

9-1989

Skunk River Review September 1989, vol 1 no 1

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Recommended Citation

Jellema, Kimber; Buch, Ron; Fosselman, Ed; Burman, Della; Heck, Sandy; Stuart, Lisa R.; McCauley, Charity; Clark, Michael; Ryner, Claudia; Lindgren, Denise; Huisman, Wendy S.; Burke, Hunter; Bare, David L.; Ladd, Brittain Clint; Phelan, Deb; Ross, Melissa; Chappelle, Jessica; Flynn, Christine; Sellen, Karen J.; Harger, Stacey; Carrier, Rosslyn; Laird, Janet; Johannsen, Rita; Host, Nannette L.; Eschbach, Scott; Linn, Gaile; Adkins, Donna; Gordon, Steve; Turner, Nancy Kay; Richey, Christine; McDowell, Jeff; Woods, Susan; and Bentley, Curtis, "Skunk River Review September 1989, vol 1 no 1" (1989). *Skunk River Review*. 9.
<https://openspace.dmacc.edu/skunkriver/9>

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VOLUME 1 NO. 1 SEPTEMBER 1989

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SKUNK RIVER REVIEW

VOLUME 1 NO. 1 SEPTEMBER 1989

Skunk River Review is a collection of student writing published once a year by The Des Moines Area Community College.

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A special thanks to:

Luanne Pruehs, Glenda Johnson, Gary Hendricks, Monte Ballard, Jim Stick, and all of our colleagues whose input and contributions have been invaluable.

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INTRODUCTION

People laughed when we first decided to call our journal the Skunk River Review. Imagine the jokes: "It smells bad"; "Sounds like road kill"; "Who'd pay money for a skunk?"; "Okay class, whip out your Skunk!" The list goes on.

Why Skunk River Review? Why not. The Skunk River is an evocation of central Iowa. Besides, we had trouble spelling Nishnabotna or Wapsipinicon and "Des Moines River Review" sounded kind of lame. We wanted a title people would remember. A skunk isn't easily ignored.

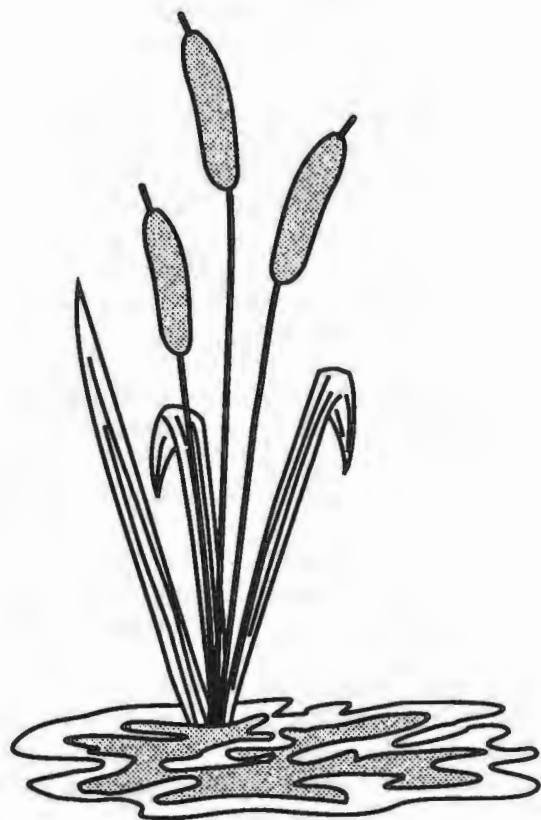
Title aside, our main goal was to celebrate student writing. Along the way we have collected a wide range of essays that reflects the diversity of the student body. This issue features writing from Writing Skills Review, Composition I and II, and Major American Writers. In Part I, we simply presented the essays as they were presented to us. We have been true to the original manuscripts (except in spelling). Part II offers essays in process.

The selection process for this issue was not easy. Out of 64 manuscripts submitted, 33 are represented here. Space limitations dictated the number. We tried to represent as wide a selection of rhetorical circumstances as possible.

We hope the Skunk River Review will be used as a reader in writing classrooms, as a supplemental text, and perhaps most importantly, as the celebration it was intended to be.

Most of all, these essays represent a voice, a collective voice. Reading these essays is an invitation to share in the lives and feelings of the writers. It is a unique voice, an evocation of a time and place, as particular as the Skunk River. A voice not easily ignored.

A.H., D.P.



A Humorous Look at College Life

*Kimber Jellema
Writing Skills Review*

It all started January 12, 1989. That was the first day that I walked on a college campus to further my education. But what I expected to find and what I found were worlds apart (well, maybe not worlds, maybe more like the moon). Anyway I expected serious people doing serious educational work. But that's not quite what I found. You see behind the glamour and the stereotyped thinking about college, there is a behind the scenes amusing world going on. I observed human life forms dwelling and behaving not quite what I would describe as normal. Also the atmosphere in and out of the buildings is a bit ridiculous. But I am happy to announce that I have adjusted to this unusual world. It would be my pleasure to share my experiences with you.

I've acquired a sense of humor having to do with the in's and out's, and I literally mean outside, of the buildings. It seemed for a new student I was confused and lost all the time. It took me five minutes to drive to school and twenty to thirty minutes to get to class. Thank my lucky stars, I figured out that most of my classes were in the same building. Needless to say, there is no numerical order to these intimidating structures. For instance, building one is by building six, building six is across from building two, building two is next to building four, and building five is next to building eight. Furthermore, these crazy monsters seem to go on like this to infinity. Because of this obvious fact, I am convinced that the person who was in charge of putting the numbers on the buildings must have been intoxicated out of his mind, and obviously couldn't count.

And it seems if I wasn't wandering around lost outside trying to find the right building, I was lost

inside trying to find my classrooms. The in's, again I mean literally inside, are just as confusing as the out's. I observed my college peers wandering around everywhere. Some folks knew where they were going with confidence and determination in their strides. Then there were those of us who were lost in the labyrinth, with confused and dumbfounded looks on our faces. Then last but not least, there were people who just plain didn't care, feeling they would reach their destination sooner or later, and neither result seemed to really matter to them.

One of the most amusing places of all is building five, the infamous student union (what I shall refer to as the hot spot). A person entering the front door of the hot spot, walks in and there is KGGO rock and roll emanating from the speakers; however (get this), there is country western music going on in the bathrooms. And of course, in the hot spot, we have T.V. people, the couch potato regulars that act out amusing plays around the T.V. These folks flock to this area like water buffalo meeting for coffee time at their favorite watering hole, cheering on their favorite game shows, or cussing out the soap operas (which they say are stupid and wouldn't be caught dead watching). I mentioned the bathrooms; well, more goes on in there besides listening to Tammy Wynett or Willie and Waylon. It seems to be the meeting place to discuss the opposite sex, furthermore, it's the re-do, as in redo the makeup the young ladies just put on an hour before! (Because natural beauty takes time). These tigresses are usually fighting for precious mirror space. There have been many occasions when this ritual has been going on that I found it hard to get to the sink to do a menial job of washing and drying my hands, due to the fact that the counters were covered with makeup, hairspray, combs, and brushes. Then we have the hairspray and fresh perfume mixed together. I think the guy

who put the goofy numbers on the buildings should put a warning sign in the re-do room reading, "DANGER! DO NOT LIGHT ANY MATCHES! EXPLOSIVES!"

Then we have the campus socialites. I am amusingly convinced that they major in FASHION 101, and are seeking (with great effort), an M.R.S. Degree, both of which seem to interfere with normal brain functions. Because of this the hormone rate accelerates and gets in the way of basic study habits. Fashion 101 plays a big part on campus. Jeans must be rolled up just right above the ankle with no socks; nevertheless, it doesn't seem to matter when the temperature gets to be 30 degrees below zero. To be in fashion you can't wear socks! Any everyone owns those Indiana Jones brown worked-leather heavy coats. Now get this! This is great! Heavy leather coats, little canvas shoes, no socks and the temperature outside can run from 30 degrees below zero to 80 degrees above, and nobody can figure out Iowa weather is always too hot or too cold? (Come on now, is it me?) GET REAL! It seems these campus socialites are so smart they never need to open a book or study, let alone attend class. But they don't understand simple meteorology. That when it's 30 degrees below zero YOU WEAR SOCKS. But I have it figured out; their brains are so fresh from high school that college comprehension is a piece of cake.

Then we have the returning prehistoric students, (who I must mention have cobweb brains), who have to study all the time, always doing above and beyond any normal degree of extra credit work, because they're paranoid about grades, something they did not care about 10 (or many more) some odd years ago. These older students are also in their own little worlds here on campus. It seems these antiques don't stop for wind, hail, sleet, or dead of night, unless it's time for a nicotine break or a caffeine fix.

Fashion doesn't really matter much to these returning dinosaurs; in fact (and I'm speaking from personal experience), it's all we can do to get out of the house in peace, hair barely combed and teeth hardly brushed, just leaving with our minds and a small shred of sanity after fighting our carbon copy counter parts. Most mornings it is a task of Biblical proportion (sort of like parting the Red Sea) just to get out the door. So these recycled students feel lucky and thankful for just getting to school on time, let alone caring about how their pants are rolled and if they should or should not be wearing socks that day to school.

Yes, I too am one of those returning dinosaurs of decades past; nevertheless, I have found much humor in returning to college life, even though I was incredibly lost and baffled by the buildings, and confused by the customs of the natives. I am a people person and love all kinds, shapes, colors, and ages of people. I feel I fit in, and wouldn't change a kinky, quirky little thing.



Returning To School

Ron Buch
Writing Skills Review

One of the most important aspects of returning to school is allowing plenty of time to prepare for the big event. Before doing anything else, you'll want to research the idea extensively and carefully and then act on these situations.

First and foremost comes the question, what is my goal? Every situation one encounters has to have a primary objective or goal which is to be reached no matter how big or small. In reaching that goal, you'll need to be realistic in what you're actually trying to accomplish; in other words, "Don't bite off more than you can chew." It's not very logical to want to become a brain surgeon if you're not very good in biology or chemistry. Just as it's not very practical to become an architect if you're a poor math student. In conclusion, you'll want to choose a profession that you enjoy and have some basic talent in. I guess I should have practiced what I'm preaching, because when I came back to school, I thought that I wanted to be a computer programmer. I had talked to several people working in this field who had reassured me that good math skills were really not that crucial in computer programming. Little did I know that although good math skills were not that important, logic, on the other hand, was essential, which is not one of my strong points either. Choose a major that is appropriate for you.

After arriving at what your major course of study will be, you'll want to make plans on how you intend to finance your education. There are several options available to the prospective student, whether it be personal savings, a scholarship, or a student loan or grant.

The best way to get the necessary information regarding the financing of your academic education is to write a letter to or call the particular school that you're planning on attending. Ask them to send you any literature or information that they have pertaining to what is available in the way of financial aid. I'm sure you'll find them very friendly and helpful and able to assist you in making any decisions that are necessary. Some students are fortunate enough to have ample savings to cover the expenses of books and tuition. That's great if you're one of these lucky individuals; however, the majority of the students will need some kind of assistance, as I did.

If you're planning on a grant, you'll have to meet the necessary requirements demonstrating the need for financial assistance.

The same is true if you're going to be applying for a government loan. Before the time of enrollment, this process should be explained to you by either your former high school counselor or an admissions representative at the school you plan to attend. You'll probably want to do this as soon as you can so you can avoid the last minute rush. I know from having been there, the admissions office is sheer chaos at least a couple of weeks before classes commence. I'll certainly never forget the experience I had when I enrolled. I thought I had allowed myself plenty of time to get everything in order, and I wouldn't have to wait very long in line once I got to school. Boy was I wrong. I must have had to stand in line for at least forty-five minutes, if not a full hour. There was a line of people to be processed, stretching all the way into the corridor. It must have been at least a hundred and fifty feet long.

So please allow yourself plenty of time to get things done right the first time and I guarantee, you won't have such a long wait.



A Thorough Cleaning Of The Interior Of My Car

*Ed Fosselman
Writing Skills Review*

I spend about as much time in my car as I do at home, so it is important for me to maintain a clean atmosphere inside my car. I've developed a method of cleaning the interior that is thorough. I begin the process at home, proceed to the retail store for materials needed, then to the carwash to do the cleaning.

The first thing you need is something you can't buy, plenty of time. Each time I clean the interior, I get a little faster because I'm more organized, but I still have to devote pretty close to three hours to get the job done. Of course, you can do what I consider a "quickie job", which is simply vacuuming and washing the car, and that only takes a half hour, but my method, done a couple times a year, is well worth the added time you have to take.

There are several items I use to accomplish the task, but none of them are hard to find or require a fortune to purchase. A few of them you can probably find at home, such as an old hand towel, a diaper or paper towels, and some glass cleaner. The Armorall products are easily found at a retail store such as Target, or an automotive parts store. The Armorall Cleaner and Armorall Conditioner cost about two dollars each. I've tried soap and water, but the Armorall cleaner works much better.

Now the fun begins. Since my car doesn't have a trunk, it seems like it always ends up with foreign objects all over. This is especially true during the winter. Before I leave home, I throw out everything that isn't bolted down. The snow shovel, coveralls, tool box, jumper cables, out they go. Now, I gather

my cleaning materials, throw them in the car, and I'm ready to leave. If I do need to purchase any items, I pick them up, then head for the carwash.

There is a carwash a few blocks from my house, and this is where I do the cleaning. I've tried it at home, but I found that it is easier to do it at the carwash than to drag out the vacuum cleaner, extension cord, and a couple of cans of carpet cleaner. Also, I've found that for about the same money, close to six dollars, the results are professional at the carwash. Their vacuum is powerful, and they have an industrial or heavy duty type carpet shampooer.

The first thing I do now that I'm at the carwash is toss the floormats outside and forget about them for awhile. Since I don't smoke, I usually don't have to worry about the ashtrays, but I make a quick check and empty them if necessary.

Now, I'm ready to donate some money to the owner of the carwash. I begin by vacuuming the rear of the car, which is the hatch or storage area. I continue forward until I have done all carpeted areas. Then I repeat the process, only this time I use the carpet shampooer. The trick is to get enough shampoo to completely saturate the carpet. Then, I flip a switch and suck all the soap and water and dirt from the carpet, and continue until the carpet is dry. Between the two processes, I usually spend about five dollars.

Next, I proceed to the leather cleaning stage. Anything that isn't carpet or glass gets the Armorall treatment. The Armorall Cleaner, applied with an old hand towel, along with a little elbow grease, does a fantastic job. Once again, I start at the rear, work forward, cleaning everything leather and vinyl. I pay special attention to the seats, because they are the most abused. After this is accomplished, do it again! No, I'm not crazy. This time, use the Armorall Conditioner. You'll be amazed at the results. Not only does it brighten the color, but you have done some

preventative maintenance. The Armorall softens and helps keep the leather from drying out and cracking.

At this point, I'm dying to clean the windows. Windex seems to do a pretty good job, so that's what I use. Instead of spraying the Windex on the windows, I apply it to my diaper or paper towel, because otherwise there is a fine mist that sprays all over everything you just Armoralled. I use a diaper or paper towel because they are pretty much lint free. I do an area small enough that the cleaner doesn't dry before I get it wiped off with a clean towel.

The final step is to proceed to the wash bay to wash the floor mats. After I wash the mats, I go ahead and wash the exterior of the car while I'm waiting for the mats to dry. Reinstall the mats, and that's it! Now I can feel good, because not only do I have an interior that has been thoroughly cleaned, but I don't have to repeat this process for about another six months. A couple of "quickie jobs" in between, and I'm all set.



Office Wall

*Della Burman
Composition I*

I dropped out of school at the ripe old age of 15. I thought I was in the prime of my life when I decided nobody was going to hold me back from having my fun. I wasn't learning anything anyway. Who needs algebra, history or science? I don't care how the legislative system works, I have no reason to vote. I certainly don't need a diploma to hang on my office wall. Who cares about that junk? So, I dropped out and told everybody to kiss my ass. My rebellion was intense--I was rampant. I was going to make something out of my life, and I certainly didn't need an education to get started on that.

I was ecstatic! I was the envy of my friends and the bane of my family. I lived off my mother's money for a time, but her bitching finally got on my nerves. The first thing I did was to get a job. I went and applied everywhere, but Adventureland Inn was the only place to call me back. That was the first time I was asked the question, "Do you plan on going back to school?" That question made my blood boil. What did that have to do with being a maid? At 16, I moved out. When I saved some money, I took my mom with me to the bank to get a loan for a car. The banker looked down at me over the top of his wire framed glasses and asked the question. I was really getting frustrated with this inquest. What did an education have to do with paying a monthly car payment?

I was having the time of my life, just like I expected. With my job, I had enough money left after rent for a bag of pot, a 12-pack of beer and a carton of cigarettes to last the next week. I was still friends with the people I went to school with. They still seemed to be having fun in school and I couldn't understand what

was so great about it. Fun was being in the real world, being an adult. My job wasn't a very glamorous one, but it gave me what I wanted, and it wouldn't be forever. While my friends went to dances and pep assemblies, I was cleaning other people's toilets and changing their sheets. When they went to the prom, I wondered what was so special; what was the big deal anyway? Fun was at the bars that I was able to get into now. I would take my girlfriends to South East Polk for school and drive up on the sidewalk under the pillars to drop them off right at the door. I was daring security to take me on.

The more the question was asked, the more I pondered the meaning of an education. In 1986 I decided to go ahead and get a G.E.D. just to shut everybody up. When I passed all the tests without any classes or studying, I started to ask myself if I was as dumb as my family was telling me I was. They had told me I was an idiot for so long, I believed it. I had such low self-esteem I truly thought that I was the worst person on earth. I went through at least four jobs a year and just couldn't get my world organized. My life and thoughts were in turmoil for the next two years.

My car was repossessed, my live-in boyfriend left and I got fired all in the same month. I was finally at rock-bottom. Looking down at my hands that held the bottle of Tylenol-3's and the glass of water, I knew I had to decide. Check out or keep fighting? Giving up was the only way I knew and I didn't need an education to know it was the easiest way out.

With one last ditch effort, I made a phone call. Waiting for her to answer, I figured my friend from school would not be home. She never was very dependable. Fortunately for me, she was there for me one last time. I tearfully asked her to come over. She and her sister came over and tried to help. They took the unused pills out of my hand and held me in their

arms. Knowing how I like to ride around to work out problems, they took me to their parent's house in Mitchellville. They went inside while I stayed out. It was a beautiful night, the sky was dark blue and filled with bright stars. I wasn't one to think of God, but the beauty of the sky prompted me to pray. I asked Him to show me the way, tell me what to do, for I was filled with utter desperation. The answer came at once. It filled my heart, head, and soul. Fresh tears fell down my face. My stomach felt like it was suddenly five inches higher; it moved to my chest. I was told to help people avoid the situation I had gotten myself into. To counsel people, show them and share with them my experiences, and how they might stay out of the same. For the first time in my life I had an idea of what to do and where to go.

Since I've started college to be a counselor, I have learned what I missed in high school. School is so much more than an education. It shows flexibility, perseverance and dedication; something I never knew I had in me. Now that I've started, I would like to be a professional full-time student and never go back to work again. Now I have a G.E.D. and a President's List certificate. When I get an office, I will hang them, with my Associate's Degree, on my office wall. That's a nice feeling, something nobody can take away, and I don't need an education to know that.



I Am A Chameleon

*Sandy Heck
Composition I*

A chameleon is a funny little animal. In the spring he is green to match the leaves on the trees. But in the fall he changes to brown in order to hide from his enemies and to adapt to his environment. Like the chameleon, I have found adaptation and change to be essential to my peace of heart and my tranquility. Despair and tragedy have been my enemies, but I have outwitted them with my ability to alter my goals and dreams.

I think every little girl dreams of the day she will be a wife and mother. I know that I did. In fact, that was all that I wanted to be. This aspiration was probably based on the love and joy that I experienced in my own family as I was growing up.

I was the third in a line of ten healthy stairstep children born to my parents. With eight brothers and a sister I never lacked for companionship. There was always a group for kickball, tag, or hide-and-seek. And I never had a problem finding another rider for our bicycle-built-for-two. Our recreation time as a family was spent camping. Every Friday afternoon, while part of us were in school, my mother would pack clothing, dishes, food, fishing gear, and other basic equipment into our trailer. When everyone had arrived home, we would all pile into the station wagon and off we would go to explore and tame the great outdoors.

These expeditions lasted until the time I was eighteen. I had graduated from high school, had a job working with microfilm computers, and wanted to experience the maturity of living on my own. After spending my life in a house full of noise and empty of privacy, I wanted someplace to call my own.

I found a nice apartment in Urbandale, and with exhilaration and self-assuredness I moved in with my hope chest dishes and garage sale furniture. Ah, the luxuries I had! I could turn the water on for a bath and know that it would be hot. I could leave a can of Pepsi in the refrigerator with the certainty that some unknown popaholic would not filch it during my absence. I could sit in my living room in total silence and savor the silence. But my Sunday afternoons always led me back home to that house full of racket and hubbub. I knew this type of nuclear family was what I envisioned for myself and my future.

A year later I met the man who was to become my husband. Dick was kind, funny and attentive. And on the day we were married my first goal in life was fulfilled.

The next four years were a typical storybook existence. We purchased a small, two-bedroom house in a peaceful neighborhood, and settled down to our new responsibilities as homeowners. One of my most precious memories of those four years is the night that I told my husband that I was pregnant. He had taken me out to an expensive restaurant to celebrate my birthday. The setting was perfect--dim lights, flickering candles, a small fire dancing gently beside us. I took out a small gift that I had purchased and wrapped, and handed it to my husband. Looking inquisitively at me, he quickly opened it and appeared more puzzled than ever. "Who's this for?" he asked as he shook the tiny baby rattle. "It's for our baby," I quietly replied. The tears glistened in his eyes as he gently held me and caressed my face.

Eight months later Kristina was born. She was a joy, perfect in every way. With her birth I saw the emergence of a new mother/daughter relationship to establish and mold, and felt the echoes of the love and closeness that I had experienced with my own mother.

Shortly after Kristina's second birthday I learned that I was expecting another child, and so we moved into a larger home to accommodate our expanding family. That winter, during one of the worst ice storms in history, Steven joined us as our firstborn son. Now I felt that my life was full and complete. I had a loving husband, two perfect children, and a comfortable home. All I needed to complete the picture was the dog named Spot.

But how quickly the winds of fate can shift and blow our lives about when we are least prepared for it. It was a warm Sunday afternoon, and we had been experiencing one of our mildest winters ever. Steven, just over one year old, was sleeping soundly in his crib. At three and a half years old, Kristina was visiting her Grandma and Grandpa. Dick and I were out in our backyard hanging clothes on the clothesline to absorb some of the crisp fresh air. Dick went inside the house to check on Steven, and suddenly came running out. "We have to get to the hospital right away," he said breathlessly. "I had a call. Kristina's fallen into the pool." My father lived on an acreage in the country with a large above-ground swimming pool for recreation. We had spent many hot Sunday afternoons enjoying the coolness that it offered. But this Sunday that pool seemed to offer a sinister one. Taking Steven next door and practically throwing him into our neighbor's arms, Dick asked her to watch him, telling her that our house was unlocked if she needed anything. Off we sped to the hospital, trying to reassure each other that all was fine. "Surely there wasn't any water in the pool," I said. "Maybe she fell and hit her head on the bottom." "Or maybe she broke her arm when she fell," offered Dick.

Upon our arrival we were told devastating yet uncertain news. Kristina was being flown by Lifeflight helicopter to the hospital and the staff believed the

cause of the accident was a cold water drowning. "Oh, my God," was all I could whisper. I looked to my husband, whose tears were silently forming, and very gently, softly, and as one, we quietly held each other.

The nurse led us to the small anteroom to await news of our daughter's condition. A few minutes later she returned and informed us that the helicopter had just landed, and that the doctor would speak to us as soon as he had examined Kristina. As we were impatiently waiting, the room slowly began filling up with relatives who had heard of the tragedy. Uncles, aunts, grandparents, and my brothers and sister--all were there to comfort me and give me support. Finally, my father arrived, looking haggard and colorless.

"Dad," I asked, "was there water in the pool?" "Yes," he said. "How deep was it?" I asked fearfully. "About three feet," he replied. "But she's only thirty six inches tall!" I wailed. Then I steeled myself for the most critical question. "How long was she under?" I whispered. "We're not certain," he hesitatingly answered, "but we're estimating twenty minutes." Suddenly stars exploded before my eyes as the ramifications of the time length of the drowning and the consequences became clear in my mind. But, just as quickly, a new feeling came over me--one of peace and an ability to somehow cope with whatever was going to happen. I didn't know then that it was shock; I only knew that I had no time to deal with my own feelings and rationalizations, for I had to be strong to see Kristina through her ordeal.

After what seemed like an eternity to me, the doctor arrived to apprise us of her condition. "Because it was a cold water drowning," he said, "she is still fighting. Things are very critical, but we're getting her into her room and you can see her shortly. Be prepared, for you will see your daughter hooked up

to many machines as she struggles for her life." But nothing could have truly prepared me for the tubes and needles, the respirator, and the eight inch bolt sticking out of her brain. Seeing my petite little child lying there staring at the ceiling in a coma as those foreign instruments invaded her body, I realized just how helpless and powerless I was to do anything.

For the next three and a half weeks, Dick and I lived at the hospital. Dick's parents cared for Steven, who was still too young to understand what was happening. Some of our days at the hospital were almost happy ones. Like the day a brain report found that there was a strong possibility that Kristina had suffered no brain damage. I had learned to cope by being as much a mother as I was able to be under the circumstances. I would read her books, brush her hair, or just sit and talk to her. Although she was in an induced coma to reduce trauma, I believed she could hear me. But slowly her little body was beginning to deteriorate from the constant abuse of the needles and from the infections that were spreading inside her. Several times she had gone into heart failure, only to be revived. I knew that there was the strongest possibility that she would die with her next attack, and now I was ready to let her go.

On the day Kristina died, the doctors and nurses did all that they could to make our farewell to our daughter meaningful. They brought a big, old rocking chair into her room, and as her blood pressure began to drop they removed all but one of the needles and monitors. Finally, for the first time in three and a half weeks, I was able to hold my daughter in my arms and kiss her sweet little face. All the love I felt inside me flowed out and into my daughter as I rocked my firstborn child and said my last good-bye.

The next few months were somewhat of a blur in my life. The beautiful funeral, picking out a marker for the cemetery, and packing her clothing away--these things were all done in a state of shock and

disbelief that something like this could happen to me.

But four months following Kristina's death, my doctor shocked me back to reality by informing me that I was pregnant. Steven, who was now two, was thrilled with the prospect of once again having a sister or a brother. Dick and I felt that the pregnancy was somewhat soon after our daughter's death, but that if God was gracing us with another child we would gladly accept the responsibility.

And so Matthew was born. Born not really to our family, but born to the hospital. I say born to the hospital because this three week premature, spunky redhead had a major problem--he had a large hole in one of the chambers of his heart. So, for over two months my little son lived his life in a special isolette in the intensive care unit of the hospital, and once again I did all that I could to act as a mother to my child. I would wrap him in his blanket and then rock him while singing lullabies. I hooked toys to his isolette so that he could look at the pretty colors. I bathed and changed him. And even big brother Steven had his turns to hold Matthew.

When Matthew was two and a half months old the doctors performed a test to determine whether the hole in his heart was closing by itself. The results were dismal. The hole was not closing, and now surgery was the only option available to us. The night before the surgery I spent with Matthew, rocking him and whispering into his tiny ear that everything would be all right. Those words, I knew, were mostly for myself. As he was wheeled into surgery the next day, I leaned over, kissed him gently on the forehead, and whispered "Remember, Mama loves you." Then I sat down to wait.

The next hours seemed excruciatingly long, but when the surgeon walked out of the operating room and gave me the thumbs up signal, my heart soared. My baby was going to be all right! But my ecstasy was

to be short-lived. Four hours later Matthew's blood pressure began to slowly drop. Once again Dick and I were placed in a small anteroom, awaiting news of our child's condition. All of my fears rose like bile in my throat, and when the surgeon walked into the room one look at his face was all that was necessary to confirm what my heart already knew. "I'm sorry," was all he could say. And then, "Damn it, we don't know why it happened. It shouldn't have happened."

But once again I moved through the rituals of death. Matthew's tiny casket was gently placed in the ground next to his sister's, his marker was ordered, and all of his baby things were carefully packed away. But my life now seemed empty and without purpose. Although I still had my husband and son, my dreams of the family with the storybook ending seemed to have had the pages ripped out. For a few short years I had achieved my goals and aspirations as a wife and mother, and found total peace. But in sixteen short months I had felt partial amputation of my heart and mind. I felt like a failure. My religion gave me no comfort as I did not understand how a kind and compassionate God could give me two wonderful children to love, only to snatch them away. Friends and relatives, unable to feel comfortable in my presence, stayed away. So the next two years of my life were lonely ones. I didn't mind, as I was in total, abject grief. Grief not only for what I had lost, but also for my future that was never to be.

It was a severe blood infection which almost killed me that was the catalyst in my recovery and entry back into the world. As I got well I determined that I would once again try putting small amounts of joy into everyday living. I reshaped my goals, and even set some new ones. I later took a job, found that I was good at it, and slowly built back some of my self-esteem. And now I'm taking college courses to improve myself.

Gradually, I am learning to adapt and grow with my new insights on life. Life has not always been kind to me, but like the chameleon, I can change as necessary to survive.



Decidedly Celibate

*Lisa R. Stuart
Composition I*

I have made a conscious choice to abstain from sex on a longterm temporary basis. My reasoning has nothing to do with the AIDS scare or other sexually transmitted diseases, morality or frigidity. Oddly enough, my decision ultimately comes of an intense, determined desire for an intimate relationship.

Whereas married people sometimes take sex for granted, single people of all ages and experiences face continuing decisions about their sexuality, including the choice of being sexually active, being sexually active with one person or with more than one.

As a single person, I won't criticize those who partake in what has been called "sex for sport." Some of my favorite people have gone through at least a short term participation in the game. This "phase" has its place--and takes its toll--in many lives.

Singles often justify their promiscuity, rationalizing that they're temporarily (or permanently) incapable of (or unwilling to) commit themselves to any form of an ongoing relationship.

A friend who's been divorced ten years is honest to say, "I miss the cuddling and holding and touching. What I miss most is the physical contact."

She wasn't even necessarily talking about sex, although I expect she misses that, too. She confesses guilt over several short term sexual involvements in the first couple years following her divorce. She revealed, "I was so pathetically lonely after my divorce. I was not only mourning my marriage, I was mourning that there might never be someone else." Sexual contact with lots of men was a desperate way for her to seek male approval after the rejection suffered in

divorce. Her one-night stands were a trade-off of a sort; the act of intercourse in exchange for a moment of pretended intimacy and manufactured affection, all too fleeting.

Deprived for prolonged periods of time of touching and stroking, even good old-fashioned sex--and given a cocktail or two to lower inhibition--intense body hunger can drive any normal libido into the arms of an agreeable stranger or moderate friend. It's not a crime to like sex, even a lot, and two adults consenting to have sex can have sex; no one made it a physical requirement that they love one another.

I, however, look for more emotional intimacy than can be found in casual sexual encounters. I expect it to be difficult to find a partner who cares about intimacy as much as I do, and I expect it to take a great deal of time to develop such a relationship. I'm not one for love-at-first-sight, thanks, but its a lovely compliment. The quality sharing that my idea of lovemaking is all about just isn't going to be found at closing time in the neighborhood country western bar.

Meanwhile, abstinence removes all worries of venereal disease, pregnancy, and a great deal of the anxiety in dating. I know that the men I see spend time with me for my delightful company. I don't have to worry about whether we'll wind up in bed. Getting to know the person is the emphasis, that's what matters. We can be equals. We can be friends. I don't need anything from him, and I'm free to be me. Dating can be innocent and fun when the complications of ego and sex are left out of the picture. Many men that are worth their salt are happy to have a friendly, nonsexual relationship. There's a notable relief on the part of most men when the pressure of such expectations is removed. It's amazing.

For the time being, celibacy offers a safeguard for my personal freedom, too. Being single and unattached

has allowed me to do what I want when I want. I help others solve problems, rather than have my own. My relationships grow richer. My friends and I appreciate each other more. I've come to better understand the importance of friendship. I'm as embedded in relationships and social networks, maybe more, than my women friends who are presently married or living with someone. My family, too, is a significant source of intimacy and helps to fill any need I may feel for more important relationships.

Once the choice was recognized and accepted, it opened up new possibilities for security and comfort in my life. I'm happy and satisfied, enjoying affection, the company of friends and lots of sensual pleasures.

Without intercourse, life is not without sensuality. Quite the contrary, sexuality unfolds in new ways; just feeling the sun on your skin, exchanging a massage with a friend, luxuriating in a bubble bath, and a variety of pleasures are provided by cuddles, caresses and hugs from many sources. These body experiences are enriching, making one feel alive and vital as any lovemaking session should. The largest human sex organ is the mind.

I expect to find much more quickly the relationship I hope will last a lifetime of sharing, trust and commitment, than I would wading through one half-committed sexual relationship followed by another.

I just don't care to detract from sexuality by splitting it from my emotions. Terrific sex occurs with total abandon. Total abandon means a high degree of vulnerability. Vulnerability without hurt isn't possible without trust. For such high level trust to evolve, any relationship requires an enormous amount of time, work, love and shared experience. You can't get any of that without the security of strong commitment.

In a long-term relationship, lovemaking provides a way to express deepest feelings of tenderness and mutual caring. A loving partner who understands

and accepts and is willing to compromise is an important element in a satisfying sexual relationship.
I'm decidedly willing to wait... for it all, thanks.



Buying Versus Renting

*Charity McCauley
Composition I*

It has been our tradition in this country to purchase our own home when we reach adulthood. It is usually assumed that, like the majority of our parents, we will become homeowners.

I have been in the business of selling homes for almost three years. It has been my pleasure to assist people of all ages in accomplishing this dream, and I firmly believe it is a better investment owning your own home instead of renting.

This past year the federal government instituted some changes in our tax laws that will no longer allow many of our previous deductions. Congress left one very important deduction, however, for the general public to take advantage of--the home mortgage interest deduction. When filing your return, you will be allowed to deduct 100 percent of the interest paid to your lending institution on your mortgage. Also, when you purchase a home, you assume the responsibility for the payment of property taxes each year. Were you aware that these, too, remain 100 percent deductible on your return? And last, but not least, some of the actual costs in assuming your loan are also tax deductible over a period of time.

I also believe that owning your own home is a wonderful savings plan. I try to emphasize to my buyers that making that payment is like putting money into a savings account each month. True, there is interest included in that payment, but remember, that is tax deductible. When making a payment, the principal you will be paying will be an investment in the future, since the equity you will be paying will return to you when you decide to sell your home.

When you own your own home, you will find it involves a lot of responsibility. Having your own home establishes roots for yourself and makes you feel part of the local community. You become concerned with the school system, your local elected officials, even the condition of the streets! You will soon develop a pride in your neighborhood, hopefully maintain your property in good condition. This, in turn, assures you of being able to find a ready buyer if the time ever arises, since neatly-kept homes and well-maintained neighborhoods retain their value and salability. People tend to become more involved in their community and become better citizens when they own their own home.

There are also some fun extras--a yard for children to play in, flower or vegetable gardens can be planted, painting your home any color you desire. This is your home to enjoy as you would like.

Of course, I have also heard many arguments against buying. Some are valid reasons. Strenuous tasks, such as mowing and shoveling, are problems for the elderly and people with health problems. Renting might be a good option in that case, if the landlord supplies someone to perform those jobs. Or, an even better idea might be buying a condominium or townhouse that has a homeowner's association that takes care of those jobs.

People often say the down payment is the biggest obstacle to overcome. In some cases that may be very true, since many conventional loans require a minimum of ten percent down and that is a great deal of money to most of us. But the lending institutions and the government have developed some very creative financing to enable almost anyone with a good credit rating to buy a home.

The State of Iowa provides low interest rates to first-time homebuyers through the Iowa Housing Administration, enabling buyers to purchase a home

with a smaller percentage down. The Federal Government, through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), operates in much the same way, requiring lower down payments (in some cases as little as three percent), and providing lower interest rates. Buyers are also able to finance their closing costs and mortgage insurance so they won't be required to come up with as much money for a down payment as in a conventional loan. In addition, many of the private lending institutions have developed financing, such as adjusted rate mortgages, to make homebuying more feasible for everyone.

The point is also made that owning a home is expensive because of the cost of general upkeep. I couldn't agree more, except to add that so are cars, boats, or anything else that is worth our investment of money and time. And I also point out as a homeowner myself, that if little repairs are done quickly and efficiently, the big repairs are spared in the long run.

The National Association of Realtors finds that seven out of ten people either own or expect to own their own home during their lifetime. I believe they are making a good choice. What else do we ever purchase in our lifetime that provides so many things at once--shelter, a tax deduction, a savings for the future, and a sense of pride in ourself and our community?

When considering the options of renting and buying, I encourage you to seriously think about purchasing your own home. The positive arguments far outweigh the negative arguments, providing you, as buyers, an excellent investment for the future.



I Found My Future in Three Days

*Michael Clark
Composition I*

My future has never really concerned me, especially the part my education would play in it. For as long as I can remember, I have approached school with a lackadaisical, carefree attitude and the general assumption that in ten years it wouldn't make a damn bit of difference whether I went to college or received A's or D's on my report cards. I very rarely saw the former and usually didn't sink as low as the latter, but managed through luck and natural ability to maintain about a C average up until 12th grade.

I now realize that the cause for my scholastic indifference was my belief that I was somehow "different" from everyone else and didn't need to travel the well-worn path of high school followed by college followed by a job to be successful. I had no idea what occupation I would have, but to me it didn't matter right now. When I reached high school I didn't search for a job with unyielding persistence, (as did my other 16 year-old colleagues) but grew my hair extraordinarily long and participated in such hoodlum activities as skipping classes and taking illegal three-day weekends. In short, I used this belief as an excuse for my incredible laziness and lack of motivation. I didn't even know if I wanted to go on to college or not. I just didn't worry about it because the future was a faraway entity, never to finally reach and darken my doorstep.

This false sense of security came to a shattering and fortunate halt the summer after my junior year in high school when I found employment for the first time. My father, who is Vice-President of Manufacturing at Midland Brick Co., offered me a three day job of sweeping the parking lot of their new tile plant in

Redfield, Iowa. I only took the job for the \$4.50 an hour it paid (which I thought was a princely sum) and did not expect to get anything meaningful out of it. However, this experience taught me that unless I started getting better grades and get a college education, I had a very good chance of holding such a job for the rest of my life.

Every morning I awoke at 5:30--(about eight hours earlier than usual during the summer)--and rode in with my father to work, arriving at 7:00 because of the 40 minute drive to Redfield. I was donned in the traditional attire of the working man: baseball cap, white t-shirt, sturdy leather work gloves, and blue jeans (shorts would have been cooler in the June heat, but impractical because of exposure to injury).

The aforementioned parking lot was about the size of a football field and covered with at least 1 1/2 inches of clay, dirt, and gravel. My job was to remove all the existing debris with a large wooden-handled pushbroom and cart it off and dump it by the use of a wheelbarrow and shovel. It sounded easy enough to me. I was actually looking forward to being paid \$4.50 an hour for my labor instead of sitting in school all day long, learning nothing, and getting paid the same amount as I learned.

Nine hours later, I held a somewhat different opinion of the despicable job. My chest, back, and arms were lobster red and tender to the touch because of 105 degree June sunburn, my hands were permanently clenched in the shape of a broom handle and scraped of all conceivable skin, my body was covered with a layer of dust an inch thick, and my scalp was on fire because of the heat my rebellious mane of shoulder-length hair kept in. Add to this dehydration and I think you will have the whole picture; yet the parking lot was less than the expected one-third uncovered. I was dreading with an absolute passion coming back for two more maddening days when a terrifying

thought occurred to me: I couldn't stand the thought of 18 more hours of this work, but how about doing this for the rest of my life? For the first time that day I took a good look around me and saw men, because of their lack of a proper education, who were doing just that. I finished the job on schedule, taking many more looks.

Two weeks later I visited a barbershop and developed a new philosophy. I would rather go to school 15 hours a week than be at work 45 hours a week. 50,000 dollars a year is a much more attractive offer than 15,000 a year, and nine times out of ten a man will work twice as hard for that 15. Four dollars and fifty cents an hour is pretty good for a kid in high school, but how about trying to raise a family on it? My future, which before had always seemed obscure and faraway, now rushed at me like a sirocccon wind. I saw two paths to take and one very important decision to make. I knew that if I didn't go to college, I had a very good chance of permanently holding a job very similar to sweeping a parking lot for a little more than minimum wage. I decided to go on to college and made the honor roll (for the first time) my last semester in high school. If they had the chance to do it all over again, I sincerely believe that the men at Midland International Tileworks would choose a different route, probably the same one I took. And besides, a pencil doesn't have near as many slivers as a broom handle.



Untitled

*Claudia Ryner
Composition I*

Despite its spartan physical setting, the dining room is the hub of the family. Throughout our home are upholstered and comfortable chairs and sofas that invite one to relax and enjoy life's pleasant moments. In contrast, the dining room is furnished with hard wood chairs. However, when I am searching for a place to reorganize or restructure my thoughts, I turn to the dining room.

The table is round and small--only 42"--yet the circular structure implies equality to all that are seated there. The mate's chairs, armless and without authority, match the table with dark pine marred and scratched finish. The height of the gouges in the chair back indicates past usage of a tot's booster seat--the chair's finish is imprinted forever with memories of little ones being boosted to sit at the "big" table with Mom and Dad. Here and there are tiny speckles of various hues of latex paint--reminders of the chairs being used as step ladders in painting chores done throughout the house. A few dried splashes of milk, spilled when small arms flailed carelessly, spatter the legs and spools of the chairs and table. The polished seat, well dusted by repeated applications of pants seat to chair seat, reflects the gleam of the lights suspended over the table.

The table and chairs are conveniently placed near a sliding glass patio door. In warm weather, the open door invites the breezes inside while the mind and body are invited outdoors to embrace the carefree breeze and warm sunlight.

The pungent scent of the warm moist earth wafts into the house along with a blend of flowery essence and new cut lawn. Birds, singing and chirping,

flutter in and out of the densely leafed tree, their colors of red and blue and brown twinkling amidst the velvety green expanse of leaves and shade. Surrounding a wide stretch of unyielding concrete are flower beds with a rainbow of hues brilliantly edging the patio and enhancing the emerald green carpet of grass. Tiny insects buzz as they wing a flight of futility, darting and thrusting against the finely woven screen that separates their avid hunger from my tempting skin.

Relaxed and contemplative, I savor the aroma of brewed coffee in my mug and allow my consciousness to drift and float, my thoughts following the birds on flight as they soar and swoop in the clear blue sky. The trees rustle and flutter below as my mind joins the breezes. Below, I spy a gray tiger striped cat poised to pounce on a stray leaf tumbling across the ground.

I feel the sun's warmth and feel like purring with the serenity and relaxation of the unencumbered birds in flight. Distantly, I hear, "Mom, Mom," and I'm jolted into reality as a small voice requests permission to visit a friend. With absent minded permission given, my mind wanders and drifts as I return to the freedom of the air, to soar above the roof tops and telephone wires, fluttering briefly above the dappled leaves before a shrill jangle of the telephone grounds me abruptly. With an outstretched arm, I dispatch the call and return again to my wanderings, the fragrant coffee revitalizing my suddenly sagging energy. I muse over the prospective day, settling my priorities, organizing the hours, and gradually drift once again to the beckoning sun. One last escape to the unfettered winds, where my spirit is free to fly and roam, while the earthly body remains bound to the realm of the hard chair under me and the firm table beneath my elbows.

The dining room table serves as the meeting ground of our family. Nearly all of our discussions, arguments,

conversations, and visiting takes place at our table. Our center of activity is located there--the children (and Mom) do their homework at the table. Art, sewing, home repairs, and taxes are done at the table.

The table is within easy access of the kitchen, the telephone, desk, and just a few steps from the piano, making monitoring piano lesson practice more convenient. All kinds of thought processes occur there--this essay came to life at the table, as well as the "down" time I find so necessary to good mental health. My dreaming and fretting is accomplished at the dining room table--all within easy reach of the coffee pot.

Our table is not only where we gather to eat and nourish our bodies, our minds and souls are nourished as well. The round table truly is the hub of the family and its activities.



Rewards

*Denise Lindgren
Composition I*

I arrived at the mental health institution late in the afternoon on that rainy, gloomy day. I had an eerie feeling as I slowly walked up the sidewalk leading to the institution. It was spooky, like a castle out of the dark ages. The only things missing were the draw bridge and the moat. I had come here to do my internship in Therapeutic Recreation, the final requirement in getting my degree. However, I approached this adventure with apprehension, because I questioned those awful rumors about places like this. This experience was unlike any I'd encountered before. The uncertainty of the unknown, risk of failure, and even the outward appearance of the institution intimidated me. Did I really want this?

My room was at the end of the long, narrow hallway. Inside the 6 by 12 room was a twin bed and a dresser. The view from my window was obstructed by the steel bars on the outside. This tiny room, which would be my home for the next four months, emphasized my solitude. I didn't sleep very much, if at all during the first night. I laid in bed with the blankets pulled tight around my neck, scared to death. I heard every little sound, from the wind howling outside, to the screams coming from the floor below me. My only thought was that one of them was going to get loose and come and get me. I was so frightened. It was one of the longest nights I can remember, but the sun did come up.

During the first week I had a frightening experience. I was met in the back stairway by one of the male patients. As far as I could see, I was all alone. I didn't see anyone. When all of a sudden, he appeared, out

of nowhere. He backed me against the wall, threatening me if I didn't do what he wanted. His tall lean frame towered above me. His black scraggly hair and cold, black eyes gave me the creeps. My heart was racing. I was so scared. However, I knew that I couldn't let him see my fear. I told him to back off and never let this happen again, or I would report him to my superiors. Because he knew the seriousness of the consequences he would face if reported, he released his grip on my arm and left. He was testing me to see if I was a pushover. Handling the situation in a professional way, rather than falling apart, gave me additional confidence and determination.

Although I was doubtful about the whole experience in the beginning, my opinion had changed after a few short weeks. I adjusted to the new and very different environment simply by ignoring the noises that caused me such worry. I liked the responsibility and the authority placed in my hands. I set up and directed all the activities for more than 50 patients, ranging from 20-60 years of age. The activities included the following: calisthenics, walks, recreational games, and parties. It was also my responsibility to keep all the patients with me on an activity, making sure not to lose anyone. In addition, I made decisions concerning the patients. For example, when someone broke a rule or disrupted an activity, I would make them sit aside for awhile or just take them back to the ward. However, it wasn't very often that I had to resort to removing someone from an activity, because most everyone cooperated. My working associates were friendly and anxious to help when I had questions, which made me feel welcome and comfortable. Many times they asked my opinion on certain matters, and the idea that they valued my opinion was important also.

My greatest reward came through a man called Vance. Vance was assigned to me as a special project,

in addition to my responsibilities to the other patients. He had a low self-esteem and a tremendous lack of motivation. I developed a program suited just for him. Every other day we went through an exercise program. In the beginning, he reluctantly went through several exercises, complaining that he just couldn't do it. Once again, I was being tested. However, I didn't give up as he had hoped I would so he could return to his place in front of the TV. I kept encouraging Vance, praising him when he made an effort. After a month of this program, Vance's attitude had changed. He became more interested, even eager; in fact, usually he was waiting for me when I picked him up for an activity. Once I was detained, making myself only a few minutes late for our activity. When I arrived he said, "Where ya been?" He attempted all exercise I asked him to do; in fact, several times he surprised me by doing extra. Toward the end of our program, his self-esteem had improved and his motivation had increased somewhat. Together, we had succeeded.

Often times encountering an unfamiliar situation can bring feelings of fear and uncertainty. It is too easy to give up, and not even attempt dealing with something unknown. However, trying something new and maybe even scary can have rewards. You can't just look at something and make judgments you have to explore it before you can decide. I'm glad I didn't give up. I am richer for the experience.



Self-Serving Myself to the First Step of Independence

*Wendy S. Hulsman
Composition I*

The day had begun like any other day and I was on my way home from my dead-end job which my father-in-law had secured for me. Glancing at my fuel gauge I saw that I needed to fill up my car; this was a process which I endured twice a month.

Never before had it occurred to me to do anything but have the gas attendant fill my car, check my oil, wash my windows, and then charge it to my account. This was a bi-monthly process which I had never given much thought to.

I had never given much thought to anything until I realized the fact that I was approaching the age of 23 and had never really done anything on my own before. This came as a shock as I realized my daily life up until then had consisted of my needs and wants being met by other people, for example, having my father-in-law get me a job, having someone else choose the job, or never even thinking of making decisions on my own. To become somewhat independent I knew I needed to start making some small steps toward achieving this goal.

This time, as I drove into Braafharts gas station the red and white self-serve sign lept out at me and I screeched to a halt. The gas pumps with their rubber arms leered at me, daring me to take them on. Backing up, I gave the full-service gas pumps one last look and with a sign of determination I pulled forward next to the self-service pump.

As I got out of my car, I glanced up at the attendants staring unbelieving as I walked over to read the side of the gas pump. After going over the directions, I flipped up the on-switch, grabbed the nozzle, and

dragged it back to my car. Horror filled me as I went from one side of the car to the other looking for the gas cap. The more I looked, the more I panicked, I knew it had to be there somewhere. Finally, I put the nozzle back and shut it off. I tried to calm myself down and remember what part of the car the attendant usually went to. Finally, it came to me, I recalled seeing him several times at the back of my car and had also seen, on occasion, cars ahead of me with the gas cap underneath their license plate. I ran to the back of my car and tugged at my licence plate. The license stuck fast as I pulled and pulled from the bottom. Hopping to see someone else in a similar situation, I looked up and instead saw the attendants and the mechanics laughing and joking as they watched me out the window. By this time a couple cars had pulled in behind me and I didn't dare look at them, sure of their impatience. Frustrated, tears welled up in my eyes and I could barely make out the sympathetic attendant in his dark blue uniform walking over to me. Angry and embarrassed I turned from him and made my way back to the car door, got in, and drove off without looking back.

After driving for a while I eventually calmed down; although, I was still frustrated. Berating myself for not even being able to pump my own gas I eventually found myself driving into my mom and dad's driveway.

Dad, seeing me drive up, came out to greet me. He took one look at me and instinctively knew something was wrong. After explaining my problem, he walked over to my car and firmly pulled down my car's license plate. Seeing how easy it was for him to find the gas cap left me feeling even more useless than before. When he offered to pump my gas for me I felt a sense of relief followed quickly by anger as I refused his offer. Backing out of the driveway a new wave of determination came over me and I headed back to

the gas station. Glancing in my rear view mirror I could see my dad staring after me with a puzzled look.

Upon reaching Braafharts, some of my determination had dwindled but I knew if I gave up now I would always be afraid to try.

Again I read the directions, took the cap off of the opening and filled my gas tank.

As I walked in to pay the attendants, even the knowledge that my experience would probably be the beginnings of a great joke at their gas station couldn't stop the sense of accomplishment and good feeling about myself.

This moment was one I will never forget, as I had made the first of many small steps towards independence. This was the beginning of a new life for me.



My Time Alone

*Hunter Burke
Composition I*

It is five thirty in the morning, and I am heading to my favorite place. Driving down an unimproved road, I come to an old apple tree. This is where I park. When I stop my truck and shut off the lights, a feeling of solitude comes over me. There are no lights for miles, except for the moon and the stars. I open my truck door and the brisk fall air chills my body, but it doesn't bother me because I know I have a long walk ahead of me to warm me up. I head to the back of my truck to get my bow, and the frozen grass and weeds crunch and crackle under my feet. It is then when I stop and listen and take a deep breath of the cool morning air. There is a slight breeze from the north. That will be very helpful to me, because if the wind was in any other direction my opponent would smell me and take another route.

It is time to head to my favorite place. I take my bow from its case and start on my long dark walk. The first obstacle I come to is an old fence. I try to cross it without making any noise, but it doesn't work out that way. When I sling my leg over the top wire, a loud and piercing creak is made. Once again I head for the edge of the woods. The eastern sky is starting to brighten. It is making a beautiful orange-blue color. This tells me to get going. My pace is now a fast walk.

The woods are coming to life. To my left, I hear the wind rustle through the tall cottonwoods and oaks. The timberline is turning now, and I am heading straight east. Heading toward the lighted sky, I can see my destination. The woods are still on my left, and a large weed patch is on my right. When I get to my place, the woods thin out and the weed patch turns to corn. The dry corn makes a scratching

sound on my clothes as I make my way through the cornfield to the foot of my tree. Now for the hard part, getting up in my tree without dropping my bow or falling. My tree, an American elm, is only about 30 feet high, and it sways with the wind. Once I am up here it seems like the wind has picked up, and it slightly drowns out the songs of the birds. I love to hear all the different bird sounds. The bird that really sticks in my mind is the blue jay; sometimes when it makes its loud screech it startles me so much I almost lose my breath. With the old blue jay around, I sure don't daydream for very long.

When I am in my tree, it is like I am in a different world. I can see for miles in all directions. It makes me feel like I am the only person alive, and I have no worries. I really think I could sit up here forever and listen to the trees and watch all the small animals as they hurry around doing their daily routine. The reason I come here is to hunt deer, but I don't even care if I see one. It's the time I spend up here; that's what really counts.

My favorite place is a different kind of place. There are no horns honking or people yelling, just the sound of the wind and the movement of the animals. It's a change of pace, a quiet time, and I feel lucky to have it. Leaving this place is hard for me. It's like a complete turn around. I have to switch modes and go back to all the hustle and bustle, but it's o.k. because I know it won't be long until I return.



Needed Changes

David L. Bare
Composition I

When welfare started out, it was a very good plan to help people who, for a short time, needed help making a living. But now, there are many people whom I feel are abusing the welfare system. I've had several people admit to me that they'll stay on welfare as long as possible because it's "easy money." In my opinion, something needs to be done to give people incentive to get off welfare aid.

"Why are you staying on welfare?" That's a question which I've asked several of my friends. One answer I've received is that welfare pays more than the low paying jobs that these people can get. Another answer is that staying home and receiving welfare payments is better than going out and working for minimum wage. Also, I'm told that if they work at a low paying job then their welfare is cut so that they end up making less money than if they didn't work at all. Actually, I don't blame these people for acting that way. The "system" lets them do it.

Some people on welfare don't have any experience needed to get a job, and some people are welfare abusers that are just too lazy to get a job. So to solve that problem, welfare recipients should be made to work in order to receive their payments. A work program could be set up where they could do community service or work for state or local governments. I think that having to work would cause some people to go on their own and get a job, and it would give other people the experience they need to find a better job. Certainly, I don't think women with pre-school aged children should have to work unless they continue to have children in order to keep from working.

Education has always played an important part in securing a good job. There should be more emphasis towards getting welfare recipients to go to a college or a vocational school. Child care should be provided so these people can attend school; also, any other help that will get them successfully through school should be given. Nevertheless, some people will just go to school to stay off the work program; therefore, if these people don't maintain decent standings in school, then they should be put back on the work program.

If people on welfare are trying to work on their own then they should be compensated for it. If they are working at a low paying job or a part-time job, they should have a total sum of their paycheck and welfare payments that is higher than welfare alone. They should be provided with decent child care facilities whether they are working or going to school. Also, they shouldn't lose their Medicaid benefits until they can earn a good enough wage to make up the difference.

I feel that welfare is a good thing for people who honestly need it. But besides money, most people need help in other ways to get to the point where they are self-supporting. And as sad as it may seem, we have welfare abusers who need some incentive to go to work.



My First HALO Parachute Jump

*Brittain Clint Ladd
Composition I*

Why skydive? Think about it. Why jump out of a perfectly good aircraft? I mean, hey, if the airplane or helicopter isn't going to crash, why not just sit back and enjoy the ride? Well, sometimes it's just not that simple.

One of the benefits, or curses, depending on who is involved, of being a scout/sniper and member of 2nd Force Recon in the Marines, was the opportunity to attend a wide variety of training schools. In fact, one of my primary reasons for becoming a scout/sniper was the training schools. The more training schools I could attend, the more knowledge I would gain. Well, as the saying goes, "Be careful what you wish for, you may get it." And I got "it" in the form of HALO school.

HALO (High Altitude Low Opening) was the most stressful, demanding, and sought after of all parachute training schools. Three weeks of classroom instruction and low altitude practice jumps, were all designed to prepare the jumper for week number four--a series of parachute jumps from 30,000 feet, free falling to 2,500 feet where the jumper deploys his parachute.

The training went by fairly quickly. Since the other Marines and myself had already been through one parachute school, the classes and parachute jumps were mostly a review of the basics. Most importantly though, we worked on perfecting our body position during free fall because if a jumper tumbles while falling, most likely he will become entangled in his parachute, and as the instructors like to say, "Once you hit the ground, you'll resemble a tomato that was thrown against a wall." What a pleasant thought.

As the third week of training came to an end, I felt extremely confident and cocksure. "Enough of this

pretend bullshit," I repeatedly said to myself. "Give me the real fucking thing or I am going to rent a plane and fucking jump that way." Like I said before, "Be careful what you wish for." Well, my wish came true and the day finally arrived for the first HALO jump.

It wasn't, however, a day that finally arrived, it was a night. It seems the instructors "forgot" to mention that the first jump is done at night to ensure the jumpers pay attention to their altimeters instead of the scenery.

The jump was scheduled for 2300 hours, which is 11 o'clock at night civilian time. The plane was a C-130, flying at a speed of 150 mph at an altitude of 30,000 feet. Nineteen other Marines and I were sitting across from each other, 10 men along each side of the aircraft. As I sat there waiting to jump, a thought entered my mind, "Hey dumbfuck, what if your parachute doesn't open?" and I became totally quiet. Never had the thought of my parachute not opening entered my head. Why? Because I was a pro, hell, I was more than that, I was fucking immortal. However, just as a drowning man realizes before going under for the last time that he won't make it to shore, I realized that no matter how cocksure or professional I was, I could die. It wouldn't be my fault if the parachute didn't open. The end result, however, would be the same--I would be killed, and for the first time in my adult life, I became afraid. It wasn't the kind of fear that a person gets when he/she has done something wrong and waits for punishment, or like the fear of the unknown. No, this was the type of fear that made me want to be given a hug by one of my friends aboard that plane, a hug to reassure me that everything would be alright. I had never felt a need like that before, but at that moment, the need was overwhelming.

Bam! Reality time. Red light flashing. Stand up, check equipment. White light flashing. Form two single file lines, prepare to jump. Green light flashing.

Rear door of plane is lowered, wind begins hitting my face. Although I was still scared, my natural cocksure attitude began to once again dominate my thoughts and actions. As we all started jumping out of the plane, "Fuckin' a babe, here we go!" was my only memorable thought as I ran 20 feet out of the back of that C-130 and jumped into the blackest void I had ever experienced.

All I saw was blackness, nothingness, and I was falling in it. I felt as if I was on a speeding roller coaster clearing the crest of a sharp hill. My oxygen mask and eye goggles prevented me from feeling or hearing the wind. And if it were not for my altimeter, registering that I was falling, I would have thought I was dreaming. As for my thoughts at this I really don't remember thinking any. All I remember is that I felt a sensation of observing myself from a distance. Watching me falling, then pulling my ripcord, YANK! Reality again. From 120 mph to 20 mph in less than three seconds. Parachute fully inflated, I did it. I was alive. Less than 90 seconds after I pulled my ripcord I was on the ground ALIVE! Although I jumped three more times that very night, I never had those same feelings as during that first jump.

HALO school was an experience that I will never forget. The fear, exhilaration, and pride I felt during those four weeks will always be a reminder to me of my youth and of a time that once was, but will never be again. That first HALO jump forced me to face, control, and then conquer fears that I had never experienced. As a result, I was able to become more confident and proficient in my job, and also self-assured with my own abilities.



Peggy

*Deb Phelan
Composition I*

It was August when I moved onto the tree lined street in historic Prospect Park, Brooklyn. The brownstones were built so close together that they touched. Wrought iron covered the windows and doorways in flower scrolls or dagger-like points. The atmosphere was peaceful, although only three blocks in the wrong direction left you deep in the heart of Brooklyn mafioso territory. It seems strange that in this up and coming yuppie neighborhood the first person I met was Peggy.

I had noticed her before. A gangly old woman in a dirty plaid coat and red rubber knee boots leaning on the gate of #196 is hard to miss. Early morning until mid-afternoon she leaned, smoking or eating ice cream bars, both of which she had a weakness for. If she wasn't there you would find her on the bench in front of a small local bank just two blocks away--one of her favorite places. Everyone knew Peggy but for the most part tried to avoid her. She was interesting to talk about when you got bored--the neighborhood oddity.

When anyone passed she'd say, "Hello there" in a high pitched gravelly voice. Once she managed to get you cornered into a conversation, it was mighty hard to back out gracefully. She was lonely, I think, and she loved to talk. She always began a conversation with the weather, then moved on into a well rehearsed speech on how smoking was bad for you and she outta know. If you were still around she would talk about all the people on the block. She liked to watch people and knew what everyone was doing most of the time. She would talk about you like she wasn't

aware that she was talking to you, and she possessed an annoying tendency to repeat herself.

I felt sorry for her and listened, mechanically smiling and nodding at the appropriate times. I once heard the smoking speech three times in fifteen minutes. One thing, she was always extremely polite--she had manners and insisted on saying goodbye. Even if you just waved from across the street, she would yell goodbye to you. It seemed to be very important to her that people said "goodbye" back to her. When she talked she liked to be right up into your face, not a very pleasant situation considering that Peggy had an odor all her own: smoke and old cat. A neighbor once told me that at last count she had 23 of them.

On rare occasions she would just sit and stare as if she were someplace else--for hours at a time. It was at these times you could really look at her. Peggy was not a pretty person. She had stringy brown hair and a hook nose. Her wrinkled skin had an unhealthy yellowish cast to it, and when she smiled you got full view of 13 crooked and broken grey teeth. She carried a black purse which hung open because of a broken clasp, inside it was filled with old kleenex and pieces of newspaper. She wobbled like a drunk when she walked--though she swore to me on several occasions that she had never touched a drop as far back as she could remember. On very calm days there would be a trail between #196 and the bank bench.

I had always wondered what the people who lived in #196 thought of Peggy hanging out there all the time and was very surprised to learn that her family had owned the building since 1880 when it was built. Being the last one left, she had inherited the house she grew up in. How ironic that a woman who looked more as if she should be living in a subway station was the owner of a three story, million dollar brownstone.

A year later in mid-July, as I was making arrangements to move, the people in #194 complained about a disgusting odor coming from Peggy's house. The Department of Health came and hauled away two truckloads of old garbage, cat manure and God knows what else. Peggy sat and watched them, and cried. After that I remember seeing her peek out of the window every now and then, but she never left that house. She had been locked inside for two weeks the day I moved the last of my things out. I never did get to tell her goodbye.



Gambling In Iowa: How Far Will It Go?

*Melissa Ross
Composition I*

I think I liked this state better when everyone thought it was backwoods and behind the times. Then, at least, we knew where we were going, however slowly the pace might be. We applied down-home values to everyday living, and for the most part, people of Iowa were proud of it. On my visit to Florida last month, all I could do was think of how wonderful Midwesterners treated other people--none of the coastal snobbery, just honesty. But somehow, the image of Iowa is changing, in some ways good and in some ways bad.

I don't mind some of the good changes--economic development, a dirty word among the pure of business heart, is a needed word for our state. Without it, we're going to be one large cornfield with a few overtaxed farmers living on the outskirts. Without economic development, our governor would have nothing to talk about but the problems of the oncoming drought. Without economic development, colleges such as the University of Iowa and Iowa State University would fall behind in revenues and research knowledge. But the state is getting caught in catchwords like the big "e.d." and finding easy ways out, and to me, it doesn't seem very Iowan.

First, there was the lottery. I can remember when members of this state thought those little tickets would upset the moral fiber of the state, and I'm still considered a youngster. Now what's happened? We not only have the instant-win lottery tickets, we have two versions of the get-rich-quick game, "bigger prizes" and "better chances." I've bought a "better chances" ticket before, and I lost the same way I did before I had a "better chance."

Then, to show that scratching that silver stuff was not enough, we got our own version of a "pick-6" lottery, the Iowa Lotto, and another, more sophisticated, national-type game, Lotto America, whose stakes are better but odds are worse. So, if you wanted to bet on one of these games only once a week (and remember, the two pick-6 games are played twice a week), it would cost you \$4 a week, \$224 a year! And then there's the dog track, the horse track.... What's next?

The Iowa Legislature came up with something else. It has provided us with further exercises in gambling, namely, riverboat gambling. It's a big-time operation, just like other states that paddle up and down the rivers, shooting craps and playing blackjack. Let's not forget our Iowa background. Legislators tried to keep that conservative nature that should oppose gambling, but they liked the dollar signs of proposition, no matter the morals. Still they're only selling out for \$5 worth, the maximum bet allowable on these floating card games. And winners can only take home \$200 at one sitting. What kind of immorality is that? If you're going to be nasty, why not go for the gold?

I can see it now, there will be blue-haired women in polyester pants trying to up the ante every chance they get. There will be families taking short weekend trips, the fathers and mothers doing some recreational betting while little kids threaten to jump over the side to break the boredom.

I think the state should throw caution to the wind. Let's bet on college basketball games and make it legal. Let's bet on college football games and make it legal. Hell, let's bet on college women's volleyball games and make it legal. Let's raise roosters and bring back the cock fight. Let's have pig races, lamb races, mouse races, rat races.... Let's open up

casinos on University Avenue and invite big-name entertainers, just so people will spend money at the tables.

Let's promote economic development here in Little Vegas. After all, you can't win if you don't play. Get the picture?



Beggars and Believers

Jessica Chappelle
Composition I

Maybe it was the cramped, uncomfortable closeness of Anna's two room tenement. Maybe it was the dirty stench of rot that seemed to invade everything where she lived. Perhaps the darkness that shrouded her two rooms, but it may very well have been all of these things gnawing at her belly, forcing her to another audition which would most likely end in a rejection --or a kick in the teeth as seen through her eyes. She loved to dance and she loved how she danced, but no one else seemed to share in this opinion. Audition after audition, turn down after turn down felt like shovels of dirt filling her grave. To be a ballerina was to be alive. This was a dream she'd held from her first ballet lesson when she was only six. Twenty years had passed since then, but she held on somehow. Anna believed dreams came true, if you worked and believed. The word "believe" echoed in her mind, this word was difficult to grasp, because in this world belief comes from sight and what Anna saw through her eyes every day she didn't want to believe. But in her mind's eye where reality was only what she chose it to be, she could believe if only for a short time.

Anna stepped in front of a large mirror that hung over the bathroom sink, she looked tired, and driven. Her curly, strawberry blond hair cascaded gently down her shoulders to the middle of her back, almost seeming to overpower her small frame. Anna's large, dark grey eyes needed no makeup. Her nose was small and slightly turned up (Anna hated having it referred to as a "button nose" but that is what it was), which gave way to high, strong cheek bones. Her lips were full and her smile had a certain glow that would radiate warmth to any room it graced. Her skin was

smooth and milky-white, except for the touch of rose that kissed her cheeks. Though her frame was small, it had a dancer's strength and grace--arms and legs that were sleek and gently defined with muscle, and a tight, flat stomach.

Anna got her things together, thoughtfully, trying to get herself psyched up. She stepped out the door, locked it, and descended the stairs to the outside. The hallway was painted a dingy green. The paint was old and peeling, giving way to other tacky colors. As she stepped down, each stair groaned and complained with age. It felt almost as if the staircase would crumble to pieces, plummeting her helplessly to the ground.

As she stepped down from the last stair and reached out to the cold brass doorknob, she heard the cold, lonely sound of the wind moaning through the streets, and was thankful for the fact she bundled up with every warm piece of clothing she owned. A dull grey haze covered the sky, making the sky look closer to the ground than it really was.

Anna pulled the door open and slid through it as best she could with her big, bulky duffle bag getting tangled between her legs. Immediately, a cold blast of wind shot from the snout of some sleeping arctic monster, and bled her body of all warmth. Her teeth chattered and her body shivered in jerky movements.

Head down, scurrying along, she prayed for a taxi, until she realized that she had no money. After walking for what seemed like at least 100 miles, she finally got to the theater where her audition was to take place. As her head rose, Anna saw an old haggard woman shivering on the cold cement stairs.

Her hair was long and greasy, running in a thousand different directions. Lines of worry and poverty dug deep into her large, round face, leaving a jumbled mass of wrinkles. Her eyes were black chips of coal set in large sockets sunk deeply into her head.

Frostbite left her cheeks and nose white. Her large mouth held very few teeth, the ones remaining were brown and rotting. She was a heavy woman and owned only rags to cover her slowly freezing body, her feet bound only with plastic bags. She watched Anna cross the street and held out her old gnarled hands, "Please Miss, I'm so very, very cold. Please," she rasped.

As Anna approached her, she looked at the woman with contempt and disgust, hating her. "I'm cold, too," she snapped and continued up the stairs and inside the double doors. But as Anna entered the warm theater, she stood still for a moment, as if frozen. Anna slowly and thoughtfully took off her hat, scarf and after a moment's hesitation, her mittens. Anna turned around towards the door, quietly stepped outside and crept down the stairs to where the old woman continued to perch. Seeing Anna's face, the woman recoiled, frightened. Anna crouched down and pulled her blue stocking cap snugly around the woman's head and ears, next, taking the green and blue plaid scarf, Anna gently wrapped it loosely around the woman's mouth and neck, then Anna slipped her green mittens, ones she'd had for years, on the woman's hands.

The two women looked at each other for a suspended moment, neither of them knowing quite what to say, or think. Only knowing they would both be warmer. Anna stood up, and in one quick movement, crouched back down and kissed the woman's cheek. Then Anna darted back up the stairs and inside.

Anna walked slowly down the dark corridor, completely forgetting the old woman and concentrating only on the audition. She went into a room where the other dancers were warming up. The room was crowded and other ballerinas that seemed more beautiful, more confident, better than she, fluttered past. Anna found an empty bench, changed and began her warm up routine in anticipation of her audition.

But something was wrong. Where was her usual headache? The knots in her stomach, the pounding heart, all of those nervous, nasty, little accompaniments that controlled her body during auditions had not just disappeared, on the contrary, they never entered her body. She was as calm and as comfortable as a kitten in a child's bed.

Anna's name was called. Her head shot up immediately. Anna slowly, gracefully, and for the first time, confidently strode out onto the dark stage. A spotlight clicked and Anna felt its heat covering her body as she assumed her initial position.

And she believed.



A Loss of Innocence

*Christine Flynn
Composition I*

The war was over in 1967. RAF Akrotiri, Cyprus, still had several grim reminders of that war: barbed wire littered the beaches; kit bags containing army food rations could be found in the caves by the cliffs, and the various assassination attempts on President Makarios' life continued throughout the spring of 1968.

That summer, my sister and I were eight and six years old respectively. A year after the war was over, Akrotiri was a glamorous and exciting place to live. The Mediterranean climate produced long hazy days and an intoxicating scent of bougainvillea and mimosa permeated the air. It was on such a day that my sister and I set out on the short walk to the Church of Scotland to attend our weekly Scottish dancing class. It was mid-afternoon and the air was heavy with moisture. We ambled along slowly until our attention was caught by a RAF bomber aeroplane above. It droned noisily, flying low, as if unsure of itself.

We hurried into class and as we were late, my sister and I sat down as unobtrusively as possible while the rest of the class was engaged in a spirited rendition of "The Dashing White Sergeant." The girls and boys gamboled about the room displaying a remarkable lack of agility.

Within seconds, the peaceful afternoon came to an end. The huge explosion resounded throughout the camp. In confusion, swarms of frightened children and workers ran out into the streets.

The bomber plane, on a routine exercise, had accidentally released a "dud" bomb. It bounced three times, leaving craters of gigantic proportions where it had landed. Chaos ensued as the military police

attempted to seal off the area, but most people paid no attention to the commands being issued. I escaped from the police confines and ran until I could run no more. I knew that if the bomb had dropped just seconds earlier, it would have decimated our little dancing class and I experienced then my first lesson in mortality. This chilling thought haunted me for many years, long after I had departed from Akrotiri.

My small, idyllic world had been shattered. The barbed wire on the beaches was no longer an exotic decoration for our gang's club house: it was a bitter reminder of the real and rapidly changing world I lived in.

I believe that my perception of the world changed that day. Every event, however inconsequential, took on importance, as if it touched me somehow. I was no longer an innocent.



Goodbye

*Karen J. Sellen
Composition I*

Death happens every day somewhere in the world, but to a young nurse's aide it can be a hard thing to deal with for the first time.

I had been a nurse's aide for eleven months, and had never had one of my patients die. I worked in a Special Cancer Care Unit in a large nursing home. My patients were all listed as "terminal". I knew I could lose one of them any time, but I pushed that thought back in my mind, and dealt with their every day care.

I worked with the same seven patients every evening. I had three male patients and four female patients. Their ages ranged from 41 to 71 years old. Their occupations were varied. There was a farmer, a lawyer, a housewife, a doctor, a music teacher, a musician, and a nurse.

The one I seemed to spend a lot of my time with was Charlotte, a retired RN. She would spend hours telling me what it was like when she was a young nurse. She told me how when she went to nurse's school it was like being in a convent. You spent all of your time studying and on duty. You were not permitted to date at all!

When she talked to me, her eyes would light up, her voice would be happy, and she would forget the pain she was in most of the time. I grew closer to her each day.

One night while I was doing my homework (I was a junior in high school), I received a phone call from the nurse I worked with on the unit. She told me Charlotte was failing, and was asking for me. She had no family to be with her.

As soon as possible, I went to be with her. I talked to my nurse when I got there. I told her I had never

dealt with death before. She told me not to worry, that death was not a bad thing to see. I would be able to handle it, and would grow from the experience.

I sat with Charlotte and held her hand. She told me someday I would be a nurse, just like she had been. She also told me I would be a good nurse, because I took time to sit with my patients. She told me nursing was communicating, caring, love, and the patience to listen. It was not just pushing pills.

She got a serene look on her face the more we talked. I knew she was happy and at peace. She told me I would cry after she was gone, then I would get busy working and caring for my other patients.

She died quietly and peacefully. She was right, I did cry a lot, but I got busy working with my other six patients.

I became a better nurse's aide that night. I learned we have to say goodbye to the ones we care for and come to love. Every time I have had to sit with a dying patient, I have remembered Charlotte, and the wisdom she gave me. I know she is happy because I am a nursing student. I will be able to carry on what she taught me a nurse should be and do. Thank you Charlotte.



Aspirations To Write

Stacey Harger
Composition I

"His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead." James Joyce's The Dead is only one of the literary works that I have read and been touched by. There are dozens of short stories, plays, poems, and novels that have inspired me. Though I have not read as many great works as I would like to be able to admit, I have read enough to know which profession might please and fit me most. Because I have been impressed by other's efforts, I would like to be a writer.

I have been a reader for as long as I can remember. My mother says that it is because she read to me so often as a child. I was the child in the first grade reading group that would blurt out the word that my neighbor could not pronounce. Being a fast reader, I would become impatient too quickly with those that were slower. I was the one that would become so anxious for the end of the book that I would skip the middle entirely, read the end, and then go back.

Growing up, my favorite books were the Laura Ingalls Wilder series, the Trixie Belden mysteries, and finally the drippy romance novels. Yet, by the time I was in high school I wanted to read more difficult, more meaningful books. Sophomore year English class introduced me to books such as Faulkner's Light In August and Huxley's Brave New World. I began to see that other books, besides text, could make me think and learn. I found myself wanting to read to learn, not just for entertainment.

My senior year in high school has been my most developmental stage as a reader. My college literature

teacher, Mrs. Joyce Tremble, was a wonder. She taught me how to analyze a story or poem and showed me another way of reading. When I became insecure or discouraged, she helped to point me in the right direction. Mrs. Tremble introduced me to great authors that I had never read, Conrad, Ibsen, Kafka, Shakespeare, Camus. The list goes on and on. From the romantic tragedy of Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights, to the horrible realization in Odor of Chrysanthemums by D.H. Lawrence, I wanted to read more and more.

There are many avenues left open to a writer. As a writer, I can become any character that I want to be. My gift of creativity can be used in any form imaginable. It is a complete freedom. I, as myself, tend to be the quiet, shy type. But, as a writer, I feel much more safe, knowing that the reader will not see me, he will see a fictional character; only a part of me. It is a special kind of relationship. One that is quite distanced, yet also very intimate.

There are many novels left to read. I am only a beginner. I feel somewhat insecure about writing a paper involving a subject that I have so much more to learn about. Yet, I feel that I have experienced enough as a writer to make an attempt. I can only learn as I make mistakes, or successes, and progress.



"In Shape"

*Roslyn Carrier
Composition I*

What does the term "in shape" mean? One hears many people use this term in discussing some form of physical conditioning. "In shape" is a state of mind as well as a reference to a state of physical fitness.

For example, Rob has been trying to get in shape since last September. He is hoping to enter some triathlons this summer; therefore he is running, lifting weights, biking, swimming, and playing handball. On a typical day when the alarm sounds at 4:30 a.m., he bounds out of bed ready for action. Through the darkness of the early morning, he arrives at the YMCA eager to begin his exercise routine which will eventually get him "in shape."

Running, at least three miles, is the first event on the agenda. After he completes that task, he enters the weight room and "works out," another physical conditioning term, on weights to build his upper body. After Rob completes his weight lifting routine, he jumps on the Air Dyne bicycle and begins pumping his legs. It's not unusual for him to keep up the pace of twenty miles per hour for approximately twenty minutes. All the while his goal is racing through his mind--being in top physical form--being "in shape."

When Rob was asked what benefits he will receive from being "in shape," he replies, "It's the ultimate. It's being slim and firm and feeling good about myself."

Many people come to the YMCA with the same intentions in mind, getting "in shape." That term has different meanings to different people. I have referred to Rob who is a person who is dedicated, for reasons of his own, to being "in shape." He is not the normal person who strives to be "in shape." Most people who

want to get "in shape" will do so in moderation and will continue until they get bored or their priorities change; that usually doesn't take a long period of time.

As stated before, being "in shape" is a state of mind as well as achieving a level of physical fitness. Setting a goal for oneself is the driving force of becoming "in shape." The way one looks, cardiovascular conditioning, and most important the way one feels about himself are the key characteristics of being "in shape."



Life is real! Life is earnest!
and the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The Visit

*Janet Laird
Composition I*

There are 430 licensed nursing homes in Iowa. This means that over 31,000 elderly Iowans are receiving long-term institutional care. I am familiar with one such institution and its staff.

The grounds of the gracious red brick care center are enclosed by a rustic wooden fence. The horses grazing in the lush green pasture give one the impression that this is the estate of some well-to-do Country Gentleman. The small black-top parking lot is situated so that cars are parked within a foot of this fence. Visitors can be seen petting the horses and watching the antics of the young colts.

We enter through double doors and are in a six foot square vestibule. A list of the sixty residents is on the wall to our right. The names are spelled with removable plastic letters that fit neatly into a grooved frame.

Moving through another set of double doors, we enter the main lobby and sign our names in the visitors book. We thumb through the pages from the date of our last visit to see which relatives and friends have been here. Asking Mom about recent company helps with conversation.

The white walls are decorated with framed pictures of happy children and cute animals. Soft grey carpet, numerous tables, lamps, and an abundance of upholstered furniture add to the homey feeling.

Alan Hart, the owner, hurries toward us. We shake hands. Alan talks quickly and gestures with his metal artificial arm. He is wearing his usual cowboy boots and jeans. He explains that this is a busy time of year for a farmer and excuses himself. We watch him leave the building and recall that his red pick-up truck was in the parking lot.

We walk through the dining room, speaking to the cook and two aides, as they prepare for the mid-afternoon snack. Six girls from the local high school are adjusting the microphone and setting up music stands for the program they will give.

Three women are watching television in the blue living room. "Hello," says Crystal, the self-appointed leader of the residents. "Your mother isn't doing very well. She hasn't been to the dining room for a long time. Poor thing. She gets thinner and thinner. I don't think she will ever walk again, do you?"

Lee is attempting to answer when Tasha approaches and interrupts with: "Crystal, the girls need help finding the music you used yesterday."

"I have to do everything around here," mumbles Crystal as she adjusts her walker, pulls herself up, and turns toward the dining room. "I'll talk with you later, Lee. There is just so much to take care of when we have outside entertainment," she complains. "It is easier to do it myself, even on Sunday."

"How are you two?" asks Tasha. Her voice is soft and gentle. We make small talk and I ask if I can interview her for a paper I'm writing. "Sure, Janet. What do you want to know?"

I ask several questions and learn that Tasha became interested in medicine after a friend died of leukemia. She got a nursing degree and began working at the care center. She is happy with this area of medicine and is comfortable with the elderly.

"Most of these people will live here until the end. I want to surround them with as much love and

comfort as possible." We both become teary and hug each other. I tell her, as I do each time we visit, just how glad we are that she is here with Mom and Dad.

We reach room 37B and find the door closed. While waiting we exchange smiles with a new aide as she assists Mrs. Johnson with her wheel chair. She tucks the afghan around the thin shaking legs and then gently pats her hand. Mrs. Johnson is oblivious to this tender attention.

The hall is filling with walkers and wheel chairs as "yesterday's teenagers" (as they refer to themselves) move slowly toward the dining room. The aroma of coffee floats through the air and we know that when everyone is served and being entertained, an aide will bring us two plastic cups of the steaming brew.

The door opens and Alice, Mom's favorite nurse, bustles into the corridor. "Florence is ready to visit. She wanted her hair combed and her new bed jacket on," she announces in her loud sing-song voice. She lowers her voice and whispers, "She is a little confused today, but her temperature is normal again."

Knowing that others are waiting for her, we do not ask any questions. She hurries down the hall chatting with everyone as she passes. One resident teases her about needing a speed limit sign. We can hear her infectious laugh as we enter room 37B.

Later, as we end our visit and retrace our steps, we see the owner's wife, Louise, at the nurses station. She is a registered nurse and worked fifteen years at the local hospital before they built this care center in 1975. She motions us over.

"Your dad is not as strong as he was, Lee."

"I know, I could see a big change in just two weeks."

"Your mother is doing better this week. We will take her back to the dining room tomorrow. She needs to be with other people as much as possible."

"Yes," agrees Lee. "It helps her to know where she is and not get lost in the past."

"I haven't seen Mrs. Axel today," I comment.

"She was 'Called Home' last Monday," replies Louise, her face softening, as we both look at the empty blue and white plaid rocker across from her station.

"I'll miss seeing her," I say. "She has been in that chair every time we've been here. Almost five years."

"She came to us when we opened. Such a sweet little woman. Never did speak a word. Always hummed lullabies and rocked her imaginary baby. Now she is with her child again."

We say good bye and head for the door. The closer we get, the faster we walk.

"Well, how was your mother, Lee?" It is Crystal again.

"Much better, Crystal. She will be in the dining room again tomorrow."

"Oh, I'm so glad. Poor thing. I just don't think she will ever walk again, though. Do you?"

"She might surprise us all," I say over my shoulder as we continue toward the double doors, trying not to run.

Outside again, we lean against the fence and watch the horses.

"In one word," I say to Lee, "describe the nursing home."

He is quiet for a moment.

"Lonely."



On The Road

Rita Johannsen
Composition II

When a person acquires a reputation, whether it is good or bad, it follows them forever like a cloud over their head. I have a reputation; whether it is good or bad depends on the other person's point of view.

I have a "road kill" reputation. In other words, when people who know me see a road kill, their first thought is of me. It's not because I resemble in any way a form of flattened fauna, but because I became entranced with a dead opossum at the bottom of a hill near Saylorville Lake. What started out as a perfectly normal interest in something I had never seen grew into a mass network of tall tales.

Now please don't get the impression that I had never seen a dead opossum. Dead animals of all species litter America's highways, and Iowa is full of both highways and dead animals. It's just that this opossum was different!

It was on one of our field trips for Field Biology in the spring of 1988 that I acquired this reputation. Road kills were a common sight in the spring, and our class would make a game of identifying the remains. Someone would spot the offensive remains of flattened fauna on the road and cry out "Road kill!" Our instructor would promptly respond, "Identify!" and this would cause everyone to scramble across the van to peer out the window so as not to make a fool of him or herself by incorrectly identifying the remains. Opossums seemed to be the easiest to identify and the most frequently encountered. In fact, we felt like we were acquiring an expertise in identifying road kills, so when we spotted some remains at the bottom of the hill, we were rather nonchalant about the fact that it was an opossum. But our instructor was more observant. His reaction

bordered on disbelief as he announced, "It's a female opossum; there are embryonic opossums on the road!"

My reaction was instantaneous. "Stop! I want to take a picture," I cried. Avid photographer and naturalist that I am, this was an opportunity that I could not let pass. I would be able to photograph the female's pouch; but even more exciting, I would be able to see immature, baby opossums. True, they were dead, but there was opportunity that I had to take advantage of.

Unfortunately, the rest of my classmates were not so enchanted at the opportunity to observe a dead female opossum. In fact, the word "gross" was expressed by several of them. Considering the hostile attitude of the remainder of the class, our instructor did not stop and allow me to take my pictures. It was quite obvious that I was very disappointed, and when we arrived at the visitor's center at Saylorville Lake, he located me and asked whether I was going to go back after class and take a picture. I stubbornly said that I was; I just couldn't let this opportunity pass. His eagerness was obvious as he asked what it would cost him to have me bring him one of the embryonic opossums, preserved in alcohol, of course. My classmates in the immediate vicinity overheard this and deciding that our instructor and I were both gross, moved away before overhearing any more of this repulsive conversation. I didn't find his request the least bit unusual; after all, he is a biology teacher and if I were a teacher I would surely want an embryonic opossum for my specimen collection!

The short ride from the Saylorville Lake visitor center to the DMACC campus seemed to take an eternity. I was so excited about going back to photograph the opossum and obtain a specimen for my instructor that I was not immediately aware of my classmates' attitude. I finally realized that they did not want to hear any more about dead female

opossums. So it should not have come as a surprise to me that none of my friends from class wanted to go with me. But it did. Their attitude and lack of enthusiasm might have hurt my feelings, but it didn't deter me from my mission.

The closer I came to the place where we had seen the opossum the more excited I became. But I was also very apprehensive. It had been over an hour since we had first observed the opossum, and there was quite a bit of traffic on that road. Despite being windy, it was a nice spring day and people were outside enjoying themselves. But all those cars were further obliterating my little opossums!

In order to avoid being a safety hazard, I parked my car in a small, grassy area off the road and walked the rest of the way to where the opossum was. People in Iowa are very friendly; almost every car and truck stopped to ask me whether I needed a ride or help in some way. I thanked them very politely but said, no, that I was fine. I did, however, repress an urge to tell them not to run over my opossums. I wonder if they would have been as friendly if they had known what I was going to do.

When I finally reached the opossum, I knelt down to study the situation. Most of the baby opossums had been run over and could not be saved for specimens. As cars approached, they would slow down before passing by me. I don't know if they were slowing down to avoid hitting me or to stare at me in horror; I didn't even bother looking up. Just as I was getting ready to take some photographs a car stopped. I didn't even bother looking up; if they wanted to go up the hill they could simply go around me. But the car didn't move. I finally looked up in irritation to see one of the ladies in my class getting out of her car. She had to see for herself if I was really going to do this. Yes, I was, and I even managed to find two respectable specimens for my instructor.

It took several weeks for my classmates to talk to me again. They probably lived in fear that I would mention the opossum or try to show my slides to them. It was terribly frustrating for me because I wanted to share this exciting discovery with everyone, but no one wanted to listen. Fortunately, I had someone in another class who was very eager to hear about my opossum.

In my photography class was a young man who had considered being a science major while in college, and we were always talking about biology during our breaks. He didn't think I was strange. In fact, he thoroughly enjoyed hearing about my opossums and thought my slides were terrific. However, I didn't notice how much of an interest my photography instructor took in my little story until I needed to do some extra lab work about a month later.

I didn't want a poor grade on my photography project, so I decided to spend an extra night in the lab. The only night available was on the night that the advanced class met. They had a very small class so our instructor did not mind people from his beginning classes coming in for extra lab work. That evening several other students from my class were also there and we chatted among ourselves. When one of them called me by name, one of the girls in the advanced class stopped and looked at me. She asked me if I was the one with the pictures of the dead opossum. How embarrassing! Did the whole world know what I had done! I am quite sure that I am not the first person to take pictures of a dead animal, but I think I'm beginning to be the most famous. It seems that our photography instructor was so amused by my opossum story that he told all of his photography classes.

Well, it seems that my reputation not only follows me, but precedes me. Even now it is not uncommon for Leslie to come to work and start out a conversation with the phrase, "Yesterday I saw a road kill and I thought about you."



Crime and Absolution

Nanette L. Host
Composition II

Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa. The procession of penitents moved another step forward as each name was recited from the litany of cases to be heard that day. Their heads were bent and voices lowered in tones of supplication. "How do you plead?" asked the judge. A soft "guilty" was usually the reply. I was immediately mesmerized by the solemn process and intrigued by its similarities to the function of the Church.

Unlike other court procedures where the wheels of justice are slow and laborious, the traffic court operated like a well-oiled turnstile. As I watched, a steady current of plaintiffs and defendants worked their way through the cogs of the judicial system.

The courtroom was 45 feet long and perhaps 20 feet deep. The atmosphere was silent, sober, and contemplative in contrast to the adjacent vestibule where police officers stood casually talking among themselves--sharing a joke, smoking cigarettes.

The collection of people in the courtroom was ecumenical--men in jeans, slacks and sweaters, women in jogging fleece and others in dark, three-piece suits. Many of them were hunched over under the weight of winter coats or worry. All races, classes, creeds, and ages were represented. I could sense their tension as they awaited their turn before their confessor. They conversed in clipped and quiet whispers while a bailiff circulated through the room loudly calling out the name "Ms. Concepcion." Her voice echoed off the water-stained ceiling along with the harsh fluorescent light onto the rows of seats and their occupants.

Six columns of pews marched, in parallel, across the length of the courtroom. They were golden-oak

hard and polished. The carpet beneath them had a coarse, sackcloth texture. It was a rusty, earthen brown--drab, serviceable. A small boy in the back row practiced fidgeting on his seat while his father stood in judgment.

"Your drinking seems to impair your eyesight, sir!" boomed Judge Louis Anania from his bench. The elevated bench was situated at the front and in the center of the room. The balding, middle-aged gentleman seated behind it was vested in black robes. He was short, a meat and potatoes man. He gave the impression of being shrewd and street savvy, a no-nonsense kind of guy. His bench was just as unpretentious. It was flanked by the standards of the State of Iowa and the United States. A water cruet, glass, and three Iowa Code books were its only accouterments.

During the course of the afternoon I watched as the judge heard the parade of oaths, confessions and denials. He would nibble on the stem of his glasses as he discerned fact, chastised, dictated penance, ordered restitution and administered benevolence. Sometimes, when the "facts" of the case were too incredible to believe, he'd roll his eyes or smile slyly. Then Anania would administer swift justice, "Guilty," he'd roar as he banged the gavel down hard.

The traffic court docket pivoted around several strategically placed calendars and clocks. The judge and his staff did not move or commit to anything without consulting them. The wheels of justice were kept on a tight schedule.

"Is Ms. Concepcion in the courtroom?" the bailiff called out again from her desk in the far corner of the room. There was no reply and she turned back to confer with the city attorney standing at her desk. I heard the attorney instruct the bailiff to request that the judge issue a bench warrant for Ms. Concepcion. "Failure to appear," she said. "Twice."

The bailiff scribbled a note and reseated herself behind the avalanche of bureaucratic paper on her

desk. Dressed in winter-white sweater and dark slacks, she leaned back in her seat and neatly tucked her legs up underneath her--Indian style. She would remain there until called upon to perform her duties as acolyte. Her job description must have included coffee, tea, and cocoa preparation as well as the dispensing of aspirin, as evidenced by the paraphernalia on a small table next to her desk.

The court reporter was rhythmically plunking away at her steno machine recording, verbatim, all the proceedings of the day. She was well dressed, efficiency incarnate. Her eyes were always fixed on the person speaking as if she was trying to anticipate and transcribe their thoughts as well as their words.

"Did you observe any approaching traffic?" was the question posed to the young man in a gold and maroon letter-jacket. Mary Laughlin, the attorney for the city, referred to her notes constantly during the proceedings. Her appearance (petite and soft-spoken) belied her ability. She was selective in the way she phrased her questions. She would wait, patiently, for the answer that she probably already knew. The young woman had a sage's understanding of body language. She would overtly watch the sometimes disconcerted defendant as he related his version of the story or as he tried to formulate plausible answers to her questions. She was ever watchful for any hesitating or camouflaging of the facts. Each of her questions revealed a succession of truths as well as a few distorted facts. On this particular day, Ms. Laughlin won all three of the cases I observed.

The procession continued on through the afternoon. I left before all of the brethren had met their judge and received penance and absolution for their transgressions. As I was preparing to leave the courtroom, a young woman standing before the deliberating judge, let out a not-too-well stifled giggle.

It had been evident that she was upset about her involvement in the courtroom proceedings. She had worked herself into a slightly agitated state. It didn't subside until the judge pronounced her not guilty. I thought, as I made my exit, of how this traffic court was like a church--it even had the nervous funeral giggles of children.



Monday Night at Ames Total Fitness Center

*Scott Eschbach
Composition II*

Monday night at the Ames Total Fitness Center, the place is hopping with action. A whirlwind of motion is before me as people move from exercise to exercise. Members walk in briskly, write their names on the sign up sheet and head for the locker rooms. A good mixture of young and old pass by wearing a colorful array of leotards and sweat suits. Many different forms of exercises await the various members as they decide which kind of fitness equipment they wish to try. The center offers the latest in computerized exercise equipment available to its members and I decided to explore this new phenomenon.

Doug Canon, one of several fitness instructors on duty shows a new member, Deb Bachman, the latest in fitness equipment. The new equipment, powercise, operates from a central computer and offers the latest in weight-training and personalized coaching. Deb has an ID code to activate the computerized exercise machine and when entered, to her surprise, the computer begins talking and gives her instructions on how to lift. The computer tells her that she must keep up with the yellow pace light projected on the screen in front of her. When the exercise begins, Deb is tested by the machine to see how strong she is. Each time she does another repetition the computer adds more weight until every muscle in her body strains to keep up with the pace light and her face turns bright red while sweat pours off her body. After the workout, she gets a print out that shows how well she had done.

I asked Deb what she thinks of this new computerized fitness equipment. She replied: "It was fun, I won't

have to go looking for an instructor anymore because I'll always have the computer to show me how to work out."

Next to the powercise are two more high-tech pieces of fitness equipment, the rowing machine and stairmaster. Connie Sanchez, one of the instructors, demonstrates how the rower works. Strapping her feet to the foot mounts and setting her program at ten minutes with a rowing speed of thirty strokes per minute, the competition is about to begin. Competition you ask? That is right; it is you against the computer in a race to the finish line. On a computer screen, a boat identical to yours lines up at the starting line ready to go the full ten minutes at thirty strokes per minute whether you make it or not. To win you must be able to go ten minutes at better than thirty strokes per minute.

There is tension in the air when the starting gun is raised and they are off and rowing with Connie taking a slight lead. At the start of the stroke her body is curled almost crouch-like. The oar is mostly controlled at this point with the arm and shoulder muscles, including the triceps, deltoids, and trapezoid. As she pulls back, she begins to use her legs extensively, including quadriceps and hamstrings. In the middle of the drive, as she opens up her body position all the major muscle groups are involved, including the biceps, pectorals and gluteus maxima.

At the end of the drive, she pulls the oar handle toward her body, utilizing the backward body swing. It is only at this point that arm and back really take over the legs. Seventy percent of the rowing stroke is done with the legs.

When finished with the program, the rower is given a thirty second warm down period to catch her breath before standing up. It is also important to let the body recuperate to prevent dizzy spells when standing up. Connie said that she thought "this exercise comes as close to a full body workout as you

can get. I also like the competition of racing another boat because it pushes me to row harder."

The last piece of computerized fitness equipment is the stairmaster. The stairmaster is so named for the body motion you go through that resembles climbing stairs. The stairmaster has a metal frame with handles to hold onto and foot peddles to step on. A computer screen in front of you, gives you a choice of programs to select. John Parks, a member, gets on the stairmaster to show how it works. Each program adjusts the foot peddles to increase or decrease the speed of your up and down motion. Programs last fifteen minutes and John thinks that is long enough to wear a person out. At the end of his workout, John feels very tired and looks exhausted with sweat covering his body. John tells me that this is his favorite workout: "I like it because it doesn't put stress on my legs like running does and I work up a good sweat."

After observing the likes of powercise, stairmaster and the rowing machine, I have come to the conclusion that computerized fitness has found a home in the gym. As I walk away from this section of the gym, lines begin to form, waiting for a chance to see these popular pieces of high tech equipment.



The Waiting Room

Galle Linn
Composition II

I was here several months ago, I note sadly, glancing around the waiting room for the Intensive Care Unit. There are many overstuffed chairs filled with waiting family and friends for news of their loved ones. The atmosphere is homey and yet sad, for it is here that many people are coldly slapped with reality of the very sick and dying. Looking around I notice the numb expressions, the red eyes and sniffing noses. One woman has a handful of tissues in a death grip, constantly dabbing her eyes.

I don't know why I decided to visit the waiting room of a hospital, especially one as depressing as the ICU waiting room. I spent several weeks here myself waiting to visit my grandmother as she was engaged in dying. Perhaps my experience brings me closer to these distraught people, for an experience that hits home hard always leaves a gouging impression.

I seat myself quietly next to an older man who is leaning to one side in his chair against a young woman who appears to be his daughter. Her eyes are closed, but I can see the dark pockets forming under them in contrast to the doughy flesh of her face. They have been here for a long time waiting for what? News that a loved one is recovering or finally at peace? I swallow grimly and shift uncomfortably in my chair.

Across from me is a young man sprawled out on a faded couch, dozing somewhat peacefully. Maybe he has finally received good news and is now able to rest with ease. His head is propped on one of the pillows provided by the hospital and he's using a coat for a blanket. Tucked beside him is a paperback book, one I recognize as being rather dreary and depressing.

Proper reading material for an ICU waiting room? As I'm thinking this he grunts softly and shifts in his sleep and the pillow he's using falls to the floor. The waiting room attendant who happens to be walking by, a grandmotherly lady, reaches down and picks up the pillow. After fluffing it she places it next to the sleeping boy's head and continues on her way, dress swishing softly.

The attendant is swallowed by the huge doors which enter into the restricted area where the ICU patients lie in their private tombs, conscious and unconscious, with and without hope. Only certain hours are open for visitors: thirty minutes every other hour. Recalling how it was with my grandmother at the end, I remember how my mom seemed to live here in this waiting room when she wasn't with my grandma.

However, it is not completely depressing. In one corner a TV murmurs softly and several children are gathered around it doing puzzles and playing cards. Their presence, their giggles and quiet shouts are uplifting. Their being here represents the part of life that is innocent and fresh like a warm spring breeze. The young healthy children are so different from the species of man who lie in their beds attached to the machines and respirators, knowing the end and yet not knowing it. I smile secretly to myself as a little girl with golden curls spots me watching her and waves. I lift my hand in response but she is already turning to run to her father. And where is her mother, I think sickly, behind those doors?

Across the room a doctor is quietly talking to the woman with the tissues I first noticed when I came in the room. His face is expressionless, but hers is twisted and pinched and slightly flushed. After a moment her head collapses into her hands and she is weeping softly with weariness. Unable to take my eyes off this sad scene, and yet knowing how rude it

is to watch, I feel my stomach take a slow roll forward and tears well up in my eyes. The woman raises her head and I realize that her tears are for relief and she has a tired smile that touches both her mouth and her eyes. I feel the relief myself almost as if it has been telepathically sent across the room. Standing, I begin to gather my things, preparing to leave this chamber of mixed emotions caught between life and death.

Glancing around once more, I'm happy to know that not everyone who is forced to spend time here in the ICU waiting room is met with only sadness and the grim reality of death. Some people do recover and continue to live long, happy lives.



Dilemma

*Donna Adkins
Composition II*

How do things become so complicated? It begins so easily, pregnancy. Besides morning sickness, and other numerous inconveniences, you're in almost total control. That baby is totally surrounded by you, essentially you are one with the other. Eating, drinking, sleeping, almost everything you do revolves around protecting another life to the best of your ability. This intense feeling is somewhat offset by the realistic knowledge that you will, at some point, have to get these feelings under control in order to begin letting go the same life that has now become second nature for you to protect.

For months after birth you remain basically in control of your child, although sometime during that sixth week of 3 A.M. feedings it may feel like you've somehow lost some of that control. Slowly, you sense the beginning of independence. Hence, up go the safety gates, and closing of doors. This is another attempt to protect, and some say limit, a child from their environment. You let them play in the backyard alone, as long as you can still see them. Once when my daughter, Ashley, was fourteen months old she seemed to magically disappear. Searching frantically for fifteen minutes we found her contentedly playing in a neighbor's garage. Needless to say, a fence was erected shortly thereafter. Protecting, yes. Limiting, possibly. Necessary, relative, but to us definitely. Still, I felt good about protecting her. After all, it was part of my job. I loved her too much to take a risk concerning any part of her existence; maybe I liked the control I had because it was easier.

Reaching pre-school age involved another burst for independence. Ashley wanted to play with her

friends down the street, and walk, by herself, to pre-school which was two blocks away. Although I preferred her in the backyard, feigning enthusiasm I walked with her the first few days until I felt confident she knew the way. This signified one small step in the process of her independence, and of my letting go. Both processes were far from complete. Although I did let Ashley think she was walked alone, there was still a period of time that I remained at a discreet distance as an observer. Things were working well for both of us. Ashley was feeling little flutters of freedom, and I had loosened my grip a little more.

We spent some of that summer before kindergarten practicing walking routes to her elementary school. I'd been slowly adjusting myself for this big event. Walking two blocks to pre-school was one thing, but a mile to the elementary school seemed much different. Each new milestone cries out for more freedom. Necessary, albeit difficult, you've got to keep pushing that child on and away. I knew Ashley felt she could handle anything, but many times I saw my five-year-old differently than she.

I'd been through this first day of school before, but somehow it had never gotten easier. I knew she was excited about school; I was excited for her, although something inside still wanted to hold on to her tightly just to make sure everything went alright for her.

The first week of school quickly blended into the second. Suddenly, many things changed. It was a beautiful day, September 17. Ashley had wanted to walk to school with two of her friends; I half-heartedly agreed, reminding her to please be very careful. She looked at me with that new found decisiveness and replied, "Don't worry Mom, I am careful." I found I wasn't overly concerned because I knew she was right; she was careful. I was feeling good about how both of us were adjusting to all day school, and the letting go part seemed to be becoming more natural

also. Little did I realize that that short conversation we had as she left for school would be the last time I would hear her voice for almost three months.

A few minutes later the telephone rang. Recognizing the voice as belonging to the school secretary I assumed a book had been left home, yet again. I couldn't have been more wrong. She was calling to tell me that Ashley, my newly independent kindergartner, has been involved in an auto accident on her way to school, and was being taken to Blank Children's Hospital. My hands were shaking almost uncontrollably, my mind racing so fast that it seemingly took forever to get in touch with people I needed to tell. I don't recall much about the trip to the hospital other than I'm positive I exceeded the speed limit, and equally sure I didn't really care.

Later after the initial shock of seeing Ashley in the Intensive Care Unit, I realized how little control I really have over her life. I felt completely helpless. Nothing I could say or do would change the situation. I'd tried so hard to always protect her. How did things become so complicated? Had I failed her? Maybe if I'd have refused to let her walk that particular morning this wouldn't have happened. Maybe if the teenager driving the car would have been watching the road, rather than his girlfriend, he wouldn't have run over my daughter. My mind was filled with maybes and other ambiguous thoughts.

I had seven long, agonizing weeks in which to contemplate many ideas while Ashley remained in a coma. I wondered many times what justification there must be for her to be living on the edge. I finally decided there doesn't have to be any. After all, don't we all live on the edge never knowing for sure when we may fall off? I also wondered if encouraging independence was all it was meant to be. It was so much easier when she was smaller, when you could just put up that security gate. Actually, we can only

protect someone as much as they're willing to let us, and we can never protect totally, not even ourselves.

Protecting and letting go sound so different, but are they really? While letting go is hard, protecting is maybe never possible to begin with. And do we ever really let go? Soviet parapsychologist, Dr. Paul Nauman, concluded from research tests that "biological ties between mother and child are incontestable." It seems it's as complicated to let go as it is to protect. Does it get easier to protect less, and let go more? Maybe it does, but if something shakes up your life as this did mine, you may find yourself having to start that letting go process all over again, one step at a time. Unlike many things that seem to get easier the second time, letting go seems to remain equally as hard. Then again, no one ever said being responsible for someone was easy. And how does responsibility enter into this? Aren't protecting and letting go big responsibilities that we assume as parent? Sometimes they seem almost bigger than some of us can handle. Somewhere it does become more complicated trying to draw the line between protecting someone and being able to let them go. Maybe the complication is in deciding if a line between them really does exist. It could be that protection is a form of letting go. Having the right answers, or even knowing which answers might work for given situations are hard to find. Too much protection, too little protection, too much freedom, too little freedom are dilemmas that are always there. The hardest part of all may not even be finding the answers to those questions, but simply living with the decisions you make.



Editors' Note: The following two essays, "Fall Leaf Colors" and "Unnerving Hiccups" are written for a younger audience. See the essay assignment below.

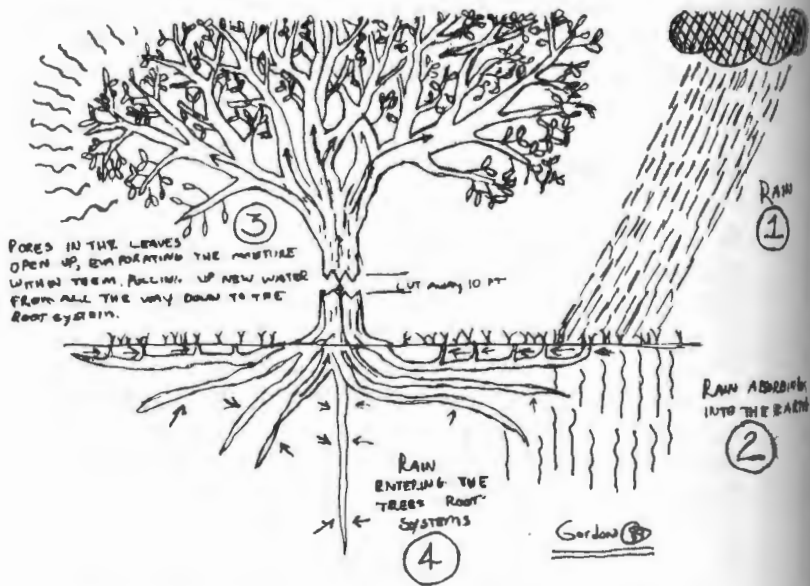
Essay Assignment

Research a familiar phenomenon like ocean waves, thunder, eye blinks, sneezing, sleep or dreams, wind, fall leaf colors, TV reception. Explain this phenomenon to a much younger reader (ten to twelve years old) who has never examined it but has only noticed it. Consider explanatory strategies like analogy, scenario, comparison/contrast, and definition. Try to engage young readers' interest in the phenomenon (Axelrod, Cooper, 1987, p. 256).

Fall Leaf Colors

*Steve Gordon
Composition II*

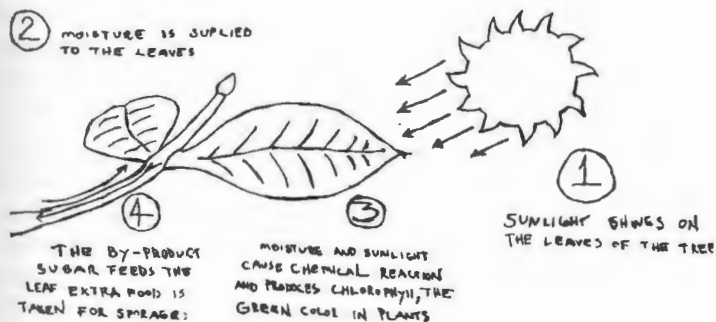
Nature paints one of the most spectacular pictures. As summer passes to the cooling weather of fall, mother nature picks up her brush. From a pallet full of yellow, orange and crimson pigments, she paints a brilliant panoramic scenery we are all familiar with. Fall leaf colors. Deciduous trees loose their leaves each year. They radiate a signature of brilliant colors in their process from life to death. Mother nature doesn't actually pick up a paint brush and paint fall leaf color. Nature does though, cause the change of the colors of leaves. But, in order to know how a leaf is able to change color you must first start with a tree at the end of summer with it's leaves still green.



Trees are living organisms. They have a circulation system somewhat like people do, carrying water through its body instead of blood. Although trees do not have a heart to pump its life giving fluids throughout itself, nature does provide a way. So, how can a tree absorb water from the soil, into its root system, then transport this water up the tree to nourish the leaves high atop the canopy? The leaves themselves are the key. Leaves have pores in them just like the pores in our own skin. During those warm summer days our pores open up and we perspire moisture from our bodies to help keep us cool. Trees also need protection from the heat. The pores in the leaves open up and moisture is evaporated out of the warm leaves pulling cooler water that's held inside the branches. The branches are connected to limbs, the limbs are connected to the main stem (trunk) and the stem is connected to the tree's root system. So by those thousands of leaves opening their pores, moisture is

pulled up through the entire tree. The same process takes place when the tree or leaves are thirsty and need a drink of water to keep from wilting. Instead of saying a tree is perspiring, a tree is known to transpire, (BRIDGEMAN, 1976 p. 12).

This brings us to know how and why leaves start out being green. This is known as the food making process of a tree. Once again the leaves play an important role. The leaf is full of moisture. When the sun shines its light on the leaf a chemical reaction takes place a chemical called Chlorophyll is produced. This reaction is called photosynthesis. The by-product of this reaction produces food for the tree in the form of carbohydrates or sugar. This is what feeds the tree. Any reserve food is passed down to the root system and stored for later use. Chlorophyll is what gives all plants its green color, (WHITTINGHAM, 1966 pg. 89).



The summer season changes to the cooler weather of fall and the inner activity of the tree slows down. The tree doesn't get as much moisture and the sun doesn't shine as much during the day. The food making process begins to stop. The tree starts to go

dormant. The Chlorophyll being produced in the leaves slows down so the bright green color of the leaves begins to fade. The fall leaf re-coloring process has begun. As the green color fades away the natural pigments that is already present in the leaf starts to shine through. Different trees have different dominate color pigments in their leaves. From this we get our red, yellow and orange leaves.

If you take these different trees and blanket them over hills or through valleys the result is the magnificent beauty we all can enjoy. Fall leaf colors.

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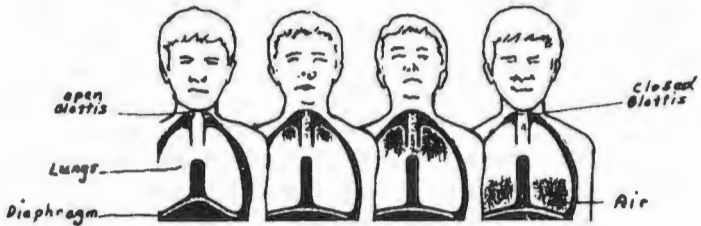
UNNERVING HICCUPS

*Nancy Kay Turner
Composition II*

Most of us have experienced the annoying, and often times embarrassing affliction of hiccups. It hits without warning, disrupting our breathing and speaking patterns, causing our bodies to jerk like the dancing of Mexican jumping beans. As if that isn't enough to cramp our style, the jerking is accompanied by ridiculous croaking sounds from our throats. There are several factors which explain the physical process and possible cures of this phenomenon. Knowing about them won't make these episodes any more pleasant, but it may help us shorten the attacks, and make them more interesting to think about.

Hiccups, also referred to as hiccoughs or singultus, are quick, unexpected, and uncontrolled diaphragm contractions (Miller, Keane, 1978, p. 469). The diaphragm is a flexible organ located directly below the lungs. Its main purpose is to expand and relax with a constant motion to help digest and empty the contents of the stomach (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1975, p. 1004). Irritation of the vagus nerve, which sends digestive information to the larynx (voice box), pharynx (part of the digestive track), and soft-palate (in the back of the mouth) (Shafer, Sawyer, McCluskey, Beck, Phipps, 1975, p. 857), causes the diaphragm to contract. The phrenic nerve, which supplies information to and from the diaphragm, also causes this reaction. As the diaphragm quickly contracts, it pushes out on the ribs, allowing sudden expansion of the lungs. This forces us to suck-in air to fill the gaps. As the air begins to enter the throat, the glottis (a protective device located between the vocal cords) closes. When the glottis shuts, it causes a vibration

on the vocal cords, which makes a hiccup sound (Rand, McNally, 1980, p. 59) (Reader's Digest, 1987, p. 114). In rare cases, the sound can be extremely loud. On March 25, 1769, a man from England had a case of hiccups that could be heard the distance of over a mile (McWhirter, 1980, p. 43).



Most hiccups last for a few minutes and quit on their own, but there are some severe cases in which they keep coming back, or persist for days or longer. Charles Osborne holds the world record with an attack lasting for at least fifty-eight years (McWhirter, 1980, p. 43). Prolonged hiccups are more easily traced to specific causes than normal hiccups. These causes included diseases like uremia (a general biochemical body disorder), epidemic encephalitis (brain inflammation), diaphragmic pleurisy (restriction of lung movement), pneumonia (a respiratory infection), and alcoholism (alcohol addiction). Other sources of irritation are bladder trouble, bowel diseases, stomach problems, pregnancy, ingestion of hot or spicy food or liquid, and fast eating. Hiccups may also follow abdominal surgery, or they could be emotionally induced (Berkow, 1987, pp. 1043, 1047) (Miller, Keane, 1978, p. 469).

There are many mythical cures for hiccups, which have been handed down through generations, including drinking out of the opposite side of a glass,

contemplating the next hiccup, being frightened to scare them away, eating a clove of garlic, arousing a sneeze, tugging on the tongue, holding a breath, and breathing in and out of a paper bag. Most of them seem silly, but breath holding and breathing through a paper bag help to increase carbon dioxide and decrease oxygen in the blood. This signals the brain that there is an imbalance, which in turn sends a message to the respiratory system that deep breathing will correct the problem. The carbon dioxide is then eliminated, causing the diaphragm to return to normal (Miller et al, 1978, p. 469). It is recommended that the paper bag is used for five minutes and not used for the next five, repeating until the hiccups are gone. Too much carbon dioxide could result in convulsions (an uncontrollable seizure) and a state of unconsciousness. It's best to stop if feeling dizzy (Shafer et al, 1975, p. 228).

For serious persistent hiccups, a process called nerve blocking may be used. A shot of 1% procaine (novocaine), an anesthetic, is injected into the phrenic nerve. This blocks the nerve impulses that lead to the diaphragm. If all else fails, the nerve may be crushed or cut for relief (Shafer et al, 1975, p. 228) (Webster, 1986, pp. 470, 545).

From now on, when we are interrupted by an annoying hiccup attack, we can try to think of what we might have done to cause the diaphragm contractions. Maybe we gulped down a cup of hot chocolate, or ate a spicy taco. Chances are there is nothing seriously wrong. It's just a reminder that our internal warning system is in good working order.

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"Mother's" Revolt and New Promise for the Future

Christine Richey
Major American Writers II

Mary Wilkins Freeman's short story "The Revolt of 'Mother'" was probably dismissed as a local color piece by the predominately male corp of critics at the time it was published. This judgement ignores the seriousness of the story; it is a story with a strong moral message. Attempts to trivialize the message miss the universality of the ideas in the story.

What makes "The Revolt" more substantial than a typical piece of local color fluff is the emphasis on the relationship between the characters of Mother and Father rather than the sights and personalities of the people in Freeman's part of New England. The subtle rules and manners governing the relationship gives the story an emotional rather than a physical landscape. The value of this story is not found in accurate reproductions of dialect or in detailed descriptions of scenery. Freeman instead wanted people to see themselves in the characters of Mother and Father and make them think about how the roles between men and women work.

At the beginning of the story Mother and Father have very narrowly defined roles for themselves. Mother is unhappily meek and obedient. Father is so gruff and private that he has the rest of the family working for goals they are not even informed of. Father is very much the boss. Most of Father's speech is either commanding somebody to do something or answering questions on things everybody should have been informed of to start with. He repeatedly answers Mother's questions with a terse, "I ain't got nothing to say." Freeman describes his voice as "almost as inarticulate as a growl." And the

growl is what Mother hears constantly; "it was her most native tongue." Mother's role as meek and subservient is supported by the description of her on page 715 until Freeman writes about Mother's eyes, "eyes, fixed upon the old man, looked as if the meekness had been the result of her own will, never the will of another." She chose to be meek because it was easier than confronting her husband. It was also what society had taught her, but it was a role that was not natural to her. Even in this early passage Freeman is foreshadowing the revolt that is going to happen later.

Mother's learned meekness is gradually overpowered by the need to do what she thinks is right. She is sick of living and working in her tiny little house. She is sick of her husband not keeping his promise of a new house. Mother sheds her meekness and undergoes a monumental even Biblical transformation from one of the meek to one of the mighty. The use of the phrase, forty years, is mentioned first when she tells her husband her feeling about living in a house she considered substandard for the entire forty years of their marriage. She repeats the phrase when speaking to the minister about the time she has been a faithful member of the local congregation. Both of these conversations bring to mind long suffering and great loyalty. The reference to forty years perhaps is an allusion to the Jewish Exodus out of Egypt. Sarah Penn has also waited forty years for the new home she was promised so many years earlier. In order to get what has been promised to her she must exhibit a new assertiveness. Sarah's assertiveness requires that she speaks her mind, but still Sarah shows respect for her husband by taking his favorite pie and then later fixing his favorite meal. I believe the action of Mother mirrors the attitudes felt by Freeman. The author probably felt a woman's role was to simultaneously think for herself and nurture her

family. Freeman's subtle assertion is that women should have legal right and should be treated as equals within their marriage. Mother needs to move her family in order to provide her daughter with a fair chance in her own impending marriage. Mother knows that Nanny is not as physically strong as she is and would not survive a marriage like hers.

Freeman while treating Mother as a kind of hero in this story does not cast Father as the villain. Even though I did not find Father particularly likeable throughout most of the story, he did redeem himself at the end when he does not demand that the family move back into the old house. Instead he cries and says, "I hadn't no idee you was so set on't as all this comes to." The humble statement is the closest thing to an apology Mother is ever going to get. The story ends with a real feeling of hope. If Father accepted Mother's decision about the house maybe he would be receptive to smaller changes. I am hopeful that Mother had conquered the fear she had of asserting herself and that Father had conquered the stubbornness that was isolating him from the rest of his family. Freeman's story ends with a marriage and a family that is happier and more emotionally healthy than it was in the beginning.



"Mainly The Truth"

Jeff McDowell
Major American Writers II

It has often been said that first impressions are the most profound--and the most lasting. And for myself, so it is in the case of Mr. Huck Finn. It is my opinion that the very first paragraph in the book truly sets the stage for the entire work. It tells us who the main character will be, a bit about the author, its predecessor (THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER), sets a humorous tone, and brings the reader into the "mind-set" necessary for the novel--one of a relaxed, down-home manner of speaking.

Mark Twain uses the first paragraph to establish a bond of communication between the main character-narrator and the audience. Phrases such as: "...without you have read..." and "...that ain't no matter..." allows the reader to see that this is not going to be about a highly educated person. Instead, the tone is one of a "country bumpkin." I believe it helps to appeal to almost every type of reader's desire for the seemingly carefree days of our own youth. We know quickly that this will be a novel that a reader needn't a Masters Degree to understand. Also, the audience learns that they are being addressed in a personal, conversational fashion by the narrator. Much more effective in a book such as this than it might be in, say, THE GREAT GATSBY.

It is interesting that Twain mentions his own name in the first paragraph, as the author of the previous TOM SAWYER. However, this is not to pat himself on the back, but to set the tone for the somewhat irreverent humor in the book. Everything from religion (pp. 132-133), to Shakespeare (pp. 137-138) is fair game for Twain.

With a "wink" at the audience, Twain allows Huck to mention that: "...he told the truth, mainly. There was things he (Twain) stretched, but mainly told the truth." (page 1)

Twain's "wink" early on seems to indicate that he is not viewing this book as Holy Scripture--but there will be an emphasis on some fun within the pages.

Twain uses the first paragraph to establish some history or background for the novel in referring to the previous TOM SAWYER. He recaps his previous work in a thumbnail fashion in the following paragraph. I feel he is able to establish some credibility for the Huck character--and Tom's later appearance in the book--by their use in previous Twain literature. Since these characters have "lived" before, there will be trends set up in the previous book that we can expect to continue. Also, one can expect further development of the characters.

It is quickly conceded by the author that the reader may not have read, or even heard, of the previous book. Twain might well be attempting to put those readers (such as myself) at ease. His acknowledgement lets the reader know that they will still be able to enjoy and understand--even without having read SAWYER.

As mentioned earlier, the use of language in the first paragraph, through its humorous tone, is meant to relate to the reader in such a way that the "river" people likely did converse in that era. It becomes obvious, for example, that education was not highly prized by the people of that era--especially Huck's Pap: "...and if I catch you about that school I'll tan you good. First thing you know you'll get religion too." (page 28)

Although perhaps not deliberately, THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN is an important historical document to allow us in the 1980's and beyond to see how those on the river

thought and conversed with each other. What they found humor in, what their prejudices were. And the use of humor (including poking fun at yourself as Twain did), is a timeless way of breaking down the walls between author and reader.

By using these literary devices, we are drawn into the "mindset" of the novel--and so are able to use the later examinations of such topics as human relationships, slavery, white/black friendships and antagonisms to almost surprise the reader. I would liken what Twain has done to sugar coating medicine. Emotion about these critical issues were even hotter in the author's era than in our own. Perhaps if he had adopted a more straightforward manner in dealing with these subjects--he might not have been heard at all.

On a more personal note, rarely have I been as influenced by an opening paragraph as with this one. The tone used made me somehow know I was going to enjoy the book. (Not having read TOM SAWYER I wondered how much I would be able to follow--but I was quickly put at ease.)

In particular, I enjoyed his reference to himself as writing: "...mostly a true book, with some stretchers..." (page 1)

How many other classic authors can poke fun at themselves--and their writing--as well as other things? Here was a man that would have made a great guest on the Letterman show. Or better yet, host of his own show...

In selecting my passage, I must admit I was a little concerned that picking the first paragraph of the first book we read might be seen as a "copout", but no more. Twain uses it as the first piece of track on a journey that takes us down the mighty Mississippi, and to prepare us for the controversial topics that journey will bring us face to face with. And that is the truth. Mainly.



An Ugly Bird

*Susan Woods
Composition II
Draft In Process*

Someone is slowly working their hands over my form. Moist hands, molding me. Pinching me here, stretching me there. Creating a "me" from a useless lump of clay. I begin to explore this structure I have been given, filling up this new cast that I have become. But to say I have become this is wrong, for it would imply a me as something else before I had become this, and before this I was not. Indeed, before this very instant there was not I, and now I am! But what am I? Investigating this new physique, I came to know that what I am is a ceramic bird. My creator has endowed me with a noble looking head and a beak to announce myself with. My eyes, alert, search the heavens as I sit with my wings folded about me in a peaceful repose.

Suddenly, gods being cruel and inclined to an occasional prank, my wings are reformed in an outstretched fashion, and I am left to dry. Since that day, I no longer grace my perch with tranquility. Why would a creator give wings to a bird that could never fly? All it will ever know is the longing to be borne up by the wind, lifted skyward - hunger for the freedom of soaring, for the sensation of a cloud.

At first the realization of one's own creation is exhilarating. All things are new. Hope is ever before you. All dreams are attainable. Nothing seems more powerful than the newly created being. Nothing has more expectations, more confidence, more aspirations than that which has never failed. Nothing is more naive.

Failure awaits all creations. The perfect cannot endure in this world for nothing remains static. The

mountains themselves are worn down by the invisible breath of wind. I too am worn down by that which I long for but cannot have. Perhaps its not the wings which plague me. After all, were they not also wings when they were folded about me? Wings are only that, what they are and nothing more. They are the same now as they were then, and yet I am not the same.

What is it then, if not these wings, that persecutes me so? I never yearned for flight while nesting, ball-like, in my blissful unexplored world. It is the desire that haunts me. This lust for gliding silently on a spring breeze, or of battling headlong a tropical gale to reach the eye of the storm. There I would spend my day circling, and dipping, and climbing while the thunderheads wreaked havoc on less cunning birds than I who were grounded by torrents of rain. When the danger had passed, and the storm blown out to sea, I would strut my accomplishment, stopping occasionally to preen and prim myself, ever watchful of any threat that would send me sailing over treetops in escape.

As evening fell, I would take to the skies once again, flitting between the long shadows of eventide and the last streams of sunlight until I could navigate no longer. Then I would roost and wait for blessed sleep when I could dream of mounting the atmosphere. With the sun far above me and the world far below me - alone - I would reign the heavens.

An Ugly Bird

Susan Woods
Final Draft

I'm sitting at the large oak table of my sixth grade art class scrutinizing the lump of clay that has become my universe. Slowly I work my hands over the lifeless void, pulling from it my creation, my bird. Its noble head alert, its eyes looking for the skies it has yet to soar. With its wings pulled into itself, it sits on my desk. I look upon it and I see that it is good. And there was evening and there was morning, and my bird lived for a day.

Then, just as Eden was refuge to its own demise, the art teacher approached as a serpent in the wilderness and pulled the wings from my lovely creature, replacing them at a perpendicular angle to its body, hissing at me, "Doesn't that look better? It looks as if it's flying now." My own attempt at creation, like the divine, fell short of perfection.

I now write my creations and with each attempt I approach that blank page with the hope of a sixth grader facing a lump of clay.

Why is it, I wonder, when you have witnessed the fruits of your imagination's wings being pulled from its body, do you ever care to try again? When your readers pull you writing apart phrase by phrase, letter by letter, red pencil mark by red pencil mark, where does the courage come from to take pen in hand and begin again? What is it that compels me? refreshes me? encourages me?

From the time a toddler first places block upon block, smiling gleefully at his construction beneath his mother's adoring eyes, we are all seeking that connectedness with another human being. Creators, like a lonely god, want to share themselves. I agonize over the choice of each word, writing to express

myself completely so to know the bond of human nature. It becomes not so much a question of wanting to write as of needing to write. Perhaps the writer is unable to contain his thoughts and emotions like the accountant or the engineer seem to do. Could it be a matter of physical limitations? My brain, being much too small, is filled with thoughts colliding like motorists on a sleet frosted highway. Writing sorts out the wreckage.

Giving substance to my emotions, I gain power over them. Knowing that someone shares my fears diminishes them. Explaining my joys amplifies them. When I write I do not seek the extremes of laughter or tears. Rather, I hope for the reader, a knowing smile that says "How true," a gleam in memory's eye that answers "Me too."

We not only strive for that nexus with our fellow man, in the act of creating, perhaps we are hoping to establish a link with the Master Creator. No, I think we hope to become Him. After all, doesn't the creation bring a sense of immortality to the creator? Can I hope to live on in the parts of me I leave laying around on eight and a half by eleven paper?

Through this process of bonding and linking, we search for the approval of our readers like a young girl who, caked with dirt, carries a mud-pie to her daddy and joyfully announces, "See what I made you?" I can imagine that on the seventh day, that day of rest, the Almighty cupped the orb, this Earth, in his celestial hands and, with a smile reserved for the Supreme, to the Heavenly Host exclaimed, "Look at My being, My art!" Perhaps my writing is as much of an image of me as we are the image of God.

And so, I attempt this joining of souls, either human or heavenly, only to fall short of the oneness hoped for. You see, creators are possessive and jealous of their creations.

I realize that Eve felt eating the forbidden apple would only improve the situation in paradise. My art

teacher, too, was merely being helpful. It should be mentioned here that Eve's assistance in Utopia resulted in mankind's fall from Grace; and it followed that my art teacher fell from my good grace as well. Criticism carries with it the risk of retribution. And so, when my husband takes his red marker, and with a heart full of good intentions, begins slashing my writing, the cuts he leaves in the paper seem to ooze its life force. Like a mother protecting her young, I can't bear to watch the violence. I rescue my work and nurture it back to health. My writing cannot serve two masters.

Why then, do I continue to write? Let me tell you what became of that bird made so long ago. That first attempt which failed so miserably. It is perched on a shelf in my father's house, nesting in a shrine of cobwebs in the attic. And, when my father is called to dwell in the house of his Creator, my bird shall sing its song in the recesses of his heart, for there is something about a Father that can cherish even an ugly bird. From this comes the courage to try again.



Force Without Form

Curtis Bentley
Composition I
Draft In Process

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delving my mind go with drift
there is not a heavy eye behind.

A few days after the services I returned to the cemetery.

Standing over his grave looking down still numb with disbelief I

began to notice how peaceful and natural the grave looked. ^{startling} ^{there beside the} ^{camp}
~~ironic~~ to the torrent of emotions that preceded it. ~~The camp~~

fresh earth, the blossoming spring flowers and the cheerful
~~songs of the birds singing in the newly leafless~~ ^{oaks} oaks served to
mirror the look on his face as ^{the ever swallows} ^{him up} he ~~slipped~~

Living in rural Iowa in a town ^{small} called Coon Rapids,
~~population 1500~~, as a child can virtually be a never ending
wonderland, but at the same time having no brothers or sisters
around to share it with could make it all seem slightly drab and
lonely.

Bill Eickman was to become my substitute for no ~~brothers or~~
~~sisters~~. ~~Bill lived a couple of miles away over a large hill~~
which had separated us until we both discovered and mastered
bicycles.

Bill was the son of a hard working farmer, and by the time
we had met he was already doing a good chunk of the ^{daily} chores. ~~His~~
~~was of German descent who tanned very easily and got to be quite~~
~~dark through the course of a summer~~. His brothers often teased
him about being their family's little nigger boy.

Throughout ^{our} elementary school ^{days} we were inseparable. We
stayed at each others houses whenever our parents would
grudgingly allow it. Bill was loaded with the same piss and
vinegar as I and we had adventure after adventure. ^{From} ~~From~~ riding
hogs, ~~skinning our knees on gravel roads, exploring~~ ^{exploring} ^{unfamiliar} ^{terrain} ^{as just} ^{chasin} each other
we never seemed to stop having fun.

terrain

Every night
Mr. Devereaux of course
Car 12 *find*
~~Richard and Devereaux~~ ~~chases~~, we always had some way of turning it
into a game. One smotheringly hot afternoon we took a hike to a

nearby river and I found out something about Bill that I never
expected, ~~he was deathly afraid of the water.~~ *he never*
expected, he was deathly afraid of the water. It was not
slow motion, it was Bill just swim slowly in the bank.
~~could be seen to cross the tranquil deep water~~
~~with any of the usual splashy and he had a long beam~~ *of a boat, deathly afraid*
of the water and he was swimming in the bank of the river.
Needless to say, we didn't do a lot of swimming together.

and *as the years passed and other things became more important*
As the years passed and other things became more important
than exploring valleys and hills, I forgot about his phobia of
water. Bill began to talk alot less about farming and more
about his dreams of traveling and seeing what the world had to
offer. He decided and redecided to be several things ~~except~~ *anything else for a*
farmer, ~~but~~ *Car 12* there was always the shadow over head, and even then
I think he knew he was destined to be a farmer no matter how
much he protested or denied it.

During Our freshman year after school had let out early, we were
riding around in his truck just killing the ~~extra~~ hours before
Bill had to do chores. Turning the music down but still
shouting over it, "I can't wait to get out of this hole." I
began, "I can't believe people actually live their whole lives
here without a ~~care~~ *Car* of what else life ~~has~~ to offer."

"Yeah," shaking his head. "This place is enough to choke a
person to death."

We pulled up to a stop sign and he turned to me with this
look of absolute seriousness. "You know I've got generations of
family here, all were farmers and most are still remembered by
someone as never intending to become farmers. I'm scared

Curtis. I don't think I can handle the idea of it. This damn place will bring my mind to an early grave."

"You can always leave, Bill," trying to let him know he had an ~~escape~~ ^{chance}. "You've got lots of brains, hell, you're one of the smartest people I know and God knows you've got the backbone."

"You don't understand, it goes too deep and strong to just pack up and leave. It's as though I belong to this land. Its very fields and pastures are the bars that hold me here. My family are relying on me to carry on as the farmer of their land and that's enough to lock the door. It happened to them by their families and it's going to happen to me."

As he pulled away from our prolonged stop he rebelliously stated, "I won't let this place trap me, I'll get out one way or another, you'll see" and he turned the music back up.

With the passing of our junior year Bill became an angry young man. I guess he began to lose faith in ever finding the key to unlock the legacy. His grades dropped and his consumption of alcohol and drugs began a steady climb. The Bill I knew who always seemed to have a direction suddenly adapted the attitude of "I don't care and it doesn't matter, ~~what~~ ^{what}?" By the first month of our senior year, Bill was being expelled from school for poor conduct to students and staff. At the end of our school year Bill had gotten into some real trouble stealing CB radios, not because he needed the money, but as he put it, "for something to do."

I was planning to move to Louisiana ^{to} ~~and~~ see what work I ^{by then}

"Are you here in town?"

I explained how I had just gotten back the night before, and quickly asked how he was.

"The same as always. I get up in the morning and go to bed at night, and nothing worth telling ever happens in between. ~~How about you, what are you doing today?~~" He hurried.

"Nothing, hadn't made any real plans."

"Great, you're floating the river with us this afternoon. I've rounded up a fourteen foot flat bottom boat and since the river is flooding it should be a great time. We'll take a few brews and see how far we can get."

"Who's all going?" I inquired

"Mike, Marty, and Monty are going to meet at the wooden

~~bridge at the old mill to meet us.~~

Mike, Marty, and Monty were all high school friends of ours who I would have liked to have seen anyway so I agreed to go.

It didn't occur to me until we were already afloat on the smaller river, which was back ~~fast~~, that Bill never learned to swim, and as far as I knew was still afraid of water, but at the time he showed no signs of it.

We had been on the water about thirty-five minutes and everyone was having a good time when we rounded a bend in the river and abruptly hit the branches of an overhanging tree, which was half engulfed by the flooding river. The branches caught the front of the boat and turned it sideways, as the whole boat rolled over everyone ^{leaped} for the bank. I heard Bill call

One afternoon Bill ^{phoned me up and suggest we get together with some food and float below river. By this time you see the river was ^{fairly} full. Confidently he said he thought the 14' flat bottom boat would be enough to handle it. Marty, Monty and I did one bring the bear so this should be a kick on time}

From Spring 1960

to Mike, who was closest ~~to me~~ just before I was plunged into the icy river.

God, I remember how cold that water was, it burned my skin and made me gasp for air. Marty and Monty had both made it to the bank, but I struggled a good ten yards from the bank in the churning currents. Mike had managed to get a hold of Bill and hold his head above the muddy waters. I heard Mike coaching Bill to hold on to him as Bill thrashed wildly to grasp Mike.

"I can't hold on," Bill cried, "Mike, I can't feel you, please help me, I can't swim!"

I was just ahead of them, a little closer to shore but still in the current, my limbs becoming numb from the freezing water, I knew ~~mine~~ ^{they} wouldn't be able to last much longer ~~with~~ ^{at hand}. There was a fallen tree protruding out into the current holding trash just for a few moments before the current sucked it under with a sickening hiss. ^{Reaching} I slammed up against it ^{but} before it pulled me under, I managed to grab a limb and pull myself up on it. Laying there exhausted, I looked up just as Mike caught the very outside limb of the tree. They stopped abruptly, but the current broke Bill away from Mike's grasp and ^{Mike} began to cry as he frantically tried to reach Bill before the current pulled him away. We could do nothing and as ^{the river} ~~Bill~~ began to ~~go~~ below the surface I got a good look at his face for the last time. A calm peaceful look was on his face, not a trace of panic, just a content peaceful look, one I'll never forget. Mike had pulled himself up on the branch and lay there with his face buried against it, crying and repeating over and over that

Bill was dead, Bill is dead.

I don't remember the next few ~~days~~ ^{days} very well. ~~I remember the funeral~~ ^{I remember the funeral fairly}
~~so I put it all together~~ ^{The only thing that reached inside}
~~was the awful sorrow of family and friends, everything else was~~ ^{so I put it all together Bill die}
~~oblivious.~~ ^{There was a large gathering and it was evident that}
~~The funeral was painful for everyone, but Bill~~ ^{the I wish even he would of retired}
~~had touched me - deep in the heart. Now everyone could~~
~~begin to forget.~~ ^{with the look should of dirt bills! His was complete.}

Reaching down I picked up a handful of the moist soil which covered his grave. I squeezed it tightly in my hand and it formed easily into a ball, the sign of good soil, Bill had once said. I began to recall what he had said about how he felt the land, the soil, when the bars that had held him here and now ~~would hold him forever.~~ ^{would hold him forever.} I thought about it ~~as he now rested in his grave~~ ^{as he now rested in his grave} ~~and I pondered about this idea. It began to become clearer to me, the pieces began to fit. I remembered how ^{in the beginning} ~~young~~ and his dreams and halve were strong and the bars seemed so weak and untamable. ^{How happy he was.} ~~He was a very happy and ambitious boy,~~ but as time passed and the bars became ~~more~~ ^{more} visible, more tangible, and his dreams ~~to~~ ^{to} just dreams, he became very ~~bored and~~ ^{bored and} apprehensive of ~~the~~ ^{the} life he could see ~~around him.~~ ^{around him.} ~~This~~ ^{The} boredom of the small town ways and lifestyle motivated him to create situations, to light up his dull prison, often times very foolishly and self-destructive. For one such as Bill who is rooted to something that cannot fulfill his needs, they are bound to perish as a tree clinging to a rocky cliff. I began to see he was not the only spindly, clutching tree in this town as~~

pretty a way of writing
 the only one I found with
 found in this

there were many. I had been offered a job in town at a place I had worked during school breaks. It was ~~the only~~ ^{the first company} the only company, in town, ~~and~~ ^{it} employed 75% of the people who lived here, including my parents. I can remember growing up how very few new faces arrived there, just kids from our high school who went to work there once they ~~had~~ ^{had} graduated. ~~The company employed generations of families.~~ I could see how ~~the~~ ^a town force without form had already started to seduce me. ~~I could see that this small country town was to a young man as heroin to an addict, and I realized that the longer I stayed, the harder it would be to leave.~~ ^{I began to think} ~~begin to feel uneasy~~

I brushed the dirt from my hands and turned back to my car. ~~I couldn't help but think about how this small town had nothing but wealth and freedom. I couldn't help but think that if only Bill knew he could leave, if only he had found his key, he would have still been alive.~~ ^{I couldn't help but think about how this small town had nothing but wealth and freedom.} Driving down the dusty gravel road from the cemetery, I began to feel cold and lonely, and completely out of place. Lying in the seat next to me was an issue of our hometown newspaper. I recognized the picture printed half way down the page as one of my classmates. The caption read "Joe Lunedon a California resident formerly from Coon had found that not all the big fish are in Iowa." Joe was holding a very large fish, standing knee deep in surf.

I then decided I couldn't take that job, I had friends in California I needed to see.

Force Without Form

*Curtis Bentley
Final Draft*

A few days after the services I returned to the cemetery. Standing over his grave looking down, still numb with disbelief, I began to notice how peaceful and natural the grave looked. It struck me as ironic to the torrent of emotions that preceded it. The damp fresh earth and the blossoming spring flowers all reminded me of how peaceful he looked as the swollen river engulfed him.

Letting my mind go, I drifted back to Bill's childhood, our childhood. Living in Coon Rapids, a small rural town in Iowa, can virtually be a never ending wonderland as a child. But at the same time having no brothers or sisters around to share it with could make it all seem slightly drab and lonely. Bill Etckman was to become my substitute for no siblings.

Bill was the son of a hard working farmer, and by the time we had met he was already doing a good chunk of the daily chores. Throughout our elementary school days we were inseparable. We stayed at each others houses whenever our parents would grudgingly allow it. Bill was loaded with the same piss and vinegar as I, and we had adventure after adventure. From riding hogs, exploring unfamiliar terrain to just chasing each other, we never seemed to stop having fun. Even with the drudgery of chores, we could always find some way of turning it into a game.

One smotheringly hot afternoon we took a hike to a nearby river and I found out something about Bill that I had never expected. Upon reaching the river, I excitedly stripped off my clothes and ran crashing into the cool, slow moving river. Bill just stood safety a few feet up the bank. In answering my inquiry as to why, he sheepishly said he had always been afraid of

the water, deathly afraid, he added. Not fully convinced, I raced up the bank threatening to throw him in, but his frantic look and forceful threat to end my life succeeded in convincing me. Needless to say, we didn't do a lot of swimming together.

As the years passed and other things became more important than exploring valleys and hills, I forgot about his phobia of water. Bill began to talk a lot less about farming and more about his dreams of traveling and seeing what the world had to offer. He decided and redecided to be several things, anything except a farmer. Even so there was always the shadow overhead, and even then I think he knew he was destined to be a farmer no matter how much he protested or denied it.

During our freshman year, after school had let out early, we were riding around in his truck, just killing the hours before Bill had to do chores. Turning the music down but still shouting over it, I began, "I can't wait to get out of this hole. I can't believe people actually live their whole lives here without a care of what else life has to offer."

"Yeah," shaking his head. "This place is enough to choke a person to death."

We pulled up to a stop sign and he turned to me with this look of absolute seriousness, "You know I've got generations of family here, all were farmers and most are still remembered by someone as never intending to become farmers. I'm scared Curtis. I don't think I can handle the idea of it. This damn place will bring my mind to an early grave."

"You can always leave, Bill," trying to let him know he had a choice. "You've got lots of brains, hell, you're one of the smartest people I know and God knows you've got the backbone."

"You don't understand, it goes too deep and strong to just pack up and leave. It's as though I belong to this land. Its very fields and pastures are the bars

that hold me here. My family is relying on me to carry on as the farmer of their land and that's enough to lock the door. It happened to them by their families and it's going to happen to me."

As he pulled away from our prolonged stop he rebelliously stated, "I won't let this place trap me, I'll just get out one way or another, you'll see," and he turned the music back up.

With the passing of our junior year, Bill began an angry young man. I guess he began to lose faith in ever finding the key to unlock the legacy. His grades dropped and his consumption of alcohol and drugs began a steady climb. The Bill I knew who always seemed to have a direction suddenly adopted the attitude of "I don't care and it doesn't matter." By the first month of our senior year, Bill was being expelled from school for poor conduct to students and staff. At the end of our school year Bill had gotten into some real trouble stealing CB radios, not because he needed the money, but as he put it, "for something to do."

I was planning to move to Louisiana by then to see what work I could find. I'd always liked what I'd heard about the place and besides, there was nothing holding me in town. When I consulted Bill about my decision he replied with, "I think you suck, you little shit," laughing and punching me in the arm.

Trying to be serious I asked, "Why don't you come with me and at least take a break from the farm."

"Oh, sure," he replied with a sarcastic expression, "I'll just put off the crops and I'm sure my mom won't mind doing all the chores by herself. Get real Curtis! Besides, I've got a carry over problem in my beans this year, that'll keep my ass running. I'll just have to party here without you," and a half-hearted smile spread across his face.

Two years passed and I'd had enough of Louisiana, so I moved back in the spring with hardly to my

name. I found the place had not changed a week in the two years I had been gone. The streets had the same cars parked along it and the same people were in the stores. Nothing seemed to have changed except the butcher shop had closed down and the depth of Bill's boredom had deepened.

One afternoon Bill phoned me up and suggested that we get together with some friends and float the local river. By this time of the year the river was bankful from spring rains. Confidently Bill said he thought his 14' flat bottom boat would be enough to handle it. Marty, Monty, and Mike were bringing the beer, so Bill thought it should be a kick ass time. Mike, Marty, and Monty were all high school friends of ours who I hadn't seen in awhile, so I agreed to go. It didn't occur to me until we were already afloat on the swollen river that Bill never learned to swim. As far as I knew he was still afraid of water, but at the time he showed no signs of it.

We had been on the water about thirty-five minutes and everyone was having a good time when we rounded a bend and abruptly hit the branches of an overhanging tree, half engulfed by the flooding river. The branches caught the front of the boat and turned it sideways. As the whole boat rolled over, everyone leaped for the bank. I heard Bill call to Mike, who was closest, just before I plunged into the icy river.

God, I remember how cold that water was! It burned my skin and made me gasp for air. Marty and Monty had both made it to the bank, but I struggled a good ten yards from the bank in the churning currents. Mike had managed to get a hold of Bill and hold his head above the muddy waters. I heard Mike coaching Bill to hold on to him as Bill thrashed wildly to grasp Mike.

"I can't hold on," Bill cried, "Mike, I can't feel you, please help me, I can't swim!"

I was just ahead of them, a little closer to shore but still in the current, my limbs becoming numb from the freezing water, and I knew they wouldn't be able to last much longer. Ahead there was a fallen tree protruding out into the current holding trash just for a few moments before the current sucked it under with a sickening hiss. I slammed up against it, but before it pulled me under, I managed to grab a limb and pull myself up on it. Laying there exhausted, I looked up just as Mike caught the very outside limb of the tree. They stopped abruptly, but the current broke Bill away from Mike's grasp and Mike began to cry as he frantically tried to reach Bill before the current pulled him away. We could do nothing as Bill began to slip below the surface, but as he did I got a good look at his face for the last time. A calm peaceful look was on his face, not a trace of panic, just a content peaceful look, one I'll never forget. Mike had pulled himself up on the branch and lay there with his face buried against it, crying and repeating over and over that Bill was dead. Bill is dead.

I don't remember the next few days very well, it's all an emotional blur. Just the pain of coming to grips with the tragedy that had taken place. I remember the horribly destructive feelings of guilt that I felt for, as I put it, letting Bill die. The awful sorrow of family and friends pushed depression deep into my hear. For days I laid alone in my room and cried until I made myself sick. I really can't remember how long I went without eating. Everyday the entire town searched for his body, and everyday they would call, wanting me to come to the river and show them the place where he went under I'd tell them I couldn't bear to, but that damn phone wouldn't stop ringing. After four days of searching, the body was found and the funeral was held. With the last shovelful of earth, Bill's life was completed. Now everyone could begin to forget.

Reaching down, I picked up a handful of the moist soil which covered his grave. I squeezed it tightly in my hand and it formed easily into a ball, the sign of good soil, Bill had once said. I began to recall how he felt about the land and soil; how they were bars that held him here, and now they would hold him forever. I remembered how in the beginning his dreams and naivete were strong and the bars seemed so weak and intangible. How happy he was. But as time passed and the bars became more tangible, and his dreams just dreams, he became very apprehensive of life. The boredom of the small town ways and lifestyle motivated him to create situations, to light up his dull prison, often times very foolishly. For those such as Bill who are rooted to something that cannot fulfill their needs, they are bound to perish as a tree clinging to a rocky cliff. I began to see he was not the only spindly, clutching tree in this town.

I had been offered a job in town at a place I had worked during school breaks. It was Garst, a seed company and the lifeblood of our town. It employed 75% of all the people who live here, including my parents. I can remember growing up how very few new faces arrived there, just kids from our high school who went to work there once they'd graduated. I could see how a force without form had already started to seduce me. I began to think that this small country town was to a young man as heroin to an addict, and I began to feel uneasy.

I brushed the dirt from my hands and turned back to my car. I couldn't help but think that this job and town had nothing to offer to soothe my restless dreams. Driving down the dusty gravel road from the cemetery, I began to feel cold and lonely, and completely out of place. Lying in the seat next to me was an issue of our hometown newspaper. I recognized the picture printed half way down the page as one of my classmates. The caption read, "Joe Lunsden a California resident

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