

Fall 2002

## Skunk River Review Fall 2002, vol 14

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# **The Skunk River Review**

**Volume 14**

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# **The Skunk River Review**

Volume 14

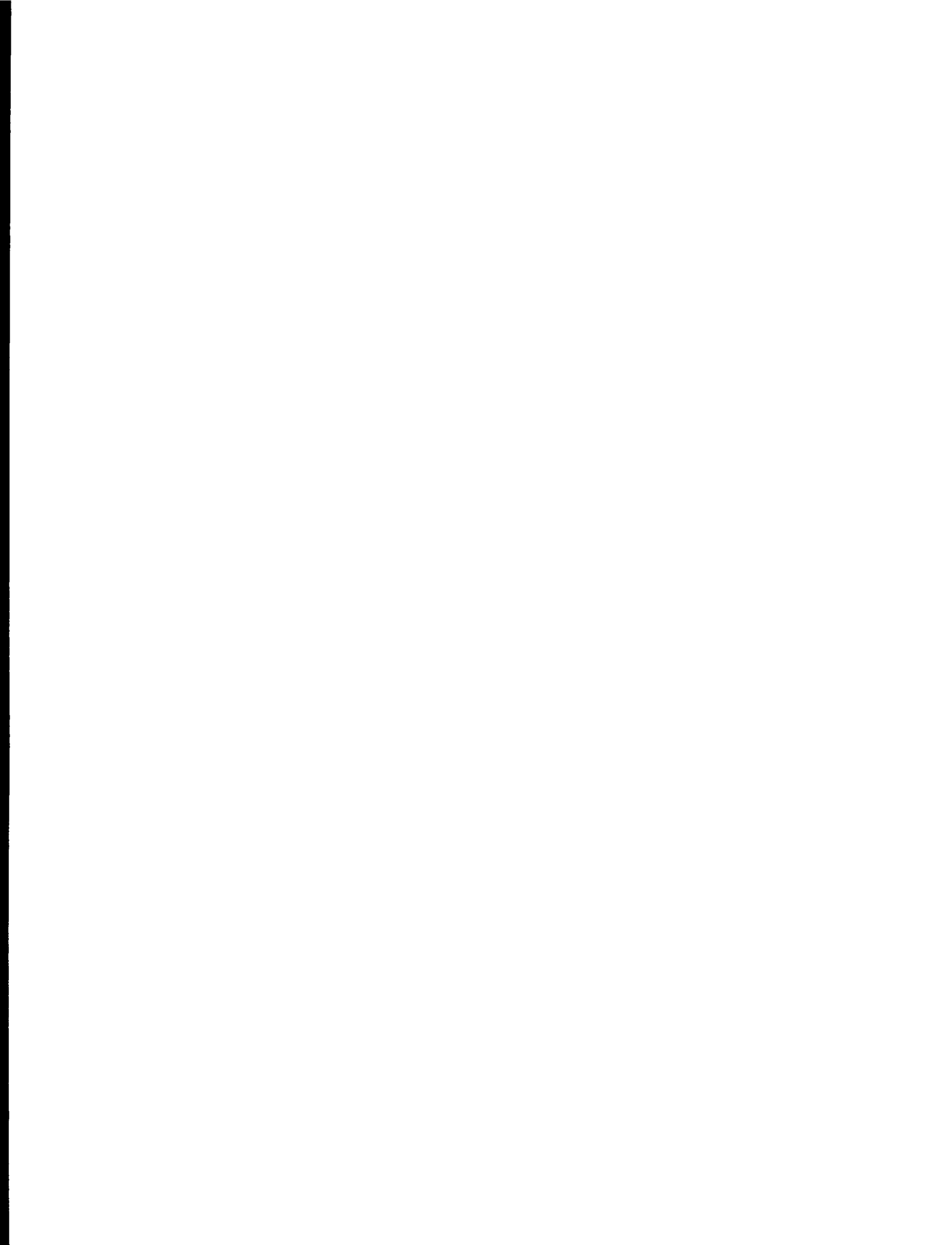
Fall 2002

*Edited by*

Eden F. Pearson

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# Introduction

Welcome to the fourteenth edition of *The Skunk River Review*, Des Moines Area Community College's anthology of student writing. Great writers aren't born; they are created. It takes practice, patience, and persistence to become a good writer, and one of the goals of *The Skunk River Review* is to reward the efforts and celebrate the success of DMACC writing students.

The second goal of *The Skunk River Review* is to provide readers with diverse experiences and points of view that invite further reflection. The last goal of *The Skunk River Review* is to provide beginning writing students with examples of good writing; examples which can often be adapted for use in their own writing. So find a comfortable chair, sit back, and enjoy the following essays. We did.

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to all of the DMACC students who submitted essays. The essays reflect the quality of student writing at all six of the DMACC campuses.

Thank you to all of the DMACC instructors who encourage their students to submit their best work and who utilize *The Skunk River Review* in their classrooms.

Thank you to the scholarship committee judges who are faced with the difficult decision of selecting the winners of the scholarship awards.

Thank you to Curt Stahr who annually encourages his students to photograph the Skunk River and who selects the cover photo for *The Skunk River Review*.

Thank you to Glenda Johnson and Shirley Sandoval who provide invaluable assistance in the production of *The Skunk River Review*.

Special thanks to Burgess Shriver, Academic Dean of the Sciences and Humanities, whose unwavering support enables this publication to become a reality each year.



# *Run*

**Shane Alan Cox**

I sat in the comfortable, familiar surroundings of my living room. As the worn-down, brown cushions on the couch comforted me, the white walls seemed to close in around me. I sat as still as a rock on the couch staring at the perfectly placed red candles positioned in pairs of two on the wall. Boredom was creeping in like a bizarre stranger I had never met. There I was wasting a beautiful spring day out of school and it was quickly passing by. Thoughts of fun and adventure continuously called to me and I knew I had to act on those impulses.

My mother was currently on vacation and my father had left for Iowa City to be with my grandfather, who at the time was having hip surgery. It was not often that I got the house to myself to indulge in whatever crazy ideas I could come up with. I was finally granted this opportunity but was wasting every precious minute of it. The overwhelming urge to do something was driving me mad. When school came around on Monday, I wanted all my friends to stand at their lockers and listen to the far out and crazy things that I did over that weekend.

Frantically scanning the list of friends in my head, I decided to give Shaun a call. Calling him would be perfect. Shaun lived only three short minutes from my house, and his laid-back personality was always in the mood for adventure. I picked up the blue phone and placed the receiver to my ear. I then dialed his number, which I

had to look up in my black Mead phone directory. I sat motionless as the phone greeted me with the usual repetitive rings. The receiver was cold to my ear and I had to hold it approximately one inch away from it.

"Hello?" Shaun greeted me with his sedated voice.

"Shaun," I started in, "Hey, this is Shane. Do you want to drink some beer at Water Works Park?"

"Well, dude, I have Tracy with me. You mind if she rolls with us?"

"Nah man, she can come. Come and get me and lets all have a good time!" I demanded.

I didn't mind if Tracy spent the day with us. A black-haired Asian beauty was always welcome as far as I was concerned. Walking at a brisk pace, I immediately went to my closet and grabbed the seven remaining Bud Lights that were secretly hidden behind a red, woven blanket. The cans were warm from sitting idle in my closet but they would have to do.

I sat on the uncomfortable, solid stone stairs that were located in front of my house. While waiting, I noticed a sense of adventure that filled the air. It was a sense of adventure that gave me a queasy feeling in my stomach. It was only seconds later when I heard the horribly run-down muffler of Shaun's rusty truck. "HOOONNNKKKK" the horn blared as Shaun held it down.

"Dude, you're going to piss the neighbors off, man!" I scolded him.

“Who cares man?” Shaun replied.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right. Let’s go!”

Shaun was sitting behind the big black steering wheel, and his strawberry hair hung in his eyes. It looked like it hadn’t been cut in months. Behind him sat Tracy, an Asian goddess whom I had been attracted to. I immediately rushed around to get in and sit by the long, black haired beauty. “C’mon, let’s go!” I reiterated while giving the truck’s side a couple of excited smacks. We then drove off, heading towards the park. All the while we were completely oblivious to the unexpected adventure that would grace us young, ignorant teenagers.

As we pulled into the front entrance of the park, the sun was bright in my eyes. Even with the sun piercing my retinas, I was able to see the bright green trees and the small birds that were whistling and laughing in the branches. The fresh spring air mixed in with Tracy’s potent perfume, penetrating my nose. I handed a beer to Tracy and asked her if she ever came down to the park. “Not often. It is pretty though,” she responded in her laid-back, innocent voice. I took a second to absorb her beauty. Tracy and Shaun were night and day. Shaun was a tee shirt and jeans type of guy, while Tracy always stayed on the front lines of fashion. I pondered the reasons of why they were always hanging out.

We gossiped about the latest high school talk and sipped on our warm beers. Each of us struggled to drink them, not wanting to look “uncool.” As we drove around the large dirt road that circles the park, I hardly noticed another car. The park was a virtual graveyard with the exception of a few elderly couples enjoying a good walk. I turned

to Shaun and was getting ready to comment on how desolate the park was, when my heart dropped like a brick. Out his window and driving side-by-side with us, was a park ranger.

I had to blink a few times to clear my sight. To me, the ranger looked evil. He seemed to stare directly at me while I sat there, eyes wide, and my mouth open. He had a typical Yogi Bear hat on, dark glasses covering his eyes and a moustache that covered the upper lip of what I swear was an evil smile. “Oh man!” Tracy and I gasped simultaneously as we stared at the ranger. Shaun sat there without a clue in the world. He had no idea about the disastrous situation we had driven into because the ranger only had his blue and red lights flashing off and on, but no siren. “Dude, we got a cop on us man!” I warned. Shaun slowly turned his head. When he spotted the ranger, he turned two shades paler.

What happened next was clouded by the anxiety that was blurring my mind and eating a hole in the pit of my stomach. In a matter of seconds, the engine roared and we were on a high-speed chase. The ranger then turned on his loud, threatening siren. “Go dude go!” I encouraged Shaun, who was on the verge of tears. Tracy sat motionless as we tried to outrun the ranger who was on us like glue. I sat back in the uncomfortable seat trying to think of a plan. After a minute of deliberation, I demanded everyone’s cans so I could conceal them. I attempted to hide the cans in the tiny space under the seat, but only succeeded in spilling the warm, foul smelling beer all over my hands. “Damn it!” I cursed. Nothing was going right. My mind raced at all the possible consequences of our foolish actions.

Looking in the cracked, side-door mirror, I noticed the ranger was still close behind us. Dust clouds obscured the air but the evil ranger's persistent red and blue lights still penetrated through. The wind howled as we picked up speeds in excess of fifty miles per hour. Horrified elderly couples ran to the side of the road, shocked that a chase like ours was polluting their quiet town.

"What do I do?" Shaun questioned frantically.

"Uh, I don't know," Tracy muttered. "We're so screwed!"

"Okay! Pull into the next trail and I will get out and ditch the beer," I hollered while trying to take control of the horrible situation that was getting worse each and every second.

Not only was I going to ditch the beer, I had full intentions of fleeing through the woods and getting myself out of trouble. I did not inform Shaun about the second half of my diabolical scheme since I knew he would have done the same thing.

Within seconds, the one-way driving trail came upon us. Instead of initializing the brilliant plan that would get me out of the situation, Shaun mistakenly went the wrong way on the one-way trail. The truck roared around a sharp curve on the dirt road and proceeded to harshly slide right off of it. The next thing I knew, we were bumping around like balls in the truck as it skidded off the loose, dirt road and flipped upside down into a deep, murky pond. The unplanned situation was progressively spiraling out of control.

"Buuusshhh," was the sound that the impact of the truck and pond made. Inside the tiny cab of the now floating truck, our three bodies were tangled and our minds were confused. When we finally separated from each

other, Shaun, Tracy, and I were all sitting on the roof of the truck. On the outside of the windows we viewed the black, ominous water that we were quickly sinking down into. The water progressively got darker and darker until it was completely black. We sank in the black, deathly water until we made an impact with the bottom of the tiny pond. We sat silent for a brief moment while our panicked, confused minds took hold of the situation.

Tracy, who was now also a few shades paler, broke the uneasy silence with an ear-shattering scream. I was still positioned on the passenger side of the truck, only now sitting on the roof. I looked at Shaun and Tracy who sat motionless. They were watching the water that slowly filled the truck thru partially opened windows. My stomach twisted and turned with anxiety while I kept thinking about all the horrible stories I had heard in the past. Stories of people in situations like ours, and the fact that they could not open the doors because of the pressure of the water and how they eventually succumbed to death. The water was coming in like a slow stream and was up to our ankles in a matter of seconds.

"We're going to die," I thought to myself while on the verge of tears. "We're going to die!" I then screamed, not adding any assurance to the situation. The murderous water was up to our waists as we sat there dumbfounded. The pond water relentlessly rushed in, unforgiving and merciless. Tracy began crying as Shaun worked at his stubborn door handle, trying to find a way out. Adrenaline pulsed through me causing me to panic. I sat square on my bottom, which was submerged in cold water by then and started kicking at the windshield

with every ounce of energy I possessed. Taking my elbow, I banged at the window on the door and made hysterical animal-like sounds. The glass was not breaking and my stomach was so torn up with fear that I was positive I was going to vomit.

Our last seconds of life were speeding by. The thought of dying was unrealistic in my mind but was quickly becoming reality. "Wait!" Shaun hollered. He reached over Tracy and took hold of the black window handle on my side and attempted to open the window. I felt a sense of security as Shaun took control, even with water up well past his waist. The water was liquid ice as it penetrated our clothing. "It's open!" Shaun announced. Confused, I looked down and took notice that the window was only open approximately two inches. What the hell was Shaun talking about, I asked myself. He accomplished his task though. The window was open. Open enough to speed up the deathly water intake! The truck's inside light, which had provided us with illumination thus far, was quickly put out as water shot in, completely filling the rest of the cab.

Then darkness was all I knew. I was on my own and had no way of communicating with Shaun or Tracy. I floated in the tiny, watery grave and held the last of the precious air deep in my lungs. Flailing my arms helplessly left and right, I searched for any way of escape. I twisted and turned while letting out a desperate scream in the water, thus releasing the remaining air I had been holding. Instinctively, I inhaled for air but was greeted with the murky, dirt tasting pond water that quickly filled my lungs. Realizing that I was about to travel to the other side of life, I curled up into a fetus position. My

chest felt as if it was on fire due to the lack of oxygen.

I floated in a fetus position as if I was in my mother's womb. Visions of my parents attending my funeral and thoughts of how young I was were playing in my mind. I tightly squeezed both my shoulders trying to provide myself comfort. Seconds later, the pain ceased in my chest and a sense of calm filled me. The madness was about to end. It would soon be over. Silence echoed in the darkness as I sat emerged in water, on the verge of passing out.

Then, as if an inner voice motivated me, I stretched my foot out to the window. With the tip of my soaked, heavy shoe, I felt the opening in the window that Shaun barely opened. "Give it one last shot!" an inner subconscious voice told me. Using my last ounce of strength, I pushed at the window with my toes. Then a miracle occurred. The window, as if guided by a guardian angel, started to open! With no breath or energy left, I squeezed myself through the partial opening of the window. I was going to live!

As my head finally squeezed through the window, I let myself float. The water started to lighten up as I rose to the surface of the pond. Before I knew it, I broke the surface of the once life-threatening water. "Thank God!" I screamed as I stood up in the muddy pond. Air filled my lungs with a sharp force as the intense colors and sounds as loud as explosions penetrated my senses. I heard the birds carrying on their usual conversations and the wind blowing as if it was scolding us. Looking up, I noticed the park ranger standing at the edge of the pond with a concerned but stern look on his face.

Seconds of fear passed and I saw no signs of Shaun or Tracy emerging

from the black pond. They popped up shortly after with looks of unbelief on their faces. "Are you okay?" I asked them with tears in my voice. Silent, they lightly shook their heads yes. Then making their way to the edge of the pond they began their climb to land. I too decided to get the hell out of the potential graveyard and proceeded to also make my way to the shore. The mud clung onto my shoes causing me to lose one, and seemed to be trying to keep me in. I crawled slowly but determinedly through the weeds and the bugs, who were upset at the fact that I was disturbing their habitat. They never asked to be bothered and buzzed and flew around my soaked head in protest. Clutching onto loose mud and soft grass, I lifted my waterlogged body to the ground.

The events that followed occurred in dream-like motion. The ranger's concerned voice went through my ears like wind. The police sirens were distant in my mind. I only thought about the fact that I escaped the clutch of death. The freezing wind wrapped around our bodies as we answered questions from the police. The reporters arrived shortly after and rushed the scene for their nightly story. They bombarded us with question after question. "Why did you do it?" a persistent reporter demanded. I looked at him, water dripping off my muddy hair, and responded, "I don't know," then smiling devilishly, "We were looking for a little mischief." The questions were abruptly ended as Shaun's visibly upset mother appeared and shooed the pesky reporters away. The three of us then escaped the scene of the crime as we left in his mother's warm car.

On the drive home, Shaun and his mother bickered back and forth as I

sat shamefully in the backseat with my head hung down. I was freezing and my teeth chattered uncontrollably as I waited to be taken home. Hope was quickly filling me as I realized that I was in no legal trouble and possibly no trouble at home. Sitting back against the cold brown leather seats of the car, I took notice of how beautiful the world really was.

The next few days at school were filled with boastful stories emanating from our lockers. Friends and strangers gathered around as Shaun and I recounted our story over and over again, acting as if it was not a big deal. We were also exalted by the fact that we were not in trouble. Shaun even escaped the clutches of the law. The officer who questioned us wrote Shaun a ticket to appear in court . . . on Sunday! The courthouse is closed on Sundays and we all got out of the situation free as birds, all of us except the totaled truck that was just an innocent victim of our mischief.

I ran and re-ran the incident countless times days after. Days and even years after the incident occurred, the images vividly passed through my head. It was a grim but informative reminder of the fact that life could cease at any moment without warning. Life could end and sometimes the situations are just out of our immediate control. Over the subsequent years, I often told friends and family about the events that transpired and how it was the craziest afternoon that graced my teenage years.

### **Suggestions for Writing**

Recall an incident in which you were involved which didn't go as planned. Write an outline based on your recollections.

*Shane Alan Cox wrote this remembered  
event essay while a student in Tara  
Wendel's Composition I class.*



# Spero Meliora

*Preston Ayers*

This house smells like wood. Not like how a forest smells but how a sauna smells. Well, I guess that makes sense. After all, there is a sauna in the next room. But why then does the upstairs smell like fish? How can Dad stand sleeping up there? This blanket's heavy. Wow, I'm not tired. This feels good, though. I like Scotland.

This is how the entire trip has gone so far. Awake for 48 hours, asleep for 12, with a bit of delirium tossed in there. It's hard enough to see Scotland on their open-at-noon close-at-4 hours, and my sleeping habits aren't helping.

When my dad and I flew into Amsterdam, we decided that our best chance to get on a regular sleeping schedule would be to stay awake until our first night in Scotland. It was easy to stay awake in Amsterdam. Our flight got in early in the morning-- at least by Holland's time. We should have played it safe and juggled knives, but instead we trusted ourselves to the taxi service. Besides driving on the left side of the road with the driver on the right side of the car, the roads intertwine throughout the city with as few signs or traffic lights as possible. Also, there is an even more complex train system

slicing through it all. Oh, and did I mention it is customary for the taxis to drive on the tracks? Like I said, no problem staying awake. The adrenaline from one taxi ride is enough to keep you going for hours. I liked it.

It's so amazing how different things are in other countries. The majority of the people in Amsterdam use bikes as their main source of transportation. Not nice, new, easy-to-ride bikes, but old, twisted, hunks of rusted metal with wheels. If I ever open my own business, it will be selling mountain bikes to the Dutch.

My dad thought it would be neat to visit Anne Frank's house while we were there. I think we were both somewhat disappointed. Not only was it quite depressing, but the house had also been renovated. Everything was new. Although the crowd did help capture the claustrophobic feeling she and her family must have felt, the 20 interactive computer terminals and the gift/coffee shop took away from its authenticity. It was neat to see but very draining. I thought too much in there.

We moved on, walking the streets and popping into little shops until we got hungry. We ate dinner at the Hard Rock Café. We were the typical travelers; go to another

country and eat a burger. From what I noticed the food's really not that different in Holland, but I would have liked to try something unique. There wasn't much on the menu. Burgers, salads, soups, and pop; that was it. The waiter told me they had Pepsi products so I asked for a Mountain Dew. He smiled and said, "Only Pepsi products." When I threw him a confused look, he said, "Pepsi and Diet Pepsi."

"No Mountain Dew?" I asked.

"Oh, I think I know what you are talking about. No, no Mountain Dew, only Pepsi. I wish we had Mountain Dew," he said, smiling.

I ordered a Pepsi. A Mountain Dew would have been nice, considering I had gone about 20 hours without sleep and had another 28 to go. But Pepsi was what I got. After dinner we went to purchase the commemorative Hard Rock Café pin. Each pin is unique to the restaurant where you buy it, and this one would go nicely with my dad's collection. He travels often and few years ago he made it a point to visit every Hard Rock he could. He collects a pin from each and places it on a Hard Rock denim jacket. He has quite a collection to this day.

The casino was next. Right across the street from the Hard Rock was one of Amsterdam's finest casinos. What better way to stay awake than the thrill of gambling? I've been to Vegas before, so this wasn't my first casino, but this was the first time I've ever gambled. We passed the slots and what I like to call the "old-people games" and

headed right to the third floor, the game floor. It would have been nice to play poker or black jack, but I wasn't too familiar with their rules, and I'm not fluent in Dutch. To prevent making a fool out of myself I hit the roulette table. For about an hour, I was up. I started with 100 guilders (Dutch money) and had worked my way up to 300. I should have stopped there, but instead I risked 200 on my lucky number "7" and, of course, lost. Well, I wasn't going to be happy with breaking even after tripling my money, so I slowly and steadily gambled all my money away. My dad had about the same luck that night and we both walked out empty-handed. Between us we were about 400 guilders in the hole. At least that only transfers to 200 dollars, but it sucks to lose.

Hitting the streets again with only six hours left before our flight into Glasgow, we decided to see why Amsterdam is called the City of Sin. A short and death-defying taxi ride later we stepped out near the Red Light District. Cars are not allowed in due to the heavy foot traffic. We weaved through back alleys and side streets until we walked face-first into it. Scantly clad women in alluring poses stand inside their window rooms shrouded in red light. Pimps dressed in all-black business suits stand next to the windows cutting deals. Men and women crowd around windows while a customer inside being serviced chooses not to close the blinds. Drug dealers shove through the masses with their wheelbarrows full of marijuana.

People are buying it by the handful. This is Mardi-gras to the extreme and it happens every night. We make our way through the crowd, amazed by what is legal and amazed that there are hardcore porn shops next to Pizza Hut and McDonalds. Drunken men and women cover the streets. Passed out on benches, drinking in the bars, puking in the canals, and smoking everywhere. It was the biggest party I'd ever been to and everyone is invited.

We got back to the hotel three hours before we needed to leave for the airport and decided that a little nap would do us both some good. We phoned down for a wake-up call in two hours and passed out. My dad woke to the call and wakes me before he hops into the shower. I reluctantly rise and eat an orange while tuning into some early morning cartoons. Wow, you'll never see cartoons like those in the states. A man rides his horse from house to house only to have sex with the women inside while the horse and the dog go at it out back. Interesting.

Shortly after my shower I find my life, yet again, in the hands of the taxi driver. We hit mach 5, possibly 6, on the way to the airport and the little car sounds like it's about to explode when we get there. Wide-awake again, I stroll into Amsterdam International Airport, knowing that after that car ride I'll never get another thrill from a roller coaster.

Airports are all the same. Boring. I slam two Pepsi's, which is just enough to keep me awake until

the plane takes off. Then, just as I am drifting off to sleep, the stewardess serves breakfast. The smell of artificial eggs and sausage is heaven to my senses. I am so hungry I force myself awake and stuff myself with the breakfast wrap they serve me. Not as wonderful as it smelled, the small egg-and-sausage-filled torte does all but fill me. I look longingly at the stewardess, asking for another, only for her to reply, "We only carry one for each passenger." I've now turned grumpy. My extreme lack of sleep and tormenting breakfast has all caught up with me. I'm not happy.

The plane lands and I shove my way off only to wait in a line for my passport to be stamped. This does not lighten my mood. Twenty minutes pass before we find ourselves waiting, again, at the baggage claim. I'm stressed, I'm pissed, I'm hungry, I'm tired; and I'm in Scotland! Just like that my mood changes. I see a man wearing a kilt with his tartan flying proudly across it. Instantly I feel fine. I think to my self "I am here; I'm in Scotland." This had been my dream for years and it had come true. I've made it to Scotland. Waiting no longer bothers me. We wait, and I'm fine.

Finally, back in good spirits, we retrieve our bags and head off to get our car. When we get there, we find out that they don't have the car that we ordered. To make up for it, the nice people, the very nice people, make us an offer we can't refuse. Later, we find out that we should have. The very nice people

gave us an upgrade of the car we had ordered. It was the SAB SG9. A full-sized family car, complete with leather interior, CD player, heated seats, traction control, and fog lamps; quite the deluxe package. The only thing that was wrong was that the roads in Scotland are about the size of one lane of a highway in the U.S. So there we are, in a full size car, having enough problems staying on the tiny roads, but also having to share them with the oncoming Scottish, who, might I add, don't slow down for anything. The drive to our hotel was quite fun. My dad, getting familiar with the opposite way of driving, hugged the side of the road. Normally this wouldn't bother me, but the side of the road either is a loch, a stone wall, or a house. There is no curb.

Our hotel was in the small town of Abberfoil, about 30 minutes from Stirling. When we got there, our room wasn't ready so we decided to go to sight-seeing. We went to Loch Ard, which was near our hotel. Actually you could see it from our living room. Then we went to Stirling, and to Stirling Castle. It was magnificent. There is a gigantic cliff on one side and a series of three, sometimes four, walls on the other, making it nearly impossible to reach. There is a small road that twists its way through Sterling, going up a steep hill and finally ending at the Holy Rude, the castle's church and cemetery. From there it is about a mile walk to the castle gates. The wind is strong enough to blow a man over, the walk is uphill and

long, and just as we reached the gates it started to rain cold Scottish rain that chilled your skin, instantly making it feel like it was 10 degrees outside.

As we entered the castle, I was overcome with emotions. I couldn't believe I was actually in Castle Stirling. This was the place where Robert the Bruce, King of Scots, ruled Scotland after driving the English out. This was the place where my great ancestor Mary, Queen of Scots, lived until her beheading. This is where my clan, the Moffat Clan came to fight with William Wallace at the battle of Stirling Bridge to take back Stirling Castle from the English, and again fought alongside Robert the Bruce at the Battle of Bannokburn, to drive the English out of our country. I felt like I wasn't even there, like it couldn't be true. The castle was beautiful, its massive stone walls standing strong even after hundreds of years of siege and weather.

We worked our way deeper and deeper into the walls. Scaffolding was holding up a few rooms and fewer yet were closed to the public. We saw all that you can see; each room, guard turret, feast hall, garden, or bedroom. Nothing escaped us. Hours passed as we wandered throughout the castle and not for a moment was I bored or ready to go. When it was time to depart, my dad and I looked at one another and we knew it was time to go, and as we walked down that long stretch of road, the wind and rain pelting at our backs, I knew I had left part of myself behind. A

part of myself that belonged there, and with me I carried a new sense of completeness. I believe there are some things that you just have to do in life. That was one of mine.

We visited the jail next.

There was an actor who role-played different characters that you would have encountered had you of visited the jail hundreds of years ago. He was quite convincing and very knowledgeable, but Castle Stirling hung heavy in my thoughts, and it was hard to concentrate. I remember being amazed at what people got thrown in jail for. Three years for stealing a potato, five years for stealing a hen. They had some harsh laws back then. The tour was nice and at the end there was a five-foot by five-foot underground cell that was actually used at one time that you could tour. It was pretty creepy. Once inside there was a small window at the top leading out to the street that shed just enough light to make out your hand at your waist. I can't imagine what it would be like to live in there for three years.

We figured that our hotel room would be ready by now, so we headed back. Besides, we were getting hungry. The drive was only something like 20 miles, but it takes a long time to get anywhere in Scotland. There is no such thing as a straight stretch of road over there; they weave back and fourth, up and down hills, and there are corners right in the middle of the country. There is no method to the madness. After driving for an hour, my dad's arms were so sore from constantly turning, it was crazy.

Making it back to our hotel felt great. During the ride, fatigue had crept up on the both of us and we needed to rest. We checked in and, boy, was I surprised. My dad had told me he had to put an order ahead so that we could have hot water. Normally the Scottish take cold showers, so I thought we were going to be roughing it. Was I ever wrong. The main floor consisted of my bedroom with a connecting bathroom. In the bathroom were a heated towel rack, a toilet bowl warmer, a whirlpool bathtub/shower, and a sauna. There was another bathroom on the main floor, along with the full sized living room, dining room, and kitchen. A patio connected to the living room with a beautiful view of Loch Ard. Upstairs was my dad's bedroom and a connecting bedroom. Although the place had a funny smell, it was as far from roughing it as it gets. We went to the club attached to the hotel for dinner and spent the rest of the night watching TV. Our favorite show, which we watched religiously while we were there, was a show called The Weakest Link. It had this rude host who insulted the contestants throughout whole show. Shortly after our return from Scotland, the show caught on in America and is now one of the most watched game shows today.

Finally I was able to sleep, and sleep I did. I went to bed at seven that night to the lulling sounds of the creek out my window and the patter of rain on my window.

I wake the next day to my dad shaking me and saying, "Preston, you've got to get up. We have to get to the store before it closes." I toss the heavy blanket off myself and look outside. The gray sky of morning peers at me through the curtains. I take in a long breath, then exhale. It feels good to be in Scotland. I pass a clock on the way to my bathroom and notice the time. It's two in the afternoon! I slept for eighteen hours, and would have slept longer had my dad not awakened me. I hastily shower and grab a complimentary apple to eat and we're off down the windy roads to Abberfoil. We sneak into the town's tiny grocery store and stock up on food right before they close. Then we head home. We spend the night playing chess, watching movies, and TV. Scottish TV is cool. They show the whole show and then there are ten minutes of commercials. I liked that a lot better than the commercials in the middle of the shows here.

That night I didn't sleep a wink and was up and ready the next day. We drove all the way to the east coast to the town of St. Andrews. It is famous for its beautiful ocean views, seafood, old cathedrals, and cemetery. It is also the town where golf was founded. We saw the first golf course there. For lunch we ate at a dockside café that served pea and carrot soup. The atmosphere was warm and friendly, exactly how you'd think it would be. On the way home, we stopped at a small wool and trinkets shop just to buy a souvenir or two. Little did I know I would

find exactly what I was looking for inside.

I am a descendent of the Moffat Clan and the main thing I wanted to accomplish while in Scotland was to find my family's tartan and crest. First thing as you walked into the shop was a wall full of trinkets, bearing clans tartans and crests. My heart was racing as I searched through the M's until my eyes fell upon Moffat. My crest sits before me, strewn across magnets, key chains, plaques, and note cards. My tartan, a black, white, and red plaid decorates the background of my crest; a red cross above a light blue X with a golden crown below, all wrapped inside a belt branded with the words *SPERO MELIORA*. Translated from Latin it means, "I hope for better things." At that moment I was so happy. I remember thinking "This is my family's crest, this is my crest, and I have found it." I stared at it long and hard and when the store started closing I purchased everything bearing my crest. That night I couldn't stop looking at it. This was why I wanted to come here. To find this.

Once again I slept for nearly twenty hours that night, and we relaxed that next day. It was Thanksgiving and we watched television until we went to the clubhouse for our Thanksgiving dinner. It wasn't your traditional feast; after all, it's not a holiday over there. There was no turkey, or squash, no yams or pies. There was chicken or haggis. My dad went the safe route and ordered the chicken, while I ordered up a sack

full of heart, lungs, gut, and liver. Yum, yum. To my surprise, I enjoyed it. It reminded me of meatloaf, and pretty good meatloaf at that. We washed our dinners down with a Guinness and headed home for a little more rest and relaxation. After another night without sleep, we headed off through the Highlands on our way to Loch Ness. As soon as the loch was in sight, my eyes were glued to the water. Each breaking wave makes my heart flutter as my mind tells me "There it is, there is the Loch Ness Monster." We spent hours at Castle Erquherdt, on the edge of Loch Ness, inspecting the wreckage of the nearly two-thousand-year-old castle. Amazingly enough, a fair portion of it still stands, and work is being done on it to help prevent any more degradation.

After the castle, we visited the Loch Ness Monster Museum. I'll tell you, after visiting that place, no human could walk out thinking that the Loch Ness Monster is just a story. To their credit, there were a lot of valid points and reasons, but I wonder how it could still be living undetected today. I believe she was real, but died quite some time ago. Even with that in mind, my eyes never left the water and my camera never left my hands. That night we called home. Speaking to my girlfriend made me truly homesick. I wish she could have come and experienced it all with me.

The rest of my days in Scotland consisted of visiting ancient battlefields, pubs, and the

William Wallace Monument. The battlefield of Bannokburn was truly eerie. It had been good Scottish weather all day, gloomy and rainy. But as we pulled up to the battlefield, the rain stopped and a rainbow appeared over the commemorating statue of Robert the Bruce, marking the spot where he commanded the Scottish army to victory. I took it as a sign that I was welcome there. It was beautiful.

The Wallace Monument was amazing. I learned that before the movie *Braveheart* hit the big screen they averaged twelve visitors a day, and after *Braveheart* made him famous around the world, they averaged fifteen-hundred people a day for the next three years. While I was there, I got to see his actual sword. It stood five feet eleven inches high, and the experts say that he would have had to be at least six-foot seven-inches to wield it effectively. That's a big man.

I feel very fortunate to have been able fulfill one of my life goals. I have gone to my motherland, and I feel like a more complete person because of it. I'd love to go back and I probably will some day. Until then, I will cherish my memories.

### **Suggestions for Writing**

Write a well-developed paragraph about a dream of yours; it can either be fulfilled or, as yet, unfulfilled.

*Preston Ayers wrote this essay while a student in Rose Toubes' Composition I class. The assignment*

*was to write an extended piece of creative nonfiction about a work experience or a significant life experience with scenic detail, dialogue or quoted passages, and attention to the fulfillment of an overall didactic purpose.*



## *Marlboros, Budweiser, and My Dad*

Jenny Doty

It was a brisk, autumn night in October of 1992. The air smelled of wood burning in a fireplace somewhere down the street. The windows popped and creaked as the wind churned some leaves outside the double window in my family room. I was playing Barbies with my younger sister, Crystal. She was eight and I was ten. We each had our own New Kids on the Block Barbies. I had Donnie Walburg and one we called "Monkey Boy." They each used to have braided rat-tails, but my three-year-old brother, Jake, cut them off with his Playschool scissors. He loved destroying our toys; most of our New Kid On The Block Barbies were missing at least one body part.

"Hey, Donnie, wanna take me out on a date?" I screeched as I tried to make the best imitation of Hawaiian Barbie. "You'll have to drive 'cause some giant named Jake tried to ride in my convertible and broke it."

"Sure Babe, I will take you anywhere," my sister bellowed as she bounced Donnie over to Hawaiian Barbie.

My head cocked to the side and my ears perked up like a dog on alert. The front door on the landing of our split-level house opened and slammed quicker

than I could put my toys down to see who was there. The ceiling trembled and the pictures on the wall shook. My stomach churned and goose bumps started to form on my arms and legs. I threw my Barbies down and peered around the corner to catch a glimpse of the person at the door. The air smelled of stale Budweiser and Marlboro cigarettes. I hated the smell of smoke. It was the cause of my asthma and it made my clothes stink.

My dad was stumbling in drunk. It wasn't the first time I had seen my dad like that because he always got drunk. His wavy brown hair was in shambles, and his glasses sat crooked on his face. His unshaved beard housed bits and pieces of vomit burrowing in its thickest parts. His clothes were dirty and stained. His shirt was wrinkled, and most of the buttons were undone revealing his big, hairy gut. What kind of message was he trying to send us? What kind of role model was he being for my three-year-old brother?

"Turn down that fuckin' shit!" my dad yelled downstairs as he tripped up the steps. The television wasn't even that loud. We were just watching a re-run

of Ren and Stimpy, but I knew that if I didn't lower the volume, he would come down and do something terrible. My dad was so unpredictable. I never wanted to argue with him.

Ka-thunk, ka-thunk, ka-thunk. I could tell my dad was hobbling upstairs and heading toward my older sister, Dinah's, room. The footsteps overhead got louder and louder, then suddenly they came to an abrupt stop. I stood up and told Crystal to stay downstairs while I quietly crept up the steps to see what was going on.

"Turn that fuckin' music down! What is that shit? Why the hell is everything so loud in this god-damn house?"

"Craig, keep your voice down please," my mom spoke softly. "I just put Jacob to bed. If you wake him up he will never get back to sleep." My mom had a soothing tone in her voice to help my dad calm down, but when he was drunk, he didn't care who he disturbed.

"Shut the hell up, bitch. Don't tell me what to do."

My dad opened up his fisted hand and swung at my mom, knocking her large, square-shaped glasses off her face. The glass lenses shattered, leaving cuts on each side of the bridge of her nose. Blood slowly trickled down her face like teardrops as she slumped down to the floor.

"Jenny, call 9-1-1 right now," my mom whimpered.

"Don't move, Jenny, or I'll beat your little ass," my dad

threatened, with a brutal look in his dark brown eyes.

I was stuck in the middle. I wanted to call the police because I knew my mom couldn't shield herself from my dad. I turned toward the kitchen and contemplated picking up the phone, but the fear of my dad beating me ran through my head and I stopped.

"Dad, leave mommy alone," Dinah said apprehensively. She tried to help my mom up off the floor. Dinah gently took her arm and tried to set my mom upright. My dad was enraged; he picked Dinah up by her thin, brown hair. She let out a gasp. Her legs dangled in the air like a person being hanged as he stomped down the hallway. He stumbled into her room and threw her on the waterbed. The water waved back and forth, moving my sister from side to side.

I felt helpless. There was no way I could stand up to my 280-pound dad, so I kept quiet in hopes that he would forget I was behind him. I watched in trepidation as my dad began to unbuckle his brown, leather Harley Davidson belt. The bright metal buckle reflected the look of terror in my sister's eyes. He pulled his belt out and whipped it in the air. The ceiling fan swung the belt around like a lasso. I had never seen my dad this angry, and I feared for my sister's life. He had spanked us before, but it had never gone any farther than that.

My mom tried to grab my dad's arm. He hurled her back against the wall where she fell to the floor. My mom instinctively curled up to protect herself from any further abuse. I froze, quivering in fear. I had no idea what he would do to me if I were to move. I watched in panic as my dad began to beat my sister with his belt. The smack of the belt against Dinah's skin reminded me of a horse getting whipped. She screamed and cried while trying to break free from his powerful grip. As she kicked and wiggled, my brother began to cry in the room next door.

"Jenny, get your ass outta here and go shut your brother up."

I didn't want to leave my sister's side. I felt like Dinah needed me to be there for her. I wanted her to feel assured that she would get through that horrific moment. I wailed as giant red welts began to form on Dinah's back. My sister was beaten like a slave, and for no reason at all. How could a father physically abuse his own children?

My dad stopped hitting my sister after about three lashes with the belt. He stormed out of her room, slamming the door behind him. I hurried over to Dinah. The only movements around her were those of the waterbed swaying back and forth. I tried to offer her comfort, and prayed that nothing like this would ever happen to our family again. I heard tires squealing

out of the driveway, so I ran to the front window to make sure he was gone.

It was that night that brought the girls in my family closer together. We had all seen the devil come out of my dad. Although I never experienced any physical pain that night, I have never been more scared. My mom walked away from the incident with a black eye and small cuts on her nose. My sister stayed strong and conquered the pain of the welts across her back.

I never understood why my dad chose to abuse his family. Schooling taught me that abuse was unacceptable. I learned that my dad wore many masks. Whenever I let my guard down, the worst came out in him. I vowed to myself that in the future I would never put myself in a relationship with a person who drank excessively or had a violent temper. I never wanted to be treated as badly as my mom was because I knew that didn't equal love.

I could never comprehend why my mom didn't kick my dad out of our house that night, but growing older has taught me many things. I understand now that was very hard for my mom to leave someone she loved; regardless of the fact that he treated her badly. It wasn't until after my dad had an affair three years later that she kicked him out and divorced him. My mother has raised me to appreciate who I am. She taught me to put my trust in only the

people who deserve it. All men aren't evil people, but those who are can do terrible damage to a woman's self-esteem.

### **Suggestions for Writing**

Think about the different relationships in your family. Write a journal entry about the strengths or weaknesses of family bonds.

*Jenny Doty wrote this remembered person essay while a student in David Gavin's Composition I class.*

## **Senior Trip**

**Peter Davis**

Right after I graduated from high school in June, my dad and I took a trip across country through Nebraska, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, California and finally Oregon. We billed it as the "Seniors' Trip" because I had just graduated and my dad is old enough to qualify as a "senior." We drove about 11,000 miles in 12 days, but that long journey didn't really bother me all that much for a couple of reasons. I wanted to see the California coast, since I hadn't seen much of the U.S., and we would be driving in my dad's new Mustang.

My dad had gotten a Roush Mustang in December of my senior year. Roush is a Mustang designed by and named after the president of the Ford racing team, Jack Roush. The car has a racing-style look. Dad's Roush was a black convertible. It has a dual exhaust system that has a low, growling sound.

Dad and I had had an argument at the beginning of my senior year. What it was about doesn't matter other than to say it was the maddest I've ever been and consequently I said some things I shouldn't have and then

he said some things . . . well, you get the idea. Anyway, we didn't speak to each other for a couple of months. There was never any formal apology from either of us. The rest of the year had passed in an uneasy truce between us.

I was surprised when he asked me around Christmas to take a cross-country trip with him. I wasn't sure how pleasant this trip was going to be, with just the two of us spending 24 hours a day together for 12 days, but . . . let's face it, I just wanted to take that car out and let it run, and I could tell Dad felt the same way.

So on a cool, predawn morning in June we packed as little as possible in the trunk and back seat, said goodbye to the family and headed for Portland, Oregon. That's where my Aunt Jana lives. I hadn't seen my aunt since my grandfather's funeral. I had been about fourteen years old then. There'd been some bad feelings in the family between Aunt Jana and Grandpa and Grandma Davis, so I'd only seen her two or three times in my whole life before the funeral. After my Grandpa died at our house from cancer of the

brain, Jana decided to come back for the funeral. Grandma wasn't too thrilled at first, but I think she realized, while we were all sitting in the funeral home, that life's too short. So, anyway, things were good again, and I know my dad was looking forward to spending some time with his sister.

Nebraska wasn't much, the parts we went through, anyway. Too flat. Colorado was beautiful. That's when I started to feel like I wasn't in Iowa anymore. We started to climb in elevation and it was all rocky, with rushing rivers. The air looked clearer somehow. It felt good just to be going somewhere.

Utah was a desert with every 100 miles or so a small town thrown in to keep it from being completely boring. That sounds pretty dismissive I know, but by the time we were halfway through Utah I was more than ready to get to California.

I'm not sure why, but I'd always wanted to see California. Maybe because it's as far west as you can get from Iowa in the continental U.S. The weather is supposed to be beautiful all year round, with palm trees, movie stars, and swimming pools.

I could tell, when we entered California, everything seemed different in some almost indefinable way. For one thing, the light seemed brighter there. The buildings, houses and clothes all seemed lighter, airier.

Even the breezes seemed, somehow, more gentle and effervescent, although the early morning was much colder than I had expected and we drove with the convertible top up.

As we came into San Francisco, things got more different. The hills were so steep that when we were on top of them we could almost see the whole city. Coming downhill, it seemed like we were going to have a head-on collision with the street.

There were a lot of homeless people. There were old people and teenagers with cardboard lean-tos, lying on the street in the afternoon. Up to this point, I had thought that San Francisco was pretty beautiful and exciting. The architecture was fantastic. Luxury and opulence wafted from countless exotic shops and restaurants. But there's something gut-wrenching about seeing a guy who could be your grandfather, looking like he hadn't had a decent meal, a bath, or a reason to smile for a very long time.

We decided to leave San Francisco earlier than we had planned. Dad seemed anxious to get to the Pacific Coast Highway and I'd seem enough, so we left San Francisco behind, passing over the Golden Gate Bridge. We took off for the "coast."

Away from the city, we drove through a countryside of

farm fields. The road curved upwards, gradually, but more and more steadily, the farm fields gave way to forested areas and rocky outcrops.

The air had, at some point along the way, begun to smell like fish. I could hear a low rumbling sound that hadn't anything to do with the car.

"Have you ever seen the Pacific?" Dad asked. I shot him a look. After all, he knew I hadn't, but I could tell he was excited and I started to feel the same way. We came to the road that would lead us to the coast highway and Dad pulled over. We had a hill to top yet before we could see the Pacific Ocean, but I could hear what I guessed were seabirds now and an odd rushing, roaring sound like some monster might wait over the hill.

We put the top down on the Mustang like it was a ceremonial act. As we got back in the car, Dad had a big grin on his face, and I couldn't help but smile too. The sun was warm and bright now, but the air was cool, blowing on our faces.

Coming up the hill it seemed like we were climbing a roller coaster. Finally, as we reached the apex, there to our left as far as we could see, the Pacific Ocean moved, thundered, crashed and sprayed. It was like the whole world changed around us. The spray of tons of water crashing into coastline caught the sun and sparkled like a silver

beaded curtain before it was blown back to join the white froth that was repeatedly drawn back away to rejoin the mass.

Dad cranked up the car and we were flying. Quickly, our speed decreased out of necessity as the curves in the road sharpened. There were cliffs with redwood forests on one side of the highway going up, but the land dropped off sharply on the other side going down to the ocean. The ocean extended off into a white mist dotted with sailboats.

We grinned at each other. Dad and I haven't always gotten along but you know what? He had planned this trip for me . . . knowing that I would have this moment and that he would be with me, sharing that moment.

All of a sudden I knew how much Jana and Grandpa had missed. I wouldn't make that same mistake.

Dad cranked up the music and we drove.

### **Suggestions for Writing**

Vividly describe a time when you had an epiphany.

*Peter Davis wrote this personal essay while a student in Rose Toubes' Composition I class.*

# ***The Hard Workin' Man***

**Taree Pelham**

At 3:45 A.M., Monday through Friday, the same annoying alarm sounds at the Pelham household. According to my mother, my father immediately wakes, rolls over from his precious sleep, and slaps the alarm with his rough, callused hand. As he rolls out of bed, he realizes that his 42-year-old body aches like a 70-year-old one should. Each day before work, my dad starts out with his much needed exercises to stretch his tired back muscles, and a whole pot of strong, black coffee to keep him awake during his upcoming hour drive to work.

After he finishes his black coffee, my dad gets dressed in his same everyday attire. He looks in his closet and chooses one of the twenty black, cotton tee-shirts with a breast pocket for his pens and a tiny notebook, a pair of tight, faded blue jeans that hug his skinny chicken legs, white cotton socks, and black, worn out steel toed boots. Before Dad walks out the door, he quickly grabs his notebook and favorite pens, and shoves his four-inch thick, worn-out, black billfold in the back pocket of his jeans. He pours the remaining black coffee into one of his favorite black mugs.

As he walks out to his truck, his two favorite black dogs race around the corner of the house to greet him. No matter

what, those dogs know how to cheer him up. "Hey puppies, how are you this mornin'?" Lexie is so excited that she jumps up on him and almost spills his coffee. "Scrappy, you stay down now; do you hear me!" he says to Lexie in a stern voice. As my father jumps in his pickup, he has to push the dogs away. The love is mutual among them, and my dad hates to leave them as much as they hate him leaving.

My dad realizes he has a long, boring drive ahead, so he kills time by blaring his miscellaneous hard rock CDs. He always makes the most of dull moments. From past experiences riding with him in the truck, I've discovered he has been known to act wild by singing and head banging to his favorite Godsmack and Metallica songs. Pretending to be a rock star and drinking coffee are two of the favorite things he does to make the drive shorter and to keep him awake.

Today, unlike his other days, Dad has to make an extra stop in Ankeny to pick me up before work. I get to find out exactly what he really does in a normal day.

It's 5:45 A.M., November 29, 2001; Dad pulls up to my apartment in his cherished '96 black GMC. It is hard to see him because his hat, hair, mustache, shirt, and shoes are all black and



blend into the truck and dull sky. I rush down the stairs eager to see him. Just as I had expected, I open the truck door, and "Fade to Black," a Metallica song, is blaring through the small speakers. Immediately my dad turns the music down. "Are you awake this mornin'?" He says with a happy-to-see me smile.

"Yes, Dad," I say with no enthusiasm.

Dad's work is only ten minutes from my apartment, so it took us no time to get there. It's in a scary slum part of town. As we pull up to the building, the first thing I notice is about 20 white H&W Motor Express semis and one black one. They are all different sizes lined up along a fence. The outside of the building consists of peeling paint and dirty gray to off-white colored bricks. It's a pretty small building, compared to all the large semis next to it. We park around back, and the first thing Dad does is clock in and go straight to work.

Dad turns to me while loading a medium sized box and jokingly says, "Do you think you could lift these heavy boxes every day? I didn't think so." As my dad loads the semis, I start to understand why his back hurts him. Many times I look over and notice the strain the packages put on his body, as he grits his teeth and sweat rolls down his face. Many of the smallest packages are the heaviest ones to load. Sometimes the forklift is needed to load heavy packages into the semi. Dad operates that

too. There are only three people, including Dad, loading four trucks this morning. The other two guys seem like the stereotypical semi drivers: rugged, rough, and scary. The loading dock is full of joking profanity that adds to the roughness of the men. Dad seems to be having fun with the other guys in the midst of all the physical labor. Although he jokes around with the guys, his manners and lifestyle are much different.

Two hours later, the loading is completed. "Wasn't that an earful?" Dad asks in an embarrassed way.

"I'd say so."

"Now we're off to the exciting part of my job," Dad says with a sarcastic look on his face. Before we leave, Dad and I walk outside and grab his cell phone (something he couldn't live without). Out of all the semis there, Dad's is the only black one. "We're off to Leon," he says, as he plugs in his bag cell phone and starts the truck. He looks so small next to the truck's huge steering wheel. As we pull away, I notice Dad's level of concentration is very high. He's in complete control.

"How do you feel about your job?" I ask. I've heard the answer to this question time and time again, but this time he knew he should answer more seriously.

"Which one? I wouldn't mind this driving job as much if it weren't for all the long hours I put in that keep me away from your mom and you kids. I hate

missing out on some of your guys' activities. Managing the tire store isn't as bad because I only have to go there for a little while after work, to make sure everything's okay, but working there on Saturdays is harder because I think of all the other things I could be doing. Owning the car wash isn't that bad most of the time. The part I hate the most is when I have to clean out the pit, or try to fix problems."

"What do you do all day when you're in the semi?"

"I think a lot about your mom and you kids; that's why I call you guys all the time. I don't do it to be annoying. It actually makes my day go by faster." I saw the pain in his watery eyes like I'd never seen before in this tough man. "You know what Taree? The thing I regret the most is not finishing college. Do you know how much better my life would be if I had? I wouldn't have to work three jobs to make ends meet.

"Why are you working three jobs?"

"It's what I have to do to pay the bills and send you and Jacob to college. You guys are gonna live better lives, get higher-paying jobs, and not have to work so damn much."

Time went by fast; it's two o'clock. "I don't usually eat lunch, but do you want to stop and get something to eat?" Dad said.

"What do you mean you don't usually eat?"

"With this job, sitting in a truck all day, I don't get much

physical activity. If I'd eat lunch, I'd weigh 250 lbs."

Dad has a little bit of a belly, but by the looks of his pencil legs and muscular arms, anyone could tell he wasn't much of an eater. "I don't need any lunch, thanks." With that in mind, Dad whips the large, black semi just like it was a Power Wheel into a Quik Trip parking lot. "Do you want anything to drink? I gotta get me some Mountain Dew to tide me over."

Dad jumps out of his truck. His bowed legs are as noticeable as ever, and his billfold looks like a softball-sized tumor in his back pocket. About five minutes later he walks out of the store with more than a Mountain Dew in his hand. He opens the truck door, places two Mountain Dews and a bag of nacho Doritos on the seat, and pulls his body into the semi. His biceps are bulging out of his tee shirt.

"I thought you might need these anyway, just to hold you over."

"Thanks, Dad."

Our next stop is what looks like a huge old condemned warehouse. Dad proudly backs the semi into the unloading dock the first time. We make many more stops during the day, and Dad's amazing maneuvering of his truck never changes.

On the way to another stop, Dad drops me off at my apartment. He walks me to the door. Before I go inside, he wraps his loving arms around me and squeezes me between his

rock solid biceps. "You miss your dad, don't ya?"

"Yeah, Dad, I do."

"I love ya, and if you ever need anything, make sure you call."

"I will Dad, I promise." As Dad leaves, I hear the sound of his heavy metal music quickly fade.

### **Suggestions for Writing**

Compare and contrast the father in this essay with the father in Andrea Smith's essay entitled "Unfulfilled Dreams."

*Taree Pelham wrote this profile while a student in Ruthanne Harstad's Composition I class.*

# *Unfulfilled Dreams*

**Andrea Smith**

The church is filled with the delightful blending of freshly cut flowers and the tingling scent of melted wax meandering from the glowing candles. Friends and family dressed in elegant dresses and rarely-worn suits fill the wooden pews. Smiling faces turn towards me, and a few tears begin to gather in my mother's eyes that look so much like my own. The feelings etched upon her face have to be the mirror image of the feelings that I have bubbling up inside me. With an insipid grin stretched across my face, I slightly tilt my head to the side to look at my father. The words that we are wishing to say are communicated through the assuring tap that lightly touches my hand that is linked through his arm. His tuxedo is smooth beneath my fingers, and the crisp tie compliments his chiseled face. Pride shines in his eyes as he leans over to place a fatherly kiss upon my cheek and then hands me over to the next man who will fill my days. The priest's voice seems to boom as he asks, "Who gives this woman to this man?" I excitedly look to my father. I see the love shining through his eyes and pour over me as he opens his mouth to speak those words to give me away.

And then I wake up.

Isn't this every girl's dream, to have a father that she loves so much and loves her in return? A father to share in just one of those important days that she will never forget? Sure it is, but that is not my dad, at least not in my eyes.

I have difficulty remembering what my dad looked like when I was younger. I get brief flashes of a young man with dark hair and tanned skin. To look at him now, it is difficult to see that he was once a handsome man. He has black, oily hair that is speckled with white puffs of dandruff. The puffiness in his face is ever changing, depending on the day. He has diabetes and the effects of the neglected disease can be seen. His fingernails are always dirty, a testament to working outside on the farm or under the hood of a car, and bitten off so short that they emphasize the fact that he is losing sensation in them. Each finger is usually puffy, filled with fluid, and resembles a sausage. Because of his swollen digits, he can only wear shirts that have snaps instead of buttons. My dad refuses to wear suits, especially tuxes. That would explain why the last suit he bought was from Goodwill.

The dad in my dreams is the dad that I expected when I was a very little girl. Our relationship has always been a roller-coaster ride. Details of what we did when I was much younger are sketchy, due to the fact that there were very few moments when we crossed each other's paths, even though we lived in the same house until I was thirteen-years-old.

I came to learn that the same action could be playful or painful. On the Sundays that I got to go with him to the grocery store to pick up doughnuts for the family, he would usually be playful. As we walked out of the store into the bright sunshine, we would have spirit in each step we took. He would reach forward with his empty right hand and cheerfully take hold of the thick ponytail at the top of my head. With a playful "this way," he would gleefully steer me towards the car, and with each giggle that escaped my lips, he would zigzag back and forth, flopping my ponytail from side to side. However, that same action could bring tears to my blue eyes and make me cringe with pain. That ponytail mom was always so fond of would be the quickest handle to grab when I was walking the wrong direction when he was in a hurry or when I would leave my dolly lying on the couch.

My parents separated when I was in seventh grade. The night that he was served with divorce papers, I was not sad. I really didn't have any

emotion, but maybe a little relief was reflected in my eyes.

"What are you so happy about?" asked my older brother David. "You are supposed to be upset that this is happening."

"Come off it, Dave, you are not upset about this. You have been waiting longer than I have for him to leave," I replied with sarcasm dripping.

"But at least I don't show it and rub it in that I don't like him."

The only child that showed emotion that night was Corey, my younger brother. He sat quietly on the edge of the couch with silent tears trickling down his cheeks. That night was the last night that Dad slept in our house. With an aura of dejection, he packed up a battered suitcase of clothes, stashed his gun collection in the back of the rusted Bronco and headed off to Grandma's house. I was relieved to see him leave but also felt guilty because he was my dad. Even though I was invisible to him or troublesome for him, I still loved him. The thought that he was only an hour away and we would still see him on weekends helped to alleviate that guilt that crowded my still impressionable heart.

When I began the long process for braces a year later, he was bitter. He refused to pay a small portion of the monthly bill. With my mother having a very limited income, I had to forego the simple procedure that would improve my self-confidence.

Corey was the only one who benefited from the split. He was the only one that Dad wanted and, therefore, was the only one invited to Dad's for weekends. I was again just a troublesome daughter that he didn't want in the first place. This was when our relationship hit bottom. I was invisible, but I did things that I had hoped would get his attention. As a freshman in high school, I took the hunting course, hoping he would include me on one of his many hunting trips. The way that he included me was by having me drive the rebuilt Bronco around the field that he and my brothers would traverse. I would invite myself along with Corey when he went for a visit. The two of them would leave me alone at the farmhouse or in town at Grandma's to entertain myself while they would go ride the horses, four-wheelers, or hunt across the field. Then, after a simple dinner, Dad would fall comatose on the ratty couch. Corey would usually join him in this state. I would be left to watch whatever was on TV, which had poor reception. I was doomed to fail. What else could I do? I gave up.

We did take a trip to Mt. Rushmore following my graduation from high school. We spent ten days on his motorcycle and totally alone. I was bubbling with excitement. Granted, Corey got to go first and further, but this was my turn. He had promised that we would get to watch the Fourth of July

fireworks at Mt. Rushmore. He broke that promise, like so many others. We spent that day doing what he wanted to do, which included riding to Sturgis to see if any activities were going on there. But the town was quiet, so we went to Deadwood where the saloons were teeming with activity. All I could do was watch, since I was seventeen and under gambling age, but he wore himself out. This meant he was too tired to drive out to the monument to watch the light show. Instead, I watched those fireworks from a distance. I sat alone on a rickety picnic table staring off into the twilight as my dad lay sleeping in the tent. The trip ended much like it began. The final day was spent entirely on the motorcycle making a mad dash through the rain trying to get home. Our "bonding" trip was a complete disaster. I was back to being the "forgotten daughter."

Then in the spring of 1995, our strained relationship reached a high note. Pride showed in his eyes when I came to visit every weekend. I had given him his first grandchild. It didn't matter that I was still single and messed up. He was finally in my life, but the pain of indifference that he showed me during my formative years did not disappear. I was waiting for the bottom to fall out of the utopia that I was experiencing.

His second "grandson," Clayton, was born three months later. Clayton was really Mary, his live-in girlfriend's, grandson.

They were not related by blood or even marriage yet, but he took precedence over Caleb. My son and I were pushed back to second place. His live-in girlfriend and her family became more important. The green-eyed giant in me was growing. We again reached a slump and have been there ever since.

A few years ago, I searched our family photo albums to find a picture of just the two of us. I found a poem that I was going to copy, frame and give to him for Christmas. I spent hours searching for one photograph and that was all I found. Just one photograph of just the two of us, and it was taken the day I was born in the hospital. That was the only time caught on film that I was the sole subject of his attention.

In July of 2000, I again tried to meet with his approval, to make him proud. I called him with the announcement that would change my life.

"Hi, Dad, I've got some news."

"What's that?" was his indifferent response.

"I joined the National Guard!" I gushed over the phone. *There was only silence.*

"I really thought about it and enlisted today," I said hurriedly. Softly, a single word drifted back to me, "Why?" Confused, I continued, "This is something that I wanted to do for a long time, and now I have found a way."

"But why would you now? I don't understand why you

would risk a good job that you already have," was his flat reply. With a flippant chuckle, I said, "It isn't that great of a job."

"Caleb already doesn't have a dad, and now he won't have a mom either. That isn't being very responsible," he said sternly.

"Yes he will," was the only response I could utter through the lump forming in my throat.

His rejection of that decision hurt, and the message was reinforced by the many letters, written during difficult and lonely times at Basic Training, that went unanswered. The fact that he chose to attend his stepson's wedding rehearsal over my hard-sought graduation from training showed me that he really didn't care. He did not show the slightest bit of enthusiasm that I accomplished a goal that I set years before. The only time he spoke about my position in the Guard was with ridicule. He laughed about my difficulty with physical fitness and shared his laughs with his replacement family. On Thanksgiving Day when I was forced to attend dinner at his house, I was told that I could not eat until I ran a mile. This was followed by a deep chuckle and a wink at my stepsister, who was wedged into a chair in the corner.

As his family prepares for my stepsister's wedding, I am filled with envy. He has a daughter that he is proud of and it is not me. I keep thinking that my dream will never come true. If I ever get married, another man will be giving me away and that

will be my son. My father gave me away years ago. That is, if he ever had me at all.

### **Suggestions for Writing**

Compare and contrast the father in this essay with the father in Taree Pelham's essay entitled "The Hard Workin' Man."

*Andrea Smith wrote this remembered person essay while a student in Tara Wendel's Composition I class.*



## ***Hunting Encounters***

**Steven Wyckmans**

In my native country of Belgium, hunting is a very elite pastime. Some fifty years ago, only people of noble birth were allowed to hunt, and the law was that any people who poached could simply be shot, whether they were caught red-handed or not. However, this law didn't stop poor people from poaching because they needed the meat to survive through the winter. Since the Second World War, this law is not so strict anymore and the nobles aren't as powerful as when they owned almost all the land. The more land you had, the wealthier you were. Due to the increase in taxes, this changed and owning all that land became expensive.

Lots were sold or rented out to new rich people. The *nouveau riche* we call them; many are lawyers, bankers or factory owners. Almost all forests, except for parks where hunting is not allowed, are private property. So, as a hunter, you have to own or rent a big piece of land. Hunting is not hobby most citizens can afford - not like here in the United States.

When I was a kid, I liked to hike through the woods to experience nature, and I tried to spot as many

animals as I could before they became aware of me.

Sometimes I could sneak so close to a pheasant or a deer, I could almost touch it or hit it with a stone, if I wanted to. Fences and signs that said "No Trespassing" made things only more exiting. Feeling your heart beat, and having to run on some occasions, was part of the adventure.

In autumn, I was fascinated by the beautiful colors of the leaves. The mysterious morning fog, and the barking of the hunting dogs appealed to me very much. This time of year really felt like the season to hunt. The flowers were dying and the trees were going to sleep until spring. Game was abundant and they couldn't all make it through winter anyway. So I went looking for the people who tried to catch game, the hunters.

I know I still was much too young to be a hunter, I just wanted to take a closer look. One morning, I climbed in a big tree at the edge of the forest to see what was going on. It was not a pretty sight; it was more a butchery than a hunt. In that field there was a big loud bunch of men, obviously

already drunk at this time of the morning, shooting at everything that moved. Even small singing birds weren't safe. They were standing in a line at one side of a field, all facing the same direction. Their helpers chased rabbits, hares and pheasants out of the tall grass and bushes towards them. As long as they could stand on their feet, they only had to aim and shoot. If they hadn't been so drunk, it would have been a massacre. This was nothing for me to be part of and at that time I thought all hunters were like this. It seemed like a just cause to do anything to boycott these obnoxious creatures with their liquor-red faces and shiny Land Rovers.

I started to read everything I could find about hunting and soon I found out that most of it was fake. The pheasants, for example, weren't really wild. They were released only a couple of days before the hunt. Most of them didn't even know how to fly and liked staying all together where they were fed.

By giving them a firedrill, I could greatly improve their survival skills. Firecrackers were the right tool to do it, and it was so much fun my friends started to help as well. That year, the pheasants became almost as smart as the turkeys. Big hunting parties had to return home almost empty-handed. After the first shot, all birds

vanished. I found out that almost all bigger animals like deer were fed and shot in the same spot, as they say poachers do. There was not much to do against these practices, and I reasoned that if these so-called sportsmen could do this, I could hunt as well.

One evening when I was walking my dog, I saw a poacher. I couldn't believe I almost passed him without noticing. He didn't move, his clothes and cap were all different tints of green and brown, but nothing like military camouflage. On the opposite side of a small stream, he was seated very quietly on a fence-post under a tree. He looked at me from the corners of his eyes. I said hello, and he nodded back.

This was a real hunter. I started trying to sit motionless myself, determined to become at least as good as the hunter I saw that evening. Out of some canvas bags and an old camouflage net, I made myself a suit that could be altered with leaves and other natural materials and, depending on the season, it was altered many times. If the suit was invisible when lying on the ground, I did a good job. I kept my stuff stored in the forest or field where I was sneaking around. It had to hide human odor as well.

The only thing missing was some kind of gun. Snares were working a bit too well,

and they also were messy. I didn't want the animals to suffer, and shooting a rifle of some kind was more exiting. From the moment I put on the camouflage, I had to make sure nobody noticed anything. To stay out of sight of people who didn't keep their dogs on a leash was a big challenge too, and sometimes I had to use cayenne pepper to make the dogs haul off. If I was going to be noticed, I put off the camouflage and pretended to hike or engage in another innocent activity.

Needless to say, my parents didn't know what I was doing, not even when I bought a small .22. It was also stored outside, somewhere where I was hunting. Since I always aimed for the head, the .22 was the perfect tool to snipe hares and pheasants. It was a clean kill or a miss, difficult but exiting, and you only had one chance - just like real hunting should be.

I had my own simple hunting ethics, like eat what you shoot, and no hunting of female animals, only young males when I was hunting deer. Some years, there were almost no hares but lots of pigeons and rabbits so I left the hares off the menu and tried a lot of rabbit and pigeon recipes. My impact on nature was minimal. I know for sure it was less than the impact of the average family cat. So,

illegal or not, I never felt any guilt.

Now I don't feel the burning urge to hunt any more, and after all these years, the cold gets in my bones when I have to sit or lie motionless for hours on damp soil. I appreciate my warm bed, especially when the sun is not up yet. Since I came to the United States, I haven't touched any kind of gun. Instead, I see all the deer that go to waste. Each year more deer are killed by traffic than by hunters, and all I have to do is pick up a buck from the roadside that is still steamy. My freezer is full for this winter.

### **Suggestions for Writing**

Write a reflective essay on a hobby you enjoy.

*Steven Wyckmans wrote this personal essay while a student in Wendy Gibson's Composition I class.*

## *Working For Jim*

**Frank Bott**

As I pull into the parking lot, I think to myself, "You know, the mornings are the only good part of this job." It is six in the morning and the lot is empty except for bits of trash and an occasional broken-down car. The stranded cars belong to one my 70 or 80 teenage employees. The vehicles, a reflection of most of my workers, basically are undependable. The warm desert breeze whips scraps of paper in a circular, rising motion, a sure sign of the heat to come. I unlock the large glass front door, step through and take a quick jog to the alarm system controls to the right. I punch in the code to end the beeping. With a deep breath, I turn to stare into the massive, dark, quiet and cavernous interior. The place smells of sour soda pop, cake frosting, popcorn, electrical wires and heavy axle grease.

The deep blue color of the painted ceiling and ductwork make the space seem much taller than it really is. The deeply tinted windows block most of the morning light, hiding the multitude of colors that are as loud and bright as the sounds that will be building as the day progresses. The rides are motionless; they stand like strange shaped monsters in suspended animation, caged by

their short, pale green iron fences. They are silent, hidden in the dark, waiting to come to life.

The silence is broken as I start the main cash register. The clacking of its printer echoes as it proceeds to print the 30 feet or so of thin white paper tape, a record of Friday's business. The noise increases to a deep hum as I start the coffee maker, pizza ovens, and their massive exhaust fans. I walk the twenty yards to the office, unlock the door and sit down in the squeaky but comfortable chair behind the desk. The office is the only small part of the entire business. It has a large cluttered metal desk, overfilled filing cabinets and a large old-fashioned safe. The safe is stuffed with things that need counting. Paper money, coins, game tokens, sets of rubber stamps and boxes of colored paper wristbands that we use for admission.

I start to read the notes and memos from yesterday's business. It is the usual list of problems that will need to be addressed before the doors open. It is long and detailed; making me glad I was off yesterday. As I start to work through the mountain of paperwork, I look through the one-way glass that faces out to the interior, knowing that I should enjoy this time,

with the realization of how different it will be soon.

An hour later, the darkness and quiet are disturbed by a jingle of keys and the blaring of heavy metal music from the back of the store. I watch the place start to light up with every bang of each circuit breaker. I can now see the many red, orange, and yellow tables and counter tops. The multi-colored lights of the rides begin their blinking, the bright painted jungle scenes and the festive signs directing you one way or another jump out from the walls. The two stories of yellow climbing tubes and nets and swimming pool sized pit of multi-colored balls rise to the ceiling. Soda and cake stains are everywhere on the orange and red speckled carpet. Limp old balloons hang from the ceiling by long tangled ribbons. One by one, each section comes into my sight. They are a sharp contrast to the darkness that I had just been enjoying.

The building, once an old grocery store, is now converted into a child's fantasyland. Jungle Jim's Playland is 45,000 square feet of fun-- if you are a kid. There are rides, games that spit out streamers of redeemable tickets, pizza, soda, cake, ice cream, and popcorn, along with balloons, music and fun. It's about the best place for young kids to have a birthday party. The kids spend the day working themselves into a sweaty frenzy, running from ride to ride. They blow through Mom and Dad's

money at a voracious rate, trying to win enough tickets to trade for cheap plastic toys.

"Hey, how's it hangin', Frank?" grunts Warren. He is our maintenance man for the store. Warren is just a kid, like all the other employees, but has been with the business since it opened a few years back. He started like all the rest, working the rides and then moved to gaming technician, the kid in the referee shirt who un-jams the tokens from the coin slots. Warren, a part time college student, has learned how to fix everything by helping the parade of skilled maintenance guys who stay only until they get sick of being on call all the time. Most go and find another job after a while, when the "big" salary we offer, no longer seems so attractive. They soon learned that the job came with calls on their days off, a report of all the machinery that has broken down, and a demand to get in and fix the stuff.

"Looks like it's going be a big one today. We've got 60 some parties and its supposed to be 106 degrees out today," I reply. Our store is Jungle Jim's Playland in Mesa, Arizona, a perfect place for an indoor amusement park. On a Saturday during the summer, we usually have about 750 kids and their parents come through the doors to get out of the heat, and they stay at least a few hours. We'll do probably twenty thousand dollars in sales, all which must be totaled and balanced with

cash register print-outs and reconciled on ten different corporate headquarter forms.

I read the status report to Warren, "It says... the Amazon has a funny squeak and is banging on the backside, when in reverse. Token Machine Two sucks, Teddy Bear's Picnic and the Earthquake are down, Skee-Ball 3,4 and 6 are missing balls and the popcorn machine has apparently burned up again." "Okay, No problem," Warren says, making mental notes and forcing a smile. "I'm on it boss. What do you want first?" "Check out the Amazon," I answer. "All I need is some bitchy mom telling me that Junior's B-Day party is ruined cause our best ride is broken." I wonder how long Warren's accommodating attitude will last.

Warren truly is a great employee, one of the few. Especially when our entire staff, besides the other three managers, is made up of sixteen-year-old teenagers who really don't give a shit about the place. We try to hire the homely looking kids, especially if they come with their parents to interviews on Mondays. Their social calendars are sparse and they are looking for something to keep them busy. Parents like these are usually more excited then their son or daughter about the job. At least we can depend on Mom or Dad to get them to work on time for awhile. The popular kids we hire from the high school across the street tend to quit when they can't get off for prom or a concert

or even a just a big party on a Saturday night. The revolving door of employees takes up a lot of our time. I hire at least five new kids every week to keep a full staff.

By eight in the morning, the phone system has started letting calls through and various employees are trickling in. On weekends, I average at least five kids calling in sick. At eight-thirty, my crew-leader Jessica, a girl who has lasted at least a year and proven herself competent in all the positions, has clocked in. Soon after looking at her list of ride operators, cashiers, cooks, dishwashers, party hostesses, table bussers and kids scheduled to wear the monkey suit, Jessica is at my door, complaining that we are understaffed and she will never be able to give everyone a lunch break. I give her my normal, "Don't worry, we'll figure it out." She walks away muttering, worried that she'll be stuck running a ride for awhile instead of being "Goddess of the Playland," ruler of the break schedule.

As I am finishing loading up the last of six cash registers, Marci, the phone girl, is paging me to the party reservation office. "There is a Mrs. Sandler on hold. She has a 10:15 party, and she just read her contract. She's got about 50 people coming to little Chris's fifth birthday, and she says she gonna need not just the one but at least five tables for everyone. They're coming up from Tucson, she wants the tables for at least four hours, not the hour

and a half the party package comes with and . . .” “ Stop, stop, stop” I say, as I interrupt her. “I’ll take it in my office. What line?” As I head for the office I’m thinking, “Here we go already.”

By eight-forty five, the once quiet building has erupted into a low roar. The crew leader has gotten all the games going, and they are singing, beeping and calling out to come play. The bumper car floor is humming. The carousel and teacups are spinning, the mini-jeps are honking and grinding around their steel track, and the Ferris wheel is groaning as the small cages squeak and swing with the circular motion. I can hear a fight breaking out in the kitchen between the pizza cooks, and a party hostess is blubbering about some guy.

Warren is at the door, covered in grease, “The Amazon threw a bearing,” he says wiping sweat off his face. The Amazon is a tight, circular roller coaster that runs both forward and backwards at a pretty high speed. It tends to force the riders to slide to the outside of their seats, smashing them together and making them incredibly dizzy. The kids love it. “How long?” I question, looking at the twenty or so children whose faces are already smashed, smiling, against my front windows. “Couple hours, max. I got one in stock,” he says. “Please, no longer,” I plead, thinking about the complaints I will be forced to field.

At ten to nine, I grab my keys and leave the office. I find Jessica and steer her out on to the ride floor. “So? How’s it looking?” I ask, as we take the final walk-through. “Okay, I guess . . . if everyone else shows. The Amazon being down gives me just enough bodies, till eleven” she says with a slight smile. Knowing her, that means she probably has at least two extra people for a while.

We cruise by the party desk, “Everyone ready here?” I question, looking at the stack of sixty some reservations and the ten or so party hostesses. Most are making last second adjustments to their hair and uniforms and practicing their forced phony smiles. A few mumble inaudible responses, then wander off trying to look busy. These are the kids who are supposed to have the best people skills. We have determined that they are at least skilled in dealing with mothers who are sure that they will be judged as a parent by the size, expense, and efficiency of their six-year-old’s party. “Hey, somebody go turn off Warren’s boom box, and turn on the sound system, would you?” I shout towards the back of the building. “And hey, someone put an out-of-order sign on Amazon.” Jessica, thinking it’s a good excuse to get away from me, jogs off.

Alone, I cruise past the registers and get the thumbs up from the counter people. I stick my head through the pizza pick-up window and throw in my best

evil eye, hoping it will keep those two clowns in check until they get busy. I flinch as suddenly, "Lollipop, Lollipop..." starts blaring through the speakers in the ceiling, so very loud. It's the first sound track of the twenty or so children's songs that run in an endless loop. I know as I check my watch that within an hour, the music will be incomprehensible, drowned out by all the other noise.

I reach the front doors right at nine, the crowd has grown to about seventy-five kids and a couple dozen adults. The kids are dancing impatiently and the parents, arms full of brightly wrapped gifts, are staring at me with disbelief. They are looking to blame someone for the bad idea of getting here early, and by the look on their faces, it's my fault that the clock has been moving far too slow. I start to unlock and pull the doors open, and before I can get my keys out, the stream of kids forces me to back up. I wait till the flow subsides so I can retrieve the keys from the lock. The last mother through mumbles, "Bout time," and not waiting for a response, hurries in trying to keep up with her kids.

I hold the door open for a couple of last stragglers, employees who are late. As I am about to let the door go, I see a familiar face. It's Sandy, one of the other managers. She looks at me with an all-knowing smile and asks, "So, what's happening? We ready?" I return her grin, thinking I'll be gone three hours

before she gets to go home. I just answer, "Nothin', it's just another Saturday at Jungle Jim's."

### **Suggestions for Writing**

Write several well-developed paragraphs which vividly describe a job you have held.

*Frank Bott wrote this remembered place essay while a student in David Gavin's Composition I class.*



the Lion's Park softball field the Gary Page Field. He fought his first battles with cancer with the support of people who loved him, and achieved victory each time an obstacle provided a threat. He went through a cancer-free period, and one could tell on his face that he was happy.

In the year 2000, he called our team over to talk to us. He sat on the first row of the bleachers with a baseball hat on, covering his eyes and most of his face. He said very simply, "My cancer has returned. It is now in my brain. Please do not worry about me; we have work to do. Get to work." That was all he said. He did not want to be a burden on people, or have his condition "get in the way" of the sport he was so passionate about. I remember feeling numb, looking into the face of a man whom I considered to be one of the strongest I had ever known. It was hard to understand how, with cancer in his brain, he was still able to function as if he were a completely healthy person. He was just that strong a person, and never wanted to appear less than that.

The community and the team rallied around him with countless tributes and songs. Appropriately enough, I sang the song "Hero," by Mariah Carey to him before one of our varsity softball games, as past and present players and fans lined the fences to support him. The whole night was very emotional and touching. We all physically saw the lives of many people

whose lives he had touched over his many years as a coach.

I watched my hero slowly dying in front of me. He was rarely at our games, but when he was, the desire to win was like nothing I have ever felt before in my life. The man who before seemed so distant and unreachable, now would put an arm around a player and tell her he was proud of her, and would talk of how much fun he was having at the games. We all knew the pain had to be unbearable. He would get up to challenge a call by the umpires, and we would watch his body sway as if he were going to fall, knowing he never would because he was too strong for that. He would vomit frequently, but always made it to the parking lot so his players would not see him. His players worshipped him.

I remember seeing him in the hospital, hooked up to all the wires. In a whisper so soft we had to lean forward to hear him, he would tell us a joke and laugh at his joke with a coarse laugh. It broke my heart to see him like this. I would have done anything to lessen the pain.

A hero is strong; a hero is determined. My hero was both of these. His wife told us after his death that all he wanted was to coach one more season, that maybe we kept him alive. She told us that he had only wanted to make it to his birthday. He was born on August nineteenth, and he did it. He passed away on August nineteenth. His funeral was very emotional with

songs and stories of a life well lived. The funeral was held at the biggest church in Urbandale, and it was filled with people mourning his death. The song "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," echoed throughout the church while my teammates and I lined the outside of the center aisle dressed in uniform, just as he had asked us to, as his casket rolled out of the doors of the church. Fate had called him home, and although he never quit fighting, I believe he knew it was his time.

My hero has forever changed my life. He has left imprints on the hearts of every life he has touched, and changed even the way I look at my life forever. A hero is strong; a hero is determined. Gary Page has forever instilled these traits in me.

### **Suggestions for Writing**

Write a journal entry that describes a role model who influenced your life.

*Tiffany Feyen wrote this personal essay while a student in Wendy Gibson's Composition I class.*

## ***To Err is Human . . .***

**DeAnn Vogt**

It's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game. That poster graced our locker room my entire four years of high school. I'm not sure who put it up, but my guess is it wasn't Coach. My coach taught us that if you play the game right, you would win - otherwise what was the point?

Coach was violently passionate about sports. Mistakes were unforgivable. The great athlete had hero status in his eyes. If you were a gifted player, you must also be a great person. I've learned over the years that I don't agree with Coach; his drive, his intolerance of errors, or his devotion to certain people.

On first impression, Coach seemed like a little kitten, but was actually a driven tiger waiting to be unleashed. Arriving fresh out of college, Coach looked more like the high school guys than a teacher. He was one of those people who could easily shave five years off his age and no one would guess. His hair was dark and kept slightly shorter than the current style to control the natural wave. Coach wasn't very tall, and had an average build. It was his baby-faced looks that incorrectly lured us into thinking he would act as young as he looked and be a fun coach. Our first glimpse of how

wrong we were came at a softball game, when the team's performance wasn't exactly up to par. Sitting on the bench, not really paying attention, his sudden outburst caught my attention. I glanced up just in time to see him kick the dirt and throw his fist into the air. Unfortunately for him, the kick came too close to the wire fence, where his shoe caught in the crossbars and immediately sat him on his butt. While a little giggle escaped from my lips, the look on his face was enough to squelch any further noises. His dark eyes glared at the bench, burning a hole right through us. His face was so tight it turned red and white at the same time. His intensity for the game wouldn't allow him the time for embarrassment. He got up, brushed himself off and returned to his box along the third base line. Except for the brief glower at the bench, his concentration never wavered.

The only time his focus ever left the game was when someone goofed up. We all expected to be made aware of our errors, but Coach made sure he had our undivided attention. Years later, when I left the bench to take up residence in right field, I learned that lesson for myself. After a particularly bad inning, he met me halfway back

to the dugout. In front of the whole crowd, I got to see up close what he expected out of me. While yelling was usually reserved for the umpires, it would have been better than the tone I heard. His voice was low, almost throaty sounding. He stood looking me straight in the eye. Even though I stood an inch taller, he seemed to tower over me. His words weren't as important as the message he conveyed. His hands were folded across his chest and his feet were firmly planted on the ground. He conveyed a look of total disappointment and disgust on his face. He made me feel incredibly small. I wished I could just escape and run away. I'm not sure how long his lecture lasted, but luckily for me, one of the good athletes was up to bat next and his *leadership* qualities were needed elsewhere.

The "win at all cost" mentality creates a need for coaches to protect and nurture their stars. Coach took personal pride in each outstanding athlete. He made sure his brilliant athletes felt his devotion. While the rest of us commoners did our homework, came to class and tried to follow the rules, the star athletes were not held to the same standards. Oh, Coach never went so far as to break the rules, but bending them for the sake of the game was a different story. While the rest of us never had a normal conversation with him, his proteges talked to him like a friend. He would seek them out like tourists on a safari

search for that illustrious glimpse of a rare animal. When he spotted them, he would make every effort imaginable to reach them. Any honors they received were like feathers in his cap. He seemed to take personal pride in their awards, like it was something he accomplished.

After high school, playing recreation league sports, I learned that winning isn't everything. Sometimes, winning isn't anything. I didn't even know that a game could actually be played without huge knots in my stomach.

People like Coach will exist as long as we put athletes up on a pedestal. Sports are his passion. Average players who screw up occasionally are not winners in his eyes. He sees perfection in his great athletes. To me, winning isn't the measure of playing well. Sometimes our best still comes up short in the won/loss columns. While I was never a star, I had a lot of fun with my friends. I was in great shape, thanks to the endless hours of practice. I even managed to learn the rules and strategies of the games I played. I think I'm a winner after all.

### **Suggestions for Writing**

Compare and contrast this essay with Tiffany Feyen's essay entitled "Definition of a Hero."

*DeAnn Vogt wrote this remembered person essay while a student in Diane Leonard's Composition I class.*

## ***Just Call Me Soldier***

**Kendra Mills**

“From this point on and through the rest of your Army careers, should you make it that far, your pathetic lives are about to change. You will not be called Jack, Sue, or whatever your mama named you. Your first name no longer exists in my world. You are now a private, a soldier, and you will refer to yourself and your fellow platoon members as such. Do I make myself clear, privates?” These words echoed loudly through the barracks walls as Drill Sergeant Wilkerson, a large muscular man of African American descent, bellowed at our platoon of nervous soldiers in training. I realized being in the army was going to be a life altering experience. I was no longer Kendra. I was Private Mills, a soldier in training, and basic training was going to bring structure and new experiences to my life.

My life was much different before I joined the Army. I had no structure or discipline. I was only known as "Kendra"; an irresponsible teenager. I had been out of high school for about a year and my life was going nowhere. I didn't have a job and had no desire to attend

college. Partying was my top priority in life. I stayed out all hours of the night and rarely woke up before noon. One day I realized my life had to change. All of my friends were growing up and moving on, and I reluctantly faced the fact that I had to do the same.

I went in to the Armed Forces Recruiting Center and talked to Staff Sergeant Gall, the recruiter, and told him my situation. I explained to him my anxiousness to leave Iowa and gain a new perspective on life. I was tired of spending my time doing unproductive things such as partying and watching television all day. I wanted to get into good physical shape, go to college, and meet different people from all walks of life. Staff Sergeant Gall told me, "The Army will make you change and it will give you the discipline you need to be a productive member of society. We will give you a GI Bill to help you pay for college; you will be in great shape physically and mentally. I promise you won't regret joining the Army." I realized the sooner I signed the contract of enlistment, the sooner my new life began. "When can you get me out of

here?" I excitedly asked. I signed the contract and on January 26, 1996, three weeks after I first spoke with my recruiter, I boarded an airplane to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, to start basic training.

A typical day of basic training began at 5:00 A.M. We were awakened to Drill Sergeant Wilkerson turning on all the lights in the barracks, which were a dreary tan color and consisted of nothing but gray wall lockers and steel bunk beds for the décor. The training was co-ed with females in one corridor and males housed in the building next door. Sleeping in was never an option and we instantly left our bunks without hesitation upon hearing the drill sergeant's commanding voice ending our unconscious state while sleeping.

Every morning Drill Sergeant Wilkerson yelled, "Toe the line." At that point all the soldiers stood in front of their bunks to be counted as if we were inmates in a maximum-security prison to ensure no one escaped. Once he had established we were all accounted for, we had 15 minutes to get downstairs for formation. In 15 minutes everyone had to use the restroom, brush their teeth and females had to pull their hair up so it did not touch the collar. Once everyone dressed, the soldiers in training

hurried downstairs to start the long day of training.

Physical training or "P.T." as it is commonly referred to, since most things are abbreviated in the army, started our morning. This was very important because P.T. is the ultimate test of physical and mental endurance. Exercise was a new concept to me; therefore, the muscles in my body writhed in pain. "You're not in pain. Your mind is trying to trick you," Drill Sergeant Wilkerson always told the soldiers. We ran in ability groups since our training was co-ed. The running groups were divided into labels of A, B, and C groups. "A" group was where most of the male soldiers were since a majority of them were faster. "B" group was for most people who weren't quite as fast and "C" group was for the "turtle privates" as the drill sergeants referred to them. I was in the "B" group. Since exercise had never been a part of my lifestyle, I was surprised that I had a little natural running ability.

The soldiers in training ran in formations across all types of terrain, including sand, hills, concrete, and gravel. We ran for nearly an hour and a half. "You better be dying if you quit running. You can't stop running if someone is chasing after you in combat," the drill sergeants yelled when it appeared the runners were tiring. "Falling

out," which basically means someone starts walking, was not an option. If a soldier in training fell out and did not actually have an injury, the drill sergeant made everyone else run longer and that displeased the other members in the running group.

I was amazed by what my body did physically when I pushed it. A soldier's mental state of mind usually affected physical performance and made someone stop running, rather than a physical injury. Once we had completed running, we did push-ups and sit-ups as well as other strenuous exercises designed to build endurance. Among the exercises were the "dying cockroach," "hello dollies," "flutterkicks," "the chair," "Russian kicks" and the "clapper." Once P.T. ended, we returned to the barracks.

Upon arrival back to the barracks, we had exactly 30 minutes to shower, get dressed, and be back in formation to go to breakfast or "chow" as it is called in the army. A typical shower usually took five minutes or less for the females to get through. Often we shared showerheads since there was not enough time or showers for everyone to get through. The way it worked, one person lathered up while the other rinsed. If someone was lucky enough to get in there first, they might even get hot water and a shower to themselves.

On most occasions, the showers were cold and shared.

After showering, we changed into our battle dress uniform, also known as BDUs. Those consist of green camouflage pants, jacket, brown undershirt, and well-shined and polished black combat boots. Every morning after I had taken my BDUs out of my wall locker, I allowed myself a moment to gaze at my Class A uniform hanging in the back. This is the Army dress uniform worn on graduation day. I pictured myself in the uniform and was determined to make it to graduation day to proudly wear it. This ritual kept me motivated.

Once everyone was showered, dressed, and in formation, we marched to the dining facility or "Dfac" to eat chow. Being Private Mills, I learned to eat a meal very quickly. Talking was not allowed in the Dfac, for we only had ten minutes or less for the whole platoon, which consisted of fifty-six people, to eat regardless of when we sat down at the table. Our drill sergeants always told us "Privates when you are at chow, you eat now, taste later." Once chow was completed, everyone quietly moved back to formation and continued on with the day.

Basic rifle marksmanship or "BRM," along with physical training,

was another crucial aspect in a soldier's learning process. Before going into the army I had never shot a weapon before, so this was going to be another new experience. BRM taught us not only how to shoot a weapon to prepare us for combat, but it also helped us learn teamwork. We were all assigned a "battle buddy." This was a person with whom we shared a firing lane. The firing lane consisted of a dirt pit, dug by the soldiers to make a "foxhole." My battle buddy was an outspoken Puerto Rican girl from Queens, New York, named Private Torres. At the range, the soldiers shot at pop-up targets ranging from 50 to 300 meters. Battle buddies picked up the ammunition and acted as coach, ensuring we shot the targets accurately. "You need a battle buddy. Without them, you will die quicker in combat," Drill Sergeant Wilkerson informed us. We learned teamwork because without your battle buddy, the ammunition ran out and we dug the foxholes by ourselves. We stayed at the range all day and once our day ended we marched back to the barracks.

To complete our day we went into a large multi-purpose room or "MPR" and the drill sergeants talked to us and we discussed the happenings of the day. This gave the soldiers a chance to unwind. We sat and "spit

shined" our boots so that the toes were so polished we saw our reflection. This was a time to bandage all the blisters on our feet and soothe our aching muscles. The hottest commodity in basic training was Bengay and Icy Hot. According to Drill Sergeant Wilkerson, however, it was considered to be contraband. Unfortunately, the soldiers were unaware of this fact.

One day we sat in the MPR and rubbed Icy Hot on our aching muscles. The substance, which seemed to be an equivalent to gold in the gold rush era, seemed to work miracles for pain. Drill Sergeant Wilkerson burst in and started yelling, "Why does this MPR smell like a bunch of old ladies in a retirement home with this Bengay. You don't have that shit in combat so you won't have it here either, privates." From that point forward, we let our muscles ache and heal by themselves without any substances. Amazingly enough as our bodies became physically fit; we didn't even miss the Icy Hot.

Mail call was the biggest highlight of the day. In a total institutional setting like basic training there is no television, newspaper, or magazines. The only contact with the outside world is through letters. My mother wrote me three times a week to encourage me. She often



sent me newspaper clippings of some of my former friends being arrested. She reassured me I did the right thing by leaving Iowa. Without goals in life, I may have become one of those people getting into trouble. My friends wrote me to let me know they missed me and I was in their thoughts. The letters began with "Dear Kendra." Seeing my first name on letters was odd, because often I forgot my first name existed since I hadn't heard it in weeks.

I learned a lot about my fellow platoon members during this part of the day. People came from all walks of life, races, religions, and backgrounds. We had people from New York to California. The soldiers in training often discussed why they decided to join the army. Some of the soldiers were financially successful and wanted to get away from a charmed life where everything was given to them. On the opposite end of the spectrum, however, were people trying to escape gangs and a life of poverty. It seemed astonishing how close the soldiers became with one another in an eight-week period. Although we all discussed many personal details about our lives, personal experiences, and everything else imaginable, we rarely knew anyone's first name.

Graduation day finally came and the soldiers

graduating were stronger and more structured individuals. The platoon started with 56 members, but 48 graduated. Injuries forced some of the soldiers out of the platoon. The remaining soldiers who did not graduate either were unable to adjust to the structured lifestyle or lacked the ability to accurately shoot a weapon. By the time basic training ended, we were saddened since we had to say good-bye to the platoon members who were leaving for various duty stations.

The time finally arrived and I earned the right to wear my Class A uniform. The nine weeks of basic training were well worth the chance to wear that uniform. All of these accomplishments allowed the soldiers to embark on their careers in the Army. Sometimes I wonder how my life would be different if I had not made the decision to leave my life as Kendra behind to be Private Mills, the soldier. I am grateful to have seen the world, to meet so many fascinating people, and now to be able to accept structure. I still keep in touch with some of the members of the graduating platoon. My battle buddy Private Torres and I e-mail one another at least once a week and a few of the others write or call occasionally.

I am still enlisted in the Army reserves and enjoyed three years of active duty previously. I am now referred

to as Specialist Mills, because the Army rewarded my hard work with promotions. My pride will continue in my country and myself.

The memory of my final day of basic training will last a lifetime. Drill Sergeant Wilkerson shook my hand and said "Congratulations, Private Mills. You are no longer a regular civilian. You are now a soldier in the United States Army and may you serve your country proudly."

### **Suggestions for Writing**

Write a journal entry on how you were able to overcome a difficult mental or physical situation.

*Kendra Mills wrote this essay on the umbrella topic of "names" while a student in Sharon Witty's Composition I class.*

## ***She was the Inspiration***

**Milissa Shineflew**

It is October of 1997, and I was pregnant with our third child. Our son, Colten, had just died from complications of heart defects and the loss filled my heart with a painful void. I knew in my heart that Colten could not be replaced, but I wanted another baby to help fill the painful empty space that was deep in my heart. I guess others would probably consider me selfish, but I felt that having another baby was what I needed to move on with my life.

Since this was considered to be a “high-risk” pregnancy (because of Colten’s history of heart defects and the possibility of them reoccurring in this baby), I went to see a perinatologist for a more intense ultrasound, just to make sure the baby’s organs were growing correctly. The radiologist was looking and studying the sonogram for what seemed to be a very long time.

After two hours had gone by, I interrupted the radiologist. “Is everything okay?”

“I really can’t tell you anything right now. The doctor will be in to see everything for himself, and then he can talk to you about it.” She avoided my eyes. I thought to myself, “Something must be wrong.” She was acting really strange. A few

minutes later, Dr. Boyle came in to examine my belly himself.

Dr. Boyle looked at the sonogram and ran the wand over my belly. I could tell by the look on his face that he was troubled by something. I didn’t say anything. I just waited to see what he would say. Actually, I was very afraid of what he might say.

“Well, this really isn’t looking too good,” Dr. Boyle said, frowning. “It appears that this baby has a lot of the same problems that your other baby had. I just really don’t see how these heart conditions can be improved,” Dr. Boyle hesitated for a moment and continued on. “I would really suggest terminating the baby. There’s just not a lot of hope for this whole situation.”

I was devastated. I listened to him explain each of the six heart defects. I knew most of the details—remembering them from when they were explained to me regarding Colten. Dr. Boyle told me to discuss the option of abortion with my husband and let him know our decision. I was sobbing now and really thought my heart would explode. Why was this happening? My heart was still broken from the loss of Colten.

How on earth was I going to endure this again? I couldn't believe what the doctor said. I went home and told Dwight the results of the ultrasound and what Dr. Boyle had said. Dwight was completely silent while I was talking. After I told him everything, he quietly got up and walked into the other room. I assumed he needed to digest the whole scenario. About an hour went by and Dwight came out of the room.

"So, what are you going to do? If the baby's going to die anyway, maybe you should just have an abortion."

I was shocked. I'm not for or against abortion. I feel it's a personal decision depending on the situation. In this situation, I did not want to have an abortion. I was having this baby, and whatever happened to it was up to God, not me or anyone else. I loved this baby so much and I wasn't going to part with it. Although Dwight did not seem happy about my decision, he knew enough not to debate it. We would just have to wait and see how things occurred.

My pregnancy progressed and I gave birth to our daughter, Briannon, on June 12, 1998, at Mercy Hospital. She was flesh-colored, and she screamed and flailed her arms. It seemed that Dr. Boyle had misdiagnosed her. She wasn't blue, and she could breathe on her own. Dwight and I were ecstatic. The NICU nurse brought me the baby to look at before taking her to the NICU to be assessed. I was overjoyed.

Our daughter looked okay. I thought things would be fine. But they weren't.

Dr. Becker, a pediatric cardiologist, did an EKG on Briannon right away. She had the same six heart defects that Dr. Boyle had seen previously. He suggested surgery as soon as possible, since her breathing was beginning to be labored. I agreed and signed the consent forms that needed to be signed. Dr. Becker scheduled Briannon's surgery for the next day.

After we kissed Briannon good-bye, she was taken in for surgery. She needed shunts put in to replace the pulmonary arteries that she didn't have. This would allow the blood to be passed from the lungs to the heart so she could breathe. The other heart defects could not be repaired or improved.

Surgery went okay, but later in recovery, Briannon had problems. The veins that the shunts were fastened to were not able to tolerate the increased blood flow. Briannon was taken in for another surgery to revise the shunts. For the next few days, Briannon's tiny body seemed to tolerate the changes that were made in surgery, but she had other complications.

Over the next few weeks, Briannon was deteriorating. During the last surgery, the duct that distributes the fats in the blood was nicked and it was not healing the way the surgeon anticipated. The fats seeped into Briannon's chest cavity and were compressing her lungs. Dr.

Becker told Dwight and me that this was a very common occurrence in this type of heart surgery, and it was usually fatal. There were already four chest tubes in between Briannon's ribs now. Her oxygen saturation levels were extremely low. Her body should have been starting to shut down from lack of oxygen, but it wasn't. She was holding on and fighting for her life. The neonatal specialists decided to put one more chest tube in between Briannon's ribs to see if it would decrease some of the pressure on her lungs. It took about half an hour, but the fifth chest tube was in and started suctioning out the thick, glue-like substance that pressed on Briannon's lungs. Over a few hours, the oxygen saturation levels in Briannon's blood increased and she was finally recovering.

After two months of healing, Briannon was getting stronger and stronger. A speech therapist taught her how to suck on a bottle nipple. Briannon would grow so tired, since her heart and lungs were so compromised, but she prevailed. She was such a strong little girl. I was so proud of her. I knew that her life will be very difficult, but I was feeling very positive.

On August 17, 1998, we brought Briannon home. It was a struggle for me to get the formula in her stomach, and for it to stay there. She had gastric reflux disease from having the respirator in her throat for so long. She would tolerate only

two ounces per feeding. Any more than that, and a geyser of formula would come spraying out, covering the carpet, burp cloth, and my clothes. I fed her two ounces of formula every hour. Another problem I had was the fact that Briannon would rarely sleep. Everyone I spoke to about this found it odd, since children with heart problems usually enervate so easily. Briannon and I stayed up for days at a time. When she would finally wear herself out, Briannon slept only a few hours.

Briannon took seven different medications at multiple times during the day. I carefully measured out the correct dosages with a syringe and documented on a sheet of paper everything I gave her and the time it was dispensed. I wrote everything down so there wouldn't be any confusion. Every medication had to be given within a 15-minute window—no exceptions. Briannon was helpless and needed me to take good care of her. I was determined to do the very best I could.

Over time, Briannon's small, thirteen-pound body was growing out of the shunts that were in her body. At eleven months old, Briannon went in for surgery to have the shunts revised. Dwight and I gave Briannon a hug and a kiss and she waved bye-bye. The surgical tech carried our daughter into the operating room.

There were complications with the procedure. After twelve

hours of surgery, an EEG was done, and Briannon was pronounced brain dead, from the lack of oxygen in her body. I requested her to be taken off life support. Briannon died instantly.

I will cherish the time I had with my oldest daughter. She survived even when all odds were against her. Every doctor who examined Briannon told Dwight and me that there was absolutely no physical reason for her to be alive. She endured more in her short life than most people do in the average lifetime. Although Briannon's death was hard for me to accept, I know deep in my soul there is a reason for everything.

Now there is a new type of chest tube that is being used on babies who have certain types of heart surgery - inspired by Briannon. When the thoracic duct is commonly nicked during central heart surgery and the body's fats seep into the chest cavity, compressing the lungs, this new type of chest tube is used to relieve the pressure on

the lungs. It has a slight vacuum that pulls the fluid down into the abdomen area where it is absorbed and taken out of the body as waste. In the past, babies who had this seepage of fats would quickly die from the lungs being compressed—nothing could be learned from this.

Even though Briannon's life was compromised, there are now more babies saved because of the information she gave through her experiences. I am sorry that Briannon's life was difficult - I would have done anything I could to make it easier. However, she was strong-willed, and now I'm a stronger person because of it.

### **Suggestions for Writing**

Write a journal entry about a time in your life when you've had to overcome adversity.

*Milissa Shineflew wrote this personal essay while a student in David Gavin's Composition I class.*

## ***Different but the Same***

Emma Antle

There are many similarities between being a woman married to a man and a woman married to a woman; however, beyond the obvious, there are many differences also. For instance, my wife and I had a *union*, whereas most traditional marriage ceremonies are called *weddings*. Weddings are held for both couples, but sometimes non-traditional couples call their weddings all sorts of things like commitment ceremony, union, and gathering. A commitment is made between two people, often raising a family together, and on a day- to- day basis their lives would seem very similar, but there are differences between being married in a garden-variety relationship and in a non-conventional relationship. Your social life, interpersonal relationships, identity, finances, and stability are all affected deeply by your relationship and how the people around you perceive it.

The roles for a man and a woman are clearly laid out if they choose to follow a pattern of society; however, there is no blueprint for a non-traditional marriage. I watched how my parents and other loved ones treated each other, divided the chores, cared for one another in good and bad times, and this is what I base my relationship on.

Nonetheless, for me specifically, there is no role model in my exact situation. I have to decide what role I play in my family and in society; and that can be both good and bad. It is sometimes nice to have a protocol to guide you through unfamiliar territory and to help you during hazy times. Often, couples of both varieties struggle when they are learning to compliment one another on a daily basis and in the long term. As my wife and I have gotten to know each other over the past eight years, I have settled into my family and life, without roles or guidelines.

Income and financial issues affect the two types of couples differently. Men make more money than women, and their wives and children are covered under their insurance and all benefits by default. My wife and I are not legally bound together in the eyes of the state or any agency therein; therefore, we do not receive any of the benefits that the traditional families do. When we work in the same jobs paying the same or more taxes, and pay social security and life insurance, we do so knowing that our family will not benefit from our hard work in the same way that a man's will. Nor will we be able to make as much money as the traditional couple will;

consequently, we cannot invest and save as much to make up the difference in pay.

Socially there are a plethora of differences between the two types of relationships. My wife and I share a group of friends and usually see them together because we share the same interests and know all the same people. However, my friend Suzanne and her husband have their own friends who they see individually, often spending a large part of their social time away from each other.

My wife is my best friend and because we have been close for so long, we know a lot about each other and we share everything. I think that in a traditional relationship there are more gender specific items the partners keep to themselves. My sister-in-law and her husband don't share certain details with each other because she thinks he isn't interested or she doesn't feel that he would understand, so she seeks a close friend outside the relationship to talk with and confide in. It is difficult for two ladies to find another couple to socialize with, talk to and share common interest with, and who don't mind there not being a man for their husband to socialize with. In most cases, evenings out with another couple just turn into a girl's night out because the husbands feel outnumbered and wander off.

Luckily we have a lot of family near us to spend evenings playing cards and sharing stories. I think it is easier for

men and women to find another couple to hang-out with because they can be out in the open with strangers and therefore can attract people like themselves, whereas same sex couples often keep to themselves and don't meet as many people.

Your self-image and the feedback you get from your peers are affected greatly by the kind of relationship you are in. We try to let people know us and figure out on their own what our family is all about and then if they want to talk about it, they'll ask.

Sometimes that is hard because I am so proud and devoted to my family. The line between honesty and dishonesty is sometimes hard to see or feel, and that affects my whole life -- especially how I'm feeling about myself. The way you see yourself changes as any relationship evolves; in my experience with my wife and I it is plain that we have become more like each other as time has passed and have gone so far as to completely change our roles in the relationship.

When I am talking to my sister, who has been married for over 20 years, it is plain that she and her husband are a team and they make decisions together and are close to one another, but they are still individual. I wouldn't ask my sister to do something I wanted her husband to do because he would have to be the one to say yes anyway. In my relationship, people often see us as one person, whatever one of us says, the people around us



think that both of us should know. Many times they don't even remember which one of us they told something to and any commitment one of us makes, we are both expected to abide by. People react to us as a single entity and sometimes only like to be with us together because of the way our personalities compliment one another. This can be hard on your self-identity.

While there are differences between all people, there are more similarities if we just take the time to look for them. As time molds the patterns of our lives, we all drift into one another's collective consciousness and become one in our sameness. At the core, any good marriage is the same in that you learn to be a significant part of the whole design and create a loving ground to exist in and for your family to thrive in. When it comes down to it, all that really matters is where your hearts lie and how committed you are to one another; anything else is just a detail.

### **Suggestions for Writing**

Write a short reflective essay that explores your perceptions of marriage.

*Emma Antle wrote this comparison and contrast essay while a student in Ami Yaro's Basic Writing class.*

## ***Political Science 101***

**Debra Dyar**

Listening to President Bush offer the American public reassurance and stridently define our response following the attacks of September 11 on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon brought to mind a song from the early 1970's, written and sung by Randy Newman. "Political Science" (Newman) is an upbeat, multi-layered, caustic critique of the ways in which Americans view the world and their relationship to it.

The events of September 11 have brought to the surface some of the best of the American people: courage and unity, and a renewed belief in the ideas of freedom and democracy. It has also underscored a unified sense of America's unique global presence as a superpower. However, several problematic elements of our role in the world and some long-held prejudices that inform our worldview have been exposed, many of which are revealed as Americans justly experience September 11 as an unwarranted attack upon innocent civilians. Yet in many Muslim countries some people see it as an act of retribution resulting from the growing mood of resentment toward America and its behavior around the world: a starkly different perspective. Why this blatant discrepancy in perception? Is it more than eastern culture versus western culture?

as in the lyrics of "Political Science." The song suggests that we must yet again examine our view of America's place in the world.

As I listen to friends and colleagues discuss the attack on our nation, I hear uncertain voices expressing concern about our safety, looking for answers to the question "Why do they hate us?" I listen to angry declarations of "We should bomb 'em back to the Stone Age" (first attributed to General LeMay during the Vietnam War). These voices, oddly familiar, resonated during the Vietnam War and the Cold War era and permeate the American psyche to this day, revealing a relatively limited, one-dimensional view of the world, a seemingly native naiveté about how many people perceive America.

No one likes us – I don't know why (l.1)

Listening to the national discussion in the United States since September 11, I hear in some voices those American tendencies to oversimplify world issues and limit analysis to our sometimes parochial interests. Many Americans seem compelled to define complex situations that contain many nuances of truth in polarized terms: good versus evil, rich versus poor, or us versus them. Too often ignored are legitimate competing interests

and differing perspectives. We tend to focus on short-term gain; opening markets while ignoring the practices of despotic leaders, tilting first one way and then the other, depending on the needs of the moment, finding ways to reduce problems in other countries to what is good for America.

Asia's crowded and Europe's too old  
let's drop the big one  
they'll be no one left to blame us (1.9, 13-14).

It is unlikely that these simplistic perspectives will assist the nation as it deals with the consequences of September 11. Nor will limited thinking move America beyond the tragedy of today to a place of greater understanding of the world and its place within it.

I hear Americans expressing astonishment at the ingratitude of the world and disbelief that our concept of progress and global capitalism is not good for and embraced by everyone.

We give them money-but are they grateful?  
No, they're spiteful and they're hateful (1.5-6).

Their disbelief reveals in part a concept of progress and global capitalism as unquestionably right with a lack of understanding of different worldviews. We have a deep and abiding belief in our view of progress bordering on arrogance and a seemingly inherent disregard for those who might think differently. As Tony Judt, a

renowned journalist, notes, "The US, in its foreign dealings, is often arrogant: it asserts a preemptive right to be where it chooses, to do as it sees fit, with scant attention to the consequences for others" (4). Political leaders today suggest that America stands for freedom and they hate it, we are rich and they envy us, and we are strong and they resent this. These are all relative truths. Are there other more powerful and complex forces at work beyond envy and resentment, forces that move men to hate, to kill and to die?

We see ourselves as unquestionably doing good in the world. We provide humanitarian aid, disaster relief and medicine around the world. Although it is true that the United States assists other nations, this assistance is oft times perceived as limited to and dictated by American interests. On September 17, 2001, drawing on our collective cultural consciousness with wild west rhetoric, President Bush announced to the nation that he wanted accused terrorist leader Osama bin Laden "dead or alive." We rightfully seek justice for the attack upon our nation, yet many Muslim nations, although publicly condemning the killing of innocent civilians, see the attack as retribution for a foreign policy that disregards their voice and marginalizes their view. If America continues to view the world within a simplified, one-dimensional construct, our international credibility will be weakened and our global leadership will be increasingly attacked.

The United States has an Americanized perspective of the world, one of manifest destiny, that reverberates around the world as “super power swagger.”

And every city the whole world round, will just be another American town (l. 21-22).

What’s wrong with having McDonald’s on every street corner? We give them jeans, Hilton Hotels and Coca Cola ... what more do they want? Modernity has been good to and for America, but not as much for other nations, particularly Muslim nations and peoples. Many have experienced globalization on the fringes, watching American movies and eating hamburgers at American-owned fast food restaurants. However, these nations rarely experience increased opportunities and liberalization of their societies. In many instances their aspirations have been crushed by their own rulers and elites, who quite often are the economic partners of the United States.

We’ll build an All American amusement park there  
They got surfin too (l.17-18).

We, as a people, must peer beneath the veneer of American mentality to understand that many cultures around the world perceive the spread of western culture, particularly American culture, as a corrupting influence, undermining traditional values and beliefs. As Salman Rushdie recently commented “Islamists preach a

loathing of modern society [...] and fear being Westoxicated (9).

There is a palpable American sense of “going it alone,” the shared belief that we don’t need other people, the concept of American independence and the resulting isolationism. Indeed, in the months leading up to September 11, the Bush administration had articulated a carefully calibrated policy of limited involvement in world affairs “treating international agencies and agreements as foreign-policy ‘options’ which it can cherrypick or neglect at its own convenience” (Judt 5).

They all hate us anyhow  
So let’s drop the big one now  
Boom goes London and boom  
Paree  
More room for you and more  
room for me (l.27-28, 19-20).

To limit United States policies to what is good for America portends potential failure within the global community and minimizes the responsibility inherent in superpower status to extend support to nations around the world. Until the United States embraces the world as one “global village”, as articulated by Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, considering all lives as important as American lives, there will be little progress toward the world peace and security we say we seek. Without a comprehensive worldview, the United States may be surprised by the response from many parts of the world when it asks, “Are you with us or against us?”

Have we as a nation remained immobile during the last thirty years as the familiar echo of Randy Newman's lyrics suggests? Has global capitalism been embraced at the expense of global cooperation and understanding? Must we be prisoners of a self-defeating set of prejudices?

They don't respect us, so let's surprise them, we'll drop the big one and pulverize them (1.7-8).

These questions, long unanswered and now framed starkly by the events of September 11, can no longer be avoided. It is evident that a nation capable of demonstrating the unity of purpose so apparent since September 11 can assume leadership in an effort to bring the world together as one global community of humankind. America historically has offered itself as a beacon of freedom, equality, and rule of law. American freedom, power, and success should lead to something more than markets, profits, and hegemony. The shallow voices of prejudice do not reflect the totality of the American spirit.

"Political Science" is a relevant and disquieting interpretation of American foreign policy and a damning statement about our culture and worldview. It is difficult to ignore the questions inherent in the lyrics. Some would suggest that "Political Science" is merely a satirical interpretation of views held by only a few Americans. Nonetheless, the song, with scathing subtlety, portrays an American

worldview built on simplistic reductionism, self-serving prejudices and arrogant self-righteousness. No matter how much many Americans would reject this worldview so blatantly described, the voices in Randy Newman's song are familiar to everyone.

Randy Newman's "Political Science" creates a reflection of America's distorted worldview. With humor and sarcasm, he forces us to see ourselves as many in the world see us. He underscores the irony of a free people who enjoy nearly unlimited access to a variety of voices could be so shortsighted. Newman's caustic homily begs the question, "Is this who we really should be?" We can choose to engage cultures different than our own, and in the process call forth those principles of American idealism upon which our nation was founded and the beliefs we have steadfastly defended. Realizing the inspiring promise of the now oft heard "America the Beautiful" requires abandoning old prejudices and reaching beyond "the shining sea."

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### **Suggestions for Writing**

Write a journal entry exploring your opinion of America's current worldview.

*Debra Dyar wrote this argument interpreting the lyrics of a song while a student in Paula Yerty's Composition II class.*

## ***Non-Violent Drug Users in Our Prisons***

**Shannon Westbrook**

Between the ages of twenty-three and twenty-five, I had been arrested somewhere between seven to ten different times and charged with over fourteen charges total, all of which were considered to be simple misdemeanors. Simple in that the crimes I was charged with committing did not inflict harm upon any member in society except, of course myself, but misdemeanors nonetheless in that I had broken the law.

The first time I was arrested was on a warrant for an outstanding parking ticket I had simply forgotten to pay. While being placed in handcuffs, the officer began searching my vehicle and my purse. In my purse, he found small amounts of both marijuana and methamphetamine. I was taken to jail and charged with two counts of possession of an illegal substance.

Because Iowa had just passed a law stating that anyone charged with possessing an illegal substance would then be suspended from driving, I lost my license for six months. During my sixth month suspension, I was arrested for driving without a license and again charged with possession of an illegal substance. And so it began.

I spent much of the next two years of my life in and out of jails and courtrooms, all the while not understanding that what I was doing was wrong. The kinds of people who end up spending a significant amount of time in a jail cell for drugs are people who have a serious drug problem. Seldom are they people who use drugs on a recreational basis. They are people, like me, who have an addiction and are therefore unable to comprehend that what they are doing is wrong.

I would like to be able to say that the time I had spent in jail taught me a lesson. That spending many days inside a five by seven foot area dressed in an orange jumpsuit, unable to eat, bathe, or even go to the bathroom without having some sort of surveillance watching over my every move wasn't wasted time. That instead, I used that time to reflect on what a danger to myself and to society I had become and miraculously, I was able to rehabilitate myself within those four walls. That upon my release, I became an outstanding, productive member of society who had managed to kick her own drug habit. I cannot say this because for me, as it is for so many other non-violent drug

offenders, the opposite holds true.

Once inside the “system,” people who have a drug problem and are facing drug charges have little to no chance of escaping the inevitable, prison, without making serious life changes. This more often than not requires some sort of rehabilitation or treatment program. However, because of federal and state budget cuts, many of these programs are starting to become extinct, but there always seems to be enough money to build another county jail or state prison.

In the Des Moines area there are only two long-term, inpatient treatment facilities: Des Moines General Hospital’s Gateway Center and Iowa Lutheran Hospital’s Powell Addictions Center. Des Moines General stopped taking new patients last year. Powell Addictions Center has a long waiting list. The alternative is to either wait or go through an outpatient program. I know from experience that neither is an acceptable solution. The norm for inpatient programs alone is usually a thirty-day stay, and even that is not really enough time to make the kinds of significant changes in thinking and behavior that an addict needs to turn his or her life around.

Outpatient programs consist of anywhere from three to four hours, three to five evening sessions a week. I tried outpatient treatment programs

twice, each time “successfully” graduating, only to end up back in jail. You *cannot* treat an addict in three to four hour blocks of time and then release them back into their environment. It just does not work. The chance taken here is that they will re-offend.

Another problem non-violent offenders have is that many times treatment winds up being a sort of last chance option accepted by the courts to avoid sending people to prison. This sounds great. It sounds like we are giving these people a choice here. But no drug addict initially believes he or she has a drug problem. My point is that it is highly unlikely a person facing drug charges for the first or even second time is going to ask for help. They do not believe they need it. It may take several occurrences with the law before they realize that they need to change. By this time, they may be facing several charges, and it is up to the judge to decide if treatment will even be applied here.

A judge may look at the person's record and assume that there is no other place for these offenders to go but prison. Or he may sentence them to an inpatient program, but with the shortage of these kinds of facilities, the wait could be long. This means that the offender will most likely be placed on some sort of probation until an opening comes up. One term of this kind of probation is that the offender is not allowed to use



drugs. How can an addict waiting to enter treatment abstain from using drugs without treatment? It is a catch twenty-two, and it is costing society money and addicts their freedom.

One answer that seems obvious enough is to build more long term, inpatient treatment facilities, but this is an answer that much of society has mixed feelings about. People do not want to use their tax dollars for funding for drug addiction. What they don't seem to realize is they are already funding half of the problem. Their money is going for the building of county jails and state prisons to lock away the drug users. In essence, they are pushing the problem aside while they look the other way in hopes that it will take care of itself. Prison does not treat the problem, it only postpones it.

Even when tax dollars are not an issue, people are against funding for addiction. In February of 2000, a man named Donald Lamberti announced that he bought property north of Valley Junction in hopes of building and providing funding for a 110-bed rehabilitation center specifically for non-violent drug offenders (Finney). The cost was over two million dollars. A two million-dollar gift given to better treat a problem that is escalating in our state.

Since his purchase, the neighbors have vehemently voiced their opposition against the treatment center, giving in to the old adage, "not in my backyard." Among their

concerns are the arguments that the center will raise crime rates, even though this would be for non-violent offenders. They are also worried that bringing addicts close to the four schools in the neighborhood will endanger the children. These offenders are not drug dealers anxiously waiting in our schoolyards to give our children drugs. These are people who broke the law, yes. Let us keep in mind that the only people who were hurt in breaking these laws were themselves. This facility is not for rapists, murderers, or child molesters. Yet, this is the stigma that society has placed on drug users. If you have been to jail or prison, then that is the sort of person you must be. I am here to say that is not the sort of person I have ever been.

If someone who smokes develops lung cancer, we do not lock him or her up. Alcoholics are not penalized for drinking, unless they inflict harm on another. Nevermind that they end up with cirrhosis of the liver, pancreatic cancer or brain injury from drinking. If someone who has heart disease is obese and continues to do nothing to better their health, do we then put them in jail? If a diabetic ignores their diet and slips into a coma due to high blood sugar, should they be charged with a crime? Wouldn't all of these people be considered a danger to themselves? Shouldn't they be held accountable as well? Could we justify locking them away so they no longer hurt themselves?

No, because all of these are examples of a disease. Yet they are all diseases in which worse case scenarios could be avoided if people would take better care of themselves. Drug addiction is no different. It, too, is a disease. Many of these worst case scenarios could also be avoided if society would allow addicts to treat their disease as well.

As with any solution to a serious problem, there are no one hundred percent guarantees. There will always be exceptions to the rule. We are a society of addictive personalities by nature, living in a nation plagued with various addictions. Why do we see one addiction as criminal and another as not?

America has become a country too ready to accept quick fixes rather than get to the root of the problem. Locking people away and throwing away lives is not always the right answer . . . we need to look beyond. Until we stop accepting temporary solutions to ongoing problems, we will never have progress.

I was lucky. I was given the chance to receive the treatment I needed. I have been clean and have not seen the inside of a jail cell since May of 1997. It was a lot of hard work, I had to change both my way of thinking and my behavior. I am not the same person I was four years ago. Often, I have wondered if I had been sent to prison, would I still be able to say that?

#### Work Cited

Finney, Daniel P. "Debate Heats Up on Rehab Center." *Des Moines Register* 4 Sept. 2000 Metro Iowa: 1.

#### Suggestions for Writing

Write a journal entry exploring another possible solution to the drug problem. Next, find some research to support your solution, and then write an outline for an argument based on your research.

*Shannon Westbrook wrote this argumentative essay while a student in David Gavin's Composition II class.*

**The cover photograph was taken by DMACC students Jill Krause and Shawn Birdsall. This picture of the South Skunk River was taken just south of Cambridge. The pillar on the front cover is the support from a railway bridge that once crossed the river. The Heart of Iowa Nature Trail follows the same route as the tracks once did and stretches from Slater through Maxwell. Future plans are to continue the trail to Melbourne.**

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