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## Skunk River Review September 1992, Vol 4

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# Skunk River Review



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VOLUME IV

SEPTEMBER 1992

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# SKUNK RIVER REVIEW

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VOLUME IV

SEPTEMBER 1992

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

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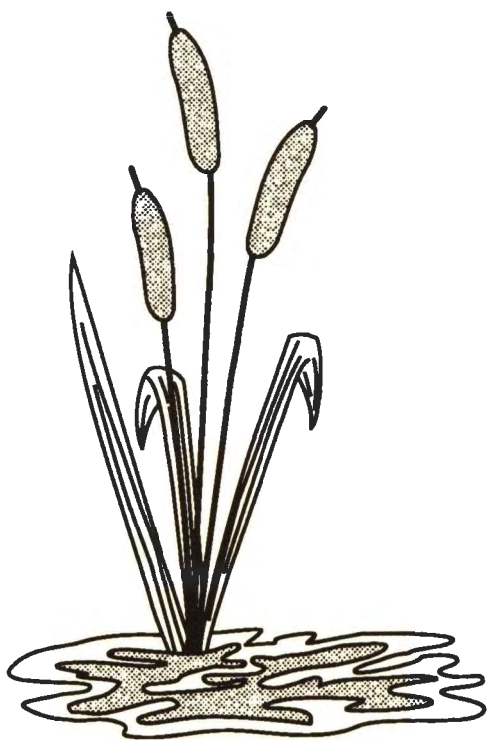
All of our colleagues whose input and contributions have been invaluable.

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Dedicated to all of the DMACC students  
who submitted their essays for publication —  
without you, the *Skunk River Review* could  
not exist.





## What Would You Do?

*Kathleen Lynch*  
*Basic Writing*

What do you do when you are laid off from your job, have children to support and find out you are having major surgery? Sit down and cry? Or apply for what everyone calls welfare, or what the government agency calls Aid to Dependent Children (ADC)?

The process of applying for ADC is harder than most people imagine. Questions asked are, "What is your household size?" "What is your income?" "What are the social security numbers of all in the household?" Then there is an appointment made for you to see a maintenance worker, someone who decides if you are eligible to receive benefits. A thirty day processing time is a long and difficult time to wait for a decision that will seriously affect your family life.

The application process is enough to discourage anyone from applying, but worrying about what other people will assume once you are on ADC is also difficult. Some of the assumptions can be, "Tax payers support welfare!" "Once you are on welfare there is no way to get off." "Most people on welfare are low lifes who are too lazy to get a job." "Most welfare recipients just keep having babies to get more money and stay on welfare." No wonder people are embarrassed to be on the welfare system.

I can relate to some of the assumptions; I used to be one of those tax payers and still consider myself one. I found out a day before Christmas my secure job of two years had ended when the department I worked in permanently closed. Not knowing what would happen to my family was my worst scare. I was numb from head to toe with shock from the news. I was still in shock when I was informed by my doctor that I needed major surgery. I didn't have the money, so the doctor informed me of ADC. He said ADC would help me with the medical bills and also provide income to live on.

Thinking "Once on welfare, always on welfare," I panicked. I worried, "Will my children grow up relying on welfare? Will I have to depend on ADC the rest of my life?" Putting my pride aside, I became determined to apply for ADC and was glad I did. The worker I talked to told me about a program that would help pay for schooling. Knowing that I could go to college took away the fear of being dependent on ADC and the worries I had about my children. Once I calmed down, I knew that I was not some lazy person who would be dependent on welfare because I knew that after I was well enough, I could go to school.

There are people who do abuse the system, but there is no guarantee with any system that someone won't abuse it. There are people who only know welfare as surviving. Those who don't do anything with their lives shouldn't be looked at as lazy but as uneducated. These people have too big a problem for the system to help them. That is why there are programs to re-educate and retrain for a better life, so people can feel better about themselves and improve their lives. These people should want to improve themselves.

Through personal experience, I have learned welfare is a big help and that it is there when needed. I look forward to finishing school and supporting my children and myself with a new career.

When I start my new career, I'll think back to when I was on welfare and how it helped me. I will know that while I'm working, my cut of the taxes will be going to help people who are in the same position that I was.



## The Abandoned Farm House

Anita L. Williams  
*Basic Writing*

Years ago, before living in Des Moines, I lived on a farm with my family just outside Linden, Iowa. Not far from our residence was an abandoned farm house. To get to it we had to walk down a path by a pond where we could hear frogs croaking and where my brothers and I fished. Winding past the pond, the path bent to the right and nestled among the trees where the abandoned house stood.

It must have been a grand house in the past. It was three floors high and had a big open porch with beautiful pillars, several bay windows and lilac bushes growing along one side. By the time I encountered it, the roof was gone, the porch sagged under broken pillars, the bay windows were broken, the paint was peeling, the wood was warped and lilac bushes full of weeds were growing everywhere. A wild strawberry patch covered the entire backyard.

During spring, the lilac bushes alongside the house were in full bloom. The aroma was so strong that you could smell them before you reached the house. When I was younger, I could stand among the lilacs, the branches towering over me, and feel like I was in a lilac castle. I was surrounded by white, lavender and pink blooms and their sweet odors.

Every spring my mother would pick the wild strawberries and make strawberry jam. When they were ripe, they could be eaten right off the vine. They were so plump and sweet that they would explode in your mouth and the juice would trickle down your chin. No store-bought berries could match them. The animals that lived in the woods would come up to the yard and eat the berries. You had to be careful to pick one that wasn't nibbled on.

While my mother was gathering berries, my brothers and I would go play in the house. With the back porch

gone, we had set up stones to serve as stairs so we could reach the door. When we entered the house, the smell of mold and rotting wood surrounded us.

We entered a room that was once a kitchen. The tile on the floor was so old it cracked under our feet; it was like walking across a dried-out water hole. Cob webs hung in the corners of the room and dust was everywhere, even on the walls. To the right was a door leading downstairs to the cellar. It was always dark down there. My brothers would venture into this abyss, but I would never go because I was afraid of what might be lurking down there in the dark.

The living room had faded. Peeling wallpaper and chunks of plaster were on the floor; leaves that had blown through the broken windows were piled up in the corners of the room, and animal tracks and dung were everywhere.

Sometimes when we entered the house, we would frighten animals. One time my brother Steve was cornered by a skunk. Our dog, Bonnie, came to his rescue. Steve was able to get away, but, unfortunately, Bonnie got sprayed.

Just off the living room was the dining area, where we had to watch for loose floor boards, or we might end up in the cellar. Through one of the broken windows, a tree limb grew up and into a hole in the ceiling.

Upstairs was off limits due to all the holes in the floor. The stairs leading up to the second floor were gone. All that was left were the handrail and the beams that the stairs once rested on. My father had nailed up boards to prevent my brothers and me from climbing up to the second floor. We were disappointed, but any thought of climbing over the boards was stopped by the threat of a spanking.

The house was our big play pen and we felt free going through the house, exploring every room. It was as though we were in a different world. In this house we escaped the reality of life and became pirates looking for treasures or the first persons on Mars. The house



was alive, giving us joy and happiness. We called this ruined dwelling "The house of imagination."

At dusk, when the sun started to set, the shadows grew long, the crickets started chirping, and the fire flies came out. It was time to go home. On the way we would try to catch fire flies; it was the best way to end the day.

It has been many years since I visited the farm. I have now grown and moved with my family to Des Moines. Last summer I went back to the farm. The path leading to the abandoned house is overgrown with weeds. The aroma of the lilacs can no longer be smelled; the weeds have killed them off. Reaching the abandoned house, I discovered all that is left are the concrete foundation and rotted pieces of wood lying on the ground. The strawberries have died. The woods have reclaimed their land. All is gone but the memories of our "house of imagination."



## Goodbye Santa Claus

*Kent Redenius*  
*Writing Skills Review*

In 1968, I was five years old. Two days before Christmas, I told my dad that I wanted an army set with tanks, airplanes, and cannons. I also wanted a Hot Wheels set that had a motorized car pusher. At that moment, I sensed something was wrong. Dad began to have teary eyes and held me tight. He brushed back my hair with his large hand and said that he loved me. He told me since he didn't have a good job, Santa Claus might not come this year.

I remember times were hard for my parents to provide the special presents we all wanted. My older brother, Kevin, was eight years old. He mainly wanted a red bicycle with a banana-seat that had a long sissy-bar. Kayla, my little sister, was four, and she wanted Barbie dolls with an assortment of clothes. Each of us wanted a big Christmas. We weren't expecting the kind of Christmas we got.

Christmas Eve came very slowly, but it finally crept up on us. The Christmas tree was so beautiful that I stared at it constantly. We all had a part in decorating it with garland, tinsel, and old balls of different sizes. The tree had nothing under it but fallen needles and an empty water pan. I still had high hopes for a big outcome. I knew Santa Claus would come like he had in the past. I didn't think about what Dad said about Santa. All I thought about was the army set and that I couldn't wait until Christmas Day.

We lived in a farm house in Welcome, Minnesota. The living room was warm and dry. Mom and Dad were in the kitchen talking while we were watching Christmas specials. During commercials we would scuff our socks around on the floor and shock each other. It was fun chasing each other until Dad would get tired of the noise.

It was time to eat, and we were all on time to get our places. Mom made our favorite, "porky pine" meatballs. We called them "porky pine" because the rice would stick out all over them. After we were finished, we had pumpkin pie with whipped cream.

It was around eight o'clock when things started happening. On the roof of the house we heard loud hoof pounding sounds and ringing bells. We all jumped and yelled, "It's Sanna Claus," and we all rushed to the front door. We nearly stepped on each other. We were pushing each other into the door and pulling each other away from the door. If someone was outside, they would have seen three faces squished against the glass of the storm door. And they would have heard the sounds of, "It's Sanna; it's Sanna!"

Dad said, "Get away from the door. It's a robber. I'm getting my shotgun!"

I said, "No Daddy. It's Santa. I know it!"

Kevin said with a smile, "Blast him a good one Dad!"

Together Kayla and I said, "No! Shut up Kevin!"

Dad went outside with the shotgun. Kayla and I clawed and cried at the door while Kevin stood at the window laughing with Mom. Dad stood in front of the house and yelled, "Hey you, Santa Claus. Get off my roof!"

A voice on the roof that sounded like Uncle Eddie said, "Ho! Ho! It's Santa Claus. Merry Christmas!"

Then my dad shot a round over the house, and my dad's brother, Eddie, threw a stuffed Santa Claus head first into the snow. My brother couldn't stop laughing, and my sister and I couldn't stop crying. Dad pulled the dummy Santa out of the snow. The force of the fall caused the dummy's head to fall off. After I saw the headless dummy, I stopped crying.

Dad and Eddie brought in the fake Santa; then Dad reached inside it. He had a present for everyone. Each of us got a nice set of clothes that we really needed.

Dad knew that we were somewhat disappointed, so he began to tell us what Christmas was all about. He

told us how important it was to be thankful for what we had. I began to think about what he was saying. Santa Claus was just a myth; it was something that drew away from the true meaning of Christmas. I felt better about the things we already had, and I was thankful for what I got that Christmas. It was my dad's hard work and an honest week's pay that got the clothes and all the things we had.

Later I found out that my grandpa had done the same thing to my dad and his two brothers. Since my dad's father thought it was necessary to kill Santa, my dad thought it was necessary to kill Santa also. This made it clear to me. As a child, I had difficulty understanding the hard work that my parents did to pay for our gifts; therefore, I took everything that my parents did for us for granted. I see the same thing in my children. It may be necessary to kill Santa Claus in this generation as well.





## Where's The Wood Stuff?

*Lesley Mienke*  
*Writing Skills Review*

I knew that every time my big brother was sick it meant that my mom was going to take me to and from school. Today was no exception. As I got out of the car, my mom told me Aunt Judy would be picking me up at the same place when school was out. How was I to know that this little change would create a memory that I would never forget!

The school day progressed in the usual manner, completing the required reading, writing, drawing, and playing. (Of course, playing games was my favorite.) As the school day drew to its end, I watched the clock with anticipation. Even though I couldn't tell time yet, I knew where those hands were supposed to be when the dismissal bell rang.

Once the bell rang, like always, everyone darted out of the room in search of the big school doors which released us back into our own worlds. (Of course, this only happened after our teacher excused us.) The school doors were wide open as I reached them, never being allowed to shut as the kids hit the door one after another. As I proceeded out the doors, my world halted.

There was a little confusion at first when I didn't see my aunt's old station wagon sitting where it was supposed to be. I still felt safe, though. Other six-year-olds were still running around. I decided to walk to the pick-up zone in hopes that once I reached the pick-up zone, my aunt would be waiting for me. Unfortunately, she wasn't. In an effort to find my aunt, I attempted to peer nonchalantly into the window of the other cars, making sure no one knew that I was alone. I was hoping she had driven a car that I did not recognize. As I waited, thoughts started drifting through my mind. Wasn't it this morning that my mom dropped me off and said my aunt was going to pick me up? Where is she? I'm sure it is today, isn't it?

Feeling safer by the school building, I decided to walk back to the big front doors. My safety was quickly disappearing as other kids climbed into their awaiting cars. Oh, how I wished it were me climbing into my aunt's car! Tears started trickling down my cheeks. It was today she was going to pick me up. Mom said so! Didn't she? I'm sure it was today.

Wait a moment! What if she went to the other pick-up zone? The fear subsided and excitement grew with thoughts that I wasn't forgotten after all. My pace was almost a run as I started towards the other end of the school. By the time I reached my destination, my pace had slowed to a crawl. Uncertainty caused fear to creep back into my mind. I was no longer racing to the end of the building. Instead, I watched the rocks and blades of grass pass beneath my feet. As I reached the corner of the school building, excitement and insecurity whirled inside me. Should I look around the corner? What if she wasn't there either!

As I peered around the corner, I spotted it — my Aunt Judy's station wagon! I began to run. All of a sudden, as if I had run into a wall, it dawned on me. There's no wood stuff on the side of the car! My heart stopped. I felt as if my body was empty as I walked back to the front school doors. There were no more fears running through me, only tears racing down my cheeks. My entire family had forgotten me. They must not love me anymore.

It felt as if hours passed by while I waited. Finally, she appeared. There was no excitement or fear as her car pulled into the pick-up zone. An empty figure simply climbed into the old station wagon with wood stuff on the side.

Over the years, I've been told hundreds of times by my mom that my Aunt Judy was only fifteen minutes late. To this day I still don't believe her.



## The Ordeal in Building 4 (A Horror Story)

Veronica Wheeland  
Composition I

At last, after weeks of mind-torturing preparation, it was time for the dreaded anatomy practicum. As my classmates and I walked from Building 5 to the lab in Building 4, I heard babbling, crying, and even a primal scream — could it have been me?

Before entering the lab, we gathered around the instructor, the Marquis De Trotter, while he handed out the work sheets that we were to write our answers (and best guesses) on. As soon as he reached for the door, the hallway became hushed except for some quiet, nervous laughter here and there. As I glanced around, the faces of my classmates appeared to be turning various shades of grayish green.

When the door opened, I could see the maze of stations set up about the room. The stench of dead cats was almost overwhelming. There were twenty-five stations displaying human bones, cat muscles, and slides of human tissue.

The instructor told me to begin at station number eight. As I approached it, I saw a microscope with a slide positioned under the lens. With my heart pounding in my ears, I anxiously peered in and a feeling of terror came over me. "What is that thing? I'm sure that I have never seen it before." My mind started to frantically search through the list of tissues I had stored there the night before. When the first scan failed to retrieve an answer, I started the process all over again. I think it was on the third pass when the instructor commanded, "Move." I soon realized that ninety seconds can be an eternity when you don't know the answer.

By the time I got to the bones, I was beginning to sweat. The first one was a simple arm bone, but the tag

was pointing to a slight depression on its surface. "Is that an alveolus, condyle, fossa, or fissure?" Still uncertain about my answer, I moved on to the next bone, which had an odd-looking knob on the bigger end. It was tagged for identification. "That's a condyle. No, it's a trochanter. No, it must be a tuberosity." Unfortunately, the old song, "Head Bone Connected To The Neck Bone," wasn't any help.

When I reached the home stretch, I began to panic because I knew that the final eight stations of cat muscles would be the hardest of the lot. I tried to recall why I wanted to be a nurse in the first place, but I couldn't. Stretched before me, as though they were on the racks of a medieval torturer, were the cats. In a frenzy, I moved from station-to-station on command — observing and writing, observing and writing. I briefly glanced down at my work sheet. That couldn't be my writing. The words were scribbled, and I could barely read them. Then I noticed that the pencil in my left hand was quivering uncontrollably. The litany that I had memorized ran rampant through my head like the melody of an unwanted song. "Pectoante-brachialis, pectoralis major, ximphi humeralis, flexor carpi ulnarie . . . supercalifragilisticexpialidocious. But what went where? Did it belong to the arm, leg, back, or cheek group? Please God, let this be over soon."

At last, the instructor said, "Stop writing. You are done." The agony was finally over. There was a loud sigh and gasp or two from those of us who hadn't breathed for an hour. As I staggered out of the room, I heard somebody say, "I think I'll just kill myself now." Still in a daze, I started to walk toward the exit. Then all of a sudden, a loud desperate inquiry echoed down the hallway, "Those couldn't be the same bones he showed us, could they?" I opened the door and stepped outside. I inhaled a couple of breaths of fresh air. Relief washed over me until I realized that the real horror, the waiting for the results, was just beginning.





## Tornado

*Hazel R. Salyers  
Composition I*

In the 30 years since I left home, I had never gone running home to Mama. But that's exactly what I did in late January, 1990.

The previous July, my husband had fallen and shattered a hip. He spent several weeks in the hospital, then came home for me to care for, help exercise, and keep occupied. But it seemed that the more he healed, the more helpless he became. Doc and I agreed he needed some time alone to become more self-reliant. The acreage in Alabama where my parents had retired seemed the perfect place to retreat. My excuse: Dad had been in the hospital a lot in the past couple of years, and Mom needed help spring cleaning.

Mom was delighted to have the help, and Dad was home for now. He was taking so many medications, oxygen, and the Nebulizer (a machine which produces a medicated mist inhalant to reduce incidence of Bronchitis) several times daily, and oxygen all night, that Mom seemed distracted trying to keep it all organized. He was also supposed to stay in the house. However, he seemed to be always puttering around the yard, fixing a tractor, or helping my brother, next door, with a project.

It was March 9 and I'd helped all I thought I could; it was time to go home to my husband. But — like every weekend since I'd arrived — there had been severe-weather warnings and tornado/flood watches all day. I waited; one more night would not be a burden to my healing mate. I was excited, though, and went to sleep, my face buried in a book, the light still on.

About 3 A.M., I awoke to the wind whistling around the corners of the mobile home, heavy rain slapping the windows. The light flickered. "Maybe it's a good thing I'm not driving," I thought, as I reached for the lamp. O-o-o-h. The light went off before I touched it!

Groping, I found the flashlight, got up to look outside, and heard the sound of a train. The trains do not run at night.

"But it is a train, and getting closer . . . Oh no. NO!" Realization dawned as the mobile home began to vibrate.

I grabbed a double blanket and a pillow, and with my only thought being to get safely away from any glass, knelt at the foot of the bed, pillow over my head, and began to pray for God's keeping. The trailer rocked; the train became a piercing howl.

"Hazel, Hazel. Wake up! What in the world is happening!?" Mother was shaking me, hard. I looked up to see the first fear, no, terror, I'd ever seen in her soft eyes. I wrapped my blanket around her, handed her my pillow, and shouted above the ruckus, "Mother, what are you doing? Don't you know it's a tornado? Get down here, away from the windows."

"But your Daddy is standing at the foot of our bed and I can't get him to move. What is going on? What's happening to us?"

Softer now, "Mama, please get down here, now, on the floor. Cover your head, and stay here until I come back for you! Okay?"

The howl was deafening as I dodged walls and zig-zagged around furniture, racing for the opposite end of the rocking and reeling trailer. Protesting metal and twisting timbers chased me.

There stood Daddy. Could this white-haired waif, lost, bewildered, with naked terror written clearly on his chalky face, possibly be my father? Could this be my strong, afraid of nothing, always ready with a solution to any problem or disaster, father? His look nearly put me in the same frozen state. Only the swift and sure realization that this time, this time, it was he who needed to be rescued from harm's way, saved my forward progress.

"Daddy, are you okay?"

"Well. I believe so. Yes . . . just a little unsteady on my feet, though."

Didn't he realize it was the trailer which was unsteady on its feet?

Gently, ever so gently, I put my arm around his shoulders, noticing that somehow they weren't as broad as they used to be, and encouraged him away from the wrap-around bow window behind him. There was no way he could get on the floor, so I had him sit on the bed, piling blankets, pillows, everything soft I could reach around him.

His oxygen tank was on the outside wall, in front of the window, the valve still open! I ran for it. As I wheeled it toward the inside wall, I nearly dropped the heavy tank as the trailer felt like it would go flying off at any moment. Covering the tank with a blanket, I looked up to see Mom standing there.

We both jumped and screamed at the same time as the trailer leaned heavily to one side, accompanied by the sounds of wrenching, twisting, tearing metal, splitting timbers, and thunder bouncing on the roof. As plaster rained down on us, we heard the crashing, ear-piercing scream of a giant plate glass window shattered as if by a wrecking ball, falling for many stories, ringing and splintering forever toward the ground. (It was a nightmare sound to be envied by the best sound-effects people in Hollywood.)

"Mother! You're supposed to be on the floor!"

I froze as I saw her more clearly. Here was my take-charge, order-giving mother, looking at me as my own child might have years before, awakened from a terrifying nightmare. She was trailing the blanket, her eyes begging me not to scold. The fury, the pure energy of the storm, was palpable in her face.

"Mama, it's okay! Come sit here by Daddy. This nightmare will be over soon. You'll see." With more blankets and pillows from the closet, they were as safe as I could make them. I fell, exhausted, at their feet.

We waited, holding on to each other for comfort, an eternity it seemed, for the holocaust to abate. Each of us silent in our own thoughts. Or prayers.

As the tempest quieted, I began to quake. Were we on the edge of the tornado, or would it return from the other direction? Warning the folks to stay put, I went to the window. Less than 75 feet away, I watched my brother and his wife crawl from the pile of twisted rubble that a little while ago had been their house. They ran toward the front door of the trailer.

I hurried to open the door for them. It struck, then gave way. My brother and his wife were moving the big freezer which had moved several feet and toppled, blocking the storm/screen; I could do nothing to help. The solidly built roof and walls of the screened porch were gone. Not one of us remembered there was another door! (We would laugh about it later.)

I made coffee, grateful Mom's stove was gas. Later as I handed a cup of the forbidden brew to Dad, I noticed a bit of moisture perched on one high, ruddy cheekbone. I turned away, not wanting him to know I'd seen what I knew would surely embarrass him.

We listened to the radio, in near silence, as we waited for dawn. I thought of all the years the folks had been there for us, their children, and of the strengths and values they had given us to live by, mostly by example. Yet they had become, in a moment of disaster, like children again, dependent on me, or whomever might have been close. My own mortality swam in front of my face as I realized that life does come full circle.





## Where Everybody Knows Your Name

*Michael Kallhoff*  
*Composition I*

The sign out front, which appears dim compared to all the neon beer lights, reads "Oly's Gone." Below that, simple wooden letters above the black-tinted glass door invitingly declare "Good Food — Cold Beer." I arrive around 5:00, and the place looks full.

Inside the small, one-room tavern, a thin haze of smoke hangs over the bar as the smoke-eater struggles to keep up. The bright flashing ultra-modern CD jukebox belts out "Three Steps" by Lenard Skynard, making a comfortable background setting to the hum of conversation going on all around. It's Happy Hour, and most of the tables are full, with parties of people huddling around, talking, drinking, laughing.

In one corner, the conversation appears to be getting serious. Four salesmen from the car dealership across the street are grumbling loudly with very grim looks on their faces. They appear to be solving all of the world's problems over a few beers.

On the other side of the room, a Casey's corporate executive is shooting pool with a scruffy-looking truck driver. Judging by the looks of determination on their faces, this must be the final game of the World Championship Pool Tournament. It all rides on this shot. The executive needs to make his 14 ball or the trucker will have an easy leave on the 8. He chalks his cue . . . lines up his shot . . . He shoots . . . and misses the ball completely. The World Championship Pool Tournament is over, and the executive smiles at himself and goes back to playing air-guitar with his cue.

In the middle of the room, at the bar, sit Karla and John. She's a college student, and he's a State Trooper. Next to them are Jimmy and Maxi, a retired couple in their early 70's. They've been buying each other shots all afternoon and laughing the day away like old school friends.

As the night winds on, the crowd thins. By 9:30, there are only seven people left in the place. Three of them sit at the bar, baring their souls for the whole world to see. The other two couples sit off by themselves, preferring the solace of quiet conversation. Outside, the world creeps by, unfriendly, impersonal. But in here, over drinks, smokes and burgers, the world is a better place, full of hope and good cheer.

By midnight, the "crowd" has grown by five. The late-nighters are beginning to show. A young gentleman with a bowl haircut and a good-to-see-you grin saunters in. "DAN-O" everyone yells.

"Beer me!" he smiles in reply. As usual.

The rest of the night is filled with tall stories, sloppy pool, dirty jokes and a faint feeling of family. The people that come here seem to need that, and to add to it. Here you can feel at home; you're always welcome. Rich or poor, young or old, black or white. It doesn't matter. It's the hodge-podge of people that makes this place so rich. They are as much a fixture here as the tappers. No one judges you on what your faults are, how much money you have in the bank, or what your last name is. If you come to Oly's Gone, buy a beer and say "Hi," you're initiated into the club, and suddenly, you're part of the family. That's a nice feeling.



## Blended Families

*Tamy Sanford  
Composition I*

Blended! Who on the face of the earth came up with the term "blended family"? Why there are his kids, my kids, half brothers, half sisters, step brothers and step sisters, ex-husbands, ex-wives, step fathers and step mothers. "Blended," it is more like a mixed-up mess.

Oh sure, I too had Cinderella dreams and happily-ever-after fantasies. There he was, my knight in shining armor, every woman's dream — a warm, compassionate and gentle man. There was only one catch: he had three children, and me, well, I had two.

I knew it wouldn't be easy, but the superwoman inside of me said, "You can make a difference, rescue these poor souls. After all, the ex-wife lives out of state and hasn't really been involved in their lives for quite some time. The children, poor things, why they deserve a mother and a father. Just maybe we too could live happily ever after as one big "blended" family. Oh sure, we would have to deal with the grief our children would experience by the absence of a natural parent, but our love would conquer all."

It wasn't long after we were married that the superwoman strength and the beautiful dreams began to fade. It soon became apparent that the ex-wife was jealous over the affection that her children would display toward me. The children were quite young. The youngest was only two years old, and she could not understand who her real mommy was. The boys, too, were confused as they began to feel that they had betrayed their mother if they loved me. While trying to soothe the heartaches of my step children, my own boys felt left out. I seemed to be giving more attention to the other children. We can't forget the grandparents who did not seem to understand the complexity of our new schedules. Each of us, my husband and I both, thought the other unfair when it came to the discipline

of the other's children. As much as we tried, there were always disappointments.

Who would have thought that the result would be constant chaos? I remember a time when my son wore one of the shirts that was purchased by the ex-wife for "her" son. She was livid, and we would never hear the end of that. And then there was the time that she cut Amy's hair. This time it was my turn to go off the deep end.

If it wasn't one thing, it was another; constantly we were in motion that seemed to accelerate. When you add motion to a "mixture," the very different ingredients are broken. I would venture to say that the motion may be the key factor. Much like a recipe, it's the motion of mixing that allows each of us to learn or "blend" as one. First we need all the ingredients:

- 1 each — a man and woman who love each other deeply
- 1 handful — children, both his and hers (ours — optional)
- 1 ex-husband — distant will do
- 1 ex-wife — jealous and dramatic
- 4 sets of grandparents — from the old school
- 1 handful each — traditions of previous marriages

Mix together over low heat, do not allow to boil. While mixing add generous amounts of sweetener (love and forgiveness). Some ingredients may be harder to mix than others, but don't give up until thoroughly "blended."



## Meeting The Boy Next Door

*Kimberly Martin  
Composition I*

He was a spirited young man who possessed all the charm yet mischievousness that a boy could hold. His face was boyishly handsome, with just a sprinkling of freckles on his nose that caused him to look like I imagined Tom Sawyer might have looked. But it was his smile that won the hearts of all the young ladies on my block. And I, like all the other girls, thought he was wonderful!

I moved next door to Brad during the summer before my sixth grade year. I would gaze out of my bedroom window, just praying for the courage to say hello to him. My younger sister had already made best friends with his sister, so I kept her busy playing "private eye." She'd rush back to me with all the answers to my many questions. And was I full of them!

I hadn't wanted to move again. I was extremely shy, and it was getting harder for me to make new friends each time we moved. I resented my parents because, once again, I had to leave my school and cherished friends. It didn't help matters that puberty was knocking at my door, and try as I might, it was closer than I'd like. Being the first one in my class to get a bra made me feel shy and embarrassed. I also happened to be taller than all of the boys in my class, which in retrospect, isn't really that abnormal. But isn't hindsight always clearer? Was it any wonder that I was shy and introverted?

So once again, I was faced with the task of making new friends. Of course it's kind of difficult to meet people if you never leave the house! I would watch out the window, but I rarely ventured out.

The neighborhood was all new, with only three basic styles of homes to choose from. There were tiny little trees planted in all the perfectly groomed lawns. It was interesting to see how the different families

“created” their own homes that uniquely fit their individual personalities. It was definitely the age of “keeping up with the Jones’.”

As fate would have it, Brad’s parents invited our family to a barbeque, to welcome us to the neighborhood.

“Kim,” my mother said with a distinct note of losing patience, “We’re already late! We need to get going. The White’s are expecting us!”

My sister burst into my room, as usual without knocking, and bounced herself on my bed giggling. All around me lay my clothes, thrown here and there. Some of them were inside out and others still on hangers, and I was nowhere close to deciding what I’d wear.

“Come on,” she said impatiently, “Mom’s really getting mad!”

“Shut up,” I snapped, “I don’t even know why we have to go! I don’t want to meet any new neighbors. My old friends are perfectly fine with me!”

“You’re just nervous about meeting Brad,” she laughed, and I hated her because, as usual, she could see right through my every personal thought. “Kim and Brad, sitting in a tree. K-I-S-S-I-N-G !” she sang as she bounded out of my room and up the stairs to where my parents were waiting.

My mom hollered down, “We’re going on over. You come when you’re ready!”

“And make it before midnight, Cinderella!” my stepdad added angrily. And then I heard a deafening silence as the front door slammed shut.

“Now I’ve done it,” I thought angrily to myself. “It’s going to be a million times harder going next door by myself.” Suddenly I longed for my sister, wishing for anyone to go over with. Maybe if I didn’t go my mom would send my sister after me. Then I wouldn’t have to make an entrance by myself.

I sat on my bed looking around. Hurriedly I chose a brightly colored sundress. I rushed up the steps to the

bathroom to check my hair. After all, I must be ready when my sister comes for me, and, knowing my mom, I didn't have much time!

As I was tying a ribbon in my long, dark hair, I heard a knock at the door. Softly at first, then a little more forcefully. Why would my sister knock at the door? In any case, I was ready, and I was not going over by myself. I threw open the front door, expecting to see my sister's ornery face. "I'm ready!" I shouted. All of a sudden I realized it was not my sister standing before me.

"Hi!" He said, with a shy little half-smile. "Your mom sent me over to see if you were ready to come over to the house yet. They're all getting ready to sit down and eat. Oh, and we haven't met, but my name is Brad."

His name was Brad. What a beautiful name, I thought. And it's perfect for him. He was even more dreamy than I had previously thought. But there again it was hard to see those big, blue eyes from out a window. It seemed like hours that I stood there unable to move. He grabbed my hand, and off we went.

It was a normal backyard barbeque, nothing out of the ordinary, but I can't remember ever having a better time. Brad introduced me to his mother, a petite little woman, who I already outmeasured by a few inches. His stepdad towered above her, at well above six feet tall. It made me feel a little less intimidated as I stifled a giggle. They looked more like a parent and child than a married couple. They were very friendly, and my parents seemed to be having a great time!

We heard the adults laughing, and I suddenly felt more at home than I had felt in a very long time. The younger kids were busy dashing here and there in a frantic game of hide-and-seek.

"Let's go talk somewhere away from all these kids," Brad said, as I felt my heart fluttering again. I nervously followed him between our houses.

We sat on the ground under the same bedroom window that had led me to this moment. We talked about

anything and everything. The stars were bright above us, and the air was crisp. Every once in awhile I'd catch a glimpse of a watchful parent peeking around the corner. And finally after hours of talking, I heard my mom call my name as the evening was drawing to a close. Brad hopped to his feet and pulled me up.

"I'll see you later, Kim. I'm really glad I finally got to meet you," he replied as he quickly planted a soft kiss on my cheek.

Looking back to that magical evening so many years ago, I realize that that was the beginning of the end of my shyness. Brad had made me feel confident and helped me to feel secure. As the school year started, I not only had lots of new friends, but even more importantly, I also had the boy-next-door! He was the same boy that all the girls were after, and he was my very first boyfriend!





## Truth and Dare?

*Amy Higginbottom  
Composition I*

Parachuting is both a death trap and a euphoric thrill. To the observer, it's often a dangerous stunt, but to the sportsman, it's a totally different experience. Bravery is the ticket to the highly energetic sport, and not many people choose to rely on courage for a fall that could turn into an ultimate death dive. Over and over again, my brother, Norm, trades in the security of the ground for a three-minute thrill in the sky. People call him crazy — but it hasn't stopped him yet!

Dollar Days is a festival for skydivers and observers alike. Many travel from all over the world to Fort Dodge, Iowa, to experience and observe the thrills that nearly one-thousand jumpers provide there. Norm and his buddies from the National Skydivers Association are sure to be present.

The afternoon is windy and sunny, "A perfect day to risk a life," as my grinning brother puts it while rolling up his main chute for the next jump. He continues to talk and smile while adjusting and attaching his equipment. "Today will be my highest jump ever, 15,500 feet . . . where the air is really thin!" He puts on his deep blue and sparkling white jumpsuit and zips it up. On goes his parachute, and the man on the loudspeaker shouts out for the next dive time, hurrying the anxious group to get to their plane. He fastens his altimeter, paralert, and finally, the helmet. He reaches down in his backpack to get two brand-new white gloves. "It gets cold up there, you know!" And with a grin and a kiss for his wife, his group heads off to the plane scheduled to leave in the next minute. He and six friends crawl in and disappear for the upcoming journey in the sky.

People point and eagerly watch while the plane leaves and slowly grows smaller and smaller. We can

at times hear the motor buzzing around until momentarily it disappears into the sky.

"I just don't understand why a person would risk his own life to do this," I overhear a woman say disapprovingly.

Her husband responds, "I guess facing fear and danger is just part of the fun!"

The cloudless sky makes it easier to see the tiny bit moving above us. We watch for the seven little dots to fall away from the bigger black dot. It is hard to imagine the excitement and loud commotion that is inside that little speck in the sky. Quietly, we wait . . .

And then, it happens! Seven tiny people fall away from the security above them, falling like flakes of snow, just drifting down . . . down . . . down.

The peace and quiet on the ground is quite the contrary to what is really happening in the sky. Norm fights the gravity and wind for control, watching out for his comrades as they space themselves and plan out their positions. The noise from the wind makes thought the only thing audible. "I just love the adrenaline surge. It gives a great sense of freedom. It's like flying. You can control it when you concentrate. It's pretty neat," I often hear him say.

The figures become easier to see, and identifying the people from the colors of the suits assures us as to where Norm is. "It's quite a high fall at over one-hundred miles per hour," he says. They then prepare for the ultimate test — their life support of the parachute.

One opens. It drifts in a long stream before inflating on the gentle breeze. Another follows . . . and another; and finally, the familiar royal blue and hot pink balloon expands over my dear brother's body. Now they can have fun.

Twisting and spinning around, all seven look like children playing in the sky. The spectators laugh; the kids stare with open mouths and wide eyes. They turn upside down, moving like wild hands on clocks. Norm

is having the time of his life; we can hear him howling and shouting in laughter and excitement. "The parachute is for you guys," he declares. He gives us quite a show.

The parachuters circle the area as they plan to land close-by. One guy veers to the left, another to the right. Norm straightens up and prepares to run the ground for a smooth landing in the center.

Other spectators resume their talking, and our family approaches the familiar face as he expertly glides to the earth. What a relief! His parachute gently falls behind him, and he tosses off his cap. His pink face and messy hair make him look like a happy kid. He just made his highest jump ever.

"Parachuting is my dream come true. The excitement has kept me coming back to it for more than fourteen years, and I'd be willing to go anywhere to take part in it. The sport gives me the chance to feel the adrenaline high over and over again. Falling is the true peak of the experience, the challenge that not many are willing to confront. Just know the safety precautions, and always double-check everything. It's like driving. There is a safe way to do a dangerous thing. If you push the perimeter, you risk death. If you are safe, enjoy yourself!"

"I love it," says Norm. "I can face death, look it straight in the eye, challenge it, and beat it." Every time he says this with a big, daredevil smile on his face . . . and usually while preparing for the next jump.



## Opening Morning

*Penni M. Kuhl  
Composition I*

In the grey misty light I could just make out the barren trees, the snow laden shrubs, the sagging fences, and the stubby cornstalks standing lonely in the field. A deadly quiet enveloped the area. All I could hear was my own shallow breathing and the crunch of dirt-colored leaves under my feet. My senses were straining: eyes moving over the landscape looking for any movement, ears seeking any sound to break this eerie silence. I shivered slightly in the pre-dawn chill, wishing the sun would make its appearance. Crouched against an old, leafless maple tree, I wondered if I would see a deer, if it would come close enough, and most importantly, if it did come near, would I be able to pull the trigger? Could I watch something as wondrous as a deer die by my hand? I had considered these possibilities ensconced in the comfort of my civilized home, but the pending reality made me wonder whether I belonged out here with the big boys. My brother-in-law, Larry, was somewhere to the east and my husband to the west, but I felt small and alone in this shadowy world.

As I pondered these questions, the first sliver of sun sprang over the horizon, bringing the field and trees into clear focus. The light bounced off patches of snow, bringing them alive in an explosion of sparkles. Almost immediately, a bird behind me started singing, beginning the wake-up routine of the forest. Soon there was noise all around me: birds chirping and twittering, squirrels chattering in the trees, small unseen creatures rustling the underbrush. This symphony of nature came to me, consuming me.

Slowly, unwillingly, my self-awareness returned. My feet were numb from squatting. My face was crispy cold, and my double-barrel shotgun had grown heavy,

gripped tightly in my hands. I had a great urge for a cigarette.

As slowly and quietly as possible, I stood up. Visions of moccasin-clad Indians, stalking their prey, flashed through my mind. I was playing a game with nature, hoping to win. Could I, one-on-one, emerge triumphant?

I leaned against the maple, feeling the rough bark catching at the blaze-orange vest covering my camouflage overalls. I stretched and tightened my muscles, bringing my body to the same level of awareness as the forest around me. Suddenly, a loud crunch came from behind me. Like a well-trained hunting dog, I spun toward the sound, my senses in needle-sharp focus. I waited, holding my breath for another noise to direct me. Finally, slowly, I relaxed. There was nothing there. A squirrel had dropped something perhaps.

Boom! A shot exploded into the forest shattering the peace, startling everything into motion. Even my tree seemed to cringe. Suddenly it seemed criminal to invade nature this way. I peered into the shadows where the shot had originated and, as the echo faded, unexpectedly, they were there.

Two of them, a buck and a doe were racing through the woods, heading for the field in front of me, unaware of my presence. The buck had a massive rack, his bony white antlers standing out in the browns and greys of the woods. They crashed through the brush, darting around trees, gracefully leaping shrubs, their labored snorts filling the timber.

The sight of them shot adrenaline through my body. My heart pounded in my ears as I brought my gun up. I flicked the safety off, aiming ahead of the deer. My hands were shaking violently, my breath came in short quivering gulps. My husband's words flashed through my mind, "Take a deep breath and let it out, then aim and fire." I followed his advice, steadying myself slightly. I shot and missed, and shot again, barely conscious of the gun kicking into my shoulder. Then it

was over. They were gone, vanishing into the trees across the field.

I lowered my shotgun, cracking it open and removing the empty shells as I stared at the field. The event began replaying itself in my mind, over and over like a needle caught in an old record. Had I winged the doe with my second shot? Had she stumbled before she disappeared? Had I even been close?

My husband came trotting up from my left, "Was that you who shot? Did Larry fire the first shot? Did you hit one? Where did they go?"

I stared into my husband's face, trying to drag myself out of the slow-motion world I had fallen into. Had only a few tiny seconds passed? I had a crystal clarity of the scene, but I felt wrapped in a cocoon of fog. Finally, I shook myself slightly, let out a nervous giggle, and fumbled for a cigarette. I relayed my story to my husband and Larry who had joined us. The two of them went across the field to check the deer's path for blood signs.

I sank to the ground against my tree, my heartbeat and breathing slowly returning to normal. I pulled hard on the cigarette, feeling my inner quaking fade away. Well, I knew now that I could pull the trigger. Blind excitement would carry me through that. I still didn't know, though, how I would feel if I actually drew blood. Someday I would find out, but not this opening morning, not this first time.



## Water Witching

Merrill J. Nurnberg  
*Composition I*

The summer of 1963 was the hottest and driest I could ever remember. The long summer days and relentless heat dried away the trickle of cool water from the nearby creek. The rolling pasture around our farm was baked to a light brown and spotted with green, thriving thistles. The heat of the afternoon sun forced the cattle in to the shade of a lone willow tree located in the slough. The pond at the head of this slough lay motionless resembling a mud puddle thirsting for a long overdue rain.

Earlier in the day, Dad had shut the windmill off at the only well servicing our farm. Running out of water meant resorting to destitute measures as quickly as possible. Temporary relief was provided by transporting water to the cistern; however, the long-term solution was to drill a new well. Prior to moving a drilling rig into place and drilling a new well, one major question had to be answered. What new location would produce water? My father was a resourceful man, but I couldn't understand at the time what he was up to as he broke a branch off of that old willow tree. Intrigued, I continued to watch while he pulled his pocket knife from his overalls and proceeded to whittle on that branch. He first notched off the leaves then shortened the ends producing a bare "Y" shaped stick. He then grasped two of the three ends with both hands, shook it a little, then held it up against the sky for a good look and feel of balance.

For the next hour I followed Dad all over the farm while he proceeded to shake this stick ahead of him. I would ask from time to time, "Whatcha doin'?" and hear the same queer response, "Lookin' for water." The intriguing thought of finding water on this parched ground with a mutilated willow stick was almost more than I could endure. Dad continued to walk steadily

ahead concentrating on this willow branch extending from the strong grip of his upturned hands. Suddenly he stopped. I gazed disbelieving at the willow stick! It was no longer pointing ahead; instead, it was bent directly down towards Dad's feet. Dad proclaimed, "There it is!" With wide eyes I asked, "There's what?" "Water," said Dad. I stood in disbelief while staring towards the bone dry clods of dirt as Dad walked away.

The art of divining for water continues to be as much a mystery for me today as it was that hot day while watching Dad's hands shake against the pull of that invisible force. Since that time I've come to accept this phenomenon as one of those things that just doesn't have an answer, and, maybe, I really don't want to hear it if there is one.

The ability to divine for water is one of those unexplained talents not everyone possesses. There are two distinct opinions on the topic. The first is laden with skepticism and total disbelief. It's easy to understand this point of view. If it's something I can't do, and I can't see what's causing the divining rod to move, then it must not be real. The second opinion stems mostly from diligent workers who rely on divining as a tool when locating underground aquifers. It may be difficult to explain, but why bother as long as it works. Without the success related to first divining before drilling, most well boring companies would either be out of business or punching a lot of hit-and-miss holes in the ground.

My wife and I had been married only a few years when my grandfather visited us a short time. Grandpa was 94 years old and full of fascinating stories of long ago. In the middle of conversation one day the topic of "water witching" came up.

The term "water witching" more clearly describes the divining process, "water" being the substance in search of, and "witching" describing the mysterious method in finding it.



Grandpa was wise in the old ways and, finding myself slightly skeptical, I asked Grandpa if water witching was really for real. Little did I know that Grandpa also possessed this ancient talent. With a look of tenacity and saying very little, he took two copper wires and proceeded to fashion them into identical "L" shaped rods. Grandpa then fit one in each hand using the same mannerisms I had observed in Dad years earlier and started walking across the yard with both rods leading the way. Like magnets on cue, both rods turned across each other as Grandpa passed over what later was discovered to be an old water main long forgotten.

Now, I've listened to many different explanations and theories supporting the mechanics of water witching. Some describe the invisible force as a magnetic pull between the underground water and freshly cut tree branch as if the tree branch was calling out for its last dying drink. Another viewpoint described in detail the molecular structures both compounds exhibit producing an attraction of atomic bonds.

The most common explanation is based around the individual person doing the divining. Apparently everyone possesses an aura of invisible emanation in varying degrees. For example, an individual who is possessed with a strong aura and holding an electrode-type object is capable of absorbing or dispersing this energy while passing over an area of highly ionized water. This would also help explain why many of us fail to possess this talent for finding water.

Finally, again I have to wonder. Is water witching fact or fiction? If it's really a well-developed hoax played out expertly by so many, I marvel and admire their zeal promoting the beauty of wonder. However, if water witching is truly a phenomenal talent possessed by few, our mainstream society will certainly dampen its integrity into extinction.



## For the Company

*Hazel R. Salyers  
Composition I*

As I turned left in the hall to face the cafeteria entrance in building 7 at DMACC, I nearly collided with a group of older women at the end of a long line of clustered, chattering persons of mature years. The air was that of a convention. Who were all these older people anyway?

One woman had auburn hair piled high in an early 60's style. Slender in her neat polyester slacks and shirt, she was talking almost as much with her manicured hands as with her facial expressions. Her audience was two plump women with salt and pepper hair and a younger woman dressed in western-wear. Several others seemed a bit older. A few had youthful, easy-care hair styles done in pure silver.

Plenty of older men were in the crowd, too. All in casual wear, and every bit as animated as the ladies. Some looked 50, some at least 80. Yet if not for occasional character lines and varying shades of gray hair, one would never guess this group to be older people. They were far too animated to be part of the rocking chair on the front porch club.

Not a minute after my arrival at the end of the line, a bustling 50ish man, whom I now know to be Bill Blass, informed me, "Young lady, you won't be ready for this line for a while yet." He promptly steered me around the 60 or so people to the regular lunch line where no one was ahead of me. Short minutes later I had my meal and sat watching this interesting group of people from a side table of the Lakeside Dining Room.

I had been here before for Adult-Ed classes and now that I had become a full-time student, I decided after a few days that I would prefer the relative quiet of this dining area to the dining areas in building 5.

The Lakeside seats about 250 people. A discreet sign suggests that students use the tables around the walls for studying. Some days the tables on the far side from the cashier are set up for special groups, like business luncheons or persons who are attending seminars. To the left is a fire exit and tray drop. Straight ahead, the outside wall is all glass windows. The lighting is muted with fabric drapes in soft colors to compliment the carpet.

I watched as more older people drifted in through the fire exit door. They seemed to be paying or buying something from a tiny bustling woman, who looked about 70, before going out to the line. It was several days before I learned what they were doing and that they came every day.

By noon nearly half the dining room was filled with these cheerful, gregarious, and yet decently quiet people. Some stayed pretty much in one spot. Others drifted about, spreading cheer like early Santas.

As they finished their meals, which looked more nutritious than the general fare, they took their trays to the drop and returned to their tables. Why weren't they leaving to make space for others? What was this, bingo night?

Not exactly. This day was Card Day. Some played Cribbage, others played different card games. Some just visited quietly with an occasional burst of genuine soft laughter.

I see most of the same elders come every day. One is a tall man with a cane which doesn't appear to slow him at all. Another is a lady who wears chiffon scarves wrapped around a wig and pinned with a brooch. I wonder if she lost her hair naturally, or perhaps some illness. One lady wears nearly theatrical makeup to try and hide the furrows of a hard life. Her wardrobe, though in good taste, hangs a little too loose. Her every movement is measured as though she is in pain.

One day I dared to ask the three women at the next table, "Do you know who these elders are?" A friendly

chuckle and nods greeted my query. I was in luck. One was Sue Edwards, who drives the main bus which brings these elders from designated, centralized pick-up points, or their homes, to DMACC each day. Ellen Cherry drives a van to bring those who would have difficulty getting on or off or riding the bus. She stops at homes only, and makes the trip even if for only one passenger.

This program is Congregate Meals, and DMACC is one of sixteen sites in Polk County. The food is prepared in a separate kitchen because of budgeting. That explains why some stop at the small table before getting into line. Those who can are making donations to help defray costs.

According to site manager, Jo Neil Long, the only criteria is over 60. If it's a couple, only one need be 60. "This is not a free lunch program, though that is certainly a part of it. The primary purpose of Congregate Meals is to get these people out and into social situations, to be with people whose needs and interests are similar to their own. If someone has a special dietary need or is temporarily ill, with a written request from a doctor, the dietician will make special menus, or a meal may be delivered."

I asked, "What do they do besides lunch?"

"Planned activity is part of their program. For instance, we have Card Day, Crafts Day, Bingo, and Sit and Be Fit, which is an exercise program designed especially for this age group. The Over 60 Club meeting day is once a week, and on holidays we sometimes have dress-ups or parties. Whatever they want, we try to provide. No activity is forced, so they join in on what they want to do."

Sue, the bus driver, enjoys her position. "They are so much fun, and so funny. One guy is especially funny. When I first started, I'd be doing my head count and he would be hiding down low in a back seat. Everyone thinks it's a great joke. Now I'm onto him and he's still



great fun. The whole group is fun, and they are never any problem.

Another day as I arrived, a man was being carried out to a waiting ambulance. He had apparently had a heart attack. Yet in the dining room, no one seemed to notice. The elders were as cheerful as always. That incident made me wonder if he, and others who were here would be all alone at their homes, possibly not eating at all, and with no one to call an ambulance in an emergency, if not for programs like this.

After lunch, most of them were in the crafts corner. Of the ones not participating in the crafts class, one was a tall man who always nods a pleasant hello but never seems to smile. He is retired from the insurance business, originally from Missouri, and he lives alone. His reason for coming here? "Hungry."

Another man retired from an insurance business in Sheldon eight years ago. He doesn't remember who first told him of this group. A sweet tempered, sweatshirt clad lady retired from cosmetology when she lost strength in her arms. Now a widow, she comes for the company. Another man is friendly and volunteers he has 7 children and 16 grandchildren and is promptly reminded by his card partner that he is attached. "That's my wife over there teaching crafts today. She loves it." He looks her way with a shine in his eyes and a gentle smile.

A teacher, retired after 30 years, volunteers, "Why cook for one? I hate to cook just for myself. Do you know what Sweet Adelines are? A group here in Ankeny is starting up. All our age. Older, you know. I've always been in church choir, but of course now I'll have the bass part."

What is the main reason members of the Over 60 Club come here? Although lunch is free, the unfailing, most popular response is, "For the company."



## The Freedom Quilt

Judy Sohn  
Composition I

"Mom, I'm not going to church anymore, There's nothing there for me and I hate it. And by the way, I've joined the Air Force."

It was a declaration of independence. Not given in anger by a rebellious teenager at the end of a heated argument, but rather just a plain, firm statement of fact, delivered late one Saturday night.

Until this moment, I was still able to exert my parental authority and say with some conviction, "Yes, you should do this" or "No, you may not do that" and feel certain that my directive would be followed. But Trevor's statement was issued with the finality of adult speaking to adult, not child speaking to mother. There was no discussion, and I sensed that my authoritative role had changed. It was time.

At 19, Trevor had been with us for one year beyond the age when most children leave home. Assuming that someday he would leave, I occasionally found myself mentally rearranging his room or pondering the difficulties of a future with one less family chauffeur. His freedom was inevitable and expected. In fact, I had begun work on his freedom quilt many months ago. Yet, I was unprepared for his announcement.

Within our family, the topics of church involvement and career choices had been debated often during the last several years, with concessions made on both sides. "You may give up choir and Sunday School, but we still attend worship services as a family." Agreed. "Dad, my summer job will be a full time position until January. I'd like to delay college for one semester." Agreed. All branches of the military had been explored and as parents, we encouraged these options with the word of caution, "Don't sign anything yet." The pros and cons were examined and then, seemingly, the subjects were dropped.

Thus, I was stunned with what my son was telling me and the manner in which it was said. He had repeatedly sought our advice before making final decisions regarding other major events, but firm conclusions had already been made on both these issues, and no further input was asked for or given. Knowing how much thought Trevor had given to career possibilities, there was almost relief entwined with the sadness I felt. Relief that an irrevocable commitment had been made concerning a vocation, and sadness that I had failed to lead him to the faith that has sustained me for many years.

It is because of this faith that I came to accept the decisions Trevor made. They aren't the ones I would have preferred for him, but they are his and, right or wrong, they will be steps in his growth to adulthood.

Trevor has matured into a young man of which any parent would be proud. We watched as he developed a responsible attitude and a sense of logic at an early age. Having held several jobs in and around the community since his freshman year in high school, we heard employers and their customers remark on his personable and helpful nature. After overcoming a weight problem, he has maintained his football player's physique through sensible dieting and a regular body building regimen. Because of his record of responsible management of previous financial matters, the local banker approved his application for a long term loan with no parental co-signers, an unusual vote of confidence for a teen. Remembering these milestones reinforced my sense of pride in my firstborn and helped me admit that he is indeed more adult than child. Not a perfect adult, because he wasn't a perfect child. But the various problems and painful lessons of childhood are forgotten on the eve of his departure and it is the adult we will miss.

During the settling of the Midwest by pioneers in the early to mid 1800s, the women of the family made quilts out of necessity. Gradually the tradition of the

freedom quilt was begun. When a young man prepared to leave his home, he was given a quilt to take with him to commemorate his coming of age and to remind him of those who were involved with the piecing and quilting. It became a symbol of adulthood and a signal to the son that his parents considered him ready to take his place in the community outside the protective family circle.

Trevor's freedom quilt is made using the Log Cabin pattern. The center square is blue, a color of the sky which is a predominant theme of the Air Force. The remaining strips are browns and beiges, earth colors of varying lengths, all straight and narrow.

I suspect the pioneer freedom quilts served another purpose as well. They were made entirely by hand and it was a tedious, time consuming procedure. But it gave the stitchers time to reflect on the young man's life and to acclimate themselves to his leaving. Trevor's quilt will have thousands of hand stitches, and like the pioneer quilts, its purpose is twofold.





## Time, Planning, and the Future

*Mike Gales  
Composition II*

Time is a scarce commodity. It is the one thing that everyone possesses equally. The highest members of society have the same amount as the underprivileged. Another unique feature of time is its continuous, never-changing speed. A minute is always the same as the next. The third aspect of time I find important, and the one I want to discuss, is called the future. That period of time ahead of us will be there like death and taxes; there is no way to avoid it. Ted Graziano is a man concerned with his future. Thomas Cottle and Stephen Klineberg introduce us to Ted in the case study, "Ted and Ellie Graziano."

Ted is a man who is stuck in the middle. He is middle class, a middle manager, and approaching middle age. But these terms are too general to fully describe him. His thinking and actions are extremely complex and interrelated. He is a blue collar man whose thinking extends beyond how to spend his next paycheck. Ted thinks about the entirety of this life. He explains life this way:

A life that asks us to make sure that pasts and presents fit together in some logical way has a price. You know, yourself, as time goes on it gets harder and harder to just live each day and get the most out of it. Can't be done. You don't live each day like that when you're a man. What you live is your work at the moment, your plans, what you call your prospects, and your regrets, what you should have done. (135)

Ted sees time as infinite, an unlimited duration when he can influence events that concern his family.

In other words, his planning includes his entire life and the lives of his family after he is dead.

To Ted, planning for the future is not a simple task. He considers his future income and expenditures. For example, he knows that equipment failure is more expensive than regular maintenance, so he repairs or replaces things before they fail. I have noticed the majority of his planning revolves around money. He knows he will have the money to pay for the children's education. He will have money saved for known expenses like funerals. To Ted, there are only two types of people: winners and losers. The winners have money and a secure future, and the losers don't.

You talk to some rich guy with his insurance policies and his trust funds. You ask them if they live day by day. They're an army the rich. They march on the future and rip it up, eat it, and spit it out. That's what they do. They beat the future at its own game . . . The rich work to make their lives work out. Everything from their childhood on is bent toward fixing their lives and giving them security. (151)

Ted wants to be a winner. He wants to be rich; so he thinks and he plans, and he tries to beat the future. The constant planning that Ted does is a great contribution to his family's well being, but it is also a factor in his unhappiness. You see, Ted knows he will not advance higher in his career than where he is right now. His job supports the Grazianos, but he has reached a dead end with regards to further promotions. Since his income is not going to significantly increase, then a thinking man like Ted knows his only other way to accumulate wealth is by spending less or making investments. His salary is already allocated for current expenses or bills: house payments, insurance premiums, taxes, future tuition. He cannot spend less,

and he has no money left to invest. Any catastrophe like losing his job or an expensive illness would ruin Ted's plans.

Yes, Ted's care for his family's well being would be the envy of many family men, but I think Ted also has deeper, more hostile feelings toward his family. I think he feels resentment and bitterness towards his family because he alone has to take care of them. He says:

I am totally alone, making it possible for four human beings to lead their lives with a little dignity. Four ungrateful human beings . . . I see the way people are living. I see the way people are dying, and we're not getting any of it. Either one. (152)

Ted's family, his wife Ellie and his children, are not ungrateful. They do as much to help Ted as he will let them. Ted just thinks that way when he is really mad at a world that will not let him get ahead of the game. Unfortunately for Ted, he is as unhappy with his day-to-day life as he is with his future.

Ted started his career at a Boston newspaper fifteen years ago as a stockroom boy. He is a hard worker, and so he steadily moved his way up to foreman of the shipping operation. For ten years, Ted has held on to his position, and for good reason; his prospects at finding a better job are dismal. Ted likes the security of his union paycheck; however, the same routine day after day has caused him to become bored and apathetic towards his job. He explains:

I tell you though, in the beginning, ten years ago or so, it was one hell of a challenge. Couple of nights there I got so damn excited with the prospect of it all I could barely sleep. Now it's just another job to me. Plasterer gets up in the morning and slops

that shit on the walls; butcher goes cutting up his meat; I direct the newspaper business down here. It's a job not much more. Every day you get a little excitement, but when you think about it day in and day out, it's routine. Man, there are times I'm working down here thinking about how nice it would be to be anywhere else. (130)

Ted does his job very well, but the lack of a challenge to overcome does not fit well with his hard work ethic.

Ted and Ellie's opposite feelings on religion are an important factor in their relationship. Ellie has a deep belief in God and in the importance of religion as a balance to earthly hardships. I think she was brought up religious. After she married Ted, her belief became even more important to her because Ted would not let her have a job. Religion became the rock to which Ellie anchored her life. On the other hand, Ted is not religious at all, and he blames many world problems on belief in God. His theory is that people who wait for God to solve their problems are fools who will never receive any benefit for their effort. Ted does not stop Ellie from practicing her belief. However, he also does not admit the slightest possibility that she may be correct. These vastly different viewpoints are one of two reasons why I think they do not have a happy homelife.

The other reason for their marital problems is the way Ted handles himself in a heated discussion. To me, Ted is the type of person who does not accept any viewpoints which are different from his. He not only has to have the last word, he wants to have every word. Ted compounds this problem by becoming angry and using hurtful innuendoes. He is especially rough when he argues with Ellie:

I'm not speaking about the dead. I'm speaking about poor people; people who think love and niceness and praying in church are what



matter. It's a lot of shit! It's all a lot of shit!  
Your parents were full of shit! (150)

I think Ellie stands for this vicious talk because she can go to church or visit her mother, because she believes in the sanctity of marriage, because she has nowhere else to go, and because she really loves Ted. Ellie knows the best way to handle him is with kid gloves. When Ted has gotten his anger out of his system, he will come back to her.

Like everyone, Ted has good and bad traits. He loves his family and is extremely competent at providing the necessities for them. But he does not accept anything less than total control of their lives and futures. He constantly worries about every aspect of his life. He has a good job, but it does not fully satisfy his wants and needs. Ted seems to be incapable of loosening up and taking pleasure in the moment. I feel sorry for Ted because he may never enjoy his time on earth. By planning and worrying about his entire future, he misses out on what the present has to offer. I think he will be successful but unhappy.

### Works Cited

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## Tag Kids: Who Are They and What Are They Hiding?

Cathy Fisher  
Composition II

"TAG kids" are Talented And Gifted children. They are creative thinkers, innovative problem solvers, the kids who have a way with words, a fantastic imagination, who come up with outrageous ideas, and who drive everyone nuts with all those darn questions! Their questions make adults squirm with embarrassment because the adults don't know the answers or can't believe they've never thought of the subject matter in that light. TAG kids are usually so sensitive that they are readily aware they make others uncomfortable and learn quickly to try NOT to do that — even if it means playing dumb.

What are they hiding? "A lot of really bright kids try to hide what they're all about. Some of them can feel pretty isolated, especially in the smaller schools," says Nicholas Colangelo in an interview with Jim Pollock, staff writer for the *Des Moines Sunday Register* (Jan. 26, 1992. 2E). Mr. Colangelo heads the Connie Belin National Center for Gifted Education which was established in 1988 at the University of Iowa. Many TAG kids are hiding their hurt at being different and at being rejected by much of society. They hide their intelligence so they'll fit in; kids don't like to be different. These kids are being taught by their parents and teachers to hide their skills, to keep their questions and their brightness to themselves; they are being taught to fail. That way they can be "normal" instead of being different — instead of being a "nerd."

"It's easy for these kids to be accused of being a 'brain,' or a 'nerd,' and teachers can learn to be much more supportive and responsive," according to Mr. Colangelo. "Teachers still don't get much formal training for dealing with really bright kids. They get

instruction on special education needs, but not on the gifted."

One young man, a sixth grade TAG kid whom I know well, gave me this account of his early school years:

It used to be pretty bad before TAG came to my school. It was real bad the first year of TAG, too, because I was the only boy in my grade in TAG. Before, I hated school! It was so boring that I'd just stare out the window and daydream. I mean, they make us do the same thing over and over a million times, and I'm like, "yea, ok, I already know that, now what?" But it's always the same ol' worksheet. So I wouldn't do the worksheet, I'd draw pictures instead, or else daydream, then I'd get kept in from recess to finish these DUMB worksheets. I hardly ever got to go out, and when I did, nobody would play with me. They all had these little clubs for recess, and since I never hardly got to go out, I didn't belong to any of their groups. 'Bout all I remember 'til fourth grade (when TAG came) is teachers telling me to stop daydreaming and, "DO THIS WORKSHEET!" He lowered his eyes and added, "I *HATE* worksheets."

This hatred for repetitive work and the dreaded worksheet is something heard in nearly every case with TAG kids. Most teachers feel this is the best way for children to learn, but a growing number feel that this is not actual learning but simply memorizing — rote recall. In any case, it is the nemesis of TAG children. Their minds grasp and move on with such rapidity that they just can not bear to do the same thing repeatedly. It is, for them, as frustrating as it is for a slow learner to try to learn something the child will never have the ability to understand. The "normal"

classroom is as much a problem to a TAG child as it is to a learning disabled child. Yet, nowhere near the same amount of concern or funds are spent on TAG kids as are on special education kids. Plus, TAG kids are much more resented in the community (and even among teachers) as well. The result is that TAG kids feel compelled to hide their many wonderful abilities.

From having watched the young man in my example go through this period, I know he isn't making it sound nearly as bad as it really was for him. He was so lonely, confused, and dejected. He suffered greatly, both physically and emotionally, from the stress brought on by that period in his life. He fails to mention (or perhaps prefers to forget) being constantly teased, tripped, "sucker punched," and occasionally thrown head-first into snow banks. He was always so utterly miserable that it was heartbreaking. The reason I know this young man so well is because he is my oldest son.

Teachers at school, rather than being supportive or encouraging, either joined his peers in ridiculing him or were irritated by all his questions. One teacher who meant well made the problems even worse by holding up his good work to the class as an example. No one really knew what to do with or for him. His depression became nearly suicidal in third grade; he started taking frequent risks with his safety that could have been deadly, had he slipped up just once. He started to do poorly in school, hiding his abilities — finally he began to fit in during fourth grade. Was this failure a conscious effort? Who knows, but most importantly to him, he began to have friends. But now the adults around him were really upset with him; his friends weren't "the right kind of friends," and he wasn't "working up to his potential" (teachers love that phrase!). TAG was his salvation.

TAG classes give these children an escape from regular classroom boredom. My son delighted in having a place where he was not discouraged from being



different, where he was encouraged to think in unconventional ways. He was thrilled to find friends who were different like he was, who enjoyed exploring outrageous possibilities and improbabilities with him. His grades still aren't great and his regular classes are still mostly boring to him, but he is learning so much and is so happy that, after all we've been through, we're not very concerned with those problems. He's not hiding his brightness anymore, in fact, he's learned to be modestly proud of it and, most importantly, not ashamed of being creative.

Perhaps the poor treatment of TAG kids is a lack of understanding rather than a lack of caring. Maybe as the public becomes better educated about talented and gifted children their brightness will become something to be proud of — and not something they feel they have to hide.



## Journey to the Self

*Diana Leonard  
Composition II*

We had just moved from the farm. My folks bought a new house in the city, and my dad had given up farming once and for all to work in the carpentry business. It was something he loved all his life. I was in first grade at the Catholic school in this new town. My cousins had all gone to this school, and since my aunt helped my mother get me enrolled, everyone knew my parents were Deaf.

I was popular from the first day. All of the kids wanted to know how to do sign language. My teachers had me get up and teach the class how to do some signs and tell what it was like to live in a quiet household. (It was all but quiet.) That was the first time I realized my life was different than the others in my class. I had never thought of it that way. My folks were good to me, but I got in trouble just like anyone else who pushed the right buttons at the wrong time. We watched t.v., ate the same foods as our neighbors, went to church, and we dressed like everyone else. If you walked by us at the mall, we were just like any other family. But the curious glances turned our direction whenever we would speak in public. In our family we used American Sign Language, and that made our experiences different.

I never shared my feelings with my classmates when some rude person would grotesquely mimic our gestures, and there were times when I would hear cruel remarks that I never told my parents. It was all too frequent when I would hear some teenagers yelling that we were the "deaf and dumb" family or when I would look over and see people waving their hands in the air with real dorky faces glaring at me. Those were the things I had to "play down" to prove that we had a normal family. My presence had to be positive. I was the bridge between my folks and the world full of

sounds. I couldn't let the ignorance of some get in the way of making life all it could be.

When I think of the meaning of "normal," the situations I had to participate in come to mind. My mother had four miscarriages, and I was there communicating her signs to the doctors and even to her mother, father and sisters because they didn't know sign language very well. There were special signs for the types of words we were discussing, not the kind she would have used with her family. My dad looked to me, a child who was anywhere from 4 to 8 years old, to explain what was happening to his wife who lay in the emergency room.

"Normal" also meant my answering the telephone for my parents each time it rang. Sometimes it was a friend calling for me, but usually it was an insurance salesperson or a customer calling my parent's upholstery business to arrange for an appointment. They always said, "Is your mom or dad there?" and I always had to explain that they were deaf. I told the caller that I could relay the information to my folks. My mother would be right there asking what they were saying. She would always expect me to sign to her at the same time I was listening. It was hard at first. I was trying to understand what they were saying, putting it into a manual language that had a different grammar and then watching what her response was and repeating it to the caller using the right inflection and English words. Sometimes it didn't really sound quite right but the caller usually understood what I was saying. With practice I got to be pretty good at it.

These types of situations required me to be more than I should have been at my age, so I am told. In school, teachers would put my desk beside theirs as if to serve as a teacher's aide. My schoolwork was always completed quickly and correctly, and then I was assigned to go around the room and help other kids who didn't understand their assignment or to get them through a difficult question. The novelty of my unique

ability to communicate in sign language quickly wore off. I was now the teacher's pet and shunned by my peers because of it.

Why did I have to stand up in front of my class and boast my "differentness." I thought I was very normal, but this type of experience made me feel different. It eventually became a way of life for me to balance the person I was at home between the person I had to be in public in order to be accepted as an equal.

As the years went on it became more and more difficult to maintain the balance. There were many strategies I learned to deflect the expectations that were put upon me. I coached myself to have a mature voice and to speak with articulation so callers would never ask for my mother. If I wanted to rush outside after dinner to play with my friends but my mother wanted me to call someone before I left, I would dial six numbers when she wasn't looking, sit there and listen to silence for a few minutes, and then say there was no answer. Then I would rush outside to be a kid. And when I had to spend several evenings every week going with my dad to show samples and give estimates to customers, my parents would reward me with a new outfit. I got a new outfit practically every week, but it was to compensate me for my frequent journey into the adult world. It was something I felt was justified because I missed so much in my childhood.

I was a normal teenager, I think, because I began to rebel against my parents' Deafness. When I was younger, my grandma told my mom that she should get me a record player so that I could get some auditory stimulation, and so she did. The record player, or more so the music, separated me from my parents. I would sing, dance, hum and feel the world in a different way through the music. My parents were stranded on a different land when they watched me enjoy it. But as a teenager I used it to separate us even more. My mother would come into my room to have me do something and I would tell her to wait until the song



was over. She didn't understand why I couldn't just leave it. Music had no value to her at all. I was sometimes mean by telling her that she could never enjoy music and that it was my world. All mine. Now I compromise by interpreting the words of the song and turning up the volume (and the bass) so that she can feel, and see, how beautiful music can be. Her favorite songs are my favorite songs.

But there were many times that I had to find a balance between the so called, "hearing world" and "Deaf world." I felt the dysfunction within my family, and it surfaced after I became an adult with a husband and a child. My relationship with my parents had become a habit, and it was interfering with my private and separate life, whatever that was. In order to find the balance I needed to lead a satisfying life, I had to completely cut the ties between me and my parents because the ties were very tight and bonding. Other attempts to slowly separate us just didn't seem to work because when I would back off they would move in. Or if I assumed a patronizing stance, they needed more and more.

The separation lasted for almost two years, but it was necessary. It was hard for me to accept, but I had the support of my husband during this time. I had the chance to discover through reflection what my culture meant to me and how significant a role that would play in my life as a hearing person. There were feelings of guilt that I had deserted my family, but it was necessary. It wasn't so much the knowledge that I gained by participating in adult transactions at a young age but the feelings that resulted from my taking on a role uncommon to my peers. I saw discrimination, ignorance, frustration, and oppression from the inside. But I also saw perserverance, appreciation of being different, and an opportunity to share the satisfaction of reaching goals, qualities that my parents possessed and transferred to me.

I know my career choice was greatly influenced by my parents and by the experiences that I had growing up. I wouldn't do it any differently if I had it to do over. I regret, but I am not sorry, that the search for my own identity had to be so severe. Now I understand why my teacher had me stand up and talk to my classmates. Being different is great! They (my classmates) were all called upon to share experiences or events in their lives that made them unique. I just remembered mine so intently because it was the first time I realized I was different, just like everyone else. It just took me a half of a lifetime to realize I was unique . . . just like everyone else.



## It's Football, Man

*Craig Pierson  
Composition II*

On Sunday January 26th, 1992, millions of men rose from their beds in anxious anticipation. For this particular Sunday was no ordinary Sunday; this Sunday was "Super" Sunday. On this day, on a carpeted field in Minneapolis, an annual ritual would be played out as two titanic forces would clash in an orgy of violence and pain to determine who was the undisputed champion of the National Football League.

I had arranged to take part in this ritual with my old friend Kelly. Kelly, a first year law student and holder of degrees in English, Math, and Philosophy, told me about his brother, Bob, a grocer and family man, and suggested we drive up to Bob's home to watch the game on his large screen color television. I agreed with his suggestion. Spending "Super" Sunday with these two men seemed to offer a good chance to examine the ritual and possibly gain some insight as to its possible meaning and significance.

The details of the drive to Bob's home bear no real relevance to "Super" Sunday, but somehow, cruising at high speed with the stereo cranking high decibel rock-n-roll while clutching a beer, I felt an almost spiritual force of anticipation growing in my soul. I asked Kelly if he too felt this spiritual quickening.

"Hell yes!" he exclaimed, "We're kings of the road man, on our own way to watch the Super Bowl. Out here we're free! Today, along with American men all over the country, we will drink beer and watch **The Game!**" The car swerved dangerously as he stuck his head out the window and shook his fist at the sky. "We're men, dammit!"

Kelly brought the car back under control, and I wondered if sharing my thoughts about the ritual aspects of the Super Bowl might have been unwise. Then I realized we had just shared what an old

girlfriend of mine used to call a "bonding moment": Kelly knew exactly what I meant when I referred to the Super Bowl as a ritual.

We arrived at Bob's home around noon and unloaded two cases of beer from the trunk along with our nearly depleted cooler. Bob showed us inside: it was a nice middle class kind of American home with family photos magnetized to the fridge. I was introduced to Bob's very pregnant wife, Laura, and his small son, Travis, who followed us down to the basement TV room. Like the rest of us, he was introduced to the ritual at a young age by his father.

Bob's TV room was a mecca of Minnesota Vikings collectibles, including a purple foam rubber brick with the familiar Norse logo on it. He explained that it came in handy for throwing at the TV set. Bob seemed particularly excited that even though his team wasn't playing in the Super Bowl, the game would be played in his team's stadium.

"That's pathetic," Kelly said.

The room also contained a small, dorm-type refrigerator. Kelly and Bob explained that this was exclusively meant to hold beer. As the fridge was only large enough to contain about a case and a half at a time, they further explained to me about the "rotation." The rotation is a system by which the maximum coldness of beer can be gained and maintained. Simply put, it entails always replacing beers from the freezer part of the fridge with beers from the lower part of the fridge and then, in turn, replacing beers from the lower part of the fridge with warm beers stacked outside the fridge. Failure to maintain the "rotation" would lead to severe consequences, namely, warm beer; a situation which had to be avoided.

About one o'clock, fresh beers were passed around and we all hunkered down in front of the television to begin the serious drinking.

"A toast," Bob said, "to beer and football, Anthony and Cleopatra, ketchup and mustard, and America



and apple pie." We all chugged our beers reverently, crushing the cans as we finished. Loud belches simultaneously escaped our mouths, signaling the beginning of the ritual.

Almost immediately Kelly and Bob started counting how many beers they had already consumed that day. I realized that the competition on that day would not be limited to that field in Minneapolis. For these men, it seemed, even drunkenness could be a scored event.

Then came another important part of the ritual, pre-game television. Naturally, there was plenty of stuff to pick from. Flipping channels, we came upon one of those great NFL productions where they show all the greatest moments from all the past Super Bowl games in slow motion from fifteen different camera angles. We watched, enraptured, as gravity-defying receivers snatched passes out of the air just before being crushed by huge defensive backs, runners hurtled through a maze of flying bodies, and Zeus-like quarterbacks launched precise, aerodynamic passes into the endzone. The deep dramatic voice of the narrator stirred our manly blood with phrases like ". . . but the Dolphin offense melted like snow under the hot glare of the endzone" or "The field reverberated with the sounds of spines cracking and bones breaking."

I asked my compatriots why football seems to appeal to so many American men. What is it that makes it so compelling?

Alcohol glimmered in Kelly's eye as he began raving, "Why does football appeal to American men?! It's the last bastion of American masculinity left, for chrissake!" Beer sloshed onto the floor as he began to gesticulate wildly. "Football is all about being tough, sacrificing the body for the good of the team. It's defining your opponents' weaknesses; then bringing superior physical force to bear on those weaknesses! It's about power! It's about crushing opposition! It's about pure, naked aggression and irresistible domination!!"

He shouted these last words, then Bob interjected, "I really like the hitting."

At around three o'clock, Laura came downstairs with some sloppy joes. Commenting on her pregnant condition, I asked Bob what he would do if his wife went into labor during the game.

"Open a beer, boil some water, and gather up some rags," came the response. We all laughed hysterically. Laura didn't seem too amused.

Kick off! The big game, the highlight of the ritual, was underway. The Redskins were rated as a six point favorite, but we all agreed that if Jim Kelly could get the Bills' offense going they could win it. I bet five more dollars on the Bills.

After consuming many more beers and watching the Bills get beaten like a gong for three quarters, my five dollars took wing. We spent the rest of the evening telling crude jokes, passing gas, playing Nintendo football, and getting sloppy, stinking drunk. Kelly, at some point, reeled out into the backyard and spelled his name in the snow while urinating. We all laughed hysterically. The next morning Laura didn't seem very amused by that either.

Looking back on it, though, who could blame her? Who would like to have a group of grown men in their home, seizing upon the ritual of Super Sunday as an excuse to behave like adolescent jackals?

Looking back on this rather specific, sordid tale, and trying to make sense of it in relation to the ritual, I kept asking myself what exactly is the ritual about? It seemed to me that it has something to do with men. I thought about what Kelly said about why football appeals to men more than women. I began to see the ritual as a manly celebration of all those good old manly macho traits that you see glorified in old war movies. But it's not easy to be a manly man in a manly world doing manly things in a manly way anymore, not when you're supposed to be sensitive and in touch with your more "feminine" side. The ritual is a sort of big

breast beating display, like an old toothless ape trying to remember what it feels like to be leader of the pack.

The man's world of my father and all the fathers before him is fading now, and it should. We humans need a kinder, gentler, world these days. That's why we need football and a certain annual ritual: to remind us why.



## The Inheritance of Woody Selbst

*Derek Morris*  
*Composition II*

Inheritance. The word brings to mind large sums of money or huge tracts of land. But is it the only type of inheritance that a person can receive? Or is getting your mother's smile or your father's personality a type of inheritance also? Our society, with all its social workings and definitions, classifies these as a type of inheritance, too. What I will be looking at is this type of inheritance that Woody Selbst, the subject of "A Silver Dish" by Saul Bellow, receives in his life.

What is the inheritance that Woody gets from his father? It is not the type of inheritance that I first described. He does not get a great sum of money and a house in the suburbs. He also does not gain a reputation of a good man, which often occurs when one of your parents is a member of standing in the community. Instead, what he gets is both the positive attributes and the shortcomings that his father possessed. A key fact to note is that he gets this inheritance long before his father passes away. These inheritances are passed to Woody as he grows up in his father's presence and influence. He takes each of these inheritances and blends and mixes them into the type of life that he feels he must live.

The first thing we see that Woody inherits at a young age is his desire to thumb his nose at the authority figures around him. On page 44 we see that Woody as a young man "... took canned pineapple and cut bacon from the filch with his pocketknife." This is done partly to fill out his big frame, as the book says, but mostly to give him the feeling of accomplishment over the Mission in the theft of the food. He does not steal in order to gain wealth or to hurt anyone, but rather he feels this is how he must live his life to be true to himself. It is part of the blending that he has received of his father's traits that he is exhibiting when he

performs these actions. He does not want to hurt the Mission in any way or cause it hardship, but the side of him influenced by his father refuses to let him live within the confines of the Mission's rules completely, and rather than openly rebel against their authority, he steals the food as his personal way of knowing he doesn't live completely by the rules.

We also see that as Woody gets older, he inherits his father's willingness to be a risk taker and to bend the edges of the law as far as they will go. You see on page 40 that to Woody, "Risk was a wonderful stimulus." He smuggles hashish across the border, not to gain profit, but for the rush of accomplishment of having done the deed, of having thwarted the authorities despite all the precautions they take. Woody also grows pot in his backyard, not to sell, and not because he's addicted to it, but because it is wrong, and he likes to do it solely because it *is* wrong. "There was no harm at all in Woody, but he didn't like being entirely within the law" (40). This trait he displays openly to his family, but not to the authorities, for obvious reasons. It is this trait that Woody must feel the least ashamed about, for he flaunts it openly for the rest of his family to see, not worried about the reactions they would have to it.

Next we see that Woody inherits his father's lust for women. "It's an exceptionally smart man who isn't marked forever by the sexual theories he hears from his father, and Woody wasn't all that smart" (46). But Woody has a problem with the inheritance in that he feels a little shame in being public about these desires, so he takes trips around the world to be away and free from the constraints of being near his family and to let these feelings run free. This works out well for him, for it gives him the ability to be free with these emotions and still put forth a good front for his family. "He maintained the bungalow . . . he paid for the heat and light and food" (59). This and other things are his way of caring for his family and appearing to be his mother's dutiful son. But by taking trips around the world, he

can be true to his father's side, without jeopardizing what he has with the rest of his family.

The last inheritance that Woody gets is the hardest to conceptualize. He inherits his father's shortcoming of not caring for his family, but realizing this he works past it and tries his best to support his family like his father never did. How this is evident is the way that Woody cares for his family. A man born of honest compassion for his family would care for them in all ways, from financial support to being there when things are wrong and they need help. What we see Woody providing is merely financial support for his family. This is not all that bad, and considering the role model he had, it is far better than we would expect. Since Woody never had a good father to imitate when learning how to care for a family, he must do what he can, even though he doesn't live with them. He does not know the proper way to care for his family, since he was never properly cared for by his father. He does a great job trying to be better than his father and should be commended for his ability to overcome the shortcoming of his upbringing.

All in all, Woody takes what he gets from his father and works with it rather well. He realizes the shortcomings he has and makes adjustments to his life that allow him these vices, to some degree, without letting them control his life. He becomes a far better person than his father was. This is especially evident in the fact that as a child when Woody needed his father, his father abandoned him, but later in life when his father needs him, he is there for his Pop until the end. This is the sign of a good man, which is what Woody made of himself with the inheritances he received from his father.

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## A Mother's Mission

*Joanna McCaffery  
Composition II*

"My baby birthday. You come my house." This is the start of one of the notes I would receive from the only deaf person I ever knew before my fourteen-month-old son was diagnosed as profoundly deaf.

It scared me to think my son would be one day communicating in this way, not only with the limitations of note writing but also the way in which the notes were constructed. I knew my deaf friend was intelligent, but her expressive language was very poor. My husband and I faced this and many other fears when we first discovered our son was deaf.

When faced with an overwhelming fear of something, I find the best way to overcome it is to educate myself; thus began my research into the world of deafness. This research was for my child, my little boy, the most precious gift God has to offer. I knew my findings would affect him for the rest of his life and ours. It became my mission to provide the best means of support and education for him that I could.

I went to the public library with the intention of checking out a few books and in no time being well versed on the subject. After all, how much information could there be on a subject I had heard so little about?

This attitude was the first obstacle to overcome. When I started collecting data, I found conflicting information on almost every aspect. There were three different types of sign language, several options of educational services, and as many different opinions as I had questions pertaining to my son's future achievements.

I started with sign languages because I knew the sooner we were able to communicate with our son the better. American Sign Language is the oldest and most widely used among deaf adults. This was the language

my deaf friend used. The most obvious problem I found with it was the fact that the sentence structure was very different; users tend to leave out words such as "it," "is," "are," etc., and most never learn to use them properly, thus causing the unintelligible note writing and difficulty with reading the written English language. I found myself questioning the so-called "experts" who recommend this for my child. Statistics showing that deaf children often finish school with no better than a sixth grade reading level should have caused these "experts" to rethink the language they propose.

Next I investigated Signing Exact English. I really thought I had found the one for us until I realized that the signs were so different from ASL that my son could not communicate with deaf adults. This dilemma brought me to a comfortable medium with the language we now use, which is Signed English, a combination of ASL signs and all the little words of the English language. Advocates for this agree that it is best for young children learning to read and write so they are able to gather a broader knowledge of the hearing world and the language we speak. Some of my deaf friends have told me that he may decide to use ASL as he gets older because it will be the language most of his friends will be using. It will be fine with me if he does decide to use ASL as long as he learns basic sentence structure first.

Not only did I research through books, I also talked with people who were supposed experts in the field: doctors, teachers, and other parents. It seemed everyone had an opinion as to what we should do with our child. One doctor told us we should not teach our son sign language because he would learn to rely on it and not try to learn speech. Although it is possible that our son might be able to speak a few more words than he does right now, it is more possible that our son at age five would not be up to a first grade comprehension level without the use of sign language to communicate.



Another doctor told us not to even try to teach our son to vocalize because without hearing words it was impossible for him to learn. About that time my son pointed out the doctor's office window and said, "Boat mama." Needless to say we completely disregarded this "expert's" input when our son reached a fifty oral word vocabulary that continues to grow daily.

Our son's first teacher sat down with other "experts" from the school and devised a list of things our son should be able to do when he was age two. Things like hold a cup, sit by himself, and walk up stairs with help are just a sample. I told her, "This is ridiculous! My son can do all these things and much more. He has a three hundred plus sign vocabulary and has been drinking from a cup since he was eight months old." I said I was thinking of potty training and working on his shapes and colors, which he already knew most of. She told me he wouldn't understand toilet training until at least age four. This turned out to be a joke when just after his second birthday Brent went to school in "big boy" pants and never had one accident.

His speech teacher dropped him after one month and said she had done all she could and her efforts had been fruitless. I asked her about her methods of teaching. She said she would say a word and wait for him to repeat it back, but he would only mouth the word with no sound. I asked her if it had occurred to her to put his hand on her throat so he could feel the sound or use a mirror so he could watch his face. She answered an embarrassed, "No."

Many of the "experts" we have talked with tell us we should lower our expectations because Brent is hearing impaired and may not ever achieve even small goals. Why should we when he has already accomplished more than they thought possible at his young age? How can they predict the future of every deaf child when they are as different as you and I?

I feel as his parents we are the experts in Brent's life. We expect no more but will accept no less than what he

is capable of doing. When my son comes to me and says "I'm going to drive airplanes when I get big," should I tell him sorry honey that's only for hearing little boys and girls? No! Why set those limitations on his young ambitions? I truly believe, as do most other parents, that my son can do anything he sets his mind to.

So through our experiences, my husband and I have decided to "take with a grain of salt" the information we have gathered and instead let our son guide us.



## WYSIWYG

*Dick Rodda*  
*Composition II*

For those of you who don't speak "computerese," WYSIWYG (pronounced wizzywig) means, "What You See Is What You Get." As an amateur historian, I can say that this is also true when doing research. However, in research we call it perception.

Perception is two people seeing a zebra for the first time. One sees a white horse with black stripes, and the other sees a black horse with white stripes. In doing my research on the Civil War, zebras (perceptions) have been my constant companions.

I try to limit my reading to first-hand accounts or at least narratives that were written during or shortly after the war. Out of the three million men who fought in the Civil War, over six hundred thousand died. All the rest wrote books. I realize that this sounds like a monumental exaggeration, but when I think of all the books I've read, and the thousands out there that I haven't read yet, I sometimes think it's true.

I discovered right away that what facts were true and what facts were false depended on whether the book was written from a Union or Confederate standpoint. Battles did take place and were won and lost. But what really happened was what each writer saw and what he felt.

Can a Confederate soldier fighting in the trenches in front of Richmond defending his home and family from the "damn Yankee invaders" be objective? Should he be? Isn't knowing what he felt as much a part of history as what he did?

What one soldier sees and feels is very important to history. One of the biggest misconceptions about history is that battles and wars are fought by the Armies and Navies of opposing nations. From personal

experience, I can say that this is not true. Every battle in every war was fought by just one person. When you are that one person, feelings are a very important part of what you are doing, and why you are doing it. The men who wore the blue and gray over a hundred years ago felt the same way. More importantly, they wrote about their feelings in numerous books.

They wrote of their hatred for each other. They hated each other so much they wouldn't even use the same names for the battles they fought. For example, the Northern Battle of Bull Run was the southern Battle of Mannassas Junction. The Northern Battle of Antietam was the Southern Battle of Sharpsburg. What the North referred to as simply Shiloh, the South called the Battle of Pittsburgh Landing.

If you were to read a modern history book, you would find the Battles of Bull Run, Antietam, and Shiloh, but you wouldn't find very many that even mention the Battles of Mannassas Junction, Sharpsburg, and Pittsburgh Landing. To the victors go the spoils, and one of the spoils is writing the history of that war.

While the Northern version of the war is what is taught in the classroom, fortunately there are many books that can be found that tell the Southern side. I can't think of any other war where this is true. Usually the winner's view of history is forced onto the loser.

To the Southerner the war was about liberty, independence, and freedom from the oppressive rule of the Yankee North, not slavery.

Only a small percentage of Southerners owned slaves. Most were even against it. While Robert E. Lee's wife owned slaves, Lee himself did not. By the time the war started Lee had freed all of his wife's slaves. Stonewall Jackson never owned slaves and thought slavery was pure evil itself.

On the other hand Grant, Meade, and McClellan, (all Northern Generals) did own slaves. These are things that just reading one version of history, (the North's), doesn't tell you.

Most soldiers who fought in the Confederate Army didn't give a damn about Slavery, States Rights, or the Confederacy. They just wanted to be left alone to live their lives without someone in Washington telling them how to do it. As Shelby Foote says in *The Civil War*, "When a captured Rebel was asked why he was fighting his answer was, "Because you're down here" (265).

The Northern soldier really didn't care about slavery either. Nor did they fight to restore the Union. Most sided with Horace Greeley, who said, "Errant Sisters go in peace" (Catton 49).

Union soldiers felt they were fighting against the treachery and treason of Fort Sumter. The Confederate attack on Ft. Sumter ignited the rage of the North much like the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor did eighty years later. Slavery was not brought into the war as an issue until The Emancipation Proclamation a year and a half later. But from that day to this the Civil War has always been portrayed by historians as a war against slavery.

Was the war fought against slavery, or was it fought for freedom? Which version is right? I came to the conclusion a long time ago that they both were. I know this sounds like a cop-out. But, if I'm willing to give the Northern writers the benefit of the doubt and say that they truthfully wrote what they saw, shouldn't I give the southern writers the same consideration?

After all, the Northern and Southern writers were just looking at the same zebra with different perceptions as to what it was. I have no problem with this. I have always viewed perception as a very intimate gift that the writer gives to the reader. The writers allow us to step inside their bodies. They let us use their eyes to see with, their emotions to feel with.

In war, as in life, there are two sides to every story. How can we say which one is right if we don't know both. Facts are facts, but perception can also be facts.

Was the Civil War fought to free the slaves and restore the Union? Or, was it fought for liberty and independence? My answer to both questions would be yes.

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## Ruth's Song

*Mike Gales*  
*Composition II*

What is fate? What is destiny? Some people feel that their lives have been preordained by a higher power. Others would say the outcome of a person's life is random, anything could happen. I believe in fate. The kind of fate I believe in is not etched in stone, not inevitable. I would compare a person's fate to graffiti on the side of a building. It is hard to cover up. If the job is done correctly, a building, or a life is enhanced. However, just as it is hard to clean graffiti, it is also hard to change the road you have set for yourself.

Gloria Steinem's mother, Ruth, was a woman who wanted to change her life. She had ambitions which went beyond those of the average woman, especially for her time period. Unfortunately, there was a myriad of forces which would act against her ambitions. What were the forces which shaped Ruth's fate? Many were the same which all of us have to deal with, things like family, money, and the economy. Ruth also faced other, more unique, problems. She had ideas which society frowned upon, and she developed an illness which nobody understood. On top of all this, she had to fight a double standard.

America treats women differently than it does men. For many years, Ruth was winning her private battle with this unfair double standard. Even as a young girl, Ruth rebelled against the female stereotype which she did not fit:

She was a tall, spirited, auburn-haired high school girl who loved basketball and reading; who tried to drive her uncle's Stanley Steamer when it was the first car in the neighborhood; who had a gift for gardening and who sometimes, in defiance of convention, wore her father's overalls; a girl



with the courage to go to dances even though her church told her that music itself was sinful, and whose sense of adventure almost made up for feeling gawky and unpretty . . . (548).

I can see Ruth was a freethinker as far back as childhood. She would listen to the advice of her parents and church, take it under consideration, then make her own decision. As Ruth grew older, this streak of individualism stayed with her. Her marriage was very controversial in her family and viewed by many as a mixed marriage because he was Jewish.

The double standard followed Ruth into the workplace, as it did all women in those days who had the fortitude to attempt a man's job. "After graduating from the university paper, she wrote a gossip column for a local tabloid, under the name 'Duncan MacKenzie' since women weren't supposed to do such things" (549). This blatant discrimination did not discourage Ruth; she worked her way up until she had earned the position of Sunday editor. She had dreams of going to New York City and pursuing a career as a reporter. Still, all the pressures that an exceptional woman such as Ruth had to face were building inside her. She began to experience depression and anxiety which led to what was then known as a nervous breakdown.

Ruth's mental illness came at a time when this type of problem was considered by most people to be the fault of the sick person. The idea that a person's troubles could weigh heavily enough on their minds to cause instability was reserved for war veterans, men, and the upper class. Sick relatives were sedated or kept out of sight. Some were sent off to state hospitals. Treatment at these hospitals could be brutal, especially for women. Rape was not uncommon. Punishment for abnormal behavior was considered treatment. The ultimate cure for an uncooperative was the now banned frontal lobotomy (*Psychology in Action* 514). After her

first nervous breakdown, Ruth spent many months in a sanatorium. She was pronounced recovered when she really was not. I think she felt her only way to escape the sanatorium was to lie about how she felt. She was very afraid of the doctors who treated her there. Ruth did not register in another hospital for twenty years. Perhaps staying away from the poor conditions in many of those sanatoriums allowed Ruth a better and longer life. No, Ruth did not seek medical help for her illness, but she did treat it with tranquilizers that the medical community made readily available.

One of the many forces acting on Ruth's life was drugs. In the years following Ruth's first nervous breakdown, psychiatric drugs were extremely crude; Ruth's first prescription was little more than knockout drops. When she was under the influence of "Doc Howard's Medicine," many of her friends thought Ruth was weak, and a drunk (544). Gloria knew differently. She realized the drug was the only escape her mom could find from the mental wars which raged inside.

No wonder that no relative in my memory challenged the doctor who prescribed this medicine, asked if some of her suffering and hallucinating might be due to overdose or withdrawal, or even consulted another doctor about its use. It was our relief as well as hers (545).

Ruth never again was able to leave behind her the necessity for some kind of tranquilizer. While drug dependency rarely is good, I think hers did more good than harm by allowing her and Gloria some peace.

Money was tight in those days. The economy did not treat very many people with kindness, and there were very few economic safety nets. Like most people who scraped by during the Great Depression, Ruth was very conscious of where her money went. "Even as she

worried about money and figured out how to save pennies, she would buy or make carefully chosen presents . . ." (552). Unfortunately, her husband was financially irresponsible. These circumstances continued until Ruth was worried about money constantly; it had become part of her illness. Ruth and her husband's best chance at financial security was a rural lake resort in Michigan. He bought the resort and was trying to attract the big dance bands which were popular in the late 1930's and 1940's. If the venture had worked, not only would the Steinems have been financially secure, but also Ruth would have had the work and the companionship she desperately needed. These plans were dashed by World War II. Gas rationing prevented vacationers from driving to the rural resort. The resort closed, and Gloria's father was forced by financial constraints to go on the road as an antique agent year round. Ruth was alone, and in her loneliness, her fears increased. For these reasons, I think money and the economy were major forces which negatively impacted Ruth's life.

Ruth Steinem's life was a mixture of triumph and tragedy. As a young woman she reached heights few women, or men, even dreamed of. Later she was plunged by despair into the depths of a nightmare world. Ruth did not choose the life she lived; she wanted a life where she could do what she loved: writing. Circumstances and social forces, fate, if you will, did not allow Ruth to become the important writer she could have been. I think her mental illness was a symptom of the forces working against her, not a cause of her problems. Ruth was not able to escape the forces in her life. She was, however, finally able to cope with them.

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