

9-1990

Skunk River Review September 1990, vol 2

Craig Wentworth

Dixon Benshoof

Linda Soto

Lynnette J. Conkel

David Vernetti

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openspace.dmac.edu/skunkriver>

 Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), and the [Nonfiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wentworth, Craig; Benshoof, Dixon; Soto, Linda; Conkel, Lynnette J.; Vernetti, David; Versteegh, Evelyn; Busse, Bradley D.; Kottke, Valerie; Kraft, Celeste; Byers, Kathy J.; Kline, Linda; Hartman, Michael; [Osterso], Mia; Morrison, Ardis; Koeneman, Ellen; Dillard, William; McPherson, Jean; Wesselmann, Stephen; Totton, Connie S.; Knapp, Fred G.; Bastron, Teresa A.; Wesselmann, Karla; Anderson, Abby J.; Harlow, Thom; Eschliman, Kris; Hubbard, Chris; Hermann, Mary L.; Lighthall, Linda M.; and Smith, Stephen, "Skunk River Review September 1990, vol 2" (1990). *Skunk River Review*. 8.

<https://openspace.dmac.edu/skunkriver/8>

Authors

Craig Wentworth, Dixon Benshoof, Linda Soto, Lynnette J. Conkel, David Verneti, Evelyn Versteegh, Bradley D. Busse, Valerie Kottke, Celeste Kraft, Kathy J. Byers, Linda Kline, Michael Hartman, Mia [Osterso], Ardis Morrison, Ellen Koeneman, William Dillard, Jean McPherson, Stephen Wesselmann, Connie S. Totton, Fred G. Knapp, Teresa A. Bastron, Karla Wesselmann, Abby J. Anderson, Thom Harlow, Kris Eschliman, Chris Hubbard, Mary L. Hermann, Linda M. Lighthall, and Stephen Smith

LIBRARY

ANKENY CAMPUS

Skunk River Review



For Reference

Not to be taken

from this library

VOLUME II

SEPTEMBER 1990

DMACC Arkeny



3 5179 00171 5037

SKUNK RIVER REVIEW

VOLUME II

SEPTEMBER 1990

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

Editors:

Beth Baker-Brodersen
Dayna Pittman

Production Assistant:

Linda Cunningham

A special thanks to:

All of our colleagues whose input and contributions have been invaluable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Last Picture Show	5
Diego Garcia, Indian Ocean Territory	8
Neighbor and Friend.....	11
Never Learning From My Mistakes	15
Walleye Fishing	18
Advice or Nagging	20
Daisy	23
Untitled	25
Look What's Happened to the Corner Grocery	30
First Day of School	33
Out of Control	37
Can We Save Ourselves?	41
Wounded Bird	44
Jesse.....	48
Rocky Mountain High.....	52
Dear Mr. Dylan	57
At Recess In The Iowa Senate.....	60
Tour of Duty: The Maternity Ward.....	65
<i>Secret of the Andes</i> Book Review	69
To Bingo or Not To Bingo: That Is The Question	78
Water Pollution: A Trend of Our Time	82
In The Wild Winds	86
Children Can't Decide	90
David Lynch's Hall of Mirrors	93
The Ethics of Having Babies?	95
Untitled	98
I Found Freedom	101
Yesterday Revisited, Revised	107
Perfectly Christ, Perfectly Crazy	111
Why Read "A Rose For Emily"	115
Hope for the Reality of a Myth	119



INTRODUCTION

What you hold in your hands is the result of hard work by several 1989-1990 DMACC students. Many of them are just like some of you—people who are struggling to write successfully, to satisfy teacher expectations and to juggle the busy demands of classes, jobs, and families.

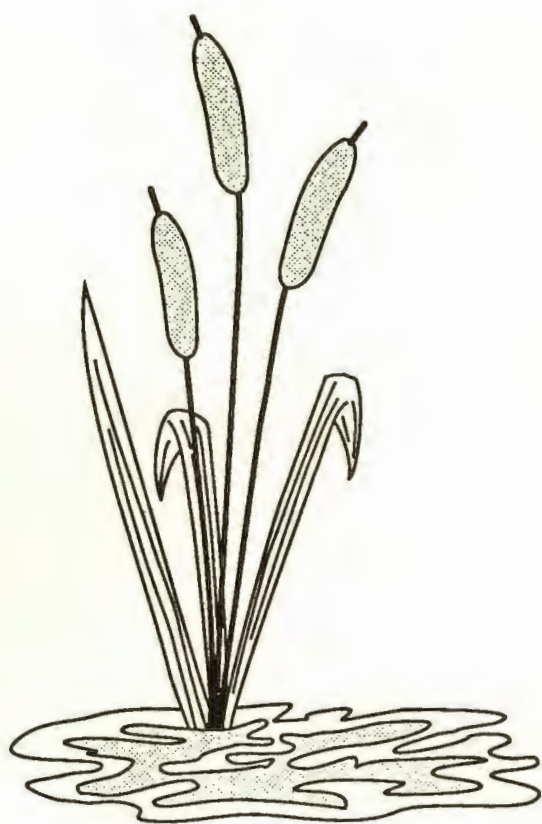
The essays reprinted here do more than meet teacher expectations and satisfy the needs of writing assignments—we think they represent the best of DMACC. The introduction of the first *Skunk River Review* states, "our main goal was to celebrate student writing." In volume two, the celebration continues.

Soon after reading the 90 original submissions, we realized that they *all* represented successful writing and that the writers had every reason to be proud of their work. So narrowing the list to the final 31 essays accepted was challenging—each entry faced stiff competition. We tried to include essays that would appeal to a wide range of tastes and show several different approaches to various writing tasks. You can read about everything from working in a maternity ward at a hospital, to special and unusual people, to backpacking, to analyses of works by William Faulkner and Thomas Hardy.

The format and editorial decisions were, for the most part, similar to last year. Essays have been included from Writing Skills Review, Composition I, Composition II, and Introduction to Literature. For the most part, all we corrected was the spelling; otherwise, the essays remain just as the writers submitted them.

Reading the essays allows us all to gain a better understanding of the DMACC experience and a glimpse into the lives of those around us. Beyond the obvious strong points of the essays represented here, perhaps most importantly, we believe they're a good read. Use volume two of the *Skunk River Review* however you want. But above all, enjoy. We certainly have.

BBB
DP



The Last Picture Show

*Craig Wentworth
Composition I*

As I turn the corner, the dark and deserted downtown street explodes into a dazzling, Hollywood premiere-style light show as hundreds of brilliant, oscillating lights beckon to unseeing eyes with promises of romance, adventure, and fantasy. The reflection of the marquee's twinkling lights on the icy glass and marble store fronts makes the walk through winter's deep freeze seem even colder. Peering through the frosted spectacles perched coldly on my nose, I smile at the irony when I see that the feature is entitled "Song of the South." Tonight's performance marks the end of my star-studded motion picture career as this small town theater closes its doors forever.

The warm, brightly lighted theater lobby is an oasis as the ice-encrusted concrete is transformed into plush, luxurious carpeting. The rug's rich, colorful pattern belies its age and thousands of fresh, buttered popcorn and icy, refreshing Coca-Cola spills. The aroma of freshly popped popcorn fills the air, enticing patrons to purchase their treats immediately upon paying their admission so as not to miss one of Uncle Remus' Brer Rabbit stories due to an ill-timed trip to the snack bar. But tonight, only the ticket girl and the old woman behind the concession stand are in the lobby to greet me. The sound of the door opening and the arctic blast of February air propels both women into action, and they quickly stash their illicit textbooks and letters and assume their starring roles for the new customer. Recognizing me, they realize this has been another rehearsal, that their performance will not be subject to criticism, and they return to their covert activities. I greet them and continue across the lobby, passing multicolored posters advertising movies which will never be shown and featuring stars

such as Robert Redford, Meryl Streep, and Dustin Hoffman, all of whom I've had the pleasure of working with on previous film projects. Suddenly, the air around the concession stand is filled with the crackling of hundreds of popcorn kernels exploding in crescendo as the fluffy, white morsels force the lid of the cooker open in their frenzied escape.

I turn towards the stairs, stepping over the soft, velveteen rope that bars mischievous young boys and passionate young lovers from enjoying the picture from the privacy of the balcony. Here, the rich and colorful pseudo-Hollywood facade abruptly ends, and I climb the steep, creaky wooden stairway, unadorned by colorful carpet, without even a handrail to guide me. With a sound heard in a hundred prison movies, the projection booth's heavy steel fire door slams shut behind me. In sharp contrast to the brilliance of the theater lobby, the booth is dimly lit by a bare light bulb with an old metal film canister cover as a makeshift reflector and a small, faded red Chinese paper lantern. The air is scented with a mixture of electric motors and stale popcorn.

Engaging the electric generator, it roars to life, filling the air with its strong, steady hum. I flip the scissor switch that provides power to the sound amplifiers, and the small black needles on the lighted dials jump as if to assure me that tonight's feature will not be a silent film. Lifting the heavy, 15 inch reels into the two projectors, I thread the smooth, dark, 35 millimeter film expertly through the sharp metal points which hold it and guide it across the film gate, over the shiny, smooth surface of the sound drum, and onto the take-up reel. Under the hood of the projector, I brush the soft, powdery white ash from the shiny reflector and adjust the carbon wands that produce the electric arc which transports the film's image to the screen 120 feet away.

Glancing at the old electric wall clock confirms that it's time for the show to begin, and I throw the lever that provides electricity to the carbon rods. With a hand on each of the smooth ivory adjustment knobs

(whose pearly white handles have long since yellowed by the touch of human hands), the rod's touch with a.n explosive hiss, filling the projector with the brilliance of a small sun. A small gauge reflects a facsimile of the arc's true image, blinding to the unprotected human eye, and after adjusting the arc for maximum lighting, I switch on the film feeding mechanism. The soft, rhythmic clatter of the film and the turning take-up reel verify that the film is feeding properly. After allowing time for the numbered header to clear the film gate and sound drum, I open the light damper and switch the sound and picture to this projector. This process is repeated every twenty minutes until Uncle Remus, Billy, and all their animal and human friends dance into the sunset singing "Zipadee-Do-Da."

Peering through the small windows of the projection booth, I see the small crowd straggle out of the auditorium. The reels of film stacked neatly in their cold, metal canisters, ready to be shipped for the next engagement, are a sad reminder that this is the last time I will be working with Walt Disney or any of my Hollywood friends. I take one last look around the booth; it is time for me to leave. Walking through the dark, deserted lobby for the final time, I whistle a tune about wonderful days with plenty of sunshine and a bluebird on my shoulder.



Diego Garcia, Indian Ocean Territory

Dixon Benshoof
Writing Skills Review

My final duty station before being discharged from the Navy was Diego Garcia. This island is located in the southern hemisphere nearly opposite the United States on the globe, in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Our flight took us through countries we had not planned to see. My friends described it as a small desolate island where a person feels isolated from the outside world. I was surprised to find that Diego Garcia, though somewhat isolated, was beautiful and full of life.

The thirty-six hour flight turned out to be somewhat different than we had expected. Originally we were to fly from Mississippi on North West Orient airlines stopping in Alaska, Japan and the Philippines to refuel. Due to a pilots' strike we only made it as far as Alaska, where we stayed at the local Hilton hotel while the Navy arranged transportation for the remainder of our journey.

After a two day lay-over we left Alaska on a military cargo plane for the remainder of our journey. The Air Force decided the best way to the southern hemisphere was to fly north. We left Alaska and flew over the north pole to our first stop in Germany, then on to Tehran, Iran for our final refueling stop. I remember what a shame it was that our last chance to experience civilization, before being marooned, would be Iran. The final leg of our journey took us south eleven hours to the middle of the Indian Ocean.

As we flew over Diego Garcia, I could see my friends were wrong to describe it as desolate. The island was shaped like a horse shoe with three smaller islands guarding the one mile opening to the lagoon. At the widest point the lagoon was approximately three miles wide. The ends of the island were one hundred yards across spreading to one mile at the bend. Aside from

the living area, airport and one road the entire island was covered with palm trees. From the air Diego Garcia looked like a tropical paradise.

When I arrived on the island I took time out to look around and see what was there. I found that the Navy was only using half of the island and we had all the comforts of home on our side. Such as tennis, gymnasium, outdoor theater, bowling alley and Olympic size pool. There were also necessities like a dining hall, trailers for us to sleep in, and barbecues. The ocean was twenty feet from the back door of my trailer at high tide.

The other side of the island was for the most part overgrown with palms and bushes, but did have a beautiful old coconut plantation. A large three story home with four pillars supporting the roof over the front porch was the center piece of the plantation. There were also several small outbuildings such as a general store, smaller homes for laborers, and a blacksmith shop. The plantation was run-down but I could easily see myself standing on a plantation in the southern United States.

Snorkeling in the lagoon was an experience I enjoyed as often as I could. I could watch fish with a variety of shapes, sizes and colors swimming around colorful coral pillars. The lagoon also had shell fish and sea turtles that were fun to watch as they swam and interacted with each other. When I was under the water, I could separate myself from anything that might be bothering me, by watching all the activity around me. I spent as much time as possible with this activity.

There were limits to our ability to communicate with the outside world, but we were not isolated. The Navy operated a radio that we could use to call home. At times the weather would interfere with the reception. We also had two mail flights a week, although it did take two to three weeks for a letter to arrive from the states. We even had a television station on the island that carried shows taped in the states then shipped to us for replay.

Diego Garcia being one thousand miles from any land was somewhat isolated, but we had no trouble keeping in contact with the outside world. As for the island being desolate, no one could ever convince me of that. Diego Garcia was a tropical paradise with many opportunities for fun.



Neighbor and Friend

Linda Soto
Writing Skills Review

In the acre lot right behind mine lives a man, Mr. Virgil Miller by name. He is a tall older man, who in his younger days must have been quite good looking, although it is not of his looks that I write, it is of his friendly, helpful nature. For Virgil is the friendliest, most helpful neighbor I have ever known.

I had from past experiences grown leery of neighbors. I had one neighbor, who worked for the Des Moines Police Department, accuse my son of shooting a B B gun at his van. When in all actuality, it was the neighbor who lived in the up-stairs apartment who had a B B gun and was shooting at everything in sight. I also had another neighbor who came beating on my door, and threatened my son with an iron poker, the type you use in fireplaces. This woman was hysterically screaming that our dog had chased her daughters and pushed them into the mud. Our dog was chained up in the backyard, and there was no mud in sight. Because of these experiences and others, when I met Virgil, after moving into my new home, it was a whole year before we became friends.

We first met in the traditional, neighborly way of an over the fence conversation in the summer of '87. The following summer of '88, Virgil asked me if he could drive through my acre of property with his snow plow in the winter, so he could plow snow for the neighbors on my street. In exchange he would install a gate in my back fence and remove the snow in my drive-way for free. Having a very long drive-way, that sounded like a good deal to me. Before I knew it, there was a nice gate in my back fence, and we were set up for the next winter's snow storms.

We continued our over the fence conversations throughout that summer, and the more I found out

about him, the more I grew to like him. Virgil has lived in the neighborhood for many years; therefore, he told me a lot of the history of the area. He said my house, and the house just to the west of me, at one time was on the south side of the street. However, the previous owner had moved them to the north side of the street to make more room for his diesel truck repair company. Virgil also told me about the nice older woman, who was the owner's mother, who had lived in my house before me. I learned about Virgil's life also; he and his wife had raised 10 children. He had been a farmer, but had given that up to move into town and go to work for Firestone Tire and Rubber Company in Des Moines, Iowa, and now he is retired. Virgil told me that his wife had died that spring of '88, and that he was now a widower. Now he has a lot of spare time on his hands; therefore, he goes around visiting the neighbors and lending a helpful hand where needed. Each time we talked I grew a bit more to confident that Virgil was a neighbor I could trust and depend on.

Toward the end of that summer, I asked Virgil to help me, for I had started having problems with leaky faucets. It seemed as if they had decided to go bad all at the same time. I knew how to fix the faucets, but found that I did not have the strength in my hands to do the work. Also, because of a divorce, I had no man around to help me; therefore, I approached Virgil on the subject of helping me to do the work. I wanted to pay him for his work, but he would not hear of it. All he wanted in exchange for his help was a home-cooked meal. I agreed to that, and we set forth fixing the faucets. It took the two of us most of the day to do it, and that evening we sat down together to a nice dinner of fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans, and good conversation. I found that to be a nice way to end a busy day. After that night, the weather turned cold; consequently, we saw very little of each other through the winter.

That next summer of '89, I had another problem. The former owner had plowed up about half an acre of my yard for a vegetable garden, and weeds had overgrown in this part of my yard. These weeds were already as tall as I am. I asked Virgil's advice about how to plant grass, and found out I was just a few months too late for planting the grass seed. Virgil, now knowing of my inexperience, wanted to help me keep the unsightly weeds under control, for they could be a breeding place for bugs, and they made the yard look bad. Virgil, using the farm equipment he had from when he was a farmer, cut down the weeds and then plowed them under the ground.

This same summer, I had steel siding installed on the outside of my house; therefore, I needed to paint the garage the same color as the house. I started painting using only a foot step ladder; of course, this was not tall enough to reach the height of the garage. I asked Virgil if he had a ladder I could borrow, so he loaned me a 15 foot wooden extension ladder. This was quite funny because I am a 5 foot, 6 inches tall, slightly overweight woman in her early 40's, and this ladder was very large and heavy. Virgil would watch me as I climbed up and down this ladder. When I was at the top he would holler teasingly, from his yard, "What are you doing? You better get down before you fall down!" I would wave at him, and we would laugh and laugh. Well, I didn't fall, but as I was on the ladder I got stung on the leg by a pesky bee. I climbed down the ladder, hobbled over to Virgil's, and knocked on his door. When he answered the door, I asked him what I should do about bee stings. I know it's hard to believe, but I had never, in all my life, been stung by a bee before. He had me hold ice on it for about an hour while we sat in his kitchen talking. Then as if I were one of his little kids, he applied a greasy ointment to the sting. I thought of how nice it would have been to have a father like him.

As you can see, Virgil is always there to lend a helpful hand to a neighbor in need. He is always friendly and

laughing. He is willing to share his time, knowledge and personal possessions. Virgil Miller is a friendly neighbor to all, and especially to me.



Never Learning from My Mistakes

Lynnette J. Conkel
Writing Skills Review

Since I can remember I have always done things without the use of the common sense. Knowing what I was about to do would cause me bodily harm.

One of these times happened when I was five years old. My sister, Patti, and I went over to our neighbor's house to play on their swing. The Aalbers, Terry, who was seven, and Brenda, who was my sister's age of three, had the best swing in the neighborhood. "Big Patti," as she was called, since she was older than my sister Patti, was also at the Aalbers that day; she lived across the street from us. We were all taking turns riding on the chair swing. The chair swing is two bench swings facing each other attached to the swing set. Terry, being a few times bigger than us, could do "underdogs" when he'd push us on the chair swing. In our neighborhood, an underdog is where you push the swing while running under it, and coming out the other side. I thought I'd try one of these underdogs. I should have known better.

I told the kids, Brenda, Patti, and "Big Patti" to get on the swing. Terry stood back and watched, shaking his head in wonder. I was only half his size; he and I both knew I shouldn't have been pushing because I wasn't strong enough. But that didn't stop me. The first time I tried, of course, I failed. Besides my lack of strength, there was mud under the swing, and I couldn't get a good run for it. Inside I knew this was a stupid thing to do.

The second try was even less successful. I was determined, however, to succeed at any cost.

Finally, after taking a deep breath I gave it my third and best try, and under the swing I went. At that same moment I slipped in the mud, falling face first to the

ground. The swing was in the air and ready to come down, as would be the law of gravity. Down it came, meeting the back of my stubborn head. Boy, what a thud!

The next thing I remember was being dragged out from underneath the swing by all my friends. I was very dizzy and didn't know which way was up. Brenda and Terry's dad had to carry me, the mighty pusher, home so that my parents could take me to the emergency room for several stitches. This would only be one of several successful attempts to show my talents as a mindless idiot.

Another one of these idiotic attempts is the time I tried to ride two ten-speed bikes at once. This would have been an ideal moment to listen to my conscience. At the age of twelve, by now I should have known to push aside the urge to feel more dominating than I was. But, I had already challenged myself when I told my friend Missy, I'd bring her bike down to her house since she had left it at my house overnight. We were going to go bike riding together, but she had to finish her housework for her mother before she could go. Hoping to save time, I offered to meet her down the street at her house with both bikes.

Despite previous experiences, I failed to heed to the little voice inside me begging me not to try this. Off I went, pushing our bikes over to the end of the driveway. It took some doing, but I managed to get on my bike while holding hers steady by the handlebars. I took off with a hard push, it wasn't until I'd reached the edge of the road that I realized I'd have to stop to look for cars. Since I hadn't planned on how to stop, needless to say, I crashed both bikes. My feet became entangled in the spokes, and since I was barefooted the spokes cut deep into my foot. This wasn't good, finding myself laying there in the street, trapped in a pile of bicycles, bleeding, and nobody around to get me free from my self-made trap.

Again, I had gotten myself into a mess that could have been avoided if I would have listened to that little voice that told me not to do this stupid act of foolishness.

Fortunately, our landlord was working on our house, and he heard my distress cry. He managed to get me freed from my own trap.

It was just a year ago when I had yet another one of these hairbrained ideas. I tried changing a headlight in my car that I was told was very hard to do. The springs that held the light-retaining ring in place were very tricky, and I had never changed a headlight before. As I had been told, the springs were tricky, so much that the spring broke and the ring flew up and hit me in the chin. I just had to try it, and wound up with stitches. As it would be, I have yet to learn from my experiences. And I have the battle scars to prove it.



Walleye Fishing

David Verneti
Writing Skills Review

Having been introduced to fishing over 30 years ago, I've come to enjoy fishing as my favorite pastime. Fishing for walleye has been a challenge that has sparked my interest for a long time. To catch this type of fish requires some knowledge of its behavior. I've also found that it takes a certain amount of skill to find where they are and what it takes to persuade them into taking your bait.

The walleye can be found in rivers, lakes, and reservoirs, on rock or gravel beds, or in fallen trees or brush piles, usually in anywhere from five to fifteen feet of water. These areas are commonly referred to as structure. Since these structures are underwater, it would be advisable to have a graph or depth finder, an electronic device that indicates what's on the bottom and at what depth. It would also be helpful to have a map of the body of water you're fishing. Topographic map shows the depth and general areas of where structure is located.

Once you've found an area where the walleye should be, it's good to know a few facts about this fish. Because their eyes are sensitive to light, the walleye is basically a night feeder; they will start feeding in the early evening hours and usually stop by early to mid morning. The majority of walleye I've caught have been with live bait, either minnows, worms, or leeches, although artificial baits can work well. It's very important to keep the bait moving; the walleye prefers not to eat something that is dead. The walleye will grab its prey from the side and hold it until it's dead, it then moves it around, by mouthing it, and swallows its meal head first.

Now that you have yourself positioned where you want to be, and you know some facts about the walleye, you'll need to know a little about what kind of gear to

use. I use an ultra light or light action rod; they're more sensitive to vibrations. I recommend using 4 to 6 pound test line, for the same reason. Next, I prefer using a 1/16 oz. jig, a hook with a sinker attached to the hook, again, for better sensitivity.

The next bit of information worth mentioning is presentation, the manner in which you present the bait to the fish. As I mentioned earlier, it's very important to keep the bait moving, this can be accomplished in different ways. The three I more commonly use are casting and retrieving, or gently tossing the bait into a desired area, allowing it to settle to the bottom, and slowly pulling it back with a bouncing motion, or another approach would be bottom fishing, allowing the bait to settle directly below you, raising it off the bottom about 3 to 6 inches and use a bouncing effect; yet another is called drifting, allowing the boat to drift with the water current or with the wind. You let your bait fall to the bottom, let a fair amount of line out, and as you drift along the bait is pulled across the bottom.

The last and probably best piece of information I could give has to do with hooking the fish. When the walleye takes your bait, you will feel a series of slight tugs. I've lost many walleye by not giving them enough time to take the bait. Remember, the walleye will hold the bait in its mouth sideways for awhile before they attempt to swallow. Once you feel those tugs, release your line and slowly count to ten, slowly take the slack out the line until you feel the tugs again, and then firmly set the hook. You will soon know if you have a fish on or not.

Well, there you have it, how to catch walleye from an expert! Now don't get me wrong; you're not going to be able to go out and catch fish every time, even "Babe Winkleman" and "Virgil Ward" have off days. But, if you can remember a few of the basics, you can increase your chances of catching more fish, not to mention having a lot of fun.



Advice or Nagging

*Evelyn Versteegh
Composition I*

If anyone doubts the nation is in the grips of a health craze, they have only to pick up a newspaper, check out a magazine stand, or tune in the local television news to find a "health segment" featured. There is as much information available today in one twenty-four hour period than an entire year provided, just a short time ago. Misinformation is as available as reliable facts, as supermarkets respond to consumer interest in healthy food and related products. Increasingly, the workplace is not only where one earns a living, but also receives health advice and corrective support as well. There is a saturation point, however where the effectiveness of information ends, and negative effects begin. There is a fine line between providing advice, and nagging.

The media saturation is just one example of the changes in information available. HMO's and general practitioners publish monthly or quarterly health reports with information varying from warnings about skin cancer to the latest reports on the current health topic. While I find some information helpful and interesting, I question how much is necessary. "Ask the Mercy Nurse" is an excellent idea providing answers to health questions by phone; but, do we need a daily dose of health information along with the news as some television stations offer? I don't think so.

I do like some of the changes the trend has brought. Grocery stores, responding to consumer demand, have a new look. The fresh produce aisles have expanded, both in size and variety of produce offered. Meat counters offer lean cuts, diet specials, and stir fry trays with vegetables. All are appealing to the time restrictions of the health conscious consumer.

There are other changes that are not positive. As business rushes for its market share, health themes

rival sex as an enticement to buy a product. Truth in labeling might be bettered called—there's a grain of truth here somewhere, if only I can figure out what it is. Some labeling is truth taken to the extreme. How about a cholesterol free banana, or a cholesterol free potato, as their labeling now reads. Other labeling is misleading, a product may be marked "cholesterol free," but loaded with saturated fats such as palm and coconut oil. Careful reading is required.

The battle is on at the meat counter, as beef and pork producers fight for a place in the market, hit by recommendations to eat more fish and poultry. Leaner cuts of beef and pork are replacing the traditional cuts of meat. Pork has an advertising campaign calling pork, "the other white meat." The campaign brought protest of unfair advertising from poultry producers. Studies have reported fish and fish oil (omega threes) help lower cholesterol, and the market has been quick to follow with products bearing labels ". . . contains omega three, proven to help lower cholesterol."

The cereal aisles might be labeled the bran wars, as the labeling and products change in response to studies claiming bran lowers cholesterol. Bran mania is not confined to the cereal aisles, a recent article in the *Des Moines Register* reported a new product under works "Bran Ice Cream." What is it about those words, "Recent studies show. . .," that send us as consumers rushing to do or not do whatever the study implies. In the case of bran, another "recent study" reports bran lowers cholesterol, because eating the required amount satisfies the appetite, and the person eats much less of everything else. And the debate is on. . . !

Companies and employers, responding to the health awareness trend, are encouraging and sometimes providing such health programs as daily fitness workouts, weight loss programs, and smokers clinics. The expected benefits of healthier employees are, less absenteeism and lower health insurance costs, which have sky-rocketed over the last several years. The benefits of good health

for employees are obvious, but what about those who don't wish to participate? I disagree with those who feel good health habits should be forced on those who choose not to follow the current trend. So far, participation is mostly voluntary, although social pressure surely has an impact.

Good health is a desirable goal, but the amount of health information is reaching extremes. There is a saturation point where the effectiveness of information ends. I think we are there. Those not "into" the health craze by now are probably not going to be, unless they are motivated by an illness that demands it. The saturation of information can have a negative effect. Some people turn off completely, while others become obsessed. I'm for moderation, common sense, and an occasional jelly doughnut.



Daisy

*Bradley D. Busse
Composition I*

No one under God's creation is more ruthless than a nine year old boy with a BB gun. If that's true, then I was a typical little boy. I was obsessed with the feel of cold gun metal against my cheek, and the idea of true authority readily unleashed with a fine little squeeze. As with many of my associates such as Napoleon, Mussolini, and Hitler, I too sat in the name of power one day, and was quickly relieved of it the next.

I can still remember the days when I constantly begged for a new gun, but with the words, "Brad, you'll shoot an eye out with one of those things", I always knew the argument was over. But because evil little boys don't give up easily, the next day I went out and bought myself a brand new Daisy BB gun against my parents' wishes. With a price tag of ten dollars, I ran all the way home while calling myself an excellent bargain hunter.

The first thing that had to be done, after loading my gun, was to call my neighbor Doug and have him come over. We met in my back yard in about two seconds flat, and instantly started shooting everything in sight. After about an hour, anything built by God or man, was now destroyed by little gold pellets.

My gun, as with any drug, made me happy as long as I became more creative with each and every shot. Doug apparently saw the lights turn on in my head when a very important question raced through my mind: "I wonder if my gun could break a window?" Doug and I set out to answer that question as we lay down in the grass in the prone position. I took aim on one of our little garage windows, and with no reservation at all, I let one fly. The window did not shatter and it was clear to see, that the only thing my pellet did was bounce off. Accepting that fact I then proceeded to empty the rest

of my gun into the glass, while I was in a complete trance created by the sound of the pellets hitting the window. That little window was probably hit over one hundred times and it looked untouched, so we suspiciously walked closer to investigate. Just as I saw Doug running for home in the corner of my eye, I found out the answer to my burning question. No, you can't break windows with a BB gun, but you can put a million holes in them.

My plan was to ignore the broken window, and the glass would eventually reheat itself. Everything went as planned until my dad decided the yard needed cutting, and went in the garage to get the mower. Doug and I were in the back yard playing when we heard the first of a series of obscenities. I looked up at the window and saw Dad on the other side checking the holes out with a dumfounded look on his face. It seemed like a humorous amount of time elapsed before our eyes met, and when they did, I followed my toddler instincts and dropped to my knees, crawling off like the little brat I was. Basically I was a crawling dead boy. Even to this day I'm not exactly sure about what happened next, but I specifically remember receiving an expensive ten buck discomfort.

In my young boy opinion, the relationship between my father and I definitely hit the very lowest. I knew my life wasn't a total failure, when the next day I stumbled upon something that perked me up. I was on my way to school in the morning, when I walked past our garbage can and saw my gun within it. The gun was evidently bent into a very noticeable 90 degree angle and looked like an extremely fun gun that would shoot around corners.



Untitled

*Valerie Kottke
Composition I*

As we walked towards the entrance of "So's Your Mother's," I knew it was going to be a great evening. The air was crisp and cold, as my sister Pam and I crossed the street. We were approaching the big brooding building with the oval sign above the door, and on it was a picture of everybody's mother, a Victorian looking woman wearing an apron. A good band was playing and we were going to dance until our feet could take no more.

As we walk up the steps, I dig in my jeans pocket and get out my I.D. and cover charge. Pam is ahead of me, after she gets done I say hello and get my stamp. I can tell as soon as I walk in it's a Saturday night. There is tension in the air, a promise of things to come. The contrast between the brisk November night, and the warm smoky haze is sharp.

"I'm dying of thirst," I said to Pam. "Let's get a drink down here before we go up and check out the band."

"Sure," she replied. We walked around the pool table almost directly in front of the entrance, towards the bar on the back wall. On our right, set back, there are two more pool tables, they are all in use. Slightly to the right and straight back is the stairway to go upstairs. The band is already playing, I can feel the vibrations of the music and sense people milling about. Smoke is creeping down the stairs.

I said to Pam, "It sounds like it's busy upstairs."

"Yeah, I hope there's a table and room to dance" she commented as we reached the bar. Pam ordered a Budweiser, and I ordered a screwdriver. Then it was up into the wild blue yonder.

A few drinks later the band takes a break. Pam said "Let's go downstairs to use the bathroom where it is not so crowded."

I agreed and I asked her, "Do you want to play a game of pool while we're down there?" As we started down the stairs, Pam said, "Sure, go put a quarter up while I go to the restroom."

The band started up again as one of our opponents shot the eight ball in the corner pocket. We headed up the stairway of rough unfinished wood, in between each stair was an open space, which gave me a view of the room below. There's not a lot going on down there, most of the crowd is upstairs. I glance at Pam's back as she climbs the stairs. Her long straight blond hair swings slightly back and forth as she moves, and it brushes the top of her Levi's pockets. As she reaches the landing before the second set of stairs, I looked down and said, "Pam look!"

"What?" she questioned as she stepped back down to see what I was showing her.

"A billfold," I answered. "I found it laying on this step."

We both paused a moment and inspected this obviously male, slightly worn, brown leather billfold, I held in my hand. "I wonder if there's any identification in it?" I asked.

"I don't know," Pam said, "but how do you suppose somebody could lose his wallet right out of his pocket like that?"

"Well you know he must have been drunk or very careless," I said.

"You're probably right," Pam agreed. "Do you think there's any money in it?"

I shrugged my shoulders and answered, "What should we do with it?"

Pam said, "Let's take it in the bathroom and see what's in it."

I agreed; the billfold was stashed and we headed back down the stairs to the bathroom with the least amount of traffic. What kind of fool would take his billfold into the bar, if he couldn't hold on to it? I wondered.

In the bathroom I entered the first stall and Pam went into the second. Slowly I open the billfold, and there staring me in the face is a driver's license; he is no longer a faceless person, and he even has a name. There is a Master Card and some other cards etc. next to the license. I peek into the bill section and there they are; count em' four twenty dollar bills.

I jumped up and yelped, "Pam, guess what? There's eighty dollars in here!" I just stood on the stool and hung over the stall, looking down at her.

"Should we keep it? she asked, looking back up at me with excitement and indecision in her fair freckled face.

I wrestled with an inner conflict. I was raised to be honest and not to steal, but on the other hand I'm on my own now and I need to make decisions for myself. Besides this isn't stealing, it's "finder's keeper's." The loser shouldn't have brought eighty dollars to the bar anyway! Pam is waiting for the answer. Feeling a little flushed from the booze, I smile and say, "What the hell, let's do it."

Pam smiled and said, "All right, but we had better turn the wallet in so he doesn't have to replace his driver's license or lose his personal stuff."

I pulled the money out of the billfold and ceremoniously handed down two twenties to Pam, and stuffed the other in my pocket. We left the stalls, washed our hands and looked at each other in the mirror; time to do our good deed for the day.

As we headed toward the bar where we had ordered our first drink, I smugly rationalized what had just taken place. The man has a Master Card—he probably won't miss that money anyway, it was fate, destiny, it was set right in front of my face.

All of a sudden I look up, and we are there. The bartender is mixing a drink for one of the few customers downstairs. As he finishes, I excuse myself and tell him we want to turn in this billfold we just found in the ladies restroom. (Boy am I glad that is over!)

"You're kidding!" the bartender exclaimed, "The gentleman who lost that, just came to see if it had been turned in. He was kind of frantic, it has his Master Card in it. He's using our phone to call it in lost or stolen right now." He turned and gestured towards a man on the phone behind the bar, with his back towards us.

The bartender hurried over carrying the billfold. The man was probably in his mid-twenties, an average looking guy with brown hair, and wearing jeans with a flannel shirt. Pam and I looked at each other with matching expressions that said "Could you die or what?" My heart had sunk to the bottom of my stomach like I'd just gone down the first hill on the Tornado.

I licked my lips nervously, as the man on the phone turned around and looked at us. The bartender appeared to be excited as he talked to him. We couldn't hear the words but I have an idea what it was about.

The whole time this was going on, all I could think was, I don't want to be here, please get me out of here! It wasn't supposed to be like this. We were supposed to turn in the billfold, get our Good Samaritan awards and be on our merry way. There is the man who lost his money, and he doesn't look especially drunk or careless to me. And now I have to face him.

The bartender and the man who was on the phone walk over to us. The man is looking inside his billfold, and the bartender is trying to get a peek. The owner of the billfold asks us if we are the ones who found his wallet. We told him yes, we are. Pam asked him if his charge card was still in his billfold.

"Yes, thank God, it is here. The only thing missing is the cash," he informed us. "I want to thank you for turning this in. I really appreciate it."

"No problem," we murmured. We told him we were sorry that the billfold wasn't found completely intact.

"Oh! Don't worry about it," he exclaimed. "It's not your fault. I can't begin to thank you enough for turning it in."

"You're welcome," we mumbled, "really it was nothing."

By this time I am feeling physically ill, and I'm sure I'm red from my ears down to my toes. Pam makes up some excuse about going back upstairs to dance. As we were walking away, he told us "thank you" about three more times. We smiled and waved as we headed back up the stairs.

As we sat down I felt like the smallest person on earth. Drinking and dancing did not seem to fit the occasion, so we waited until we thought no suspicion would arise, and then we left.

To this day Pam and I have hardly discussed what happened that Saturday night. There really isn't a lot to say, except for I'm sorry, and it's really too late for that. The money that seemed so important, is now long gone and I can't even remember what I spent it on. But I do remember how it made me feel.

I still can't think about it without getting that sick feeling in my stomach, that feeling of embarrassment and shame.

We walked back out into the fresh November air and headed silently for the car. As we were crossing the street, we heard someone yell goodbye. We turned to see the man whose money we had stolen, wave and get into his old beat-up Dodge and drive away.



Look What's Happened to the Corner Grocery

*Celeste Kraft
Composition I*

My weekly grocery shopping and errands once robbed me of much of my precious free time on the weekend. But I've discovered an alternative. Instead of logging miles every week going from the bank to the pharmacy to the grocery store to the video store to the bakery to the dry cleaner and back to the bank for more money, all this and more can now be done in just one stop by going to HyVee.

No longer just grocery stores, many area HyVee stores have become one-stop shopping centers. Take, for example, the one at Grand and E.P. True in West Des Moines. Now home economists warn us not to do our grocery shopping on an empty stomach. We may end up buying things we otherwise wouldn't have. To protect us against this (among other reasons, I'm sure) HyVee has a deli/cafe as soon as you walk in the door. You can start your shopping by sitting down for a lunch of turkey and dressing, fried chicken, or maybe some Mexican food. There are dozens of entrees and side dishes to choose from, not all of them like Mom would make, but better than what one would expect from a cafeteria. And for a busy shopper at the start of a busy day, you can't beat the price and selection.

The smell of fresh baked breads and rolls beckons as you continue down the aisle. More than a token stand passed off as a bakery, the HyVee bakery has all the variety of the family-owned, neighborhood bakery, and more. You can have special-order cakes ready usually in just one day. The chocolate cake with butter cream frosting was recommended to me by one of the employees, and I was not disappointed. Unlike many bakery cakes I've had, the cake was moist and the frosting creamy,

not gritty. I received many comments on how delicious the cake was and heard more than once that night, "I can't believe this is from HyVee!"

But HyVee is full of surprises. It seems every time I go there, I discover another service available, cash checks and even pay some bills, but HyVee offers more. Your dry cleaning can be dropped off, to be picked up, cleaned, and returned by French Way Cleaners. Shoe repair is also available. And to save you even more time, First Interstate Bank has a full-service branch right inside the store. They are open 7-days-a-week and, although not 24-hours-a-day like HyVee, their hours are still very convenient (definitely not "banker's hours!").

A full-time pharmacist is on hand to fill prescriptions and answer any questions you might have about medication. Although there is not a wide selection of over-the-counter medications, the pharmacy does carry more than just the brand names. There are generic equivalencies available for almost everything, at sometimes less than half the price of the name brand. If you don't see it, just ask.

With the additions of an in-store florist and video department, I can't think of anything you *can't* get done at HyVee, except maybe an oil change. But then again, the employees seem so eager to please it couldn't hurt to ask!

If you have any questions about a service or where to find something, the HyVee employees are there to help. Being new to the area and the store, my first few months found me asking for help on almost every trip. Instead of being made to feel like an inconvenience, as is so common with "service" personnel these days, each employee made me feel as though s/he was there just for me. I wasn't "told where to go," either. I was taken to the item I was looking for. If it wasn't available, they might suggest a similar product or tell me where I might go to find what I was looking for. Whether the

reasons behind this courtesy stem from good employee training or from the store being employee-owned doesn't concern me as much as the fact that it still exists—from the time I walk in, when someone *hands* me a shopping cart, until my groceries are loaded in my car for me. Weekly grocery shopping has become less of a chore.

Of course, courtesy and convenience don't matter much if you end up paying more for your groceries. While many area stores, along with HyVee, have competitive prices on name brands, HyVee also has store brand products which are substantially lower in price than the name brands. If you read the labels and compare, you will find they are virtually the same product. Sometimes the only difference is that the HyVee brand has less sodium or additives and preservatives, some things I don't mind "sacrificing."

But even if HyVee *didn't* have low prices, convenient hours, and so many stores-in-one, I think the courtesy alone would be enough to keep me coming back.



First Day of School

Kathy J. Byers
Composition I

Remembering my son's first day of kindergarten floods my mind with various memories. Great care had gone into the preparation of that very important moment. I was hopeful that he was ready for this leap into life, and perhaps even more, I hoped that I was ready for him to leap.

First, there was the process of enrolling him in school. From the beginning I imposed a desperate plea to the school, "Can my son please attend morning class kindergarten?" Somewhere I had read that young children's minds are like little sponges, ready to absorb everything within their environment. I know my son. He is a morning person. I wanted his "little sponge" to be at its highest point of absorbency.

A month later I received the news. My son had been assigned to a morning kindergarten class and his teacher would be Mrs. Kilpatrick. I was elated! Sharing my bubbling enthusiasm with my son brought a vague, somewhat disinterested, "Oh yeah, okay, Mom;" however, when I told him that his teacher would be Mrs. Kilpatrick, he moaned, "I'll never learn to say that name, it's too hard!" Assuring him that we would work on it together seemed to ease his fears.

Now that registration was behind us, properly dressing the soon-to-be kindergartner was next. It didn't take long to discover that this was not my son's idea of fun. His impatience was apparent as I helped him struggle out of the tenth pair of pants he had tried on that day. He was equally unimpressed with comparing different styles of shirts. "Which shirt do you like better, the red one or the white one?" The frustration was evident in his voice, "Mom, it doesn't matter." Realizing that I had pushed the shopping "fun" as far as was reasonable, it was time for us to go.

With enough new pants, shirts, and shoes to see him through the first six months, everything was done.

Or so I hoped.

I began to ponder different thoughts. With my son entering school, my sphere of influence would decline with each passing year. Had I instilled the values in him that I believed to be important?

Did he understand the importance of not always doing what everyone else was doing, especially if it's hurtful to himself or someone else? Did he understand the difference between worrying enough to remember to wear his hat if it's cold outside, but not to worry if he became muddy while playing because sometimes, learning can be a messy job? Did he know beyond a shadow of doubt that I loved him, and that if he had a question or problem I would always be there for him? Even if he had done something that he believed to be wrong? Did he know that he was capable of accomplishing anything if he would only believe it to be possible? I felt reasonable confident that he was developing values that would serve him well, while acknowledging that only time would bring the true answers to my questions.

The day arrived. I awoke him early so that he would have plenty of time to eat, put on his freshly pressed clothes, brush his teeth, and wash his hands and face. Combing his blond hair, I gazed upon his tanned little face; I couldn't help but notice the excitement of anticipation in his round blue eyes. "Well kiddo, it's time to hit the road." I grabbed my camera and he grabbed his new backpack.

We had to park a block from the school building. Walking, we soon approached a street corner intersection. Automatically I drilled him about remembering to look both ways before crossing, "I know, I know, Mom." I knew that he knew.

As we approached the school, I joined other groups of parents taking pictures of their children. After getting as many posed and "natural" shots that I thought he would reasonably tolerate, I knew the time was drawing

close. I wasn't worried about him being able to find his class because we had visited the school a few days prior in order to reduce any first day jitters he may have. For weeks he had been able to say his teacher's name, Mrs. Kilpatrick, with complete ease.

Standing there outside of the school, beside the school building doors, I kneeled down to look at those beautiful blue eyes. "I just know that you're going to have a super day."

"Okay," he responded.

"I'm looking forward to hearing all about it later."

"Okay Mom." I yearned to reach out and hug him. We had always been very affectionate, but I didn't dare risk embarrassing him now, here, on this very important day. "You know that I love you to pieces, right?" He nodded. I knew it was time. I stood up. "Have a great day, Sweetheart," I cheerfully said.

"Bye, Mom," he responded just as cheerfully.

I didn't walk him into the school. Basically, this was going to be his journey. It was important to me that he cross the door's threshold by himself. We didn't talk about it but I believe that he, too, sensed the importance of doing this himself.

After I felt sure that he was a safe distance down the hallway, I stepped inside. There was my little blond son, clad in freshly ironed khaki shorts, a red shirt, royal blue backpack swung over his left shoulder. He looked so small in that large long hallway, but he walked with confidence, his head held high, a sense of eager anticipation in his step. As the lump welled in my throat, I quickly departed, fearing that he might turn around and see me.

Walking to my car I thought about my precious son. It seemed that it was only yesterday that he was a babe in my arms. In the briefness of a moment, the first six years of his life scanned across the screen of my mind.

Driving home, with tears streaming down my cheeks, I realized that he had taught me so much. Patience, the magic of a totally selfless love, the importance of

setting an example, just to name a few. Reflecting further I knew that he too had learned. He was one of the most honest people I knew. His unfailing kindness and generosity toward others had always held me in a state of awe. And I had to admit that his enthusiasm for learning reminded me of myself.

In that instant I realized that the biggest part of my job was done. From here on out most of his growth would involve building upon the skills and behaviors he had already learned. The foundation had been laid. It was a strong foundation.

A smile began to break through my tears. It really wasn't a leap after all; rather, it was a step—a step we were both ready to take.



Out of Control

Linda Kline
Composition I

Credit cards—aren't they wonderful? You can buy the things you want when you want them, or take that vacation you've been dreaming about! Drive? Why not fly. The time saved by flying is worth more than the extra cost. And as long as you send in that small monthly payment, you're home free! Well, these little plastic wonders can sabotage your willpower if you're not careful!

Robin and I were working together when she applied for, and received, her J. C. Penney charge card. "Look at what came in my mail yesterday," she beamed. "Isn't it exciting. I've never had a credit card before! I can't wait to use it!" She made a purchase, paid it off in two or three payments; made another purchase (just a bit larger) and paid it off in four or five small monthly payments. It was great! Montgomery Ward and Younkers cards came during this time and she used them in the same way. No problems yet, though there were three small monthly payments. When her Sears card arrived, Robin was ecstatic! She called me and announced its arrival with great pride in her voice: "Guess what? I'm now the proud owner of a Sears Charge Card! You have to have GOOD credit to get one of these!! I'm going to the mall to try it out—wanna go?" "No, thanks. Just don't go overboard with these cards, O.K.? I don't want to sound like your mother, but you do have to pay eventually, you know," I warned. "I know, but I'm in complete control. Don't worry!" she assured me. Add payment number four.

Robin almost sent out engraved announcements when her MasterCard and Visa cards arrived. In her eyes, these were THE ultimate credit cards. New horizons awaited her! And new clothes and new shoes and new

jewelry and new curtains and new sheets and towels and—oh, yes, that “justoogoodofapricetopassup” rabbit fur coat! There were restaurants to eat at, weekend getaway trips to Kansas City and Chicago, and gifts to buy for her family and friends. She wasn't happy unless she was using one of her credit cards for something—**ANYTHING!!**

“You've got to come over and see my new entertainment center that was just delivered. It's got a color TV, a VCR, and a complete stereo. It looks great with all of my other new furniture—kind of completes the look! Oh, and I bought a microwave, too, at the same store. You wouldn't believe their prices! You should go and get some things you need. Anyway, I figured out that it's only going to take 24 months to pay for all of it, so I can handle it.”

Not too long after this, Robin began acting strange. She wouldn't “do lunch” with her friends, or go to a movie or out for pizza with us. She complained of getting nothing but junk mail anymore. (She **LOVES** junk mail!) She worked out a code for her friends to call her—let the phone ring twice, hang up and call back—because she said she kept getting nuisance calls. She wouldn't answer her phone if we didn't use the code. I went along with this mysterious (and annoying) game for a short while, but confronted her after work one day after watching her sneak to her car, nervously glancing around the parking lot. “What the hell's wrong with you? Is the Mafia after you or what?” I demanded.

“No, it's not them, though they would be easier to face. It's my creditors! I owe so much I can't make my payments. I haven't answered their letters or phone calls for the last month, and I'm afraid they're going to show up here at work. I just don't know what to do! I thought I could handle it. Will you help me figure something out?” she blurted out, her eyes glistening with tears. I could see the embarrassment on her face, and knew that this confession had been very difficult

for her. Robin is a proud, responsible person who normally has her life under control, but right now, that control had slipped away from her. Needless to say, within one year of the arrival of that credit card, my friend was "maxed out." Those small monthly payments they advertise were using up the money that was supposed to buy her food and the gas for her car.

We went straight to her apartment to brainstorm and came up with a few ideas. She vetoed borrowing money from her parents because she didn't want them to know about her problem, and a consolidation loan didn't appeal to her because of the high interest rates charged by finance companies. The plan she chose began with a pair of scissors and a wastebasket and ended with her selling her car, her most prized possession. She had saved for two years to buy that car. Robin grimaced with pain with each snip-snip of the scissors, as if I were cutting pieces of her in two instead of her credit cards. And she cried, two days later, as she signed the title of her silver Monte Carlo over to the new owner; it had been the car of her dreams. But now she had enough money to pay off all the credit card balances and buy her a new mode of transportation: a shiny new ten speed bicycle!

I have to admit, I wasn't sure she would stick to this part of the plan because she was going to have to use this bicycle for five months, from May through September. Yet each morning she pedaled the three miles into work, no matter if it was hot and humid or windy and raining. At the end of the work day, she would climb wearily onto the bike and ride home. The only time she would accept a ride was when it was really storming out. She was lucky enough to live within walking distance from the grocery store so she didn't have to try to balance a sack of groceries and ride her bike at the same time. I'm not sure if I would have been able to stick with it, to be honest, but Robin did, and by the end of September she had saved enough to buy a good,

dependable car. Even though it wasn't a Monte Carlo she was very pleased with it and with herself for sticking to the plan. She was also pleased about the fact that she had lost some weight and had toned her body up during the process.

Fortunately, Robin's credit rating wasn't destroyed by all of this, and the following January she applied for, and received, a loan to buy a small house. Robin still doesn't own a credit card—she says the temptation to buy is too great for her. "It's kind of like being an alcoholic," she sighs. "I can't stop with just one purchase. I always want MORE!!"



Can We Save Ourselves?

*Michael Hartman
Composition I*

Genocide. Can it be described in any other way? We, the members of the human race, are creating a disposable world. Virtually everything sold to consumers is packaged in something which will be thrown away as trash. Slowly, human waste is polluting our air, land, wildlife, and water. Along with destroying the environment, we are destroying ourselves. If we are to save our own lives, we must save this planet. It is for this reason I believe that the government should impose a mandatory recycling law.

Mandatory recycling would require people to separate their recyclable waste—such as bottles, cans, and paper—from waste which could not be recycled. With each group of waste separated, garbage collection services, using trucks with individual bins for different waste, would pick up the garbage and take it to centers for recycling. The remaining garbage which couldn't be recycled would be taken to incinerators or landfills depending on the amount of garbage and the needs of the community.

Recycling would cut down the waste that we create daily. Almost 421,918 tons of garbage is thrown away daily by the population of the United States according to the Earth Works group. This is enough garbage to fill the New Orleans Superdome from top to bottom, twice a day, every day. More than half of that garbage could be recycled and immeasurable acres of land could be saved from becoming polluted landfills.

Recycling would also help save our water supplies. In areas such as New York, Washington D.C., and Chicago, landfills have allowed poisons to seep into the ground water. This pollution of the water supply is creating water shortages in these areas. Clean, fresh water, a

basic necessity to human, animal, and plant life, is becoming one of our most endangered resources.

Opponents of a mandatory recycling law argue that making the individual separate garbage is a waste of that person's time, and that problems of pollution are caused by corporations and factories. Most of us seem to believe tighter controls should be imposed on these businesses by the government.

While I agree that corporate pollution should be regulated closely, I do not believe it is the solution to the problem of pollution. According to the Environmental Defense Fund, 53% of the pollution generated in the U.S. is by individual persons as a collective whole. If every person would do his or her part by spending an extra few minutes to separate recyclable waste, a chain reaction of benefits would occur.

First, garbage dumps would not fill to capacity. Fewer garbage dumping sites would be needed. Second, pollution of water from dump sites would lessen due to fewer poisons going directly into the land. Third, less energy would be used in making products from recycled materials than would be required to start from scratch. Fourth, air pollution would decrease because factories would burn lower amounts of fossil fuels to supply the energy to make products from recycled waste. Fewer natural resources such as trees would be used, and so on.

Opponents of a recycling law also argue that the government doesn't have the right to dictate how a person spends his or her time. Those who disagree with a recycling law often believe that a business should be created to separate waste so that the individual doesn't have to waste his or her time performing the task.

However, two problems exist when responsibility for recycling shifts from the individual to the government. The first is the amount of waste to be separated after it is collected. The tons upon tons of garbage would require huge amounts of labor to separate. The number of man-hours required creates the second problem,

money. Funding for such a large operation won't magically appear. The government is already in debt and doesn't have the funding available for such a large project. Taxes to support recycling are very unlikely to be supported by the people. A mandatory recycling law would be for the good of all people which is what laws were intended for. The law would help by treating the problem of pollution itself, rather than treating only the symptoms.

Though we have known about the pollution of the environment for years, few people have taken upon themselves the task of stopping pollution. By imposing a mandatory recycling law, we would be required to take responsibility for our own waste. This slight change in our lifestyles would create long-term benefits for all life on Earth. For the human race, a mandatory recycling law seems to be the simplest thing we can do to save ourselves.



Wounded Bird

Mia Osterse
Composition I

The scenario was always the same: Brrringgg. Recess time! Recess was the only reason worth going to school besides show and tell, and lunch. Everyone threw their reading books in their desks and lined up by the door. Single file we marched into the hallway and geared up in our coats, boots, mittens, mufflers, hats, and ski masks. It took more time to put on our overclothes than we had recess time. Out we walked until we passed the threshold of the old red school door, then we ran, in all directions, to the crossbars and chin up bars, to the swings and slides, to the teeter totter and jungle gym. Our playground was small but it held a world of fun for small children. It held a world of fun, however, until the boys ran out of things to do. Then they would always find the girls to tease, and tease they did.

I was in first grade when they started picking on me. I was a skinny thing, I was quiet and kept to myself, I had thin legs, a pixie haircut, and cat-like framed glasses. I was the perfect excuse for the boys to tease. I now realize boys are boys and their nature is to tease, but at that time I just *knew* they hated me, and I hated them. They started out calling me four-eyes (the old classic), then moved on to ostrich, which evolved to ostrich legs, to bird legs, and finally, to bird. I hated the word bird, the word brought to mind a scraggly, ugly, matted little creature, the ugly duckling. Oh! How I hated that word.

One cold, snowy, January day my girlfriend, Robin, and I were at the last recess of the day playing on the jungle gym. We were having a lot of fun playing touch tag, minding our own business, when what happens when you're in the height of your fun? The recess bell rings, and it's all over. Robin fled to the school door with a stream of long red hair waving behind her. I crawled down from the top of the jungle gym to run

after her. Unbeknown to me, the boys had been "bird watching." They clobbered me with icy snowballs and name calling. Why didn't they get Robin too? She wore glasses! She was ghostly pale! She had way too many freckles! Why couldn't they just once tease her too? But I knew the answer—her dad was the town Sheriff. It was just not fair!

At the young, tender age of seven, words and actions are cruel and hurtful, here I was being battered to death—in my own school yard and by my own classmates at that.

"Boys! Boys!" Mrs. Anderson, the teacher on recess patrol, yelled as she waddled down to the jungle gym. That was all it took, and they were gone—as quickly as they had appeared. Mrs. Anderson was my first grade teacher and there she stood before me, her pursed lips painted with orange-toned lipstick and a red smear of rouge on each cheek; her dishwater blonde hair was cut short with a thick curl of bangs on her forehead. She looked at me as if I had provoked them! I received no sympathy from her as I sat there crying, my glasses broken, wet, cold, hurt, and humiliated.

She drug me up on my feet by one arm. With a disgusted look on her round, pug face, she waddled back to the school building with me at her side, my knees shaking and pink from the snowballs. She did not let me go home early that afternoon. She said I was a little wet and a little cold but that I was alright and she made me sit through class until 3:30 when school ended. I remember running home to the security of my mother's warm, loving arms and never, never, ever wanting to go back to that school and see those . . . those . . . those boys, ever, ever again!

Of course I did go back to school; I went back the next day and every day after that. I don't recall any significant learning experience from my clobbering. I found out that the boys were given a good talking to, which did not affect their outlook on me nor their name calling. So . . . things went on pretty much as usual—with the

exception that I now hated Mrs. Anderson along with the boys.

By the fourth grade "Bird" was my standard name. I still had the same perception I had in first grade of the word and still hated the one-syllable word, bird, but something crazy had happened. One day for an art assignment Miss Reeves, our art teacher, assigned us to draw a picture of anything in the world that we wanted to draw. I thought and thought and I started drawing, oddly enough, birds. I worked religiously on these birds—at home and in art class. Miss Reeves was a big, roly-poly woman with short, salt and pepper colored hair. Her head did not seem to fit her body, it was small and round, like a melon. Aside from her unusual appearance I liked her and she liked me; she paid attention to me; she thought I had talent. Miss Reeves gave me an A for my bird drawing. Crude as it was, she was amazed and thought I had much talent in the bird-drawing area. She, along with my family and friends, thought they were beautiful little creatures.

I continued drawing my birds throughout grade and high school and with each bird I drew, the name became a bit more bearable—more likeable—not as ugly.

Today I have perfected these birds and craft them lovingly. They are colorful birds; tall with long legs and knocked knees; their bodies are like a Butterball turkey, round and fat; they have long swirled tail feathers and short wings; they have a long curved neck and on their head they sport long swirled head feathers to match their tail feathers; and they have big eyes with long eyelashes. I make greeting cards with my birds on them; I paint them on canvas with oils and acrylics; I craft mobiles; I sculpt them. Most recently with amateur videos I dabble in I used "Bird Productions" on the cover, along with the name of the production.

I like the word Bird. There is no pain, there are no ugly thoughts, and there is no hatred associated with the name any longer.

I can truly say I have grown from the little, wounded bird in first grade, to a person who uses her talent and the name Bird to fly to greater heights.



Jesse

*Ardis Morrison
Composition I*

Jesse reminded me of one of the munchkins in the Wizard of Oz. She was short, with a sturdy build and an elfin-like face. When she walked, she swayed from side to side like a penguin.

I first met Jesse at a meeting of United Methodist Women. Although she was seventy years old, she wasn't typical of the other older women in the group. She wasn't there to sip tea and socialize. Jesse was there to work—to help other people in any way she could. She was actively involved in mission projects in our church and throughout the Des Moines area. During the meeting, Jesse gave a brief announcement about the Polk County Elderly Nutrition Program and asked for a volunteer to help her deliver meals to shut-ins in Ankeny. Everyone was quiet and looked at the floor as if they had just been asked to volunteer for the military. After the meeting, I went up to Jesse and casually said, "That sounds like an interesting volunteer job, but I would have to bring my five-year-old son, Kyle, along."

"I like children," she responded in a blunt, to-the-point manner. So much for my excuse. We made arrangements for her to pick me up the next day at 11:00 a.m. and I left the meeting wishing I hadn't opened my mouth. On the way out, a friend asked, "Have you ever ridden with Jesse?"

"No. Why?"

She just laughed and walked away.

The next day Jesse arrived promptly at eleven in her old battle-scarred, blue and white Pinto. I put Kyle in the back seat and climbed in the front seat next to Jesse. She stepped on the gas peddle like she had just seen a green flag at the Indianapolis 500. I dug my fingernails into the armrest and prayed as we broke the speed limit on our way to the DMACC cafeteria to pick up the food.

It was an arctic January day with a temperature of 2°. We had fifteen meals to deliver all over town—hopefully while they were still hot. By the time we finished, my feet felt like deformed Popsicles. I was exhausted and out of breath. Jesse seemed as cheery as if we had just returned from a vacation in the Bahamas.

We dropped Kyle off at afternoon kindergarten, and when he got out of the car, I noticed he had food stains on his coat. He had been sitting quietly in the back seat trying to eat a sack lunch while Jesse steered the car around town like an out-of-control roller coaster. She took me home, and as I got out of the car she said, "I'll see you next week!" Then she screeched out of my driveway. I limped into the house, my toes still numb, and collapsed on the couch.

How could I possibly spend two hours every Friday with this eccentric old woman who drove like the winner of a demolition derby? I couldn't even carry on a conversation with her. She talked about mission projects, books she had read, politics, and foreign affairs. When she asked me if I'd read any books lately, I was embarrassed to admit that I had not. She challenged me to stretch my mind, and I wasn't sure if I was intrigued or annoyed by her prodding.

That was the beginning of a relationship with Jesse that lasted five years. I never did think of a good excuse to quit helping her deliver the meals.

One Friday after we finished the route, she invited me to have lunch at her house. I wasn't sure I wanted to spend more time with her, but I couldn't think of any good reason to say no. As I walked into her house, the scent of Swiss steak simmering on the stove almost made me drool. Her house was plain and unpretentious, just like Jesse. The living room was sparsely furnished with just a couch, rocking chair, and some bookcases. Her collection of books had outgrown the shelves and overflowed onto the floor in neatly stacked piles.

Sitting at her kitchen table savoring steak, salad, and pie made with strawberries from her garden, it struck

me that this was a very loving thing that she had done for me. Jesse was very uncomfortable with any display of affection, so maybe this was her way of showing me that she cared about me. I looked across the table at this fragile little woman, so short that her legs dangled from the chair, and for the first time saw her as vulnerable, and maybe even lonely. She occasionally talked about her children and grandchildren, but never any friends.

The last two years of Jesse's life were difficult, as she battled cancer. She fought the disease like a determined young prizefighter; never complaining and never giving up. She had three surgeries during that time and came back to help me deliver the meals within a few weeks after each hospitalization. Some of the people we delivered meals to were in better shape than Jesse, but she was too stubborn to admit she didn't feel well.

The last time we were together was a glorious, sunny Friday in October. Jesse was scheduled for her fourth cancer surgery the following Monday. She didn't talk much during the route—just a few comments about how beautiful the trees were this year. When she dropped me off at home, she got out of her car and stood in my driveway. I sensed she wanted to say something, but the words wouldn't come out. Finally, I said, "Jesse, just go into this surgery with the same positive attitude as you did before."

"Yes, I will," she said weakly.

I had an empty feeling as she got into her car. I wanted to hug her, but I knew she wouldn't be comfortable with that. She yelled back at me, "You'll take care of everything for me, won't you?"—meaning delivering the meals until she got back from the hospital.

Jesse died a few days later from complications of the surgery. Her funeral was well attended by staff members from the Urban Mission Council, and several pastors from area churches. I sat toward the back of the church, feeling rather insignificant among this crowd of semi-VIP's.

After the service, I went outside and looked up the street at the trees that were now deep shades of scarlet, rust, and amber. The sun seemed to highlight each leaf. As I walked around the corner toward the parking lot, I saw Jesse's old Pinto; her grandson had driven it to the funeral. I looked at it for a moment and started to cry. Deep choking sobs rolled over me like waves. Someone came up behind me and led me to my car.

Later that afternoon, I went out to the back yard to pull weeds out of the strawberry patch. Jesse had given me the plants when she thinned out her patch. I was disgusted with myself for letting the weeds get so thick that they nearly strangled the little strawberry plants. I thought if I pulled the weeds and covered the plants with leaves, they might do better next spring. I worked impatiently, digging my manicured nails into the dirt. I had the eery feeling that Jesse was watching me. I mumbled to the strawberry plants, "Yes, Jesse, I'll take care of everything for you."



Rocky Mountain High

Ellen Koeneman
Composition I

As summer approaches, many of us are trying to answer that age-old question of what to do for a vacation this year. For several years now I have gone backpacking for a week with a group to Colorado. Each year something draws me back to the hiking boots and "gorp"—good old raisins, peanuts, M&M's and whatever else you want to put in it. Those majestic mountains and times of gathering around a bonfire bring back fond memories. Perhaps backpacking is the alternative you are looking for this year.

A backpacking group need only consist of a few interested hikers. The group I trek with started with a handful of individuals who share camping as a hobby and attend the same church. Groups can also be found through the local sports equipment supplier or backpacking clubs.

The first year I went backpacking, my acute anxiety over having to leave the curling iron, make-up and contacts behind overwhelmed me. When I realized all personal items, plus my share of the group equipment, had to be carried on *my* back, reality set in. I've learned that I can live without "essentials." Compared to other vacations where one takes a major shopping spree prior to leaving, backpacking requires only a couple of your favorite jeans, T-shirts, sweatshirts, and a good pair of hiking boots. One backpack, totalling approximately 35 to 40 pounds, will carry the basic needs of the average backpacker.

Investing in expensive camping equipment for this venture is not a necessity. Renting or borrowing gear from a seasoned backpacker is a possibility. Once you decide this is an adventure you want to repeat, look for off-season sales at sports equipment stores and garage

sales. By taking a van, dividing the cost of gas and borrowing equipment, on an average it costs each member under fifty dollars, although I recommend an investment in a good pair of hiking boots. Backpacking may be the least expensive vacation you will take.

Food for the expedition should be kept simple and tasty. None of those dehydrated unidentifiable food items should be included or it will be a week of malnutrition. Numerous camping supply stores now carry meals packaged in what is called a soft can. Choice such as salisbury steak, chicken tetrazzini and chili are available in pouches which require only to be placed in boiling water for 3 to 5 minutes to heat. We even made cheesecake; a mix was prepared, then covered with cherries and cooled in the nearby stream. A scrumptious meal for a ravenous appetite after hiking all day. For those late night snackers, popcorn and s'mores made over the bonfire hit the spot. KP—Kitchen Patrol was rotated so members only were involved in cooking and clean up a couple times that week. Two rules were strictly enforced: no food in the tents and all food was to be put in the bearline at night. A net bag suspended high in an overhanging limb served as a bearline; therefore, wild animals would not be attracted to our campsite.

A first-aid kit and medical pack are essential for backpacking, due to the lack of medical facilities close by. A person experienced in first aid and often a nurse was included in our group. For emergencies a person can return back down the trail where vehicles are parked and drive to get help. At the head of hiking trails, groups are required to register the day they enter, the day they are leaving and the number of members in the group.

Backpacking is not only for the super athlete who runs marathons and pumps iron to get into physical shape, but is also for the average person. With her doctor's approval, one year a woman who was five

months pregnant and a three year old child accompanied our group. If you enjoy walking, you will enjoy ambling along the scenic mountain trails. Established trails in the national forest are classified by their level of difficulty, leaving the hiker to choose the summit he would like to master. On our trip each hiker sets his individual pace with periodic rests depending on his endurance. Those choosing to hike at a faster rate went ahead on the trail and determined the camp location, then returned for stragglers to help carry their packs. Many do not engage in any special exercise regime before the trip, but I find bicycling a short distance daily to strengthen my legs was beneficial. Although sore muscles from exercising those unused in the everyday course of life are a common occurrence, one goes to bed with a tranquil kind of tiredness.

Although the weather does not cooperate at times, all enjoyment is not lost. Rain gear would include a rain poncho or suit and large plastic bags to cover the backpack. The waterproof tents provide a haven from the elements. Time could be spent playing cards or reading by a flashlight, catching up on sleep or visiting while the rain continued outside.

Water for bathing and cooking was as close as the local stream or lake. Using a small portable water purifier makes the water safe for human consumption. Filling a large shower bladder and laying it in the sun to heat, then hanging it from a branch served as a shower. We took shower curtains along since this was a co-ed group; all the conveniences of home. Washing our hair was a communal effort each morning. Pouring water from the cold mountain stream over a shampoo-lathered head is invigorating.

Some people are affected by the altitude, although it seldom deters them from the experience. Headaches which occur can be relieved with simple analgesics. One fellow in our group constantly got headaches yet continued to go each year.

Backpacking is just the mountains, wildlife, clear air and hiking winding trails. The first year I went, we chose to set up a base camp in a beautiful meadow dotted with wild flowers near a rushing mountain stream. Once camp was set up, we usually stayed there for a week, taking day hikes from that point. Our day consisted of doing anything from hiking, fishing, kite flying or taking a rain poncho to use as a toboggan to slide down the snow-covered mountainside. To add excitement to our hikes, deer would bound across our path, hummingbirds would zoom over our heads, and marmots, those woodchuck-like creatures, crossed caravan style across our trail. The small pika—a rabbit-like mammal which lives in the rocky terrain—scurried into its burrow when we approached.

The cooperation and teamwork involved in backpacking can deepen relationships. There is a special bond with those I share a backpacking experience. Some group members I see only a couple times a year, but it is inevitable our conversation gets around to reminiscing about our backpacking days. Evenings spent together around the bonfire singing, laughing, telling stories and watching falling stars are deeply meaningful and memorable. Making new friendships with members of the group is rewarding. A tentmate becomes special after the joint effort of putting up our tent dwelling and rooming together for several days. Fun and fellowship abounded, yet I watched my sleeping back for crumbled crackers placed by some prankster.

Forget packing and lugging suitcases, then tipping the baggage carrier, only to arrive at your destination with your luggage sent to the opposite coast. Are you going into debt for an expensive vacation spent staying in a stuffy hotel room, then spending the next six months paying it off?

Possibly you're tired of the crowds, hectic pace and long lines at frequently-attended tourist traps. So much for the relaxing vacation you dreamed of. Going to the

mountains is the ultimate in recreation. You deserve the relaxation after a year with a hectic schedule. Although backpacking may not be for everyone, try enjoying nature and getting back to basics in life. Consider backpacking as an alternative. Get that Rocky Mountain "high."



Dear Mr. Dylan

*William Dillard
Composition II*

Bob,

Where have you been? It seems like ages since we've last heard from you. You remember those days, don't you, when we all marched together bearing flowers and chanting our songs. Remember when every one who could find a guitar or harmonica tried to learn how to play? We sat in our dorm rooms practicing the nasal intonations of your voice, changing your lyrics, trying to make them our own. We never realized that they already were.

Every arts major in college wanted to be just like you Bob; the lonely wanderer, wise for his years, traveling Highway 61. Who cared if you were actually born Robert Zimmerman, the son of Jewish merchants, and had probably never seen Highway 61. All that ever really mattered was the songs. We sang "The Times They Are A-Changin'" like a battle hymn, which, I guess, it was, and spent hours pondering the images of "Hard Rain."

What happened Bob? We lost touch with you some where. We all gave into the material world, deciding that becoming doctors, lawyers, and industrialists was much more important than saving our souls. We did our part, the world wasn't that bad off, really. Our children would fix it. Right?

Forgive us, Bob, we were wrong. We all live in mortgaged houses and drive foreign cars now. We spend our weekends partying by our swimming pools while our brothers and sisters starve next door. And our children, Bob, they don't care. Why should they?

I was at the mall yesterday and I saw your picture in the record store window. Your sparse beard and impish smirk seemed out of place next to the youthful excess of

"New Kids." I bought your new tape Bob, you know, *Oh Mercy*. I listened to it on my way home.

The whole album seems dark and foreboding with little hope for the future. We can't blame you for this though. The times have changed Bob, unfortunately, for the worst. Your songs "Political World" and "Everything Is Broken" paint an excellent portrait of the decadence that is our world. Telling the truth has never sold anything, Bob. People don't want to know what the world is really like outside of their suburbs and shopping malls. It scares the shit out of them. But you know that, don't you? You always tell us exactly what we don't want to hear. You've never pulled a punch, have you?

In the song "What Good Am I?" you ask the same questions that plague us all. Every one of us has at one time or another looked into the mirror and counted our wrinkles, wondering where we went wrong. You always know the right questions to ask to make us think, to make us act, Bob. You may only hint at the answers but you always know the right questions.

Hell, Bob, even when you point the problem out to us, like in "Disease of Conceit," we don't always listen. I guess that admitting that there is a problem is the first step toward solving it. Unfortunately, the disease runs rampant among even your most devout disciples.

You end your album by asking us one last question, "What Was It You Wanted?" What do we want, well, that's easy enough to answer. One more cause Bob, that's what we want. One more thing to struggle for, one more reason to get off our lazy asses and try to change the world one more time. Is that too much to ask for?

The problem is that we're old now, Bob. Few of us have the balls to stand up for our beliefs like we used to. Don't feel bad, you knew it was bound to happen. There is still hope though. Our children, Bob. They're better educated than we ever were and, as always, with youth comes that endless desire to right the wrongs of the

world, that innocent belief that things are changeable, that feeling of invincibility that keeps one going. The young don't fear the world like we do, Bob. They think that they will live forever. Let's hope they do.

Sing your songs for them Bob, they may be our last hope. They may not want to listen but keep trying. If only one listens, if only one tries to make a change, others will surely follow. Just like we followed you to Mississippi and to Washington, D.C. Remember?

Well that's pretty much it for now. I like your new album Bob, I really do. I think it ranks among your best works. Don't let us lose touch again Bob, our hope for the future resides in you. Never stop writing your songs, never stop telling us all we don't want to hear. Please, Bob, if not for us, then for the children.

Take care Bob, we missed you.
Your faithful (although older) followers.

P.S. I liked your song "Man In The Long Black Coat," although I'm not really sure what it is that you're trying to tell us. Of course, that's always been half the fun of your music, hasn't it Bob? Maybe I'll ask my daughter what it means, she probably knows.



At Recess In The Iowa Senate

Jean McPherson
Composition II

The Senate Chamber of the Iowa Capitol, like much of the 100-year old building, is beautiful. Its vast expanse is decorated with the deep rich scarlet and gold hues of royalty. The warm walnut and oak furniture, panelings and trim blend beautifully with the shiny marble pillars and the four large, ornate chandeliers overhead.

The 40-foot tall arched windows on either side of the Chamber are covered with scarlet velvet draperies and are decorated with an "I" insignia, as in the carpet covering the Senate floor.

From where I sit, high in the gallery on the north side of the Senate Chamber, it is easier to appreciate the beauty of the large stained-glass window placed in the ceiling and lit artificially from both above and below. In addition to the deep colors of the stained glass, there is a large amount of opaque etched glass. The intricate paintings and moldings on the ceiling may go unnoticed in the day-to-day activities that occur during the annual legislative sessions, but I thoroughly enjoy them today as the Chamber is relatively quiet and I am alone in the gallery.

I have come to witness the activity, the relative calm, while the legislators are at recess. Some are at lunch, some in the committee meeting I see posted on the electronic billboard mounted on the opposite side of the gallery, and others remain in the Chamber itself. From my vantage point well above the floor, I can witness the activity about the room with a panoramic view, yet I cannot hear anything that is being said.

At the press bench, a very intense discussion is being held between a reporter whom I know to be from the *Des Moines Register* and a legislator who has just recently announced his decision not to seek another term. The

legislator is sitting at ease, seemingly quite comfortable with the reporter, but frequently using firm hand motions, perhaps to help emphasize the point he is making. The reporter diligently takes notes, pausing to look up from time to time at the lawmaker who seems to know a good deal about the subject. The reporter interjects with a question occasionally, giving himself the opportunity to scratch his head or push his glasses up on his nose. This exchange is followed by even more animated gestures by the legislator as he returns to his topic.

At the opposite end of the room, another press bench is occupied by three more reporters who seem to be working on their stories from that morning's activities. It is interesting that all three of them use small portable computers, and even from where I sit, I can hear the persistent "tap, tap, tap" of their keyboards. This scene is far removed from the common stereotype image of the reporter with a "PRESS" card tucked into his hat band for identification and carrying a pencil and small note pad as tools of his trade! Two of the more seasoned reporters stop from time to time to chat with each other. As they both lean back in their chairs, one of them scratches his rather large midsection, while the other takes a long drag on his cigarette. Are they discussing their stories of mutual interest or the results of last night's ball game?

Since my employment with the State of Iowa, I have come to realize the importance of the role of the news media. The stories published in the print media and, even more so, in the broadcast news arena are what the majority of the public learn concerning our laws and the process by which these laws are made. Public opinion is shaped, measured and considered as a result of reporting and polls taken by members of the press. Legislators and other government officials rely quite heavily on public opinion; that is, after all, how they got in office. But I have also observed the reaction of non-elected officials to unfavorable stories concerning their

areas of government. Policies may be established, revised or eliminated as a result of one reporter's accounting of a single incident.

A prime example of this is the recent placement of two young children into foster care by the Department of Human Services when their father, with whom they were riding with in the family car, was arrested for OWI. The mother of the children, who was at home at the time of the arrest, was not allowed to know the whereabouts of the children for two days when she was able to obtain the legal means of locating her children through the court system. A law (and departmental policy) supposedly prevented the children from being returned to their home, where they should have been taken, rather than whisked off to a stranger's home for two days without any contact with either of their parents. The news account of this incident caused public outcries of indignation, and subsequently, that policy was changed within a matter of days. Had the news account only mentioned that another man was arrested for OWI, the policy may have remained unchanged.

In addition to the discussions taking place with reporters, other conversations are occurring around the large room. Many individuals appear to be relaxing during this recess. One gentleman has placed his feet up on the desk as he reads the newspaper. On an otherwise empty desk, a half-eaten sandwich and an apple can be seen. A few legislators sit in pairs around the room, while others are alone at their desks, flipping through materials before them. One man has been on the phone for quite some time and he occasionally stands and gestures with his entire arm as he stresses an important point to the person at the other end of the line. A few Senate pages and legislative secretaries are busy at desks around the room, filing documents which will be needed at some later time, throwing away many others.

A janitor makes his rounds, systematically dumping the trash cans beneath each desk into his large receptacle.

I can hear the rustling sound of paper in a steady, constant stream of "swishes" as he moves along the rows of desks.

There is a lot of truth to the notion that perhaps the most crucial decisions are made by lawmakers "behind the scenes." The closer one gets to the political process, the more one hears of the "deals" cut between lawmakers in order to have a special interest of their own supported or even taken up by the legislative body. Support of an issue may be mustered through one-on-one discussions with many lawmakers, perhaps agreeing to swap votes for each other's causes, or a debate held earlier in the formal session will continue long after the gavel has been dropped. There are so many issues presented to the state's lawmakers during their short time at the Capitol, there is a need for many specialized committees and that is where most of the decisions and recommendations for passage or defeat of a proposed bill are made. Legislators are usually recognized as specialists in one or more areas and they are often sought out by others for their advice.

Most of these decisions and agreements are made in private offices, secluded corners of the State House, or even a quiet booth of a nearby restaurant. However, I believe I see an important decision-making process occurring as I write this, as I witness (but do not hear) a discussion in a corner near the window on the floor of the Chamber.

A very powerful legislator, who is chairman of the Appropriations Committee (which ultimately is responsible for the funding of state programs) is reviewing an appropriation bill with two members of his party's research staff and two employees from the Legislative Fiscal Bureau. The Fiscal Bureau is a bi-partisan body whose function is to advise all legislators on fiscal policy and impact of proposed or existing legislation.

This group pours over the budget prints in front of them in the form of proposed appropriation bills and the lawmaker listens with keen interest to what his staff

is saying. He nods as if to indicate he understands or to indicate his approval as a staff member talks, but then abruptly raises his hand as if to stop him or to ask a question. He leans forward in his chair and speaks. Others around him quickly begin to make notations on the documents before them. Another staff member enters into the discussion and their voices become a bit louder. Are they disagreeing with each other, or just competing to be heard?

A little later, this legislator approaches others still in the room, leaning over the desk of one and speaks softly to him. He sits down beside another lawmaker further down the row of desks and slaps him on the back after visiting briefly with him. He continues to work his way around the room talking to several people before walking out of the Senate chamber into the Capitol rotunda. Is he looking for more of his colleagues to perhaps sway their opinion in his direction? Or is he simply leaving for lunch?

I have found the action on the floor of the Senate to be extremely interesting. I have speculated on what may be occurring, and am probably right in some respects but off the mark on others. The interesting thing is one will never know what is going on in the private discussions between our state's lawmakers, but I know the results of many of those discussions will be realized by the end of the legislative session. I'll continue to read the newspaper and listen to the news to determine how I am affected by it!



Tour of Duty: The Maternity Ward

Stephen Wesselmann
Composition II

During my high school years I worked as an orderly for a small hospital. Normally, I dealt with bedpans, backrubs, and basic medical care at work. During one unusually fertile period in the county, I was temporarily assigned to the obstetrics floor to assist in caring for the increasing population. Although I had younger brothers and a sister around most of the time, it was not quite the same as caring for babies fresh out of the wrapper.

The first few days of this new assignment weren't too out of the ordinary, but being a shy, sixteen year old it was a bit embarrassing. When the nurses asked me to fill the water pitchers in the labor room, I obediently entered the labor room to accomplish the task. Now here I was, right in the middle of the labor room, trying very hard not to drop the water pitchers on my feet. On one side of the room a mother-to-be was screaming and swearing at the top of her lungs, while on the other side of the room another future mother was slowly drawing her knees up to her chest and grunting deeply. Until this moment, I had considered myself pretty much conditioned to most of the sights and sounds of the hospital but what I was experiencing at this moment made me wonder why on earth these women would knowingly submit themselves to such pain and anxiety. Finally, after standing there staring in panic and amazement, the nurse escorted me out to the hall and told me I should wait a little while before I finished filling the water pitchers.

The nurses, realizing they had someone around who could do some of the unpleasant jobs, promptly took advantage of this fact. After a delivery I was told to scrub up the delivery room. I had seen the delivery room when it was clean and sterile. It was a cold,

squeaky clean room. Now as I scrubbed the room after it had been used for a birth, it didn't look clean or sterile, but it still seemed cold and impersonal. Not at all the type of room to instill the joy of birth into people. There were shiny, stainless steel instruments, trays, and I.V. stands, even the stirrups on the delivery table were bare cold stainless steel. Looking around at this room made me wonder why they had made these rooms so impersonal, so uncomfortable, so scary.

One day a week, the new mothers were gathered together in one large room and given a lecture and film strip on the benefits of breastfeeding. The head nurse of obstetrics usually gave the lecture and reviewed the film with the mothers in case they had any questions. On this day, the head nurse gave her lecture and then was summoned to the delivery room, so she needed someone to show the film. As luck would have it, I turned out to be the first person she saw when she left the room and so began the longest twenty minutes of my life. Imagine, if you will, one shy sixteen year old showing a film on breastfeeding to about a dozen women.

To make things more complicated, these women were all happy and euphoric having just dropped at least twenty pounds apiece and having all the pain of labor gone. They showed me no mercy, they asked every conceivable embarrassing question they could think of just to make the kid dressed in white, stutter, stammer, and turn red. Trying my best to maintain some measure of composure, I finished showing the film and promptly left the room with a chorus of laughter and whistles behind me.

By the end of the week in the baby factory, I had earned enough trust to help out in the nursery. One of the most important parts of working in the nursery was to scrub the hell out of your hands and arms up to the elbows. The next step was to put on a surgical gown over your clothes and wear a mask over your face. I felt like a surgeon ready to open someone up. When I

finally entered the nursery, I saw what had been lacking in the delivery room. The room was warm and cozy and filled with the smell of baby lotion. Quietly, I walked over to the cribs of the newborns and stared for awhile. These were small babies, how could I possibly touch one without hurting it? The nurse instructed me to have a seat in one of the rocking chairs in the nursery and to take a small hand towel with me. She brought this tiny form wrapped in blankets and handed it to me. She showed me how to hold the baby properly and then handed me a small bottle and said, "Feed her." Then she went off to tend to other matters.

"Oh my god," I thought, "what am I doing. This isn't even my child or relative, should I be feeding someone else's kid?" After this momentary panic I decided if the nurses did it every day, surely I could manage to shove a bottle into a baby's mouth. The child wouldn't take the bottle. What was I doing wrong now? The nurse, seeing my awkwardness, came over and told me to rub the nipple on the baby's cheek. I really didn't see the logic in this, but I gave it a try anyway. Touching the nipple to the baby's cheek, she turned her head toward the nipple, opened her mouth, took the nipple, and started eating. How did this day old child know what to do and I didn't? This was amazing!! Sitting there holding this little girl was beginning to grow on me. She laid there so content and warm, I was rocking gently back and forth just looking at this small wonder. At this point, I found out two things, one, don't rock a baby too much after it eats, and two, the purpose of the small hand towel. Where did this baby get the large volume of vomit; I didn't put that much into her?

After my week was up in obstetrics, I returned to my regular floor and duties. The experience was one I didn't soon forget partly because of the embarrassing moments, but mostly because I found a new respect for mothers, O.B. nurses, and for my own ability to adapt to new situations. I also found that a person needs a

little more experience than I had before one confronts a gaggle of new mothers hellbent on breastfeeding their babies. Even after the experience I find I still haven't overcome my embarrassment with the subject of having babies. With my first two children I couldn't bring myself to witness the sacred event of their births, I sat in the waiting room like men have done for many years. When it came time for our third child to be born, my wife chose a birthing room. At the time I believed this was just a more comfortable place for the mothers to endure the labor pains. As the time came to deliver the child I kept thinking, "Okay let's wheel her right on into the delivery room." I was wrong. Very wrong. Instead of wheeling her out, the nurses simply collapsed the bottom half of the bed, and snapped some stirrups into place. I was trapped, then it dawned on me why they called it a birthing room. Whether I liked it or not I was going to see this child born right there in front of me. To be perfectly honest I didn't see much of the actual birth, but the headboard of the bed was quite nice.

It was quite an experience being there but I don't think if the opportunity presented itself again I would care to be there. I think the best part of the whole experience, both in my high school years and having my own kids, were the babies.



Secret of the Andes Book Review

Connie S. Totton
Composition II

Ann Nolan Clark's novel *Secret Of The Andes* is a refreshing children's mystery full of unexpected twists and turns. The plot revolves around a young Inca Indian, Cusi, and his guardian, Chuto. Cusi and Chuto live high in a hidden valley in the Andean mountains of Peru. As the story unfolds, Cusi is lying on a rock staring down into the valley below curiously watching an Indian family. Up to this point, he has led an isolated existence with only Chuto and his llamas to keep him company. He has never known another human besides Chuto, so he is very interested in the activities of the Indian family in the lower valley. Why hasn't Cusi known other people? Why hasn't he been outside of the hidden valley? The entire story is dependent upon these questions.

Throughout the book, we are made aware of Cusi's yearning for a family and his need to know who he is and from where he came. A minstrel arrives in the hidden valley and by a slip of the tongue nearly makes a revelation to Cusi before Chuto stops him. The time isn't right yet for Cusi to know who he is. One day a striking Indian man wearing a turban and long, golden earrings comes to the hidden valley. He is obviously of royal blood. He is Amauta, the wise one, the teacher. He has been sent to teach Cusi the history of the Inca. After Cusi receives his education, he embarks on a journey in which he searches for a family where he can belong. Along the way, the mystery of his origin and life's purpose begins to unravel. In the end, Cusi comes full circle and returns to Chuto and his hidden valley. Chuto reveals to Cusi that Cusi is the last of the Inca royal line. He takes him to a secret cave. Within the cave are bags upon bags of gold, a literal fortune. It is

the lost Inca treasure. It will be Cusi's life's work to be the guardian of this treasure.

Secret Of The Andes while containing a wealth of information on Inca Indian history still manages to be vastly entertaining to its young readers. Ms. Clark has a knack for presenting historical information along with just the right blend of mystery, adventure, facts and intrigue to keep those pages turning.

The main character Cusi, encounters mystery seemingly wherever he turns from the beginning to the very end of the book. As stated earlier, we realize that in the beginning of the story Cusi has never seen another person outside of Chuto. He hasn't been out of the hidden valley.

In this passage Cusi sees other people for the first time. He's lying on a flat rock watching an Indian family in the lower valley. Unobserved, he watches them go about their daily tasks.

"What are you doing, Cusi?"

At the sound the young boy leaped to his feet. His dark face was shining with happiness. His eyes danced with excitement. 'Chuto, I see them again.' At Chuto's questioning look he said, 'Sometime every day I come here to watch them.'"

"I have not seen people before, not that I remember. Isn't it wonderful that I can come here and see them every day, Chuto? Isn't it wonderful!"

I immediately felt a comradeship with Cusi. I was reminded of the secrets of childhood, the secrets I shared with only my best friends. They seemed so important then, so exciting to share, but I don't think any could compare to Cusi's secret.

Throughout the book we are given clues as to who Cusi is, but it's never fully revealed until the end of the story.

"As the man and the boy came near him, the

minstrel rose from his seat on the ground. He stopped his music-making and looked at Cusi. 'Oho!' he said. 'Golden earplugs in the young boy's ears! It is true, then, what they say.'"

'Who says, and what is said?' Chuto asked. His usually gentle voice was harsh and stern.

The boy looked from one man to the other. What were they talking about? His earplugs, surely. But why? He had always worn them. They were part of him. Did all boys wear them? What made them different?" (p. 15)

Chuto goes on to tell the minstrel that it's well that he recognizes one of royal blood. Cusi finds this all very perplexing and strange.

Later there is more mystery when we read about the once yearly trip that Chuto makes to an undisclosed destination. Each time, he is only gone for one day. Cusi doesn't know where he goes or exactly why.

"This was something to think about. The Old One must mean that every year he gave llamas away. Cusi thought back, remembering the mysterious day-trips Chuto made every once in a long, long time. Yes. Now he remembered clearly that on these trips Chuto would take llamas with him, but he did not bring them back again. He must give them to someone. But why? And who willed that he should do so?" (p. 28)

Cusi doesn't learn the answer to this until much later in the story.

What child hasn't come across a particularly fascinating place in their wanderings? For me, it was a small island in a river near my home. Cusi also wanders in his hidden valley. One day he follows his pet llama Misti through a canyon to a narrow stairway that leads to

some temple ruins. He makes a startling discovery.

"In the days of the Old when the proud Inca ruled the land the tribal priests had tied the Sun on his way through the heavens. They had tied him to a snow-white boulder with ropes of gold. . . .

Cusi looked up at the stone dais on which the great Sun had rested. He looked again. He walked nearer to see better. . . .

On the carved stone lay a pair of golden sandals. Cusi knelt to see them. They were small, too small for him to wear. They were delicate and lovely. They were perfect, as if they had been left there yesterday. Should he touch them? Could he handle them? Dare he take them to have and to keep and to treasure for always?" (pp. 79, 80)

When I was a child, I remember how much I loved to find what I considered to be treasure. I never found anything so lovely as Cusi's golden sandals, but I do believe my treasures were just as beautiful to me as Cusi's were to him. I would take an egg carton or coffee can and use it for my treasure chest then fill it with things I thought to be beautiful, a pretty rock (jewels), a bird feather, perhaps a broken robin's egg. My treasure was always buried for safe keeping. This seems to be a common thing for children. My husband had his treasures, but he called his miracles and buried them also. I wonder how many childhood time capsules there are buried throughout this world? Cusi did not bury his golden sandals but continued to carry them near his heart throughout the rest of the story.

Children have a natural love and affection for animals whether it be pets or animals they see in a zoo. I'm reminded of this every time my nephews visit or when my friends bring their small children to my home. The

first thing they look for is no, not the toys, but my cat Molly. When they find him, they pull him up in their arms and carry him all about the house. Though this seems to thrill them, I'm not so sure it does much for Molly, but he bears it all so good naturedly like the superior cat that he is.

Ms. Clark makes good use of her knowledge of children's love for animals. Cusi has a dog named Sunnca, but more emphasis is put on his love for his pet llamas.

"Cusi looked at the llamas, grazing again now that the music had stilled. They were the heart of his home. At night he slept among them. Their silky fleece kept him warm and dry. Their nearness kept him unafraid. By day they gave him company. When they were resting, they chewed their cud and looked at him. They understood his words and his moods. They obeyed his commands. They were his companions. Cusi was not sure that he wanted to leave them even for a day."
(p. 16)

Reading this made me feel warm and snug. It was one of my favorite passages in the book.

There are many interesting facts presented in *Secret Of The Andes*. Children are often fascinated when confronted with the old way of doing things or how things are done differently in another culture. In chapter two, we find Chuto making sleeping mats and Cusi is making rope.

"He was ready to return to the hut and finish weaving the mat he had been working on. He was making it of tortoru reeds and twisted grass. It would be good to sleep on when he traveled. Cusi also had work to do. They needed new rope to tie their bundles.

Yesterday the boy had gathered armfuls of long grass and had put them to soak in water overnight. Now he pounded the water-soaked grass with a rounded wooden club. When he had mashed it into a pulp, he rolled it into long strands between his hands. Now he braided the strands into even, strong rope lengths." (p. 24)

In chapter eight, Chuto and Cusi go to the salt flats to obtain their year's supply of salt. This is quite a departure from the iodized salt we pick up so conveniently from the market.

"Here and there in the terraces men could be seen, working busily in the hot sun of afternoon. They dug shallow holes in the loose grainy soil. These were filled shortly with water from some underground source. Chuto, who knew so many things, did not know just what it was that caused this water to be salty. But salty it was, and it was this sandy, salty brine that the men scooped out of the shallow holes into hollowed stone traylike vessels that were lying about in great numbers. Under the hot tropical sun it would not be many hours before the water evaporated. The coarse, gray, sandy salty substance that remained was the salt they used." (p. 55)

Further along in the book children might find pleasure in learning how a llama is sheared of its wool, how to start a fire without matches, about landslides, how to get things by bartering without money, or even about the different kinds of cuisine that Peru offers.

The adventure in *Secret Of The Andes* is riveting and easily rivals any of the "Indiana Jones" sagas. At one point, Cusi must cross over a swinging bridge.

"Over the gorge, above the rapids,

connecting cliff to cliff, swung a slender bridge. This was the swinging bridge the minstrel had teased about. This was the bridge that they must cross.

The bridge was made of rope vines of maguey plant. These vines had been twisted and plaited together into two cables as thick as Chuto's body. They were tied into holes that had been drilled in the cliff walls. Between the rope cables, planks had been tied. Higher up was a smaller vine rope to be used as a handrail.

Cusi had looked at this swinging bridge before, but he had never thought of crossing it. Now terror touched him with its cold fingers, and hot excitement filled him with the thought of what he was about to do. He felt that he never could move a sandaled foot a half-pace forward. Yet he knew that he would move. He knew that nothing could hinder that first step that would lead forward." (pp. 40, 41)

This is heart pounding, palm-sweating adventure at its best.

Later Cusi must climb a ladder up a steep granite cliff.

"Cusi watched Chuto as the Indian swung upward, catching the end of a narrow ladder made of tied tree branches. Then he boosted Cusi up so that the boy could catch the ladder ends, could hold them tightly in his hands, could get a foothold on the ladder. Cusi began climbing. He had to climb. He could not get down. There was only space beneath him."

"Across the cliff face the boy climbed steadily. Sweat ran into his eyes, stinging them with its salt. His hands were wet against

the ladder rungs.

But he climbed on and on. At last he reached safety behind the granite wall." (pp. 42, 43)

The imagery is almost tangible. It's hard to believe that in Cusi's world, it is a normal part of everyday life to climb rock walls or to make one's way across a swinging bridge. In American society these activities are reserved for thrill seekers.

Whenever things are put into a historical context in this book, it is always done in an interesting manner that is sure to hold a child's attention. We're not confronted with stodgy dates and facts. This an excerpt from one of Chuto's chants.

"Chuto spoke, but it did not sound like Chuto's voice. The words were precise. They were deadly and cold. Cusi, listening, shivered.

They, the Conquerors, came.

They came swarming into the land
with hate and with weapons.

They came.

They captured the mighty Inca,
holding him with chains.

They captured him.

Down the trails of the Andes
the Indians sent ten thousand llamas,
carrying bags of gold dust
to ransom their King.

But they, the Conquerors, killed him.

They killed the Inca,
fearing his wrath
if they set him free.

And the ten thousand llamas
marching down the trails of the Andes
vanished from the land,

and with them vanished
the gold dust, ransom for the King.

Four hundred years men have searched
to find the llamas
and to find the gold. . . . (p. 127, 128)

It's poetic, concise, and dramatic. It tells history in story form. It is also remarkably on target as far as how the actual historical event took place. The gold was never found, and this story is now part of Inca legend. I think this a wonderful way to present history to a child.

Since children rarely seem to enjoy learning history straight from a textbook with all its facts and dates, I believe this book would make an excellent companion book to be read during a social studies unit on Latin America or on Peru, in particular. In addition to learning the history of the region, it would also familiarize the students with customs and everyday habits of the Inca Indians.

Though, its target audience is probably 10 to 12 year olds, I think that *Secret Of The Andes* is truly ageless in its appeal. I've enjoyed reading it every bit as much at 30 as I did when my teacher read it to me when I was 10.



To Bingo or Not To Bingo: That is the Question

*Fred G. Knapp
Composition II*

If one were to walk into a neighborhood bingo parlor expecting to see nice, old men and women, people that one would like to have as grandparents, you might come away more than mildly shocked. The majority of people spending their time and money to yell bingo are approximately between the ages of 30 and 60. In fact, the number of elderly bingo maniacs does not exceed the under 30 slide-card-slappers by a great margin. New York, New York, is known as the melting pot of the American people and their cultures: the various races, ethnic backgrounds, and social economic classes are mixed like no other place in the world, with the exception of the local bingo hall. When one looks around at the long rows of fold-up-tables filled with families, couples, and single people, one has to wonder what brings all these people through the front doors.

Traveling the aisles of this "I-hope-so-world" one can hear many reasons for venturing forth into the land of aggravation, frustration, and hope gone astray: the housewife who wants to get away from her husband and children for awhile; the business person who has no better place to spend his or her money; the desperate person who is trying to win enough money to pay the rent; and of course, the person who says, "The horses aren't running yet, and I don't like playing poker!" It seems that no matter what brings a person through the doors of this rubber room, called a bingo parlor, there are only two reasons why he or she stays—money, the chance to win it. Most people, at least in the United States, have played some form of bingo while they were young, but no one ever learned the brand of bingo that is being displayed in some bingo halls across this country.

today. The Dr. Jykle and Mr. Hyde syndrome has found a home in America's "new" national pastime.

What is it that transforms fun loving people into greedy monsters once they enter the house of misguided hopes and dreams? What changes the attitudes and behaviors of these people: could it be the nicotine stained tables filled with cards that have various sequences of numbers ranging from 1 to 75 on them; could it be the eggshell colored walls; could it be the food sold at the snack bar; or heaven forbid, could it be that the bingo caller did not call a person's winning number. The atmosphere, before the night's activities begin, is that of a country fair. People are laughing, joking, and talking about how much money they are going to win. There is a man at a table near the entrance saying, "Eggs, I have farm fresh eggs for sale!" Over at the snack bar two children are screaming in unison, "Mom buy me some popcorn!" Floor runners (people who sell bingo cards to the players seated at the tables) are darting here and there yelling, "Earlybird bingo packets for five dollars!"

Two women sitting toward the back wall laughing when one says, "Ever since Gloria's husband died, all she does is run around with guys and play bingo."

The second woman, who was much younger replied, "She thinks she's so pretty!"

The first woman then says, "Yeah, maybe she ought to look in the mirror. Where does she get all her money to play bingo anyway?"

The younger lady again, "I don't know, but she should stay home where she belongs!"

All of a sudden, a middle aged woman at the opposite end of the building, sitting at the bingo ball machine by the number display board, speaks into the microphone and says, "Anyone else need any earlybird packets if not we are about to start!"

As play begins, so does the metamorphosis of the crowd. Everyone goes from a happy, nonchalant outlook to a more serious, determined mood. One can almost

feel the intensity rise as an elderly woman yells, "BINGO!" Now the ice has been broken and people can settle in for a big night of heartburn, headache, and smoker's cough. Just as the night gets rolling, a young blonde woman, who has arrived late tries to grab a seat by a rather large lady in a white dress.

The large lady speaks up and says, "I was here first and that spot is for a friend of mine!"

The blonde answers with, "You know there is no saving seats for anybody. It's first come, first serve; now give me that chair fat butt!"

"I'll tell you what I'm gonna do with this chair. In about a minute you're gonna be wearing it. Now get the hell out of here," screams the woman in the white dress. The crowd around the two women begin to get involved when the noise starts to interfere with the bingo game. Certain comments are then heard: "Go home;" "Sit down;" and, "Shut up!" After awhile, the police officer got involved by telling the two women, "Both of you ladies will either control yourselves or I will be forced to ask you to leave." By the time the earlybird session was over and the regular session was about to begin, the crowd was fast becoming much more vocal; in fact, one man yelled, "Thanks for the ride. Now go home," to the woman who was calling out the numbers.

The metamorphosis was in full swing as the regular session neared the mid-way point. A little girl had excitedly screamed bingo when, all of a sudden, from across the room an unidentified voice busted out, "Get that child out of here. This is no place for kids anyway!" Some of the crowd actually responded to the lady's outburst with applause. As the night and the chances of winning were slipping away, frustration and disgust were manifesting themselves in comments, which were coming from all directions. An old man sitting with his wife by the snack bar blurted out, "This damn game is driving me crazy!" He, then, looked over at his wife and shouted, "You're driving me nuts, too! Pleeese shut up!" A group of young men sitting at a table near

the middle of the building were discussing the possibility that the owners were giving free cards to people and splitting the profits if there are any winners. When the regular session ended, so did the hopes of winning for a lot of people; in fact, almost half the crowd made their way to the parking lot. As the people walked out, they left their comments of anger and disappointment behind; "I'll never come back to this place again," "That was the last of my money that these people will ever see," and of course, the ever popular, "They cheated me; I should have won that game!" For the people who still had money or who could borrow some the night was not over yet. The latebird and winner-take-all games were still left to be played.

At this point of the evening if one hasn't won there is a better than average chance that he or she is not going to; in fact, one is probably just donating his or her money to someone else's cause. This is the moment when the professionals are separated from the rookies, for this is do or die time. A well dressed, gray headed woman, who arrived in a new Lincoln Continental, gasps, "I don't know what I'm still doing here; my luck is awful." Across from her sits a young, skinny woman, who nervously says, "My husband is going to kill me; this is the last of our bill money!" As the last bingo of the night was yelled by the well dressed gray headed lady, the young skinny, woman who was sitting across from her silently slipped out the door with her head down.

Another night of bingo is over and the youthful innocence of the game is also a thing of the past. Most of the people started the evening off with shared happiness and hopes of winning, but the night ended with people swearing to themselves and questioning why in the world they were there in the first place. Whether it be the money or the ritual of the game, one can't help but to wonder what it is that transforms such a pretty painting into such an ugly picture. In a situation like this are there really any winners?



Water Pollution: A Trend of Our Time

Teresa A. Bastron
Composition II

Today there is a vague awareness that toxic chemicals are present in our waterways. However, most Americans assume these chemicals are removed before the water comes out of the tap. This is not the case. A representative from the Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 90 percent of the municipal water purification systems in the United States were originally designed to kill only bacteria. Chemicals and viruses are allowed to pass through these systems and into our drinking water, thus entering our bodies.

A 1980 survey done by the Public Health Department of California shows that most public waterworks operators lack formal training for treatment processes, microbiology, and chemistry. There is a lack of adequate education for those with access to our water supplies as well as a lack of government intervention in this matter.

The greatest threat to our drinking water is not the inexperienced hands processing the water, but rather the massive quantities of chemicals in use today that find their way into our water supplies. An estimated five hundred new chemicals are produced each year without public information regarding the effects of their use or disposal.

Excessive levels of the element nitrate have been found in the waters of Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota and Kansas. Nitrate is found in the agricultural ammonia fertilizer used by farmers, obviously those in the Midwest region. In addition to birth defects, high levels of nitrate are linked to increased mortality rates in mothers who drink this water while pregnant. Chemicals in our ground water are not only environmentally evil, they are life-threatening.

In May of 1971 the Federal Drug Administration placed a ban on the sale and consumption of swordfish. Ninety-

five percent of samples tested contained mercury well over the legal limit. And again in 1981 the *New York Times* published a report by federal marine biologists stating that the livers of Alaskan seals were found to contain up to one hundred sixteen times the amount of mercury considered safe for human consumption. The source was traced to the Atlantic Ocean which has become a dumping ground for United States industries.

Dr. W. D. Conway, a leading expert on carcinogens warns of the cancer threat by excessive exposure to organic and inorganic chemicals in the water. These agents are retained in our bodies and may accumulate in organs such as the liver, bones and tissues. Death rates from cancer are much higher where cities draw their drinking water from more highly polluted bodies of water. There is a growing recognition that most human cancers are probably caused from environmental carcinogens.

The problem starts when the demand for dissolved oxygen exceeds the available oxygen supply. Large quantities of organic pollutants, such as sewage and pesticides alter the natural balance of the water. Bacteria feeding on the pollutants multiplies and consumes all of the oxygen. Fish are dependent on oxygen and cannot survive without it, but most importantly, our supply of pure water is gone. Water has a miraculous way of purifying itself of small amounts of waste, but the amount of impurities that we, as a nation are imposing on our waterways leaves them a virtually helpless natural resource.

Transportation and agriculture account for about one-half of water degradation. Industry and a lax attitude by society account for most of the rest. By the year 2000, the demand for clean water is expected to reach 1,000 billion gallons a day. At the rate our population is polluting the resources we now have, where will the supplies come from in the future? There may be a time when there will not be enough usable water left in the

United States to fulfill our basic need. Population growth and technology may become our eventual collapse.

On March 24, 1989 the world became a little more aware of the extent of our water pollution with the help of Exxon. The Exxon Valdez, an oil tanker, carrying over fifty million gallons collided with a reef, spilling eleven million of those gallons into Alaska's Prince William Sound. What was easily the worst environmental spill in U.S. history was also the costliest. The clean-up efforts employed by the Exxon Corporation proved to be very limited. The true measure of the disaster will not be known for many years. As technologicalized as society has become, little could be done to restore the natural beauty and balance of nature. Tens of thousands of birds and sea creatures died because of this preventable accident.

Slowly, public concern over our environment has emerged but little has been done to change our unhealthy practices. An alarming fact: no waterway in the United States is entirely free of pollution. "Water is the most precious limited natural resource in this country. The technology that ruins this water can also save it."
—Ralph Nader.

Major food corporations such as Coca-Cola and Borden have noticed this deadly trend and taken action. They have begun using bottled water in their processing plants in an effort to avoid the chemically altered water piped in through our cities. Some critics might argue that Coca-Cola's actions are more of an effort to pad their own pockets than that of an environmental concern. Possibly, but the attention and attitude are still visible.

One way to help reduce water pollution would be to reduce the amount of chemical fertilizers that farmers apply to their fields. The excess fertilizer not absorbed by plant life washes into our streams and underground water supplies. The world population attributes to this need for fertilizer usage. The Midwest, in particular, produces a large percentage of the agricultural produce

used to feed this population. The need for higher crop yields is a cause for enormous quantities of organic chemicals. Phosphorus pollution from fertilizers and detergents impose a heavy load upon our lakes and rivers. These toxins that we so mindlessly discard enter the food chain. The food chain is a world-wide link, leaving little room for escape from the possibility of contamination and absolute uncertainty for future generations.

We, as a nation, need to respond to this devastation as the American Indian proverb suggests: the frog does not drink up the pond in which he lives.—Eighteenth century proverb.



In The Wild Winds

Karla Wesselmann
Composition II

The day started out just like any early summer morning. The sky was a beautiful robin egg blue, the sun was awakening the earth by stretching golden rays of light into the sky. As the sun rose higher, the early morning coolness quickly burned away, leaving a hot, muggy feeling in the air. The gentle, whispering breeze that fluttered the curtains in the morning hours became stronger as the day went on. By the afternoon, the wind was whipping and twisting the clothes on the clothesline. I felt an uneasiness, like something was going to happen, but I couldn't quite figure out what.

Going into the house in the early afternoon, I heard the sound. Beep, beep, beep. "The National Weather Service Center has just issued a tornado watch. People in the following counties should keep a lookout. . .," the television was saying. I went running into the living room to see if our county was on the T.V. screen. It was. "Mom, we're in the tornado watch!" I yelled outside to my mom, who was in the garden.

"Watch the sky! Get the girls! I wish your dad was home!" she said panicking. Now I wasn't sure if Mom had ever been in a tornado or if she was just petrified of storms, but her panicking upset my sisters and me and we started searching the sky for storm clouds. My one sister started packing her survival basket, a clothes basket filled with her favorite toys and books, and graham crackers and water. She then had me place her precious "jewels" down in the cellar so her basket wouldn't be forgotten. She did this for every storm. The wind was trying to whip the clothes off the line, so Mom and I ran to the clothesline to catch hold of the clothes and get them off the line before the clothes ended up in the neighbors' field or beyond.

In the west, the sky was starting to darken. The cattle in the field started mooing and heading for the barn, and once there, started milling about, restlessly. In the hen-house, the chickens began cackling and squawking up a storm. Our dog, Smokey, was acting strangely. He would run around barking and growling for no apparent reason. All the animals seemed to sense something ominous was going to happen soon.

Evening was coming and with it came the clouds, dark greenish-black, menacing-looking with numerous bolts of lightening flickering throughout the wall of clouds. Dad pulled into the driveway and quickly ran down to the barn to check on the animals, and to make sure everything was locked up tightly. He made it to the house just as the first raindrops splattered against the windows. The wind was rattling the windows like a giant was shaking the house. Bright flashes of lightening, deafening cracks of thunder vibrated the house. Every once in a while dad would step out into the storm, searching the clouds for an unusual rolling masses when the lightning lit up the sky. Hail began bouncing off the roof and sides of the house. Suddenly, all was quiet. I thought, Oh, good, the storm is over.

"Get outside and down in the cellar, NOW!" yelled Dad. He tore open the cellar door, pushing Mom and us down the cellar steps. The wind hit with a blast of dirt and debris filled the air. Dad was having a hard time getting the cellar door closed. The wind was blowing with tremendous force and then came the dreaded sound, like a freight train bearing down upon us, hissing at first then the roaring getting louder and louder. Dad was trying to hold down the cellar door, his knuckles white. The wind was sucking the door up and down, picking up Dad with each burst of wind. We tried to hold him down but he wouldn't let us. "Get into the corner! NOW!!!" He yelled. We did as ordered.

Mom screamed over the noise, "Lee, LET GO!! Get over here!"

"I can't! Everyone would be sucked out of here if I do!!" Dad shouted. Suddenly all was quiet. The silence was deafening. Emerging from the cellar, we all stood in awe. Trees, branches, and leaves littered our large yard. Looking at all the destruction around me, I stared in disbelief. What would have happened if the tornado had hit our house? My heart felt like it was going to pound out of my body. I was shaking uncontrollably, feeling hot and cold at the same time. Looking around the yard, I saw the much used picnic table in splinters, pails and barrels had been blown from the barn into the garden sixty feet away. It was dusk, the storm had moved to the northeast of us. We could see the lightning and hear the thunder, but the sky to the west of us was clearing. The pink-tinged clouds were picking up the last of the sun's rays. No farm lights were coming on. The silence was overwhelming. Mom and we girls went into the house and found everything was the same except for a good layer of dust on everything. Dad had ran down to check on the animals, and found them settling down for the night. He came up to the house and said, "Let's go see if anyone needs help." As we drove around destruction was everywhere, trees uprooted, leaving gaping holes in the ground. The tornado had passed one mile north of us, leaving a garage strewn around a yard and damaging part of a house. Thankfully, no one was hurt. In less than ten minutes, the tornado had cut a path two miles long, a path of tangled, splintered, demolished land.

The next morning as I awoke, I heard the birds singing and looking out the window, I saw a robin egg blue sky once again. The day's work was cut out for us, trying to get our lives and land back to normal. Our next few days were planned out for us by Mother Nature, cleaning up the mess she had left us.

Scientists are still wondering exactly why tornados develop. They know that warm, moist, air colliding with cool, dry, air will create the right conditions for

potentially dangerous weather. With new inventions helping track these storms, the forecasters are able to warn people of a coming storm. Living in a tornado belt, one must expect the unexpected, and the destruction that comes with the territory.



Children Can't Decide

Abby J. Anderson
Composition II

Do you remember what you took to school for "Show and Tell" days? As young children, most of us took a favorite doll, stuffed toy, book, or an interesting rock or sea shell. We were encouraged to bring something that the class could discuss and everyone would enjoy. Things have changed since our days in elementary school.

During Christmas break last semester, I visited my daughter's preschool on "Show and Tell" day. I was amazed to see what the favorite possessions of today's children were. As the kids gathered round their teacher, I saw figurines of G.I. Joe, Beetlejuice, Transformers, and my personal favorite, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Nearly every child, including my own, clutching her Barbie doll, held a toy that came into being through a television program. Actually, it was a relief to find I wasn't the only parent unable to resist the demands of her children for these toys. I couldn't help but wonder: Why do parents buy these pieces of plastic? Where did they all come from and how can parents resist their children's demands for them?

Until 1984, the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) regulated the amount and quality of air time aimed at children on TV. The Commission played the role of watch dog, protecting children from constant exposure to commercials. Late in 1984, newly appointed FCC chairman, Mark S. Fowler, lifted regulations that had safeguarded children's television. Fowler assured the public that deregulation would have little effect on the amount of commercial air time directed at children. He reasoned that the marketplace would determine what was best for children and that viewer preference would hold the reins on excessive advertising. (*Video,*

March 1989) While his theory may sound logical, children know little about logic. When kids are repeatedly exposed to commercials, designed to entice them, they want what is being advertised. Children haven't the experience to be discerning consumers; they want what they want, what they see, and if my own kids are a sampling, they want it with single-minded determination.

The marketplace can't determine what is best for children when the marketplace is firmly entangled with program producers and product manufacturers. Today's programs are designed to sell products rather than just offering simple Saturday morning entertainment. In many cases broadcasters are enticed into scheduling product based programs in exchange for a percentage of the revenues generated by the program. Congressman Edward Markey (Dem., Mass.), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance, revealed instances where products such as toys, breakfast cereals, and clothing were being designed in advance of a program's development. The programs are designed to visually bombard children with images of the products they are based on. In the minds of three to seven year old kids, the programs are indistinguishable from the commercials. (*The Education Digest*, Sept. 1989)

Viewer preference has little effect on the programs aired, unless the preference is not to watch television at all. On any Saturday morning, all four commercial networks air programs backed by product manufacturers. My choices, as a parent, are to let my kids watch programs designed to brainwash them into mindless consumers, or I can turn the TV off. Isolating my children from television doesn't solve the problem. Everywhere I look, there are products emblazoned with images of Batman, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Barbie, and Ghost Busters. When my daughter needed new gym shoes, we had no choice but to buy Barbie shoes. That's all that was available in our price range, except for My Little Pony and Smurf shoes. My choices, as a parent,

are all or none. There is no neutral territory out there; I'm outnumbered and outmaneuvered by cartoon characters and profit hungry programmers.

In November 1988, President Reagan pocket-vetoed a bill that would have limited advertising minutes aimed at children. This bill had strong bipartisan support, in both houses and was designed to prevent advertisers targeting children. This same bill, slightly revised, is expected to reach President Bush's desk sometime this year. For all children's sake, I urge our President to sign this bill; to put the next generation's interests ahead of the advertiser's.

Currently, the National Association of Broadcasters is lobbying against this bill. They claim commercials aren't aimed at children, that adults are the true consumers. They argue that the right to decide, on a product purchase, is in the hands of adults. If this is true, if adults are the intended audience these commercials are aimed toward, then why aren't they aired between seven and ten p.m. on weeknights? I have yet to see a commercial for Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle Cereal aired during prime time. While it's true adults should be the consumers, kids often control those adults in the marketplace. If you don't believe this is true, just watch a parent trying to run the gauntlet of the cereal or toy aisles, youngster in tow.

As for me, when the budget is tight and my willpower is weak, I leave my kids at home when I go shopping. Programs and their twin commercials, for Barbie pajamas and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle Cereal may invade my living room, but these products won't invade my shopping cart, if I can help it. I've learned that my kid's fascination for these products is short lived. After all, the next product is already on the designer's desk and what is the hottest new item now will be "totally out" by week after next.



David Lynch's Hall of Mirrors

Thom Harlow
Composition II

What is "good" T.V.? Would we know it if we saw it? Is good T.V. a sitcom about a black child (or children) living with white parents? Is it a sitcom about a family's less than realistic problems in suburbia? Is it a "drama" about good looking cops in slick suits and sleek cars? The three major networks seem to think so. I think that good T.V. should challenge you both mentally and emotionally. I think good T.V. should be different. I think good T.V. should be clever. And until April 8, 1990, nothing met my requirements. But on that fateful night a crime/drama named *Twin Peaks* premiered on ABC.

Twin Peaks is the brain child of movie whiz David Lynch. David Lynch's first movie was the 1977 cult classic *Eraserhead*. He then went on to make such critically acclaimed films as *The Elephant Man*, *Dune*, and *Blue Velvet*. His films are known for odd camera angles, strange characters, moody music, and his sharp contrasts between good and evil. *Twin Peaks* contains all these elements.

The program is set in the fictional town of Twin Peaks, Washington. It starts out with a lone fisherman finding the body of beautiful Laura Palmer (the town homecoming queen) on a rocky beach. "She's dead. She's dead," the fisherman blubbers in the phone to Sheriff Harry S. Truman. The ensuing autopsy turns up that Laura was brutally raped before she bled to death (by many shallow wounds, none of which would have killed her alone). Less than 24 hours later, another high school girl, who's badly beaten, is found wandering down a railroad trestle. She too, had been raped. FBI special agent, Dale Cooper, arrives in Twin Peaks to assist the sheriff in the investigation. The two turn up many suspects in the case. There's Bobby, Laura's

boyfriend, who seems to know something he's not saying. There's James Hurley, a leather clad biker, who was the last to see Laura alive and claims to have loved her (but by the end of the show he's making out with her best friend). There's Dr. Jacob, Laura's psychiatrist, who seems obsessed with her murder. There's Lee, a crude truck driver, who lies to his girlfriend about where he was the night of the murder. And there is countless other characters, all of whom seem to have a little secret of their own. But by the end of the episode, nothing is resolved and you have more questions than just whodunit.

But the beauty of the show isn't only the suspense of the investigation and the development of the characters. It's also the little quirks David Lynch throws in. The way some things just slightly out of place or out of focus. Like at the town meeting, a little old lady is turning on and off the lights, trying to get everyone to settle down and be quiet. On closer examination you notice the little, old lady is cradling a log. "Who's that?" FBI special agent Dale Cooper asks Sheriff Harry S. Truman. "We call her the log lady," he answers.

And in the hospital when Dale Cooper is examining Laura Palmer's body, the lights are oddly flickering on and off (creating a morbid, surrealistic feeling). "Must be a short," the technician on duty explains.

Or in the bank when Dale Cooper and Harry S. Truman are going through Laura Palmer's safety deposit box, there's a stuffed moose head lying on the table, looking up with glassy, marble eyes. "It fell," the bank teller says.

You never know what to expect from *Twin Peaks*. Watching it is like going through a hall of mirrors, reality is strangely distorted. David Lynch had created a hall of mirrors for television using edge-of-your-seat suspense and perverse humor. It's nice to see something original on prime time T.V.



The Ethics of Having Babies?

*Kris Eschliman
Composition II*

Many loving parents, myself included, would not hesitate to give blood, organ transplants, bone marrow transplants, or go to any length necessary to save their child's life. Yet some ethicists are questioning the morality of having babies for the sole purpose of rescuing an endangered son or daughter.

Abe and Mary Ayala, from Los Angeles, are taking this unusual step. Their seventeen year old daughter, Annissa, was diagnosed as having a virulent form of leukemia. Her only hope for survival is to find a donor with compatible bone marrow. Abe's, Mary's, and Annissa's brother, Airon, each tested as having incompatible marrow and the search for a suitable non-related donor has been unsuccessful.

In the fall of 1988 Mary suggested the idea of having another child in the hopes the new child's marrow would match Annissa's. Though the chances were slim that a match would occur, plus other obstacles such as their ages (Abe is 44 and Mary is 42), Abe agreed. Their decision was in spite of the fact that Abe would need to undergo surgery to reverse a vasectomy done 16 years earlier, a procedure which only had a 50% chance of success. Doctors estimated that the possibility that Mary would become pregnant and have a baby with matching marrow and the transplant curing Annissa's leukemia would only have a 6.4% chance of success. Yet against these odds Mary is due to give birth this April and tests not only indicated that the baby is a girl, her tissue is compatible. Abe has said that they will name their new daughter, Marissa: "This is our miracle baby." (*Time*: 3/15/90)

I am elated with the good news, as are the Ayalas, but I find it appalling that there are ethicists declaring their worries. The ethicists question if it is "right to conceive

children expressly so that they can be donors" and claim that this is "a step on the path to treating offspring as objects. And what if tests show that a baby conceived to be a donor is not medically useful? Parents might be tempted to have an abortion and try again. Babies might be used before birth . . . (because) transplants of fetal tissue may one day help victims of Parkinson's disease or juvenile diabetes." (*Time*: 3/15/90)

I don't believe that the Ayalas' decision is a legitimate matter of ethics because the marrow transplant procedure is simple for doctors to perform and it is safe, causing no harm to the donor. The Ayalas' motives in conceiving Marissa are not dissimilar to any other adults motives in bearing children, for example, the experience parenthood, to have an heir, to ensure that a youngster is not an only child, or to carry on the family name. "In a sense we all have children to use them," says bioethicist Michael Shapiro of the University of Southern California. (*Time*: 3/15/90)

The Ayalas' motives are mixed because Mary has long wanted a third child and Abe has said that "If Annissa didn't survive, we'd have another child in the house to help us with our sense of loss." And I believe that regardless of the motives in conceiving Marissa, once she arrives she will be loved as the Ayalas' other children are.

Some ethicists have claimed that "parents like the Ayalas have a conflict of interest and that an outside legal guardian should serve as advocate for the infant." (*Time*: 3/15/90) I feel that such an intrusion into the Ayalas' lives would be absurd. I do agree with Anastasia Toufexis, a reporter for *Time* magazine, that "at least some restriction on using children as donors seem to be justified. Since infants and youngsters obviously cannot rationally weigh the risks to themselves against the benefits to others, parents are entrusted with such decisions. But the parents can hardly be objective in balancing one child's needs against another's." This is particularly true when the "other" child is not yet born.

I believe that parents should be restricted from using one child as a donor for another in procedures that would endanger the life of the donor.

I feel that the Ayala family suffers enough from the injustice imposed by life; they should not be subjected to ethical debates by people who are not living in the fear and pain the Ayalas live with daily. The ethicists should devote their efforts to legitimate ethical issues such as abortion as a form of birth control and the abandonment of children, such as the full term babies that are on occasion found abandoned in places like garbage dumpsters.



Untitled

Chris Hubbard
Composition II

Amazingly, I liked *Rabbit Run*. The filming technique, overall was fine (by this I mean believable). A review of this film by Gary Siegal was smart to point out that the reader of Updike's novel, "must have quick reflexes to keep a guard on the changing, twisting, and shifting protagonist" (249). The movie was the same way. Lax viewers are apt to lose track of what is happening in the chain of events.

James Caan portrayed the Rabbit effectively. The use of the word Rabbit as a nickname for Harry has many implications which hold true. Not only is he fast, athletically, he's fast in the bedroom and multiplies rapidly as rabbits do. Harry appeared to be an adult captured in a teenager's body. Siegal stated, "Rabbit's behavior appears sudden and erratic, and the viewer is ill prepared to accept or understand it" (251). I felt his behavior added to his character by enhancing the teen-like qualities. He didn't have any real direction in his life and when it came to dealing with difficult situations, he RAN. I did agree with Siegal's opinion that, "the film can only keep harping on the one overdone character trait of Rabbit: his inability to cope and comprehend" (252).

Carrie Snodgrass was very convincing as an alcoholic and I agree with Siegal in stating that she gave the best performance of the film and yet lacked dimension as the viewer doesn't really get to know her (252). We do know that she's a selfish housewife whom doesn't do much except drink all day long. This was shown by the way the house was (un)kept and how the kids were treated. She definitely wouldn't receive a parent of the year award. She contributed to Harry's inability to deal with life by acting like a child herself. Siegal described

the drowning scene as being intense, (253), which is far from accurate in my opinion. I felt it lacked reality. It all seemed to happen far too quickly and the technique used was confusing to the viewer. Compared to the dramatic acting abilities of today's actors/actresses, that scene was ineffective to say the least.

I felt Harry's relationship with Ruth (the prostitute), added a bit of zest to this flick. The love scenes were primitive compared to those used today. It was obvious that these were just actors. I also noted that there was no concern about AIDS or any other types of sexual diseases, which was a typical attitude of the sixties, even though Ruth was a hooker. Siegal noted that this was "a film not afraid to cope with how much of our lives happens below the belt" (253). This is so true of this movie.

The burial scene, in my opinion, wasn't used to better the emotional impact of the movie, I think it was too light hearted. In a real funeral situation, I don't think people would be so concerned with placing blame. I would think they would wait until the initial shock was over. I got the feeling that the child wasn't all that important in their lives and as the plot reveals, it wasn't. This was a plus for the film.

The things that I was dissatisfied with seem to be acting and filming techniques that have improved with time in the filming industry. The use of things like music (*Hey Man*), and special effects (like the nude girls flashing on Harry's windshield at night, symbolizing his thoughts), were used to their best to make the movie a sign of the times, in my opinion. Many people seem to criticize it for this reason since the novel was done during the fifties and the film was released in 1970. I feel the makers of the film did their best to relay this to the public as a film of sixties value.

I feel that this film was good, overall, for a swinging sixties flick. The film seems to portray the attitudes of its characters quite well. I am not sure, however, if it

measures up to the novel because I haven't had the chance to read it myself, usually they don't.

Works Cited

Rabbit Run. With James Caan, Carrie Snodgrass, and Anjanette Comer. Writ. John Updike. Dir. Jack Smight. A Howard B. Kreistek Production. Pennsylvania. 1970.

Seigal, Gary. "Rabbit Runs Down." *The Modern American Novel and the Movies*, Ed. Gerald Peary and Roger Shatzkin. New York. 1978.



I Found Freedom

*Fred G. Knapp
Composition II*

On the streets, I was known as the man with the plan. When I said jump, people asked how high. I had, what I thought, most people wanted: money, power, and drugs. I, personally, was addicted to the lifestyle and power as much as the drugs, themselves. But the old saying goes, if you want to dance, you have to pay the fiddler. The cost was something I never thought about until December of 1986, when life taught me a lesson about taking things for granted that no classroom could ever convey. I was ordered by a judge to commit myself to a federal prison in Fort Worth, Texas, where I would serve a two and a half year sentence for drug dealing.

On the December 29th, I began a trip that I will never forget. The trip started with good-bye kisses and tears of sorrow: then, it went downhill from there. My brother, Tony and our friend, Hank were my escorts to the land of bars. Usually, when the three of us got together it meant good times, but this time the occasion was of a much more somber note. Before we had even crossed the Iowa state line, the thought of not seeing Lori and Lisa (my future wife and our daughter) was already tearing at my heart. The loneliness, which had manifested itself by the far away look in my eyes, had completely engulfed me as we drove on into the night toward Texas and prison.

As the oncoming headlights played tricks on my mind, I remembered an event from my childhood. My mother had taken me to the Shriner's Hospital for Crippled Children in Minnesota for what was supposed to be a simple back examination. What I did not know was that I would not be returning home with my mother; in fact, I didn't return home until Christmas, nearly a year later. Even though these two trips were worlds apart,

they did have one thing in common. I, would soon be on my own again, hundreds of miles away from my home and security and that feeling of being alone was as haunting as ever.

As we drove past a sign that said, "Welcome to Texas Yu'all," it dawned on me that the last time I'd crossed the Texas line I was on vacation. A lump stuck in my throat as I got glimpse at the prison from a side road. Here was this group of buildings with bars on every window and fences standing as tall as a lot of trees; I have to admit that the sight scared me. I told my brother to drive slowly to the prison entrance, for I wanted to get a good last look at the free world. Next, I said good-bye to my saddened escorts, which left puddles of tears everywhere.

I knew exactly where I was, but the question was what was I going to encounter there. I rolled up and checked in with the guard at the front desk while all the time envisioning horror stories of prison life that most people only hear about. The first thing that came to mind was whether or not I was actually going to have to pay for protection or special privileges.

After checking in, I was introduced to the processing procedure; I was shown into a holding tank, which was so full of prisoners that I could hardly turn my wheelchair around. Then, I sat there and waited, for an eternity, to get a medical checkup. While waiting for my turn, I noticed all these big, ugly guys standing around me with that look of bad intent stamped on their faces. My mind immediately started running wild with crazy thoughts: would I have to fight anybody; would I have to join a prison gang; and heaven forbid, would I have to deal with someone trying to rape me? No matter how scared I was I had to project an image of being confident, in control, and tough. After the checkup and before being assigned a cell, all of us who were new to the prison system had to listen to a speech on some of the do's and don'ts of prison life.

In order to stay out of trouble, we the inmates had to follow certain procedures, which were explained to us by one of the intake guards. This guard strutted back and forth in front of us with his shoulders back and his chest out while all the time shouting out commands for us to follow; I was under the impression that this guy thought he was a drill sergeant. The most important rule, he stressed, was to be in your cell and on your bed during the different count-times. This meant that at certain times of the day all the inmates were herded into their cells and counted like cattle to make sure that no one had escaped.

Another big no-no was to be caught in a area that you were not supposed to be in, or you would be guilty of being out-of-bounds. If you really wanted trouble, all you had to do was to smart off to one of the prison staff. If for some reason you could not find it in yourself to follow any of these simple requirements, a friendly little confine called the hole was provided for your convenience. When the hole was mentioned, all the guards looked at each other and laughed. If, by chance, you don't know what the hole is, it can best be described as a black hole in space; once you enter, daylight becomes a thing of the past. In fact, one of the guards exclaimed, "The Devil himself would not want to be caught dead there!"

"Everything that I always wanted to know about prison but was afraid to ask," was the thought that kept playing in my mind as I was escorted off to see my newly appointed counselor. The counselor told me if I had any questions I'd better ask them now, for it could be a long time before I might get another chance to talk to him. I wanted to ask him why but something told me not to. As the questions were forming in my mind, I noticed the funny look in his eyes. This look was saying, "I've seen a thousand of your kind come through these doors, so why should I believe that you are any different?" I felt like I had two strikes against me, and I hadn't even

stepped up to the plate. Nevertheless, I started to ask about the possibility of getting a furlough when the counselor stopped me, in mid-sentence, and let me know that I hadn't been there long enough to worry about it. Then, he explained to me about the visitor list and how it works, but again he told me not to worry myself over it. I did manage to force a smile onto my face when he started to tell me about the phone use situation; he assured me that I would soon be able to use it. After our little chat, I was introduced to my new home and my new roommate.

I had to take a crash course in the politics of cell hierarchy as I met my cellmate. My cellmate was also in a wheelchair; I could tell by the look on his face that he thought he was the toughest thing to ever ride a wheel. I was feeling sick and wanted to talk to Lori, so I was in no mood to take a bunch of lip from a perfect stranger. Before I knew it, my cellmate had jumped from his bed to his wheelchair and proceeded to get in my face yelling, "This is my cell and you're my boy!" I then pushed my chair into his and told him, "If you want to fight, by all means let's get it on!" As we continued to argue, I let my cellmate know that anytime he wanted a piece of me that he would know where to find me. After the shouting match was over and my cellmate had backed off, he threw me a look as if to say, "You're the first person who ever told me what I could do with myself." I didn't know what this crazy man had in mind, but I did know that I would have to stay on my guard from then on.

As night time settled in on my first day of prison life, my mind was aflutter with questions and thoughts of what, if, and why. When I was finally able to talk to Lori, I realized just how much she really meant to me. She and Lisa were both doing fine, but they were missing me as much as I was missing them. Lori put Lisa of on the phone, and my two year old daughter told me, "Daddy I love you!" I replied, "Don't forget me baby; I

love you too." As a result of that conversation, I had to pick up the pieces of my heart from off the floor. After the phone call, I dried my eyes and got ready for bed.

My brain burned with the question: why in the world did I get involved with the drug business in the first place? Even though the money and power were great, what good were they both doing me now? My heart raced as I wondered if Lori would wait for two and a half years for me to return. Just before my time came up to go to prison, we found out that Lori was pregnant again; the thought of our new baby being born while I was in prison made me feel ashamed. Even, my mother popped into my head, for I wondered what she thought of her first born son being a convict. Even though I had just talked to Lori, I tried to guess what she and Lisa were doing at that very moment; indeed, that was the only way I could think of to be close to them. When I jumped into bed, the feelings of being alone and trapped hit me like a run-a-way locomotive. Another chilling thought also slipped into my mind: from now until the time of my release, I would have to sleep with one eye opened in order to protect myself from people like my cellmate.

I was finally starting to understand what it cost to pay the fiddler. While I lay on the steel meshed bed with my eyes filled with tears, the concept of freedom was no longer a product of abstract imagery but something as concrete as the bars that imprisoned me. I like so many others seen freedom as something that was owed to me; in fact, I took it for granted. But, now, I could not even pick what cereal I was going to eat for breakfast, so freedom was no longer a right but a privilege that should never be considered a luxury. Looking back on that first night in prison I have come to realize what Paul Friere termed, "Conscious of consciousness;" in other words, I became aware of the reality of the world around me and my role in it. I knew that I was no longer a person who was on the outside looking in, for my

actions had put me right in the center of things. I was not a spectator of life but a participant in it. The late author, Jack Henry Abbott, who wrote about his life in prison summed it up best when he said, "I am in the belly of the beast!"



Assignment: Writers sometimes visit perfectly ordinary places. Usually, they look for something extraordinary about it, hoping to show it freshly or humorously or ironically. Go to a very ordinary place—a gas station, a supermarket, an elementary school. Observe and talk to people, looking for an unusual angle that will allow you to write an engaging profile of the place.

Yesterday Revisited, Revised

Mary L. Hermann
Composition II

Seated in the modern, 25-year-old Catholic church in Ankeny, I listen to the words being spoken by Father Gubbels, the parish priest. He stands behind a podium and speaks calmly to his parish. Father talks of Jesus Christ, saying, "We should honor our Lord Jesus every day of our life." In the background I hear a chorus of children fussing and crying. I look at all of the young families who are members of this large parish, and my mind wanders back to my recent visit to the church in which I grew up.

St. Joseph's Catholic Church was constructed in the early 1900s and is housed in a large building located on the corner of a block on the edge of downtown Otley, Ohio. In my mind, I traced my steps as I approached the church and noticed the old-fashioned bell tower atop the church. The once-enhancing trim around the stained glass windows surrounding the building and the wooden doors had been painted since I'd last been here, and it now seemed to blend colorlessly into the off-white bricks which surrounded the church.

I had arrived shortly before 5:30 p.m. with my husband and mother. As we walked through the arched, double doorway, we were greeted by the parish priest, who was also new since I had last been here. "Good evening," he greeted us. "Hello, Father," we responded. We entered

the church, genuflected at a pew located near the center aisle, kneeled on the brown, padded kneelers to pray, and then we took our seats on the hard, wooden pews, which showed the wear of years of use.

I looked forward at the altar. It had been updated from its original setting which centered around Christ on the wooden crucifix above a large, thronelike chair with a chair on either side for the priest and altar people. There was now a simple, white cross over a small, rectangular table covered with a plain, white table cloth. A candle burned at each end of the table.

I recalled growing up in this church, celebrating my first communion, confession, and confirmation here. It made me feel warm and secure to sit inside this building. It was a sort of refuge from the wicked world which surrounded it, and I had often stopped here during my teen years to sit alone in its silence and sort out confusing thoughts that seem to go along with "teenhood." Although not a member here since 1981, this church seemed to fondly welcome me whenever I returned to visit.

Promptly at 5:30 p.m., the music from the organ at the front of the church began and the hymn leader sang the processional as Father, the lector, and the altar people entered down the center aisle. As the priest passed by me, I noticed that his gait possessed an air which made me immediately uncomfortable. He swung his green capelike robe with his arms and strutted up the two short stairs to the altar. My mom whispered to me, "I'm trying to be positive about this man, but it's so hard." As he recited the prayers, he used certain dramatic gestures, such as clenching his fists, and facial expressions, such as pain or relief, and he shook his head to reflect his opinion about the words he was speaking. It was as if he were an actor on his stage and we were his audience.

When he delivered his homily, I was impressed initially by the way he came out into the aisle to speak. It was a very informal and personal way of delivering a homily which I hadn't seen a priest do before. His clear, deep voice made it unnecessary for him to use a microphone.

He paced up and down the aisle as he spoke, and I couldn't help but notice his soft, unwhiskered face and the way he folded one arm to use as an armrest for the other, which continually found its way to his smooth chin. Each time he turned around to walk the opposite direction, he flung his green robe around to trail behind him. "What does that gesture remind me of?" I whispered to my husband.

As he continued to speak, I became increasingly aware of the content of what he was saying as my thoughts drifted away from his appearance and delivery of the sermon. As I listened more intently to his words, I realized he was preaching that there should be stricter laws within the community, family, and church. "I agree with this," I thought. "It made sense that we should adhere to the laws or rules no matter what the setting."

He went on to say that this especially holds true to this parish. "Okay," I thought, "if you say so." He continued, "After all, if someone doesn't watch out for me, I'll be teaching your children how to set fires in your living rooms. I've told you before that I'm insane. You'd better keep me in line. Otherwise, I could think of all kinds of terrible things to teach your children, which would make you want to disown them, much worse than simply burning down your house. And they'd listen to me because I'm a man of the cloth. You see, I am insane. But that's okay, because Jesus Christ was crazy."

His voice stopped. Whispers heard throughout the parish were the first response to his statements, and then there was a low hum of people's voices as they recovered from the shock of what he had just said. In this parish located in a farm community with a total membership of less than 500 families and an average age of member at around 45, this type of comment was not well received. Father quietly watched from his place in the aisle as his parish responded. Some people continued to whisper. Others just stared blankly into

air, while others gaped at him. Father smiled, swung his cape as he turned toward the altar, and took his seat at the head of the church.

It was at this moment that I, with the help of my husband, realized who this man reminded me of—"Count Dracula," he whispered to me, a delayed response to my earlier question. Looking around, it seemed he had bitten the necks and sucked the life out of all the adults in the church and then swung his cape and flown back to the belfry to sit and admire his kill.

Sitting in the Otley church, I reflect on the comments I had heard regarding Christ's sanity during my visit to my hometown church. I don't doubt Christ's sanity, but I do wonder what Father's purpose had been in proclaiming Christ, as well as himself, insane. Whatever the purpose, the outcome to me was that he discredited the entire message of his homily. More than that, he shattered the image I'd spent my childhood building of the symbols that this church held for me—stability, warmth, security, refuge. It's now simply a large, white, brick building with stained glass windows and an old-fashioned bell tower located on a corner at the edge of downtown Otley.



In "Perfectly Christ, Perfectly Crazy," the writer rewrote the previous essay, "Yesterday Revisited, Revised," from the viewpoint of the priest.

Perfectly Christ, Perfectly Crazy

Mary L. Hermann
Composition II

"Hello, Father," a young woman greets me. I don't recall ever seeing her before, but then, I'm greeted so often this way by all kinds of new faces; I couldn't possibly be expected to remember everyone. "Good evening," I answer the woman as she briskly glides past me. I watch as she and her family take a seat near the center of my church.

After being at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Otley, Ohio for almost three years now, it truly has become *my* church. I live in the attached rectory, and I spend more time at this place than any of these once-a-week Catholics.

This is my home and my life seven days a week. It's their weekly obligation to show up here at Mass time and expect me to renew their Christian spirit. Well that's fine; I'll do that for them. But what do they do for me?

The sound of the organ interrupts my thoughts, and I realize I must begin to prepare myself for tonight's audience. I look down at my green cloths to make sure they're perfectly straight. I brush the creases from my sleeves and open my red-covered hymnal to "Christ Jesus Victor" so that I can sing to my people as I make my entrance from the rear of the church, parade past them down the aisle, and take my place at the head of the church in my throne-like seat on the red carpeted altar.

The music finished up as I sing the final words with the parish, "Christ Jesus, Lord and Redeemer." How appropriate, I think to myself as my mouth begins to speak the Mass for the evening. I've done it so many

times by this point in time that I say it perfectly without even concentrating on what comes next in the Mass. Like Christ, so perfect. He created the word, and I spread it; people came from miles around to hear him speak and watch his miracles at work, and people come to my church from this town as well as from smaller communities nearby to see me relate Christ's message; Christ was a ruler of his people, and I rule these people in *my* church.

It's time to say my homily. I step to the center aisle to speak. I want to be close to my people, as Christ was to his. They like me to be near them; it makes them feel closer to Christ. They expect a performance from me to make them feel enriched with the Christian spirit. As I speak to them, I pace up and down the aisle, my stage, leading my green cape with my right arm each time I turn around.

As the words flow smoothly, perfectly, from my mouth, as they once had Jesus', I look at the faces of the people here tonight. Most are middle-aged or elderly people who perceive me as Christ himself. The words I speak are, in their minds, derived from Christ's own, and I am merely his voice, his messenger.

I resent this analogy; I'm as human as any of them. Christ is dead. The thoughts that I'm communicating to them are my own. Can't they respect me for the person that I am? They come here with their families or friends, and they leave the church after Mass to go outside of my world to carry on with their lives, leaving me until next week, or the next. This is my whole life. Why will they only share an hour a week with me? Don't they see how I can teach them about Christ, how much I know and how well I've studied the Lord's works? Can't they understand that I need friends, people like them to comfort me, talk with me, care about me? Christ had friends, people followed him for days and weeks to hear his words. He was never alone. I speak his words. Who is here for me?

But there was Peter. Peter betrayed Christ. Christ

gave him every opportunity to be his friend. But Peter couldn't defend Jesus when Jesus was down, when his reputation was less than perfect, as it once had been. He didn't want people to know that he had befriended this man, who was now accused of being a fraud, a fake. Peter was a typical human being—a simple, Christian person who looks out for only himself. All of the people here tonight are Peters; they would betray me if given the chance. No, I'm smarter than that. I will never call any of these Peter-parishioners my friend. They will not betray me.

I've delivered my homily to them for the evening; I've renewed their Christian spirit and enriched their imperfect lives. That's all they'll get from me, tonight or ever.

I can see by the looks on their faces that they feel pleased with the spiritual nourishment they've taken from me. It was a perfect performance. But I wonder—did they really absorb my message, or were they daydreaming, thinking of what they'll be doing tonight, or tomorrow, or next week? Did they hear Christ's words as they were interpreted by my mind and spoken by my mouth? No, I'm sure they heard something. They adore Christ's message, while they could care less about me. Who was Christ anyway? I'll tell you—a man, just like me. Almost a perfect man, except he trusted people.

I turn to take my place in my throne-like seat on my altar. I decide to leave these people, my parishioners, this group of "Peters," one more message. I face them as I speak, "As you leave here this evening, you should consider the message I've given. However, you can make up your own minds about the validity of the message because as I've told you many times before I'm crazy."

I sit down and smile to myself. There now. Does that weaken their peace of mind? By the look on the face of the young woman who greeted me earlier I'd say I've established my ability to perform, to enlighten and uplift them with Christ's words, my words. Now I'm demonstrating my ability to shape their attitudes, their

feelings about this Perfect Christ—and me, their perfect priest, the voice of their Lord. The Lord they betrayed. They won't betray me; I don't let them. I don't need any of them.

Oh, I see they're recovering from the first blow. Let me really show them how powerfully my words can strike. I slowly stand to add one last thought to the sentence I previously began to make it perfect: "But that's okay, because Jesus Christ was nuts."



Why Read "A Rose For Emily"

Linda M. Lighthall
Introduction To Literature

"A Rose For Emily" by William Faulkner quickly read is a plain and simple horror story, a story of the grotesque. When one reaches the end of the story, the images of the horror slowly rise up like bile in the back of one's throat. It is with this end, and the refusal to believe the evidence presented there that draws the reader back into the story. One seeks to understand Emily and how something like this could possibly happen.

Faulkner uses a narrator, a town resident, to tell the story of Emily. By so doing, he leaves a lot of areas implied. We, as reader, are left to only guess at what really took place in Emily's life and in her mind. We are never allowed into Emily's confidence, just as the townspeople are not allowed the privilege.

It is discovered, in the very beginning that everyone in town knows who Miss Emily is, and also knows some background to her life (whether it is factual or not). In the first paragraph; "When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old manservant—a combined gardener and cook—had seen in ten years" (Faulkner 728). It is clear, that Emily has never been married. She is the talk of the town—a monument. She was isolated in her house and her manservant must not have shared with the community or the town would probably have known more about the "inside" of Emily's life.

Judith Fetterly has said that Faulkner's "A Rose For Emily" isn't a story about conflict between the North and South, or even between the old and new. She says "it is a story of a woman victimized and betrayed by the system of sexual politics" (363). Emily never has the

opportunity to become an individual. Her life is first governed by her father, then passed on to the town's responsibility when "Colonel Sartoris, the mayor, . . . remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity" (Faulkner 729). Even death for Miss Emily is not her own. All that she had is locked in the upstairs room; her bridal suite.

At a time in her life when Emily should have been breaking away from home and forming an intimate relationship and beginning life in a new role, it is learned from the story this never came about. The narrator tells us that the townspeople felt "that the Griersons held themselves a little too high. . . . None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily" (731). We are shown the dominance of Emily's father "a spraddled silhouette in the foreground" and "Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background" (731). This gives the impression that Miss Emily had been raised as her father's prize, part of his property which he would allow no one else to have the privilege of enjoying.

With this beginning to Emily's repression, the townspeople (with Colonel Sartoris' guidance) continued to treat Emily as the lady who "must have either husband or father, and that, because Emily has neither, the town must assume responsibility for her" (Fetterly 362). Brooks and Penn Warren have pointed out that the narrator says "that to the community Miss Emily seemed dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse" and because of this she belonged to the whole community" (346-347).

Emily doesn't know how to form a normal relationship. From her father she had only learned how to totally possess another. This possession becomes obsessive and the only outcome is a form of madness from the town's point of view. To Emily this madness is perfectly normal. She knows no other way of life—just as a child born without one of its limbs never truly knows what

any other way of life may be like—what is normal for most. Emily's madness "is simply a development of her pride and her refusal to submit to ordinary standards of behavior" (Brooks & Penn Warren 348). Emily becomes isolated like a valuable museum piece, surrounded by visitors but never touched. How much lonelier could her life become?

The ultimate outcome of this whole sad story is that Emily craves companionship. She, like each of us as human beings, must have love and a sense of belonging, in some small way, to society. We are a social species and need human contact to maintain life. Because Emily is treated as this museum piece, no one really sees who she is. She becomes totally isolated. Even her servant, Tobe, doesn't interact with her. It is said in the story "his voice had grown harsh and rusty, as if from disuse" (Faulkner 735). Emily, needing someone to cling to, murders Homer, and will therefore possess him for eternity as she had first been taught by her father. Since no one really sees her other than as a museum piece, she easily gets away with murder.

At the end of Emily's life, we find what all this loneliness and isolation has done to her. She had become "bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough . . ." (730). "She died in one of the downstairs rooms, in a heavy walnut bed with a curtain, her gray head propped on a pillow and moldy with age and lack of sunlight" (735). The focus is now on the grotesqueness that results when an individual is denied the chance to be. "At the end, the townsfolk finally discover who and what she is, they have in fact encountered who and what they are" (Fetterly 362).

As I have shown, this story, "A Rose For Emily" is not just a story of gossip about a crazy old lady. It is a story about how easy it is for a life to be directed in a direction apart from the normal. We as individuals

must learn that we are not isolated in our deeds. Whatever we do in life, whomever we cross paths with in life, will have some effect as to our course in the future as well as for those we meet. No contact with another human being, no matter how insignificant, is to be treated lightly. Emily's father began the destruction in her life, but had the townspeople gotten her help at his death, her life may have had a chance for a more acceptable direction. Had someone shown an interest in a manner of a truly caring way instead of a mere curiosity, it may have made a difference in Emily's life.

We, as human beings, must be designated as the caretakers of this world. Life must be respected, appreciated, held as valuable, and above all, it must be shared or it will become a story of horror—a story of the grotesque.

Works Cited

Faulkner, William. "A Rose For Emily" *Literature The Power of Language* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1989.

Brooks, Cleanth & Penn Warren, Robert. "An Interpretation of 'A Rose For Emily'" from *Understanding Fiction* 1943.

Fetterly, Judith. "A Rose For 'A Rose for Emily'" from *The Resisting Reader* 1978.



Hope for the Reality of a Myth

Stephen Smith
Introduction To Literature

Hardy, Thomas

"The Oxen"

Superficially, this poem tells a simple tale about the memory of a story heard in childhood being fondly rekindled in adult life. However, beneath the simplicity of the tale, particularly through engaging choices of words, the poem plummets far greater depths of meaning than would be expected from an initial or casual acquaintance with it.

Instantly, with the very first line "Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock" we are placed in a magical world, at least for children, and surely for adults when children are present, as they are in the scene that is cast at the beginning of the poem. With the word "clock," its abrupt ending gives a pause and, with the magic of the moment, we can almost hear the tick tock of the clock at its pause as the midnight hour is struck and the tale is about to be told. All the family is gathered around in "hearthside ease," a scene of family togetherness, comfort, and warmth described with beautiful effectiveness and poetic ease. Probably there has been quite an evening of folk tales and stories for this period of history predates the advent of radio or television; entertainment was routinely and fairly expertly homespun. Now, as the fire has died down to its "embers," the story is told of the oxen that are "kneeling in their strawy pen."

Following this introduction which flashes back to childhood we are brought, years later, to the time in which the poet was writing (late 19th to early 20th century). The comment is made that no one "doubted that the oxen would be kneeling then" and furthermore, no-one would likely tell such a tale nowadays, "So fair a fancy few would weave in these years."

The final section of the poem is also placed in the poet's present time. The poet notes that "Yet . . . if someone said . . . come see the oxen kneel . . . I should go . . . hoping it might be so."

This poem tells a story of Christmas yet it is not a Christian story. There are allusions to the Christmas story. For example, the oxen kneeling in a stable. They could be perceived to be kneeling in prayer, in homage, in meditation, but presumably not in a ritual that would be accepted or understood by established religious figures of the time. Religious hierarchy, especially at the end of the 19th century, put man on a pedestal above animals. The very idea that animals might be able to commune with a divine creator would likely have been unacceptable. Such a concept would most likely have been ridiculed at least as much as were Darwin's theories on evolution. New scientific thought had put man in direct biological line with animals being joined through a series of common ancestors. Thus, man could be seen, albeit perhaps by a minority, to have a degree of common origin and sympathy with the animals upon which he relied for sustenance through agriculture.

Thomas Hardy was reverent of folk tales, folk traditions, and he was a witness of the depth of character that was to be found in country folk and in rural customs. Thus, it could be that he saw a possibility that humans, and indeed animals also, could commune simply and directly with a creator or otherworldly being that transcended earthly reality. Indeed, he was very critical of established religion. Therefore, the oxen could also be symbolic of a body of people unspoiled by the vices of human edification which, in their most perfect form, might be seen as the rural folk; a body of people with traditions that allowed them to express faith and belief simply without the need of religious bigotry and politics. We are told in the poem of an "elder" who told the story. This choice of word suggests a wise man, wise in rural tradition, esteemed in traditional rural hierarchy, possibly

the local rural equivalent of a member of the religious hierarchy. There is also here the suggestion of another connection to Christmas, that being to the wise men recounted in the tale of the nativity in Bethlehem. The setting of a strawy pen in the poem provides a strong allusion to the nativity scene of the animals in a stable. Further connections to rural traditions are given by the use of the word "weave" to tell the story in the sense of spinning a yarn. Animal connections are present again here also as we think of wool spun from sheep at the mention of the word "weave." In the overall context of the poem the choice of this word is significant for the poet not only weaves a tale but he also weaves himself through it as a child and then as an adult. Another definition of "flock" is a tuft of wool. Thus there is emphasis on the people as sheep (another biblical connotation) being a closely knit family constituting the material element of the story for they are woven into the tale as they "sit in a flock." At yet another level the poem weaves into it us the readers. We are also drawn into the poem's world and the meaning that we can find in the yarn. Through these means the fabric of society, both past and present, becomes one of the raw materials in the poem.

The poem thus abounds with words that seem to have been very carefully chosen so that they can make a precise and colorful effect on our imaginative powers. The choice of "years" suggest something more than simply "now." The poet is making the point that there has been more than a passage of time from childhood to adulthood. To coin a phrase "the times have changed," in other words people's habits, thinking, and beliefs have changed since the poet's childhood. Rural traditions have been swept away, everything now has to be proven by experimentation, there is no room for weaving fantastical stories in the new world of science.

However, the poet clings to the memory of childhood. Particularly, he wants to adhere to a belief in the existence of a world where at least some fantastical tales would

be told and which could be believed. He wouldn't rule out the possibility that the oxen could be kneeling and indeed "hopes that it would be so." Once again, the word choice is important. Use of the word "hope" means much more than if the word "wish" had been substituted. "Hope" denotes a far greater sense of need, a need that is not solely for personal gratification but more for universal worldly salvation. Once more, with this word we are reminded of the biblical nativity and the power of the meaning in "hope" as we cast our minds back to the words "The hopes and fears of all the years rest in thee tonight" that are to be found in the carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem." Very subtly, there is once more the allusion to Christmastime and the hope of worldly salvation, yet this is executed without direct reference. The connection is thus made more powerful because it is conjured up directly within our own imagination. Yet again we enter into the world of the poem as we weave our own thoughts into the yarn.

The poet himself hopes, contrary to much contemporary thought, that the oxen really would be kneeling on Christmas eve. This picture of animals kneeling could signify a world of naive simplicity where simple goodness reigns; a world where layers of intrigue, politics, and bigotry can be stripped off; a world where one can be worshipful and reverent without the need for a religious hierarchy and bureaucracy; a world where natural simple animals and countryfolk have dignity and equality. A pastoral world that might be considered supreme to that found in the outer urban world of increased complexity, speed, chaos; a rapidly evolving world of change with ever increasing distance from basic simple connections to both earthly and spiritual life.

Quite possibly, a myth had developed as to why oxen knelt. This is a posture that they normally adopt whilst standing up from a lying position or vice versa. Folk tales could conceivably have been told for centuries that oxen adopt this position in homage to Christ, the

child Jesus, or to God. Such a tale would have particular relevance at Christmas; a time when the child Jesus and animals were housed together. There could also be some degree of deeper meaning to this tale that would have relevance to a rural world that was under attack from the encroachment of science and technology. For example, if a stable was acceptable to God as a place into which to bring His son then surely the rural scene was equal or better than the rushed, disturbed, yet richer urban world as a home for man. Regardless of the precise connotations, it is true that as scientific and technological advances have increased impact, as they were doing in the rural environment that Hardy was talking about, then mythical fantastic tales that have no simple, logical, or provable basis tend to be unfashionable and die out. However, there are dangers in the loss of myths for they are stories with which we as humans attempt to understand the mysteries of, for example, why and how we and the universe were created. Without myths we tend to lose our mental bearings in the world and we become precariously balanced on ever more dizzying heights of scientific hypotheses and theories. Even in the present state of scientific knowledge, nearly a century after the writing of this poem, science cannot answer all of the questions that we, sometimes illogical humans, have a need to have answers for.

The poet not only wishes for a retelling of the story but he "hopes" that the mythical existence of worshipful oxen would be true. In this hope I see a desire by Hardy for a stronger connection to rural roots and traditions as a reaction to the increasing flood of scientific ideas and theories that were being brought out at that time by Mill, Huxley, and Darwin. Being myself a scientist and coming from a farm I feel much the same need to have a basis of thought that is not dependent upon everything being scientifically provable. There is a need within me to accept that much, indeed most, remains unknown and fantastic and that we humans have not got it all figured out. The ability to accept the unknown and to

have an open mind is critically important to a scientist because it fosters creative unblinkered thinking and allows us to ask interesting questions that are the sparks of understanding and which can become the flames of wonderment as we learn more about our world and about ourselves.

One final point that deserves mention in this poem, which also gives it greater depth of meaning, is the choice of words as regards the time period of their origins. Of 25 words in the poem that I researched, only 2 ("occur" and "gloom") had roots that went back only so far as the middle to late 16th Century. Other words traced back to Old or Middle English used in the 13th and pre-12th centuries. One word "barton" is not even mentioned in Websters dictionary among 160,000 word entries. Amongst this choice of words Hardy is very adept at using puns. For example, the word "gloom" could mean the darkness of evening. Equally, it could mean disenchantment in a world that has cast off mystery and simple beliefs. Again "embers" denotes not only the dying flames of a fire but also conjures up the thoughts of cooling emotions, memories, ideas or responses that could be brought back to life with a breath of fresh air.

This poem thus creates an incredible richness and subtlety of image and meaning through the use of old words. In this poem I believe that Thomas Hardy is calling for the hope of the return of a world of simple dignity and beliefs that would be the moral superior of much of the modern world in which he now finds himself. We, the poet, and the characters in the poem are all woven into a tapestry which, with the ever increasing march of complex technology and science in our own day, can be seen as a yarn that transcends the time and place of its original conception.





U. 2

Sept 1970

LIBRARY
DMACC
ANKENY CAMPUS
