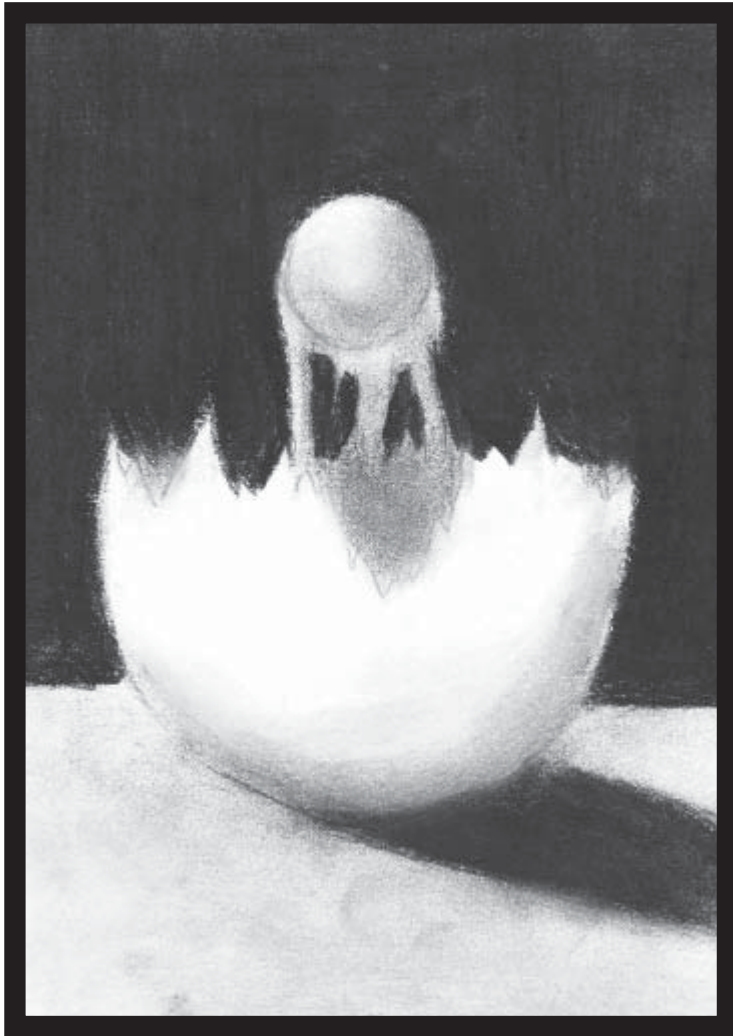


MICROCOSM



2011
VOLUME XXXVIII

Microcosm
Spring 2011
Volume XXXVIII

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Microcosm is a publication of the Copiah-Lincoln Community College Humanities Department, Debbie Bush, chairman, and the Art Department, Tom Ross, program coordinator. Inquiries should be addressed to *Microcosm*, P. O. Box 649, Wesson, MS 39191. The reading period for submissions is August through the first week of January.



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Microcosm is a digital publication of the Humanities and Art Departments at Copiah-Lincoln Community College. The digital journal is used to encourage writing by students and staff. Students are invited to submit their creative work according to the guidelines below. Students can also enroll in the Creative Writing/*Microcosm* course to foster creative writing talents and work on the publication. Winners of published material may receive cash awards and/or scholarships.

Submission guidelines:

Reading period: Submissions are considered between August 15 and January 15 each year.

Form of submission:

Work must be emailed as an attachment to microcosm@colin.edu. Work must be submitted in Microsoft Word. The first page of the work must contain your name, address, phone number, e-mail address, category of entry and an approximate word count. Works not submitted using these guidelines will be rejected.

Response period: The *Microcosm* staff attempts to reply to submissions within two months by e-mail.

Category of work accepted:

Short Stories – Should not exceed 2,000 words

Creative Non-fiction – Should not exceed 2,000 words

Essays – Should not exceed 1,000 words

Poetry and Lyrics – Should not exceed 100 lines

Plays – Should not exceed one act

Previously published writings and simultaneous submissions are accepted. Writings containing needless vulgarity or other offensive material are not accepted.

Rights:

Microcosm receives the right to publish the author's work on the *Microcosm* web site and in print if desired.

Payment: First, Second and Third Place winners receive cash awards.

Microcosm is a term meaning:

1. a little world; a world in miniature (opposed to **macrocosm**).
2. anything that is regarded as a world in miniature.
3. human beings, humanity, society, or the like, viewed as an epitome or miniature of the world or universe.
4. a digital publication of short stories, essays, poems, and art of students of Copiah-Lincoln Community College.



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Short Stories

A Born Truth

By Courtney Carter

There was something coy and abrasive about the wind that blew on the April morning. Though the smell of honeysuckle and purple magnolia tickled my nose, I could tell by the wind and the thickness of the air that a storm was brewing.

Of course I knew that—the whole town knew it. There was a storm brewing right under the roof of my house. Daddy had suspected Mama of being intimate with another man. Mama readily disagreed and shook her dark brown curls at Daddy with a fierce snap. But Daddy didn't see what I saw: Mama was wringing her hands. Mama would only wring her hands when she was nervous or when she was lying.

Daddy was going to find out that Mama had been cheatin' because she had her appointment with her female doctor. Mama made the appointment because she suspected that she might be pregnant. That would reveal Mama's ways.

See, it took Mama forever to get pregnant with me. After I had turned four Mama and Daddy decided to try again. After numerous tries and no pregnancy, Mama and Daddy went to the clinic to see what was wrong. Mama seemed as fertile as fresh soil; Daddy, not so much.

So if Mama is pregnant, it ain't Daddy's. Guarantee it.

Just as the first thunder was heard over the horizon, I heard the familiar rumble of the family Chevy that Daddy used as a farm truck. Mama rarely went anywhere without Daddy, so she didn't have her own car. On the rarest of days when Mama needed something or had an appointment, she took the old beat up work truck of Dad's while he drove the newer Chevy to work.

Instead of pulling into our driveway, I watched through the kitchen window as Mama barreled on down the road past our house. I had reckoned to myself at that moment that down that way was where her lover lived. I decided to put the whole thing out of mind, so I grabbed a book and headed for the backyard.

Just as I opened the screen door, I saw a rattlesnake on the porch. Daddy had taught me to shoot from a young age, just for the purpose of self-defense and warding off snakes. So without thought or hesitation, I made my way to the gun cabinet to find myself a .22 so I could take that rattler out.

I noticed two things right off. First of all, the cabinet lock wasn't fas-

tened. Secondly, Daddy's handgun, his prized revolver, was missing. Daddy held great pride in that gun, so I figured he just took it to work to show the fellas and forgot to lock the case. So, I found the .22, went out back, and blew the rattler to hell and gone.

I was just headed to get my book and get settled, when once again I was interrupted by the roaring of the work truck pulling into the driveway. For no reason at all, this caused a sudden fear in me. I passed through the kitchen to get to my room just as Mama shot through the door clutching a brown paper sack in her frail hands.

Now my Mama is a looker, and a sophisticated woman, but in that moment her looks made me believe that she was in a moment of desperation. Her brow was creased, her skin was pale, and her dark brown curls (normally kept neatly in place) were scattered wildly about her face, which was smeared with red lipstick. Her eyes were cold and wide—wide with anger or fright or both—I couldn't tell which. I decided to leave her be and head on up to my room.

From my room, I heard the rustling of the brown bag and Mama cursing under her breath. I heard the sink faucet turning on and off, dishes crashing and colliding, and Mama's curses getting evermore severe and louder.

"Anne-Marie!" Mama yelled for me.

I went into the kitchen with a pounding heart. Instead of seeming perplexed and angered, Mama just seemed ready to kick back. She was already unbuttoning her shirt.

"Finish those dishes while I change, dear," Then Mom was out to change.

I tried to focus on the dirty dishwater, the suds, and the plates, but Mama's love affair kept creeping up on me. Her hair a mess, her lipstick smudged—the nerve! What nerve it took for her to walk into the house my Daddy built with the evidence of her ways glaring off of her face! How is she going to explain that one? How would Daddy take it? Would Mama take off with this lover?

My mental shouting match was interrupted by Mama coming back into the room with neat hair and fresh lounging clothes. Her hair was pulled back and her face was washed clean of the evidence I had noticed before. I noticed the lounge wear was fitted and showing her curves. Who was she out to impress now?

"Help me with supper dear, I want it to be nice for Daddy," Mama said, but with her tone, I don't think she meant for it to be special. She was trying to be convincing more than sweet, I think.

I humored her. “What we having, Mama?” I asked.

“We’re having chicken breast, steamed potatoes, and green beans. I also stopped by and picked up Mrs. Martha’s pecan pie for dessert.”

“That sounds good Mama. Can I get Billy to come eat with us? He didn’t get to take me to the picture show this week.”

“You know, I saw him in town,” Mama said. “He looked ill. You should call and check on him, but I don’t recommend him coming over tonight. I saw him leaving the drugstore.”

“Oh, never mind then,” I said.

I began fueling over Mama’s ways again. She’s having an affair and trying to impress her husband at the same time. Again, I noticed the weather. It was growing dark, damp, and the roar of thunder that was once distant became a near neighbor to my home.

A few minutes later, I had just slammed the oven door from checking the potatoes when the lights flickered off. When they came on, Daddy was there among us in the kitchen.

“Mark, you’re soaked!” Mama exclaimed, “Come on darling, let me get you a change of clothes.”

Daddy’s face lit up at Mama’s sudden attention. His blonde hair was whipped about his face and neck from wind and rain. He gently grabbed Mama’s hand.

“Hey, Angel,” he said as he passed me.

Mama and Daddy came back, and now Daddy was in his pajamas. The weather had quieted down just as dinner was about to be served.

“Mama, after dinner, can Billy come over to have some pecan pie with us?” I knew he was ill, but I still wanted to see him.

“Actually, honey, I wanted tonight to be about family. Besides, he’s sick.” Mama started poking at her food, “and I have an announcement.”

This was it, I knew it. Daddy would know the truth. This room is about to explode. The world was about to change.

“Well ya’ll both know I’ve had some problems with the depression and swooning lately. I’ve seemed standoffish and I do apologize. I went to see the doctor today, sure that it was just the mid-life crisis, but I found out something rather surprising.”

“What is it?” Daddy seemed agitated that Mama was being so vague.

Mama reached across the table and grabbed Daddy’s firm hand. She forced a smile onto her cold face.

“Mark, it’s a miracle. I’m pregnant.”

I sucked in a breath and waited for the storm. I knew it had arrived. But instead of screaming in anger, instead of pain or tears or threats, Daddy jumped up and started whooping and hollering like a banshee.

“Praise the sweet Lord. It’s a miracle! Awe, honey that’s fantastic,” Daddy screamed. He leapt from the table and kissed Mama with a fervor that I’ve never witnessed in my life.

I knew that baby wasn’t Daddy’s. It couldn’t be. I mumbled something like “Congratulations, that’s great,” and headed on up to bed.

On my way to the stairs, a sudden thunder clapped and the lights flickered off, but when they came back on, my attention was at the gun cabinet.

It was locked, and the revolver was in place. I dismissed it, thinking Daddy had simply put it back without my noticing.

I went up to my room and grabbed the phone to check on Billy, but he didn’t answer. I figured he was really sick. Climbing under the covers, I let the sounds of rain pull me into a deep sleep.

It was another dark and stormy morning when I descended the stairs and found Daddy at the kitchen table.

“Come sit by me, Angel,” Daddy whispered.

I began to feel a knot in my throat. I was sure that he knew about Mama. I tried not to cry before hearing the news; I bit my lip and braced myself.

“Baby we’ve got some bad news,” Mama said, “Billy had some secret issues going on in his life,” her voice broke, tears filled her eyes. “He was found dead this morning with a revolver in his hand. He shot himself baby,” and Mama broke down.

The bad news washed over me like a sickening wave. Billy was dead. My boyfriend was dead.

It didn’t occur to me until much later just how deep Billy’s problems had been. I didn’t understand why he had committed suicide until about nine months later, when my little sister Gabby Michelle was born.

Gabby Michelle was born with strawberry blonde curls and green eyes—just like her daddy. She had chubby little cheeks and a crooked grin—just like her daddy. Just like the chubby cheeks, crooked grin, strawberry blonde curls, and green eyes that I had fallen in love with—on Billy—as had my own mother. As soon as I realized where the familiar features came from, I began to wonder to myself if Billy’s last kiss was worth the penalty of death, whether it was intentional death, or blindsided by the body that his passion had longed for.

Floating

By Glenda Dean Cavalier

I was awakened by the silence. It was a screaming silence, and then a few hushed whispers of gloom filled my senses. A familiar panic ran through my gut, up through my throat and out of my mouth came a defeated whimper. My cousin opened the door to her bedroom where I was sleeping. I pulled the frilly, blue blanket over my head to hide my face. She sat on the bed next to me, and I wondered what it would be like if I were a bubble with a brain. I would float effortlessly through the air and escape all bad things at will. I grabbed the pillow and held it tight over my ears so that I could shut out the sound of her hesitant voice. I lay there and remembered the double funeral of Uncle Joe and my cousin Terry. I could easily see the winding road that led to the graveyard, the way oncoming traffic pulled off to the side of the road and how the occupants of those old cars stepped out as we passed through town, the gentlemen with their hats tipped, the ladies with their heads bowed.

“Only in Mississippi. People sho know how to respeck they dead here, child,” Miss Chel whispered to me. She placed her dark, plump hand on my knee, and I felt safe. I remembered how cool my nose felt pressed against the glass of the car my mother was driving. The road was full of rocks and dry dirt. Swirls of dust lapped at the window, and I wished it were on the inside so that I could draw pictures with my fingers on the glass. When we came to a stop, the dust lingered. We sat and primped while we waited for the dust to settle, and then like magic, one by one each car in the procession began opening their doors. I wondered if they had all practiced that. Black dresses and dark suits filled the gravel lane. We walked, and I giggled as ladies in their high heels stumbled clumsily over the carefully laid stones. Awkwardly we moved deeper in to the crowd, and I could smell my grandmother’s Chantilly perfume as the wind wafted it my way.

“It’s Perry,” Eva said as she tried to move the pillow from my head. Floating just out of her reach, I could hear the twelve gun salute in the distant wood as Aunt Sarah stoically accepted the neatly folded American Flag from the man dressed in blue. The sound of gunfire echoed through the oak trees, and I prayed that a bird or a squirrel would not flop to the ground below. I became horrified at the possibility of dead animals falling from branches that shaded the cemetery. I wondered why my mom wasn’t looking towards the wood, and I scanned the crowd to see if anyone was watching for dead animals when I saw T-boy. I faintly heard, “C’mon June,

it's gonna be okay. My mama's gonna take you to the hospital to see him.” Eva's voice became mere static around my head, and I was once again looking at T-boy in my mind's eye. I could feel a rush of excitement as I waited for his eyes to meet mine. They didn't. I continued to stare, and in that moment I caught my first glimpse at despair.

“No, daddy. Wake up, daddy,” I heard him sob. The lowering of coffins began, and suddenly I realized the piercing permanency of what was happening. T-boy and Aunt Sarah were soon surrounded by well wishers and huggers. I remained on the outside of that circle, holding tightly to Miss Chel's leg as she stroked my hair. She carried me back to the car. Relieved to have avoided T-boy, I peered through the rear-view as the grown-ups said their goodbyes. We headed back to Louisiana, and as darkness fell over us, my struggle to sleep was unlike any I had known before.

Just as the static began to sharpen and the memories of that day in Mississippi began to subside, I could feel Aunt Wanda's hair on my face. “C'mon, cher lez. Go see Bubby,” she said softly. I wanted so badly to not move, to not acknowledge her. Instead I let her move the pillow from my head, and she touched my face. Her fingers were warm, and I wished that they would cover my entire head. I sat up, and now with both hands, she held my face. “Look at me, cher, June Amber, look at Taunte,” she instructed. I lifted my eyes to meet hers and my stomach bottomed out when I saw the streaks that ran down her face through her usually flawless makeup. I knew she had been crying, and I felt torn between needing to comfort her and wanting to float away. I sat there for a moment longer and tried to find the courage to ask what had happened. Language would not form in my head; words would not flow from my mouth.

Aunt Wanda scooped me up and in a huge exhale let out a cry. “I got you, babe. Taunte got you now and you gonna be alright, you hear me”? I stood there engulfed in her perfect comfort long enough to gather my strength.

“Yessem,” I said. Pulling away, I reached for my corduroys and quickly slipped them on. She grabbed her keys and my sandals as we headed out the door.

It was a long ride from the river to the twinkling lights of the refineries that lined the highway. Tears puddled in my eyes as I remembered riding with Perry down River Road in his white Camaro, singing “Life's Been Good” at the top of our lungs, and him laughing wildly when I told him how I wished I could work at a cloud factory when I grew up. “You know those ain't clouds, right Junie? Them is puffs of pollution comin' outta them stacks girl”. “No duh fart face,” I said with an obvious embarrassment.

I looked out the window, and as Aunt Wanda passed the last cloud factory, I closed my eyes. I could almost feel Perry reaching over to mess up my curly hair. Sweet assurance.

The sound of sirens woke me, and as I sat up, we pulled into the hospital parking lot. I saw mama through the car's window; she was outside smoking one of her long brown cigarettes. We got out of the car and gingerly approached her. Mama didn't notice us at all until Aunt Wanda touched her arm. I stood back and circled the cement post as they cried and talked. I heard bits and pieces of their conversation--"motorcycle," "E. J.'s bar," "legal limit," "Hopewell Springs road," "median on the street," "third floor," "ICU." I continued to circle until I heard the automatic door open. I left them outside, entered the corridor of the hospital and found my way into the elevator. I pressed the lighted three after the doors closed and leaned against the cold, metal wall. I felt like I was so close to him, and all I could think of was seeing him, hugging him and fussing at him for getting on that damned bike after being at E.J.'s bar.

The doors opened, and I could see Helen sitting Indian style on the floor. She was turning her wedding ring around and around on her finger and praying aloud. "Dear God, please. Dear God, please," she repeated the refrain several times before noticing that I had landed on the floor next to her. She cried, and I asked questions: "When can I go see him?" "How long will he be here?" "Is his motorcycle okay?" "You alright, sis?"

Laying down her rosary, she pulled me to her, "June, I don't know if he's gonna make it, and I don't think you're old enough to go in there." She pointed to the sign on the wall, "No one under 14 allowed in ICU." I didn't argue or complain. I just sat with her, and we talked about how they met, we talked about the summer we spent by the pool at I-5 Garden apartments, and how I knew she and he would marry someday even back then.

"You were only 6! How did you know that?" she asked with a smile.

"Cause my Bubby told me so," I replied.

"Uhm, is it bad, Hel?" I reluctantly asked.

"Yeah, Boo, it's really bad", she said as she lowered her head and began sobbing. "Why? What happened? What'd he hit? Oh God, was he drinking beer?" I felt myself nearing hysteria and thought surely I would faint. I didn't really want to know the answers to any of the questions I was asking, and when she began to answer them, I wanted to float away again. I sat, trying to brace myself to the floor. The answers came, and I saw flashes of T-boy standing near me in inconsolable despair. I wished I had hugged him; I wished I hadn't hid in the car to avoid his sadness. The sound of Helen's voice brought me back.

"He was really drunk, June. He hit the median that separates Hill-

Springs Rd. and Airline. He flew from his bike, up thirty-five feet they think, and he landed on his head,” I heard her say. I had pictures in my mind of what he might look like, and it was too much too raw. I lay on the floor there with Helen for hours the first day.

For the eight days that followed, I watched as family and friends walked in and out of his room at the designated times. I wandered around the hospital, into the tiny chapel, the cafeteria, up to the roof and to the gift shop. I bought Perry a small stuffed puppy with floppy ears and held onto it for dear life. Finally on the eighth day, mama came to me and told me I could go in. I leapt from my seat by the window and sprinted to the door that separated me from him. I stopped just short of opening it and looked back at mama. Her eyes were so tired, and her movements labored. I longed for Miss Chel.

“Go on,” she said as she motioned with her hand.

I opened the door and saw Helen standing by the bed with her back to me. The room was cool and smelled of oxygen. I approached and saw a young hull of a man lying in the bed. I scarcely recognized him as my brother. His long, dark curls had been shaven, a white bandage wrapped his entire head; he was terribly thin, and his face was colorless. I stared and I tried to cry, but I couldn't. I laid the plush puppy next to him and held his frozen hand. It worried me that he was so cold, and I tried to cover him with the white cotton blanket. I began tugging at it and moving it about so that I could cover every inch of his vulnerable skin.

“Stop, June. It's okay. We had to let him go, cher,” Helen said to me softly.

There had been talk of “unplugging” him, but I didn't really know what that meant until that moment. I stood just outside of reach of my dying brother, I wanted so badly to climb into the bed and snuggle with him, to tickle him, to make him laugh. But Hel and I just stood. We held hands with mama as she leaned in to kiss him one last time. I looked upon the fading whisper of a beautiful soul, full of vibrant promise and goodness, and I felt cheated.

Perry was buried in Greengage cemetery in Baton Rouge. I remember the ride to the graveside through the city. Red lights and stop signs hindered his final journey. Cars and trucks buzzed passed us as though his life meant nothing. I thought so many times about Miss Chel, about T-boy and Aunt Sarah and about that line of cars that hugged the side of the road as Uncle Joe and Terry passed through that little Mississippi town. I thought about that summer by the pool, about long rides in a white Camaro down River Road, about laughter and sunshine, about my brother's big hand messing up my curly hair. I felt such sadness for mama and for Helen. And

for myself—there was a disconnect.

As we made our way to the graveyard, I held tightly to Helen and mama, refusing to let go of their hands for fear of floating away.

Twenty-nine years have passed, and I've since left Louisiana, but sometimes I return. I ride my bike out to River Road and listen for the hum of my brother's Camaro and the heartiness of his laughter, fading whispers float on the wind and mess up my curls as I sing Joe Walsh to the heavens.

"Enjoy the ride, Junie girl," I hear him say. I feel a warm assurance there, a familiar sweetness, and I smile.



Illustrator: Joanna McKenzie

Time Travelers

By Jeani Davis

Here we go again off to another small town, no-where. It never fails. Just when we kids start to get comfortable, our parents yank our chains and we are crammed into the back seat of an over-stuffed station wagon. It seemed like we were in the car forever when we pulled up to an old white two-story house with peeling paint and missing shingles. The house looked as if it had been deserted fifty years earlier and not touched since. Man, it is bad enough that we only own what we can cram in and on top of the crappy station wagon (that just won't die), but do we always have to move from one shack to another? Frankie and Billy are already running in to get the first pick of rooms. I have reached the point of not caring anymore because I know I won't be in a room long enough to care if it's the biggest. Tomorrow should be a real blast.

As a new student in Mrs. Wise's ninth grade class, students are required to stand and tell the rest of the class something about themselves. Nervously, I stand and say "Hi, I am Jesse Taylor. I am 15 and I have a twin brother and sister in the 7th grade whose names are Frankie and Billy. We are time travelers."

As the class erupts into laughter, I can't help but smile as Mrs. Wise jumps to her feet, quieting the class. She tells me to explain what I mean. I proceed to tell the class that my family has moved so many times that my siblings and I gave ourselves the name as a joke because it is always just a matter of time before we are traveling again.

After class, everyone was super cool and wanted to ask me more questions, like which one of the twins was my sister and why did we have boys' names? And what house did we move into? I guess my introduction was a big hit and Frankie, Billy and myself made friends quick.

We were all hoping we would get to stay in Charles, Nebraska this time. Charles was a small town with one stop light on the main highway, and it really didn't even need that one. It had a community pool, a Dairy Queen and the main reason my dad chose this one-horse town was because it had two bars—just one hundred drunken steps apart.

Good ole Kenny, or Mr. Wonderful as we kids like to call our father, hasn't been able to keep a job in six years. And with every year, the drinking gets worse, another reason I became a time traveler, "self preservation" they say. Our mother Becky Lin is a good mom, for the most part, if you overlook the fact that she didn't have the backbone to stand up to Mr. Won-

derful and keep him from dragging us from one town to the next. I like to believe that she would find her backbone she lost long ago if only she knew the truth.

Things seemed too good to be true; we had finally made a year mark in one place. Frankie and Billy are a hit with the whole town. Of course, it was hard not to love the tow-headed, blue-eyed, bronzed devils in disguise. The twins favorite pastime was pulling pranks on me and my new best friends Amy Gedert, Judy Jones, and Jennifer Jochum. Amy, Judy, Jennifer and I have been inseparable since we formed our little clique. We are the most popular girls in our grade.

Amy and I are the good ones at sports and Jennifer and Judy are the cheerleaders in the group. Funny thing is both Amy and I are also the poor ones in our group while Jennifer is the richest girl in our town. Judy is somewhere in between us. Somehow we managed to make the friendship work, that is, until Clint Maxwell moved to Charles.

He was the hottest boy in Charles, and lucky me, he is now in Mrs. Wise's homeroom class. I did not know it at the time but Jennifer and I had both set our sights on Clint, and I seemed to be winning—only I was losing my best friend Jennifer too. I just couldn't lose my friend over this guy; my friends were my salvation. Without Jennifer, I would have one less place I could go to escape and that is just too frightening to live with. So, I decided, then and there, to let her have Clint.

I am heart-broken to know I have to let go of the first boy I have ever felt anything for, and I worry he may be the only boy I will ever have feelings for. Besides, who would want a tarnished girl like me anyway? And, I know I should not get close to anyone because just when I do, our parents will be moving again. The harder I try to stay away from Clint, the more it seems I run into him. I don't know how much longer I can keep pretending I don't like him. He is all I can think about, and to make matters worse, in class, I catch him staring at me all the time.

After school, Clint and two buddies come up to us girls. And, as Clint comes up behind Jennifer to slip his arms around her, he looks me in the eyes as if to say I wish this was you. Clint's buddy Matt tells us he, Lane and Clint are all going out to Sutherland's Creek, and they want us to come with them. Of course, Jennifer and Judy are all for it, and Amy and I look at each other like, "How can we get out of this?" I try to tell them my dad would be mad if he found out, but the peer pressure won and I was pedaling my bike right along beside them.

Once we get there, the boys start pulling off their clothes and yelling, "The last one in is a rotten egg!" The girls and I look at each other, "Are we really going to do this?" Judy was the first one to get undressed

then Jennifer.

Just as I was taking off my clothes, I hear a gasp from Amy and then I realized what she was looking at. It was the bruises. I had forgotten about them in the excitement of the moment. I quickly pull my clothes back on and take off on my bike as fast as I can go. I don't stop until I am safely in my room. "Oh, God, how am I going to face them again?" I say out loud.

The next day at school I stick to myself not really talking to anyone. Clint doesn't even look at me, which is a blessing. I could not stand to see the look in his eyes now. At the end of the school day, I take off for home as fast as I can. I hear someone calling my name, but I keep going.

The next thing I know, I am being tackled to the ground. I scream and start hitting and kicking, but then I hear a familiar voice. It is Clint telling me to stop. So I do. Right then, he kisses me and I have never wanted anything more. Clint helps me get to my feet, and holding my hand, he walks me toward my home. On the way home, it was Clint who broke the silence first. He told me he was sorry he tackled me, but he had to get my attention somehow, and he knew I wouldn't stop walking any other way.

I couldn't help but laugh at how serious he was. To my surprise, Clint suddenly asked, "Jesse will you be my girlfriend?" I was scared to answer him. I did not know what to say. He told me he had broken up with Jennifer at lunch earlier that day. Then, I saw the look in his eyes and sensed his struggle while he waited for me to answer. I smiled and said, "Yes, but on one condition. We keep it a secret for now."

Clint wasn't very happy at first about the condition, but he agreed. We were almost to my road, and I couldn't let my Mr. Wonderful see a boy walking me home. Also, I could not let Clint see Mr. Wonderful in the shape I knew he would be in by the time Frankie, Billy and I got home every day from school. Since mom was having to work, I knew she would not be there to run interference either. I had to tell Clint that it would be better for me to go the rest of the way on my own. Clint looked sad, but he agreed and gave me a quick kiss. He asked if he could have my cell number and call me later. My face burned as I had to tell him that we did not have a phone. He said, "Okay, then can I call you on your house phone?" I had to explain that we did not have any phone, no phones at all. It finally sank in to Clint that the rumors he had been hearing about how poor we were must have been true. He smiled and said, "That's okay, Jesse. I will see you before class starts in the morning. You have a good night." Then, he was headed off in the other direction. I turned around to see if he was looking back and he was; smiling, he waved and I waved back.

I was so excited that I ran the rest of the way home. But, my excite-

ment was quickly shattered as I heard Frankie and Billy crying and saying, “No, Dad. We are sorry. We didn’t mean to wake you up. Please, don’t spank us!” As I walked into the living room, my dad was just about to hit the twins. I started yelling at him to leave them alone. Just as I stepped in between him and the twins, he backhanded me, knocking me to the floor. I yelled at the twins to run lock themselves in their room and to stay there until mom got home.

By the time our mom finally got home, Kenny had drunk another six-pack and was once again passed out on the couch. Becky took one look around at the beer cans piled in the floor and on the coffee table and started cleaning up after him. When she saw my face, she did not even bat an eye—as if the purplish mark that had formed was not even there.

At that moment, I actually hated my mother more than I did the Mr. Wonderful who stumbled into my dark room a year ago, in the middle of the night, after drinking at the bar for hours, slurring the words “Becky, I am home.” Stinking of booze, he crawled into bed, ignoring that I kept pleading, “It’s me, Daddy! It’s Jesse!” I snuck out of bed as soon as he had passed out and went down the hall to the bathroom and ran the hottest shower I could run to scrub the nightmare away. If only that was possible. That next day it was as if he had no idea what he had done to me, except his drinking and the beatings became worse than ever.

The nightmare never happened again and I could live with the beatings, maybe I deserved them. But I couldn’t allow sweet Frankie and Billy to suffer for our secret. I get up early for school so I can try to cover with make-up the bruise that has now formed on my cheek. Doing the best I could, the twins and I head to school.

Getting there early, I go find Clint at the picnic tables that we all meet at before class. The gang is all there, so all I can do is quickly smile at Clint and he winks back. Then at the same time, he and Amy notice the bruise on my cheek. Amy bursts out, “Oh my God! Jesse what happened to your face?” Of course, I blow it off, saying I walked into a door Billy threw open. “It was an accident guys, really,” I say. I did not know it but Amy, Judy and Jennifer had gone to their parents about the bruises they had been seeing on me and their parents got together and called the child welfare services.

The next day during class I was called to the office to check out. I round the corner and Frankie and Billy are already there. I know without even being told what is happening. By the horrible looks of despair on the twins’ faces, I know we are about to become time travelers again.

The Definition of Me

By: Jason Giangrosso

September 4, 2009
Moving faster than life itself,
Tearing away from love and health
The choices we make
Decide our fate.
Empowering knowledge to those who care.

I see them walk in every morning. They sit. They stare. They have no interest in anything I am saying and are out the door at the first sound of their freedom bell. They want so much out of life, but they don't know how to get it. How can these kids touch the sky when their environment is keeping them on the ground?

--Entry from Renee Baudin's diary

As I collect the stacks of tests and essays that accumulated over the week, I feel a slight wave of relief knowing that school will be out on Monday for Labor Day. I need the extra day to regroup and to hopefully spend time with my eighteen-month-old daughter Audrey. Ever since I became head of the English department at Chalmette High School last month, I have barely had enough time to be a mother for her.

After picking up Audrey from daycare, I go through the McDonald's drive thru and order my supper for the night. She is the only person who can put a smile on my face these days, but I am just too worn out to play with her.

After I finally put Audrey down for the night, I settled down at my old wooden desk to look over my students' work. The assignment was to write an essay about what a perfect life would be like. The first paper I pulled out appalled me. "I think that tha perfect world woold be mee havin lotsa mony and..." I couldn't even finish it. The next four papers started out the same. These kids are after nothing but money, and they don't have any realistic dreams. How do they think they are going to make it in this world if they don't set reasonable goals?

Just as I was about to turn in for the night, I found the energy to grade the final essay. I looked at it with disdain. How did this student manage to get all of these green stains on here? I unwillingly pushed my worn out reading glasses over the bridge of my nose and forced my tired eyes to read the short paragraph. "A purfect world wold bee one wher I can go too

college and get a good job so I can raise my son. I just want him to have a better life than me.”

I stepped away from my work, exhausted, and went to bed. As I tossed and turned in the night, my thoughts continued to drift to that one student’s paper.

I have got to do something about this.

Tuesday morning was very exciting. I sprang out of bed and dressed hurriedly, wanting to get to class as early as possible. I went through my morning routine like a madwoman. When I finally stopped to take a breather, I found little Audrey just staring at me with a playful smile on her face. It’s times like this that I wish her daddy could see how beautiful she has grown to be.

After prying myself away from my little angel at the Stay and Play Learning Center, I drove at lightning speed to get to school. Chalmette High, prepare to have a new beginning.

When my class started, I saw the same students sitting in the same spots thinking that this would just be another ordinary day. I decided to start the class off with a bang—literally. I placed my garbage can on top of my desk for all to see, then I grabbed the large folder containing the essays that I had graded over the weekend, and I threw them into the garbage can with the force of a high speed car crash. BANG! As I looked up at my students, I saw that I had achieved my goal of getting their attention. “Good morning, class. I hope you all had a great weekend and I hope that you are all ready to start a new adventure because from now on, this is no longer a class; it is an adventure. We are going to start from scratch.” I could see a wave of confusion and worry sweep across my large class of forty-three. I handed each student a crisp new composition notebook and a pen. “Okay, this is where our adventure begins. Open up your new notebooks and write your name, your age, and a few sentences about yourself, your life, and your family. Write down what you love, write down what you hate. Don’t hide anything. This entry is strictly private and you may choose whether or not you’d like to share it; however, the next entry will be more open.”

As I finished instructing the class on the assignment, I saw a sea of emotions. Some students took hold of the activity and were writing so fast that I swore I saw smoke rising up from their pages. Others just sat and stared at me, probably expecting me to start laughing and tell them that this is just a joke. That was not an option. “You will regret if you miss out on this first assignment,” I warned those who were still staring blankly at me.

After about twenty minutes of writing time, I told them to put their pens down for a few minutes so we could talk. “So what do you think the purpose of that assignment was?”

I received blank stare. Not a single student understood the purpose of the assignment. “This assignment was to introduce you to yourself. How can you start a journey when you don’t even know who you are? Now that you have properly introduced yourself to you, turn to the next page, and let’s start on this life-changing adventure.”

“Is anybody willing to read their essay to the class?” I asked hoping that some brave soul would share his or her story. But they just stared back at me. “Okay then, I’ll read you my introduction. ‘My name is Renee Eileen Baudin, named after my great-grandmother. I am twenty-seven years old and I am from Violet, Louisiana. My parents are John and Cindy Baudin and I am an only child. I love my little girl, my family, and being able to teach my students. I dislike rainy days, Mexican food, and the color green. I dream that I will be able to encourage every one of my students to achieve his or her goals.’ See, now that wasn’t that hard. Is there anyone who would like to share their story now that I’ve shared mine?” Again, there were no responses. I have to get these kids to open up.

“Okay, your homework for tonight is to write another entry, one that will be read to the entire class tomorrow. The assignment is to tell of the best and worst days of your life. See y’all tomorrow!”

That is how the very rough start began; however, by the end of the year, I was proud that all of my students had graduated and thirty-five of my students had been accepted to colleges across the state.

The Downfall

By Gavin Mendus

Prologue

As we saw the intimidating invasion force drawing ever closer to our planet, we felt that our certain doom was coming; the Zaken Empire had been taking over planets, edging their way to our home, and finally they arrived. The military had fought and what a stunning fight it was, but unfortunately, that was not enough. The destruction of our planet and our entire race would have been inevitable if had we stayed there. That is why we sent all civilians to one of our experimental colonies for the time being. The Zaken Empire has no idea of the planet's existence, so our citizens should be safe there.

But before they had arrived, there had been an elite team assembled to flee from the planet and to fly to each planet taken by the Zaken Empire, and finally fight back in this war. There are many of us involved in this mission, from the lowest in engineering all the way up to myself, Captain Berklon. Each one of us is required for the mission, and it shall take everything we have to be able to fight back against a whole Empire with just one ship of soldiers. Although this is the largest ship ever manufactured on our planet, we must do everything we can. We cannot let this travesty go on any further than it already has.

As we left we knew that there are only two things that will become of our planet once the Empire destroys our military. They would either use it as they see fit, or they would destroy the planet if they have no need for it. As we flew off onto new planets to take back, in the name of suppressed aliens everywhere, we realize which of the two it is when we saw the light from our planet's destruction following us into space. We realize that now we have no home. There is no place for my people to feel safe, nowhere we can return to, but this only ignites our passion for the downfall of the Empire even more.

Chapter 1: Our Race

We were able to escape with the destruction of our planet covering our trail. We are safe for now. I look at this elite crew of my newly acquired ship, and I cannot help but feel as if this position does not belong to me. However, I must push such thoughts out of my head. Whether this is something that I deserve or something that I was forced into, I am here to save not only our species but all life forms from this deadly menace that is

an infestation on the universe.

I soon decide that action must be taken, so I carry forward to the navigation room. This room is by far the largest on this entire ship. Many untrained might think this is a hanger for smaller ships, but in fact this is where all the planning takes place. I approach the navigational director. "Pull up the Nav Map," I tell the obedient soldier. Without saying a word he swiftly brings up the map, salutes me, and resumes his duty. Soon a huge three-dimensional map of the whole known universe envelops the entire room, leaving us standing inside of it. Every little detail can be seen on the map, from the smallest insignificant asteroid all the way to the largest scorching sun. As if to be a cold reminder to us all, the place where our home was always located is now filled with floating debris and silence. All those memories, all those people, just ripped away from us in an instance.

I force these gut-wrenching thoughts out of my mind so that we can begin our efforts against such a villainous fiend. I soon grab the ComLink on my chest to broadcast a message to my entire crew. "All members of this crew assemble at the navigation room immediately. It is time that we begin preparations for our first attack." As I stand in the middle of this map waiting to deliver my speech, I am taken back by just how enormous and beautiful this universe really is. Part of me knows that we must stop this evil from ever rearing its ugly head again if I want to save everything in this beautiful place from being destroyed. Another part of me wonders that if we ever destroy them, will another great evil take its place.

Soon the room is filled to the top with all the people from my race. All my people have varying skin colors; they can range from pale white to midnight black. We all have hair on top of our heads ranging in colors from green, blue, red, and every color in between. The one thing, that all of my species has in common are our eyes. This is not because we are born this way, but rather because we are given biotic eyes at the moment we are brought into this world. For this reason, we all have blue eyes. But if you look closely, you will see all the small mechanics of our eyes working to constantly send messages to our brains. These biotic eyes are able to see much farther and much more than our regular eyes could have ever been able to. Perhaps this is the reason for our survival up to this point. At any rate, I must give my people guidance so that all these traits will never be wiped out.

Chapter 2: The Team

We are now closing in on the planet Gorchon. In the navigational room, it was decided that this would be the optimal striking point for our

resistance to begin, since this planet is lightly guarded. Since the device they use to monitor the orbit of the planet cannot detect something as small as a three-man drop ship, I have selected two soldiers and myself to drop onto the planet to halt all productions of their factories. The two soldiers I have chosen are easily some of the best warriors throughout the whole universe. Their names are Zakion and Parklo. Zakion is an extremely tall soldier. He measures to be about 7' 2" tall and is very dark. The red hair on his head seems to shoot out of his skull as if it were a flame. He is the best our planet had to offer when it comes to hand-to-hand combat; he is incredibly useful with a gun, and he has never once had an officer speak ill of his abilities. The one problem with him is that he can many times be too over-confident and charge head first into a battle without a proper plan.

For this reason, I chose the second soldier, Parklo. He is known as one of the most, if not the most, intelligent soldier in the whole universe. When he was three he cracked a mathematical code that not even our top scientist could figure out. He has created some of the weaponry that has helped our resistance even be possible. No one has been able to exactly figure out how his brain operates, but however it works, it is the fastest-working processor out there. Even the strongest computers that we have constructed pale in comparison to his rapid thinking. He has very pale skin with light blue hair. He has a small frame, but in no way does he look sickly. No one has ever seen him eat, so none of us are really sure what he eats, if he eats at all.

As I walk down the hallway, my two teammates join me to walk to our drop ship. I can feel the anticipation welling up inside of me. I feel as if it is going to eat me alive. Suddenly, I feel Zarkion's hand on my shoulder. "Listen, me and Parklo know that there is a good chance we will not survive this mission, Captain. So, we just want you to know that we are here for you and we will follow you into the depths of Hell if that is what it takes to destroy these damn assholes." I look at Parklo, and he shakes his head in agreement with Zarkion. With my team's confidence in me and my confidence in my team, we set off on what could very well be the last time I am ever Captain of this ship.

Chapter 3: The Landfall

We finally make landfall after what seems to be an eternity of waiting in the drop ship. As I look at my chronometer, I realize it was less than ten minutes of falling in actuality. We leave the ship behind and begin our long trek onto the main factory to shut down their horrible operations. We are not even sure what is made on this planet or even what the planet could

have been used for. As I look around I see that the whole planet is a huge wasteland; oxygen levels are very low, and there seems to be no life forms around for miles. To ensure our safety, I tell my team, “Do not remove your oxygen masks; it seems as if the air is filled with very little oxygen and an abundance of toxic fumes from the factories. Just one minute of this would surely kill any of us.”

It seems no sooner had I spoken the words that we see something coming our way. “Ready yourself team. It could be anything” I warn them. Just as we raise our weapons, I suddenly, with horror and relief, realize who it is. It is my prior superior who died in battle not three days before our planet was destroyed. “We had hoped you would pick this as your first target.” He tells me, almost menacingly. “What do you---” But before I was able to even finish the sentence, I felt myself losing consciousness along with both of my teammates.

Chapter 4: The Deceit

As I slowly regain consciousness, I am trying to get an idea of where I am at. It seems that I have been bound to a steel table with small force fields around my wrist and ankles. The table is tilted so that I can see everything that is in front me. There is blood splattered all over the floor. There are tools here that are so grotesque that I cannot even imagine using them on another living being. As I wonder what is going on I see a figure open a door, pouring light into the room. He quickly closes it and walks slowly towards my position. As he strolls closer and closer I realize who it is, my prior superior, Gazo. I stare at him in amazement.

“I can see that you are surprised to see me here. I cannot say that I blame you. If the tables were turned I would be stunned as well my pupil.” He tells me calmly. “What are you talking about, what’s going on here?” I ask, almost hoping to not hear the answer. “There are many lies I could tell you. I could say that I miraculously survived my near death, and now I am here to help you. I could tell you that I have no idea what’s going on, and that I am just as much a victim in this as you are. But to be honest, that is all just pointless.” He tells me very matter-of-fact-like. “I am actually one of the leaders of the Zaken Empire; I ordered the attack on our planet just to see if you could escape.” My worst nightmares have come true. “What was the point?” I ask angrily. He looks at me calmly, “To see if you were worthy to join us.”



Illustrator: Kayla Potts

Non-Fiction

Down and Dirty in Turkey

By Elizabeth Dawdy

In America, personal hygiene is just that, personal. In some parts of the world, bathing can be a communal activity, as in Turkey, where my foray into this old world ritual took place.

I spent most of a family vacation to Istanbul in 2006 holed up in a hotel room recovering from complications after a recent gastric bypass surgery while the rest of my family went sightseeing. My dad was concerned that I was missing out both on cultural learning opportunities, and not getting adequate exercise. Fortunately for me, he suggested we visit a Turkish bath. Not only would it get me out of the room for some much needed exercise, but it would also provide me the added benefits of purported healing properties of the minerals in the water. After much cajoling, I agreed to go. I was apprehensive about having total strangers see me naked, and I was not alone, as the rest of my family refused to join in this adventure.

After learning from the hotel concierge about a unisex bathhouse located less than three blocks from the hotel, my dad and I set off on what turned out to be quite an extraordinary adventure. Every step of the way was spent psyching myself up. I told myself, “Liz, you are a big, beautiful, woman who is secure in her own body.” I repeated this mantra as we marched into the bath palace’s atrium. I heard the man at the door say, in heavily accented English, “Sorry, cash only. Bank down street.” So, off my dad went, leaving me to sit and stew.

Five minutes passed while little demons of doubt and self-loathing started attacking my sub-conscious. Eyes closed, I chanted my mantra, calming and strengthening myself. I opened my eyes in time to see a bus load of young, buxom, Swedish exchange students filing past me into the female bath. My resolve crumbled just as my dad appeared in the atrium, cash in hand.

With the bill finally settled, my dad and I parted ways, heading down gender-specific hallways, our footsteps echoing ominously along the way.

The corridor opened wide, and an attendant escorted me to one of the mahogany cubicles lining the lounge. Inside was a bed and nightstand. Folded atop the bed was a small sheet-like wrap and pair of wooden sandals. As I undressed, it occurred to me that I could just stay in my cubicle and nap awhile, with no one the wiser. However, the attendant knocked on the door, peeked her head in, and gestured for me to follow. I followed her reluctantly.

I tried in vain to cover myself with the wrap, holding it together in strategic places only to create giant gaps of exposed blubber in others. Up ahead, I saw two of the Swedes disappear into the bath, both wearing panties. Realizing that even perfectly-proportioned, Scandinavian, blonde, exchange students are body-conscious supplied me with the fortitude to step into the bath with my head held high.

It took a moment for my eyes to adjust to the muted light and abundant steam in the three-story high, three hundred fifty-year-old, beautifully elaborate marble bathing palace. I was hoping to stake out behind one of the many columns that supported the domed ceiling of the magnificent octagonal room. I was almost to my hiding spot when, through the steam, a short Turkish woman of about fifty appeared in a bathing suit. The woman yanked me by the arm, ripped off my wrap and led me to a raised dais in the center of the marble room. In the middle of the dais flowed a fountain around which sat ornate brass bowls, sponges and assorted potions. She began slashing me with bowlfuls of water and there I stood, two hundred fifty pounds of pasty white glory. Soaking wet and humiliated, I was directed to a marble bench protruding from the wall while she repeated a similar process on another woman. Five minutes later, she sat me back on the dais and laid me down. My masseuse/professional bather began to give my skin a brisk rub down with a pumice stone. She then picked up a cloth, covered it in sweet smelling soap and lathered me up. In my head, I was wondering exactly how thorough of a cleaning I was to receive. Telling myself, "Surely, she'll leave it to me to wash my intimate parts." Then--"Oh, my God. She's washing me DOWN THERE!"

Only when she'd finished rinsing me with more bowlfuls of water did I fully recover from shock enough to stagger back to the bench and await another treatment. Sitting there, I tried to force my mind to appreciate my surroundings. According to the brochure, the bathhouse was built by an ancient sultan for the amusement of Ottoman royalty. It was also a frequent hangout for Tony Curtis during the filming of *Spartacus*. The architecture was exquisite, so I tried admiring the carvings and gilt work. But, I couldn't get past the fact that I was still naked in a room full of strangers.

I walked over to a cold water fountain along the wall and rinsed my face. As I returned to my bench I looked, for the first time, at my fellow patrons. It seemed I was the only person bathing solo. Women sat around in groups. Some were laughing and chatting; others dozing. A few had brought their young daughters along who frolicked and splashed. It dawned on me that absolutely no one was paying any attention to me, let alone staring at my body in disgust. I laughed out loud at my narcissism. The realization that my discomfort was self-inflicted and unfounded was

liberating. The humor behind the irony enabled me to conquer my inhibitions, and I began to relax. Each trip back to the fountain became more enjoyable.

After the pampering was over, I returned to my cubicle and dressed. The lounge attendant brought me a hookah and a cup of fragrant tea, and I settled back on my comfy little bed, feeling triumphant. I had come to the bathhouse hoping to experience some culture and, in the process, I had. The health benefits of the ritual had taken years from my body and added them to my soul. I had matured and gained confidence. Nineteen years of worrisome image issues had evaporated in the steam of a public bath in Istanbul, Turkey. I left there cleansed in body, mind, and spirit.

Out of the Pit

By Chris Olander

It was the summer of 1992. I had recently turned eight years old, and hurricane Andrew had recently smashed into my home. After it was over everyone began to clean up their damaged properties of debris. Between my neighbor's home and mine, there was an empty field where we decided to put our tree branches together in a large pile and burn them. We did this at the back of the property along the side of a steep drop off of a drainage canal. During the second day of cleanup while a friend and I sat by the fire, I wandered too close to the side and slid barefoot down the slope into the cauldron of hot ash and coal. I screamed.

As I began to climb out of the pit, I could not feel pain anymore. I decided I would tell my buddy that I was just messing with him and that I was ok. Whenever I made it to where he was, though, I saw a look of horror on his face as he looked down towards my feet. I joined his gaze, and that is when I noticed the skin and flesh were melting like wax from candle off of my feet. I started to scream again. Shortly after that my grandmother, a short and stocky woman in her early sixties, appeared out of nowhere like the flash. She picked me up like I was weightless and ran back across the overgrown field with me to my house. There she tossed me on the ground and started spraying me with the hose. My mom, who heard all the commotion, was now outside. Her first reaction was to carry me to the car and bring me to the hospital. I remember asking my panicking mother what was going to happen to me just before I passed out.

I awoke in the hospital to the extreme pain of the doctor cleaning the ash and small chunks of coal from my charred feet. My thoughts after that moment are somewhat blurred now. I remember right before my release hearing the doctor telling my mom that I would be in a wheel chair for at least a couple of months and that I may never walk correctly again. The ride home was a quiet one. After I returned home, I slept for what felt like forever.

After just a couple weeks of pain and sadness, I could not take being in a wheelchair anymore. I would wheel myself into the hallway and stop next to the wall. After an epic struggle to get out of my prison on wheels, I hugged the wall and tried to walk but failed. I then got up and did it again and again. After a couple of weeks of tremendous pain, lots of crying and screaming, I was able to walk again. It was not pretty, but I could walk.

Today I can walk perfectly fine. Although it was hell for an eight-year-

old to go through, I know that if I had not chosen what I did, I would have problems today. When something is hard, it is easy to give up. In life bad, awful things will always happen. I know clearly that my future depends on how I choose to react to the difficulties of life.



Illustrator: Kaila Hogan

Lyrics

Goodnight

By Reed Rodgers

Well I'm sitting here watching
Your eyelids dropping
It's half past twelve with
No signs of stopping
It's getting real late
But I can't sleep
I've tried everything from reading to counting sheep
It's no use
I guess I'll sit here and watch you
Well my mind starts racing as I stop and stare
At your beautiful face and your pretty long hair
I'm losing sleep
But I don't care
It's all worth it watching you just lay there
And as I wait for the night to turn back into the day
The only thing I wish
That you could hear me say

Is goodnight
Sleep tight
I hope everything in your dreams is alright
Well I can say
That I'm doing ok

Even though I'd rather be asleep than awake
But it's alright
I'll just hold you real tight
And wish you a goodnight

As I sit here waiting
In my mind culminating
Are the words being spoke
In my own conversation
About you
All about you
How my heart beats faster when you look at me
How I haven't had a bigger crush since I was three
Taking your hand
While you're fast asleep
Praying to the Lord that your soul He may keep
Girl I'm so lost without you
Staying up real late just to think about you
Wish you were awake
I would tell you things
The things you have never even heard in your dreams
Like.... (Chorus)
I'm about to run back out all the lights
And I'll be keeping your heart in my sights
Thinking about how great that you've made my life
It's been a good night
Goodnight

Some Things Just Aren't Fair

By Reed Rogers

I remember way back when I was just six years old,
When I couldn't walk across the street without a hand to hold.
When my daddy's pickup truck was the biggest thing I've ever seen
And when I thought my momma's money grew right on our big oak tree
She'd take me to the supermarket when she'd buy our groceries
And you know kids, they'll beg for everything that they see.
All I wanted was the He-Man on the shelf way up there
Some things just aren't fair

Well growing up I knew a girl as pretty as could be.
But keeping her attention wasn't one of my luxuries.
She'd walk her walk right past me without giving me a glance.
He had stolen her heart before I ever had a chance.
I watched from a distance and thought everything seemed alright.
They couldn't make it through one day without having a big fight.
He'd cuss and yell and break her heart and he didn't even care
Man, Some things just aren't fair.

Well my luck was high and I finally landed me a good ole girl.
She was hotter than a pistol and I revolved around her world.
I took her out real late one night when everything was dark.
I drove around and found a quiet place where we could park.
The cops showed up as soon as we were out of our underwear.
Man, Some things just aren't fair.

I'm proud to be an American and live in this country
I guess seeing 9/11 kinda did it for me.
This goes out to all who live and to those who were left below.
I'll be damned if I see a Muslim Church get built on ground zero.
Just as sure as the black smoke filled the September air.
Man, some things just aren't fair.

God has done some great things in this life that I lead.
I have tour dates, a fan base, and a platinum CD.
To those of you who envy me, you can love me and buy my CD.
I love to share. But if you don't really care
Well you can hate on me if you dare, I really don't care
Cause some things just aren't fair!



Illustrator: Laiha Pevey

The Road

By Reed Rodgers

Verse 1

It was broken hearts and gray skies
Before I met her
She was right in front of me
And everything was better
With those big green eyes
Her long brown hair
And the way she laughed at me
She made me
And I don't know what to do now
She's got me wrapped up in her smile
I'm tangled up in this web of dreams
I wish she'd stay for a while

Chorus 1

And I don't know
What to do right now
She's like a long straight road to carry me right out of town
And I don't know
Where to go right now
But I know I wanna find out where this road takes me

Verse 2

It's strange to think
We've only met three times
A reason not to feel this way
Is what I've been trying to find
So many obstacles in her way
So many roads in her eyes
I'll rip off this disguise
And hope she picks the right side
And whatever's down this interstate
I'm sure it's something great
The speed limit has no limit
All it takes is two hearts to be in it

Chorus 2

And now I know what to do right now
She's got me revved up ready to take this road right out of town
But I still don't know where I'm going
I'll know just when I get there
And I swear I won't stop til it takes me somewhere

Bridge

We've all taken some roads in our lives
Some were dead ends
Some were just wrecks on the turnpike
It seems I've taken every road but this one in my life
I'm all gassed up and ready to drive

They Don't Even Know

By Tera Thornhill

Sitting on a barstool
Smokey lights everywhere
He thumbs slowly on his guitar
As his music fills the air

He thought by now, he'd have a life
A record deal, kids and a wife
But for now he just sings his songs
As he watches her tonight

And she doesn't even know
That she's the reason that he sings
And she doesn't even know
That her love could mean everything
A touch so soft, with eyes so dark
Every part of her is in his heart
And she doesn't even know

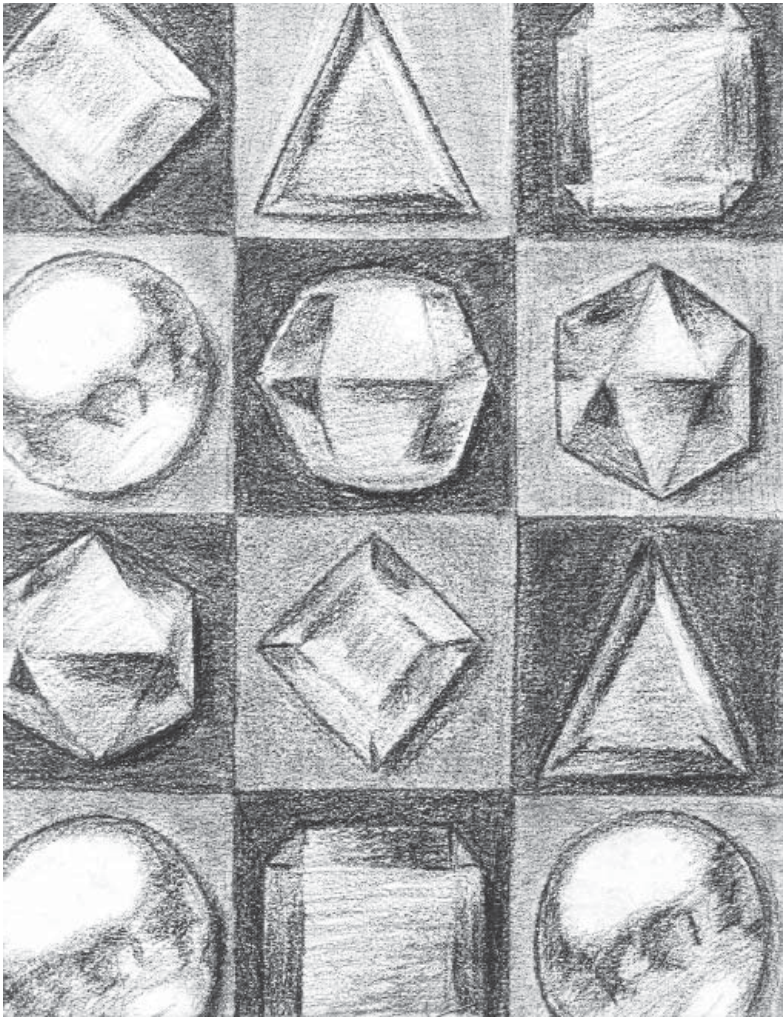
She stands there wiping tables
As she listens to him sing
She looks into his eyes
Then she looks down at her ring

She thought by now that she'd be happy
But something's just not right
The man she loves, should be the one at home
Not the one singing there tonight

And he doesn't even know
That she wonders what could be
And he doesn't even know
That his smile is all she sees
An honest voice, a caring man
Someone who'll be there to hold her hand
And he doesn't even know

Oh they see each other every day,
but somehow they let each other slip away

And they don't even know
That they're what each other really need
No, they don't even know
They're what a real love really means
A perfect soul mate, a true best friend
A lover who'll be there in the end
And they don't even know
No, they don't even know



Illustrator: Allison Higbee

Poetry

A Feather Carried by Light

By Brenda Temple

A feather carried by light,
over a sea of green,
it forever knowing flight
and sun so bright.
The leaves a wide screen
a feather carried by light.
The ground a plight
from the sky never seen,
it forever knowing flight.
the mother tree taking spotlight,
the pride and queen,
a feather carried by light.
Forest only knowing evergreen,
cloud above on the silkscreen,
it forever knowing flight.
Again it goes up with height
to leave the green off screen,
a feather carried by light
it forever knowing flight.

A Pearl in the Shell

By Whitney Clark

An oyster reminds me of a human being.
Sometimes we feel trapped in a shell.
We edgily wait for someone to open us up so we can see the light.
Every oyster is not a pearl-producing oyster.
And that's kind of like us humans.
We can have great intentions, but not accomplish a thing.
We can work at something steadfastly,
And still not produce something in a usable form.
Oysters are filter feeders.
Humans are too.
We take in so much, and we end up beating up others
When all the pressure builds up.
The pressure of being chosen and valued by the seaman
Is the same pressure we feel to be chosen by society.
I hope to be valued like the precious pearl in the shell.

Aftermath

By Glenda Dean Cavalier

I saw a living statue
In the square today
Identity hidden
By layers of metallic paint
Bronzed and perfectly void of life
I stopped and searched his face
His hands
And shiny shoes
I stared and longed for a gesture
A wink or a smirk
I dropped a ten in the metal bucket that sat
Strategically next to his stillness
And waited on the curb
For a glance my way
But nothing of my friend would I find this day
Perhaps I am never to see him again
With deepening sadness
And defeated grief
I pressed on
And vacantly
I walked to the Cathedral
In search of peace

As I Watch the Streams Flow

By Bryan Jones

As I watch the streams flow
Floating by in majestic blue
Giving off a pristine glow

There I sit under a green willow
Thinking back oh my how time flew
As I watch the streams flow

Over the meadow I saw the wind blow
Bringing over me a feeling so true
Giving off a pristine glow

I saw a fox dance through the stream shallow
Thinking of the troubles he could brew
As I watch the streams flow

Watching as the sun fell so low
With heavy thoughts of sleep they grew
Giving off a pristine glow

Coming up through the sky so slow
the moon illuminates the grass dew
As I watch the streams flow
Giving off a pristine glow

As the Angels Sing

By Heather Phillips

Lord, you hold the answer; you hold the key. Please take these confusions
away from me. Help me to find; help me to see All the blessing you have in
store for me.

Help me to always follow your plans And lay all my burdens in your
hands. Help me to always rely on you And seek you out through and
through

Hold my heart through my darkest times And shine a light so that I may
see your signs. Fill my hunger when I am weak So that I may feel wholly
complete.

Help me to make Your right choices
As I hear Your angels' voices.
You are my Savior; You are my king,
And I will bow before You as the angels sing.

Autistic Reflection

Eleanor Stascavage

Learning how to speak,
learning how to listen,
(you can hear but not listen, you know)
I lived in my own world
within the world I grew up in
within the world we call Earth.

In the world I grew up in,
computers, television, and telephones existed.
In the outside world called Earth,
I knew nothing about the new technology
like the Internet, cell phones, and portable CD players.
I grew up with books and cassette players
and not the fancy stuff I was oblivious to.

Growing out of my world, but not completely,
and out of the world I grew up in,
it amazes me to see that my generation
is growing up and adapting to the changing Earth
and technology while I, a child of
the new millennium, am moving slowly in time
and still wondering, "If there are touch-devices,
i-somethings or another, online chatting, and
other stuff I can't comprehend, then why
aren't there flying cars?"

Growing up in the 90's and the new millennium,
I considered my childhood in the 90's to be
my Golden Years.
As of the first decade of the new millennium,
I am at the peak of life and learning yet
I feel like I'm getting too old to live
in my own era.

Backyard Haikus

Glenda Dean Cavalier

Orange-pink spider lils
Pop in my unruly yard
Sing of fall's return

Yesterday's tadpole
Make your way clumsily up
And find Earth's dry land

Sleek and glimmer
The leaves of summer are here
Hummers breeze on in

Wisteria blue
Creep the pine tree's gnarly bark
Claim your kingdom high

Gnats catch a charmed ride
On the spindles of a wish-
Weed floating on high

Bubbly, plump, orange koi
Through thick, green murk can you see?
Blow-fly on your roof

Becky Girl

By Glenda Dean Cavalier

She wobbled on the back of my green huffy
as my bare feet stomped with fury
over the prickly pedals-
moving us along the side of the road
and into the back of Mrs. Almer's yard

I ditched the bike
between the fig tree and pink azaleas
grabbing her hand- I pulled us across the street
Down in to the storm drains we went
Pretending to seek treasure
as we searched for cover

Fearless! Fearless!
Ha!
So afraid

She had my heart
and I...
I had her back
as we trudged together-addled
thru our muddy kingdom
and waited for Old Man Theriot to pass

Believe

By Chad Harveston

When you think that time has run out, believe.
When you feel tired, believe.
When you have no more strength, believe.
When you are surrounded by darkness, believe.
When the world stops spinning, believe.
When light turns to dark, believe.
Believing is the key to Happiness, happiness is the key to life.
Believe, there is happiness in the world.
Believe, time has not passed you by.
Believe, faith still exists.
Believe, there is strength in numbers.
Believe, number one is all you need.
Believe, there are others like you.
Believing cures fear, fear holds you back.
Your lover will leave, believe.
Your heart will break, believe.
Your stamina will wear out, believe.
Your life will change, believe.
Your eyes will open, believe.
The light will come through, believe.
Your mind will go, believe.
Your body will change, believe.
Your age will increase, believe.
You will die, believe.
You will live on, because you believed.

Changes

By Reed Rodgers

It's time for me to start making some changes
Everybody I see is like a distant stranger
Nobody knows me quite like I do
And the worst part is that nobody even tries to
Now I don't walk that tall, maybe about 6'2"
But I have to, otherwise I'll be stuck with fakes like you
Have a face like you, be in a place like you
I'm sorry, but I don't even want to be the same race as you
It's time to face the truth. Look at me, living proof.
I get better than you every time I step in the booth.
I'm done with all these games and these people smack-talking
I'll keep the money running in and this nonsense walking.

As life goes by, I have to try to keep in mind
Always look forward, never look behind.
Cause when you reach your prime, your time to shine, you're gonna find
All these jealous haters wasting your time.
Though I try to ignore it, I can't lie
I'm hypnotized by all these so called friends in disguise
I look into their eyes, realize the lies, and then I look away
And focus only on the prize I got in my hand
Understand that I am the man, I got the plan
I'm running hot, ya'll on fan
I'm just embracing the situation I got at hand
I'm coming out this quicksand, ya'll cant....but I can

Changing

By Jordan Vinson

This life is just a dream

I battle through the days and retreat at night

We all hope and wish, but it isn't what it seems

This life is just a dream

I got an ace up my sleeve, but I'm waiting on a queen

Days are getting better; I can finally see the light

This life is just a dream

I battle through the days and retreat at night

Crystallomancy

By Eleanor Stascavage

Crystallomancy
Can help you to see yourself
And also help you.

Go grab a mirror,
Crystal ball; or look into
Fire or water.

Like meditating
It will surely take some time
Before you're ready.

Slowly shut your eyes
Make sure you are breathing deep
Then let your mind drift.

The experience
Is different for everyone,
You'll know once you see.

Disaster in Haiti

By Jeani Davis

Feel the earth rumble
Cities crushed like sand castles
Waves of terror hit

Hear the people cry
Mothers looking for babies
All are in despair

Faith and hope challenged
The destruction seen for miles
Fear and panic rise

See the suffering
Injured and hungry people
So much needed

Must come together
There will be help for Haiti
Americans care

Diverse but One

By Jason Giangrosso

Rising sun across verdant land,
Each tree and flower part of God's plan;
As a new day brings a future none can foresee,
Effervescent streams flowing sing their glee
Butterflies, like gems, dazzle the air.

An icy breeze blankets the frozen ground
With snowflakes falling, barely making a sound
Floating endlessly, never needing to care
The warmth of home lighting the somber air
Smoke dancing from their hearths.

Warm breath awakens the fields,
New skies are painted and revealed.
Cattle graze, free as the winds that caress
Each crop with great finesse
While sweet morning dew slowly disappears.

Streetlights humming their melodic songs,
Pavement rushing beneath busy throngs,
Taxis and buses dot the sluggish streets.
Fresh coffee, like a dozen roses, smells sweet
As some end a fast night and others begin a long day.

This is our home, diverse but one
Being watched over by the Creator's glowing Sun,
As freedom comes down alight;
A nation that bleeds red, blue, and white
This is my America, my one true love.

Dry County

By Glenda Dean Cavalier

She summoned me to her ostentatious SUV
Just as I pulled into a spot at the “Little Pig”
I glanced at the floorboard lined with recycled Styrofoam cups
All of them saved to provide the deceitful illusion of harmless cola
But I see straight through this mirror
And I know
This town is full of drunks
She’s just one of a thousand or so
Strange smells of Listerine and liquor linger between the W’s and the T’s
Slurred speech, weakened eyes, awkward twists and fidgets—
Just one of a thousand, I think in my head
I am sad for her self-imposed and lengthy sentence
I feel pressed to hug her
But this town doesn’t really envelope the obvious it seems
And I, never a trendsetter, step backwards
to escape the dreamy vacuum
of her minty fresh, bourbon bouquet
Smiling, I wave goodbye and turn from her
and as I uneasily make my way across the sticky asphalt to my car
I dream of distant towns
Settlements saturated with mislaid but probing souls
Ones that embrace

Echoes

By Jason Giangrosso

Dark echoes through the cavern
Willing me to venture through.
A single step I take
Falling to my doom.

Landing on the sharp rocks
Of the dusty cavern floor
Watching the light disappear
Waiting for my doom.

Hearing the faint whistle
As my life begins to leave.
Feeling Death's heavy footsteps
Fighting against my doom.

Wishing for an escape
From a life's early end
Shaking from Death's cold grip,
Finally meeting my doom.

Dragging me to the colder cavern depths
Knowing that the
Dark echoes of the cavern
Led me to my tomb.

Floundering With Mama

By Betty Kemp

Flat creatures; eyes looking to the surface
Watching the predator who hunts with a purpose
Old white tennis shoes, holes in the toe,

Give footing with purchase.
Moonlight on water, dancing, hunter moving slow
Flat creatures; eyes looking to the surface

The “gig” called into service.
Red toenails thru the water plough,
Outline shaped in the sand; hunter wordless,
Watching the hunter who hunts with a purpose.

Coleman lantern; flame burning bright
For hunter to see in the night.
Old white tennis shoes, holes in the toe

Curly hair blowing in the with the wind
Looking to the creature to be skinned,
Old white tennis shoes, holes in the toe.

Patience and persistence taught
Teacher, student, mother, daughter
Old white tennis shoes holes in the toe.

House of Fright

By Bryan Jones

Under the mystic gray moon
Lunar souls fill these walls
Forever wandering these dark halls
Are the souls that dwell
As the fog settles, oh the terror
Tale of despair, hear how it swells
Too horrified to speak, he can only shriek
Desperate in fright, he made his flight
From the house, these souls do dwell

Inner Light Upon The Delirious

By Bryan Jones

Look at this girl I thought, her wide eyed hypnotic gaze

Bright attire - spastic colors, skirt of bright yellow shirt of orange

Pom poms of the brightest pink and red, cursed cheerleaders and their bright dress.

Could you spot her through a haze? Yes! You fool, she's as bright as the sun.

No need to call myself a fool, but I must say she is as bright as the sun,

Why if I don't look away I may actually be blinded by the light,

But what would possess someone to wear something of as bright as the sun?

I suppose she has found her calling in life and is shepherding us the light or our so called calling!

Ha Ha that couldn't possibly be it, could it? I believe delirium has gotten the best of me.

Mean Girls

By Jessica Haynes

How could they have such a passion to hate
To make everyone's lives miserable games
To have nothing better to do than wait
For some innocent chick to call mean names
And their friends don't care because they are scared
To be made fun of for growing a pair
And leaving the mean clique because they cared
About something other than their hair care
Boys that like those mean girls have a problem
From missing baskets to dropping passes
They are second to girls' drama column
They won't even look at a guy with glasses
Don't pay attention to these mean, mean girls.
They are miserable in the own little worlds

Memories

By Shelby Lofton

They come and they go
Everyday seems more away
Farther from the day I saw you last
Harder it seems to always get
As the pain never eases
Growing and growing
The pain in my heart
Almost as it's going to explode
Explode to pieces that can never be fixed
With my heart shattered I still love you
The love I have grows everyday
Growing as the memories die
You are way better off than me
Smiling with Jesus is where you should be
Watching over me when I don't even know
Even though you're gone; you're still here
Always will be, please say you are
Sometimes I feel you in the weakest of times
Telling me to dry up the tears
Smile the biggest smile for you to see
Always have faith and trust in the Lord
You're here with me in my heart
No matter the time or distance
I will always have you in my memories

Midnight Affair

By Jason Giangrosso

Watching smoke rise up the cool midnight sky
Feeling our bare skin touch in open air,
Without a care, in the wet field we lie.

Soft wind blowing with leaves falling nearby,
Seen only by the sidereal Air,
Watching smoke rise up the cool midnight sky

Gentle silence falling from way up high,
Time breaks, leaving us to do as we dare;
Without a care, in the wet field we lie.

Our separate beings suddenly collide,
Sinking deeper in this late night affair
Watching smoke rise up the cool midnight sky.

Forming new secrets, never being shy,
Promising on the bright soaring star flair
Without a care, in the wet field we lie.

Bathing in moonlight, just pure ecstasy,
The perfume of night dew in wild damp hair,
Watching smoke rise up the cool midnight sky
Without a care, in the wet field we lie.

Mississippi Gulf Coast

By Betty Kemp

Waves lapping against piers
Crabs crawling from hampers
Seashells collected as souvenirs
Waves lapping against piers.

Great Grandfather houses appear
Elegant stairways built by masters
Waves lapping against piers
Crabs crawling from hampers

Fish swimming without ears
In water salty as tears
Waves lapping against piers
Crabs crawling from hampers

Memories replayed over years
Finding life's answers
Waves lapping against piers
Crabs crawling from hampers

Nostalgia

By Brittany Bernard

Nostalgia

A well-placed ink jar

Quill askew

With a trail of dripping ink

Oblong Obscure splashes

Pooling and drying----

Ceaselessly like waves

Along the shore of the mind

Old Thunder

By Tera Thornhill

Dry dust fills his lungs
Nervous sweat beads on his skin
It doesn't matter now
If he loses or if he wins

It's a chance to redeem himself
To forget the mistakes of back then
A way to face his fears
And so they meet again

As he climbs atop his foe
The cowboy looks into those soulless eyes
That hooked nose bull just stares back
Knowing he was that cowboy's demise

Haunting memories of his past flood back
A dying love that broke his heart
A moment that changed his life forever
All of his dreams that were torn apart

He doesn't ride just for himself
But for a new love too
To forget a past mistake which lacked
To help start his life anew

As he lowers the brim of that worn black hat
He covers his ice blue eyes
Old Thunder's roaring and ready to go
That cowboy's adrenaline begins to rise

The music begins to play
That young cowboy holds on tight
He nods and says, "Okay, Let's ride."
And starts the longest eight seconds of his life

He rode that bull all eight seconds worth
And doesn't think of what might have been
He's just proud that he had the courage
To ride Old Thunder again

Oyster girl

By Gavin Mendus

I see her there
With her hard shell
She acts so tough
But I see through that
I see into whom she really is
She is a scared girl
Wanting nothing but love
Even if it is just one person
She has the hard shell of an oyster
But deep inside
She is soft and vulnerable
So for now she clamps shut
Not showing herself to the world
Maybe one day she will show herself
Maybe one day she will love

Reminiscing

By Jordan Vinson

You took my heart down a one-way
I told myself you were mine
You took my soul down a runway

Love was far off, lost to a someday
I couldn't tell you this, so I dropped you a line
You took my heart down a one-way

We got so high I wasn't aware of our mayday
You got my heart in a twist and my future in a bind
You took my soul down a runway

Now I sit and reminisce about the fun days
I thought this was forever, but I guess I missed the sign
You took my heart down a one-way

You were more holy than a Sunday
I try to make it through, but the days are a grind
You took my soul down a runway

I hope to reunite one day
I keep telling myself different, but you are a one of a kind
You took my heart down a one-way
You took my soul down a runway

Rumination

By Glenda Dean Cavalier

I am not the me I thought I would be
Perhaps I was grandiose
When I dare dreamed of being me

Not a merry mariner on the blustery sea
Nor the ruler of a blue wave coast
I am not the me I thought I would be

Of a true love's heart, I hold not the key
Pining ardor in a lover's eyes, I longed to boast
When I dare dreamed of being me

Squeamishly, meek is the charge I lead
It is my intrepid heart that I miss the most
I am not the me I thought I would be

Not a writer high atop a Paris balcony
Nor a zealous woman to cheer and toast
I am not the me I thought I would be
When I dare dreamed of being me

Schizophrenia

By Glenda Dean Cavalier

She stared at me
From high atop the slide
As I dangled from the monkey bars
Singing Delta Dawn—
It was our sister song, she knew every word
Even still
My link remained hushed
She could only gape
At the demons as they flew from my mouth
And took to the air just above my head
I continued the refrain
Oblivious to the deliberate swing of the shovel
As it banged against my skull
My legs released and as I flopped to the wet earth below
I saw
Her rapier drawn and her eyes fixed
She dared the devil to move
I lay still
And prayed for our rescue

Spider Lillies

By Glenda Dean Cavalier

Orange-pink spider lils

Pop in my unruly yard announce now the fall

Four, five, sometimes more

Cluster to wave me hello

the back porch so warm

Weepishly I long-

My mother's content green soul

her soft sun-browned skin

Excitement and joy-

shouts to me early in morn

"Glenda, awake, awake"!

The spider lillies

have arrived to tell us so

summer will leave now

With no qualms at all

I leave my slumber to see

mostly her---happy

The Country

By Eleanor Stascavage

So quiet, so lonely,
the wind, it is blowing,
such is the country for me.
The lakes are as still as can be,
there are no boats rowing,
so quiet, so lonely.
Nothing's in a hurry,
be it shine or snowing,
such is the country for me.
From the sway of the trees,
to the soft rivers flowing,
so quiet, so lonely.
In the night I can see,
little fireflies glowing,
such is the country for me.
Step foot into the country,
and see that life's always slowing,
so quiet, so lonely,
such is the country for me.

The Love of Heaven

By Ariel Rushing

The love of heaven:

I want you to know that I am here,
Do not give up and have no fear.
I am with you inside your heart,
And nothing on earth can tear us apart.
My love for you is strong and true,
I am the one who died for you.
My hands were nailed to a great big cross,
My blood was shed to cover the lost.
A crown of thorns was on my head,
My side was pierced then I was dead.
Inside a tomb my body was laid,
With a sacrifice of love the price was paid.
Three days had passed since I was dead,
Now I wear a crown of gold not thorns on my head.
The scars on my hands and feet are still there,
To show the whole world the pain I did bear...
My feet were pierced through and my hands nailed too,
I died on the cross to give life to you.
Sometimes you think I do not care,
But I will not give you more than you can bear.
My love is sweet and my burden is light,
I'm here to tell you it will be all right.
The spirit inside you is hope and not fear,
Just call on my name and I will be here.
If you're wondering who am I?
I am the son of God this is no lie.
You are my child and as my gift to you,
I laid down my life so you could have one anew.

The Storm is Over Now

By Whitney Clark

When the storm finally ceases,
The rain stops falling.
My life is put back to pieces.
I close my eyes as the stress releases.
For I can hear the Lord calling.
When the storm finally ceases,
I want to escape to the tropical beaches.
I am finally through bawling.
My life is put back to pieces.
The pain attacked my soul like leeches.
The rain hitting against my windowpane is galling.
When the storm finally ceases.
The smell of victory tastes like sweet peaches.
The piercing sounds in my ear as loud as someone sawing.
My life is put back to pieces.
The wrinkles in my forehead creases.
The magnitude of the devil's work is appalling.
When the storm finally ceases,
My life is put back to pieces.

Thoughts on Expressing True Feelings

By Bryan Jones

I have never understood
Why people force words
To hold the emotions
That those words never could
How can the word love
Ever know
The depth it speaks of?
How can dignity
Ever comprehend
That it's poise's epitome?
How can the word dead ever grasp
The pain it causes when said?
I have never understood
Why people force words to hold the emotions
That those words would never hold

Torn

By Jason Giangrosso

Broken-hearted, lost
Not knowing whom to turn to
Searching for the way

Looking for answers,
Never feeling what is right
Giving up the fight

Broken happiness
Speechless words left between us
Deafening silence.

Knowing there's no end
To this punishment I'm in
Will it ever stop?

Torn pieces falling
Nothing left here to salvage
Just oblivion

Tuesday

By Glenda Dean Cavalier

I wait anxiously for their school bus
Every thirty seconds I announce the time
However, my sense of urgency does nothing to stir their movements
“Okay Mommmm, chill!” I hear from every room
Even still, I report an E.T.A. for their only mode of transport..
“Sev-en min-utes”, I sing
“I can’t bring y’all to school”, I warn
they slowly putter about the house collecting books, projects, socks--
Panic begins to set in
Finally, the two youngest head out, always the first in line
“Okay girls, get a move on”, I plead to the two oldest
I’m ignored except for the occasional rolling of an eye
Then number three
Out the door she goes
with an awkward pre-teen gait. Each step exhaustively conscious of the next
I run to the door and open it. I toss her a “you’re beautiful sweetie”
To which she replies, “Okay uhm and you’re... random”
I chuckle, close the door, and wait
One to go
but there is still one lock of blonde hair to straighten, mascara to apply
and teeth to brush
the tension mounts
“Mommmmm, someone used my toothbrush AGAINNN!” she
screams at me
“It’s time to go NOW!”, I yell back as I hand her piece of peppermint
gum
“Here, I’ll buy you another toothbrush, now GO!” my pointer finger is
nearly removed as she swipes the gum from my open hand.
A fight for later, I think
She retrieves her flute from the kitchen table, slips on her flip flops, one
more look in the mirror and then SLAM! Out the door she goes
I follow behind to sit on the porch in my broken lawn chair
and as I watch her walk down the gravel drive it occurs to me
it’s always with minutes to spare
that they wait for the bus
Tomorrow, I’ll practice patience, I think to myself

I hear the sound of the diesel engine and the squeal of brakes as their
ride approaches Virginia St.
I stand and wave
“I love y’all, have a great day”, I shout to them
My words float through the dust and camellias onto mostly deaf ears
Only the youngest replies these days
“I love you too Mommy, bye”
Relieved, I sit back
and as bus 173 pulls away with my most precious cargo, I grin
and enjoy the first sip of my morning joe

Wrinkles

By Glenda Dean Cavalier

I wonder what poems
Are hidden in the wrinkles
Of his waking brain
I stare at his face—
Folded hands upon his thinning chest
As it moves with rhyme
Eyes closed, blind of sight
Arms, legs too stiff for movement—
He sits and possums
Listening with one ear
For me to move from my chair
And come nearer him
He can tell me now
About Thelma’s flawless smile
And how she learned to fly
Back after the war
Unheard of for a girl
When men ruled the skies
I listen and sigh
To words unwritten
Of love not ready to die

Narration

Essays

Grab the Buck by the Horns

A Narrative Essay By Christopher Buie

It was a frosty November night as I walked across the yard returning from the day's hunt. Unfortunately, I had an unsuccessful hunt and all I could think about was getting something hot to eat, showering, and hitting the bed. Out of the three, I was lucky enough to eat a tasty bowl of soup.

As I savored the last few spoonfuls in my bowl, the silence was shattered by the sound of the phone ringing. Lazily, I reached over and answered it. "Hello?" I answered. "I need your help," I heard my brother say through the receiver. "With what," I answered, slightly irritated that my peaceful night had been interrupted. "I will explain when I get there," he answered, "go round up the dog."

I knew that his response could only mean one thing. Reluctantly, I gathered my heap of camouflage from the floor and dressed myself for the adventure.

As I opened the door to step outside, my face instantly felt the burn of the ice cold eastern wind. With a whistle, I summoned my hound from the darkness of the night and put him in my truck.

I didn't have to wait long for the sound of tires crunching gravel to announce the arrival of my brother. "I shot a deer but I have to go find it," he casually said as he stepped out of his dust-covered white truck. "Get in," I told him. Suddenly, I realized I had left the one most important thing for my adventure on my dresser. I ran inside and picked up my 22 caliber pistol and belted it on. I didn't realize then how much later I would be glad I had remembered it.

We drove down the road, maybe twenty minutes, and my brother directed me to a small gravel road leading into the woods. We had to walk from there. About five minutes into our trek into the woods, he stopped me. "There," he said pointing to the ground. Instantly, I sighted the crimson-colored blood on the brown pine needles. The sight made me forget all about the bitter cold that had me shivering in my boots. I was zoned in on the hunt now. I pulled up my dog and showed him the scent. Immediately, he seemed to realize what we were doing and bounded off following the scent.

As I walked, or ran actually, I noticed my brother dropping off in the distance behind me. The vicious patches of thorns were slowing him up. I managed to wrestle my way through and followed the sound of Orphie baying in the distance.

I came to a clearing and suddenly my blue LED light caught sight of two sets of eyes. The sight I saw was astonishing. In the middle of the small patch of prickly briar bushes that formed the clearing, my dog was baring his teeth and growling nose-to-nose with a magnificent but wounded buck. When the deer saw me, it lowered its horns and charged. I tried to pull my gun out of the holster but it was stuck. I thought I was going to be impaled by the massive rack of horns. Terror surged through my every vein, but I couldn't move. I was frozen by fear. Just before those ivory-colored horns could pierce my body, I saw a brown blur smash the deer to the ground. My dog had hit the deer in the side of its muscular body and knocked it down. In this instance of confusion, I managed to free my pistol from my side and pulled it up. The deer was just scrambling back to his feet then I clicked off the safety of my weapon. I pulled the trigger until the gun depleted itself of ammo. The deer had slowed to a walk but he was still coming toward me. Knowing I was in for a good fight, I dropped the gun and unbelted my hunting knife with hopes of defending myself. As every muscle of my body tensed up for the fight, I forgot all my fear. Before I had even decided how to go about fighting the beast, it just dropped. The bullet wound he had suffered earlier in the evening had finally taken its toll. He had bled so much he didn't have the strength to stand any longer.

Victoriously, I finished off the deer with my hunting knife and sat down against a nearby tree. My dog walked up and proudly rubbed his head against my chest. I was utterly exhausted. When my brother finally caught up, he was panicked. "What happened?" he asked looking first at the bloody deer on the ground and then to my weary face. I briefly relayed my fight with the deer to him and then stood up. "Well, let's get him out of here," I said.

After that, we took the deer back through the black mass of trees and on to my house where we strung the deer up and dressed him. At that time, I reflected on the experience and realized I had learned a very valuable lesson—always carry a bigger pistol than my weak 22 caliber to finish off a deer.

The Ace of Research Papers

A Narrative Essay By Allison Higbee

At Terry High School, it is a requirement for all of the seniors to take English IV in order to graduate. Part of taking English IV was to write a research paper about critiques of books written by an English author. To be honest, I was not looking forward to this aspect of my senior year. I had to write a research paper for English III during my junior year and did not do very well on it, so I was not confident in my writing abilities at all.

When it was time to start the boring process of discussing and writing the paper, my teacher, Mrs. May, let us choose our authors one at a time by drawing numbers. Luckily, I drew the number one, so I got the privilege of having the first choice out of all the authors. Thinking wisely, I decided on an author that I was the most familiar with, knowing that I would be able to find plenty of information on any of his stories. Charles Dickens caught my eye and I knew that he was the one I would write this dreaded paper on. Apparently, half of the class also had their eye on him, considering the upset moans and groans that followed my decision. The two stories of his that I chose to write my paper on were *A Tale of Two Cities* and *A Christmas Carol*. I began to think more positively about this nuisance and hoped that maybe luck would be on my side this time.

For about a month, Mrs. May would take us to the school library during class time to work on our research, whether in the books or online. The whole hour and a half was filled with busy students constantly searching for research worthy enough to put in his or her paper. Like I had assumed, I was able to find mounds of information on the two books that I had chosen. With all of the information I had to record during class on my stack of note cards, I realized that writing the actual paper did not seem to be as difficult as I had originally expected. Starting the paper and turning in the rough draft was the hardest part. However, by the time Mrs. May proofread it and gave me suggestions, I knew that writing the final copy would be a breeze.

When I finished writing the final copy, I felt very confident and hoped for a grade that would be refrigerator-worthy. A few weeks later, when Mrs. May had finished grading everyone's papers, she passed them back out to us with our final grade. I anxiously waited for my grade while listening to many classmates complain about a failed grade or one they were just not happy with. When Mrs. May handed my paper to me, she quietly said, "Good job." I was tremendously excited and overwhelmed with relief to

see that I made a perfect 100 percent! I admit that I was very proud and bragged about my success for the rest of the day. Hopefully, I did not “jinx” myself, and this luck will continue throughout my college experience.



Photo: Tom Ross

My Christmas Essay

A Narrative Essay By Laura Jackson

It was January, 1979, and I was in sixth grade. We were given an assignment to write an essay about our Christmas vacation and what we got for Christmas. I was sitting on a bar stool in the kitchen in the house I grew up in and where my mother still lives today. The TV and dishwasher were going in the background and the aroma of supper still hung in the air. My dog, Heidi, was lying at my feet and my mother and sister were watching TV. I was actually more concerned about getting through with my homework to watch TV before bedtime than I was about the assignment itself. I began my essay with this sentence, “I got lots of neat stuff.” This phrase has haunted me in a humorous way for the past thirty-two years. My mother and my sister still rib me about it to this day.

My mother, whom I love dearly, has a dry-wit and a sense of humor that is saturated in sarcasm. Bless her heart! She takes offense when we describe her in this way. She says she is not being sarcastic; she is simply being honest. She shoots straight from the hip. However, she instilled in me a desire to put more thought into my writing. She also gave me the gift of reading and the love of reading. I still have childhood memories of my mother reading to me. I also remember a lot of the books I read or that she read to me as a child. Growing up, our house was full of books to read.

My older sister is smart, compassionate and empathetic. She also shares her “big-sister wisdom” with me. She too, contributed to my love of reading. Growing up we shared a room and I remember her reading me bedtime stories, *Bed-knobs and Broomsticks*, *Bambi*, and two of my personal favorites, *Flat Stanley*, and *Ferdinand*. There were other books we read through the years. We now share a love of reading as adults and swap books that we find we enjoy.

With this rich history of literacy in my early childhood, I should have put more thought into my writing as well. I really do not remember much more of what my essay consisted of, as I was being lackadaisical in my studies. What sticks with me the most is the fact that my mother and my sister both have helped me improve my writing skills since then. As a matter of fact, I love to write. I have kept journals in the past and I wish I had more time to write now.

I remember getting a passing grade on that Christmas essay back in January of 1979, although it was no masterpiece. I have used that experience throughout my entire life to do my best in everything that I do—not just

with my writing. I do believe that in the past thirty-two years since then, I have improved upon my writing skills. I now put more thought into what I am writing about. This is about the worst thing my mother can tell on me about as far as embarrassing childhood stories, so all in all, I was a pretty good kid. I am thankful that I have a mother and sister who taught me the importance of literacy and that reading and writing stories can broaden horizons. I hope I have done the same with my own children. Needless to say, I no longer worry about getting to watch TV before bedtime or view it as a priority!

Fatal Perfection

A Narrative Essay By Brooke King

Writing assignments used to be my absolute all-time worst enemies. No one should take this the wrong way. I thoroughly have a love for writing and truly enjoy brainstorming for new and creative stories. Each time I write I feel as if I'm sharing a special piece of myself with the rest of the world. However, grammar mistakes would creep around my paper like a lion toward a helpless deer. I wrote an exhilarating essay that was an adventure full of twisting tales, primping princesses, and brave-hearted beaus. These words grasped at the readers' minds and kept them wondering and waiting for the next twist of fate. The words on those pieces of plain white paper were my absolute prized possessions as I strutted into English class on the due date. Proud was a total understatement of my emotions as my completed paper, perfectly printed without a wrinkle in sight, was placed into the correct paper bin.

With my head held high and with purpose in my step, I pranced my way into the English classroom the next day. My excitement could not be contained even if I had tried! I sat on the edge of my seat just counting down the seconds until my essay's fate was revealed. Finally, after that whole day of waiting and wondering, white sheets of paper were placed in front of me. To my utterly speechless horror, red ink bled through the clean white paper like blood. Painful as it was, I quickly flipped my paper over to examine what could possibly be wrong with my prized paper. There was more red ink on my essay than there were red pens in all of America—it seemed. My teacher must have special ordered red pens from Russia and China to be able to write that much. Once again, grammar was my evil flaw.

Misspelled words and incorrect punctuation consumed my paper and seemed to choke my entertaining words. My head fell limp and my very own pride had used my stomach for a punching bag. I did not want to touch the now red-stained piece of paper. I was wishing it would disappear into thin air. “My” essay was not going to move itself; I had to touch the paper. Turning to the second page felt like it took an eternity.

Again, more red ink filled the page. However, a small section of blue ink on the bottom, right corner of the second page caught my attention. Suddenly, the knots in my stomach loosened, and my head perked up some as I read a small note freehanded by my teacher. My eyes focused intently on the paper. The few words in that note let me know that my creativity had not been overlooked, and with some grammar reconstruction, my essay would be one used as an example of creative writing for years to come.

My First Day

A Narrative Essay By Tori Redd

August 16, 2010, was the day I had been waiting for since kindergarten. Though it seemed like the day would never come, the years had flown by faster than I could have ever imagined. August 16, 2010, was the first day that marked the beginning of my college career.

The day before school started, I brought all of my things to my dorm. All of my tee shirts, my socks, my shorts, my twenty pair of shoes and anything I thought I needed was packed tightly together in at least fifteen bags. One would have thought that I was never planning to go home. Once I had completed the many hours it took me to unpack, I finally got into my new bed. Even though I was filled with much excitement, I still had many worries. All I could do was lie in bed and think about events that would occur the next morning. Some of the things that were going through my mind were: What am I going to wear in the morning? How am I going to find all of my classes without getting lost? Who all will be in my classes? Will I know anybody? After worrying for at least an hour, I drifted off to sleep. The next thing I knew, my alarm clock was going off, and it was time to get ready for my first day of college.

As soon as I started to get ready, I was faced with one of the problems that I had worried about the night before—what to wear. Usually, this is typically an easy decision for me to make, but since it was such a big day, it seemed much more difficult than usual. I probably stood in front of my closet for at least ten minutes until Shelby, my roommate, noticed me. Because she is my best friend, she immediately knew what the problem was. She came over to my closet, shuffled through my whole entire closet, and within five minutes picked out my clothes. She took the outfit out of the closet, threw it at me, and told me that was what I was going to wear. I looked at what she had chosen. As it turned out, it was the same outfit I was planning on wearing—white shorts with my off-the-shoulder, loose fitting, black shirt.

As soon as I was dressed and ready to go, I began to worry about how I was going to find all of my classes. My biggest fear was that I was going to walk into the wrong room and not know it or wind up being late for class. With my schedule tightly gripped in my hand, I walked out of my room and headed down the stairs to the outside. As I was walking to class, I noticed that many other people also had their schedules in their hands and looked somewhat confused and nervous like I did. Seeing that people were just as

nervous as I gave me a sense of relief.

Finally, I made it to my first class. To my relief, I found that task much easier than I thought it would be. When I walked inside the classroom, there were only two people sitting down. This made me feel a little better since I didn't have to walk in front of a lot of people to sit down. Once I sat down, I began to wonder if I was going to know anybody in my class. I was hoping that I would know at least one person. As the minutes went by, more and more people came in. I assumed that nobody I knew was going to arrive since class was about to start, and there were only two empty seats left. Then, to my surprise, my two friends, Morgan and Grant, came walking in. Even though they didn't get to sit by me, I felt much better knowing that they were there.

As the day went on, I didn't worry as much. I discovered that finding my classes wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. And, while I didn't have many friends in most of my classes, I knew that gave me a good opportunity to make new friends. Even though I probably stressed myself more than necessary, I wouldn't have changed anything about my first day. I know in the years to come I will be able to look back on that first day and laugh at how ridiculous I had acted and how I had overanalyzed many things—all part of the great experience.

The Power of Footprints

A Narrative Essay By Trina Sessums

It was the day before Father's Day, Saturday, June 20, 1998. Two weeks earlier, I had turned twenty-two years old. I worked full-time for the Jackson ACCO Credit Union and I waited tables part-time at Sudie's Fish House. That night I was working a private party when my boss called me to take a phone call. It was my sister-in-law, Lisa. She said, "Trina, something has happened. You need to go to your Dad's house, right now." I asked what had happened, but Lisa refused to tell me anything besides "You just have to go to your dad's house, right now." I do not know what I was thinking, but I refused to leave without an explanation. Lisa then told me that my dad had died. He had killed himself. In shock and disbelief, I grabbed my brother, Donnie, who was also working, and sped to Dad's house, running the stop signs that stood between us and our dad. I do not know what I thought, other than I expected to get there and that they had made some horrible mistake or that they would have somehow managed to have brought him back. "They had to have saved him," I thought to myself, "right?" I was certain he was alive. Dad could not be gone.

When Donnie and I arrived at Dad's house, we found out that Lisa was right. There had been no mistake. No miracle had occurred; he was gone. Our dad was really gone. He had committed suicide at home all alone. One of our older brothers, Greg, was there when I arrived. He had been the one who found him. Police and medical personnel were there along with several neighbors and a few passersby. I wanted to go inside and be with him. I wanted to tell him that I loved him and to hold his hand for one last time, but the emergency responders would not allow it. I look back now and know that it was for the best. But in that moment, I wanted to be with my dad more than anything in the world.

So many emotions were suddenly flooding through my body. It was like a tsunami in that the emotions and questions were coming in so fast, like waves rushing through, consuming me entirely. There were so many questions that I could not comprehend or process a single one. Yet, they still kept coming, crashing through with no end in sight. I felt as if I was drowning and I could not stop them. Did he not love us? How could he do this to himself or to us? He knew how much we loved him. Didn't he? Did he die instantly, or did he suffer? Then the biggest question hit me like a ton of bricks and my heart sank deeper. Was he in Hell? This one, tiny question would haunt me and take hold of my heart for a very long time.

For the next several months, I struggled to make it from one day to the next. I could not bear the thought that my dad could be in Hell. I could not eat or sleep. I went only to work and then back home. I had lost all interest in my family and friends. I did not want to do anything. I would lie awake at night while those questions and fears would speed through my mind. It consumed me. The depression, guilt and anger would surface, rip, and tear away at my heart and my sanity. I was ready to quit living my own life. I remember thinking to myself that it is no wonder people take their own lives if they have to live like this. I did not see a way out, not a glimmer of hope in sight.

Then one afternoon, an anonymous friend left a gift on my doorstep. It was a stepping stone with a line from the famous poem "Footprints in the Sand" that read: "When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you." I had read that poem before and I had heard it many times over the years, but until that very moment, I just did not get it. That day, I pulled myself together. I began to accept what had happened. I started to realize that I could not have changed it. Our dad was gone. But, I was still here and with God's love, mercy and grace, I would make it through this and whatever else life threw my way.

I keep the stepping stone propped up on my bathroom counter still today. I look at it often, especially during difficult times. I draw strength from those words. I even find myself reciting it to others when they need encouragement in their lives. Who knows, maybe one day, it will save someone else, just like it saved me.

Journal Writing

A Narrative Essay By Brianna Shaw

Journal writing has been a part of my life since about the seventh grade. It started out as just something teachers made students do in class. Journal topics in class ranged from things like summer vacations to favorite foods or holidays. Once I was in ninth grade I realized journal writing could be about anything, and I could write whenever or wherever. My first personal at-home journal writing experience was about my sadness and worries caused by my mother's move back to Minnesota. After that journal entry, the rest just flowed easily. Journal writing turned into my way of venting any thoughts or feelings I experienced.

My most important and self-assuring journal writing that I wrote was on September 22, 2009. It had been a long, painful day. I remember turning on my mp3 player and setting it on shuffle with the volume low. The beat began to play; it was slow and steady. The woman, Tamia, started singing, "Sometimes I sit at home and wonder how it would be if he had loved me, truly loved me." I recognized the song immediately; it was "Smile". That same line just kept replaying in my head. For a while I just sat there looking at and listening to my surroundings. I saw my tan walls, my red and tan comforter set, my colorful "B" painting, and my notebook. I heard the fan blowing, the rain hitting the roof, and the music playing in my ears. I felt pain because of my realization, my stupidity, and my weakness. I felt and tasted the tears as they ran down my face onto my lips. Then I felt this urge to write, so I grabbed my notebook. I had to write to gather my thoughts and figure out what went wrong.

I had fallen in "love". After knowing this person and being around him on a few occasions, I saw someone I liked and wanted to get to know a little better. We hit it off around June 2007. We started conversation and meeting up to see each other. By August we became a couple. For the next two years, we broke up and made up on numerous occasions. Sometimes it was over petty things and other times it was over his cheating habit. Even though I found out about his cheating and we broke up, somehow I still managed to want to be with him. Throughout this two-year time frame, his cheating behavior became repetitive, and so did my "forgiving" habit. That is until I saw his dishonest ways with my own two eyes.

It was over with then! We broke up for good. I remember crying my poor little eyes out the whole way home. Sitting in my room, I kept getting this feeling that there was something I wanted—no—had to do. Write!

Writing was all I wanted to do. I wanted to pour my heart out onto the pages of that notebook. I decided to use words rather than actions to suffice my pain. I knew that in order to make sense of what happened I had to write down how I felt. I wrote page after page until I felt I had nothing else to express. I sat there reading what was in my notebook. I not only read the entry I had just written down, but I also read all the other entries from the past two years with this person. I noticed the constant use of words like angry, betrayal, honesty, loyalty, love, lust, and lies. After I finished reading and re-reading my journal, I smiled! Despite the swollen, red eyes and dry cheeks, I smiled because I had finally realized it was over. All the wrongdoing and dishonesty was done.

Writing in a journal is an important activity because it can clarify so many things and ease a person's mind. For me, writing in my journal that day helped me realize that I was worth so much more than I had been settling for during those two years. I realized I had been getting walked all over and would not allow it anymore. My journal writing that day brought me out of the fairytale, or at least the fairytale I was trying to create. That day in my room, on my bed, it was like my eyes were opened, all because I took the time out to write and read what was going on inside my head.

Illustration

Essays

Changes

An Illustration Essay By Brian Furr

The famous artist, Pablo Picasso, was once quoted as saying, "I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it." This is a very good description of how I felt after I finished high school. The sudden transformation from youth to technical adulthood was a graduation in more ways than one. My life changed in three major ways after finishing high school.

Perhaps the most immediate change was the realization that I was, from that point on, going to be working without a safety net. Although my parents did not pack me a bag and shove me straight out the door, I was aware that I was going to be expected to pull my own weight. My bills would be my own. My mistakes would be ones that had to be dealt with by me alone. In other words, any benefits or consequences my life handed me were mine alone to bring about.

This pointed out directly the next major difference in my new station, the fact that I was going to be solely responsible for deciding how my life played out. The choices I made then would forever after shape who and what I became. This process would not be a temporary or simple one either, but was one that was, and still is, a constant effort. That particular change, I believe, is one that I struggled with more than almost any other life has thrown at me. Looking back on that moment, and the moments that followed, from a distance of some twenty-three years, I still sometimes wonder if I made the right decisions.

The thing that altered my outlook the most, however, was the thought that even though I would make mistakes, they would be my own mistakes. There would be no more hands guiding me onto roads I did not want to travel. The rules I lived by were ones that I had to work out for myself as I went along. If this meant falling on my face, at least I would be falling in a direction I had started down by my own will. It was a thought that was a little scary, but at the same time, very freeing.

The end of my school years meant going from the shelter of being protected to being my own protector, having decisions made for me to becoming my own decision-maker, and putting my fate into my own hands. There is something to be said for the idea that all change, whether good or bad, is a chance to grow. Even though these changes were sometimes stressful, sometimes even frightening, I cannot truly say that I regret having

to make them. They were changes we all have to deal with, sooner or later. In the end, I think that what old Pablo was trying to say was that the only real way to reach one's destination in life is to make the journey, even if one does not know where that journey is taking one.



Photo: Tom Ross

Religious Doctrine and Salvation

An Illustration Essay By Justin Alexander

Salvation is a religious breakthrough in which every soul seeks. Whether that salvation is a paradise free from pain and suffering or virgins awaiting one in the afterlife, it plays a major role in day-to-day life. Sadly, some of us never reach that salvation. Religious doctrine can have a major effect on how, or if, salvation is ever obtained. Thus, the basis of my belief, religious doctrine interferes with salvation, is born. Whether it is a suicide bomber following his or her beliefs, radicals protesting theatres and condemning the people who partake in them, or the humble believers that try with all of their might to walk that “fine line,” religious doctrine has its effects.

The world is full of diverse religions. Some of these religions have beliefs that most people would say “stray from the norm”. Take Buddhism for instance. Buddhist monks take vows of silence and practice martial arts for self-defense and self-discipline. On the other hand, Islamic and Muslim beliefs command such things as fasting during Ramadan, the Hajj, which is an annual pilgrimage to Mecca, and Zalkat, which is the giving of alms to the poor. Muslim religions also take their practices to the extreme. Suicide bombing coincides with the belief that should a Muslim follower die in battle or for their country, virgins will await them in the afterlife to cater to their every whim.

Hideously enough, wars are often fought solely on religious doctrine and principal. Dating back even farther than the Crusades, religious extremists have taken part in these atrocities. Often neglected during these devastating times is the cost it will take to rebuild everything that is lost to war. Not only are material possessions lost, but lives and land are tossed into the fray. War takes an enormous toll on the land it is fought upon, especially in the cases of chemical and biological warfare. Take the use of nuclear weapons for instance. When used, radiation has an extremely long-lasting effect on the environment. The use of these types of weapons during war can lead to anything from birth defects to genetic mutation for years to come.

Being the youngest child in a family of two religious extremes can often be complicated. My parents fought about my participation in everything from church to Vacation Bible School. My father, who had a Pentecostal background, pushed for me to attend Vacation Bible School. Whereas, my mother who had a background as a Jehovah’s Witness, refused to let me attend. I was constantly pushed into religious decisions and caught in the crossfire of the arguments. My parents constantly asked what I wanted to

do. Being the child I was, all I wanted to do was stay at home and watch cartoons. The older I became, the more my mind had begun to make the decision I preferred. I developed my own religious views and told my parents that my beliefs were my own to have. They did not like the idea at all, but what could they honestly say. Nothing could change my decision. My epiphany was final. I had chosen my own path.

Different religious doctrines combined over the entire world entice a constant feud between each other. As long as one religious extreme views the other as wrong, there will be wars fueled by those doctrines. Within these wars are men, women, and children that believe their sacrifices will never be in vain. Extremists will always view the opposite as wrong and condemned. Extremists will always try to force their beliefs on others. Religious doctrines will always be the fuel that the fire of these feuds crave.



Illustrator: Laiha Pevey

You Are What You Eat

An Illustration Essay By Adrienne Ellzey

The president most likely would not be seen wearing hand-me-downs, nor would a homeless man be seen wearing a tuxedo. People's food and clothing choices are affected greatly by the kind of person they are. While this is not always the case, one can usually tell a lot about people by observing what they wear and eat.

A person's religious and political views can often influence and even dictate what they eat and wear. For example, Jewish individuals must eat kosher food. And Catholics must eat fish on Friday. Conservative Republicans often dress in a manner that refrains from drawing attention to their bodies. Pentecostal and some Baptist women wear skirts that cover the imprint of the thigh. These same individuals sometimes wear long-sleeve shirts and do not wear make-up or flashy jewelry. Liberals, often Democrats, seem to have looser convictions and do not strive as hard to cover up their skin and draw attention away from their bodies, but rather intentionally draw attention to parts of the body they deem their "best figure." A person's religious and political views can sometimes be detected by observing their food and clothing choices.

The financial status of people can sometimes be seen in their food and clothing choices. When people do not have enough money to buy well-balanced meals, they buy a greater quantity of food, but it is often cheaper and unhealthy. Those that are wealthy more often have the ability to buy well-balanced meals. They are often able to participate in exercise programs and join gyms. When people are less wealthy, they may not wear the finest of clothing. They choose comfort over fashion. They also choose to wear cheaper clothing to save money for other necessities. A people's wealth can be determined by the clothes they wear and food they eat.

Though not always the case, the level of respect people have for themselves can often be determined by their clothing and food choices. Those who have high respect for themselves often dress and eat to the best of their means, whether great or small. Choices such as drinking water instead of sodas, and exercising regularly even if only at home are usually made by those who respect themselves. Personal hygiene shows whether individuals respect themselves. If they can afford nice clothing and food, but choose not to, this shows they do not highly respect themselves. The human body is not invincible, and those who eat correctly, when capable, respects this.

The president is known for his high authority, well-paid figure. His

clothes often reflect this. Homeless protestors in D.C., across the fence, are not seen in much more than rags and gloves. One's religious views, political views, financial status, and even level of respect can be detected by peering into his or her pantry or closet. While stereotyping is often prevalent when dealing with this issue, a lot can be determined by what one chooses to wear and eat.

Faith

An Illustration Essay By Amanda Emfinger

Most people often take for granted the complex processes that occur every day. Oxygen is released into the air by plants for each human to breathe in for survival. An actual human develops and grows in a mother's womb in nine short months. The sun rises each morning and sets in the evening without being controlled by any human or machine. Each takes place daily without being seen by the human eye. Even though we cannot see them happening, we have faith that they will occur. I believe faith is being certain of what we cannot see.

When I was nine years old, this belief became real to me. I never questioned what the answer was for how life magically happened each day until September 11, 2001. All of a sudden it seemed that life was not the way it should be. Instead, lives were being ended and people were being hurt. I asked my sister who the person or thing was responsible for putting all of the pieces together in our world and why the pieces were messed up suddenly. She told me about someone much greater than our comprehension, God. He could not be seen or audibly heard, but He was out there controlling the many activities occurring daily. Also, she said that God had the ability to control the people who caused this tragedy. I questioned why He let such a thing happen to our country, but she simply told me that in the end, He knows best. Suddenly it all seemed to make sense to me, and I knew what it truly meant to have faith in something.

This past Spring Break my belief was put to the test. I signed up at my church to go on a mission trip in a tiny village in Mexico. During the intense forty-hour bus ride, I was extremely nervous about sharing this strong belief that had continued to grow in my life. The challenge would be to communicate my belief with other people who spoke a completely different language than I. I worried that I would not be able to help them understand this belief as easily as I did nine years ago with the guidance of my sister. During the week, I was amazed by how simple it was to communicate with the people without having to speak a word at all. At the end of the trip, it was very difficult for me to leave them because I had developed a love for them. Riding home, I realized that it was all possible with the help of God and the faith I had in Him. Even though I could not see it at the time, he knocked down all language barriers and made it possible for me to share love with the people of the village. My trip to La Nariz, Mexico only solidified my belief in being certain of what I cannot see.

Since 2001, life seems to make a little more sense to me. I am constantly reminded of my faith in God each time I see a beautiful sunset painted in the sky and a smile across the faces of the ones that I love. What used to seem like a normal process in life now seems to have so much more meaning, and I strive daily to give all of the credit to the One who deserves it. With this belief, I have a stronger love for others. Instead of just walking past others, I attempt to offer a friendly smile to them to hopefully brighten their day. Whenever I see someone else down, I do my best to lift their spirits and show a small portion of the love that God has for each of us. Having such a strong faith in God has had such a positive impact on me and my life.

If I had not questioned how plants helped us survive, how babies develop in such a short time, or how the sun rises and sets each day, I would have missed out on such a wonderful part of life these past nine years. Days would have passed without having the joy of noticing the simple, but brilliant, processes happening every minute. Being certain of what I cannot see has made my life so much more delightful, and it is a belief that I will live out for the rest of my life!

What Would We Do Without Sports?

An Illustration Essay By Chase Holmes

I think it is about time that someone cleared the air about just how important sports are. Most people say sports are just an extracurricular activity or a hobby. Saying that is like spitting in the face of every athlete and fan. It seems to me people like that are not realizing the true importance of sports in our economy and our communities. I believe sports are the backbone of our nation.

For anyone who does not think sports are very important maybe that person should think about the relation between sports and our school systems. Most school systems have “pee-wee” leagues which start training young athletes as early as the fourth grade. These young athletes usually train for and play their desired sport, or sports, all the way through high school. Once the athletes finish high school there are thousands of college scholarships rewarded for athletes who are exceptionally gifted. There are also numerous scholarships given out to cheerleaders who, despite what some say, are athletes. These outstanding cheerleaders get all or most of their practice in a school setting cheering for a school team. In our school system athletes are taught, starting at a young age, how to perform great, and later they are rewarded for great performances.

Sports are also very important to our communities. Everyone waits anxiously for the local game every week. Most high school students attend their local high school games, most college students attend their local college games, and most adults in the community attend both games for support, or possibly because they have children on the team. Sporting events are a much better environment for high school and college students than a party. There is no need to drink to enjoy a local sporting event which really eliminates sloppy drunks and the drama and violence that they cause. Also, if someone is really intoxicated and causing problems at a sporting event, there are usually officers there to escort them out, as opposed to a party where someone has to step up and knock them out, which ultimately causes more unnecessary commotion. Taking these factors into consideration, I would say that sporting events are the best way for communities to gather and interact.

Just like a local sporting event can bring an entire community together for one night, a national sports franchise can bring an entire state, even an entire nation, together for one cause. A perfect example of this is the way that the 2006-2009 New Orleans Saints practically resurrected a city that

was thought to be destroyed forever. After Hurricane Katrina demolished the city of New Orleans, its inhabitants thought that it was the end of the once famous city, and they were filled with despair. As the cleanup process began, so did the 2006 NFL season. The New Orleans Saints acquired quarterback, Drew Brees, running back, Reggie Bush, and coach, Sean Peyton. This really gave New Orleans natives a little bit of hope and they took the team, a team who had never even reached the playoffs, all the way to the NFC championship where, unfortunately, they fell short to the Chicago Bears. The Saints football team had mediocre seasons in 2007 and 2008 but generous donations from all of the team's players really helped the rebuilding process, and they still carried their city on their back. Beginning the 2009 season, the Saints picked up an all star cast to help Drew Brees on his run for the national championship, including very valuable players such as, Jeremy Shockey, Darren Sharper, and Jonathon Vilma. Everyone said that it couldn't be done--everyone except for New Orleans natives. As the city was finishing the final touches of the rebuilding process the Saints were marching their way to the super bowl, and picking up an enormous fan base as they went, which generated a lot of revenue from jersey sells and donations from people who wanted to see their city make it. The Saints won the Super Bowl that year and the celebration was absolutely epic. For the first time since Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans' famed Bourbon Street was back to its prime and residents of New Orleans finally felt at home again.

If anyone can honestly tell me, with these considerations, that he or she still does not think sports are important, I feel like I have failed not me, but failed that person. Sports can give underprivileged kids a chance to go to college, bring communities together, and actually save a city. A world without sports is a world I never want to experience.

I Believe in My Hometown

An Illustration Essay By Brooke King

I believe that my small hometown plays a special role in my life. Wesson, Mississippi, is a picturesque local community located right on Highway 51; this place has been the town I have called my very own since birth. My heart belongs to this town because it has supported me, loved me and cared for me these past eighteen years. Growing up here has truly been a blessing in itself. Being the Wesson girl that I am, I always know exactly what to expect of my hometown.

In Wesson there is nothing but genuine and kindhearted people. Each person is truly special to me, even if I do not know them personally. At Wesson High School I was involved in several activities, which meant I was always being watched and noticed. After Friday night football games I was always greeted with hugs and handshakes from various people that I may or may not have known.

Wesson holds an annual Founder's Day to celebrate the birth and life of our small town. Every year one girl is interviewed and selected as Wesson's Founder's Day Queen; this young lady is to represent the town and to help the chamber board to promote Wesson. My parents had people coming to them to make sure that I applied for the position. The chamber chose me for this honorable title. When I really think of the love my town shows me, my church family automatically comes to mind. During very difficult situations, whether good or bad, they were there for me with open arms, open hearts, and with an open kitchen of home cooked food.

After every vacation I have ever taken, one of the best parts was coming home. I am not talking about to my literal house; it's more like I am ready to come back to my actual Wesson, MS. It's the little things I would miss the most. My daddy is the branch manager of Copiah Bank in Wesson. I love going to the bank on Fridays to get a warm, soft sugar cookie and to chat with the "bank ladies". These women are always rooting for me and give me boosts of confidence when I may need it the most. When I want to really go back to my roots and enjoy a mouthwatering meal, my parents and I sit down in comfy patio chairs out on the porch at Porches restaurant. I grew up on their southern home cooking; when I ate everything on my plate, I was carried by the chef himself to retrieve a cookie from the pantry. Still today, their cracked peppercorn steak, lemonade green beans, and soft buttered rolls tickle my taste buds.

My childhood summer days were always spent with other Wesson kids

at the ballpark. Many friendships were made on and off those fields. Going there, even today, brings back memories of sunflower seed spitting on the pitcher's mound, pairing up to go warm ups throwing, and the pride I had when I came home with a nice grass or mud stain on my ball pants.

High school Friday night football in Wesson is a high priority; with me being a cheerleader and captain my senior year, football fever runs through my veins. My senior year was like a motion picture movie. I was named head senior cheerleader, which has always been a dream of mine. Every week I worked extra hard to make sure my football players were happy. In return, they elected me football homecoming maid. It was a huge honor to me and I took great pride in representing my football team. At the last pep rally of my senior year we were preparing to perform this awesome hip hop dance, when my name was called out as one of the four people to be inducted into the Wesson High School Hall of Fame. My parents surprised me by being there at the pep rally to see me get presented. It was the single most amazing moment of my senior year. By my bed in my dorm sits a picture of my senior cheerleaders and football players; and whenever I need something to make me realize how blessed I truly am, I look at it and sink back into the memories.

Looking into the future and reflecting on the past, I would not change anything about my life here in Wesson. My memories I made here are treasures I will continue to think about for years to come. I cannot imagine growing up without my hometown to support me during the victorious times and the down times, without the love from the people of Wesson, or without just the friendly atmosphere that helped me to grow to be whom I am today. I believe that my small hometown plays a special role in my life.

Consequences in Three Seconds

An Illustration Essay By Carrie Moak

According to a study released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI), 80 percent of automobile accidents and 65 percent of near-accidents involve at least some form of driver distraction within three seconds of the crash or near-miss. Learning the simple things we do wrong while driving could help prevent us from having a wreck one day. Even though we consider driving as a pleasure, many of today's drivers have dangerous habits.

Drivers today have become too confident in their driving that they think they can do other things while behind the wheel. Talking and texting on the phone while going down the road is an everyday occurrence in our society today that many do not see as a threat, but it can take one's eyes off the road for just one second and it can cause a wreck. Going through the drive thru at a fast food place is easy and convenient for our fast pace lives but it also distracts us while we are driving. Eating a burger or grabbing some fries out of a bag can distract one from their surroundings because they are concentrating on their food. Girls are prone to think that we are better than boys and we are always late so putting on our makeup while driving is the perfect solution for us; until, we think of the true dangers of it. Driving down the road while looking in the mirror is a serious danger because the driver cannot see far out in front of their vehicle to see what is coming.

Peer pressure can get the best of teenagers while they are driving and this creates bad habits. Teens today want the radio blaring while they cruise down the boulevard. Having the music loud seems like it would be no big deal, but not being able to hear things that is coming could change the results of a collision. Drinking and driving is an occurrence that peer pressure plays a huge part in. When teenagers drink they think they are invincible. Instead of having someone to drive them home; they want to look cool and drive themselves. This extremely dangerous habit is dangerous not only for the driver but also for the car in line with the drunk teen. Because teens are so adventurous, showing out for friends has become common. Speeding, cutting wheelies, slamming on breaks, and just pulling stupid stunts can ultimately result in a horrible crash. Teens are influenced everyday by bad habits that can be the life changer in their life as they know it.

Adults have many flaws when it comes to driving that they easily overlook. Because adults think they are well experienced drivers, many try to

read the paper or get themselves ready for a day at work while driving down the road. Parents also have yelling kids in the back seat that can distract them. Most parents will turn around to help their child and this can lead to a wreck that could kill them and their child. Many over confident adults are guilty of driving over the speed limit and will only come to a rolling stop at stop signs. Although these incidents are only minor dangerous habits, they can lead to a crash. Adults, just like teenagers, have many dangerous habits that we do not notice until it is too late.

Dangerous habits of driving are becoming more evident in our daily lives. Many people are not taking the right precautions and this could lead to more crashes in the future.

Priceless Gifts

An Illustration Essay By Kara Stafford

Picture this! A little girl around the age of four with a cute, little dress on is running towards her mother with her long, chestnut curls bouncing all over. Once she reaches her mom, the little girl jumps up into her arms and squeezes her neck tightly. When I see a scene like this, it makes me smile and want that for myself. A child's hug is one of the most perfect gifts. Usually, the best gifts in life are the gifts that come free.

One example of a priceless gift is a teenage girl being able to sit down with her mom and talk for hours. Talking and sitting close together gives the mother and daughter a sense of closeness and that feeling of "Maybe we can understand each other in more ways than one." I remember one day during my senior year that I was able to do this. My mom was sitting in her favorite chair and I came in, sat down beside her, and started talking. The next time I looked at the clock, I had seen that two hours had passed. Even though all we did was talk for those two hours, I would never give up that time for anything. It was a great gift, and my mom feels the same way.

Some may say, "To feel safe is to feel loved." For a girl who is dating someone, having a guy cuddle with her is another priceless gift. When a couple cuddles and holds one another, they are able to feel safe and secure in each other's arms. When my boyfriend and I cuddled, he would pull me as close as I could get, wrap his arms tightly around me, and say that he was never letting go. It made me feel like he would love me forever, especially when he would lean down and kiss my forehead. This small treasure was a gift that I can still look back on as a fond memory.

Finally, the last example -which I think is the best- is to hear that special someone speak the words "I love you." When someone says those three little words, it opens up a whole new chapter of the relationship. A relationship is an amazing gift that should always be cherished, and to hear him say "I love you" means that he wants you and no one else. The first time I heard those words, my heart fluttered. My heart seemed to be beating out of my chest because he loved me and I knew he meant it. Like it says in the song from the movie *Aladdin*, it opens the couple's eyes to new, unknown territories and brings along bigger and better feelings.

From having a kid wrap his or her arms tightly around their parent's neck to hearing the words "I love you," there are precious presents being given out all over the world. It is true that not everyone can receive all of these gifts, or even any of them, but the ones that do should be mindful not

to take them for granted. For all anyone knows, that gift may be the last one he or she ever receives from that person. So like the song by Lee Brice says, “Be a best friend, tell the truth, and over-use ‘I love you.’ Go to work, do your best, and don’t outsmart your common sense. Never let your praying knees get lazy and love like crazy!”

Technology's Downside

An Illustration Essay By Cody Wall

For years people have been achieving tremendous feats in the area of technology. Scientist and engineers have made so many discoveries and advancements that have changed the world and made life more enjoyable for the average person. All of this technology seems to be fantastic but it can also cause terrible side effects, which could ruin a person's life. Technology has become so addictive that people refuse to accept that it is taking control of their lives. I believe technology is to blame for the corruption of children's thoughts, laziness among society, and feuding between countries.

Firstly, technology is corrupting society by targeting young kids. Technology gives bad thoughts and ideas to society's younger generations through many forms. For example, television allows children to watch bloody violence and hear large amounts of profanity. Another form of technology that promotes bad ideas is the internet, which allows kids to access anything they choose. Technology also takes away some of a child's creativity. It provides so much entertainment that the child never has the need to use his own creativity to entertain himself. Technology can also hinder a younger person's social skills. For instance, with so many forms of entertainment, a child will have less reason to interact with other children. As a result, the child may feel uncomfortable around other people later on in life from the lack of contact with others.

Secondly, technology causes today's society to become lazy and unhealthy. One cause of this is television. Society watches so much television that it does not spend any time exercising. Another cause of this laziness among people, especially kids, is video games. People become so addicted to video games that their life starts to revolve around them. Some children have even started to use video games as an alternative for actual sports. Some of the laziness in society is also derived from the convenience of technology. Technology makes things so easy that there is no need for any physical labor. For instance, the riding lawnmower takes all of the exercise out of cutting the grass compared to a push lawnmower. An additional way technology is unhealthy is by driving while using it. For example, by driving with a cell phone or other electronic device people are not only putting their lives in danger but others' lives as well.

Lastly, technology is causing arguments and feuding between countries. It has caused our country and foreign countries to begin a race for the latest technology in military weapons. One example of this is the nuclear bomb,

which was a result of countries using new technology to build a more powerful weapon to keep up with the advancements of their rival countries. Technology has made it easier to produce these new weapons, which leads to more fatalities throughout a war. It also makes these new weapons cheaper and more affordable by the common person. One result of this is a higher number of homicides in America, which can also be linked to watching violent movies at a young age.

I believe that technology is the main source of problems among children, within America, and around the globe. The need for technology today has left the human race unprepared for a time when essential needs are not available at the local convenient store.

Compare/Contrast Essays

Movie Night

A Compare/Contrast Essay By Will Ashley

“Let’s all go to the movies!” is a common phrase used by adults, teens, and kids alike and has been for many for years. Children dream about seeing the newest animated 3-D movies with their friends; adults and those in between go to the movie theaters for different reasons, such as to get away from a stressful career or for a date night. Movie theaters, however, are not for everyone. Many prefer to watch a movie in the comfort of their home. Deciding which option to choose can be a more difficult decision than it seems because there are many factors that go into choosing whether to see a movie in a theater or to watch one at home.

Cost is a major factor in deciding where one should watch a motion picture. Tickets to see a movie in theaters can range from around six dollars to ten or even twelve. The price of refreshments is particularly outrageous. Buying even the smallest sizes of soda and popcorn available can exceed the cost of the ticket to get in. This type of pricing should be considered petty theft and can weigh quite heavily on a young man’s wallet when treating a special someone to a night at the movies. If one decides to watch a movie at home, then there are many cost-efficient methods to choose from. With a Redbox kiosk on seemingly every corner, renting movies has become very cheap, easy, and worry-free. Buying a movie for a date night is equal to, if not less than, the cost of two people to get into a theater, and one also will own the movie for as much future viewing pleasure as he or she would like. Owning a movie also makes having movie parties at home easy, whereas the cost for a movie party at a theater multiplies remarkably fast with each new person invited.

Another chief factor in making such a difficult decision is convenience. If one does not live in an area of significant size, there may not be a movie theater within many miles. Theaters are not cheap to run and maintain, so they are usually located in only heavily populated places. The cost of gas can be high for people living in rural areas to travel to see a movie in theaters. Also, if a woman or young lady is going to a movie, then there is much ready making and time consumption that will take place. When watching a movie at one’s domicile, one does not have to dress up to be presentable. One may dress in what he or she deems fit to wear or not wear. Viewing movies at home is much more relaxed and even more sanitary than going to the theaters and sitting in seats that nobody knows who could have sat there before them.

The third and most important factor in deciding between watching a movie at a theater or in one's home is the overall experience. With everything from the rumbling bass to the colossal screen, the theater experience far outshines that of watching a movie at home. The popcorn, though expensive, has a timeless, buttery and unforgettable flavor that cannot be replicated elsewhere. Watching the previews to decide which movies to see in the future is always a staple at theaters whereas almost nobody watches them at home on a DVD. When watching a movie at one's abode, becoming wrapped up in a movie like one becomes in a theater is difficult because there are many more possible distractions.

The issue concerning where to watch a movie is one that has and will stand the test of time. Although watching a movie at home may seemingly have more benefits, experiencing a movie in theaters trumps it because watching a movie in theaters is an experience. There is just something about going to the cinema that makes it all worth the trouble, whatever that may be. Going to movies is a tradition that has been passed down through generations since the time of drive-ins and will continue to be. Movie experiences at home have become more common in recent years with surround sound and home theaters becoming more commonplace in houses, but the fact of the matter is that there is absolutely no substitute for a trip to the movies.

Tale of Two Teachers

A Compare/Contrast Essay By Zach Fetcko

Throughout a person's schooling, he or she will come in contact with many different types of people. Some of the most diverse will probably be the teachers. There are countless options when it comes to teachers, each benefitting different students. It is important for a student to be able to identify what type of teacher they learn best from. In high school I had two very different teachers: Ms. J and Coach K. Both of these teachers played a big part in my education, but in very different ways.

To say that Ms. J and Coach K. have different teaching styles is an understatement. Everyday I stepped into Ms. J's class, I knew I would have tons of work. She always did her best to cram as much information into one fifty-minute period as possible. She always gave notes, lectures, worksheets, reading assignments, and homework. No day in her class was easy. We had tons of extremely hard tests, quizzes, and papers. In Coach K.'s classroom, work was very rare. The only thing we were ever expected to do was take a few notes. We had a few tests throughout the year, but they were easy and contained a lot of bonus questions. Coach K. did not give homework assignments the whole year. These two teachers' teaching styles were almost as different as the way they treated their students.

Ms. J and Coach K. are exact opposites when it comes to the treatment of their students. Ms. J would not let anyone talk during class—most of the time not even to her. In Ms. J's classroom, everyone knew who the favorite students were, and they were treated very special, unlike the rest of her students. Ms. J would not tolerate the use of cell phones in her room. Anyone using a phone was sure to be sent to the office. She knew and believed in the Wesson Handbook. She cherished every word in it and made it the law in her room. Coach K., on the other hand, loved to have fun during class. He would always turn music on, so we could listen during the class period. Everyone in Coach K.'s class would be running around playing and having a good time. A normal day in his class consisted of a game of cards, a few funny Youtube videos, and maybe even a game of wall ball. Students stayed on their cell phones in his class. Everyone knew the golden rule in Coach K.'s classroom: HAVE FUN! Since these teachers were so different, it is no wonder I learned differently in both classes.

I did not learn much in either of these teachers' classes. Ms. J constantly tried to cram hundreds of tiny details into my brain; needless to say, I remember none of them. She loved to teach literature, and we learned a lot

of useless facts about made up stories that were written centuries ago. The only useful thing that I obtained in Ms. J's class was taught during our College Project. This project that she forced us to take part in helped me to see the differences in some of my colleges of choice and played a big part in the decision making process. I honestly cannot remember anything school related from Coach K.'s class. I do not even remember what the class was. I do know that it was something about history because we watched Pearl Harbor one day. I think the most beneficial thing about that class was that it helped to pull up my GPA some. It also allowed me to spend some valuable time with my friends just goofing off. Even though I did not learn much, Coach K.'s class was by far my favorite class in high school.

These two teachers were definitely on separate ends of the teaching spectrum. Both teachers were a little extreme with their methods. That is probably why I did not learn much with either. It would have been more beneficial for me in the long run to have had a teacher with a more balanced teaching style.

Dorm Life is an Experience worth Trying

A Compare/Contrast Essay By Melissa Jackson

Graduating from high school and moving to college is a big step. Some graduates move off to universities; others move to local community colleges. Statistics suggest that about seventy percent of students apply for the dorms each year. Either way, it is a life-changing experience. Moving from home into a dorm has its advantages: like having roommates, a sense of independence, and more involvement.

When leaving home, fear and anxiety of being on one's own will come. As an only child, I did not have to share my possessions. Sometimes, this was not an advantage. It was just me and the parents and it got lonely. I had no one to talk to or watch movies with unless I had friends over. When moving into the dorm, one has the privilege to have roommates. At first it is nerve racking not knowing if one will get along. On the other hand, there will never be a dull moment. One will always have someone to talk to and watch movies with. Roommates can help each other with homework and projects as well.

Living at home has its advantages, but one does not get the true feeling of independence. Parents seem to always be saying, "Do your homework," and "Have you studied?" However, that all disappears when living in a dorm. One has to mature and learn to set aside study time on his or her own. Living in the dorm gives a sense of what independence is like.

There are many activities, organizations, and sports that go on after school hours. Living at home and being involved has its disadvantages. It puts wear and tear on a car traveling back and forth. This also means several gallons of gas used each week which adds up. Living in the dorm can reduce some of these problems. Being in the dorms means one is in walking distance to every activity that goes on, which saves on gas money. One also seems to have a better idea of what is going on around campus. Overall, it seems like more students who live on campus are involved in more activities than those who commute.

Contrary to what many students think, having roommates are not that bad. Living in a dorm also lets one have independence as well as being more involved. It is not surprising with all the perks to having a roommate and having independence that the number of students wanting to live in the dorms has increased greatly over the years.

Before and After I Got Saved

A Compare/Contrast Essay By Lindi-Lane Smith

It is strange how one decision through a person's life can completely change them inside and out. Some for the better and some for the worse, but for me, it was definitely for the best. I was raised in a very Christian environment ever since I was born, but just recently I accepted Jesus into my life and it completely changed me. It affected my relationships with others, my bad habits, and my outlook on life.

Before I was saved, I never really attempted to have good relationships with my family or my friends. Along with all the pressures of being a teenager, I never really cared about trying to have a relationship with my mother, or any other member of my family. I never wanted to attend family events, and I would always make excuses to miss them. I did what was best for me and I did not care about others. I pushed everyone out of my life that really cared about me. When I pushed everyone out of my life, I turned to drinking, smoking, and unhealthy relationships with guys to try to fill that "empty space". I stayed out late almost every weekend making really care-less decisions that turned my attitude into a very negative one. I got into the habit of being very careless and my school work suffered because of that. With all the things I was putting myself through; my outlook on life was a very negative thing. I did not care whether I was here or not. I took my life for granted and I gave up on myself. I shut down completely and was stuck in a depression faze. I would not listen to anyone who was trying to help me. I was rebelling from everything and everyone that was a good influence in my life. Before I was saved, I feel I was at rock bottom.

After I was saved, my whole life changed. I am now so much closer to my family, especially my mom. I finally feel a part of the family, or anything for that matter. I enjoy attending family gatherings and anything where the whole family is together. I am so much more caring for other people, and I try to do what is best for everyone. All of my bad habits have changed also. I quit staying out late and drinking every weekend, and I found a new way to fill the "empty space" in my life. I try to pray and read my Bible every night. I also found a hobby I enjoy which is singing in the choir at church. I also volunteer to teach children's church once every month. My school work has gotten so much better and I know that is because I stopped being so careless and I am actually trying to succeed in life. My outlook on life has completely changed. I look at it now as a white canvas that I cannot wait to start painting when I continue with my life. I have started to see that God

put us here for a reason and I cannot wait to see what my reason is. I have started listening to the positive influences in my life while trying to be a positive influence to someone else. Being saved and finding hope with God is the best thing that has ever happened to me.

My life has completely changed. I would not change anything that has happened to me for anything, though. It gives me a wonderful story to tell. Looking back and seeing how different my life use to be really amazes me. Becoming saved has really changed my outlook on life, relationships with others, and my bad habits all for the better.

Opposites Really Do Attract...Me

A Compare/Contrast Essay By Erin Vanier

What would life be like without friends? What would life be like if there was no diversity among friends or if every friend was exactly alike? I am distinctly fortunate enough not to know the answer to these questions, for I have many friends who are very diverse. However, my two closest friends, Amber Anthony and Jessica Smith, could not be more diverse in their personalities, their interests, and the means by which they communicate with me, if they tried.

My friends are complete opposites when it comes to describing their personalities. Amber, to put it lightly, is the more outgoing of the two. She never meets a stranger, and is rarely intimidated to give her opinion. She is a giving person, also. Many times she has given of her time and resources to help those in need whether it be a visiting an elderly person in the nursing home or baking cookies for her neighbor's children. To talk to Amber, one would never guess that she was only sixteen, but like many other sixteen-year-old girls, she struggles with her self esteem, and how others view her. Jessica, on the other hand, is more reserved and even a little shy. She only gives her opinion when asked, and has to be prodded even then. Jessica, who will soon be twenty-three, has had the time to mature and grow confident in herself, and is wise beyond her years. Both of them, with both the pros and cons of their personalities, are the perfect balance for me.

Amber and Jessica also have very different interests. Amber enjoys taking advantage of the convenience of modern technology. She keeps up to date with her Facebook account. She also posts a blog once a week on different topics of interest. Amber is also very musically talented. She has a voice that is out of this world, and she also plays the piano and the organ for her church. Jessica is Amber's complete opposite when it comes to interests. While Amber creates with words and music, Jessica, creates with colors and light. Jessica is a very talented amateur photographer. She takes pictures of simple things and turns them into masterpieces. When she has had her film developed, she uses her pictures to make scrap books, which are, to put it mildly, a work of art.

My two friends differ very much in the means by which they communicate with me. Since Amber lives in Pennsylvania, we are limited to communication via the internet and the occasional long distance phone call. We e-mail each other nearly every day, even if it is just to say, "Hi!" I also post little comments on her Facebook page and blog posts to let her know I am

keeping up with what is going on in her life. On the other hand, since she Jessica lives in Brookhaven like I do, we get to see each other almost every day. We always stop to talk to each other, even if we are running late. We talk on the phone at least twice a week, and we sometimes even get to have a girl's night out when schedules permit. No matter how we have to communicate, I am glad that I have two friends that care enough to communicate with me.

Though Amber and Jessica are complete opposites in their personalities, they provide the perfect balance for my personality. Though they have different interests, they never fail to amaze me with their talents. Though they have different means by which to communicate with me, I am glad the connection is there. Most of all, I am thankful that God has given me two very different, very unique, but very dear friends.

Living at Home Vs. Living in a Dorm

A Compare/Contrast Essay By Cody Wall

For years, colleges have offered dorms to its students as they will for years to come. Many students would prefer to stay in dorms if they had the opportunity while some students would rather live at home. If some students thought about the pros and cons of living in a dorm and living at home, they may change their outlook on the situation. They might see that living in a dorm for a few years could help make the transition from living at home to living on their own a lot easier. Living at home is very convenient, but living in an apartment or dorm has significant benefits that make it a more favorable choice.

The first noticeable difference between living at home compared to living in a dorm is the overall type of experience. In a dorm, students receive a type of experience that is adventurous and thrilling at times. Living in a dorm also gives people the opportunity to meet and interact with new people without having to go out of their way. These activities can also help develop a young adult's social skills and even gives a student an idea of what life will be like after college. On the other hand, living at home gives a student a quiet space to study and focus on school work. A student who lives at home also builds a stronger bond with family members. For example, there is nothing like sitting down at night with family and eating a home cooked meal.

Another difference between living at home in contrast to living in a dorm is the feeling of security. Students who live in dorms may have a sense of security that leaves them feeling exposed. For example, the students will not have the comforting feeling of lying down and going to sleep in their own bed at night. Living in a dorm also has the potential to make the student vulnerable. For instance, many people have access to the student's personal belongings. On another note, living at home gives the student a stronger feeling of security. The student would be going to sleep in a warm environment surrounded by loving family members, which would let the student sleep easier in the comfort of his or her own bed.

The last difference between living in a dorm compared to living at home is the feeling of independence. Living in a dorm has the valuable ability to prepare students for the real world. For example, it is each student's responsibility to wake up and go to class every day. Living in a dorm gives a student the opportunity to make decisions without the influence of a parent. Living in a dorm also gives the students an option to go and do things

without the constant monitoring of a parent, which means the student has the freedom to go as he or she pleases. For instance, a student staying in a dorm does not need to ask for permission before leaving the dorm. Living in a dorm also gives students some of their first experiences in managing money. Students living in a dorm also learn how to set priorities and manage time efficiently. On the contrary, living at home takes some of the stress off of the student. If students still lived at home they would have their parents to help them manage their time for them by reminding them of important assignments, waking them up in the mornings for class, and reminding the students of tests. A student's parents could also cook, buy groceries, and clean the household, which would have to be done by the student if they lived in a dorm.

Many parents believe it would be better for their child to live at home instead of moving out and living in a dorm at college if they had the option to live at home. Parents do not realize that this is a time when their child has the chance to move out and gain valuable experience that will help them become a successful adult. Although living at home is convenient, living in a dorm will help students become more experienced and prepare them for the real world.

Cause/Effect Essays

Cash-crop or Death-trap?

A Cause/Effect Essay By Justin Alexander

As each generation becomes of age, more and more consumers are drawn into the deadly world of tobacco use. There are many causes that start a person down this road, but a decent percent of users suffer the same fate. Whether one is drawn in by peer pressure or for the fulfillment of an oral fixation, drastic outcomes remain the same. Although the causes seem miniscule compared to the consequences, today's youth are drawn in quicker than ever. What these young minds do not realize are the outcomes, such as birth defects, heart-attack and/or stroke, and loss of energy and shortness of breath.

Tobacco use has been known to cause birth defects in children whose mother used the product during pregnancy. These birth defects can range from physical and/or genetic defects to mental and/or nerve disorders. In most cases, the defects are brought on by use during pregnancy, but use during conception can have the same results. Other research has proven tobacco use during pregnancy and/or conception to be linked with a possible case of addiction later in the child's life. Not only can use of these products be dangerous, but someone using tobacco products near a pregnant mother can have the same effects.

Another known health risk contributed to by smoking is an increased risk of heart attack and/or stroke. These health risks are even greater in an individual whose family has had a medical history of heart and/or circulatory related illnesses. The knowledge of these elevated risks are a great deterrent, but this alone is not a means of prevention. Heart attacks and strokes happen quickly and instantaneously enough, so smoking while having previous cases of circulatory and cardiovascular issues only causes a person to be a proverbial "ticking time-bomb."

Although birth defects, heart attacks, and strokes are very serious consequences of smoking, the main effect I encountered as a smoker was lack of energy and shortness of breath. I was amazed to find the physical change that had taken place when I quit smoking. I no longer get winded by simply going to check the mail. I have three times the energy that I had when I smoked. I could not fully enjoy the company of my daughter because I did not have the energy to keep up with her. Now, I have the energy to play with her for hours without end.

Smoking is a very dangerous habit and only decreases the life expectancy of a person. The older a person is also increases the chances of illnesses

related to the use of tobacco products. My advice to upcoming generations is to ignore peers who try to convince one that smoking is “cool.” In my opinion, the only thing that smoking really can be considered as is assisted suicide. Do not be drawn into the death trap known as tobacco use. I hate to use such a clichéd saying as just say no, but that is exactly what I would do if I could go back to when it all started. I am saying this from experience. Smoking is never worth the consequences that follow.

Effects of Owning a Dog

A Cause/Effect Essay By Jonathan Farnham

For many years, dogs have often been referred to as man's best friend. Dogs are loyal companions to their owners. The owner can bond with the dog in a way that enables the owner always to be able to turn to the dog when he or she feels alone or needs someone to talk to. Some dogs are helpful when hunting or finding a kill. Some can save lives. They can do many good things, but there are still some issues with owning a dog like any other pet. One such problem is the dog's droppings. Even with the issues, owning a dog has many good effects on the owner's personality and time management.

One effect of owning a dog is getting out of the house to walk with the dog. Most of the time, I can be found inside watching television or playing video games. I do not prefer to be outside too much, but I feel that I must set aside some time to enjoy the sun's rays directly. I carry this feeling out when I walk with my dogs each day. I walk with them out to the lake behind my house to get some exercise and enjoy nature without any unnecessary sounds. For me, it is both relaxing and rejuvenating to get out of the house and enjoy what God made in peace.

Another effect of owning a dog is the sense of responsibility it brings. When I was younger, my brother and I would take our oldest dog out for a walk by the lake each day. We would throw a stick, ball, or some other toy either on the ground or in the lake to cool her off. At that point in time, we shared the responsibility, but that period of time did not last forever. Not long after our dad purchased our second dog, we started to get into arguments about when the dogs should be exercised and fed during the day. He wanted to feed them right after school each day, but I wanted to exercise them when the temperature was not too hot or cold before the sun went down. Eventually, he stopped coming with me all together and left me to take care of the dogs myself. It has been that way for several years now, and I am, in a way, glad that the change took place. I am now responsible for walking them, giving them food, giving them fresh water, and making sure that dog food is in steady supply. Even though at some points it is troublesome, it has taught me that I have to take some responsibility in order to get the job done.

A final effect of owning a dog is the bond between owner and dog. Over the years, my family has had a few dogs that only remained in the family for a short period of time. Our first dog was only a puppy when

it died. Our next two dogs were killed by cars driving down the road and hitting them. After each death, I felt depressed for a time because I had grown fond of playing with the individual dog, but I moved on because the bond was not that deep. When our oldest dog, Lady, came into the family as a puppy, she was full of energy. My brother and I would play with her to get her used to us and have fun, and I enjoyed her company. As she got older, we were able to do more things than before. When we got our next dog, Coal, things changed. Coal was the new center of attention while he was a puppy, and Lady was, in a sense, left out. Despite Coal getting plenty of attention from my dad, I still treat Lady better because I have bonded better with her over the years. She has been in the family for over ten years, and, despite her old age, she still finds ways to make me smile. Even when she is long gone, I doubt I will ever forget my bond with her.

Many people say cats, birds, reptiles, or rodents make good pets, but I prefer dogs. I can somewhat agree that cats are fun and help with pest control because I interact with cats that hang around my house and my grandmother's barn, but they cannot compete with dogs in areas like loyalty and companionship. There are challenges with owning a dog, however, such as making sure it does not tear something up that it should not. Such negative side effects go hand in hand with the good side effects. As an owner of two dogs, I can honestly say that owning a dog can really change a person's life for the better.

I Get it Honestly

A Compare/Contrast Essay By Allison Higbee

Children are like sponges. They learn from watching Mom and Dad act and react in day-to-day situations. The effects of watching the actions of their parents are substantial to the development of children's personalities and life choices. From the way Mom cleans to the way Dad dresses, no action goes unnoticed by a young child trying to soak up every little move his or her parents make. My parents personally influenced my life by instilling the values of religion, money, and love into my everyday life.

Ever since I can remember, my parents have taken my little sister and me to church every Sunday. The effect of that practice is now that I am old enough to make my own decisions about my faith, I still choose to attend church every Sunday. Being involved in church activities has become a way of life for me. I tend to surround myself with people with the same beliefs and values that I have. For example, my roommates and I enjoy going to the Baptist Student Union on campus on Monday nights. I also try to be as involved in mission work and helping others as possible. I love working with kids and teaching them about my faith like my parents taught me.

As well as religious values, I also was affected by my mom's tight money values. When I was younger, I felt like I was the only person at school who did not have the latest clothes or name brand snacks in my lunchbox. My mom was, and still is, the queen of cutting coupons and buying everything off of the sale rack. Even though it annoyed me then, I have a great appreciation and understanding of the value of a dollar now. Like my mom, if I ever go grocery shopping on my own, I go straight to the Kroger brand items. I hardly ever go shopping for myself unless it is absolutely necessary. However, when I do go shopping, I have a set budget, and the first place I look is the section of items that are on sale. Though I have not started clipping coupons yet, there is no doubt I am my mother's child because of how frugal we both are.

Fortunately for me, another way my parents have influenced my life is by showing me what true love looks like. After almost twenty years, my parents are still together and love each other like they did the day of their wedding. My mom always told me to look for a boy who was like my daddy. I used to think that dating a boy like my dad was completely absurd, but now I understand what she meant. I always believed true love existed just from looking at my parents, but I never knew I would find it so soon. However, when I was seventeen years old, my boyfriend proposed.

Although I was excited, I was also very shocked just because we were, and are, very young. However, I have no worries about our future together as husband and wife because I have found someone who has the same values as I do, and he is just like my daddy.

Regardless of how parents choose to raise their children, their beliefs and ways of life will undoubtedly influence their children's lives. Whether they specifically teach their kids about a certain religion, or unintentionally teach them the value of a dollar or of love through their actions, kids will learn to live their lives around their parents' ways. I feel that I am very blessed to have the parents I have and that they have successfully raised me into the mature young woman I am today.

Back to the Basics: Identifying the Causes of Drug Influence

A Compare/Contrast Essay By Chase Holmes

One of the biggest problems in our nation right now is drugs. Our nation's drug consumption rate has been growing rapidly over the last five to ten years. The government pours billions of tax dollars into what they call the "war on drugs." The focus of this program is to get drugs off the streets and put dealers behind bars, but what they do not realize is those dealers will get out of jail and the drugs they seized will be replaced by more drug imports the next day. America need to start looking at the causes of the increasing consumption rate. The three main causes for increased drug use are celebrity, media, and parental influence.

One of the biggest causes of the rapidly growing drug consumption in our nation is our nation's celebrities. Some estimate that actors and musicians spend close to one million dollars a year individually on drugs. If this is to be believed, then upwards of fifty million dollars of the drug revenue every year comes from famous celebrities. Celebrities are also promoting drugs more frequently. Ten years ago a number of celebrities were speaking out against drugs, whereas now more and more celebrities are speaking out for the legalization of marijuana and boasting about how much drugs they do on a daily basis. None of these celebrities are punished for their actions either. It seems like they are truly "untouchable," and they lead young teens to believe that there is nothing wrong with doing drugs.

The media is just as much the reason for the growing drug consumption rate as the celebrities. Every show on TV these days has references to drugs. Not the kind of references shown on after school specials, but references to drugs making them seem like they are the "it" thing to do. Shows and movies such as *Weeds*, *Pineapple Express*, and *How High* make it seem as though marijuana and other illegal drugs are needed for having fun and living a joyful everyday life when in reality they just ruin people's lives and drain people's bank accounts. It also does not help to lower the drug rate when every song on the radio is putting drugs in a positive light, and promoters try to get these songs played as often as possible. Media also loves to put celebrities who are struggling with addiction in the spotlight, which makes fans of these celebrities think if their favorite celebrity is doing it, then there is nothing wrong with it.

The blame for our rising drug consumption rate cannot be placed solely on the media and the celebrities they keep in the spotlight. Parents

also have a huge negative impact on the war on drugs. One way that the blame can be taken off celebrities and media is to say that parents should not only be keeping their children from watching shows and movies with positive drug references in them, but they should also be teaching them from a young age that drugs are bad no matter what the media, celebrities, or anyone else says. Also, it is proven that teens with divorced parents are much more likely to try drugs while in high school than teens coming from a stable family. These teens usually turn to drugs for attention or to be rebellious because they feel lost. The teens usually turn into addicts by graduation and never go to college. Also, it is surprising how many parents do drugs with their teens to try to seem like a cool parent.

One of the biggest problems in our nation today is drugs, and the consumption rate is rapidly increasing. This problem is depleting our tax funding for schools, hospitals, and government-assisted income. It is also directly related to our growing poverty, unemployment, and high school dropout rates. If something is not done to fix this problem fast, there will be complete chaos in our nation. If we start by taming the media and celebrities and teaching better parenting, we will finally begin to win this “war on drugs.”

Going Against the Grain

A Compare/Contrast Essay By Brooke King

Teenage girls in today's society are constantly being pulled, shaped, and measured into what is supposed to be "the perfect body." Looking around, I notice pictures, advertisements, and products that scream to the world: "Everybody is supposed to lose weight!" As a young woman, peer pressure about weight and size is a huge obstacle. I wish I could say I did not care about what I looked like or how much I weighed when I was in high school, but I did. Unfortunately, I gained extra pounds at the beginning of my tenth grade year; it seemed as if no form of exercise would force the pounds off my body. This time in my life is when I made a stupid choice that affected me in a horrid way. Bulimia became my means of shedding pounds, but the binge eating, constant hiding of the practice, and the malnutrition started to drastically impact my life.

Binge eating is a way to enjoy the foods I love while at the same time preparing to purge myself. I would sit down at a meal and devour everything on my plate as quickly as possible. This may sound like a win/win situation, but it is not like that at all. My stomach would begin to hurt after eating many things in such a quick time constraint and from the purging of food out of my stomach. Then it became a feeling of misery every time breakfast, lunch, or supper was put in front of me. I knew the purging was coming, and often the feeling of knowing was worse than the actual bulimia. My appetite for food began to dwindle as the binge eating consumed my life, which made it become more and more difficult to hide my eating disorder.

It was September when I began the horrid practice of bulimia. This was in the middle of football season and during my family's time of living with my Mamaw while our new house was being built. I was constantly surrounded by people whether it was cheerleaders, friends, or my family. People would certainly become suspicious if I ran to the bathroom every time we finished a meal, so I began finding different excuses to leave the table early and various routes to the back bathroom where no person could hear me. One time, a fellow cheerleader heard me in the bathroom, and I had to fake being sick. Hiding my secret became so challenging that I would stress out about my next meal before I had even had my first. This was a stupid thing for me to stress out about because I had many other things going for me that were all accomplishments. Hiding soon was not an issue anymore because I had an even bigger problem to face: the malnutrition.

Even though I would eat food that was filled with nutrients, since I was purging it out of my system, the minerals and vitamins from the meal did not absorb into my system. My hair became brittle and dry, and my nails turned yellow. Dancing and cheering became struggles without energy from food. I was constantly sleepy, tired, and unhappy. When I looked in the mirror, I did not see a thin, fit girl; all I could see was a physically fatigued young lady. If I was losing weight, my eyes were oblivious to it.

My physical body and emotional state went through difficulties during my time being bulimic. One day God came and swiftly cleared my thoughts. Thankfully he did, and I immediately stopped the practice. Food had never tasted so good before. I do not know what I was thinking the whole time. Being bulimic hurt my body much more than it helped it. Now I use my story and the stupid consequences of my terrible choice to help young girls who battle with peer pressure and body image. I learned that the effects of bulimia, such as binge eating, disorder hiding, and nutrition starving are not a cheap price to pay for what people see as “a perfect body.”

A Good Student

A Compare/Contrast Essay By Eddrika Lawrence

Being a good student is sometimes believed to be one's destiny due to only the amount of intelligence he or she possesses. In contrast to some beliefs, being a good student is a person's own choice along with social and environmental factors and how one's intelligence is applied. I started school as a good student. When I was old enough to understand its importance, I chose to put forth an effort to remain a good student for various reasons. Some reasons are more influential than others, but all are significant factors. I am a good student because I am always encouraged and supported by my mom, I am self-disciplined and self-motivated, and I have good time management, class attendance, and study habits.

One reason that I am a good student is I have a loving mom who has always encouraged and supported me. She always tells me to be the best I can be and is proud of me when I try hard and do my best. She tells me she believes in my ability to do anything I set my mind to do and put forth effort to accomplish. She reminds me to be proud of myself and not feel ashamed of making mistakes or for not always making right decisions. She lends a helping hand whenever she can and assures me that she is here for me through any and all circumstances. For instance, one Thursday evening when I was in 9th grade, I was so worried about taking a test the following day. I had been studying the day before and that Thursday evening after I got out of school. I usually do well with studying, but for that particular test, I had much to study. My mom told me that I had to break my studying into sessions, and it would make studying easier. She even helped me study by reading my study notes to me and asking me questions. I can truly say that her encouragement and support have brought about aspirations in me and inspired me to do well in school to receive a good education.

Another reason why I am a good student is because I am self-disciplined and self-motivated. Growing up, I have always had my own unique view of life. I never seemed to follow the crowd, especially when negative consequences could result. My conscience played a very big role in life, and I knew right from wrong. I always seemed to be more interested in things that would help me learn and do well in school. I would stay inside to read books and write my own little stories much of the time instead of going outside to play from the age of six to nine years old. When I was about ten years old, I would say, "I am going to be a good person with good kids and a good husband and a good job with a big house and three cars." Looking

back at what I said at that age, I know that I have always been determined to be successful and happy. To this day, I have a strong desire to be successful and am determined to get a good education to be my path on my journey to success.

A final reason why I am a good student is that I manage my time well, study hard and efficiently, and attend class regularly. I learned the hard way to begin managing my time to do class assignments and study for tests for school. I had to suffer from anxiety and stress because I chose to procrastinate one time on a school project. I was terrified that I was not going to get finished in time and receive a low grade. From that point on, I began to do my work ahead of time. I even began to study two to three days in advance for a test or quiz. I get extreme anxiety when I am not prepared for work that I have to do, and I love to make good grades. In addition, I attend class regularly because I do not like to miss any work. I dislike make-up work unless an absence could absolutely not be avoided. My preferences of how I like to be prepared for class and do all my work on time have made me a good student.

Intelligence alone is not a factor of being a good student. It is when intelligence is applied, regardless of the amount, that a good student results. Although intelligence is important, it is not the only factor or reason for being a good student. Various reasons contribute to why I am a good student. Of all these reasons, my decision to apply my intelligence is what contributes the most to me being a good student. It is one's own decision to want to do better to become the best one can be in life. Being a good student is only a choice not a destiny.

Accounting

A Compare/Contrast Essay By Alex Lea

A Certified Public Accountant with a Bachelor's Degree averages a starting salary of \$93,257, according to Smart Pros survey poll results. Who would not want a starting salary of \$93,257? There are many benefits of being an accountant or a certified public accountant. To be a Certified Public Account, I would have to pass the CPA boards. Accounting has always been what I planned to major in once I got to college because of the money, working conditions, and the mathematics.

One reason I chose to major in accounting is the salary. As with most all majors, a person's salary will depend on how far he or she goes with his or her degree. I plan to get my Bachelor's Degree. By having a bachelor's degree in accounting, the starting salary is around \$90,000 a year. I have been fortunate enough not to have had a struggle with money while growing up; therefore, I need a degree where I make a larger amount of money. By making a larger amount of money, I would not have to adjust to new spending habits. Also, I would be able to support a family on my own if need be. Without a larger salary, it would be more of a struggle for me than what I am used to having. I would have to adjust my spending and shopping habits. So to make finances easier on myself, I am going to major in accounting to have a higher salary that would support and satisfy me.

Another reason I chose to major in accounting is the working conditions an accountant has. An accountant does not have to work weekends. Their hours are Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for the most part. Also, they work indoors in an office setting. The main reason I like their working conditions is the fact that they dress nice on a day-to-day basis. I feel like someone in the business field should always dress to impress. People always seem to carry themselves better if they are dressed well. I enjoy getting to dress up, so I would really enjoy dressing up every day. Working conditions can be a huge factor for someone trying to decide on a major.

A final reason that I chose to major in accounting is because of all the mathematics. I thoroughly enjoy math and working with numbers. Anything that involves numbers can hold my attention for a long period of time. Math has always been my best subject. I always had an A in math throughout school. I can pretty much figure out any problem placed in front of me dealing with numbers. Mathematics is something that could definitely affect someone in choosing a potential major.

Choosing a degree or career comes easy for some but hard for others. Luckily, it came easily for me. I knew without a doubt that I needed something that had a good salary, working conditions, and that dealt with money. Accounting jumped out to me at an early age. I knew right then that was what I wanted to do, and I have continued to push myself in that direction throughout school.

Researched Argument Essays

Media and the Government

Researched Argument Essay By Trevor Pinson

In a country with a free press, the media holds the responsibility of holding the government accountable for its actions. This has always been necessary, even going as far back as examples of journalism in the American Revolution. However, today's mass media has become so biased and lazy that they are no longer upholding this duty. In their current state, nearly all mass media news outlets have become the results of corporate enterprise, with objective reporting being replaced with emphasis on bias and a lack of responsibility. If this trend continues, information from media outlets will eventually become unreliable, and the government will no longer continue to be held accountable for its actions.

The lack of reporting in Washington making it to the nightly news is nothing new. According to the Wilson Quarterly article, "Media to Government: Drop Dead," "In 1997, only one-fifth of all the stories on the front pages of the New York Times and The Los Angeles Times, on the network TV nightly news programs, and in Time and Newsweek were about government" (Hess). Despite most Americans getting the majority of their information from local news programs since the last few decades, an appetite for crime, disaster, celebrity gossip and entertainment does not leave much room for stories about the government and its affairs. Predictably, most news outlets and virtually all mass media corporations feed this diet with their own skewed representation of journalism. This corporate-journalism sets the precedent of generating stories that are designed just to draw a larger audience, not to report actual events that resonate within the lives of Americans.

Still, one could argue that news outlets have every right to report upon whatever it is they so choose. Their right of freedom of the press is upheld under the First Amendment to the Constitution, and they certainly cannot be forced to report a story they otherwise would not. However, the very purpose for the First Amendment is so that the government cannot restrict the voices of the people, and so those that are governed are still able to speak out against the government if necessary. Jenifer Whitten-Woodring explains how a free media is a requirement in a democracy. She states, "Freedom of expression in general, and freedom of the press in particular, has long since been considered crucial to democracy because the news media provides a fundamental informational linkage between the mass publics, the elite, and governments." Although it is completely within their rights

to not focus on government affairs, to no longer hold the government accountable for its actions would be a grave misuse of a fundamental constitutional right and an injustice towards the institution that exemplifies it.

In a country with a free press, a responsible news media is an undeniably necessary entity in keeping the government under public scrutiny. When the Constitution was first being drafted, the Founding Fathers knew that the press was, by far, the only means for their new government to be held accountable. Knowing this, the Founding Fathers gave them ultimately the power to do so, despite the presses at the time being partisan, scandalous, and often inaccurate. In a speech to the New York Press Club, former governor of New York Mario Cuomo explained how vastly important this was: “Overall, the press has been a force of good—educating our people, protecting our freedom, watching our government. . . . Teapot Dome, Watergate, the Pentagon papers—these are all examples of disclosures that might never have occurred had it not been for a free press.”

For hundreds of years, journalism has been the *de facto* way for the average citizen to scrutinize the government, while giving the journalists an audience for their voice. Despite its opportunity to be exploited, a free press is a necessary and justifiable facet in a democracy. As a companion to free speech, it can never be fully eradicated by corporate interest or from a lack of public interest. “Thus even if freedom of press was a façade, freedom of speech would be worth defending and expanding,” stated Noam Chomsky. He continues, “There are many opportunities to pressure the media, and there are openings within them” (qtd. in Raptis and Fotopoulos). Therefore, although mainstream media is under manufactured corporate control, its ability to hold the government accountable for its actions continues to manifest in individuals and grassroots campaigns. It cannot be concisely determined whether a corporate news organization should still hold true to the ideals of journalistic integrity in reporting government affairs, but its original reason for existing, in order to observe and report relevant news stories for the people still remains.

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Robotic Automation and the Future Economy

Researched Argument Essay By Lucas Thompson

In the year 1811, textile workers in England, led by Ned Ludd, were involved in a series of riots that led to the destruction of many mechanical looms. These workers would later be referred to as the Luddites. They were upset because these new mechanical looms greatly increased production, and the looms could be operated by generally unskilled laborers. It was costing them their jobs. It was changing life as they knew it, so they did something about it. This was the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, and it changed the world forever.

Even today, we can still see the effects of the Industrial Revolution. It still goes on around us every day. Technology is growing by leaps and bounds. What might have seemed impossible twenty years ago is a reality today. This new technology has many great effects on our economy, but it also has some disadvantages. Many jobs are being lost as people are being replaced by machines that can do the same job faster and cheaper. Although job automation causes people to lose their jobs, it greatly increases production, minimizes the costs of producing goods, and it is the stepping stone to future economies.

Over the last century, economic production in the United States has grown to amounts that were previously impossible until technology began making an appearance in production methods. Workers are slowly being replaced by machines that are many times more efficient at the job they are designed to do. These new machines have increased productivity 7% a year for the last ten years (Lamb). As technology advances, many more companies will continue to adopt these new methods of production. Arnold Brown states, "According to the Robotics Industries Association, sales of factory robots increased 28% in 2005, which comes on top of a 20% rise in 2004" (Brown 52). If production has increased 7% a year for the past decade and the amount of robots being installed in factories continue to increase at the same rate, the economic production rate should continue a positive growth trend for many years to come.

Another up side to job automation is the reduction in production costs. Every job that is eliminated saves the company money. When companies start eliminating jobs in massive numbers, these numbers begin to add up. For example, according to Thomas Ide, the Merced County system in California was able to reduce its staff by 28 percent. This cut reportedly saved

the county around 4 million dollars a year in various costs (Ide 7). Savings like these can also translate to lower prices for the consumer. In his article “Job-Killing Technology,” Martin Ford notes that once the automation industry began its transformation of the agriculture industry in later parts of the 1880s, the agricultural workforce dropped from 75 percent to 3 percent of the employed United States workforce. He goes on to state, “Food prices fell as efficiency increased...” (Abate). If this same effect holds true to wide spread automation in other industries, the savings to consumers could be quite large.

Automation is also the stepping stone to future economies. Automation is progress, and we need progress to go forward. New technologies are being worked on every day that will push our economy another step up the ladder to a better economy. As one technology is pushed to its limits, another comes along that makes it obsolete. Take check processing, for example. At first, banks processed checks by hand. Then they moved to automated check readers and computers. Now, electronic bill payments have virtually eliminated checks (Atkinson). As one step reaches its maximum potential, a new, more efficient step is created, and the cycle continues.

Even with all the benefits of job automation, it does have a major downside. It takes people’s jobs. It is inevitable. If a business can increase its profits and reduce its prices, it will. It is just an unfortunate side effect of technology. The automation process does create new jobs, but they are mostly highly skilled jobs that require a certain level of education. This will leave the majority of the American unskilled workforce unemployed and unable to find new jobs. Gregory Lamb asserts that there are an estimated 1 million industrial robots now on the job in America. He also claims that these 1 million robots have eliminated approximately 10 million jobs (Lamb). As technology advances and businesses see the rising profit line, this trend will only continue to grow.

Not all companies are following the trend of eliminating jobs. Some companies are using automation as an opportunity to transfer workers to other departments. After installing self-checkout lanes in its 850 stores, Home Depot put the previous cashiers into the aisles helping customers (Lamb). Another example of this comes from the fast food restaurant McDonald’s. According to Lamb, McDonald’s recently installed kiosks at 55 restaurants where customers could order their own food. This led to some of the restaurants having to increase the amount of food preparers to keep up with the faster ordering process (Lamb). While this will not be the case in every industry, it does provide some hope for unskilled workers. When one job disappears, another could become available. It may not be the job they want, but it will provide for their needs.

While unemployment could become a serious issue in the long term if we do not address it, the benefits of automation are too many to ignore. It is an unpleasant experience for any worker who loses a job during this change, but it will lead to consumers receiving faster service, better products, and lower prices (Lamb). These benefits will even extend to the very people who will lose their job. They will enjoy the same increase in service quality and the significant drop in prices that everyone does. As technology continues to advance, the unemployment issue will continue to rise, and it will have to be dealt with. Technology is progress, and the history of the world shows that progress will continue no matter what the costs. As we move into the future, the majority of people will reap the benefits of automation. It will be up to them to lend the helping hand to the unfortunate people who are left behind in the coming technological revolution.

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Outsourcing Equals Reality

Researched Argument Essay By Tomeka Williams

Outsourcing is necessary by all means, season in and season out.

Whether companies are big or small, acquiring contracts with multi-national companies is significantly beneficial. These services provide strategies different companies use to maintain their businesses. The top three leading countries, China, India, and the United States, face dilemmas concerning the issue to outsource for job availability. The fact is outsourcing proves to be credible, rather than irrelevant. This new way of innovation has been around for several years. Outsourcing confirms progress with more job opportunities, significant cost reduction as well as efficiency for operating businesses, enhancement of quality of service, and the mother of them all, innovation.

One advantage of outsourcing is providing a cost saving in the area of technology. Technology is growing faster day by day. In order to keep up with time, technology, and health, qualified people should have the opportunity to step to the plate. International Technology Services, in the United States, reports that their services are from equipment to personnel. With so many products, manufacturing is quite expensive. Outsourcing has “resulted in cost savings almost 79% of the time and the quality of the products have improved by a whopping 68%” (Bourbeau). In addition “some U.S. companies insist that day to day tasks of operations have dropped significantly due to the strategic efforts of outsourcing”(Yalverton). Outsourcing frees time and resources to conduct research into new technology, such as in the field of medicine. Outsourcing is a way to keep up with technology as well as health. Qualified candidates should have the opportunity to step to the plate, no matter if they are from China, India, or The United States. Legal process outsourcing is “a growing phenomenon with revenues projected to grow to 64 million by year 2013”(Bucki). Companies have incredible numbers and figures that result from the strategy of outsourcing. This is a significant way of expansion, in other words, new job opportunities.

Another advantage of outsourcing is the room for small businesses to expand in the United States. Global giants are “not the only companies cutting cost and opening job positions...Increasingly, small businesses are finding that outsourcing jobs is a boon to their bottom line-and sometimes give them room to create new jobs at home, here in the United States”(ShellenBarger). According to Krishna, “a source of job growth information is the Labor Department ten year forecast for demand, pay,

and competition for more than 300 jobs in 45 categories. Jobs are out there and available for various careers and in many types of fields. One should be qualified to avoid complaints of job positions.” New innovations and technology have improved the market for job openings all over the world.

People who oppose outsourcing argue that job availability in the United States is short and few. These anti-outsourcers claim that outsourcing has boosted the loss of jobs, and that people who have jobs feel threatened as well. Lance Winslow explains “that since 2000, the United States has lost more than 5 million manufacturing jobs and 850,000 information sector jobs, many of which have been shipped overseas. Faulty trade and tax policies continue to lead to outsourcing as corporate executives boast record-breaking profits and salaries.” He goes on to say, “over the past decade, U.S. manufacturing jobs have declined by more than 11 percent... and the economic system is plunging further” (Winslow). Accenture is one of America’s outsourcers. This company has expanded rapidly over the past few years. Accenture collaborates with its clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments. At Accenture one can “join ranks with approximately 204,000 people in more than 120 countries and work with clients in nearly every major industry worldwide” (Campbell). Accenture has 3,167 jobs available to the date (Campbell). Part of the support Accenture offers is ongoing training to help people remain at the top of their game and continue to grow. Accenture offers 80% more training hours and make constant investments in our employees’ development to keep them at the top of their games (Campbell). In 2008 Accenture invested “\$985 million in training and professional development and provided an average of 78 hours of training per person” (Campbell). Therefore, anti-outsourcers have received the wrong information concerning the availability of jobs and training positions.

Outsourcing is what should be reality to people all over the world. Jobs are out there and available. Different outsourcing companies advertise and have career fairs for young students. People need to stop settling for less and apply themselves. When larger companies move on to outsourcing, there is that hope for the smaller companies to expand and grow. Technology is now a part of daily living, and the field is rapidly on the move. Ways of new inventions and innovations bring about progress for new job opportunities. Families all over the world could appreciate progress from the strategy of outsourcing.

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Featured Contributor

Ghosts

By Brett S. Shufelt, Ph.D.
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While pursuing a brief career as a cowboy on a ranch crew in Southwestern Arizona, I witnessed an unforgettable, dreamlike sight when driving down a remote ranch road on my way to the headquarters.

I hadn't seen another vehicle for over an hour. Evening was encroaching and the sun was setting into a colorful display. As I admired the sunset, I noticed some odd shapes sky lined against the glow. They were too large to be cattle and as I drove closer I discovered two bison.

I pulled the truck over to the side of the road not thirty yards from the pair. I had the foresight not to venture near; however, I was so moved by the animals, I unintentionally moseyed closer.

Subconsciously, I suppose, I wanted them to acknowledge me. They looked like gods from another time. My heart raced as each accepted my presence and granted me an audience. I was thrilled to experience such animals in their natural state. I imagined I was back in the 1800's living a scene from history. I remember the silence and the complete feeling of awe. Only five strands of old cow wire separated us, and they could have broken through this barrier without breaking stride. I did not press the issue nor was I compelled to reach out any further. I needed to move on before the night settled.

At the ranch, in the cool nocturnal desert, I entered the horse corral and wove my way among the herd in order to find a soft, familiar back to stretch my arms across. His body heat and comforting smell were reassuring as my face pressed against the side of my partner, my horse. The herd grew quiet and still, each drifting in and out of sleep. This was my simple reality, but I don't think I have ever achieved anything as peaceful or gratifying since.

The power plant was turned off for the night and only the dim glow of an oil lamp in the kitchen served as a beacon to my bunk. My reward was a cup of strong coffee and a spoonful of cherry preserves as I sat reflecting on the evening's encounter. Was it a spiritual sign of sorts? I lamented that I couldn't keep working for \$600 a month "playing cowboy". I had to get back to my journey toward racking up whatever success I could muster out of life.

Such is the irony of “The Cowboy”. He spends his time trying to get a “better job” for more pay, and if he achieves it, he whiles away the rest of his life wishing he was back in the saddle with pennies in his jeans living the cowboy way.

I told my tale of the bison encounter to the Cowboss that next morning at breakfast. He was amazed. He didn’t know of a ranch that raised buffalo, nor had he heard of any in the surrounding country. Being a poet warrior in his own right, he smiled and remarked, “I have experienced many things in my life that cannot be shared—encounters that are locked in my heart, which is where a cowboy stockpiles his wealth.” I understood and appreciated what he said, but eventually, due to responsibilities, had to move to a different trail.