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THE SKUNK RIVER REVIEW

Volume 20

A collection of unique student writing
spanning 2007-2008

Thank you for reading the Skunk River Review. We hope you will enjoy these selections and we hope they may inspire your own thoughts and writing.

We encourage all DMACC writing students to submit to next year's competition, and we look forward to the creativity and diversity of style that makes this publication a proud celebration of student expression.

Welcome to the 2007-2008 edition of The Skunk River Review!

Each year we continue to receive many tremendous examples of student writing. Selection is a challenging process, but enjoyable as the submissions range from variety of topics and styles. Selected entries were only minimally edited for clarity.

The Skunk River Review focuses on students from various DMACC campuses and includes three separate categories of writing from College Preparatory Writing and Composition I and Composition II classes. All entries generally begin as class assignments and are supported by the instructor.

We would like to recognize the following people who contributed to this student publication:

To all of the DMACC students from College Preparatory Writing I and II, Composition I and Composition II for their outstanding essay and research submissions.

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Editors

Roselyn Harbart
Shelaine Tuyschaegers

The Skunk River Review reserves the right to edit for minor corrections and clarity. Works cited have not been edited.

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Chris Bollhoefer
 First Place – Composition I

Concept Essay

Anticipating Your Future

Grover Cleveland stated in 1905, “Sensible and responsible women do not want to vote” (qtd. in Barker 89). In 1927, Harry Warner of Warner Brothers Pictures said, “Who the hell wants to hear actors talk?” (qtd. in Barker 89). Ken Olsen, president of Digital Equipment Corporation, declared in 1977, “There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in their home” (qtd. in Barker 89). Having the benefit of knowing where our past has led us to today, we read these quotes with a sense of amazement and disbelief. How could these prominent individuals who were so vital to their related fields (politics, motion pictures and computers) have been so wrong about what was to come? The answer could be as simple as one word — paradigms. What are paradigms? Merriam-Webster Online defines paradigm in this context as “an outstandingly clear or typical example or archetype”; “a philosophical and theoretical framework of a scientific school or discipline within which theories, laws, and generalizations and the experiments

performed in support of them are formulated”; or more broadly — “a philosophical or theoretical framework of any kind” (“Paradigm”). What makes paradigms so important? How can understanding paradigms unlock the door to a brighter future? The answers to these questions could be the key to reshaping our future.

In 1962, Thomas Kuhn first wrote about paradigms in his book entitled The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Kuhn, a philosopher of science, received his doctorate in history of science at Harvard University in 1949. He went on to teach at Harvard, the University of California, and Princeton University. Kuhn was widely acclaimed for the paradigm concept as it related to scientific study and discovery (“Kuhn, Thomas”). He defined paradigms, within the scientific context, as scientific accomplishments that had two distinctive components. The first component was that the accomplishment was notable enough to draw other scientists away from a prevailing school of scientific thought. The second component was that the feat was nebulous enough that it left many unanswered questions for those drawn to it to work on (Kuhn 10).

One paradigm that Thomas Kuhn references repeatedly in his book is that of Copernicus’ advancement of the concept that the sun, not the earth, was the center of the universe (68). Copernicus, a Polish astronomer during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, found errors in the prevailing Ptolemaic astronomical system (earth-centered galaxy) and through further research discovered a previously ignored minority decision that put the sun, not the earth, as the center of the universe. The prevailing scholars and scientists of that time were entrenched in the belief that the earth was stationary, while the sun, moon, stars, and planets moved above and around the earth. In that day, contradicting the accepted position of the time could mean rejection, punishment, and ultimately death. Fearing this backlash, Copernicus was very patient and protective about getting his idea out. In fact, his heliocentric (sun-centered) view of the universe was not published until the time of his death in 1543. Though his views eventually won out, those who followed Copernicus’ teachings faced the wrath of the established scientific community (Rosen).

While Kuhn’s understanding of paradigms focuses on the scientific arena, Joel Barker views paradigms in a much broader context. Barker, who wrote Paradigms—The Business of Discovering the Future in 1992, sees paradigms impacting every phase of people’s lives (38). Joel Barker provides a simplified definition of paradigms: “A paradigm is a set of rules and regulations (written or unwritten) that does two things: (1) it establishes or defines boundaries; and (2) it tells you how to behave inside the boundaries in order to be successful” (32).

Barker provides a paradigm illustration at the outset of his book that exemplifies not only the power of paradigms, but also the fundamental principles that encompass the paradigm concept. The story revolves around the watchmaking industry. He chronicles the Swiss watchmaking industry in particular. He states that in the year 1968, the Swiss had been a domineering force in the industry for sixty years. In addition to producing the watch of choice and being the most profitable watchmaker (they controlled over sixty-five percent of the world market and owned eighty percent of the profits), they were also the greatest innovators. The Swiss pioneered the minute hand and the second hand; improved the production methods of gears, bearings and mainsprings; were leaders in researching waterproofing of watches; and put the best self-winding watches on the market. Barker concludes that they deserved to be the dominant force in their industry (16).

Barker then fast-forwards to the year 1980 and describes the astonishing reversal of fortunes that the Swiss watchmakers had undergone. Their previous market share of sixty-five percent was now less than ten percent, and their eighty percent profit sovereignty was reduced to less than twenty percent. The Swiss national economy was devastated, as fifty thousand of the Swiss' sixty-two thousand watchmakers lost their jobs between 1979 and 1981 (Barker 16).

What was the dynamic that caused the Swiss watchmakers' demise? They had been unwitting victims of what Joel Barker calls a "paradigm shift." This "paradigm shift" meant that the previous mechanical watchmaking rules that included gears, bearings, and mainsprings had been replaced by rules of watchmaking that now focused on electronics. Japan had now jumped to the forefront in the watchmaking market with Seiko leading the way. In 1968, Japan had less than a percent of the world market, but in 1992, they had claimed thirty-three percent of the world market and thirty-three percent of the profits. Their development of the electronic quartz watch was a resounding success. What was so unbelievably paradoxical for the Swiss was that this reversal of fortunes was totally in their own hands. Swiss researchers were the actual inventors of electronic quartz movement, but it did not fit in with their watchmaking paradigm — gears, bearings, and a mainspring. As a result, their own manufacturers rejected it in 1967. They were so blinded by their previous success that they did not even protect the idea. Swiss researchers displayed their unappreciated idea at the World Watch Congress that year, and Seiko of Japan took notice (Barker 16).

So what do Copernicus and the Swiss watchmakers tell us about paradigms? Resistance to the new paradigm is evident in both cases. With Copernicus, the resistance not only came from

the scientific community, but also from Copernicus himself, through his prior learning. He had been educated on the Ptolemaic system (Rosen). The Swiss' biggest detractors were their own watchmaking manufacturers, who were so entranced by their currently held successful paradigm that they saw no reason to do anything different (Barker 16). This resistance to change to, or even consider the new paradigm is what Joel Barker terms the "Paradigm Effect." Barker cites Thomas Kuhn's explanation of the "Paradigm Effect," where Kuhn notes that scientists can be looking at the same thing from the same vantage point and yet come to two completely different conclusions. Joel Barker takes Thomas Kuhn's findings a step further, concluding, "that paradigms act as physiological filters — that we quite literally see the world through our paradigms" (86). Barker further details that information that conforms to our current paradigms has an easy pathway to understanding, but that information that runs counter to our currently held paradigms will be difficult or perhaps impossible to see at all (86).

Another important aspect of the two paradigm examples shared is that when a paradigm shifts, everyone starts from scratch. Barker describes it as his, "going-back-to-zero rule" (140). This rule means that no matter how successful someone has been with the old paradigm, when the rules change with the new paradigm, everyone starts over (140). The Swiss watchmakers paid a heavy price for their investment in the old paradigm, and equally so, the scientific community that came after Copernicus's time eventually had to adopt a new understanding of their own theories.

The final key point of the two paradigms revolves around those who took the new paradigm and ran with it (Copernicus and Seiko)—despite the challenges and ridicule it presented. Barker refers to these people, who early on drive the understanding and resources needed to shift a paradigm, as "paradigm pioneers" (41). While Barker describes "paradigm pioneers" in a somewhat pragmatic way, ironically, Kuhn, the philosopher of science, puts the onus of being a paradigm pioneer in a very intangible sense. Thomas Kuhn states:

"A decision between alternate ways of practicing science is called for, and in the circumstances that decision must be based less on past achievement than on future promise. The man who embraces a new paradigm at an early stage often must do so in defiance of the evidence provided by problem-solving. He must, that is, have faith that the new paradigm will succeed with the many large problems that confront it, knowing only that the older paradigm has failed with a few. A decision of that kind can only be made on faith." (157)

Kuhn is saying that it takes courage and belief in one's judgment to make that change of paradigms a reality.

Joel Barker sums up paradigms in chapter eleven of his book by sharing what he believes to be their seven principle attributes: 1) "Paradigms are common" (150). They exist in all phases of our life. Whether it is a scientific theorem, a new business concept or your dad's way to change a flat tire — they are constantly in our lives. They range from the precision-oriented paradigms of science to the trivial paradigms of everyday life. 2) "Paradigms are functional" (151). They are needed rules to live by. They help guide us toward what is important. They give us clarity of thought. The diversity of our combined paradigms gives us the ability to deal with complex problems. 3) "The paradigm effect reverses the commonsense relationship between seeing and believing" (153). In other words, we need paradigms to understand that which is in front of us. By understanding the rules of the paradigm, we can deal with it effectively. 4) "There is always more than one right answer" (154). By realizing there are alternate ways of doing things, we open our minds to multiple possibilities of a desired outcome. 5) "Paradigms too strongly held can lead to paradigm paralysis, a terminal disease of certainty" (155). If we hold on to our paradigms to the point that we refuse to see other paradigms, we do so at our own peril. Being comfortable or powerful with our current paradigm guarantees us nothing. 6) "Paradigm pliancy is the best strategy in turbulent times" (156). Those who utilize the proactive method of seeking out new paradigms by continually challenging their current paradigms will put themselves in better shape to see the next paradigm coming. When confronted by something outside our comfort level or understanding, we need to step back and examine it thoroughly before reacting. 7) "Human beings can choose to change their paradigms" (157). We are not born into a predisposed way of viewing the world; in fact, we have the ability to look at the world in a multifaceted way. Our flexibility opens up new possibilities for our future (157).

Barker concludes his book, as he started it, with a paradigm story. The story is entitled, "The Pig and the Sow." In the story Barker tells of a man who is somewhat enamored with his sports car and likes to test his skills by driving it around the dangerous curvy mountain roads that he knows so well. In making one of his drives, he meets a car that is seemingly out of control coming around the curve ahead of him, nearly colliding with his car. After gaining control of her vehicle, the woman driving the car sticks her head out the window as she passes him and yells, "Pig!" The man retorts quickly, "Sow!" Though he is confused by the abruptness of the incident, he feels pretty proud of himself because he had gotten her back before she got away. Pleased at

himself, he hits the gas and goes around the curve — and runs right into the pig in the roadway (210).

Barker uses the story as a review of what is most important about paradigms. He shares that the woman was trying to warn him, even while risking her life. He notes that the man reacted with his paradigm of “you call me a name; I’ll call you a name.” He was unable or unwilling to look for the truth of the situation. He had “paradigm paralysis.” If the man had demonstrated “paradigm pliancy,” he would have tried to ask her what she meant and probably would have driven safer, avoiding the pig. Joel Barker concludes the story with a moral and a couple of key points that provide a fitting conclusion to this discovery of paradigms. The moral reads like this: “During the next decade many people will be coming around blind curves yelling things at you. They will be too busy to stop and explain, so it will be up to you to figure it out. If you have paradigm paralysis, you will be hearing nothing but threats. If you have paradigm pliancy, you will be hearing nothing but opportunity!” (210). He concludes, “The choice of what you hear is entirely up to you” (211).

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Nancy Coons
2nd Place – Composition I

Remembrance Essay

Counting Pennies

What can you do with a penny? Not much you say. You certainly couldn't buy anything. If you saw one on the ground, would you stoop to pick it up or is that too much trouble? Does a penny have any value? If you had ten pennies, would that be enough to go shopping? How about ten times ten? How many would it take to have value? Well, this is a story about a man who counted pennies.

Every night, my dad came through the kitchen door hungry, tired, and dirty. He trudged to the kitchen sink where he picked up the ladle from the drinking bucket and drank greedily. The cool water ran down his chin leaving a river in the dirt. Then he lifted up a mason jar of water and primed the red pump at the edge of the sink. He pushed the handle slowly down and refilled

the jar for the next time and then filled the chipped basin in the sink with water. He removed his glasses revealing big white rings around his eyes. He looked like a bandit who had just lost his mask.

He leaned over the basin scrubbing his face, hands, and his arms clear to the edge of his short-sleeved shirt. As he washed, his sleeves were pushed up slightly, revealing his farmer's tan. He rubbed a bar of Lava soap around his neck and behind his ears. When he finished, he pulled an old navy colored towel from a hook and dried his face while he called, "Ma, come here and look to see if my ears are clean." Dutifully, my mother dropped her meal preparations and went to look at Dad's ears. "Dad," she would say as she pulled his ears forward, "you have nough dirt there to plant corn." She would yank his ears this way and that, as without mercy; she then used an old rag to dig dirt from every crevice in his ear.

Supper was served promptly as soon as Dad was ready. Gravy was poured in the serving bowl, meat and potatoes were set on the table and the meal began. Food was passed and plates were to be cleaned. No one took more than they could eat.

Dad always sat in his spot on the dilapidated couch in our living room while I helped Mom wash and dry the dishes. Without fail, Dad called, "Little girl, come here." Dad would reach his large hand into his overall pocket and bring out buried treasure. Among a multitude of matches, a nail, a stick of gum, several toothpicks, a cough drop and field dirt was his pocket change. I would dig through the debris looking for pennies. Usually there weren't many, but always we looked. "How many did you find, little girl?" I would count out the number and carry my pennies in my clinched fist to the tall dresser in my parent's room. I climbed the step stool and stretched to the very back of the dresser to drop the precious pennies in Mom's flower vase.

When the vase was sufficiently full, Dad would help me get the vase down and carry it to the kitchen table. I would carefully dump the contents on the white enamel table. The coins would spread across the table clattering as they fell. Dad would supervise as I counted stacks of ten. Five stacks would make a roll. Dad would supervise as I counted stacks of ten. Five stacks would make a roll. Dad would balance a penny inside the roll and I would carefully add my stacks until the fifty pennies were inside. We sealed the ends and repeated the procedure. Two rolls made a dollar. Eleven rolls! I was rich! The rolls went back in the vase and would later be added to my bank account.

“Little girl,” Dad would say, “Take care of your pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves.” One by one we looked at the leftover coins. “Read me that date,” Dad said as he squinted to make it out. “1901? Why that was the year I was born.”

“Here is 1923, that there’s the year I married your ma.”
“See this man on the penny? That’s Abe Lincoln. They called him Honest Abe because he once walked miles to return a few pennies that weren’t his. That’s maybe why they put his face on the penny. I like to think it’s there because he had common sense and that’s not always a common thing.”

“If you save a little all the time, it can grow to be a lot.”
“See this one? It’s old and worn. Maybe it’s traveled all over the United States. Maybe some little girl like you once had it in her pocket.”

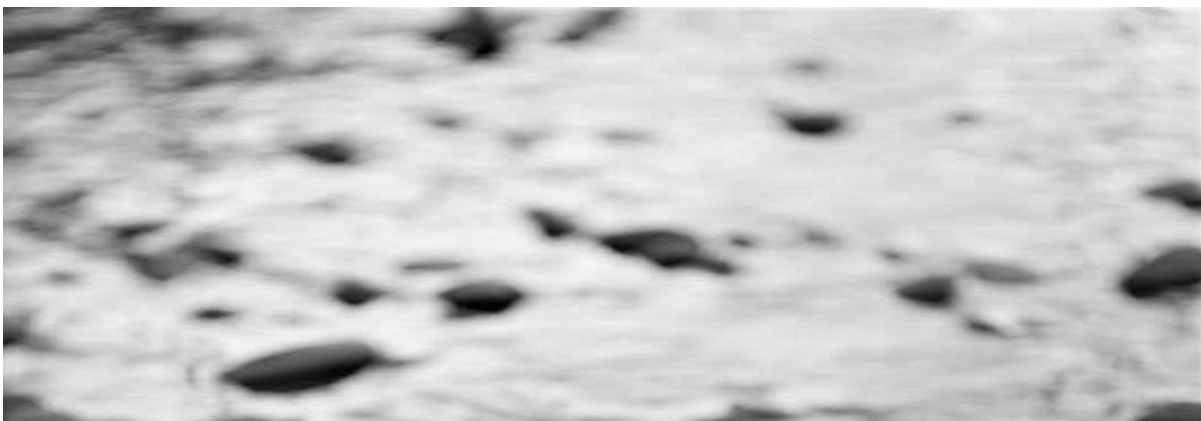
“This penny is shiny and new. Pennies are like people. Some really look good and some don’t look so hot, but they are all worth the same just like people are.”

I added my stories to Dad’s, trying to invent magical places these pennies had been. We smiled as we picked up the remaining pennies and put them in the vase. This is the way I learned to count. First by ones and then by tens. This is how my dad taught me the lessons of life.

The years went by and I grew to be a young woman. It didn’t seem so important to me anymore to look at pennies. I hurriedly and without thanks grabbed the pennies and dropped them in the vase. Still my Dad never spent his pennies. He would break a dollar bill instead. His pennies were for his little girl. The game became a bother. I had schoolwork, friends to see, and things to do. After all, he was only giving me pennies, couldn’t he see how lame this had become? Finally, he took the hint. He didn’t hand his little girl the pennies any more. He just put them in the vase himself. Someday she would want them.

I’m sorry, Dad, I was so selfish. How could I feel that you were a bother? I didn’t realize that you gave not only pennies, you gave me love. It’s too late now. My Dad is gone, but I so do wish we could count pennies again.

I came home from work today tired and hungry, and I dropped my pennies in a jar.



Rachel VanRaden
4th Place – Composition I

Personal Essay

Drab Doxology

Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving, the holidays come and the Sundays they fall around would find me sitting up stiff and straight on the orange upholstered pew in my Grandma's church. I'd be all dressed up for the occasion: A frilly girlish dress, scratchy white tights, and "church shoes" which were only fun to wear because they made clicking sounds when I walked. My rebellion of hair would be wrestled back and clipped with a floppy barrette of ribbons and lace. I never complained about going to church because I didn't know anything else, but the doodles on my bulletin showed how interested I was.

I loved to sit next to my grandma because she always had Winterfresh gum in her purse, and after the first couple of songs, she would slip some to me and to my sisters. I think maybe she thought if our jaws were working she wouldn't have to tell us to stop squirming. It worked pretty well.

I also loved to sit by her because she had a beautiful soprano voice that would lilt through the hymns. We would share a hymnal, she and I, and although I didn't usually know the tune, I would sing along softly as my grandma's voice led mine in daring grace. There was one song that her little congregation sang every Sunday, and I learned later that many believers sing the same tune. It is called simply the Doxology.

Deep and resonant, the bass foundation of the men, and high and reaching, the compliment of the women would fill the room. "Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above the heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." And then a long, low "Aaaaa-meeen."

By this time my winterfresh gum had lost all of its flavor and I was ready to get out of these uncomfortable tights. As we walked out the door of the church and across the gravel parking lot to the car, I would rarely have a passing thought about that slow, sweet song or the truth shared before it. My thoughts were usually consumed with the afternoon's festivities and the lunch waiting for us.

As I grew older, something about that song and the sincerity of those dear old men and women singing it came back to my mind. What does it mean to praise God? Who are the heavenly host? I am one of the "all creatures here below" to the best of my knowledge, but am I praising Him?

It is a tendency for most people to do things out of habit or obligation. Singing the Doxology was one of those things for me. Going to church can be another. Even believing in God can fall into this category. But as we grow older and take stock of our lives, hopefully we either grasp the reasons or cease the activity. Activity in itself profits no one. A dog chasing his tail is incredibly active, but what he is doing is obviously futile and quite frankly stupid. That was the way I lived my life for quite some time.

It wasn't until I started to grow up, until I started asking real questions about why I did the things I was doing and what motivated me to make certain choices, that I realized there was something missing in my life. What was missing was conviction. I realized I needed to make my beliefs my own. So I went hunting truth and determined that whatever had the most convincing

evidence backing it, I would stand on it and I would stand on it with my life. After much searching I realized that what was true were the very things I had been raised on. There is a God who created the world, desired relationship with me and paid a high price to have it because He who loved me dearly. I realized there is nothing more fulfilling or glorious than giving Him my life. I wanted my life to sing “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.” I wanted to be that creature that praised him with everything I did.

Chanon Ross, PH.D. student at Garret-Evangelical Theological Seminary and director of youth and adult ministries at Knox Presbyterian Church in Naperville, Illinois, who spent considerable time with teens came to the conclusion that most teens today are sadly inept at discussing many or all of the important points of what they claimed as their beliefs. (23) It raises the question, if we can't even verbalize in any detail, much less defend, what we say we “believe” can they really be called beliefs?

The issue becomes even more troublesome in college. A study done by UCLA's Higher Education Research institute found that 79% of freshmen entering college profess belief in God. 69% pray, but only 40% think it is very important to follow religious teachings in everyday life. (Chu, 39). How could only half of the people who say they believe in God think it is important to live in a way that honors Him? I believe it is because universally there is a tragic disconnect between the things we say and the things we really believe.

Our minds need to be engaged in religion, and in faith, otherwise it would be more profitable to bury ourselves alive in a mountain of winterfresh gum than to sing that Doxology or even go to church. These things become only tradition, only action. Harvard Law School recently realized a need for the connection between religion and reason to be explored and proposed a drastic alteration of their curriculum to accommodate this. Mark D. W. Edington wrote in the Chronicle of Higher Education, “What might come out of a new curricular engagement with reason and faith is something far more constructive and desperately needed – a deeper sensitivity on the part of educated young people to the enduring power of religious belief to direct and motivate the aspirations of individuals and societies. We have wrung the few drops of progress that we could from the adherents of secularism and religion, shouting across the divide at each other, and insisting that the other disappear. We are dying – quite literally – of thirst.” (B17) The learning community is dying of thirst, and so is the individual life void of understanding and real, tangible belief.

This terrible tendency covers the globe but the correction starts with us. What do we believe? Why do we believe it? How do we live it?

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Amber Buldhaupt
3rd Place Tie – Composition I

Remembered Event

Victory Forge

I spent my summer, before becoming a senior in high school, in the 100-degree heat of South Carolina. I had gone to army basic training to become a soldier. I had overcome many obstacles throughout the nine weeks that I had been there. Now I had to overcome the final test of basic training, the one that would make me overcome the unthinkable and realize what it takes to become an American soldier.

Victory Forge would be a nine-mile march to our campsite. It would be the biggest giant that we would have to conquer. Victory forge would test us both physically and mentally. This was the finale to my summer of basic training.

I had gone through many feats to get this far. I had crawled underneath barbed wire in the dirt with sweat dripping down my face. I had been on marches that were five miles long with 20 pounds of equipment pressing me down. The mysterious meat in the MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) was hard to swallow. After waking up at 4 or 5 a.m. every morning to do push-ups, prone rows, and running miles, I had passed the APFT (Army Physical Fitness Test). I had crawled through the dirt and sand as bullets shot through the air above me. I had propelled down a 40 foot wall and got rope burn on my legs while overcoming some of the obstacle courses. Drill sergeants had yelled in my face, and I occasionally caught some of the spit that had escaped from their mouths. I had been smoked in the middle of the night for other female soldiers not doing their duty. I had choked my way through the gas chamber, coming out coughing and snot dripping down my face, as I waved my arms up and down like a bird in flight. Yet, I did not know if I was ready for this 9 mile march.

The company had been packing and preparing for this march, and now it was time to set out. We left at 3a.m. in the pitch dark to conquer the march that was ahead of us. I was suited up in my army uniform, my combat boots, my bullet proof vest, my kevlar, my ruck sack, and my trusty rifle. It was still dark outside, so we had to be careful when walking down the dirt trails. I almost twisted my ankle many times while tripping on the divots in the dirt. As sweat rolled down my face, my glasses became fogged up like a car window. The sweat left a salty taste in my mouth. We stopped a few times on the way to secure our perimeters as if we were in a real war. We took turns drinking water from our canteens, while our battle buddies felt the rocks poke into their elbows, as they lay on the ground to protect us from any enemies who may be lurking in the trees. As the sun came up, I began to get extremely tired from marching all this way.

I felt as if I were going to pass out. My legs felt like jello, and my chest ached. Once we hit the sand, I really thought that I was going to die. Each leg felt as if it weighed 100 pounds. Walking on the sand was twice as bad as walking on the dirt paths. Trying to keep our spirits up, we did some cadences along the way. "They say that in the army the coffee's really fine. It looks like muddy water and tastes like turpentine. They say that in the army the food is really fine. The chicken jumped off the table and started marchin' time." This helped for a part of the way, but the pain kept creeping up on me.

A voice in my head was telling me to quit. I could not quit after all this way. I had made it so far, and I only had a couple miles to go. After falling down from a divot I had not seen, I did not know if I would be able to get back up. I knew that I was marching toward chow and would be able to eat pancakes, grits, and sausage when we got to the campsite. The thought of eating gave me the energy to get back up and continue on the march.

The drill sergeant announced that we had one mile to go, and now the sun seemed to really be beating down on me. My body wanted to collapse like a bridge. The other soldiers that continued to march around me encouraged me on. "You are almost there. Do not give up now." This helped keep my spirit up, and the encouragement gave me hope that I would be able to finish this march. I joined in cheering those on who were about to pass out. "You are almost there. You can do it."

At last, we made it to our campsite. We got in line for chow, and the smell of sausage filled my nose. I was so hungry and worn out that I would have eaten anything right now. I would have even been happy to eat the mysterious meat in the MRE's. I was so proud of myself for making it the entire 9 miles with so much gear weighing me down. I had overcome the march and had never felt so relieved that something could be over. I had made it, and would never forget this moment in my life. As I sat down to eat my breakfast, I thanked God for getting me through my Victory Forge march.

This march had an enormous impact on my life. I know that if I put my mind to it, I can overcome the unthinkable. When I feel like I can't make it anymore, I can just think of my fellow soldiers saying, "Come on Buldhaupt. You are almost there. Do not give up now." After going through this, I appreciate everyone who is in the army even more than I did before. Soldiers have gone through so much to be a proud part of the army. I respect all soldiers who are putting their lives on the line, so that we may live a better life. After conquering my Victory Forge march, I know what it is like to overcome the unthinkable and what it takes to become an American soldier.



Nicholas Adams
2nd Place Tie – Composition I

Persuasive Essay

The Need for the FairTax

Every spring, Americans compile complicated tax documents and file their tax returns. The Internal Revenue Services collects taxes on earned income, Social Security, Medicare, pensions, and investments. Because the tax system today is so complicated that most Americans do not even understand it, they seek the help of accountants and tax preparers. Since the income

tax was established in 1913, the tax burden on ordinary Americans has steadily increased. What started out as a tax mainly on the wealthy has grown steadily to adversely affect the middle class, as well. According to Neal Boortz and John Linder, “the top 52 percent of all income earners paid virtually 100 percent of all personal income taxes collected by the Internal Revenue Service” (16). In addition, the estate tax, or also called the death tax, basically penalizes people for dying.

A solution to this dilemma would be the FairTax, which is a national sales tax “that would raise the same amount of revenue for the government as our current income tax system, but which would be less intrusive, abusive, coercive, and corrosive” (Boortz and Linder 70). According to Boortz and Linder, the FairTax would essentially be a national sales tax of “23 percent levied on all goods and services sold at the retail level” (76). The implementation of the FairTax in the United States would make taxation more fair, less complicated, less burdensome for Americans and beneficial for the national economy.

Naturally, there are critics of the FairTax proposal. These criticisms come from both the left and right (Hemingway 22). Laurence M. Vance criticizes the FairTax because it is not a tax cut, but simply a different method in which revenue is raised (3). The FairTax proponents never claimed that their proposal was a tax cut, but simply a tax that is fairer and less complicated for the average American. Some critics of the FairTax believe that a national sales tax, being the sole method of federal taxes, would result in the formation of black markets (Regnier 4). Proponents of the FairTax, however, argue that retail businesses are unlikely to help individuals to cheat on their taxes (Regnier 4). Many opponents of the FairTax also claim that this tax proposal will be detrimental to lower and middle tax consumers, but because of the prebate involved in the FairTax proposal, this argument does not carry much merit. The prebate would be a refund given to individuals and families to cover basic expenses up to the poverty level (Regnier 4).

Compared to the FairTax, the current tax code is inherently unfair for most working Americans. Many proponents of the income tax, the estate tax, and taxes that affect capital gains justify these taxes because they are believed to be progressive, meaning they tax the rich more than the poor. However, Professor of Law Edward J. McCaffery points out that due to loopholes in today’s tax system, many of the richest Americans can legally find ways to avoid paying almost any tax (3). Meanwhile, wage earners in the middle and lower classes have no way to get out of paying income taxes.

Today’s tax system is, in fact, not truly progressive because most people with wealth can avoid paying many taxes using basic tax planning techniques. McCaffery states, “By buying

appreciating assets and borrowing against the appreciation until death, the fortunate few can have the resources to live the good life tax free” (32). However, as unfair as the income tax is for most Americans, the federal payroll tax hits the hardest. The federal payroll tax is money withheld from employees’ paychecks to pay for Social Security and Medicare. Together Social Security and Medicare take “7.65% of a worker’s wages until they reach the ceiling that is now roughly a contribution of around \$80,000”; after this limit, Social Security is no longer collected and only the Medicare tax is collected at a rate of 1.45% (McCaffery 18). Because of the ceiling contribution, this tax affects the middle and lower classes much more so than the wealthy. Due to the inherent unfairness in the current system, a new approach to taxation is needed.

The FairTax solves the complications of today’s current tax code for most Americans. Currently, tax preparation often takes a large amount of time and money to comply with the code. According to Neal Boortz and John Linder, the average American in 2005 spent 27 hours of time filling out tax forms (40). Of course, tax preparation takes too much time for many Americans; and thus they spend much on tax preparation fees and services to accountants and tax preparers. A few years ago, Money magazine sent exact same-tax scenarios to 45 different tax preparers and received 45 different responses for tax liability, which highlights one of the major problems with today’s tax system (Regnier 5).

Under the FairTax, income taxes on individuals and businesses, Social Security and Medicare payroll taxes and estate taxes would all be eliminated (Boortz and Linder 76). With the FairTax, the rich would not be able to hide behind loopholes to avoid paying taxes because they spend money just like everyone else. To avoid being overly complicated to the middle and lower income classes, Americans would get a monthly prebate check to cover the basic necessities (Boortz and Linder 85-86). By instituting the prebate check, Americans’ basic needs would essentially be free of tax (Boortz and Linder 85). The prebate makes this plan a progressive form of taxation, rather than the current regressive tax system (Kotlikoff 2).

The FairTax makes taxation less burdensome for many Americans by placing taxation on consumption of goods and services. By taxing spending, almost everyone is taxed; this taxation would be in the form of a retail sales tax (Gleckman 3). A consumption tax encourages all Americans, both poor and wealthy, to save money. Eliminating the capital gains tax, which is part of the proposed FairTax plan, would create a huge incentive to save. Creating a nation of savers is good for the country as a whole.

Professor Edward McCaffery points out that “having money available for investment is a good thing for the economy: the more capital there is, the lower interest rates become” (38). Lower interest rates helped the economy boom during the 1990s. Lower interest rates are beneficial for consumers because home mortgages and credit card debt are then less expensive, as are student loans (McCaffery 38). Making homes easier to afford and a college education less expensive would benefit large numbers of Americans who are now struggling to obtain these objectives.

The FairTax will also be beneficial for the national economy as a whole. Many corporations in this country have moved corporate headquarters overseas to countries that have tax structures that favor them (Boortz and Linder 62). While often portrayed as greedy for leaving the United States to seek tax shelters, corporations are simply doing what is in the best interests of their shareholders. By paying fewer taxes, the corporations make more profit. By instituting the FairTax, the tax system would create a huge incentive for American businesses to come back home because the FairTax would eliminate the corporate income tax (Boortz and Linder 65).

Lessening, or even eliminating, income taxes would also make America a profitable place for foreign manufacturing companies to do business; more manufacturing plants in this country would mean more jobs for Americans (Boortz and Linder 65). By increasing employment in this country, Americans would have more money to spend which would increase the revenue of the sales tax (Boortz and Linder 67).

By instituting the FairTax, Americans will have a much simpler taxation system and one that is fair across the board; hence, the name FairTax. Taxation will become less complicated and less burdensome to Americans. By moving the taxation system from one that taxes wages and savings to one that taxes consumption, the FairTax will encourage people to save more, not less. And finally, we can improve the national economy and make America an enticing place to conduct business, which will bring back domestic companies and encourage foreign investment. Because of these reasons, it is clear that the time has come for a new and fair tax to replace the current taxation system.

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Chris Bollhoefer
3rd Place Tie – Composition I

Profile Essay

Curt Stahr – Exposed

When Des Moines Area Community College's Professor of Photography Curt Stahr talks about his approach to capturing a subject, mood or an event, he states simply, "Almost everything I take is to show something that most people wouldn't see, even though it stands right in front of them." It is a simple statement, but, just as the camera he wields so artfully provides memories and

meaning to so many, so too Curt's passions, perspectives, life experiences, and success provide a gift to DMACC students and the world that is priceless. The camera, when amplified through the life of Curt Stahr, takes on a life of its own. In fact, the camera itself is an embodiment of the life of Curt Stahr.

Entering the photography studio, located in the Advanced Technology Center of Building 3W on the DMACC campus, it is seven o'clock, an hour prior to an eight o'clock digital photography class. The room is dark, but the door is wide open and the portable stereo setting atop the dorm-sized refrigerator is cranked to an early-evening party level. On this day, country band Big and Rich's song "Save A Horse, Ride A Cowboy" pulses its bass undertones through the room, radiating out to the hallway corridor, fading as it reaches the main hallway.

Flipping the light switch reveals a slightly faded, waist-length leather coat with five collies printed in color on its back (four small ones bordering a large one in the center). The coat has been thrown over the backrest of Curt's little-sat-in chair that sits directly in front of his iMac computer. The room's two large chalkboards, covered with various class assignments, dates, and destinations for the traveling photography trips, are detailed in curvy, stylish writing using wide pieces of pastel-colored chalk. A clock with a black and orange Harley Davidson motorcycle logo on its face is prominently displayed on the north wall along with two posters. One poster displays the array of camera lenses that are a part of the "Maxxum Auto Focus Lens System"; the other shows the "Leica-Stamm Baum" — the Leica family tree of camera bodies.

The classroom is decorated with a smorgasbord of student artwork. Featured is a Photo Field Studies poster showing Curt and several of his protégés dressed up like cowboys and dance hall girls in an antique "wanted poster" genre, promoting a trip to Arizona. There are numerous calendars including one that features a flashback to the 1960's in the form of a red and blue tinted psychedelic Volkswagen car logo. A collection of various student-taken pictures featuring the greeting "Hi Curt" formed in marshmallows, multi-colored chalk, or written in mustard on a hot dog surrounded by ketchup and relish and sitting on a bun, decorate the walls. Opposite the posters, dorm fridge, and Curt's iMac, on the right-hand side of the room as you enter, are three, 3 X 5 foot tables made from sections of bowling alley lanes, at which students congregate at the beginning of class.

About thirty-five minutes before class, in strides Curt Stahr. He is a lean, six-foot, middle-aged man, with just-past-shoulder-length gray-blond hair. He darts back and forth between the film developing wet lab and the studio, putting the developing chemicals in the

large sink and the various trays for the film classes while he gets quiz copies ready for his Introduction to Digital Photography class. His hair is still wet from showering after his morning regimen of light weight-training and stretching over at Building 5. His gold, wire-rimmed glasses obscure his piercing blue eyes. He has a long, bushy horizontal mustache and an equally bushy funnel-shaped goatee that make him a dead ringer for either a rogue Harley rider or a late-life, sixties-era, Grateful Dead band member. His left-hand pinkie finger is decorated with a silver ring with a stamped design. A silver watch with a black-faced dial that has a black, wide-strapped, leather band wrapped around his wrist accompanies it. A red and black plaid flannel shirt adorns his matching black pants and t-shirt. His motif is completed with his fashionable Borne-brand replica leather shoes and low-cut, white ankle socks. He seems so very distant as he moves about the room, traveling into the studio adjoining the classroom and then back across the hall to the film developing wet lab. His looks and his demeanor give one reason to pause. But for those who dare to delve deeper, who ignore the obvious, there is much to learn and spiritual treasure to be unearthed.

Film speed refers to the sensitivity of the sensor (or film) to light (Stahr, Digital Photography). Curt's contribution to the world is measured by the "light" he shines on the passions in his life. Cornered out in the main hallway that he calls his office, Curt shares his approach to the physical aspect of being one who seeks to define the essence of life. Speaking in his nasally pitched, earthen tone he explains, "I get up at 3:30 every morning. I've got a big dog that weighs 140 pounds, and we run. I get back at 4:30 – quarter to five, clean up, spend some time with that dog, then go to the gym for forty-five minutes, just to stretch and do weights." He pauses for a moment; then his voice takes on a firmer, more serious tone. "I have to do it; when we go on all these physical field trips, I don't want to just 'go.' When we go in to the jungle or the boundary waters or wherever we go, I don't want to be the third one out of the portage, I want to be the first one. These kids that are 18, 19, 20, 25 or 29 years old still have control of what's physically going on, you know. Eventually, you get to a certain point that if you don't keep your muscle tone up along with everything else, you can't keep up with those young kids anymore."

His passion to physically keep up with his apprentices is mirrored by his desire to help them grow. Getting them started off on the right foot means starting at the beginning. "I like to teach the basics of everything, basics of film, basics of digital, basics of studio. I actually adjunct the other classes out a little bit, because I still think that if you don't know the basics of what you're going into, you'll never be able to grasp the advanced aspects of it. So, if you don't get the

students when they're young, thirsty, and eager, and give them that ground that they have to have, then they're not going to be any good later. Although after all these years it's awful repetitious, I still think it's the most valuable. The start is the best." When asked what he hopes to instill in each of his understudies, he asserts simply, "Pride."

Curt definitely has a self-developed sense of cool. He's hip, savvy and smart. But along with that cool, is a disciplined schoolmaster who will mentally or verbally rap a student across the knuckles if they're not taking this life experience seriously. He's passionate about his art. His displeasure is felt through a penetrating look, a blunt remark, or simple indifference; whichever suits the situation.

His love of animals is yet another example of his zeal for living. "I love animals. Growing up on the farm, we always had farm dogs and workhorses. Even in college I had dogs. I had a couple of big dogs, eighty to one hundred-pound dogs. I'd put them on the motorcycle and would drive to San Francisco or New York, and they were always with me. I had this one dog that just died a couple of years ago. We walked from Tijuana, Mexico, to Bogotá, Columbia, and back together, just that dog and me. That same dog went to the Artic Circle and Antarctica too. The dog's name was Jasper, the red dog. I was going to open up a bar and call it the Red Dog Inn, but I never had enough time. There is something about those animals; I don't know what it is. You know what they say, 'unconditional love.' They're good friends."

His passion for life is further shown through his love of music. On any given day one can hear Country Joe and The Fish, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, Government Mule or Delbert McClinton, just to name a few. He is candid as he speaks of his musical likes and dislikes, saying, "I like a pretty wide variety, but I like rambling blues more than anything. I listen to a lot of stuff, but I don't listen to rap because I can't stand their words. The way they degrade women is just pathetic and the violence, I just won't listen to that shit. I don't think they should say it, but nobody ever asked me." Curt sums up his passions and their relationship saying, "Teaching, loving animals, and being creative — sometimes they work hand in hand."

Like a roll of film, or a memory card for today's digital camera, Curt's life experiences are exposures that describe so much more. Curt has traveled to and plied his craft in nearly every country in the world. He reels off destinations as if they were streets in a small town. "I've been to the South Pole, North Pole, Iceland, Greenland, all of the states (United States), Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Japan, Mongolia, Russia, every South American country – Machu Picchu, Peru, Columbia, Brazil, Venezuela, and all of Central America a number of times, just about

everywhere.” He catches himself admitting, “But not Australia. I never went to Australia. I don’t know why.” His eyes transfix on something across the hallway, as he laments, “I never went there.”

Curt’s father died very young, and Curt would often call home to check in with his mom. While his mother knew his focus was photography, she really did not know ‘what’ he was doing or ‘where’ he was. Curt remembers one time in particular when he called home to check in with his mother. “I was in Bogotá, Columbia, in the middle of a minor revolution down there, a civil war. I was talking to my mother on the phone — lucky I could find a phone. She asked, ‘What was that noise in the background?’ I said, ‘machine guns.’ I was in my mid-30’s and she said, ‘I want you to call me every week and check in, but don’t you ever tell me where you are again.’” Curt laughs and says, “So, that’s how it is.”

A true flavor of Curt’s adventures and their impact on his students is given by Gloria Ekins, a fifty-six year old widow and mother of two grown daughters. “Curt told us we’d have a pizza party on the night of our final exam, and that he had a slide show we could see. We didn’t know until that night that they were slides of prints he’d taken in Vietnam during the war in the mid 1960’s. He told us he was one of few, if any as I remember, that had the opportunity to do four tours of Vietnam before there was such a thing as ‘embedded journalists.’ He was exposed to danger as the soldiers were. Following close, keeping his camera clicking while on foot or in helicopters, as things changed so quickly. They might meet a small group of villagers, including children on bikes or walking, spend a few seemingly innocent minutes talking with them, only to learn that as soon as they left, they had killed some of the US soldiers.

Everyone had to be considered dangerous, even women and children. He had pictures of the children, some with pets. One shot was of a soldier sitting next to him in full gear, with parachute ready to jump out the open side door of the helicopter. The next slide showed what was left of the man moments after a grenade or shot was a direct hit. Curt said it was before digital cameras and all shots were on film, which needed to be developed. With limited resources on the battlefield, he’d process the film using diluted coffee, which gave the prints a sepia tone. The US newspapers were anxious to receive any live photos from the field & his shots were well-received and publicized.”

Gloria remembers well the lasting impact that Curt had on her and her classmates as their class came to an end. “Our last evening, Curt gave us each a pocket size black and white photo mounted on pebble board of a statue unearthed in China a few years ago. Curt was one of only four photographers worldwide that was allowed to come and photograph the statues. The statues

looked like they were from the Ming dynasty. Curt also gave each of us a soft back photo journal book with several of his photos, short stories of students, plus an autobiography of Curt was included. There wasn't time to read it there, but when I did read it, I realized what an incredible career Curt has had, and how unassuming he comes across. I couldn't believe that I had a class under one of the most gifted photographers of this generation!"

The lens of the camera controls four functions: image size, image focus, depth of field and the amount of light reaching the sensor through the aperture (lens opening) (Stahr, Digital Photography). This control allows an artist to capture a unique perspective of a person, place, or thing. Like the lens, Curt's vision was derived by adapting a mindset akin to that of his mentors along with years of trials and adventures. This enables him to give perspective to things that are otherwise unseen. Curt's voice takes a near reverent tone as he shares famous painter Pablo Picasso and print maker Mauricio Lasansky as two of the men that he admires most. He shares about Lasansky, his gift to the world, and talks of Picasso and Lasansky's commonality. "He's a print maker from Iowa City. I've known him since the middle 1960's. He escaped the holocaust and came to Iowa.

The University of Iowa didn't have a printing department, so he started a printing department there. In 1967, he released this book called "The Nazi Drawings." The pictures were just horrific to look at. They were so controversial at the time, the University of Iowa, his home campus, wouldn't even show them. They were shown in another place, and the world just embraced them. They were terrible to look at with the story behind them, but for some guy to live through that and put it down visually was just unreal. Then the exhibit of forty lithographs came back to the University of Iowa in 1968, and the State of Iowa embraced him from that moment on. The same with Picasso, who was like Bob Dylan; he just reinvented himself whenever he had to so he could stay on top." What was most impressive of the pair? Curt revealed, "Their drive: it's just unbelievable."

The dorm-sized refrigerator's primary purpose is storage for rolls of film and maybe a couple bottles of Diet Mountain Dew. The stickers that litter the outside of the refrigerator provide snapshots of Curt's perspective. "I Adopted A Wolf," "Help Save the Florida Everglades," "Some Things Are Too Precious To Lose," "Save The Spirit Bear," and "Highland Park Veterinary Clinic," relate to his animal and nature loving tendencies. "1998 Right To Ride," "Sturgis 1995," "American Motorcycle Association 2000," and "Zooks Harley Davidson," give credence to his motorcycle background. "Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Museum," "Des Moines Skateboarding.com,"

“Lynne’s Paradise Café – Louisville, Kentucky,” and “Notice – No Whining,” round out some of his interests and tell of his policy regarding complainers.

The shutter of the camera controls the amount of time light is allowed to pass through the aperture to the sensor plane (Stahr, Digital Photography). Just as a finger pressing down on the shutter button controls the capturing of an event, so has Curt took charge of his destiny, showing time and time again that he is an entrepreneur who has built a career around his passions. Curt has taught at DMACC since 1990. He has trained and inspired many. His students have gone on to work for the likes of: The San Francisco Chronicle, The Des Moines Register, Annie Leibowitz, ELLE Magazine, freelancers that work for National Geographic, some of the biggest and best commercial photographers in town, and others who travel all over the world shooting for magazines. He photographs weddings, does commercial work for magazines, develops visual programs for corporations, and creates visual calendars for major companies around the United States. He has exhibited in sixty-four invited or juried art shows, twenty-two one-man art shows, and received twenty-one purchase awards. Additionally, he has been listed in: American Artists of Renown, Marquis Who’s Who in America, Marquis Who’s Who in the World, and Who’s Who in Photography.

Curt speaks candidly of his personal sojourn. “Happiness is pretty elusive. Some days it’s there, and some days it’s not. Some days it’s there for ten years, and all of a sudden it’s gone again. You can never underestimate it.” In reflecting on further, he divulges his mantra, “No regrets. And that’s what it’s going to say on my tombstone. I’ve loved a lot of women and let a lot of them go — no regrets.”

The amazing thing is that while you marvel over Curt's uniqueness, his passions, his vision, his independence, and the depth and breadth of Curt's life-long adventure, the fact remains that he is still an exposure yet to be fully developed.

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A Change of Scenery

It is the dead of winter. The TV no longer beckons, and the stack of magazines on the floor have all been read—twice. The obsession to clean closets and attack every smudge on the walls dwindles. The dust collects. Even the allure of shopping the winter clearance sales has lost its appeal. The feeling of restlessness starts to fester. The need for human contact is building. It's time for a change of scenery, even if only for a few hours. Where to go? How about a little trip to Ireland, Japan, the Old West, or a walk down a dark, dank alley in Chinatown? What about a trip in time to an unsettling future, or to the arms of a forbidden lover during World War II? All these alter worlds and more are waiting at the Newton Public Library, as well as real, live people.

The Newton Public Library is really a tourist attraction with its unique architecture of brick, metal and glass. The center, or core of this sprawling complex, reaches upwards to allow the lineup of windows to let in natural light. The blue metal roof has several peaks, and today one cannot help but notice the arrangement of icicles hanging from every soffit. They look like uneven silvery fangs and are a perfect backdrop for Sir Rustalot who also is displaying jagged teeth. The lounging lizard sculpture, knighted Sir Rustalot, is on the left side of the lawn in front of the main entrance to the library. Today he looks like a frozen dragon protecting a medieval ice castle.

On the right side of the main entrance, adjacent to the lizard, is a rather large whimsical-painted chair. The rainbow-colored chair is way too tall for anyone to climb on to without using a ladder. I wonder how many imaginative children, too young to read the library sign in front of the building, think this is the home of a giant.

Upon entering the double glass doors, I notice there is a sharp contrast between the going-about-your-business sounds outside and the absence of them on the inside. In fact, the library seems to be in hibernation mode. Two glass cases, located just inside the entrance, are completely empty. Normally they hold interesting displays of butterflies, or arrowheads and the like. The “click, click” when stepping through the metal security frames (that make an entirely different sound when patrons walk out with un-checked books), seems unusually loud. No one is at the

book checkout counter, but the sound of a label-maker or adding-machine can be heard from the room directly behind it. Where is everybody?

The newest books are displayed on a round table. Supported by their binders, the books stand in a perfect circle, as if they've never been handled by a curious reader. Looking to the left, the pre-teen section that houses books that are appropriate for 4th, 5th and 6th graders, is shadowed. The Carousel Horse Room, a safe haven for the elementary multitude, is normally bubbling with excited voices; today the room is empty, and the carousel horse that stands in the center of the room stands alone. There are no children clambering for a seat in the saddle.

Venturing to the middle of the large room, I find the intersection to reading fulfillment is strangely quiet. Turning to the right, I take the path between the rows of whispering romance novels, adrenalin-junkie mysteries, shoot-em-up-then-get-the-girl westerns, and "my life is an open book" autobiographies on either side of me. One may find it difficult to leave this highly seductive section.

Emerging, alas I see two older women, both cloaked in gray sweaters. They're standing, hunched over a table, brows furrowed, concentrating on a large jigsaw puzzle. Neither woman looks up nor do they speak, not even to each other. They circle the table as if to corral it from running off on all four legs. I start to take a seat at the table next to them, when I see movement behind the rows of books I just walked past.

A man, or at least I think it is a man, is browsing behind the rows of books. The shelves ascend upward and are spaced just right, so that the man looks like he has neither feet nor head. When he steps into the aisle, I see he does indeed have both, but his head is encased in a hood. Since he walks away in the opposite direction, I cannot see his face.

The two women in gray sweaters are still mum. I get up from sitting awhile, and plunge into the next passageway which leads to promises of financial freedom, exotic travel, second careers, how-to hobbies, religious realms, and outdated reference books. A few steps and I realize there are people here. Rounded chairs hug the outer walls that encase this section, and two people take advantage of the privacy there. Hands hold books where their faces would have been.

Just to the right, the newspaper and magazine section entertains a few individuals, whose clothing appears to be as rumpled as the newspapers they are reading. These people hide their faces as well behind the headlines of today's news. It seems that the few people here wish to be

invisible, and the icy feel on the inside of the building, is not all that dissimilar to the outside of the building today.

While shuddering from a sudden chill, I make my way back towards the front of the library. In doing so, I pass two middle-age librarians standing very close behind an aisle of audio books. They are whispering, not for the facade of a library rule, but for the secret they appear to be sharing. Then startlingly there is a child's voice. Where did that come from? She hollers, "Mommy, I'm out of bullets!" A little girl, of slight build, is sitting near the end of the children's section playing some sort of video game on a computer. Her mother is nowhere in sight, and the child continues to play her game. She's oblivious to the children's books all lined up in bins, just the right height for little people, their curious and colorful titles begging for her attention.

A woman, at last, is sitting behind the information desk—with no one in quest of information. The sound of paper shuffling, and an occasional key stroke, makes her appear to be busy. Beyond this point are the computer terminals for internet use, all lined up at attention, to be of service to the first user. The study rooms are dark and uninviting. Even the blinds in this section of the library are drawn, for fear that if any light filters in, it would be an invitation. The atmosphere in the library today is not its norm, which is usually busy with activity.

I now realize I have wandered in a circle and am facing the front entrance, where the activity of people, cars, and the sounds that accompany them, await just on the other side of the double glass doors. My afternoon at the library feels more like a trip to the twilight zone. The silence is unusual, even for a library. The lack of patrons is strange as well. The light coming from the other side of the doors draws me forward. The feeling of restlessness starts to fester. The need for normal human contact is building. I think it is time for another change of scenery, and out I go.



Big Universities Can be a Big Mistake

After high school, nearly all students hear the same question asked again and again: “Where are you going to college?” Many students answer with the name of a four-year university with a huge price tag. Unfortunately, very few students want to say they are going to a community college. They are afraid their friends will look down on them because they could not attend a high-end college, or their parents will be disappointed in them for wasting their academic skills at a substandard college. However, more and more students are recognizing community colleges because they “serve nearly half the country’s undergraduates” (Teicher 1) and have programs that can benefit anyone from high school graduates, “second career starters . . . and new immigrants” (Teicher 1). More students should be attending community colleges because for over half the cost of a four-year university, students receive endless services and opportunities, as well as an education from knowledgeable instructors.

Many new college students do not consider community colleges because they lack the status of four-year universities. While community colleges are not as well known as other universities, community colleges have made up for what they lack in prestige in other areas. For example, community colleges do not have any entrance exams (Boss 1), so students can begin at a community college regardless of their educational experiences, and then transfer to a four-year university when they are ready. Many community colleges now have articulation agreements with larger colleges which “spell out which courses count for credit at the four year school” (A.M. 1). With these articulation agreements, students can fulfill many, if not all, of their general education requirements and then transfer to a four-year college to focus solely on their major. Through articulation agreements, students can graduate with a degree from a widely recognized university although they started in a community college.

Many students consider community colleges because they are more affordable than four-year universities. According to Cost of Attendance figures, on average, a student who attends a four-year university pays \$10,980 a year for tuition, room and board, books, and other miscellaneous expenses; however, a community college student, on average, pays \$6,912. Also,

since community colleges are often close to home, those who attend one can live at home, cutting that cost in half (Kirkland 1). Students who want to continue their education realize it will not be cheap and by attending community colleges they can save money.

Four-year universities are now beginning to realize how many students attend community colleges, especially since many of the students want to transfer to a four-year university after completing their degree. So, four-year universities are beginning to acknowledge these students by offering scholarships specifically for community college students. For example, Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society for community colleges, has agreements with many four-year colleges to offer transfer students automatic scholarships simply because the students attended community college before a four-year college and did well academically (Dungy 2). Therefore, community college students are still able to get an education, but at a reasonable price with worthwhile benefits.

Community colleges are much smaller than four-year universities, and students do not consider how the smaller size can benefit them. Class sizes at community colleges have a range between “eight and 20 students” (Straw 1), which allows for more beneficial class time. Because of small class sizes, students can easily ask their instructors questions, which helps them learn quicker because they will not have to feel overwhelmed and confused by the new information they are learning. Also, by interacting with instructors, the instructors become more aware of their students’ capabilities, which allow them to change their lessons to better suit their students’ educational needs (Straw 1).

Community colleges also offer “remedial courses, so students who have not performed well in the past can build their skills” (Wheelan 2). Students who attend community colleges do not receive less of an education. They receive one made specifically for them by instructors who know the information best. Community colleges also have to follow “rigorous and exacting rules and regulations” and if they do not meet these requirements, they could lose their funding and accreditation (Garmon 1). Through these regulations, students who attend community colleges are assured a high-quality education, possibly superior to that of a four-year university.

More students should attend community colleges because they can receive the same education offered at four-year universities. Students may think the instructors are not as smart, or are just working at the community college until there is an opening at a four-year college. However, the delusion concerning poor instructors is one of the biggest myths about community

colleges. According to Deborah Straw, an adjunct instructor at the community college of Vermont, “most teachers . . . have a Master’s degree, and a few have a Ph.D.” (1).

Also, instructors at community colleges “see themselves as teachers rather than researchers” (Rowh 2). Since the professors want to teach, they actually will teach, instead of allowing a graduate student, who is still learning the material and has no teaching experience, to lead the class. Barbara Risser, the Vice President of Student and Academic Services at the State University of New York claims that community college “faculty . . . have chosen to dedicate themselves to the classroom rather than to focus their energy on research interests” (qtd. in Rowh 2). This allows students to receive an education from those who best know the material and who are passionate about passing that knowledge on to others.

More college students should take advantage of services, such as a variety of classes offered for low tuition, that community colleges have ensured for everyone who attends. Upon attending a community college, students are greeted with passionate teachers, small class sizes, and articulation agreements in order to help them earn the degrees they desire. There is no reason for every student to start at a four-year university. Students who start at community colleges receive the same education as those at a four-year university, possibly even better, and are given every opportunity to succeed. Prospective college students should consider community colleges before making the decision of where to go to school. They may be surprised with what they find.

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He was gone

I was only three years old at the time. I do not remember much about him. The war started and he had to leave the family. The Serbs invaded Bosnia and threatened to transport the Muslim women to their side, and any men they found would be killed. My father, Salih, had to go through the woods, and try to save his life. I did not understand why or where he was going, so I said, "Father will you bring me some pears?" He let a tear drop down his cheek and nodded "Yes honey." Then, he looked up to my mother Ziba, and hugged her. They both were crying, and he said, "Take care of her, only her. She's our baby and always will be." He hugged and kissed us all goodbye, and then left. Then, my life completely changed, and my mother became head of the household.

Later, my mother had to take all of the responsibilities. My oldest sister Armina was married in Germany during the war. My second sister Remzija was also married, and decided to go with her husband to hide in the woods. We have never heard of them. Mom had to take care of us other three girls; Saida, Sabiha, and me, Semina. Mom thought us three everything. We were always good students and helpful children with good manners. Everyone in the city recognized us and knew whose children we were. Living with three girls alone, and no man in the house, my mother worked extremely hard. She tried her best in making us grow into strong and smart children. I remember her leaving for work and telling us to lock the doors. Without my father being there, there was no one else to protect us. Even today, whenever I come inside the house, I lock the door behind me because we never knew who would come to the door.

Ten years later, after the war on Bosnia ended, my other two sisters Saida and Sabiha got married and created a supporting family. However, it still was not safe living in Bosnia. People still hated each other. Mother figured out that I would soon be going on to high school, and in order to send me, she needed money and she did not have any. She heard about the Croatian Embassy letting people who suffered from war go to United States. We, the two of us, went through the two-year process of filling out papers. My mother had an interview with an American person to explain everything she had experienced during the war. Mother wanted to give me a better future.

We qualified, and they said we passed and will go to United States. Now I understood why my father said to take care of only me, because my sisters were growing up, and I was the baby. It was so hard to leave our family, my sisters and their kids behind. Two weeks before leaving for America, my mom had two heart attacks, but she got better and we left.

Coming to United States was something amazing for me; I imagined I would have everything: television, kitchen, living room, my own room, mom's room, bathroom plus go on to high school. First getting out of the airplane, I smelled fresh air and saw a clean airport of Waterloo. I did not know where I was going or how it would look. But when I saw good and nice people and a clean environment, that made me feel safe, and it was almost like my father was there to protect me. Walking in to our apartment and seeing all these things I would never had if we stayed in Bosnia, made me so happy. My mother began to cry. She was happy to see me so excited in a long time. Then on our new kitchen table, I saw nice, beautiful, yellow and green pears like my father used to bring us from the woods. Only then, I did realize that he was not coming back, and that my father was really gone. Life still had to go on.

A few days later my mother had to have surgery, and the doctors said that if she did not have one she would die. Another advantage of coming to America was saving my mom's life. Since her surgery, her health has been just great. I had to do everything; caring for her, cleaning the house, paying the bills, and working every job possible. I first did some detaseling, then picked strawberries, worked in a nursing home, as a waitress, baby sat, cleaned people's houses, and more. Even today I do all of this. But in return, I matured much faster, and grew up as a strong and good child.

Although I do all of this, my mother is still head of the house and tells me what to or what not to do, and I truly respect that. So this is where I grew up to be a good person. But if my mother did not care for what I do, she would not be a big part of my life now. I would have turned out to have bad grades and wouldn't be able to go on to college. In my family, not just my sisters, but other relatives, I am the first person who has successfully finished high school and gone on to college. If my father were here, I am sure he would have been proud of me.

I grew up in a household that not lost a father, but the only man in the house. Being raised by a strong, smart and strict mother, I turned out to be a one smart daughter and a strong girl. Losing my father has made a big impact on my life, but it was all chosen by dear Lord, and I just follow it. Today I just keep being the best I can, and keep hoping that my father is in heaven. My mother has never remarried and always says that he's still her husband, and he is in her heart

forever. She also mentions that I look and remind her of him by the way I act. Just putting this real life story which happened to me on a paper brought me to tears. We still buy pears all of the time and pears are my favorite fruit of all.



Why Competency Tests

In high schools nationwide, students take tests in individual classes to identify what essential skills they have mastered and what areas they still desperately need to improve in before these students move on to bigger and better things, such as higher education at a community college or at a university. When it comes to developing and putting into effect a universal policy having one set of standardized tests as a graduation requirement, however, many would disagree. Thus, the question is asked, “Should all high schools have to take and pass a set of standardized tests as a requirement for graduation?” Yes, competency tests should be taken in order to graduate from high school so that students can recognize and improve their skills to be able to succeed in their college education, in their chosen careers, and finally in their personal lives.

To begin with, high schools should have these competency tests so that students can recognize and improve their basic skills in order to continue their studies beyond high school. The tests and areas that it would cover would include reading, writing, math, social studies, and science. Evaluating those areas would allow not only the students but also the teachers to realize if the students themselves are learning and if the teachers are preparing the students for their futures.

Basically, what this means is that these essential skills are needed in every aspect of living a normal life. Then if these tests do not become mandatory for graduation, students would not have the knowledge of which of their skills are weak and which are strong. Without knowing this information, students would suffer a major amount of stress and frustration if they were to pass on from high school to college. Moreover, having set standards that students must meet in competency tests to be permitted to graduate is a positive because it will demonstrate if they are ready for college-level courses or not. Recognizing and improving their skills means they will know if they should move on to college.

One factor as to why high schools should have these competency tests relates to demonstrating whether the students will have the talent to succeed in college. A student who has not obtained the knowledge and basic skills needed before enrolling in college-level courses has

a more difficult time succeeding; in addition, if pupils do not have the foundation to take college courses, they must start out in preparatory courses which will earn them no credits, and in some cases, will waste time and even money taking them. Another point is that these students should have good organizational skills. In writing classes, for instance, students have to set a logical format with how the assigned writing is supposed to be developed so that their writing will be coherent, consistent, and unified. If the writing is not developed correctly, it sounds very choppy and may not flow from the introduction to the conclusion, which will diminish a reader's interest.

Another instance relates to reading: Students must know organizational structure and be able to use it for reading a paragraph or even an essay. If students do not possess the capability to read and to comprehend when a test comes up, it is hard for them to understand what the questions are asking and also what is necessary in a response. A sample incident arises perhaps with someone who is not capable of reading an assigned article and not understanding what he or she was supposed to take from it. Another student will have to sit down next to this friend and begin reading the assignment while the confused one takes notes. As a result, of having help, the student in trouble will be able to understand and to complete the assignment successfully and on time. Succeeding in their college education is not the end, however, since individuals will need essential skills for their future occupations.

Indeed, the next factor as to why high schools should have these competency tests for students is to help them to succeed in chosen careers. For instance, for someone to succeed in almost any field, he or she must have excellent communication skills. If a person is not capable of being able to write plain, formal English, how is he or she to be expected to produce acceptable pieces of writing and other forms of communication? An individual who cannot read as well will not be able to write reports of the work that was completed for that day; therefore, this will cause confusion and chaos. Finally, having the knowledge of using a computer for writing and documenting important pieces of information is crucial. This is important because in this modern age in almost all lines of work, the individual needs to have down the basics such as writing and typing to document information; in addition, many will create PowerPoints to use as presentation tools.

Although succeeding in a chosen career is good, succeeding in personal life is even more rewarding, and tests will help students as well to be successful in their personal lives. For example, it is necessary to have the ability to do basic arithmetic, such as to balance a checkbook. If people not have the basic math skills to know how to handle their finances efficiently, they will

not be able to do addition or subtraction to find out how much money they are spending and how much is still left in their checking accounts.

Also, people must have the intelligence to read and comprehend their mail; this includes bills and letters. For instance, one TV commercial depicts a father who cannot read his mail. Since he cannot read the material, he has his daughter read his mail to him ~ until the day comes when the daughter goes off to college. Then she gets someone else who will help him. This father is very fortunate because there are other types of consequences that could have taken place. Some of those are that his bills and letters could started to pile up, unread and unpaid, or he could have gone back to school to learn how to read so that he can reply to his letters and bills to get them paid on time.

For all the above factors, therefore, it will be beneficial to have all high schools administer competency tests as a graduation requirement to so that students can recognize and improve their skills and if they should graduate and move on to be successful in their college education, in their chosen career, and, lastly, in their personal lives. Also, the realization that having these types of tests has a positive effect on students that should be enforced with great care. That is why having to take competency tests before graduating would end up benefiting students in every school district. If taking these tests is a benefit and it is little effort to administer them, why not do this?



Add Some Spice to your Life

There is a new and exciting way to put some spice in your life. It is an effortless way to experience a different culture and try something you have never tried before. All you have to do is take a short drive down 8th Street in West Des Moines to the relatively new four-star restaurant, Tandoor. Tandoor is the only restaurant in the city that has created a menu of Indian, Pakistani, and Mediterranean cuisine.

The restaurant is warm and inviting with rich gold paint on the walls. Because of its breathtaking design, the ceiling looks as though it came straight from inside an Indian place of worship. It curves up from the walls, and is a shiny gold color. It may almost be competition for the Iowa Capitol Building. Soft soothing music, authentic to India, along with the fireplace in the dining room creates a wonderfully cozy atmosphere for lunch or dinner.

There are only fifteen tables in the entire restaurant. That helps it feel more like your server is paying attention to you, not the laundry list of other tables and things they might have to do instead. There is also a patio available for when the weather is nice. Every table has a candle lit in the center to set a classy mood. The water glasses are shown off with a red towel folded into them origami style.

The food at Tandoor uses “fragrant, warm, and pungent spices, which are delicately blended in meticulous proportions to create every dish.” Tandoor’s bread is baked fresh in a clay oven, which gives you the authentic taste of true Indian cuisine. During lunchtime you can go in and eat at the buffet, or if you would rather stop in for dinner the full menu is available.

When I walked in, the first thing I noticed was the strong aroma of curry. It was as though a linebacker thrust himself into my nose at full speed. It is not a scent that is easy to forget, nor is it easy to get off of your clothes once you leave. The hostess, an adorable blonde high school girl, took my date and me to a welcoming table in front of the fireplace.

Once we were seated the owner of the restaurant, Faraz Asad, came right up to our table and asked if we had been to Tandoor before. Since it was our first time, we said “No,” and Asad continued to talk to us and help us understand what was going on. First he explained the menu to us. He taught us some words that would help us make our decisions in what to eat. For example, “murgh” means chicken; “naan” is the word for bread.

Asad enjoys talking to people who come into his restaurant and inviting them back again. It is a refreshing idea when you think about it because not many restaurant owners actually go into their restaurants on a regular basis. Asad is in Tandoor all day, everyday. After asking Asad several questions about his establishment, he explained to me that Tandoor has only been open for three years. There are only two cooks, and they are there every day. They are a married couple from India named Sheik (pronounced Shake) and Kamala. They have a junior-high aged daughter named Sweetie. Sweetie hangs out in the back of the restaurant while her parents are at work. That is proof that Tandoor is not only a family oriented place on the dining room floor but also in the kitchen.

Everything served at Tandoor is made from scratch. The chefs take great pride in making every meal special. Instead of food being cooked in an oven like we would think of in America, it is cooked in a tandoor. A tandoor is the traditional oven of North India. It is basically a beehive-shaped clay pot. This simple oven is heated by charcoal or wood. When meat is cooked inside of a tandoor, it is hung in the middle on long skewers. Breads are cooked by being stuck to the inside walls of the tandoor.

With all of the newspapers and magazines around town raving for Tandoor, there is no reason for anybody to make excuses as to why they cannot or do not want to go. The food was excellent, with just the right amount of spice. It was full of flavor and a great alternative to the normal American diet. The service was first-class, and the prices were reasonable. Anyone who is looking to experience a different culture while staying in his or her home town is encouraged to try Tandoor. Do not be afraid to let loose, "Add some spice to your life!"



Parminder Kaur Papp
2nd Place – College Preparatory Writing

uasive Essay

The Positive Effects of Androgyny

Parents should try to teach children to be androgynous as this will help people to live their lives freely, instead of capturing under certain principles or beliefs carried on by a family or society. Androgyny as a term involves redefining gender roles and attaching new meaning to the concepts of masculinity and femininity. In the world of androgyny, children are not chastised for being tomboys or sissies. It is a concept where children are taught there are no such things as “boys’ toys” and “girls’ toys”. In order for a family and society to function properly, people should not set disparity for gender roles, professions, for emotions and for sensitivity when circumstances warrant.

Many societies determine gender roles. Androgyny melts the division of work based on sex. For example in many parts of the world the perception is that women are attached to the kitchen, looking after children, cleaning the house and going out for grocery shopping. On the other hand, men are seen responsible to bring income to run a house, take major family decisions, fix every leak in the roof, every gap in the fence, every cough in the engine and to drop bombs and die in the war.

There is a need of mutual understanding between men and women in a family where work is performed by whoever is capable, regardless of sex. Men can cook food, look after children, clean the house and buy grocery. Women, at the same time, should not wait for men to fix the house, if possessed with certain knowledge or are capable of performing particular task. Without setting up boundaries between men’s work and women’s work, a lot can be learnt from one another. Blaming each other for not performing his/her duty can be reduced. Thus androgyny can help society to tear down the border line which distinguishes men’s and women’s roles based on the sex.

Professions when limited to certain gender can reduce job opportunities and desire to choose a certain job. Today women are capable of performing traditional men’s work in the military, in the field of law, medicine, science and politics. When certain limited professions are open for women, we can recall some names such as Sunita Williams, (NASA Astronaut) the first lady astronaut who spent 6 months in the space station (2007); Sonia Gandhi, current chairman of Indian national congress part (2007) and Hillary Clinton, the U.S Senator from New York running for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination.

During WWI (World War I) Princess Eugenie Shakhovskaya and Princess Sophie Alexandrovna Dolgorunaya were among the first women to become military pilots in Europe. Though American women pilots volunteered, none were taken seriously. Many of us know the story of “The Gallant WASP Pilots.” Who flew every airplane made during WWII, which also including an experimental jet at 350 mph at 35,000 feet, (flown by Ann Baumgartner in 1944). They were not considered military pilots until decades later. History tells us that the first licensed woman pilot in the United States was Harriet Quimby in 1911.

Similarly, social and cultural attitudes often discourage men who pursue “feminine roles” such as homemaker, secretary, nurse, flight attendant, and housekeeper. Yet some famous names as the best chefs in the world are not women but men. For example, Ming Tsai is one of the most celebrated Chinese Chefs in Boston; Sanjeev Kapoor is one of the top chefs in India and Antonio Carluccio is a much-celebrated Italian cook. It can be seen that men also have far excelled in the area of cooking and emblaze their names among the best cooks of the world. Thus we can learn that following concept of androgyny it can be stated that women and men are not born with limited professions. Professions when experimented by both the genders can set examples and make history for generations to explore new ideas.

Androgyny embraces the full range of human emotions and sensitivity. Men in some societies are seen being aggressive, athletic, physically active, logical, and dominant in social relationship with females. On the other hand, women include passivity, docility, fragility, emotionality, and subordination to males. Following androgyny boys are taught that it is okay to cry and that is perfectly natural when circumstances demand. It is natural that when one feels a heavy heart it is better to cry so as to feel better. In this way, emotions are revealed and one feels better. There is no such law written that boys are not allowed to cry.

Similarly, girls are taught to be aggressive and assertive when social situations call for such behavior. It is important for girls to be aggressive and develop self-confidence so as to protect them from physical harm and to form their individual personality in the world. Thus, it becomes easy to express emotions and build a new sense of self-confidence among men and women.

It is highly important for families and society to broaden their thinking regarding gender roles, In order to make lives easy and for the prosperity of a nation as a whole. It is time for those societies to welcome new changes into their traditions and leave behind old beliefs where a boy is desired in a family and girls are aborted. When boys and girls are equally treated and no

distinction is made we call this androgyny, as a term which involves redefining gender roles and attaching new meaning to the concepts of masculinity and femininity.

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Michelle Reeve
3rd Place – College Preparatory Writing

Personal Narrative

The Measure of a Friend

Everybody has memories of special friends in his/her life; many of mine happen to be of the four-legged variety. My special friends were always there for me when I needed them and could always make me feel better. Although there have been many companions over the years, there are those few who stand out in my memory and always will. Unfortunately, special friends cannot stay with us forever; nonetheless, I have no doubt that I will always keep in my heart the memories of Mitzi, Chipper Kealy Cat and Izzy.

I have so many memories about Mitzi; after all, she was my first dog. We had her for as long as I can remember. She was nearly all black with a little bit of white on her chest and was a rather small dog; however, she had a big and very brave heart. One of the things that I remember most about Mitzi is how protective she was. Everyone got a kick out of how she would react when our dad would get mad at one of us. Now and then he would tease Mitzi by pretending that he was going to spank one of us. However, as one might imagine, this did not go over so well with her. She would growl, bark and even try to sometimes bite him. Mitzi, who was with us until she was about 14, was always a faithful friend, but like all good friends we had to say good-bye to her.

A few years before we had to say good-bye to Mitzi, I was lucky enough to find Chipper; she was a beautiful six-month-old German Shepherd/Collie mix. I was outside in the front yard when I first saw her wandering around across the street; she almost had been hit by a car. We had an immediate connection, and I knew she was meant to be a part of our family.

Unfortunately, getting our dad to realize this was a completely different matter. Our mom, however, was very helpful. In fact, she helped us hide Chipper in the backyard for a couple days, just until our dad could be convinced she should be our dog. Once we had taken care of that little problem, Chipper fit right in, and with a little help from Mitzi, she learned all the rules of the house. Finding her that day was a gift, and one that we never took for granted. Chipper was about thirteen years old when we found out that she had cancer. Since my mom did not want to see her suffer, we all gave her a kiss and said good-bye to our beautiful girl.

Growing up, we had many family pets, but when I was about twelve years old my mom took me out to the Animal Rescue League when I met Kealy Cat. He wasn't even old enough to be away from his mother yet. He was so tiny that all you could see was the tip of his little black tail sticking out over the top of the litter box. Kealy came home with me that day, and for the first time I had a kitty that was all mine. In the beginning, he was a little black ball of pure energy,

always getting into trouble. Sometimes, though, he found it difficult to get to where he wanted since he was so small, but he did not let that stop him.

He learned very quickly that he could climb anything. In fact, he would climb up my pant leg and perch himself right on my shoulder; he did this his whole life. I guess he always thought he was that little kitten I had brought home. We were inseparable; he slept in my room every night. I only wish we could have had more time with each other. One night when I was seventeen, I came home from work, and my mom told me that Kealy Cat had died. This time I didn't get to say good-bye; he was just gone.

Then, just a few years back, my son and I found a stray cat hiding under a car, and even though there were no animals allowed in the apartments, I figured she was worth the risk. Every pet has its own unique personality, and the cat we named "Izzy" was no different. One of the greatest things about her was her greeting. For example, I would come home from a long day at work, and there she was, more like a dog than a cat, always at the door to greet me. Mornings were no different, and on the rare occasions she did not sleep with me, she would be up bright and early to start my day off with her little Izzy smile.

Then one morning, she was nowhere to be found. This was strange because she was always there, so I looked for her. While I was looking for her, I realized one of my other cats was also missing. Later that day, I noticed a screen was out of one of the windows; I realized they must have gotten out sometime in the night. I searched for days with no luck, and a couple of weeks later Frankie, the other cat who was missing, just showed up on the porch. However, I never did see my Izzy again. I always hoped she had found someone else to love her just as much as I did.

I have always wondered how we determine what makes a good friend. Do we base it on how much time we spend together, or maybe the fun we have together? I guess, in my opinion, the true measure of a friend is decided in the heart. I have had many human friends in my life, although I am not so sure that they are any better than my special furry friends. After all, animals will not judge us or put us down; they just love us. So, whether my "friends" can talk to me or even understand what I am saying to them really makes no difference; my heart has always let me know who my true friends are.



Christopher Colgrove
Composition I

Informative Essay

Pornography in Schools and Libraries

In our ever-changing and modern world, information is becoming easily available, maybe too easily. Children of all ages are now able to plop in their dad's comfy office chair, push the power button, and in front of their eyes they have an unlimited pathway to knowledge. "What a wonderful world we live in!" one might say. However, like all great tools the internet is only effective in the right hands. Not all information available to children is beneficial. With so much pornography and adult content permeating the internet, our society needs to be careful as to what children are allowed to witness. Libraries and schools should have the right to block their students from sites containing pornographic and adult content.

A public library is not the place to view pornography. Regina Lynn, weekly columnist at Wired.com and author of The Sexual Revolution 2.0, believes that although adults should not be limited in what they view, people should also realize that there is a time and place for all things. At a public environment such as a library or school, parents should not have to worry about their children having unlimited access to sites that they would otherwise be unable to view.

Although some may think that blocking pornography may violate the First Amendment, Lynn states, "...it's not particularly polite to have adult content up where children...can suffer accidental exposure. Part of supporting an adult's freedom of sexual expression...is recognizing that we live in communities, and that we need to respect other's right not to be subjected to our taste just as we'd rather not be subjected to theirs." Our public libraries are to be a safe environment for learning, and not a place for physical self-gratification, such as surfing porn. A policy adopted by the Loudon County Public Library in October of 1997 states,

"Library pornography can create a sexually-hostile environment for patrons or staff. Pornographic internet displays may intimidate patrons or staff, denying them equal access to public facilities. Such displays would transform the library environment from one of reading and scholarship to one which invites unwelcome sexual advances and sexual harassment."

(qtd. In Policy on Internet Sexual Harassment)

Also, many in the United States hold to certain religious beliefs and standards resulting in banishment of all adult content from the home. Children are then not allowed to view this content in the privacy of their own home, and should therefore not be allowed to view it at school or the library. It is the responsibility of parents to raise their children, and if rules apply in the home then they should apply outside.

Though some think pornography should be allowed, their beliefs should not be imposed on those who do not think it is right. Rebellion in children is also encouraged when they are allowed to participate in activities strictly forbidden by their parents. This is known as conflicting authority. According to Gregory Baker, a professional counselor and pastor, a devastating situation for a child is when parents say one thing, and someone else says a different thing. Baker believes that rebellion's greatest contributor is conflicting authority.

Pornographic sites are not only harmful to children but also to our computers. According to Ethan Webb, computer programmer at the corporation GeoLearning, there are four basic types of harmful applications which pc's (personal computers) are exposed to on pornographic sites. The first is a computer virus. A computer virus is simply a computer program that can copy itself and infect an individual's computer without his or her knowledge. This program is not a friendly application. Viruses can do a variety of things including wiping a computer of all information or even as severe as disabling the computer entirely, making it useless. The next three applications are closely related and are known as spyware, malware, and adaware. These infiltrate a computer's system and oftentimes damage or corrupt the computer's operating system and files on the hard drive. These applications can also take partial control over the user's interaction with the computer.

Finally, another downfall of unblocked pornographic sites in public libraries and schools is that children can be exposed to these acts without parents. Some may argue that firewalls installed to block porn also blocks sites designed to instruct young people in sex education, but should children really be learning sex education from a computer at their public library or school? Instructing young people about sex is not the responsibility of text on a screen, or a video streaming over the worldwide web, but rather the job of parents and teachers. If children access pornography without parents present to put it in a proper context, it can be detrimental to a child's learning. By doing this they may receive the wrong idea about sex.

Vida Juozaitis, a teacher who has taught in schools around the world, in her article "Sex and Censorship in School Libraries" states, "The UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) report concludes that success in lowering the teenage birth rates in the Netherlands, for instance, has resulted from 'the combination of a relatively inclusive society with more open attitudes towards sex and sex education, including contraception.'" Parents and teachers must take the time to explain the pros and cons of sexual activity instead of allowing children to learn from degraded sex acts portrayed on a computer screen.

As one can see, open access to pornographic sites in public libraries and schools can be harmful in multiple ways. It is in many cases impolite or offensive, children may get the wrong idea about sex, and computers suffer exposure to harmful applications. These sites should be banned from public places in order to protect young children from accidental exposure, and to keep offensive content to the minimal.

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1996: a 45-Minute Catastrophe

It was early in the evening in 1996, when our greatest enemies found their way in my rural community. It was a battle that can be described as the greatest and most horrible battle of all times in this Sudan civil war. My people have always looked at Arabs living in the north as invaders, and outsiders. They are not Sudanese nor are they African Arabs. In my memory this was the most horrible battle, even though it lasted for only 45 minutes; the memory of the deaths and suffering of my innocent people will last my lifetime. I really hated seeing the death of innocent people in this civil war.

The two parties that clashed in this war and divided the country into north and south Sudan are National Islamic front and Sudanese people liberation movement. The National Islamic Front (NIF) is the political organization that controls Sudan. It is a dominating political system that is based in Northern part of Sudan and is made up of Arabs. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and its political wing, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPL/AM) is a Sudanese rebel movement based in Southern Sudan and dominated by black Africans.

When the fight between SPLA/M and NIF began, I was outside with my family. We were playing, eating and getting ready to go to bed as we usually do. On that day I did not know that some people would die due to this foolish civil war. In this terrible war you cannot know what is happening or if you are breathing until the war is over.

We lived close to SPLA/M military base and refugee camp. When NIF came, they went directly to the refugee camp believing that it was a military base, and some of NIF forces came toward our village because they thought that SPLA had a branch in our village. Our house was across the road from the refugee camp and there was a big tree on the right side of our house where there was a SPLA check point. Some of the NIF soldiers came directly to our house since they thought that our house was a branch of SPLA/M. I think this happened because my father was a SPLA soldier and lots of soldiers were coming to my house everyday including the highest ranking commanders. Sometimes they would spend a night in our house.

The NIF soldiers began to shoot at refugees thinking that they were SPLA soldiers. A SPLA soldier who happened to be at the refugee camp shot back at them and was immediately killed in cross-fire. The NIF continued to shoot at the refugees. People were running away for their life, screaming and mourning for the death of their children or mothers. People were suffering and dying like animals,

The SPLA realized that their enemy had missed them and if they don't do anything soon, the NIF would finish the refugees. The SPLA decided to shot toward NIF with heavy weapons to show their enemy where they were. Finally the two enemies found each other and fought a deadly battle that resulted in the suffering and death of innocent people. They fought a fight that lasted for 45 minutes, no more. But the refugees, were suffering because they found themselves in-between two enemies.

While the two enemies were fighting, some of the NIF forces came toward our village. My house was the first house they came in. The danger was even greater now for us, but the good news was that my father was at home. My father, Yak, was a well-trained soldier; he was a soldier at the first war. My father fought many wars and he knew how to fight very well. I believe he could fight many soldiers by himself. The NIF soldiers came towards our house and as they came, my father got his gun, an AK-47. He urged us to find a hiding place and stay together if possible.

Instead of finding a hiding place with us, my father decided to go into our front yard and face NIF soldiers who came towards us. As it was late evening, it was already dark but the soldiers fired rockets and it seemed like daytime. The NIF soldier shot in the direction where my father was standing. My father shot back at them; the shoot-out lasted for a while. My siblings and I ran into the house and hid under the beds, but the soldiers were shooting at the roof and staying under the beds became unsafe.

I was thinking that both the NIF and SPLA/M may hit the house with grenades and set the house on fire. So I decided to take my sisters and brothers outside with me so, we can lie down in the backyard behind the bushes where we could not be seen. I left my siblings in the hiding place and ran to help my father. My father sent me to get more bullets. It was a deadly moment for us. If my father had not been there to fight for us, we would all have been killed by the NIF soldiers. But my father managed to keep them out of our house.

As the fight was going on, a man from a refugee camp came to our house. This man was shot several times in his body. He looked horribly pained. As I still see this crying man, I feel so mad, and sad; I feel like crying. I don't cry easily and did not cry then, and I was not afraid either.

My father and other people came, helped the man and put him somewhere safe. And then my father went back to fight the crazy NIF soldiers. I was running back and forth frantically trying to help my father fight and to make sure my siblings were safe. And at that moment I was so sad and wished that I was old enough to fight so I could fight alongside with my father.

The fight that lasted for only 45 minutes was so crazy and it seemed like it lasted for 45 years. I should thank my father for my life. I think it is the duty of parents to keep their children safe in all situations. But I also think it is the duty of the government to protect the people of their country. But our government became the enemy of the people and wanted to destroy them to maintain their power and force people to think, feel, act, and live the way they wanted. The government confused ordinary people and divided them in order to maintain power. Blessed are those poor 2 million people who died in this Sudanese civil war and in every disastrous event including the one I was part of.

When the fight was finally over, my father and I went to my aunt's house. My aunt and her family were safe, but in her house we found a child who ran from the refugee camp with his mother. This child, a girl, was very young; 2 or 3 years old. When we came the child was dying from several bullet wounds in her body. The image of the child has not left my life since. Even today I can see the man who ran from a refugee camp and my people mad with fear, running away from the enemy, and the sound of guns so near me.

Those were only two people who died in our village. However, the deaths of two people in my village are nothing compared to more than half of the population at the refugee camp. Many of them were children, old folks, and women. Those camps were a transition point for them on the way to a safer life in Europe or America. Instead, they ended up dead. People who were killed were lying there for about 3 days, because no one could bury them since there were too many of them. Some time later, the Ethiopian government found two big construction cars, dug the ground and pushed the people in there all together.

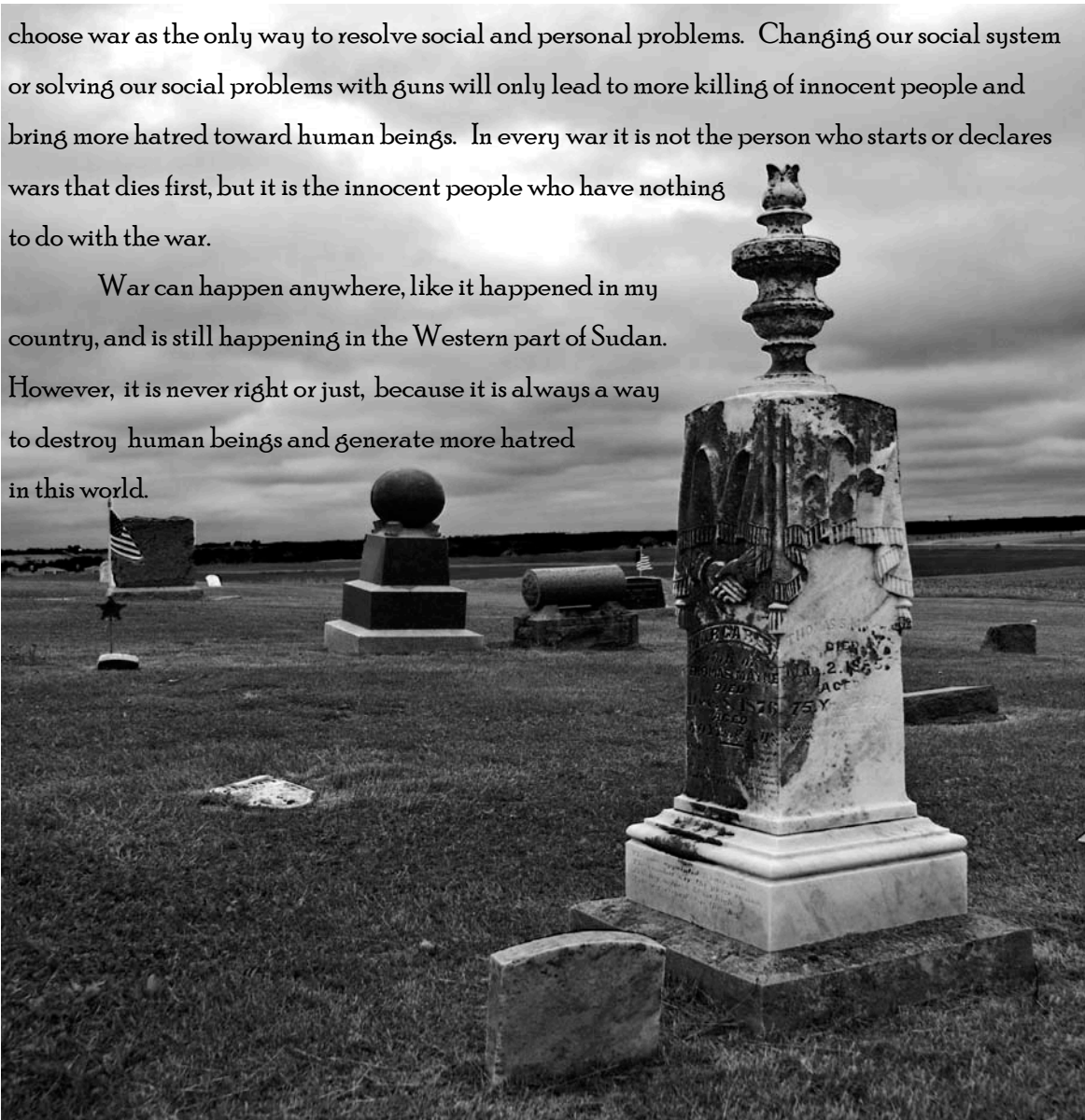
The disaster that I witnessed in my village and at the refugee camp was fear of death. My people were so terrified of death. Fear led to panic and that feeling was so strong that people just ran under the enemy bullets. But they had the right to be afraid of death because they had been terrorized for years. At that moment I could not describe our feelings in that war because we were so young. I was so young I couldn't quite realize what happened. I only realized how traumatized I was when I could not eat for the next two days.

We can not forget what happened. It is our obligation to remember because there were no journalists who could record the events. The village and refugee camp had nothing, no electricity or any sign of development; it was a refugee place. So only us, the witnesses of the fight, know about the death of innocent people on that day. But shame to those people who bring harm to harmless people not only in Sudan, but all around the world.

I was not even born when the first war started in 1955. Then another war followed in 1983 and lasted until 2005. I have learned my lesson in the Sudan civil war that claimed the lives of 2 million peoples over more then 22 years of fight.

I was brought up in it and struggled just like anyone else and I learned to hate people who loved wars, and start wars. We cannot solve our social problems through war. People often choose war as the only way to resolve social and personal problems. Changing our social system or solving our social problems with guns will only lead to more killing of innocent people and bring more hatred toward human beings. In every war it is not the person who starts or declares wars that dies first, but it is the innocent people who have nothing to do with the war.

War can happen anywhere, like it happened in my country, and is still happening in the Western part of Sudan. However, it is never right or just, because it is always a way to destroy human beings and generate more hatred in this world.



Down Syndrome

Lisa and Mike Spellman were so excited for the arrival of their child Anthony. However, when that day finally came, Anthony came into the world a little differently than most babies. He was born with Down syndrome. The Spellman's life was going to dramatically change, but not for the worse as many people would think. Anthony was born with many complications including a hole in his heart, vision and hearing problems, and slower development. Even with a long road ahead of them, Lisa and Mike never lost confidence in their son. They would not have changed him one bit (Renkl 1-2).

Some parents, unlike the Spellmans, would rather have aborted the baby than raise a child with Down syndrome. Or, early on, children with the disease would be sent to an institution to live for the rest of their lives. Now, women are able to have prenatal testing during their pregnancy that can find out if their babies have any abnormalities like Down syndrome. Eunice Shriver who wrote "Prenatal Testing" stated, "When Down syndrome is identified during pregnancy, however, the pregnancy termination rate grows to an estimated 90 percent" (20). Terminating a pregnancy because a child has Down syndrome is wrong. Couples should accept responsibility and raise their children.

Raising a child with Down syndrome can be very fulfilling for parents who accept the responsibility. Martha Beck was told that she would be throwing her life away if she did not terminate her pregnancy. But she later found out that her decision to keep her baby, Adam, was exactly what she wanted. Beck said, "It's true that things haven't been the same for me since Adam was born, and that when I refused a therapeutic abortion I 'threw away' the life I'd always thought I would have. What I didn't know back in 1988 was that the life I was throwing away was far less interesting, fulfilling, and happy than the one I would get in return" (137). Even with her doctor telling her to end the pregnancy because Adam was going to have Down syndrome, Beck accepted it and found her life more rewarding than before. One lesson Beck learned from her child is that life is not about money, power, or status; life should be focused more on love. Adam really changed her life for the better, which is reason enough to keep a child with the syndrome (Beck 141).

Another mom talked about her experience of keeping her child with Down syndrome. Brenda Hanson found out her daughter, Sarah, was going to be born with the syndrome through prenatal testing. She even knew that Sarah had a heart condition. None of these obstacles stopped her though. Sarah had to go through heart surgery, a stroke, a feeding tube, and even leukemia along with other minor diseases. But Hanson explains that her thoughts about Sarah were never negative. She had a sense of protection. She feels that she is there to care for Sarah and make sure she grows up to the best of her ability. Sarah has been a blessing in disguise. Hanson believes “The world lies to us sometimes and tries to convince us that having our plans and lives disrupted or inconvenienced is not necessary and to be avoided at all costs. But truly it is in these very disruptions and supposed inconveniences that the purest blessings may arrive” (2).

An objection society raises is children should be aborted because they will be born with many health problems. Why would parents want to bring children into the world if they knew they were going to have a rough life? Children with Down syndrome are born with medical problems like heart defects, respiratory problems due to the flattened facial features, leukemia, and sometimes Alzheimer’s later in their lives. Most of these problems can be treated. Also, not all children are born with problems (Shannon 26). In the above example, Beck’s baby was not born with any health problems (Beck 139). He was a healthy baby.

So, why would not all parents hope for the best and go through with the pregnancy? The fact that people will actually kill their child when they find out the diagnosis is horrible and wrong. There is no reason children with the disease should have to live any differently than other children. In the article “Weeding out the Unfit,” Ramesh Ponnuru talks about some doctors who persuade parents to have an abortion. He states, “Parents of children with Down syndrome often report that they were encouraged to have an abortion or, what might be worse, simply expected to have one” (1). He also discusses how many mothers were given out-of-date information which convinced them to have the abortion. Now, they believe if they were told the right facts about children with Down syndrome, they would have loved to raise their children (Ponnuru 2).

Children can make parents’ lives complete even if they have a disorder. Letting these children live in a warm and loving home is the best option for them. People who are afraid to keep their babies because of potential health risks in their lives should weigh out the pros and cons. The pros of raising children with Down syndrome will significantly outweigh the negatives.

Not only do parents’ lives become more fulfilling, but also children living with Down syndrome can lead productive lives with the help of their parents. Society has a negative outlook

on people with the syndrome, but this outlook is not true. Timothy Shriver who wrote “Silent Eugenics” says people view children with Down syndrome as “liabilities” (1). Children with the disease are far from being a burden to someone. They can actually accomplish many tasks on their own. In the *Mental Retardation Sourcebook*, Joyce Brennfleck Shannon discusses the myths and truths about Down syndrome.

One myth is that children with the disease are extremely mentally challenged. She says the truth is, “most people with Down syndrome have IQs that fall in the mild to moderate range of retardation” (31). The children can actually go to school and learn just like other children. Sometimes they may have to be in the special education department, but they are still capable of learning. Another myth is “most people with Down syndrome are institutionalized” (Shannon 31). The truth is more of them today live at home. They are able to participate in the community, school, and recreational activities. Many can play sports, have a role in the school play, or play a musical instrument (Shannon 31). Children are also able to leave the home when they get older.

Mia Peterson wrote about her experience with Down syndrome and living on her own. Her family lives in Iowa while she lives in Ohio. At 27 years old, Peterson has her own job as a self-advocacy coordinator for the Down Syndrome Association of Greater Cincinnati. She also discussed the perks of living by herself. Peterson said, “I like having my own place, because I can have a life of my own and make my own rules” (111). An achievement Peterson has made is writing her own book. She is currently working on a book titled *Take the Challenge, Take the Risk*. Her life would be considered normal to most people. She attends college, works out, takes dance classes, and goes out with friends. Peterson is able to do all these activities on her own. Even though children and adults like Peterson can accomplish so much, some people still have objections to keeping children with Down syndrome.

Realizing a child will be born with Down syndrome can be scary. Some parents may be overwhelmed with the fact that they will have to live with the hassle of a child with a disability the rest of their lives. But raising a child with Down syndrome is not a hassle. It is worthwhile and best for the child. The children do not deserve to have their lives ended before they have the chance to live them. With preparation and knowledge, parents can raise these children to be mature individuals. Children with Down syndrome have the potential to go to school, have relationships with others, and even hold jobs. They are just like everyone else and ought to have the right to live.

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Safeguarding Children from Online Solicitation

Sarah is fourteen years old and just entered her first year at a new high school. Her parents describe her as a good kid' she gets good grades, has many friends and generally obeys her parents. As with many teenagers, however, Sarah starts having trouble communicating with her parents and feels like no one really understands her. Her feelings of isolation change when she meets Alex, a new friend, in a chat room. He says he is in his twenties, and he is attentive and caring. He listens to what she has to say and understands all of the stressful issues she has to deal with as a young teen. As they grow closer, the relationship becomes more intimate.

Alex begins to call her on the phone, send her regular e-mails, and ask for pictures of her. Then he starts asking Sarah personal questions: Has she ever had sex? Does she fantasize about sex? What are her measurements? He even begins to suggest that the two meet face-to-face somewhere. Sarah feels slightly uncomfortable with Alex's changing attitude, but she has grown fond of Alex and believes he would never do anything to hurt her. Without her parents' consent or knowledge, she agrees to meet him. At their meeting, Sarah quickly realizes that Alex is not as sweet as she once thought; he pressures her into going back to her empty house to have sex with him. Sarah has just become another statistic of online solicitation.

Sarah's story is fictional but illustrates a growing concern among parents everywhere. As the Internet grows, so do the dangers surrounding its users, particularly minors. In a 200 study, the Crimes Against Children Research Center (CACRC) found that out of 1,501 minors between the ages of 10 and 17, "approximately one in five . . . said they had received an unwanted sexual solicitation included in an attempt to contact the youth in person, over the telephone, or by regular mail" (Crimes 1).

One of the episodes of solicitation occurred between a fifteen-year-old girl, who was asked by an older man if she were a virgin, and if they could meet. Another participant in the survey said that she had a close relationship with a man in his thirties who met her in a public place and asked to stay the night with her (Crimes 6). Predators such as this one, who travel to their victims or ask the victims to travel, are known as "travelers" (Cooper et al. 74-75). The

targets of sexual solicitation are both male and female, though in CACRC's study, "girls were targeted at almost twice the rate of boys (66% versus 34%)" (2). Children who build online relationships often show similar characteristics. They are children who have trouble communicating with their parents and have shown past delinquent behavior. Children who suffer from depression or distress, and children who are looking for someone to listen to and understand them (Cooper et al. 74-75).

The statistics on online solicitation are particularly alarming because "in almost half of incidents (49%), the youth did not tell anyone about the episode" (Crime 4). There are several reasons why youth may choose not to report the episodes. Children and minors who are victims of sexual solicitation or even abuse may feel embarrassed because of their unfamiliarity with sex or may be afraid of unfair labeling and the reaction of their peers. Victims may also feel guilty or feel responsible for what happened because they were warned against predators, and they are afraid of a punishment from a parent, law enforcement, or even the offender (Goldstein 40-41).

Parent once worried about their children cruising the mall alone, and that fear has spread to children surfing the Internet alone. The Internet is an easy tool for predators because it makes personal information easily accessible. Social-networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook, in particular, leave minors vulnerable. Users can post pictures, share personal information, make friends with other users and write in online journals referred to as "blogs." A researcher at Northwestern University conducted a study on teen blogs and "found that nearly 70 percent used their real names online and 61 percent gave out their contact information" ("Keeping" 7).

Such bountiful access to personal information makes it easier for users to keep in contact with friends, but with the amount of people on the Internet and on networking sites, it is difficult to tell whose intentions are benign. One of the most popular social-networking sites is MySpace.com, which carries over "36 million users, mostly teens and young adults" ("Keeping 7). MySpace has been the target of public scrutiny in recent years; concerned parents claim that the networking site does not do enough to protect minors. Networking sites are not the only avenues for solicitation, however. Minors are also frequently approached in chat rooms and by instant messengers (CACRC 4).

It is difficult to determine the ratio of male and female solicitors because of the anonymity of the Internet; users can portray any persona they choose. CACRC's report found that in many cases, solicitors claimed to be a wide range of ages, and there were both males and females, but it is impossible to tell the validity of the solicitor's statements (3). In other words, a forty-five-year-

old man could pretend to be fifteen or a thirty-year-old woman could pretend to be a thirteen-year-old boy.

The online threats to minors are growing, but how can minors be protected without being forced to stop using the Internet altogether? The most important tool in preventing online solicitation is education, and parents, educators, and law enforcement should all be actively involved. First and foremost, parents need to familiarize themselves with the Internet and their children's favorite sites. They should also know current Internet lingo and how to check a computer's history to see what sites their children have been viewing. Many programs can help, such as Cyberpatrol, which filters online content (Hitchcock 174).

There are also programs available which will allow parents to log instant messages that children send online. Some like Tim Lordan, Executive Director and Counsel of the Internet Education Foundation, ask "What kind of relationship do you set with your teens once you start spying on them?" (qtd. in Hoover 2). Many parents do not see it that way, as illustrated in a study conducted by the DSL provider Telocity found that almost three-quarters of those polled said it's acceptable to read their children's e-mail without permission. (Hitchcock 165).

Parents should not go overboard; however, they should be monitoring their children's Internet usage. It is also important to keep open communication. Besides, it is futile to rely strictly on monitoring programs; in the CACRC study, they found that "in 22% of the incidents [of online solicitation] the youth were at someone else's home" (CACRC 3). It is impossible to monitor a child 24 hours a day. Jayne Hitchcock also suggests other methods of protect children online in her book *Net Crimes and Misdemeanors*, such as placing a computer in a family room, rather than a child's bedroom, an monitoring long-distance phone bills for unfamiliar calls (173-174). Hitchcock also warns that parents should not lose sight of the Internet's educational gains:

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of educational sites on the Web. For instance, there are the TV-related sites—such as Nickelodeon, Sesame Street, and the Fox Family Channel—that help children learn. On the Web, kids can play interactive games that actually teach them something, or play games that are just plain fun. They can download printable coloring books and even find out how to play new off-line games with their friends. (169)

Parents should not let themselves be susceptible to thinking, "My child would never give out personal information on the Internet," or "My child will tell me if something happens."

Children do not always disclose enough information to their parents, as shown earlier in the CACRC report. In 2005, a sixteen-year-old formed a relationship with an eighteen-year-old who arranged for his friends to drive her to “sex parties” (Sowa 2). Her parents had no idea.

In another case in 2006, sixteen-year-old Katherine Lester’s parents never had any disciplinary problems with her and suddenly found themselves in the center of a national news story when their daughter tried to travel to Jordan to be with a man she had met online (Hoover 1). The dangerous situations that both girls experienced send a clear message: parents should not be afraid to be suspicious. Why did a sixteen-year-old have access to a passport? How did she correspond with a man from Jordan and plan such a trip without her parents’ knowledge?

Once parents are educated, they need to pass that knowledge on to their children and keep the communication open. Parents should warn their children time and again about the dangers of the Internet, but not rely solely on monitoring *or* the willingness of their children to divulge their personal lives, but they should seek a balance of the two. It is best not to forbid children from Internet usage or making friends online; the Internet can be educational and fun, and meeting people from other cultures can be a mind-opening experience. Children and teens may also rebel if forbidden to do something on the internet. CACRC recommends that parents remind their children that if they make an online friend and wish to meet face-to-face, it needs to be in a public place, and parents and family members should be told of the meeting beforehand (7). This plan is a good way to protect children without being overbearing, but parents should also be present for the meeting if there is one at all.

Law enforcement and educators must also play an important role in the prevention of online solicitation of minors. Perhaps one of the best laws that need to be implemented in all states is Virginia’s law that requires Internet safety to be part of the curriculum in schools. Lawmakers are also beginning to crack down on predators who lure or solicit minors, and 21 states have adopted laws that require libraries and schools to adopt filters for blocking obscene material (“Keeping” 7). Many argue that websites such as MySpace should also help in the prevention of online solicitation by putting in place harsher age restrictions.

While MySpace has tightened its reins a little—users older than 18 can no longer view a minor’s profile without knowledge of their full name, for instance—it is impossible for a website to adequately monitor its many users, especially when it is as large as MySpace. Users can easily lie about their age, and even if a website like MySpace were to require age verification, it would be impossible for minors who lack credit cards and other official documentation of their age. Besides,

MySpace cannot be held accountable for what its users do outside of the realm of the website (Hoover 1-2).

Lastly, an important part of preventing child solicitation and exploitation is stopping it. Children and parents should become familiar with sites such as Operation Blue Ridge Thunder, which help catch Internet predators and parents should report solicitation more often. Law enforcement officials should also continue to use the sting operations in which they pose as minors to entice predators (Cooper et al. 215). Many argue that luring in potential predators is a deceptive tactic and unfair to the unsuspecting solicitors. Whether or not there is an actual minor involved, however, the solicitors believe they are meeting minors to have sexual encounters. Thus, they are showing intent to commit a crime.

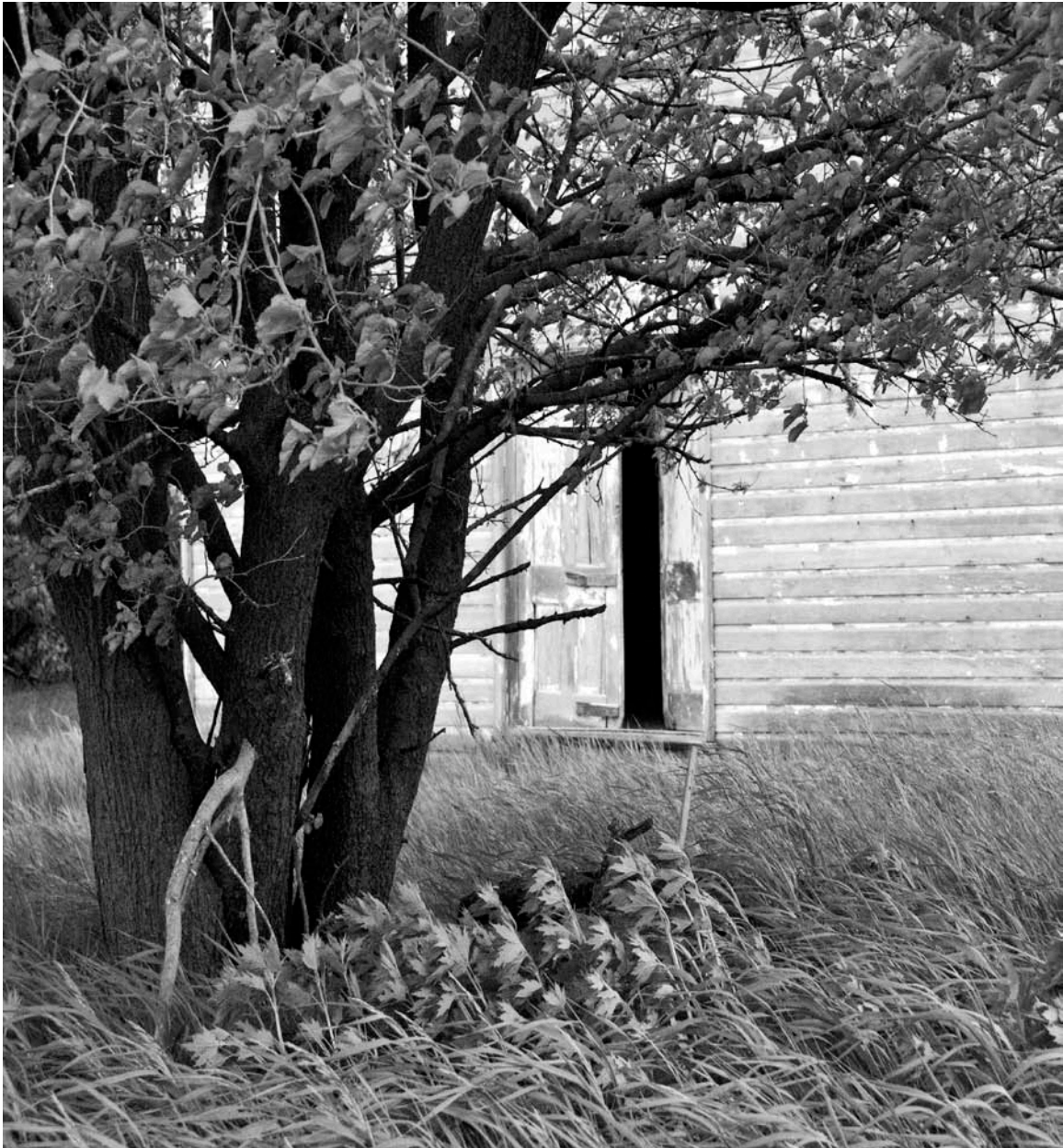
The online solicitation of minors is a growing problem in a world where personal information is becoming more readily accessible. As it becomes easier for predators to seek out victims, however, it also becomes easier to monitor and protect children while allowing them to access beneficial aspects of the Internet. With the help of educators and law enforcement, online solicitation can be reduced dramatically. It is mostly up to parents, however. When parents and children become more educated about the Internet, it not only allows the children to be more aware of Internet dangers, but also helps to bridge the technological generation gap. Parents should be communicative with their children because as Ernie Allen, president and CEO of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children said, "If parents aren't telling their kids they love them, someone on the Internet will" (qtd. in Hoover 3).

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Eating Disorders on the Rise in Men

There are two main types of eating disorders, commonly known as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa (Gay 28). Anorexia can be described as having an extreme fear of gaining weight and not eating as a way to avoid any weight gain. Similarly, bulimia is also described as having a fear of gaining weight, but bulimics eat and then purge themselves through vomiting or the use of laxatives. Eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia are often thought of as disorders that affect only women. However, “studies show that an estimated 8 to 10 million Americans seek treatment for eating disorders and about one million of those Americans are males” (Gay 4).

Influencing men to try and attain what may sometimes be unattainable are the current media trends and images of perfectly toned and fit models, which affect men much in the same way they affect women. Some men begin suffering from eating disorders in the beginning stages of adolescence and continue to struggle with eating disorders throughout adulthood. Eating disorders may occur in any type of male, but some studies find that eating disorders may affect men more frequently among the gay community and athletic community.

A new disorder has also been sighted in men called muscle dysmorphia, sometimes referred to as bigorexia, which is described as “an obsession with the size and shape of your body, constant working out and weight lifting and the use of supplements to bulk up” (Gay 28). Muscle dysmorphia is thought to be more prevalent in men than in women and males can begin showing symptoms of it as early as adolescence.

Today’s media plays a very large part in influencing how people feel about themselves and their body image. In turn, the media plays a role in what may cause a male to struggle with an eating disorder. These images can affect males at a very young age with something as seemingly harmless as a G.I. Joe doll, which started as an action figure but has been made into a television show aimed at young males. Findings show the G.I. Joe doll has changed drastically in the past 30 years: “In 1964, G.I. Joe was 5’10” tall, had a 32” waist, a 44” chest and 12” biceps, which was a figure reasonably attainable by men. By 1974, G.I. Joe had developed quite defined

abdominal muscles, sporting the now-popular “six-pack” look, and by 1991, G.I. Joe had slimmed down to a 29” waist and increased to a 16 1/2 “bicep” (Stout 3).

The rise of muscle and fitness magazines has also played a large role in men’s urge to become the perfect male. Experts say, “The spread of lean male body images in men’s magazines in recent years has contributed to the increasing number of males diagnosed with anorexia” (Cassell and Gleaves 194). There is an argument stating that women struggle much more than men in trying to attain the perfect body that the media portrays. Modern analyses of men’s and women’s magazines “indicate that there are more ads and articles concerning dieting, body shape, and food in women’s magazines.” (Smolack et al. 97). In either argument, it cannot be denied that today’s media can have a negative sway on a person’s sense of body image which can lead to the on-set of an eating disorder.

It is not uncommon for eating disorders to develop in adolescence. In today’s society, young boys “have been exposed to extreme thinness as a standard of attractiveness for their entire lives” (Cassell and Gleaves 198). Adolescence is a time when boys are figuring out what type of man they hope to become and these types of feelings can lead to the development of an eating disorder. In fact, research shows “that males who become anorexic tend to do so on average at an earlier age than females” (Cassell and Gleaves 194).

Peer pressure has always played a part in the development of children going through adolescence, so it is no surprise that boys can feel peer pressure when it comes to body image. Peer pressure can work two ways in the context of young males’ developing body images. One way is that boys “become more adept at identifying the shortcomings in themselves, and when that process becomes too painful, they begin to point out the physical shortcomings in others” (Stout 4). The other way peer pressure works in this situation happens when boys, “do not fit into the concept of the ideal male image feel a silent peer pressure that they begin to enforce on themselves” (Stout 4).

One group of males that seems to be affected severely by eating disorders is male athletes. These men seem to be more at risk to struggle with eating disorders, especially in wrestling, bodybuilding, and horse racing (Dobie 96). In the sport of wrestling, athletes are constantly aware of their weight because it has a direct affect on their ability to wrestle in their specific weight class. Psychologist Craig Johnson conducted a survey on disturbed eating behaviors on more than 14,000 college athletes and found that, “wrestling, at 93.8 percent, had the highest figure for any sport” (qtd. in Dobie 98).

Some states are instituting laws to deter young athletes from practicing harmful behavior. In the 1990s, New York and Wisconsin both “passed regulations barring from competition any high school wrestler whose body fat [fell] below 7 percent” (Dobie 101). Unfortunately, there are some high school wrestling coaches who feel that the extreme measures wrestlers take to manage their weight are normal in the world of wrestling. A respected Long Island coach was quoted as saying, “I guarantee you it was not just from cutting weight. I cut my weight my whole life it was never a problem[sic]” (qtd. In Dobie 100) as a response to the recent deaths of three college wrestlers who may have died as a result of excessive weight loss. Young athletes who practice bingeing and purging or the use of diuretics to help their performance in a particular sport may continue to show symptoms of eating disorders throughout their adulthood, even when they are no longer involved with a sport (Stout 5).

The homosexual community also seems to be at a higher risk of developing eating disorders. In gay culture there lies a “greater emphasis on appearance than does heterosexual male culture [and gay men] are more likely to be looked at and evaluated on the basis of looks” (Smolak 103). There is a preference in the gay community for a slender physique, which is what may lead to an eating disorder. A study at Massachusetts General Hospital found that homosexual men were especially prone to bulimia while another study conducted by psychiatrist Joel Yager found that “nearly 50% of the men who enter treatment for anorexia nervosa describe themselves as homosexual” (Cassell and Gleaves 168). These two studies make it clear that homosexuals are at a greater danger of suffering from an eating disorder, be it anorexia or bulimia.

Fortunately, there is a solution available for males battling an eating disorder. The first step is asking for help, which is difficult for some men because men “often believe it is taboo to talk about their feelings” (Stout 2). Men also may be embarrassed to ask for help because of society’s perception that anorexia and bulimia are women’s diseases. However, once a man can admit he has a problem, he can begin seeking treatment in a number of ways. He may choose guided self-help, in which “a patient is first assessed by a health professional and then chooses to use a self-help manual [and then returns at regular intervals to] consult the health professional to discuss any problems which have arisen and can monitor progress” (Abraham and Llewellyn-Jones 213).

Another form of treatment available would be an in-patient program at a rehabilitation facility specifically designed to treat eating disorders or hospital treatment. These types of treatment “have the advantage of enabling a lot to be accomplished in a short period of time [and offer opportunities to] take part in small group therapy, learn social skills . . . and anxiety

management” (Abraham and Llewellyn-Jones 214). In either case, it is best to always work with a trusted therapist and dietician involving health professionals when necessary (Abraham, Llewellyn-Jones 211).

It is also extremely important for the family of the victim to become involved with the recovery and possibly seek therapy themselves. It is crucial because, “by the time of diagnosis, families will have been living for weeks or months, even years, with high stress because of the sufferer’s self starvation, dramatic personality change, denial of problems, lying about food, and possibly theft of money. Many feel overwhelmed by the situation [and] family relationships are likely to be fraught” (Smith 153).

Once the victim of the eating disorder has begun to heal it is imperative that family members continue their support. The best ways to do this are through “motivation, reassurance, setting boundaries and accentuating the positive and eliminating the negative” (Smith 155). Overcoming an eating disorder can be accomplished if people are willing to get help and ready to begin to change their attitudes towards food, weight, and body image.

Men’s struggle with eating disorders is a relatively new topic in society, and research is lacking in this area. In writing this research essay, it was difficult to find information about the relationship between males and eating disorders. Some texts didn’t even mention males when discussing anorexia and bulimia. While these eating disorders may affect women more, it is critical to remember that men are struggling as well. If society keeps stereotyping eating disorders as a woman’s disease, it will only make it more difficult for men to recognize they have a problem and stereotyping may make them feel too embarrassed to ask for help.



Water: Keeping It Clean

Water is a very important part of life, and clean water is a necessity. Every living being on this planet uses water. Everything from humans to insects would cease to exist without water. Human beings use more water than any other organism on earth. Every day we need water to carry out basic tasks: drinking, bathing, cooking, and feeding our plants; none of these tasks could be completed without water. To be put simply, life without water would not exist. Clean water is just as important, and too many pollutants in water can cause serious harm to plants and animals.

The term *clean water* has a hazy definition. Water has always had small amounts of nutrients and minerals resulting from natural erosion. Trace amounts of these minerals found in our water cannot harm us. Although, there are at least forty-five unnatural chemicals which are allowed to be in our drinking water by standards set by the EPA (Matthews 198). Over half of these chemicals are the result of improper use of agricultural fertilizers or pesticides. They come straight from America's farms, and taint our natural water reservoirs.

Water pollution comes from a vast number of sources, but some sources are more prominent than others. Rainwater washes over land and absorbs any chemicals or nutrients that are contained within the soil. Sources such as, "livestock manure, fertilizers and mining metals to suburban lawn chemicals, construction site wastes and motor oil from city streets—enter water supplies when rainwater washes over land and into streams, or percolates down into groundwater" (Miller 1). Water pollution happens all over the country and is very hard to regulate. Susan Miller explains, "It is impossible to detect which farmers use too much fertilizer or pesticides, or which city dwellers dump their used motor oil into storm drains [sic]" (1).

Although there are so many unregulated sources for water pollution, Miller claims that "agricultural runoff remains the largest, unregulated source of water pollution, affecting between 50 and 70 percent of all surface and groundwater in the United States" (2). Artificial fertilizers, used to feed plants, and pesticides used to deter insect infestations, wash off of farm plots and drain into the water supply (Lambrecht 1). These chemicals then wreak havoc on the ecosystem of nearby rivers and damage the population's fresh water supply.

In Iowa these pollution problems are becoming rather commonplace. The need to use more artificial fertilizers on farms has become a common place practice because of the constant erosion of nutrient rich topsoil (Berns 2). With the sudden bio-fuel revolution, farmers in Iowa are trying to use the utmost land available to grow ethanol friendly corn. In Iowa and throughout the corn-belt, more pesticides and fertilizers will be needed to account for larger yields of corn. A study completed in June of 1989 showed that 35% of wells less than 15 meters deep tested above the health advisory level for nitrate pollution (Kross et al. 270). The report even goes as far as to say that, in Iowa “nitrate has become a nearly ubiquitous contaminant in the shallow groundwater system” (Kross et al. 272).

Water pollution is a definite problem, but several steps can be put in place to alleviate the problem. As with many problems, the best way to prevent them is to seek out and eliminate the sources. With water pollution the sources are clear. Pollution comes from human activity: motor oil dumped into storm drains, bad sewage disposal techniques, wastes from mining or chemical factories, and mainstream agriculture all contribute to water pollution. Mainstream agriculture is by far the worst cause of water pollution, and therefore should be dealt with accordingly. Several simple water conservation techniques have been brainstormed by some of the world's top scientists. In order to alleviate and prevent the problem of water pollution in the future, Iowa's farmers will have to implement several new procedures into their farming techniques.

Farmers can help reduce the problem of water pollution by implementing a few simple approaches into their farming techniques, while increasing efficiency. Farmers utilize the nutrients in the ground to make their plants grow. As farmers use and reuse the same land, the nutrients start to become sparse. Over long periods of time the land will become a barren plot, void of all the nutrients plants need to grow. The invention of chemical fertilizers has allowed farmers to continue farming for generations without over exerting the soil's nutrients. Fertilizing the soil is required for optimum plant growth, but damaging the water supply is a negative side effect. Simple steps can be taken to lower the amount of chemicals introduced into the water supply.

One technique, making its way into agriculture, involves using a GPS navigation system connected to farm equipment. The GPS is used to navigate farm equipment and in conjunction with digitized soil quality maps, it creates a much more efficient way of applying chemicals and tilling (Committee 54). The system automatically guides the farm equipment exactly to the

specifications of the land. The system makes the farm equipment *smart*; tilling less in spots that are more apt to erosion, and tilling more in areas that are known for less erosion. The same idea is applied for fertilizers and herbicides. The GPS unit, in conjunction with in depth soil maps, specifies what land needs extra doses of chemicals, and what land does not. Using this system can make a farm much more efficient by: saving fuel in farm equipment; saving chemicals, such as pesticides and fertilizers; lowering erosion rates, through the use of conservation tillage; and improving soil quality (Committee on 54).

Opponents of GPS agricultural applications believe that GPS units are too expensive to integrate into the average farm. In fact these GPS units do cost a good amount of money. However, the expense of a one-time buy soon is overshadowed by how much money farmers will save in the long run. Increased yields and decreased use of chemicals make the overall profit margin grow. Not only positive economic effects are felt through the use of GPS agricultural systems, but also the effect on environmental systems is immensely positive. As water pollution continues to worsen, the eco-friendly effects of the GPS agricultural applications would more than make up for the amount spent on the entire system. A community of Iowa farmers used the new technique and found they spent three-thousand dollars less a year on fertilizer, attained the same crop yield, and found a reduced level of nitrates in local water reservoirs (Miller 2). The system is an overall better way to farm.

Another way to increase farm efficiency and help alleviate the problem of water pollution, is to use more cover crop systems in the United States. Cover crops are small plants planted over conventional crops such as corn and cotton. They can be planted at any time during the plant's life cycle. The use of cover crops have been very beneficial and have, "demonstrated the ability to reduce erosion, surface runoff, and leaching of nitrates to groundwater" (Committee 93). A study conducted by Meisinger and colleagues, showed that use of cover crops, "reduced the amount of nitrogen leached [lost to groundwater systems] from farming systems by between 31 and 77 percent" (qtd. in Committee 93). Obviously, the use of cover crops can, and will, reduce the amount of chemicals in our water supply, making our ecosystem a better place to live in.

A final way to deter water pollution is for farmers to practice conservation tillage, and integrate the use of landscape buffer zones. Conservation tillage is a more efficient, environmentally friendly, tilling practice used by farmers. Instead of totally removing all plant matter from the ground, farmers allow a certain amount of plant matter to be left in the soil before tilling occurs. As a result, soil erosion is almost entirely negated. Conservation tillage, "results in

dramatic decreases in erosion and runoff from farming systems” (Committee 99). Buffer zones, “intercept or immobilize pollutants before they reach surface water” (Committee 105). Stretches of simple grasses can be adequate buffer zones, and almost zero upkeep is required as soon as these strips are planted. Almost every chemical used by agricultural systems can be trapped by buffer zones. Buffer strips and conservation tillage are both intelligent ways to deter water pollution.

Changing farming practices is not an easy endeavor. It takes time and money to teach farmers new techniques and to show them how the techniques will be beneficial. In order to persuade more farmers to use better practices, a multi-year experiment is being conducted by a group of Iowa farmers worried about pollution. Representatives from the DNR showed farmers ways to cut back on pollution, without cutting into profits. The results have been encouraging. The farmers now use less fertilizer, and nitrate levels in the water have been dropping (Miller 2).

By asking farmers to slowly change and implement new techniques, changes have been successfully made. Telling farmers to jump from modern farming techniques straight to something like an organic system would be a drastic change, and would not be a practical solution. Taking small steps such as using more efficient fertilizing techniques, using chemical filtering cover crops, and practicing conservation tillage would be the best way to get the ball moving in the right direction (More Ethanol 4).

The benefits of long-term changes to farming practices would be immense. Economic benefits would be immediately apparent. Less chemical fertilizers would be needed to feed plants, and smaller amounts of pesticides would need to be purchased. Farm equipment would be used less, and as a result fuel prices would drop. On top of that, the environmental benefits of better farming techniques would be immense. Decreased chemical runoff would allow our lakes and rivers to recuperate back to their normal healthy level. Natural ecosystems such as the Everglades would cease to be endangered. Millions of fish would be saved, and the positive effect would be felt on all of the natural water reservoirs in America. The overall the change would be incredibly positive.

Water pollution is a problem that can be dealt with, but people will need to come together and work to make it happen. Farmers will have to be willing to implement changes to the old tried-and-true methods. Educators will need new exciting ways to teach the techniques and be able to show raw physical data that these techniques are more efficient than conventional techniques. Government officials will have to step up, and possibly spend a little bit of money in order to get these programs under way. These solutions will take time, but as long as we are

making an effort to make the changes, and moving in the right direction, solutions will be found. Benefits will be immense, and once again we will be able to enjoy healthy lakes and streams. Entire ecosystems such as the Everglades will be taken off of the endangered list, and we will have an increased percentage of clean drinking water sources. If solutions are not being implemented, then the problem will get worse. It is time to start being responsible for our planet Earth.

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