that it doesn't. Dad, I am your son, have you forgotten how much I mean to you? Or does your disappointment and pride make you think otherwise? Do you refuse to accept me, because I cannot be the son you want me to be? Or is it the fact that I live in a world that does not approve of me? Don't you see it's harder on me than it is on you. I am the one surrounded by those that see me as "abnormal." I live in a world that wants to "fix" me. I live within a world that wants to "diagnose" me

and wants to find "cures" for the way I am. But Dad, no Biblical aid or therapy is going to change me. When you cry Dad, do you want to cry? Or when you laugh, do you force it out of you as if it's not supposed to happen? Dad, when you fall or hit something by accident, do you ask for it to hurt you? Are you capable of controlling your emotions, because that is something I have never learned how to do. Dad, when you look at me, your eyes fill with disgust. It hurts when I come to you, and you feel obligated talking to me. You don't have to say you don't want me there, because from the look on your face, I am able to tell. Dad, I want you to care for me the way that I care for you. All I want is for you to look at me and realize that I am the son that you loved a few years ago... I'm still the same, can't you see? Nothing has changed... But I'm different Dad, and I hope that one day you'll accept me.

I can't do it Mrs. Cedrick, I can't! Don't you see, I'm different? I come to college, and the first thing I hear is a remark about the black hijab wrapped around my head. You see, it's hard, for I have committed myself to God and in dedication, wear it to represent my respect for him... But it is something I am ridiculed about. I waited, for a very long time indeed, to come to college and finally be accepted for who I am... But instead, nothing has changed. I wouldn't even mind if I was treated as if I were invisible, but instead, I am treated as if I am the odd one out of the crowd. You see, words hurt... And I do not have the capability to just disregard them as if they are not said... And when we learn about 9/11 during our history class, you best believe that all heads turn back on me... Don't they see, I am not who they presume me to be? They let other peoples actions speak for me... And when I go to pray Mrs. Cedrick, people watch me as if I am some type of clown in the middle of a circus. I grow such an audience, and I feel shameful. Mrs. Cedrick, I am human... So, why am I treated as if I am something beneath that? The students, they say cruel jokes, and those that hear them, laugh. There is no one that has the courage to say that it is wrong... There is no one that has the audacity to speak up and say that I don't deserve this... But I'm different Mrs. Cedrick, and I hope that one day society accepts me.

A Great Work Experience

Scott Vaughan

Just out of personal training school in 2003, I returned home to northern New York from Florida to start looking for work. I spent the next few months working, for my family in their small country store training some family and friends to keep my schooling fresh in my mind. One day my mother approached me with the newspaper from a small city about 30 minutes north of the store. The newspaper read, “City of Plattsburgh looking for Personal Trainer to help with Biggest Loser program.” Of course, I had to jump on this opportunity as fast as possible. I filled out the application and received an interview the next day. I landed the job and was starting as a personal trainer and nutrition consultant for 60 participants in the Biggest Loser program, which I continued to do for the next three years. Some of the things that happened in this program were life changing not only for all the participants involved but also for myself.

It was about a month after the interview and it was time to meet every one I would be working with. I was working with two other trainers, Mary and John. We each had a different background, which made us unique and helped us to relate to our participants. Mary was a recovering alcoholic and had been addicted to drugs, but now she was a triathlete that won first or second place, in her age group, in every Ironman race she entered. John was a competitive runner for most of his life and I was obese for most of my life, which helped me relate to my group much more than the others.

It was much like the Biggest Loser show everyone weighed in, explained why they were there, and what they thought caused them to live their life style. We found that this was extremely difficult for all the participants; there were many tears and most of them were crying so hard they could hardly speak.

Despite the tears, this was great for them it helped them; finally say out loud what their problems were. This also helped them come to the realization that they finally had a spot to go where other people had the same problems. In turn, all this made the participants feel much more relaxed and comfortable about the situation they found themselves in.

Most of the participants had no idea what they were getting themselves into. For the first few weeks, due to the extreme life style change, people were vomiting and taking ibuprofen like they were tic-tac’s. In this program we worked with the participants three days per week and they had to come two more days on their own, which was requirement for them to stay in the program. Over the course of the next month, all of the participants that stuck with the program started to see amazing results. Some of them dropped almost 60 pounds in this time. The expression of shock on my participants’ faces was priceless. These people were not only feeling better and more energetic, but also the way everyone held themselves after these six months showed the boost in confidence they had gained.

Although there were many great things that came from this program, there were also some scary moments. In the personal training field, you work with people who have lots of health issues. Most of the people I worked with had type two diabetes and some had multiple health issues, whether it was diseases and/or injury, which made working with them difficult at times. In the four years, I worked with the biggest loser program the ambulance was only called twice, which is not that many times due to working with such high-risk individuals.

Over the next three years, I helped four groups lose one ton of fat, literally. All of the participants I worked with were some of the most fun people I have had the pleasure of training. The experiences I had working for the city of Plattsburgh changed who I was. Because I heard all of these troubles that people had to overcome, not only with their weight but just the everyday issues that everyone had to deal with. Nevertheless, I used my participants’ problems and helped them channel it in a productive way. This did not only get them the results they needed, it also made them change into some of the strongest individuals I have ever met.

