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Skunk River Review 2012-2013, Vol 25

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Skunk River Review

Silver Anniversary

2012-2013
EDITION

DMACC
DES MOINES AREA
COMMUNITY COLLEGE



SKUNK RIVER REVIEW

A MAGAZINE OF STUDENT WRITING

Volume 25



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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
DES MOINES AREA COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Silver Anniversary Edition of the *Skunk River Review*, Des Moines Area Community College's annual publication of academic work that begins in the Composition I, Composition II, and literature classrooms.

This publication is representative of the objectives of English 105, which is to find a voice and through research, critical thinking, and the recursive process, create thought-provoking essays; it is also a representation of English 106, which is to master the art of persuasion through writing.

As you peruse this year's edition, you will notice that some essays need editing, or a little more tinkering, but that is why the recursive process is so important. Our writing can *always* be improved. MLA formatting has not been edited for this publication because it is used as a teaching tool in many classrooms.

Des Moines Area Community College would like to thank the students that submitted to this year's publication as well as the instructors that use *The Skunk River Review* in their classrooms and whose contributions make this publication possible.

If you are a student that would be interested in submitting essays for next year's publication, email skunkriver@dmacc.edu.

Thanks for reading,

Troy Bishop
Editor



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Clayton Ryan

Growing up in Phoenix, Arizona, Clayton Ryan found his fascination with American society and its history at an early age. After years of exposing himself to American culture and its driving motives, he has come to the conclusion that being a citizen of the “Great Melting Pot” is pretty awesome. When he isn’t pounding out an essay for a contest or for fun, Clayton enjoys directing and shooting short films, playing his favorite hollow body guitar, and travelling across the state to softball games with his friends. However, money to sustain this lifestyle doesn’t just appear in his wallet, and you can find Clayton most mornings in the produce department at Fareway Food Stores.

Research Paper with citations

Buying Happiness: How Materialism is Ruining American Society

I look back at my growing, young life with an unclouded view. If there is anything that comes more clearly to mind, it is the desire I had possessed for many years to “own it all.” In first grade, I drooled over the extensive line of modifiable Transformers action figures that my friends had. Middle school gave way to a desire to own the newest NERF foam dart guns and sleek, colorful Huffly BMX bicycles. I even begged and begged my parents incessantly for a cellphone in the later years of Junior High. Fortunately, I was blessed with parents who work hard to provide their children with every necessity and an abundance of trinkets to make an easy life. However, my life wasn’t as full as I thought my material items made it. Only recently, I began seeing things from a different light, and realize now that I had followed a path of materialism. This infatuation with filling our homes with tangible pleasures is much more widespread than I had once believed. In modern America,

a growing obsession with materialism has pushed aside the ethics of determination and cooperation and has attributed to moral decline.

There are many causes of the “melting pot” society’s materialism, and one was set in motion more than a century ago. America was a country in which the social classes of the rich and poor were separated. The wealthy, industrial tycoons, such as J.P Morgan and John D Rockefeller, made thousands of dollars by the day from the profits of their massive companies, while the working lower class toiled long hours in conditions that would be intolerable by today’s standards. However, under the Teddy Roosevelt administration, big businesses were broken up, and pay and work standards were raised for the majority of laborers. As American workers gained higher income, excess wealth was created, and men and women across the nation began to enjoy a more comfortable way of life (Majewski). From this ease of living came a desire to keep up with the rapidly industrializing America. New goods were manufactured, such as the refrigerator and radio; devices that made every home newer and better. There was one invention that would influence the consumer more than anything: the television. Advertising agencies waged a campaign of opinion swaying, convincing the consumer to buy goods that were “better than their neighbors” (Beder). Over six decades later, and years of commercial ads, clever slogans and marketing, TV is still the most influential factor. Jason Sines of Chase, Md., says: "The worst is TV. Magazines, movies, and other media require a trip to the store or the theater” (Dillin). Today, American consumers have embraced the darker side of capitalism. This “spending monster” drives people to not only own the latest technology or wear the trendiest clothing, but also desire better working conditions, safety and comfort in life, and leisure time (Alm). Unfortunately, this “move forward or fall-behind” train of thinking does not apply to morality, and is derailing society’s moral progression.

Adults and children alike bear the weight--both literally and physically—that materialistic desire creates. Like the common cold virus, the “wanting mechanism” affects every societal class, from the working class to the affluent. American children of the newest generations have grown up in a country that values people for what they have as opposed to what they achieve. However, in this age of privilege and prosperity, parents carry much weight of the blame. "Parents today focus too much on what they can do for their children and on what they can give to their children, instead of concentrating on being available for their children," says Dr. Madeline Levine of Stanford’s School of Education. This is especially prevalent in both wealthy and even middle-class families, where parents feel the need to show affection through providing material items. According to a survey by the Center for Disease Control Atlanta, depression in children among affluent families is at 22 percent, or three times greater than the national average (Levine). A generation of spenders has been born, and statistics have made it very clear. An average eight year-old in the US can list 30 popular brand names. More than 90 percent of 13 year-old girls in a survey listed shopping as their favorite pastime, followed by TV watching (see a connection?). In 1968, US children aged 4-12 spent around \$2 billion a year; today they spend nearly \$300 billion (Schumaker). This onslaught of morality has led to a league of children who want a \$500 smartphone, but do not know the work required to earn it. They want to fill their bedrooms with flat screen LCD televisions and gaming consoles, and then hold scorn for the parents who won’t get them the upgraded model. Wanting is easier than working, and this is the lesson young adults are taking to heart. Where parents’ influence ends, the addiction of television media takes over. Advertisers use a method known as “cradle-to-grave,” in which companies use persuasive marketing techniques to influence viewers for the length of their lifetime; essentially, marketers create a “buying army” from a young age (Tyre). Adults,

though not as susceptible to the marketing scams, are capable of becoming obsessed with material items. “Living large” can become a goal for many adults, especially those influenced by celebrities and the vast amount of role models Americans follow. These influences- religious leaders, actors, and sports stars to name a few- inspire generations to replicate their lives by matching their every quality. We follow the same political thoughts, style our hair and clothing, and most important; fill our homes with luxuries to match celebrities’ lavish lifestyles. It is no coincidence that this desire to stand out, for the right amount of money, has coincided with the decay of morality in the US.

Over half a century, Americans have made a digressing transition from achievement-respected innovators to a league of competitors that measure one’s success by the wealth they possess. Returning to the “age of the monopoly,” we observe a time where one could make greatness their own through life-long work and integrity. For example, Rockefeller was born into an economically challenged family in New York. Without a steady income from his father, and his mother between jobs, he sold turkeys and gave small loans to neighbors. Three hardy decades later, Rockefeller sat upon the throne of an oil empire, and would become the richest man in history. That “rags to riches” determination, and focus on achievement would disappear, however, with the increase in wealth. The worker today is privileged with a minimum wage and a maximum hour that seems miniscule to the endless, **enervating** toiling of 19th century mill operators and oilers. This increase in wage and augmentation in leisure time has led to a mass of people spending an abundance of money on a **surfeit** of comfort goods. Today, there is a television in every home, a source for the young and old to be exposed to a market that glorifies capitalism. A generation is now striving to own the latest fashions, avoiding criticism from a “beauty-is clothes deep” society. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, we as consumers spend almost

\$4000 a year to stay connected with the social world from our cell phones. How could a society so founded on integrity have turned to such mindless spending? In the pursuit of “happiness,” capitalism has reached a **zenith**; inversely, morality has reached a new low. Americans have thrown ethics to the hounds. Flip through any of the thousand channels now available for all tastes, and examples of our lost sense of right and wrong becomes as unclouded as the screen of a new iPhone. Sex appeal sells the newest luxury vehicles between horrendous reality show commercials, with a plot similar to children’s bath time playing. And yet Americans continuously pound out the cash to outdo their neighbors’ vehicle, subconsciously at the will of the **benevolent** marketing war. In a recent article released in *Psychology Today*, Professor of Psychology Steven Reiss wrote, “Reality TV allows Americans to fantasize about gaining status through automatic fame. Ordinary people can watch the shows, see people like themselves, and imagine that they too could become celebrities by being on television(Reiss).” Shows continuously push the boundaries of what is acceptable, all to satisfy the paying consumer. There is strong, **verifiable** opinion in the theory that American morality is declining. According to a study by Technometrica Institute of Policy and Politics in Oradell, New Jersey, of 800 people randomly polled, nearly 80 percent of Republicans and 53 percent of Democrats say the country's morals have fallen significantly in the past 40 years. That view is shared by 75 percent of Americans old enough to have personally experienced the 1950s and seen the changes since that time (Dillin). By forgetting ethics to pursue a life of wealth, fame, and competition, capitalist Americans have unknowingly pulled the moral airplane into a screaming tailspin. However, there is hope for the nation.

Moral decline due to the increase in materialistic obsession has become a problem, but it has not become **incorrigible**. To find the motivating mechanisms that have created

the downward spiral of morality, we must look towards the influence of Americans' role models. According to a nationwide poll issued by the Christian Science Monitor, Americans have mixed opinions about who is a reliable, honest role model. Athletic sports stars, Hollywood celebrities and actors, government politicians, and even religious figures all received a rating on their ability to be influential. In the poll, it was found that religious figures score the highest as "excellent" and "good," based on their moral standards, with 58% of people agreeing to the criteria (Dillin). All-star athletes and **prominent** celebrities, those most influential to children and young adults, came after and scored much lower, earning ratings of "poor" and "very poor." These are the people that the newest generations look at, **yearning** to be as famous—and unfortunately, as wealthy—as the stars they see on their 45-inch flat screen television. It starts with parents. As adults with money and a conscience, parents feel that they can gain self-happiness through purchasing comfort goods. Like an emotional bank, parents also exchange the latest gifts for their children's affections. "Be careful of what type of role model you (parents) are," says Laurence Steinberg, a leading professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. "Parents who complain about their children's materialism are often quite materialistic themselves. Children learn self-control by watching how other people behave, especially their parents (Tyre)." Another grand mistake that parents must correct is their willingness to say "yes." The adults of the household must be **recalcitrant**, and become more comfortable with denying their children every wanted item. It is difficult in a society like ours, in which man can spend money freely, to tell adolescents that they cannot have everything they want. To see their sons and daughters distraught about feeling "left-out" and "behind" often pushes parents to fill the void with gifts. Parents need to be parents, and provide affection and a sense of belonging. In the words of American morality author Peter Slovasnik, "We need to develop the healthy

scorn for materialism that our grandparents had. The pressure from children to get more stuff can appear relentless, but it is humorous and fun once you define the struggle: intelligence and parents are on one side while indulgence and immaturity are on the other side. (Peg)” A sense of morality can return to future ages, but only through the resilient work of the older generation. Once the easiest target market, children, is introduced to a society that teaches about determination, humility, and **abstemious** living, America will find equilibrium between morality and capitalism.

The United States of America is a country that is one of the few to build a successful system of capitalism. Through the **adversity** of engineering pioneers, such as Henry Ford, and the struggle of laboring workers, a lifestyle of luxury and consumerism has become central in the home of every American family. However, the seductive allure of materialism, and the desire to elevate oneself to a higher lifestyle, has led to a decline in the ethics and morality of the American people. The many causes – poor role models, insensitive marketing techniques, and the undermining of parental foundation – have given birth to a generation of children and young adults that value material possessions and a façade of wealth over honorable achievement and the rewards of solid relationships. As a human society, we must act together as a needle and thread to mend the rifts torn into the Star-spangled patchwork of America by the disease of consumerism. The transcendentalist author Henry David Thoreau’s once wrote, “What's the use of a fine house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on? (Thoreau)” The obsessive ideas of materialism and its place in our culture has led to a fall of morality, and can only be reciprocated by American society.

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Kenny Lehman

Kenny Lehman is an optimistic young man. He tries to look at the glass half full most of the time. After overcoming the adversity of being bullied and abused, he is now inspired to reach out and help those who go through the same thing. He is now in his first semester of college and has aspirations of being a writer someday—one who wants to evoke a

positive influence in many peoples' lives.

Narrative Essay

Divine Intervention

I was at a very dark place in my life. My so-called friends I had at the time were everything besides friends to me. I'd been bullied and abused by them for years. They used to undermine me and make me feel like the lowest person on earth. My self-worth was next to nothing. Every time I saw my reflection, all I saw was shame and failure. "You're just a piece of shit," I said to myself, "and you'll never be anything." I was constantly referred to as retarded, stupid, ugly, and they told me that I wasn't good for anything. Even though I had known these people for years, they seemed to take a complete turn on me. I would take them places all of the time without getting gas money. I used to buy them things like alcohol and marijuana and never saw any form of repayment. Sometimes, I would even get beaten up or slapped across the face if I didn't comply with what they wanted. But, there was one person, one radiant, shining light that would pull me out of this deep, dark place.

I met a woman when I got my first job at Taco Bell. I was seventeen years old and a senior at North High School. That first day was so nerve-racking for me. I walked into

work, my hands shaking and my palms sweaty. Our uniforms were all black, and included a hat that had the Taco Bell logo. My manager really wasn't sure where to put me, so he stuck me in *drive thru*. Oh my God, I thought, this is my first day and they are already trying to torture me? That particular day at Taco Bell was so frantic and busy. A line of cars wrapped clear around the building and was nonstop for hours. But, despite being so nervous and frantic, I still managed to make it through the evening. Then, I noticed one of the other employees approaching me. She stood about five foot eight, had her light blonde hair up in a ponytail, and she was half-smiling at me. She looked like an older woman, I would've guessed, in her late forties. But, I later learned that she was almost sixty. Despite her age, she was still a gorgeous and beautiful woman. Often times she wears her hair down, almost down to the middle of her back, a radiant, bright blonde. She was coming over towards me to get a drink at the soda fountain next to the drive thru area.

"Hi there," she said to me. "Is this your first job?"

"Well, yeah, it is," I responded.

"Wow," she said with enthusiasm. "You're doing such a wonderful job for it being your first day." I then looked at her name tag. In big bold letters it said "**SHERRY.**"

"Hey, thanks," I said back to her, with a big stupid smile on my face. Her compliment very much relieved my tension.

There was one particular instance that really sparked our friendship. I walked into work one day feeling very depressed. I had not only been dealing with being abused by my friends, but also dealing with my alcoholic father at home as well. There were times when he

would drink a whole thirty pack of Miller High Life in just a couple of days. Often times he was staggering drunk and just reeked of alcohol. Oh, how I hated that smell. We had been constantly arguing and yelling at each other that day.

“If you don’t like it, then you can get the fuck out!” He yelled at me as I was leaving for work. That was one of his favorite things to say to me. But, since I had been acting out due to being bullied every day, it was reflected in my behavior towards my parents. So, I was a bit of a hellion.

But, thankfully, Sherry was working at Taco Bell that night. She was going about her usual duties: cleaning dishes, prepping food, putting meat in the rethermalizer (a machine used to reheat frozen meat). I was working on the front register that night, a nice change of pace from working the *drive thru* all of the time. As I walked into the back area to grab a pan for some meat, she approached me.

“Kenny?” Sherry said with a concerned look on her face. “Is there something wrong?” At the time, she was vigorously washing dishes, her hands moving like lightning.

I was feeling very vulnerable at the time, so I decided to tell her what was on my mind. As soon as I started to tell her about my day, she immediately stopped what she was doing. I found it weird that I was talking to almost a complete stranger about personal issues, but she seemed to actually show a sense of concern and care. Her bright green eyes were completely focused on me. I had never felt this kind of attention from my friends. All they cared about was whether or not I could find them some pot, or if I was able to be their personal chauffer.

Sherry stood there in the kitchen area listening very intently. I was actually making eye contact with her and standing up straight. I felt so relieved to get everything off my chest.

“Kenny,” Sherry said to me with a stern look on her face. “I know exactly what you are going through.” She began to tell me about one of her former friends, an alcoholic. She let him live with her for an extended period of time.

“Kenny,” she says while telling her story, her hands waving in the air, “I wanted to kill him. He would yell and scream and complain until he had some beer. Hell, I even prayed to God that he would be dead the next day I woke up.”

After hearing her story, I felt a lot better about myself. I felt a sparks flying between us. I was actually conversing with a person who had similar issues as mine. But, that night before I left work, Sherry said to me, “Kenny, come here...” And, so, I approached her. She reached out her arms and wrapped them around me, holding me close against her.

“Kenny,” Sherry said, “I love you.” At that moment, I felt empowered yet awkward at the same time. Her hug made me feel very content, but, at the same time, I never had anyone outside of my family say those words to me. She also gave me her phone number and told me that I could call her anytime. I was very moved by that experience. After that, the sparks only started flying higher and higher.

As time passed, our friendship began to blossom and develop. We started to talk and see each other more frequently. I met her father, Harold, who is a veteran of World War II. After meeting him, I could see why Sherry is such a compassionate and loving person. She has even taught me some very important life lessons, one of them being, and I quote Sherry,

“Everyone is the way they are for a reason.” If I hadn’t learned this at such a young age, then I wouldn’t have half of the friends that I have today. Knowing this helped me learn not to judge people and to learn to get to know them before I make any kind of assumptions. Another very important lesson that Sherry has taught me is that humor can get you through just about anything in life. I don’t know how many times she has made me laugh until I was crying and my abdomen got sore. Our sense of humor is so unique that it seems like we practically invented it. Whenever we try to explain something to someone that we find funny, they just have this baffled look on their face and say “You guys are weird.” But, through Sherry’s love and inspiration, I learned to seek new friends that would make me feel good about who I was instead of making me feel like a “retard” or telling me that “I was nothing.”

All in all, Sherry has had a very positive influence in my life. Every day she reminds me of “what a fine, young man that I have turned out to be.” She has taken on a motherly role in my life by telling me “I wouldn’t ever steer you the wrong way.” If Sherry had never walked into my life that fateful day at Taco Bell, I would have never turned out to be such a loving, compassionate, caring person. Through Sherry’s love and inspiration, I have learned to seek out new friends who make me feel good about who I am instead of making me feel like a “retard” or telling me that “I was nothing.”

“I know in my heart,” Sherry says to me, “If God hadn’t brought us together, you would have ended up dead or getting killed by those bastards.” So, it’s obvious that this friendship wasn’t just any mere coincidence—it was divine intervention.



Jon Christiansen

Jon Christiansen has finally found what he believes to be his calling in life and is pursuing an education in criminal justice and a career in law enforcement. He has held a number of interesting and exciting jobs such as an explosives technician for a mining company and managing a camp for the military in Iraq. Jon has a passion for travel and has seen more of the world than he could ever have imagined. Jon enjoys movies, books by Max Lucado, riding his bike, going to the shooting range, and playing with Chewbacca, his Yorkie pup.

Argumentative Essay

Deadly Force: To Use or Not to Use, Should There Be a Question?

On April 10, 2011, in a small town in central Iowa, an officer was faced with the hardest decision that the men and women sworn to protect our communities have to make. On that April evening, Story County dispatch received a 911 call from a woman who said that her husband had come home drunk and was calling the family members “pieces of shit” (qtd. in Goettsch and Brown). The woman also told dispatch that there were guns in the house and that her husband had tried to strangle her and was threatening to kill their family. She told dispatch that she was in fear for her and her son’s lives. When the officer on duty responded to the call, the woman was outside in the front yard. The officer heard shouting and was informed by the woman that her son was still in the house. He then requested back

up, but he did not wait because of the threat that the intoxicated husband posed to his family. The officer, with weapon drawn, entered the residence to find gun cases on a table. As the officer proceeded into the house, he saw the husband “standing over [the son] yelling at him in a threatening manner and attempting to grab [the son’s] throat” (Goettsch and Brown). The officer demanded to see the husband’s hands. The husband exclaimed, “Fuck you, you can’t tell me what to do in my house” (qtd. in Goettsch and Brown), and charged the officer. The son described the husband as being “on a rampage [and] he was going to kick his ass [and] was just storming towards the officer” (qtd. in Goettsch and Brown). As the husband approached the officer, the officer took steps in reverse and attempted to draw his Taser (Goettsch and Brown). What was to follow is the quandary and basis for this essay.

The Iowa Code (704.1) defines reasonable force in the following manner:

Reasonable force is that force and no more which a reasonable person, in like circumstances, would judge to be necessary to prevent an injury or loss and can include deadly force if it is reasonable to believe that such force is necessary to avoid injury or risk to one’s life or safety or the life or safety of another, or it is reasonable to believe that such force is necessary to resist a like force or threat. Reasonable force, including deadly force, may be used even if an alternative course of action is available if the alternative entails a risk to life or safety, or the life or safety of a third party, or requires one to abandon or retreat from one’s dwelling or place of business or employment.

(Iowa)

In his report “Deadly Force: Issues, Risks, Dilemmas, and Solutions,” Thomas C. Frazier says, “Police officers have the discretion to use deadly force when they deem appropriate. This awesome authority sets police apart from every other profession. They are

guided in their decision-making by policy, training, intelligence information, and more” (1). Police officers are highly trained in the use of force and usually follow, but are not confined to, a department use of force continuum. This document is a guideline of the force that is reasonable and necessary to maintain control of a given situation.

In the situation of the officer in the opening of this essay, as he was moving away from the aggressive, intoxicated husband, he realized that the totality of the circumstances warranted deadly force. The man was almost twice the officer’s size. If he were able to overpower the officer, he would have access to the officer’s weapon or could obtain one from somewhere else in the house. He would then be able to follow through with his threats against the family members, as well as harm, even perhaps kill, the officer. In a split-second decision, knowing that all of their lives were in danger, the officer fired three shots into the chest of the husband. The Department of Criminal Investigation conducted an investigation of the shooting and after the scene was processed, interviews conducted and all information was analyzed, the Attorney General’s office concluded that the officer was justified in his course of action (Goettsch and Brown). Although situations involving deadly force are tragic and undesired, for both the community and any officers involved, deadly force is absolutely a necessary option.

The argument has been made that police officers should not use deadly force because they have a variety of less lethal options at their disposal. OC spray (pepper spray) and Tasers are two very common items on an officer’s duty belt. The downfall of these items is that they are not always effective and depending on the situation, not enough to neutralize a threat. According to Commander Robert Stewart, “OC spray must be used at a fairly close range and is not effective on everyone.” If a suspect is swinging wildly with a knife at someone and pepper spray was used, it will still not prevent the person from slashing. Tasers

are another very useful, less lethal option, but they have their drawbacks as well. According to Officer Douglas Davis, Taser instructor, “Tasers are only effective if both barbs come in contact with their target [and] if the clothing worn by the target is too thick, it can affect the effectiveness of the Taser because the barbs may not make a good connection with the target.” Although the idea of using less lethal options is noble, they are not always practical.

The first reason deadly force is a necessary option is to prevent the fleeing of a known convicted felon from a place of confinement or a know felon fleeing a scene and poses a threat of harm to society. Chapter 704.8 of the Iowa Code states as follows:

A correctional officer or peace officer is justified in using reasonable force, including deadly force, which is necessary to prevent the escape of any person from any jail, penal institution, correctional facility, or similar place of confinement, workplace of trial or other judicial proceeding, or to prevent the escape from custody of any person who is being transported from any such place of confinement, trial or judicial proceeding to any other such place, except that deadly force may not be used to prevent the escape of one who the correctional officer or peace officer knows is confined on a charge or conviction of any class of misdemeanor. (Iowa)

In situations involving escapees, it must be determined that they are a threat to public safety, which sometimes may be difficult, before deadly force is warranted. *Police and Law Enforcement* by William J. Chambliss states that in the court case of *Tennessee vs. Garner* (1985), it was determined that “deadly force can only be used in two situations: (1) when there is an immediate danger to the officer, other officers, or the community; or (2) when the suspect has demonstrated serious dangerousness in prior threats/uses of force” (114).

The second reason deadly force is a necessary option is for the safety of the officer. The Iowa Code states, “A person is justified in the use of reasonable force when the person reasonably believes that such force is necessary to defend oneself from any imminent use of unlawful force” (Iowa). During a Citizens Police Academy for the Ames, Iowa, Police Department, the following question was posed: How many calls or traffic stops do police respond to that involve a gun? The answer to the question was 100 percent. Because all officers are armed, every call or stop that they encounter has a gun involved. Videos can be found all over YouTube where officers, on routine traffic stops, have had weapons pulled on them. Some officers have been slashed or stabbed with knives; some officers have been shot and killed, sometimes with their own firearm. Police officers respond to potentially volatile situations, such as the domestic call example provided earlier. If officers do not have the option or the means for the level of force that was necessary in these rare situations, the officers could very well have been the ones who died trying to protect innocent lives.

The Third reason that deadly force is a necessary option is for the protection of the public. Once again the Iowa Code says that reasonable force, including deadly force, is justified when protecting oneself or another from death or serious harm (Iowa). The duty of police officers is unique in the sense that when the public is running away from a violent situation, the police officers are running towards it. In volatile situations, such as an active shooter or domestic violence, the main objective of the officers is for their safety and even more so, the safety of the public. Innocent civilians should never have to be in fear for their lives or serious injury. The students and faculty at Columbine High School; the patrons at the movie theater in Aurora, Colorado; the students on the campus of Virginia Tech; or anyone, anywhere else, has the basic human right of being safe. Police officers have sworn to their city, state, and country to protect that basic right. When that right is taken in a violent

manner, police have to respond. When a person enters a movie theater or college campus and starts shooting innocent people, the police need to be able to use that like force to handle the situation. Even in less extreme situations, like entering a residence and finding a husband physically abusing his family, the option for deadly force must be present in order to protect the innocent.

Deadly force is an unfortunate and misunderstood resort. Chief of Police Martin Richardson says, “Because departments aren’t allowed to discuss such instances until after DCI (Department of Criminal Investigation) is finished with their investigation and the county attorney provides the decision in the form of a public record, the public doesn’t know the details of instances in which police use deadly force.” It is sad to think that situations arise in which that type of force is necessary. It should never be the officer’s objective to take a life, but deadly force is a necessary option to prevent a violent person from escaping and causing harm to someone else, or needed in the process of saving the life of the officer or a citizen.

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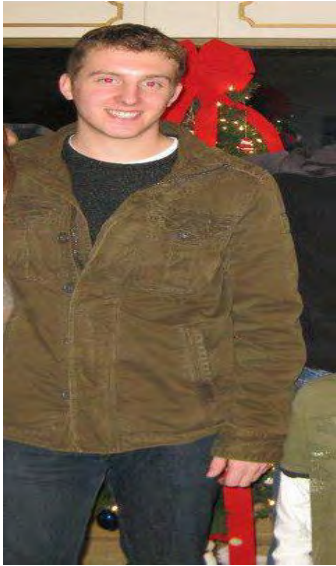
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Guy Newberry

Guy Newberry believes that when writing a story there is a way to strike resemblance in an audience without conflict. Not necessarily the fact that conflict doesn't happen in everyday life, but there comes a one in a thousand day where everything goes well. Being half of a newly engaged couple, he feels that an ordinary person can do extraordinary things when they love someone. Like write an exceptional short story for example. His favorite author is Dan Brown.

Remembering an Event essay

Top Of The World

A soft, familiar touch brushed across my lips. A smirk crept across my face as I reluctantly opened one of my eyes. There she sat, in my dark grey Iowa Hawkeye t-shirt anxiously trying to get me on my feet. "Wake up baby!" She demanded, the excitement hardly contained in her voice. She looked at me; the innocence in her perfect green eyes seemed to go for miles. I groaned, "What time is it? Can't we just sleep a little longer?" She slid off the bed and paraded to the window of our hotel room. I covered my eyes as she yanked the curtains open on the window. "It's a beautiful day out," the smile on her face was as bright as the sun light coming through the window. "Yeah, a little too bright for the people still in bed over here," I muttered. Amidst the bustle of people on the sidewalk and the line of cars that seemed to go for miles in the street, there was a peaceful carelessness in the air of Rio de Janeiro. The clean sandy beaches stretched out towards the ocean, while the

waves rolled in and crashed as they capsized. I knew where she was really looking. Off to the eastern shoreline rose the tallest mountain in Rio. Towering over the city, as if he were on top of the world, stood one of the most influential people in human history. The statue of Christ the Redeemer, standing at 125 feet tall, was the reason I was being dragged out of bed.

As I was brushing my teeth, Gleika wrapped her arms around me and gave me a kiss on the neck. I smiled and looked at our reflection in the mirror. Her arms draped over my shoulders. Her radiant smile warmed my insides. Her long brown hair flowed down her back and the dress I bought her billowed as she moved. I didn't even need to leave my hotel room to see the most beautiful attraction in Rio. *How did I get so lucky?* A thought I had been puzzling myself with for months on end. I rinsed my mouth out and kissed her back. She handed me my black V-neck and I pulled it on over my head. I wrapped my arm around her and grazed the top of her head with my lips. I opened the door and we paced toward the elevator. I hit the button for the ground floor and the red down arrow flashed. "You know what? We are the best looking couple in Rio." Her cheeks flushed with a deep rosy color as she answered, "Of course we are baby." She gave me a peck on the nose. As we swept across the lobby the receptionist gave us a quick nod as if to say "*have a nice day.*"

I pushed my sunglasses down over my eyes as we stepped outside. We strode down the sidewalk toward a line of taxis. The drivers all leaned up against their cars talking to each other as they waited for their next passengers. Gleika was the only one out of the two of us that spoke Portuguese. An amused smile inched across my face, "I think you better take this one." She grinned and stepped in front of me. The man leaning on the car closest to us looked up. "Bom dia! O senhor poderia nos levar ao Cristo Redentor?" She questioned. He replied casually, "Sim, o preco do percurso ate o topo da montanha fica em torno de

cinquenta reais.” We climbed into the back of his taxi. As soon as we shut the door he sped off around the corner. *These guys apparently don't like to mess around*, I thought to myself. We were weaving in and out of traffic, and sliding down the seat as he whipped around every turn. It became pitch black as we entered a tunnel, when we came out we were waterside of the Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas. The water in the lagoon was as clear as the ocean, and massive business buildings had it surrounded. Gleika saw me peering through the window,” That’s Leblon. It’s the richest business district in Rio De Janeiro.” I turned to look back out the window again. “So it’s like the Beverly Hills of Rio?” I inquired. She smiled, apparently amused with my connection,” Yes, it’s just like that.” She scooted over to loop her arm through mine and laid her head on my chest. We hurriedly made our way past Leblon and were met by the favelas. There were hundreds of homes cluttered so close together that they were all practically touching. The houses swept across a majority of the city, and some areas of the neighborhoods went up the sides of the mountains.

It seemed as though we were in the movie Fast and the Furious. We sped through tiny, winding side roads as we weaved our way up the side of Corcovado Mountain. The driver turned back and muttered something informative. “What did he say?” I interrogated. Gleika rolled her eyes,” He said that about a year ago there was a train bringing tourists up the side of this mountain. It went off the tracks and tipped over, killing a bunch of people.” My stomach turned over,” Well, that’s one more reason I’m glad we took a taxi!” I exclaimed. The houses on this mountain were more spread out and each driveway was gated. They were a modest, but pleasant sight with a cheerful feel to them. The roads on the side of the mountain were narrow with a lot of traffic going to and from Cristo Redentor. Each time a bus came down the mountain it was a near collision.

We slowed to a stop in front of an old brick building. The bricks were worn down, and the color in them was faded. The building could have crumbled any minute. Gleika handed the taxi driver a wad of cash and opened the door. “Why are we getting out?” I wondered out loud. Gleika looked at me, clearly annoyed, “Baby, I told you about this yesterday,” she remarked, “Taxis aren’t allowed to go to the top of the mountain. They can only come to this point, and then we have to take a tourist bus the rest of the way,” She grabbed my hand and pulled me out of the car. We hiked across the street and through the parking lot full of buses. We advanced towards the shack and stepped up to the window. Once again, Gleika had to act as my translator, “Ola, voce aceita de credito?” She asked. The lady responded but I didn’t hear a word she said. I was lost in my own thoughts as I looked at Gleika. *I love when she speaks a different language*, I smiled to myself. On the other side of the shack there was another parking lot. This one slightly rose from the steep hill that was the street below. It was filled with taxis waiting to take people back down to the city. Gleika handed her the credit card and paid for the bus tickets.

We clambered on to the bus, which had four rows of seats shaped like cushions of a futon. We sat in the first row just behind the driver’s seat. My eyes opened wide at the surprise of Kelly Clarkson coming from the radio. I’m not a big fan of hers, but it was the first time I had heard American music in almost a month. Gleika laughed when she saw my face. I didn’t even have to say anything, she already knew.

The houses grew sparse on the last leg of the mountain. As they dissipated and the distance between the bus and the neighborhood increased, the population of trees grew vast until they were all that was to be seen. “Ouch”, Gleika cursed and plugged her ears. “Que?” I asked, trying to sound cute speaking in her native tongue. She rubbed her ears. “You didn’t

feel that? My ears just popped.” She winced in discomfort, and then it hit me. My ears began to feel the pressure as if we were in a jet twenty thousand feet in the air.

Our driver hummed through clenched teeth as we zigzagged up the mountain. I turned and looked at Gleika, our arms outstretched towards each other to where they finally rested: on the seat, her hand in mine. I squeezed her hand gently and smiled. My heart beat faster as she turned to look at me. Her eyes were warm and soft as they glazed over. Gazing upon me, her cheeks began to flush. The corners of her mouth quickly turned up into a smile, and dimples appeared setting into her cheeks. She squeezed my hand in return. What must have been only a few seconds felt like a lifetime as we held eye contact. A chill ran down my spine. We emerged from the trees into the clearing at the top of the mountain.

We squinted and peered through the front windshield as the sunlight intensified. The ride was smoother as we entered the square. There was no longer road beneath us, but the ground had become a tiled floor. We had arrived at the bottom level of Christ the Redeemer.

The driver hopped out and walked around to open the door and let us out. I climbed out first, pulling Gleika out behind me. I stretched my arms towards the sky and arched my back as I stood up. The air was much thinner at the top. Yawning, I took in my surroundings. In the middle of the square the buses were parked waiting to take tourists back down the mountain. Around the outside of the square was a sidewalk set a few feet lower in the ground outlined by a railing. Families and friends crowded the railing observing the city from the first vantage point. A few kids stood on the railing with their arms stretched out like wings, the ability to fly still apparently a possibility in their mind. Across the square there was a bar and restaurant. A few guys, probably waiting for their families, sipped on glasses of beer at the bar. To the right of the restaurant something caught my eye.

Armed to the teeth, stood three security guards fully decked out in black bulletproof gear. They guarded the gates like they led not to a statue of Jesus, but to Heaven itself.

Fixed on them, I began to walk in their direction. A slight tug on the arm pulled me back. The sound of Gleika's voice snapped me out of my trance, "Babe, where are you going?" she questioned, looking puzzled. "Shouldn't we check out the first level before we go up there?" I shrugged and let her guide me to the far corner of the platform. I jumped down to the sidewalk and held my hand out to help her down. She shot me a look and I grinned as she ignored my hand. Grabbing her dress with both hands, she carefully lifted it off the ground and jumped down with ease. She walked past me, my hand still outstretched, toward the railing.

She stood in the corner of the deck where the two railings met, her hands rested on it. I slowly stepped toward her, taking her in. I slid my hands down the outside of her arms, and finally rested mine on top of hers. She gasped at the city of Rio far below. The beach ran down the coastline beyond the city. The reflection of the sun stretched across the ocean, as it rippled in the waves.

"The city's gorgeous from up here!" Gleika cried out. I chuckled at her reaction as I responded, "Come on dork! Let's go see the rest."

She grabbed my arm and put it around her as we headed to the gate. We handed the guards our tickets and they held up their hands, palms to the sky, motioning with their fingers for us to step through. After we got through, the path forked. One route went off to the left, one to the right. Down the left path was an elevator that took people up to the top level. To the right there were old concrete stairs that curved up to the second deck.

"It would be cheating to take the elevator to the top while we're still young," I teased, "we'll get the full experience by walking." Halfway up the stairs we were already

running out of breath. There was a gift shop off to the right. Shelves lined the walls filled with statues of the Christ in all shapes, materials and sizes. In the corner they had other gifts like mugs, key chains, and big straw hats. We pushed on up the stairs and the second lookout deck unfolded in front of us. It wound around to the right like a wide corridor. A massive stairway led up to the third and final level structured like the steps to the temple of a ziggurat. At the top rested the statue of Christ, arms outstretched, watching over the city like he protected it and its inhabitants.

The stairs came up at the backside of the statue. The cream colored statue was enormous. Jesus seemed to ascend higher into the sky with each step we took. I smiled at Gleika as we walked out from behind the statue. Breathing heavily, we stopped and looked around as we caught our breath.

Clouds had rolled in fogging our view. The Christ was depicted in the statue exactly as he was when he was nailed to the cross. His arms stretched, holes in the middle of each hand from the nails. He seemed to be floating in our direction as the clouds kept rolling in. The deck was crowded and it was hard to move without rubbing up against someone. It was a rare sight as people joined together from all over the world. Different races, religions, and ethnic groups in the same place to commemorate the man that died for all of them. Families taking pictures in front of him in the same cliché pose. Their arms stretched out directly in front of him trying to duplicate his stance.

The observatory deck split into two levels. Halfway down the deck stairs led to another level that narrowed as it came to a point. People were packed together like sardines, tighter and tighter as it got to the tip. We made our way to the stairs about to descend when the splash of cold water startled us. A group of dark skinned people chanting and singing in a language I didn't recognize passed us by. The father led the people back towards the stairs,

sticking his hand in the water and flinging it at people as he went. His green robe was dragging on the ground behind him as he slowly paced away from us.

I pushed through the people holding on to Gleika's hand as we progressed towards the end of the long, narrow deck. We got to the end and put our hands on the thick stone railing. Gleika's eyes went wide as she looked out from the top like a kid receiving a new toy on Christmas. I pecked her on the head. The heat intensified on the back of my neck as the sun came out again.

"Are you glad we came?" I questioned her, gleaming. She leaned into me. "Yes," she replied, "It's perfect, thank you for bringing me here." Her bright smile matched my own. "The city really is breath-taking from up here. This is what I see every time I look at you," I informed her, "It knocks the wind right out of me." She craned her neck up waiting for a kiss. I leaned down, closed me eyes and firmly kissed her on the lips. We stood there together looking out over Rio from the top of the world. Sometimes a day can go by and everything is alright. Fulfilled by having everything we had ever wanted, each other.



Charles Levy

Chuck Levy, a married father with four children and a mother-in-law, is an adult learner who has finally decided to return to school and forget all that he used to remember, or is it remember what he used to forget, or... Anyway, he loves long strolls on the beach at midnight, a good book in front of a roaring fire, (virtual or in the real world, he isn't picky), and enjoys playing a rousing game of *Diablo III* or *World of Warcraft* with other gaming enthusiasts. He loves to read and was recently pushed into realizing that he has a tolerable ability to write thanks to a Composition I class

and decided to share it with the world.

Argument Essay

I Want a Robot to Enrich My Life

Robots have changed the face of our current workforce and the continued use of robots in our everyday life is a change for the better when compared with the human alternative. With their expanding use in the workplace, in our homes, and in the places that we go to relax and enjoy life, robots are a reality that is better to embrace than ignore. It is my belief that robots should continue to take our place in those areas in which they excel and that we should overcome our fear of robots taking over. By embracing robots, we can allow them to help us be safer, produce goods more cheaply, and provide ways in which we can gain more time for ourselves.

To begin with, we need to get a common definition of what a robot is. According to Merriam-Webster, a robot is: "a device that automatically performs complicated, often

repetitive tasks” (Merriam-Webster). This definition is the most suitable to the majority of robots found today in our society. While humanoid robots, or those that look and act like a human being, can be found in many specialized areas and are becoming more commonplace every year, the most frequently found robots in our world don’t look anything like us.

Depending upon what a specific robot is designed to do, it might have a variety of arms for holding and manipulating objects, legs, wheels or tracks for mobility, and cameras, microphones and other miscellaneous sensors used to accomplish its designated task. Using this definition, we can now begin a discussion around how their use is more of a help than a hindrance.

Let's take a look at the workplace; either the factory or the warehouse floor would be a good place to start. It is on these factory lines where many different people have historically been crammed together doing the many different repetitive tasks each day that comprise the packaging or manufacture of a product. This is one of the positions where a robot has excelled in their place, as doing the same thing over and over is what a robot does best. By replacing the human worker with a robot on an assembly line, it has saved hundreds of hours spent in a doctor's office with a repetitive stress injury for replaced workers, or may have even saved employees' lives, in the case of an accident in the workplace (Pearson). A robot worker, in contrast to the human being, can work 24 hours a day, seven days a week without stopping for restroom breaks or lunch. Robots don't complain, they don't stress out, and they don't care if you use them without regard to their feelings. Robots also help the company's bottom line, by saving with costs in the way of benefits, compensation or salary demands (King).

While there is an initial high expense in the purchase and the corresponding training of a robot to do the individual work necessary, after they are in place, the only thing they

need is a power supply and a program to follow. A displaced worker from this scenario might argue that their fear was justified in regard to robots, yet the use of a robot in this manner has made the corporate workplace safer and allowed the company to supply their goods more inexpensively to the consumer. The worker replaced by the automaton will have an opportunity to find a position in which they might enjoy their work or use their imagination more frequently than their old job allowed. Instead of spending their day placing a wiring harness into an automobile frame over and over, they could be helping to design a better way for the harness to ergonomically fit into the limited space available or even how to eliminate the harness altogether so that there might be more space for passenger comfort. The fact that their work was so repetitive and required so little innovation is what made it possible that they could be replaced by a robot in the first place.

The medical field is also another place in which robots or mechanical devices are doing work in better ways than humans can hope to do on their own. Currently in hospital or surgical setting, robots can only aid humans in their work to save lives. They cannot currently function on their own and must rely on the expertise and experience of the doctor or surgeon operating them. Yet, robotic surgical devices can do procedures that are less invasive and more accurate than a human being can do alone. In the case of brain surgery, the minute details and cramped space provided for inside of a human skull, the millimeter adjustments possible by the robot can spell the difference between a successful removal of a cancerous growth or the patient living with a speech impediment for the rest of their life (Haragozloo, Margolis and Temesta 1882). More surgeries can now also be done on an outpatient basis, as those done with robotic aid generally need less recovery time due to the minimal blood loss experienced during those operations. Robots save lives and money in

hospitals by providing for the accurate delivery of medication or food, replacing human workers and allowing them to do less tedious work (King).

Robots in our everyday lives, outside of the workplace and the emergency room setting, not only save our time but can save our lives. The obvious ways that a robot can save our time at home is by doing the menial chores of housework for us. The advantage of the Roomba robot allowed for easy vacuuming of our carpets and the mopping of our floors. There are even robots mow our lawns for us or clean our gutters, helping to keep our lives safe by preventing mowing accidents or from taking nasty spills from high ladders, accidents which could result in injury or death. Google's new robotic cars are an innovation that will provide for a gateway into a much safer way of driving and being driven on our highways and roads. With the advent of sensor driven technologies and the permission of the Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles, who recently issued the nation's first drivers license for robotic cars, there is hope that these cars will eventually become mainstream and help to provide safe and secure transportation for all. The problem with cars, and their current human drivers, is that since we are at the controls, accidents occur more frequently due to our human frailties. Human beings get tired, become distracted easily, and succumb to health effects that are unforeseen when first getting behind the wheel at the beginning of our trip. As a matter of fact, according to the NHTSA, "18% of injury crashes in 2010 were reported as distraction-affected crashes" (National Highway Transportation Safety Alliance). In contrast to our own driving habits, robots don't get distracted; they don't text, eat or drink, rubberneck at accidents, or mess with the entertainment system. The sensors provided for in the robotically controlled vehicles can see under and around the cars around them, have radar and infrared sensors that enable them to gather more information than our simple ocular and aural sensors could ever hope to do, and lasers and gps provide for

exacting location and environmental mapping that gives this robotic setup an almost foolproof driving accuracy (Stewart). As cars become more automated, removing fallable humans from the equation, we gain more in safety and more time in which we don't have to concentrate on the road and traffic, allowing our commutes back and forth to work or our vacation destinations to be more productive or relaxing, depending upon your interest. Currently, on average we spend more than 100 hours per year commuting back and forth to work, with a drive time of more than twenty minutes each day, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau). This is more time than I got to spend on my vacations in the last three years combined.

Whether it is in our homes or in our workplaces, using robots to replace us in areas that can save time, money or lives makes sense and should be considered an aid to human beings instead of a replacement for us. They free us to do the harder parts of our jobs, thinking and creating, which is we should be doing instead of the menial, backbreaking and dangerous things we currently must do without a robot to take over. By our acceptance of robots into our everyday lives, we can begin living them as we should instead of how we currently are forced to without the additional, automated aid. I am ready for our new robot overlords, or more accurately, our new robotic helping hands to come and assist us. Our fear should not even be a part of the equation, for while they have great power and ability in which they can influence our lives, it is by our imagination and innovation that they have come into being in the first place.

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Charles Levy

Narrative Essay

My First Family Reunion

"BOOM!" The crash of thunder seemed to have come straight out of my imagination, rattling the living room windows as I stared out into the early morning gray. "That's just the way it's going to happen," I think to myself, envisioning the reaction as Michelle's family meets me for the first time. The gloomy and threatening weather is but a reflection of my mood as I contemplate the coming afternoon's events. The day itself seems to be typical one for early summer, with nature deciding to give us a bit of rain before letting summer truly take hold. It is the middle of June in the year 1995 and I'm feeling a bit nervous as we are preparing to drive down to my first ever family reunion. The anxious question of whether or not they will tolerate me as a member of the family, much less like me, is tying my stomach into knots.

It might seem that I am blowing this whole thing out of proportion, but a family reunion is a brand new experience for me, for my own family never held them. My parents were in their mid-30s when they adopted my sister and me, and their family always seemed to be from a generation once removed from us. The only times they seem to get together were weddings and funerals, not a single time in celebration of family and friends. By contrast, family reunions aren't anything new for my wife Michelle's family; they try having one every few years, but the Templeman reunion is new to my little family because this is the first time we've been able to participate. While there had been two or three of these events scheduled in last six years, we hadn't been able to attend because we either had previous

commitments or felt that the kids were still too young to handle the large group of people that invariably attend these affairs.

For the last two weeks, I had been running through worse case scenarios in my mind surrounding how this event would go down. In my imagination, my wife's family reunion is plugging along great. I visualize walking up to a shelter house filled by conversation and laughter, with glimpses of children running in and out of the doors, tossing balls and playing tag or hide-and-seek. Laughter, fun and frolic, that is, until I walk in. That is when all movement stops and everyone turns and stares. I know, I know, a little dramatic, but what's an imagination for, after all, if it can't provide a little drama?

The reality is much more mundane. We arrive around one in the afternoon and the whole family piles out of our forest green Mercury Villager like a clown show at the circus, all the gates flinging open and a tangle of arms and legs rolling out of the sliding passenger side door. The culprits, in this case are my twin 8 year old boys who both want to be first out of the van. Shouts of "Where's the football Dad?" and "Can I get something to drink now?" greet me as I struggle out of my seat belt. "In the back", I say in answer to the football query and "No, like I told you already, wait until we get to the shelter," my response to his tenth request for a soda during the interminable ninety minute drive.

The park is lush and green, still wet from the brief weather that passed through the area earlier in this morning. Hissing and popping, I see four smoking grills which must be providing the mouth-watering scent of pork ribs and bratwurst that lingers in the atmosphere as we walk towards the open air shelter with our arms full. Our contribution to the pot luck picnic is my wife's famous potato salad, chocolate chip cookies and a fruit cocktail filled cherry Jell-O mold in the shape of a ring. Being the man of the family and the head of the household, I have somehow volunteered to carry the drink cooler all by myself.

I don't mind so much, since I feel the need to demonstrate my strength and agility to all present as we move to the shelter containing the picnic tables, much like an alpha male silverback gorilla in an unfamiliar situation might do. In my head the display seems to be going pretty well as I smoothly move up the path with the heavy Coleman cooler gripped between my hands. Unfortunately, the reality is that I am staggering up the path under the weight of the case of Pepsi, a twelve pack of Bud and about 10 tons of ice.

As we reach the shelter, I notice that there isn't an empty table in sight and a grunt of exasperation leaves my lips. I no longer feel as strong and agile as before just standing there with the cooler getting heavier and heavier in my arms. I may be six and a half feet tall and over three hundred pounds, but the majority of that is no longer muscle and I know that if I don't set this load down, it may leave my grip involuntarily. Now wouldn't that be quite the show of strength and agility?! Michelle and my mother-in-law Rita enter from behind me and suddenly an empty table materializes. I am almost certain that it wasn't there before, but I keep my mouth shut and place the cooler on its edge with a relieved sigh. From the back of the shelter, pair of figures separate from the cluster of people gathered there. "Michelle!" shouts a linebacker sized young man moving towards us at a brisk walk. He is about five feet ten inches tall and must weigh as much as I do. Something about his ash blonde hair, pale blue eyes and pert face remind me of a cross between a mother and daughter that I know and I realize that these two must be some of the people that my partner has mentioned many times before. "Chuck, this is my Uncle John." Michelle informs me with a big smile, "And this is my Aunt Peg", she says as a much smaller woman steps out from behind John. Now, before you hear my response to her introduction, please keep in mind that I am not a real "party" kind of guy. I was a geek in high school and would still be considered one now almost ten years later. My nervous greeting to both John and Peg

consisted of a nod and the single monosyllabic word, “Sup.” As you can imagine, this earned me a scowl from my wife as I also receive a cursory head to toe glance from Peg and a handshake from John. They prove not to be quite as reluctant to meet me as I thought they would be, for I got a pleasant greeting from each of them. Both of her relatives look happy to see her and they immediately begin moving about the room, greeting everyone as they pass, “working the room” as I like to call it.

I wave to my spouse in a short goodbye because I know that I won’t see her for a while, sit down at the recently vacated table and pull out a Budweiser from the overfilled cooler. I was starting to get the feeling that my imagination may have gotten the best of me surrounding this shindig. Meanwhile, my three kids have disappeared, moving off to join other groups of children at play somewhere out in the larger area of the park. I remember seeing a large playground and a six person swing set as we drove around the park looking for a space, so I am not too worried. I also know that they will be back eventually, at least for as long as it takes to grab a pop and a cookie or two from the plate on the green wooden bench. I glance around the shelter house at the groups of two or three people standing together. Curious looks and tentative smiles greet me as I survey the area, but I am not adventurous enough to get up and introduce myself to my “relative” strangers quite yet.

After a short while, my youngest child Karah appears from out of nowhere. “What’cha doin’ sweetie?” I ask as I pull her onto my lap and give her a big squeeze. I hadn’t realized that I was feeling alone and abandoned until just that moment, which is a pretty tough thing to do in a room full of people, but then again being an alpha male isn’t easy either. “Just playing,” she says, “Can I have some cookies to give to my new friends?” She was standing there with two other little girls her age when I had grabbed her for the hug. All three faces light up and smile when I tell them “Sure, but just a couple.” She moves

directly to the blue glass plate, taking four cookies and disappearing just as quickly and quietly as she had appeared. I marvel at my daughter's ready acceptance with a group of kids she has just met, wishing that adults could do the same thing. I also chuckle to myself at the speed in which my little four year old girl has learned to wrap me around her finger and wonder if I am not mistaken, that adults may do the same thing if they are given the chance.

It sounds like a cattle call as a chorus of "Food's done" and "Come and get it" echo from the relative strangers manning the grills. As they begin to pile perfectly charred burgers, juicy brats and long racks of baby back ribs off of the grills and onto platters, people start moving back into the shelter and a queue starts at the main table. Over the heads of the gathering throng, I can see my wife walking up to the shelter house chattering with three new faces. She comes over to me obviously excited about seeing all of the people she grew up with gathered in one place. I am happy for her, but also a little nervous about how dinners work in this group. "So, how does this work?" I ask. She shrugs and says "Just grab a plate and pile it on, I guess. That's the way we used to do it." I throw the shrug back at her and grab a plate for myself and hand her one. "Lead the way!" I reply with a grin and a wink, "Cut me a path to them ribs."

The kids and mom have joined our little group and we all work through the line, grabbing salads, buns, meat and fixings as we go and sit back down at our designated space. The atmosphere is similar to a holiday dinner in our own home, with laughter and good natured banter being shouted across the space. As we finish piling our plates for the second time and sit back down to enjoy another beer, my wife leans into me and whispers, "I told you that there was nothing to worry about. We're all family here."

The small knot that had formed in my chest begins to loosen as I realize that, not only has this affair been nothing like my wild imagination had envisioned, it has somehow

been an enjoyable and relaxing time as well. It was about this time when people began to get up and move out of the shelters, grabbing various pieces of equipment that I hadn't noticed earlier as they went. Footballs, basketballs, Frisbees, baseball mitts and bats are picked up as groups begin to form for some informal games of sport. John and a cousin I have not met yet move over to our table and he puts a hand to my shoulder. "Let's go Chuck, it's time to get cracking", he says, "We need some heavy hitters on our team and you've been selected." To say that I am surprised would be an understatement. I hadn't thought they would be interested in the "new guy," but it just goes to show how far from the truth my entire scripted scenario had actually been. I joined them and the five or six others members of our team, each of which greeted me with a smile and a high five. Even the opposing team's players smiled a greeting and I overheard shouts of "Hey, no fair!" and "How come they always get the good ones!" Friendly greetings, inclusion in "family" games and good feelings all around, I couldn't have been more mistaken about this affair. Drama from my imagination indeed, all placed there by my own fears and assumptions.

I guess that sometimes when if we sit back, relax and let events unfold as they may, life can take us down an unexpected and enlightening path, as it has here at my first family reunion. It is here that I learned that families, no matter how different we all might seem on the outside, will always accept you, even if you only become a member late in the game like I did. I know that we will be returning again the next time the Templeman family reunion gets together and I also know that when we do, I won't have to be worried about fitting in or knowing everyone there. I know now that even if I don't remember all of their names, I will be with my family, and that is all that matters to this fine group of people. Apparently, ready acceptance was there for me all along; all I needed to do was recognize it for what it was and to receive it. I just never imagined that it could be so easy to fit in with a group of strangers.

Strangers no more, now they are family.



Jon Christiansen

Remembered Event

A Walk Through the Clouds to the Rooftop of Africa

It was 5:30a.m. on October 18, 2006. My legs and body were numb from the cold temperature and cutting wind. My face felt like it was on fire from the sleet attacking the exposed areas. I had three layers of clothing on my bottom half and five on top, yet the wind sliced through them like they were not there. I had on a balaclava (a fleece ski mask) and a warm hat, yet it felt as if they had vanished. It was pitch black outside. I could not see more than a few yards in front of me. My headlamp was a joke. My nose wasn't running because my snot was frozen. My legs didn't hurt because I couldn't feel them. At 19,340 feet above sea level, on Mount Kilimanjaro, at 5:30a.m. there were no streetlights, no paved sidewalks, nothing to follow except my guide Raymond. Zigzagging back and forth in a switchback fashion, we slowly progressed towards our goal. Raymond and I had been climbing a very steep scree covered section of the mountain since leaving base camp at two o'clock in the morning. I could not tell how far we'd come or how far we had to go. The darkness had drowned out all the indicators. I thought quietly to myself "Will this ever end?" I was exhausted! At that point, I was really beginning to wonder if I would reach the summit. Raymond and I came to a small cave in the side of the mountain.

"This would be a good place to rest for a few minutes and get out of the wind and cold," Raymond said to me.

"Can I just take a nap here for an hour or so? Hopefully, by then the sun will start to come up and it will get warmer."

“You can’t go to sleep and we can’t rest for too long! If you do, hypothermia may set in and we will have to turn back!”

I was exhausted from the cold! I started thinking back to when I began planning this endeavor.

In June of 2006, I had just returned to Al Asad Air Base, in Iraq, after a vacation to Indonesia, Cambodia, and Thailand. I had gotten the bug for travel. All I could think about was where I wanted to go next. I had always wanted to do a safari in Africa, so I started planning a trip. I knew that Tanzania would be my destination because of the amazing national parks. While researching which parks I wanted to visit, I saw a picture of Mount Kilimanjaro. It was beautiful! I enjoyed hiking and thought about how awesome it would be to climb one of the seven summits of the world. The decision was made. I was going to conquer that mountain.

I started looking into what I would need to get myself ready, which included beginning a training schedule, purchasing the appropriate gear and getting vaccinations and medications. One website recommended climbing decent-sized hills two or three times a week for a couple months before the actual climb. I literally laughed out loud. I was in the center of the flattest place on earth. Where was I going to find a hill to climb? Thank God treadmills have an incline setting. I went to the gym everyday for one hour over my lunch break, put the treadmill at the highest setting, and that was my hill for the next three months. I ordered new hiking boots and a bunch of cold weather clothes. Every night after work, I strapped on my new boots and walked around for a couple miles to break them in, so I wouldn’t get blisters during the climb. I changed my diet to help me tone up and be in the best physical condition possible to help insure success. I read statistics on the success rates of people who had attempted to summit Kilimanjaro. Some sources say only sixty percent

make the summit. I wasn't worried. I had tenacity and Diamox (a drug that helps prevent altitude sickness). The final item on my list of preparations was to fly to Kuwait and get my vaccination for yellow fever and obtain malaria prevention medication. Mission accomplished, it was time to head for Dar es Salaam, Tanzania!

I arrived at Dar es Salaam International Airport and took a taxi to my hotel. I spent a day and a half in the city before taking my next flight to Kilimanjaro National Airport, near the city of Arusha. I was taken to my hotel and met with my guide. After an eight-day safari in Tanzania's northern circuit, I was brought back to Arusha, where I waited to be picked up by a representative from the Gates Hotel in the city of Moshi. I began the several hour car ride to Moshi, situated at the foothills of the highest mountain on the continent of Africa. My heart was racing. I was so excited and nervous at the same time. What was it going to be like? Did I train well enough? Did I bring the correct gear? What would I be eating? How bad will I smell after six days without a shower? All of those questions ran through my mind.

"There is Kilimanjaro," my driver said in broken English.

In the distance, I saw the monstrosity. It was imposing even though clouds obscured the top. I arrived at my hotel and separated all the gear that I needed for the climb from my other luggage, which I checked into a holding closet.

I met Raymond Mtui for the first time. He was a young, tall, thin black man from Moshi. He spoke very good English, as well as French, Swahili and his native dialect. He told me that he was working on a couple of other languages to make him a better guide to a wider range of clients. He had been working as a guide for about three years, and when I asked how many times he had summited the mountain; he said that the number was over 100 times. He told me that there had been times that he would get back down the mountain with one group and head back up with another group the next morning. Raymond knew

what he was doing! As we sat down to talk about the details of the climb, I informed him that I was an experienced hiker but had never attempted anything like this before. He assured me that I would be fine. We parted ways for the night after planning on meeting early in the morning to check in with the park warden. As I hung around the hotel for dinner, I was invited to sit with a group of people who had just returned from their attempt on the mountain. Out of the five people in their group, three of them made the summit. They offered some words of encouragement and wished me good luck.

In the morning, I woke up from my last night on a bed and took the last shower that I'd get for six days. I met Raymond at the front of the hotel and we took a vehicle to the gates of Kilimanjaro National Park. As we were checking in, an SUV with flashing lights screeched to a halt. A man jumped out of the back and ran up to the warden's station speaking in his native tongue.

“What is going on?” I asked.

“He says that the man in back has very bad altitude sickness and needs to go to the hospital” Raymond replied.

A scene like that wasn't what I wanted to see just before I began my attempt. Seeing that man in the back of the SUV gave me my first reality check.

Raymond and I made our way to the trailhead to begin our climb. The first day included eight hours of hiking through rainforest. The vegetation was thick, but beautiful. Bright colored wild flowers exploded out of the dense green background. The rush of water in the distance was peaceful and every now and then a waterfall came into view. Equally peaceful was the chatters of Colobus monkeys as they jumped around in the trees above. The birds and other wildlife were a worthwhile distraction and a great excuse for taking a

break. The day of hiking ended shortly before we broke the tree line. After the long day, I was ready for dinner and bed.

Day two started off great. The weather was nice and the temperature was perfect. That lasted for about four hours and then came the rain. I pulled out my poncho and covered my pack and myself. Raymond and I hiked through a savannah in the rain for another four hours. I didn't get to see too much of my surroundings. I just trudged along with my head down until the rain stopped. Within a couple of hours of the weather improving, we arrived at Horombo campsite. As I looked behind me, I noticed that we were above the clouds. It was surreal! I had never climbed this high before. I looked far ahead of me and for the first time since we began the climb, I saw Uhuru and Mawenzi peaks, the two major peaks of the mountain. Uhuru Peak is the summit at 19,340 feet, and being able to see it, made it seem that much more attainable.

Day three was used as an acclimation day. Raymond and I got up early and hiked to a place called Zebra Rock. As one would guess, Zebra Rock gets its name from being striped. The day was a shorter, more relaxing day, but also very important. Climbers' chances of success are doubled when taking an extra day to acclimate. Two major reasons for failure in mountaineering are high altitude pulmonary edema, a condition in which the lungs become filled with fluid, and high altitude cerebral edema, a condition in which the brain swells. Taking an extra day gives the body a chance to adapt to the altitude, which increases the chances of success.

Day four was a long and arduous trek across alpine tundra. The terrain was sparse and dry like a desert. I stopped on occasion to look back at the blanket of clouds I left behind. I took some pictures and continued on my way. We had been hiking for about four hours, when in the distance in front of me, I saw two men running down the trail toward

me. As they got closer I realized that they were carrying a stretcher with a man on it. I stepped off of the trail to give them plenty of room as they raced past. I didn't know what the circumstances were but I quietly said a prayer for the victim's safety. Once more, the mountain gave me a reality check. Raymond and I continued on through the area between the two peaks of the mountain known as the Saddle. After a total of eight and a half hours of hiking, we arrived at Kibo Hut, the last stop before the grueling summit attempt.

Going through my gear, I packed a small backpack with some food, such as energy bars and trail mix, water, and other essentials for the next morning's journey. I ate a nice meal and then went on a short hike up the summit trail because, according to the research I did, it is good to climb high and sleep low. Sleeping low means that it is always wise to climb to a higher altitude than the altitude planned for sleeping, so the body adjusts and is better able to absorb the oxygen it needs from the thinning air. By the time I got back to the hut, it was getting pretty dark and time for bed. I had an early day ahead of me. The plan was to get up at one o'clock in the morning to begin the ascent. I was so excited and had so much running through my mind that I couldn't get to sleep. I finally dozed off around ten o'clock.

Raymond woke me up at 1:45 in the morning and it was cold! I crawled out of my nice warm sleeping bag and bundled up. On the bottom half of my body, I had a thin, moisture-wicking layer to draw perspiration away from my skin. Atop the base layer was a thick, thermal fleece layer covered by an outer shell trekking pant. On the top half of my body I had the same base layer of moisture-wicking material followed by another, slightly thicker, layer of moisture wicking material covered by a thick cotton t-shirt. In hindsight, the cotton was a bad idea because cotton traps moisture. The fourth layer on my top half was a thick fleece covered by a final outer shell layer. I had started to sweat before I walked

outside. I threw on my balaclava and hat, grabbed my headlamp, bag and trekking poles. I was ready! Nothing could have prepared me for what I was about to encounter.

So, there I was, three and a half hours after leaving Kibo, sitting on my ass in a cave, freezing, knowing that there are several more hours to go and the climb was only going to get tougher.

“We need to keep moving,” Raymond said.

I pled with Raymond to sit in the cave, out of the elements, for just a little while longer. He agreed. Until that morning, I was confident in my ability to make the summit. The previous four days had just been a long walk up a steep hill, but nothing so exhausting that it gave me reason for doubt. The fifth day was unlike anything I had ever experienced. The temperature was frigid and the wind was astonishing. Both cut right through every layer of clothing and skin, right down to my bones. Raymond’s comment to me about hypothermia echoed in my head as we sat in the cave. At that point, I seriously began to wonder if I would make it to the top. I knew my legs were strong because I had not felt fatigued after each long day of hiking up to that point, but the fifth day was different. I knew that if I would have had any feelings in my legs, they would be exhausted and sore. As I sat in the cave, I thought about the time and money I had invested in the trip, the gear, and the training. I thought again about how awesome it would be to be able to say that I had summited Kilimanjaro. Most of all, I wanted to prove to myself that I wasn’t a quitter and that I could do anything that I set my mind to do. After about twenty minutes in the cave, I had warmed up and felt somewhat rejuvenated.

“There is no way in hell that I’m not going to make it up this mountain,” I said to myself.

“We need to keep going. Are you ready?” Raymond asked

“Hell, yeah! Let’s do this,” I replied.

We left the cave and started the back and forth pattern again, slowly gaining altitude. An hour had passed and the most welcoming sight started to peek over the horizon; the sun was coming up. There was nothing that I wanted to see more at that moment. We continued on and the sun continued to rise along with the temperature and my spirits. At 7:00 we came to the end of the scree and were faced with a half hour scramble over boulders to reach Gilman’s Point. From Gilman’s Point, we had just a couple more hours of hiking around the crater rim and over the sadly eroding glaciers to reach Uhuru Peak. The last two hours were just as tough as the beginning of the day. The air got thinner and the temperature got colder the higher we went. I had to stop to catch my breath constantly because of the lack of oxygen at that altitude. I would walk for twenty minutes then rest for five. There was even one time that I lay down on the path behind a rock to get out of the wind. At this point, my legs were completely beat. We had been climbing over steep terrain for seven hours. That’s when I saw it in the distance, the wooden structure that signified and solidified a climber’s success. A rush of adrenalin shot through my veins as I raced up the path until the sign was just a few feet in front of me!

“CONGRATULATIONS: YOU ARE NOW AT UHURU PEAK, TANZANIA,
5895M AMSL. AFRICA’S HIGHEST POINT, WORLD’S HIGHEST
FREESTANDING MOUNTAIN, ONE OF WORLDS LARGEST VOLCANOS.
WELCOME”

I had made it. I had walked through the clouds to the rooftop of Africa. I was at the top of one of the seven summits of the world! Everything else was literally downhill from there. Kilimanjaro was mine!





Shannon Pierson

Shannon Pierson teaches yoga. She roots for the underdog. She accumulates musical instruments but can't play a note. She devours fiction and short stories. She loves to travel and no matter where she goes, she becomes convinced that she should move there. She's a big tipper and she always claps for the band.

Rhetorical Analysis

Clinton's 1996 State of the Union

On January 23, 1996 President Bill Clinton appeared before a joint session of Congress and delivered his State of the Union address. The economy was strong and people expected a combination of good news about the nation's well-being, a sermon on the challenges the nation faced, and a reminder that all Americans have a responsibility to take an active role in their community (Feldmann). The President delivered. His speech focused primarily on domestic issues like community policing, education, and campaign reform. Senator Bob Dole delivered a lackluster ten minute response for the G.O.P. and though others would join him in voicing disagreement, his performance would become a precursor to the election that November. Clinton's hour long speech relied heavily on appeals to ethos and pathos to persuade the members of Congress seated before him and the voters watching at home that although the nation faced major challenges, the state of the union was strong.

In a direct appeal to the voter's ethos, the President sought to establish himself as a reliable family man: likeable, sincere, straightforward, and above all, fair-minded. Clinton's

administration had been accused of partisan gridlock and the overwhelming message of his speech was one of working together as a nation to accomplish common goals. He brought it up in conjunction with every major issue he discussed and even went so far as to salute Senator Dole, his likely opponent in the upcoming election, thanking him for his military service during World War II. This tactic redirected the audience's attention, instead of criticizing Clinton's lack of military history, they recognized his ability to be fair and honest. This is a valuable trait anytime but especially in an election year. Clinton went on to establish credibility as a leader by demanding more from the politicians seated before him and even those sitting at home. He urged Congressmen to resolve their remaining differences and rise above partisanship. He directed his audience to do more to influence positive change, emphasizing the importance of volunteerism and individual responsibility to build better communities saying, "Self-reliance and teamwork are not opposing virtues; we must have both." These tactics appealed to the listeners' character, the President was establishing that he was capable, trustworthy, and respectful of his opposition. Unfortunately, his opponents didn't see it that way.

Senator Dole tried to refute Clinton's character by tearing down his credibility and demonstrating his unwillingness to cooperate. Dole defended the Republican efforts at bipartisanship saying, "President Clinton says our differences are few...that we should try to find common ground. We have tried and tried. Again and again. But such a place appears to be elusive." He went on to call Clinton's trustworthiness into question saying, "the President's words speak of change, his deeds are a contradiction." Indeed the President's speech did seem to contradict his platform as he had adopted some GOP positions in an effort to appear bipartisan. "Twice the president said that "the era of big government is over," in an attempt to dodge the label of tax-and-spend liberal. He emphasized the need for

family values and community, and some of his specific proposals... involve the federal government only peripherally. Republicans sat stone-faced, many furious that the president was stealing what they [felt] to be their themes. (Grier)”

Clinton appealed to pathos using hopeful, opportunistic language and vivid descriptions. He expressed pride in what had been accomplished by his administration and inspired hope for a brighter future. “Our leadership in the world is strong, bringing hope for new peace. And perhaps most important, we are gaining ground in restoring our fundamental values,” he proclaimed “...We live in an age of possibility.” By speaking of hope and possibility Clinton used positive emotions to convince his audience that he had their best interests in mind and under his careful guidance they were being led in the right direction. He also reminded them of how far they’d come by closing his speech with three emotional examples of everyday Americans heroes, a teacher, a veteran, and a police officer who happened to be sitting next to the First Lady for the duration of the speech. This served to remind the audience of what they had lost in the Oklahoma City bombing, a topical national tragedy. The stories of commonplace people doing uncommon things to overcome struggle and tragedy drew empathy from the audience by reminding them of their own hardships. The tales of bravery left the audience in tears and inspired them to believe in hope and change.

Dole attempted to appeal to pathos by provoking fear of big government and anger over injustice but his speech fell flat after Clinton’s hopeful and heartwarming message. He warned the country that the Clinton administration had “tried to place Government experts in charge of our economy and our health and our lives,” and called the President, “the last public defender of a discredited status quo.” Dole tried to use emotion to channel citizens’ dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs to dissatisfaction with the current

administration. The GOP tried to inspire resentment by accusing Clinton of using a national address to deliver a lecture telling Americans how to be parents, spouses, neighbors, and colleagues. “Bill **Clinton** is the say-anything, do-nothing, liberal President... ‘Father Knows Best’ was a television sitcom; it’s not a governing philosophy. (Seelye)” Unfortunately for Republicans, Clinton’s extensive knowledge of policies, both past and present, would lead the audience to believe he really did know best.

While Clinton stuck to broad themes throughout, he appealed to logos by peppering his speech with statistics, historical analogies, and real life examples to drive his arguments home. He specifically mentioned the Family and Medical Leave Act, The Brady Bill, the Goals 2000 Initiative and the START II Treaty and provided statistics to support their value. He compared the move from farm to factory to the Information Age and demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of political history. During the speech he appointed an expert, General McCaffrey, to lead the war on drugs. These arguments appealed to the audience’s logic and reasoning and proved very hard to argue with. Senator Dole refuted many of the President’s claims, but perhaps due to the limited length of his appearance, he relied largely on the emotional appeal of his argument and included little evidence to back it up.

Republicans and Democrats alike agreed that Clinton stole the show. “Millions of those who watched President Clinton deliver his State of the Union Message... did not stay tuned to hear the response that Senator Bob Dole presented. Perhaps, Republicans around the nation said... that was just as well (Wines).” In an ironic twist, an excerpt from Senator Dole’s speech would summarize the public’s reaction to his own performance quite succinctly, “Sometimes all the talk and fighting in Washington can seem very remote. And we political figures can seem detached. And petty. And far removed from the every-day struggle of American citizens and families.” While Dole’s speech did seem petty to the

everyday American, Clinton's speech hit home. He systematically addressed several major issues faced by the American people and used appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos to convince the people at home and in Washington that a solution could be born out of community involvement on the home front and bipartisan effort in Washington.

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Ryan Davis

Ryan Davis graduated from North High School in Des Moines, Iowa. He enjoys playing the guitar, Boy scouts, and hanging out with his friends. He currently attends DMACC in Ankeny, majoring in Liberal Arts AA. After DMACC, he hopes to attend the University of Iowa to major in political science.

Profile Essay

Dimebag Darrell: A New Level

As a guitarist who's been playing for almost eight years, I've been interested in many different genres of music and many different players. Although I admire a lot of guitarists, no guitarist has influenced me as much as the late, "Dimebag" Darrell Abbott, the guitarist best known for his work with, "Pantera." He has influenced my guitar playing skills in many different ways and brought a new sound to heavy metal. At thirteen, I bought, "The Best of Pantera: Far Beyond The Great Southern Cowboy's Greatest Hits" and when I put it into my cd player, it just blew me away. The first song titled, "Cowboys From Hell" kicked off with Dimebag using a Flanger effect pedal as he played through the opening riff to the song and I was blown away.

As I continued to listen to the album, the music was getting heavier and had a different sound but yet, Abbott still contained this groove in his playing which made the

songs unique because until Pantera got popular in the ninety's, most people thought metal was all about speed and brutality. Though Dime could thrash with the best and even better, he brought the groove into heavy metal and as you listen, it's hard not to just bob your head to the music. It was insane because he was the only guitarist in the band. Most metal bands traditionally had two guitarists so one could play the rhythm chords and the other to play the lead solos and arpeggios.

I was always a fan of heavy metal and hard rock music before I first listened to Pantera. I loved bands such as "Slipknot," "Godsmack," "Disturbed," and "Stone Sour." These bands grew popular in the late ninety's and early two-thousandths and were a part of the "nu-metal" subgenre of heavy metal music. When I was a child, I never knew what made these bands change their musical styles from traditional metal bands such "Metallica," "Iron Maiden," "Megadeth," and "Ozzy Osbourne." Even though Pantera was around longer than the bands of the nu-metal category, I didn't listen to them until I bought their greatest hits cd. That's when I was able to fill in the gap between traditional bands and the nu-metal bands. The heavy grooves that Dimebag brought to Pantera had an enormous impact on the nu-metal bands, which is something that changed the sound of metal for that generation of "metal-heads."

I read about Dimebag Darrell and Pantera in magazines before listening and I could tell that he was a loved guitarist and person by his fans and peers. Unfortunately, I didn't have the privilege to hear his music until after he died. On December 8, 2004, Dimebag was shot and killed by a schizophrenic fan while playing onstage with his new band, "Damageplan." I would never have the chance to see this wonderful musician play onstage or see what he could have accomplished if he didn't pass.

Even though it took me awhile to listen to Pantera, Dimebag Darrell's style of playing guitar changed my approach of writing songs and helped me expand my horizons in music. Hopefully more young metal-heads will pick up a Pantera album someday and will appreciate them as much as I do and will be able to pick up the pieces on how their music has changed the whole genre of heavy metal.





Donald Asher

Donald Asher believes that all colleges should have playgrounds for those adults who are still kids deep down. After graduating from Dowling Catholic High School, Donald enrolled at DMACC to further his education in hopes of moving on to Iowa State University. He loves to read books by Anthony Horowitz and Cinda Williams Chima. He even met Mr. Horowitz

once at a book signing and got his newest book at the time *Snakehead* personally autographed.

Profile Essay

A Big Man with a Big Heart

Knoxville Raceway is known as the “dirt racin’ capitol of the world.” I always love going to watch the sprint cars rip around the track at dangerously high speeds. Many people go there to see “the big crash.” They don’t want anyone to get hurt, but they just want some excitement. I loved going there simply to have some quality time with my father and his best friend, and mine as well, “Mr. D.”

Before Mr. D passed away we would make it a yearly trip to the track. Sometimes we would go multiple times during the racing season simply to have a good time. When my dad left to go to Iraq in 2008 I thought that I would miss out on the racing season that year and I was seriously bummed out. Little did I know my dad had a plan in action and it would soon fall into place?

One day I got a phone call; this was an odd thing in itself because as an 8th grader I didn’t get many calls except from my parents to call me home for dinner. When I looked at the caller I.D. on my phone I saw that it was an unknown number. I answered it and found out it was Mr. D calling me to see if I wanted to go to the races with him. He told me that

my dad had made him my honorary “step dad” while he was away. I told him that as long as it was alright with my mom that I would love to go.

The race was a blast: People everywhere, lots of wrecks at the race and even a tour of the pits. We walked down onto the track and I was amazed at how compact the dirt was. It felt just like concrete. While touring the pits Mr. D suggested I asked one of the drivers for a tire. I was apprehensive at first to ask any of the drivers. These were guys who lived life on the edge at high speeds. Why would they want to talk to some kid like me? I finally bucked up the courage to ask one of them if I could have one of their used tires from the race. The driver whom I asked, I forget his name now after all these years, said it was no problem and handed me this giant tire.

So now I had this tire to carry around with me. Mr. D’s son Jonathan also got one that so we spent about an hour running around the pit area playing a new game we invented called “Bumper Tires.” We would put our bodies inside the tire with our legs sticking out the bottom and our head out the top, and run into each other and bounce off. Our arms were trapped inside the tire so if we fell it was going to hurt.

After all this I still had not cleared this with my mom. She had no idea I had this huge sprint car tire and we both had no clue where I was going to put it once I got it home. Mr. D told me not to worry about.





Elbert Fiscus

Elbert Fiscus is a 63-year-old Vietnam veteran. Elbert recently retired from his construction job after 30 years and decided to make use of the GI bill to complete his education. He has taken classes both on-line and on-campus and has gotten used to being the oldest one in class! Elbert has been able to connect with fellow students and work on projects where his lifetime experiences have contributed greatly to the conversation. Elbert has been married to his wife, Ramona, for 40 years. They have four grandsons and one granddaughter. He and his oldest grandson, who is graduating from high school in the spring, are expected to graduate at the same time! Elbert is contemplating continuing his education at a four-year university.

Narrative Essay

The Day JFK Died

A communist killed Jack today. The announcement over the crackling school intercom came swiftly with instructions to leave school immediately and go directly to our homes. As I tried to process the news with the instructions, I swallowed hard, but the lump in my throat does not budge. It's cold and drizzling rain and snow, but my face is burning hot and my feet are freezing cold. I think I'm going to be sick. I swallow the vomit. What should I do? Should I cry? But then I hear my mother's voice: "Boys don't cry." I feel like I need to do something. I don't think this is where I'm supposed to "duck and cover." No, this was not a nuclear alert drill that we practiced during the "Cold War" days. This was an assassination of our beloved President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, or simply "Jack" as we knew him. Fast forward now four short years later when President Kennedy's famous "ask not" speech would resonate within me on my personal quest to "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States." This, then, would be the beginning of my military mission.

On Friday, November 22, 1963, the reign of Camelot exploded, and America as I knew it came to a screeching halt. I was a 14-year-old student sitting in Mrs. Hess' English class, daydreaming about the upcoming weekend. Mrs. Hess fled the classroom in tears. The principal announced that school would be dismissed early. Various emotions from screams and tears to utter silence and shock flooded the hallways as we quietly walked out of the school to our homes. I, again, heard my mother's words: "Boys don't cry." So, I just kept swallowing, hoping the lump in my throat would settle while I quickly wipe away tears forming in the corners of my eyes before mom sees me. As I slowly make my way down the street toward home, the shock of the announcement begins to clear to where I can think. My mind begins racing with so many questions: Where was the Secret Service? What would happen to Mrs. Kennedy? What about John-John and Caroline? Who would be president now? I remember thinking about that word—assassinated. The word was from our old history books that we usually associated with President Lincoln, but not a word we used in 1963, and certainly not in America or with our beloved President Kennedy. This had to be some sort of sick joke. It could not happen in this generation.

Upon arriving home, our fears were confirmed. CBS news anchor, Walter Cronkite, removed his glasses and tearfully confirmed what we all dreaded, that "President Kennedy died at one p.m. Central Standard Time, two o'clock Eastern Standard Time, some thirty-eight minutes ago" ("CBS Announces JFK's Death"). With the news came the confirmation that, indeed, a communist had killed Jack. The days that followed found us glued to our black and white, round picture-tube televisions recapturing those events and participating in the funeral from our living rooms. I watched my mother as she remained composed because Jackie was composed, and Jackie set the standard for decorum. I saw others cry and even wail publicly, but not me or my mother. Why were we so different? Maybe my

stepfather's recent suicide made us a little hardened. Life goes on and one does not wallow in grief. If life hands you a raw deal, then you do something to change it. You don't dwell on it. Boys don't cry. Men fight back.

I remember my mother talking about the blood covering Mrs. Kennedy's stylish outfit. The women of the '60s looked to Jacqueline Kennedy as the style guru, so it was distressing to them to see her so "dirty." It was noted on the morning of the assassination that "Jacqueline Kennedy was pleased that it was raining; she hoped the top would be on that car, she was concerned about her hair becoming disheveled. She didn't want her husband to be ashamed of her. She knew she looked tired." (Manchester, from *The Death of a President*, 1967).

In his inaugural address, President Kennedy stated, "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." In 1967, I took this statement to heart and made the decision to enlist in the Army. I had received my letter from Uncle Sam noting that I was in the top ten for the draft, so I thought I would go on my own terms, knowing that my enlistment would no doubt lead to being sent to fight in Vietnam. While some of my friends were planning to run to Canada if they were drafted, I opted to do the highly unpopular, spit-in-your-face reaction, of serving my country. At 18 years of age, not old enough to vote or drink alcohol, I found myself going from my high school senior prom to the rice paddies of Vietnam. Whether the assassination of President Kennedy drove this decision, I really cannot say for certain. What I do know is that his "ask not" speech did have a profound impact on how I saw my responsibility with regard to my country; perhaps, the understanding that I gained from President Kennedy's statement did instill a sense of personal responsibility of what I can do.

Evil entered my classroom in 1963. More evil was to follow with the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bobby Kennedy as well as the civil rights unrest.

Some 49 years later, questions still exist regarding that day in November 1963. Years of investigations still have not proven exactly who or what was involved in President Kennedy's killing. Yes, we do know that Lee Harvey Oswald made the deadly shot, but we don't know whether or not he acted alone or was part of a vast conspiracy. My personal opinion is that Jimmy Hoffa knew something about the Kennedy assassination which led to his mysterious disappearance. It is well documented that Jimmy Hoffa, together with his association with the Teamsters Union, drew public outbursts directed to then Attorney General Robert Kennedy, as Kennedy felt the Teamsters union was becoming more powerful than the government.

So, can we state that this Camelot existence of the Kennedys and the *Leave It To Beaver* family just played into the naivety of our dreams and that if evil has its way it will destroy our Garden of Eden existence if it wants to? Perhaps, but I feel that it is how we react to the evil and what can we do to counteract its existence. For me, it was to do as President Kennedy cited, to not ask what my country can do for me but ask what I can do for my country. Not only me, but for my brothers and my son whom I am proud to state have all given of themselves for their country. I teach my grandchildren the importance of a simple gesture such as removing their hats during the playing of the National Anthem at ballgames and placing their hand over their hearts. It's a small gesture, I know, and they will let me know that it's a bit corny and give a roll of their eyes, but it is one that they respect and in turn I am hopeful they will teach to their children.

I did fulfill my military career, having served two tours in Vietnam, earning a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star. I later went on to join the Iowa National Guard and received my

commission as an officer. My interest in defending and protecting my country and my state was extended with my National Guard career as I retired as the commander of the 186 Military Police Company. The day that JFK died—I will never forget where I was and the impact that day had on me and my generation.



Shannon Pierson

Persuasive Essay

The Case for Marriage in the Modern World

My boyfriend and I had been dating for four years and living together for two when he proposed to me. Although I had thought about it before in vague “someday” terms—how he might do it or what he might say—it is safe to say I was very surprised when it happened. So surprised in fact that my instinct reaction wasn’t to throw myself into his arms, but rather to lock myself in the bathroom and start sobbing uncontrollably. While it didn’t help that I was a victim of the worst proposal ever, I probably didn’t make the situation any easier when I immediately fled the scene, leaving him all alone with a very large elephant in the room. This unexpected reaction was very separate from the happy and congenial day to day life we shared. I tribute the panic attacks that ensued over the next two days to my long held reservations about marriage that had been simmering beneath the surface and were suddenly boiling over. Is it worth it to risk matrimony in a society where more than half of marriages end in divorce? Is the institution of marriage still valuable or has it become just another silly outdated tradition?

It is important to differentiate between marriage as a public institution and marriage as a union between two committed partners. The public institution of marriage is recognized by the government and when applicable the church. These organizations have been known to abandon some non-traditional relationships, for example long time cohabiting individuals or homosexuals who are legally unable to wed. This paper will use the term “marriage” loosely to refer to all long term committed romantic relationships, unions,

and partnerships since having the correct paperwork or a shiny diamond ring does not make a marriage.

Healthy marriages aren't found or witnessed or signed on to, they are built. It is assumed that not all marriages are created equal and like any relationship, there are good marriages and there are bad marriages. One has the potential to provide tremendous personal growth and the other can be suffocating and even dangerous. A government backed research report outlined these characteristics of a healthy marriage: couple commitment, satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, lack of domestic violence, fidelity, interaction and time together, intimacy and social support, and a commitment to any children the couple may have (Moore et al. 3). Most of these are qualitative characteristics that exist on a sliding scale rather than markers that are achieved over time. In a study of fifty longtime couples, the New Zealand Relationship Commitment Study concluded that, "Commitment, nowadays, is more often internal, personal, and specific to the person or the relationship rather than being about the more abstract ideal of promise itself" (Pryor 24). Since it is the individuals whose actions will build the foundation of the partnership, it is their perspective that matters when deciding whether their relationship is healthy or not. Relationships may mean different things to different people but they all demand change from each partner.

A marriage is a union of individuals and entering a marriage requires a shift in perspective. 'I' becomes 'We'. 'Mine' becomes 'Ours'. Commitment involves a lot of inclusive pronouns and the sometimes arduous task of working together as a team forever. In short, it means that you don't get everything you want whenever you want it. It is easy to think of the choice to be alone as a choice to be free, master of your own schedule, captain of your own ship. The American cultural model contradicts itself by idealizing rugged

individualism and self-reliance yet also aggressively promoting a public, formal, lifelong commitment to share your life with another person (Cherlin 9). Essentially, marriage puts every decision you make up for discussion. You no longer do what's best for you, you do what's best for the partnership. This usually means that you spend your Friday night at Junior's school play instead of watching the game and your bonus check usually goes to the savings account instead of a casino in Vegas. However, while being a good partner requires time and effort, it does not mean foregoing all personal goals. In fact, marriage can provide accountability and support that keeps your nose to the grindstone when you'd rather go out for a few beers. While you might achieve great heights with no strings attached you may find yourself without a safety net to fall back on.

Marriage may require learning the art of compromise but it also provides an enormous amount of stability in an often unpredictable world. It means that when you fall down, which you almost certainly will, there is someone there to pick up the slack. Doing everything by yourself all the time is much harder than working together. Change is inevitable and as life goes on big things are going to happen: new jobs, new cities, having kids, death in the family. One married woman wrote, "Marriage is a breathing organism that grows with you" (Fremont 431). At the end of the marriage the person you started with will be someone completely different. So will you. This is true of all marriages no matter how they end: death, divorce, freak accident. This is the nature of life, we are always evolving. A successful marriage requires that you learn to grow together instead of apart. Taking the time to talk to your partner honestly and learn to resolve conflicts peacefully can go a long way toward preventing a failed marriage.

Fear of divorce is the most commonly listed reason for not wanting to get married. As one writer put it, "Marriage is an act of pure arrogance. You are pretending to lay claim

to the future which is risky business at best” (Fremont 427). When you consider the high divorce rate, negative effects on children, and cultural stigma attached to divorce, choosing to get married can seem like walking into a casino and laying your well-being on the line. But big risks can yield big rewards. “Studies show that people who are married are healthier, are likely to live longer, are more satisfied with their jobs, have more social support, have more wealth and income, are less prone to mental disorders, and are involved in fewer unhealthy or risky behaviors than people who are not married or who are divorced” (Moore 3). Strong partnerships are greater than strong individuals and working your way through life with a teammate can yield some handsome benefits.

Once I changed my perspective and looked to see what I stood to gain from being married rather than what I stood to lose, I started to warm up to the idea. I realized that marriage can be a meaningful and beneficial component of a happy life if a couple is able to adapt to change and willing to work hard to ensure the success of the relationship. I stopped running away from the problem and had an honest conversation with my boyfriend regarding my reservations. We discussed what being a good partner meant to us, what makes a good parent, what are the important things, what are the not so important things, and what we can't live without. I decided that the collaboration, camaraderie, and partnership offered by a lifelong partner are worth the risk of failure and we came to a mutual agreement. From now on, we are going to lie to everyone we know about the proposal. If anyone asks, he proposed to me in the dog park while his phone was playing our song. I said yes and we lived happily ever after. Teamwork baby, that's the name of the game.

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Charles Levy

Ideal Community Essay

Communities We Walk Through in Life

When I look back on my life from the comfortable couch of middle-age, it is easy to see the community structures that were available to me and my family as we walked through life. From my beginnings in the heart of the city of Omaha, Nebraska, where I was born, to the small college town in which I currently reside with my own family, the ways in which I have engaged with the life and leisure around me have varied by very little. After taking on the challenge to describe the idea of what an “ideal community” might consist of, the reflections on my own past interactions in the various communities I was part of help to focus the nebulous concept of what a utopian existence could be. By examining my parents’ upbringing, my own, and how I have raised my children, I hope to see a progression towards the idyllic neighborhood for myself, my family, and others who might share the same idea of what a community should be.

I was raised in a two-parent household with a younger sister in Omaha, Nebraska. Born in 1968, I had lived in only two different houses during the period from infancy to adulthood. My parents were from different aspects of life; my father, who was born in Germany in 1932, had a relatively lean social life. His family believed in hard work, and the idea that all members of the family should help with the finances to keep the family afloat. My mother, on the other hand, born in 1936 in Chicago, had a less strict family upbringing with a relatively normal social life and a family-centered structure. Dad and his brother spent many years of their childhood working for small bits of change in order to help make ends

meet. Both boys had little interaction with their own parents, and seemed to be aloof and unconcerned when it came time to be with their own families. Mom was an only child, and was doted on by her parents. After mom and dad got married in the mid-1960s, they adopted my sister and me and moved to central Omaha to raise their family.

My formative years, from birth to about age 7, were spent in a small house with two bedrooms and a small living area. I remember that there was little to no backyard to speak of. It was situated on an average lot with a medium-size front lawn and a big tree at the side of the house that I must have climbed regularly because I remember the feeling of the sticky sap on my hands and in my hair. The house itself had no front porch, with just a front walk that stretched between the front door and the driveway. Our side of the street did not have the sidewalk, so we would rarely see people walking by. We walked frequently to school, which was three blocks away, and to our friends' houses down the street or the next block over. The park in the neighborhood was more than a mile away, so we hardly ever traveled there because a mile on a bicycle, to a seven-year-old, is too far to go on a regular basis. I don't remember seeing my parents very often, as my father seemed to be always at work and my mother was a homebody and preferred not to do anything with us after we grew out of diapers and didn't require her to push us in a stroller any longer. We went on no walks, and the relatively few hours spent together in social gatherings were usually centered on Jewish community life, with trips to the synagogue or the local Jewish community center. That early neighborhood had to be traversed by car in order to get to major shopping, the library, and civic services, such as the town hall or the post office. Our bicycles allowed us to get to a favored play area behind the train tracks down the street, and to our friends' homes, but bicycles didn't get us far enough to socialize with people outside of our immediate neighborhoods.

In fourth grade, my father got a new job with AT&T, and we moved out to the outskirts of Omaha to an area near Millard, Nebraska. This must have been closer to an ideal home for my parents, because it consisted of a much larger home with three bedrooms, a large backyard, and it was located in a newly developing neighborhood. While it only had a small front yard, it did have a front landing, but we spent no time there. I don't recall ever seeing my parents doing anything out of doors besides the regular yard work that is required of any homeowner. Compared to our previous one, this neighborhood had many more families out taking casual walks. I would have expected that the wider walks and the friendlier neighbors might have prompted my parents to participate in that healthy, socially-inclusive pastime as well. With the park three blocks away and the school eight blocks away, my bicycle was frequently used to get around. The few friends that I had in the neighborhood could usually be found within a one-block radius of my own home, and we rarely went farther than the four or five blocks to the corner store. I vividly remember this corner store, the "Shop and Save," because it was there that I first learned how to play video games. With no shopping close by besides this store, we regularly had to get in the car and drive to most events, occasions, and services that we would require in our daily lives. The majority of my social life also required trips to the Jewish community center by car. Important memories of my childhood include summertime visits by the ice cream man, with his bell-ringing, music-filled truck, proudly advertising his icy treats during the hot Midwestern days, and the hundreds of wasted hours – and quarters – in front of the Donkey Kong machine in that corner grocery. From my couch, I can see now that it was this upbringing that hindered me from integrating well with the communities I lived in after I got out on my own.

At 18, I decided to go to school out of state at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. At this point, I began my own community life very slowly in a small trailer park at the edge of town. With relatively few neighbors who were friendly to college students, no lawns and gardens, and shopping that required a drive into town because the bus lines didn't extend that far, interactive community could not seem to be found. I spent my first year and a half commuting back and forth between home and the main part of town by car. The college student's life can be either full of parties or quiet nights of study. My own were filled with the latter and were spent mostly at home. From there I moved into an apartment in central campus town. Here I experienced college-centric life, with the ability to walk to the bars and fast-food restaurants that were important at this stage in my life, and I frequently took the bus or drove to shopping, went to the library or paid bills downtown. The only interactions I had with my "community" were in my regular attendance at class or during my infrequent trips to the nearby bars that were the Friday-after-class special occasions. It was during my second year in college that I met Michelle, my wife, and her two twin boys. I realize now that it was at this point that family life had taken me, and I have never looked back.

Michelle, her mother, and the boys lived in an apartment in West Ames, where community life was very similar to the trailer park lifestyle that I experienced when I first got to Ames. There was some interaction with neighbors who happened to be on their small cement balconies, but these were generally during our comings and goings to the parking lot immediately outside of the building. There were no lawns, only lots and lots of cement parking lots. I began my home life with her family, and we rarely left the comforts of that apartment due to the meager earnings a young adult can bring in. After a year or so together, Michelle and I decided to get married and move to Nevada, Iowa, to begin our formal life together. Our first house in Nevada was a small, three-bedroom situated next to the high

school and across the street from a large park and a small restaurant. Both front and back yards were small, and we had no neighbors, but at this point in our lives we were really focused on ourselves and our family. Within a few months, we had to find a new house because our first child together, our daughter, was due to be born, and a three-bedroom house for six people was not enough room. The house we found was a small, four-bedroom right next to the local Union Pacific Railroad tracks, which I fondly remember loving to hate. Our new home had a large backyard, a small front yard, and a park three blocks away which we could walk to frequently with our twin boys and new little girl. While this house did have four bedrooms, it was relatively small, and our neighbors were older without any kids. Our own kids at this point were too young for school, but we knew that we would have to drive them, or bus them to elementary school within a few years. Getting groceries required a trip across town. A fill-up at the local gas station, or a trip to city hall and the local library were equally distant from home. Home life once again was mostly centered on the home since we had little extra money to spare. Opportunity presented itself to me for good work back in Ames, so we went back to try our hand at making a good life there once again.

A narrow, three-bedroom house near Main Street became our new home, with no neighbors due to its placement between minor retail business fronts. There were plenty of small shops, and it was across from a park; it seemed to be close to perfect. Ames' good bus system allowed us to get back and forth to grocery stores or to school for the kids' after-school activities. With the tiny front yard and no backyard to speak of, and being immediately on the main street in town, interaction with neighbors and community here was difficult. After only a few short months, the bright opportunity of work for me had turned dull and lackluster, becoming unbearable, with a relatively bleak outlook for advancement. It was at this point that we decided to try something new. We packed up all our belongings

once again, loaded up a one-way U-Haul trailer and headed down to my parents' home in Tampa, Florida. My parents, by now, had relocated to the Gulf Coast state after my father retired from four decades of work with AT&T. It was in this sun-drenched section of the country that they would make their last attempt at finding a place to spend their twilight years. We decided to emulate their daring choice of residence as a next step to our own lives, as we thought that work opportunities had to be better in such a great place.

My parents' home in Florida, while it is a great place to visit, wasn't quite what it was reputed to be as a place to live. The cost of living in Florida was much higher than we were expecting. Job opportunities were also scarce because of such a high population, but we were hoping for the best. The home itself was now a cramped three-bedroom with a speck of a front yard, and a larger backyard with the citrus trees you might expect for Florida. There was no park nearby for our young children to play. Shopping, schools, and the main part of town was far enough away to require travel by car or bus, and the residential neighborhood where my parents lived had relatively few young families staying there. This did not allow for much social interaction with their neighbors. Our being new to the area and not knowing many people in town provided almost no opportunity for us to become part of the community there. After four short months, the beautiful weather was not enough to keep us in the socially uninviting and economically strained environment that we found ourselves in. After the kids got out of school for the summer, we moved back to Iowa so that we could return to our preferred small-town lifestyle. Yet, if it had not been for our trip to Tampa, we might never have realized that Iowa life was our preference after all.

After returning to Iowa, we decided to make another go at Nevada, Iowa, and small-town life there. We found a medium-size apartment with four bedrooms, two upstairs and two downstairs. This building was at the edge of town, had no yard, no neighbors, and little

opportunity for social life outside of our own family. The kids had to take the bus to school, and we had to drive everywhere for everything. To say that it was not our "utopia" was obvious. As soon as we could get back on our feet after our soul-draining, savings-account-depleting trip to Florida, we moved back to Ames. Opportunities were better for me, as I found a new job at a local quick-service restaurant. This job, and a lot of hard work and long hours, allowed me to be able to afford a larger four-bedroom house in the middle of town. This new home was only three blocks from the park, had a small front and back porch, with bus stops a short walk away. Yet it still required a drive to all amenities: the store, city hall, the library. Getting to these locations required piling into a car and driving across town. New to the neighborhood, we didn't have much opportunity to find out whether our neighbors were friendly, yet we knew this still wasn't what we were looking for. The location was too far out of the way to be able to enjoy the little free time we had after work and on weekends. We once again decided that there had to be a better "place" to live our lives.

It was at this point we came to our last and current home. We found a large four-bedroom house in North Ames. The neighborhood had many pedestrians, plenty of "front-porch hangers," and families with children our own kids' age. It has a large backyard and a decent-sized front yard and is on a quiet cul-de-sac that gets relatively little thru traffic. It's a block away from a park, two blocks from a local grocery store, a 10-minute trip on foot to a mall, gas station, or movie theater. It is much closer to the perfect neighborhood we were growing towards throughout these 20 years than ever before, but it still requires driving to get to downtown areas, or to city services, such as city hall or the library. It's difficult to have everything, but we decided to take this generous portion of neighborhood and family-centered activity and build a life there.

As I began to raise my family, the idea of what my wife and I idealized for house and home took shape with many important components. We found that our idea of a perfect life would include a nearby park, school and shopping, with a nice neighborhood, friendly neighbors, and opportunity for social interaction prevalent in the community. From my own upbringing, I realized that in order to keep a tight family and foster a sense of togetherness for ourselves, we had to try to spend more time outside of the home than inside it. By trial and error, and with eight separate moves into different neighborhoods and communities, we finally found what we are looking for that fits us. Yes, there are still many other great ideas of what the “perfect” community might entail. I hope in the next section of my paper to give you a framework in which to judge what might make up that community for you.

To begin a discussion about community, whether it is how we live every day with other members of our society, or the idealized "perfect" location where we dream of living for the rest of our lives, we need to find a common way of identifying what we're talking about. For the purposes of this paper, we are talking about planned “ideal” communities and the different ways in which they can be put together. If you asked 10 people what they thought an ideal community was, you might get 10 different answers. How each person was raised, their education, family connections, influences throughout their life and their own imaginations would all come into play when defining that concept. They might also be thinking in terms of their workplace, their family life, or even what their living situation might be after retirement from a lifetime of work. Definitions of community might even incorporate an idea that touches on all three of those areas; a “live, work, play” community would be an example of this classification. Even the fact that we're looking into these ideal planned communities shows us that we've come full circle in our thoughts of where we want to live, as America has migrated many different times throughout the past few centuries,

both across the country and from inner city to exurbia¹ and back again. A good starting spot for my conversation about community is in a description and examination of cities themselves.

Cities are large, permanent settling places that incorporate everything people need to live and work in the same area. Housing, transportation systems, utilities, business centers and the land that each requires are all taken into account in city design and planning. During a conversation I had with Debra Gervais, an associate planner for the city of Ankeny, she mentioned that most planning commissions are "involved with many areas directly affecting the life and businesses that are housed within the city limits." How these cities are planned has a big impact on how much people will enjoy living there. Looking back at previous centuries, in which cities had begun to rise from the small towns at their origins, a common theme to be found was that a core of housing and commerce could be found at its center. Immediately surrounding this core is where the majority of manufacturing was centered. Further out, one could normally find the housing for the support workers for the manufacturing processes in the city's centermost rings. These supporting community members, more commonly termed the middle class, consisted of hard-working people who were essential to the smooth operation and evolution of the city. Frequently outside of this area could be found a third "circle" of living arrangements, typically called the suburbs, and this is where more affluent members of society might be found. This simple description of a common city's makeup could be found in many different areas of the country, but was most prevalent in those larger cities along the eastern coast in the United States in the early 18th and 19th centuries (Glaeser 230).

¹ The area outside a city, though much farther out than suburbia or the suburbs, that is typically inhabited by upper middle class residents.

In his book *Triumph of the City*, urban economist Edward Glaeser describes how many cities have succeeded in emerging from the small towns that make up their birth. For example, Boston, Massachusetts, had its start as the center of commerce based on its thriving port. The seafaring lifestyle was the basis of the city's life. The tall-masted ships and the knowledgeable mariners who sailed upon them were the mainstays of urban life, and without the ships, Boston may have never risen above its common start as a busy, small religious community founded by John Winthrop (231). Boston's shipping could easily take food and clothing to other areas of the New World, and on its return trips, bring back the old comforts of England, which then could be inexpensively sold locally. The only difficulty with this came upon changes to our technology in the intervening years. With the invention of steamships, Boston was no longer necessary to play a role as oceangoing hub, due to the fact that steamships no longer required the seafarer's knowledge and could be relied upon going directly from place to place by their strong, superheated steam engines. Yet Boston reinvented itself after this period of faltering economy by gaining an edge in manufacturing with the acquisition of steam-powered looms and creating a need for their mass-produced textiles (233). By being situated at this port, Boston, a city founded and still functioning as a port, could once again make itself a hub of commodity circulation throughout the world. Its broad connections to other areas around the globe in the previous decades helped to reaffirm its grasp of the international marketplace. Finally in the mid-19th century and into today, Boston had to once again reinvent itself after reproduction of its textiles began to be made in other areas around the world more cheaply than the local textile manufacturers could do so themselves. This reinvention included concentration on education and making itself a fount of knowledge where people would come to continue their education and gain advanced understanding of the world. Tufts College, Boston College, Boston University and

Wellesley were all founded in the late 19th century in response to this need, as well as Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (234).

It was back and forth to and from these great cities that American citizens settled and resettled areas of the country in what American historian and sociologist Lewis Mumford called the "three great migrations" (qtd. in Ehrenhalt 230). According to Mumford, the first great migration consisted of settlers moving west across frontier America in the 19th century. A second great migration could have taken place when the children of these first migration settlers moved from the frontier farms that their parents founded to factory towns that grew up around the manufacturing era that Boston took advantage of in the mid-19th century. Migration number three was thought to have occurred at the beginning of the 20th-century with moves to big metropolitan cities, such as Boston after it reinvented itself. Mumford also prophesied that there might be a fourth migration in which people moved away from the city once again – a distributed move to the suburbs, leaving the urban centers of these cities much less densely populated (qtd. in Ehrenhalt 230). Another respected urban historian, Robert Fishman, described yet another migration, a fifth “great migration,” to come in generations ahead. This resettlement would involve a move back to the city in which the old way of looking at the city’s growth – with a core at the center and outlying areas providing residences – would result in a reverse of this with suburbanites repopulating these under-populated urban areas and moving downtown (qtd. in Ehrenhalt 230). Urbanist and scholar Alan Ehrenhalt describes this occurrence in the Manhattan area: “The strollers have reached Wall Street, and they are not leaving” (9). Essentially, young parents are deciding to move to the area with their children to live and raise them. Each of these migrations has expanded and contracted our population over and over from coast to coast until almost every available stretch of land had been claimed by the beginning of the

21st century, causing real estate to sell at a premium cost and for people to search for some measure of open area still to be found. It is this search for open ground and Mumford's "fourth migration" (qtd. in Ehrenhalt 230) that was the subject the next area of focus for this look at community in America.

The term urban sprawl, defined in the film *Subdivide and Conquer*, can be described as the latest human tendency to look for any available areas that still need to be taken over and converted to living space, and it illustrates how our population has become decentralized and spread out without a well-defined center. The film takes a descriptive look at urban America's basic moves from area to area while building suburban homes and increasingly distant areas to surround our cities and necessitating travel from these far-flung areas to the urban centers via the automobile. As we moved out of the city centers, we began to make subdivisions full of cookie-cutter houses – houses that looked the same and felt so familiar that if you picked someone up, blindfolded them and drop them off in one of these neighborhoods, "you wouldn't know if you were in Tulsa or Denver" (*Subdivide*). The film also describes a social cost to sprawl in that it causes the inner cities to fall apart and the schools and jobs that were once found there to move out to the residential areas in the suburbs. The pollution of the environment due to increased automobile usage and the price that the individual homeowners pay in time, fuel and lost social interaction is yet another cost that can be attributed to urban sprawl. The thought is that building more livable communities from scratch is vital to the reinvention of community in America, and by doing so, we will begin to "repair and revitalize places that already exist" (*Subdivide*). The American public is beginning to covet the old ways of staying in contact with one another. This wish for the old to become the new once again is the central theme to the latest version of an

early 1980s movement called New Urbanism and is at the heart of the common themes that surround planned communities that have been popping up over the last two decades.

New Urbanism can be defined as the idea that a diverse, walkable, compact and vibrant community can be found by emulating the societal fabric of the 1920s and 30s in which a sense of working together and close-knit communication connected neighborhoods and families. A common theme of these planned communities is that they tie in with a new sense of what is missing in our disconnected lives. In sociologist Ray Oldenburg's *The Great Good Place*, a book about the places in which people can set aside their worries and meet to converse with other members of their local community, he describes the fact that this missing third place that we are lacking in the United States is basically a location in which we can hang out. A place much like those found in previous-century Europe – areas like Rome with its Forum and Italy with its public bath houses. Even early tribal societies had these good places; their central long houses were gathering places in which the entire community could come together for discussion, celebration or plain old social interaction. Oldenburg hypothesizes that the importance of this third place has been lost on American society, and without it we are moving away from meaningful interaction with fellow members of our local community (18). He also believes that “daily life amid the new urban sprawl is like grammar school without its recess periods” (Oldenburg introduction xxix) – that something integral is missing, some piece of relaxation and an area in which we can unwind or speak our minds, discussing our lives and the world around us.

In an article on New York architecture and how it helps to facilitate the practice of democracy, by architect Michael Sorkin, the idea that Americans have a right granted to us in the Constitution to freely assemble in gathering places, great or small, is “the primary expression of democracy in space, the physical embodiment of liberty” (Sorkin 85). These

missing areas in which to practice the tenets of freedom and the “failure to solve the problem of place in America and to provide a community life for their inhabitants” (Oldenburg 6) is the driving force behind the development of New Urbanism. It is this “great third-place” that has captured the minds of those people who have put together the planned communities found across the United States in Stapleton and Boulder, Colorado, in Celebration, Florida, and even in Ankeny, Iowa. Educator and journalist Max Lerner thinks that the “critical question is not whether the small town can be rehabilitated [...] but whether American life will be able to evolve any other integral community to replace it” (qtd. in Oldenburg 3). It is these planned communities of Wild Sage, Disney’s Celebration and Prairie Trail and their desire to restore our community life that are the subjects of my continuing look at what might be the “ideal” community for you.

The film *Designing a Great Neighborhood* is a look at the project of building the Holiday Neighborhood sustainable community in Boulder, Colorado. It displayed the living spaces planned and designed by the community of people who would eventually take up residence there. Termed the Wild Sage Community, their “ideal” place was one where the entire residence project could grow into a sustainable habitat, in which the entire area could be a place in which to live, work and play without leaving the community at all. The notion behind a sustainable community is not a new one. In the last twenty years or so, it has become vogue to build “green,” promoting healthy, energy- and resource-efficient building practices. The process of green building itself, from its initial design concept to its living-in stage, has evolved with goals of reducing wastes, promoting renewable energy sources – like wind and solar energy – and cost savings due to sharing of resources and available building practices. With Wild Sage’s design around shared boilers in multiple-family dwellings and providing a common house in which the community could gather to cook and share the

day's experiences and could later become the center of the community's life, it looked to be the epitome of green living arrangements for the designing families. The centralized common house also provided a core for the developing community's social structure, much like that described in Oldenburg's *The Great Good Place*. Determining if this planned community was a success or failure – whether it satisfied the multiple designers' criteria and expectations – is a matter of taste and point of view. For the most part, Wild Sage was a success in the eyes of the residents living there, yet even the best of planned communities sometimes fail on minor points of unexpected real-life consequences. We will see more on this in the discussion of the next planned community I plan to examine – Celebration, Florida.

In the mid-1990s, the Walt Disney Corporation decided to take a leap into designing a planned community that was intended to be as unique as the amusement parks they are famous for. At the center of this idea was the desire to create a feeling of coming back into a new community that had found the missing elements that were lost when moving into a big city; in essence, the small-town connectivity. Celebration would be a self-supporting community with leading schools that incorporated new technology and groundbreaking ideas. The city would integrate nostalgic areas consisting of a city center and neighborhood green spaces. Disney's involvement would guarantee interest in the new community and ensure a consistent enforcement of the look and feel of the areas via plan books and design controls. Unfortunately, the good intentions of this “brave new town” (Frantz & Collins) were not lived up to in the final completion of the community. Many different hurdles began to crop up early in the development phase and were not properly addressed while there was still time to remedy them before they became an overwhelming obstacle to positive growth. For instance, the various homes in the community were only allowed to be

built by two previously contracted builders. One of those builders had previous experience in the type of rush building of these types of homes planned for the new community – a hurried build and move on to the next-on-the-list type of construction process. Mike Ryan, a co-owner of Town and Country, one of the two housing contractors allowed to build in Celebration, knew that the move to get everything done put his company behind before they even started. “Looking back, we should have said that we were not ready,” he said. “Instead, we tried to honor the opening date... you end up with everyone really scrambling, trying to put things together” (qtd. in Frantz & Collins 93). As a new builder to the area, Town and Country was still getting its feet wet and needed to find local subcontractors to help with the construction process. Due to staffing problems, the build times for the new houses began to lag, and new homeowners began a lengthy wait to move into their new homes. In some cases, the homes were completed on time, but there might be errors in the construction or imperfections that did not meet the standards in the design books for that model of home. At the outset, Celebration was intended to show that American urbanism was alive; it would be a model community in every way. From the houses and business structure designs by “top-drawer architects and planners” (Frantz & Collins 59) to its school system’s “model of academic excellence” (Frantz & Collins 68) for the Florida public schools, the town had big shoes to fill.

The perfect planning guide of Celebration’s hopes did not hold up to the real-world of construction and setbacks that are most often experienced outside of well-intentioned fiction, and while the seeds planted by Disney and Celebration’s planners did indeed grow into a well-intentioned tree of knowledge for the community’s school, their hopes failed to bear the sweet fruit they envisioned in the way the new school functioned.

Celebration school was designed to be a leader in the way schools should be put together from the beginning. From the idea surrounding the integration of all classes to share in the learning processes and of teaching of the younger students, to the use of new computer technology to help realize the goals of making teaching bright students easier, which was a novel concept in the late 90's with computer technology still expanding with its own growing pains, the school system and its lack of qualified teachers began to have difficulties from the start. Even after the school began to run smoothly, graduation from a school system that didn't use a consistent set of grading standards like the 4.0 system of grade point averages caused many college entrance counselors to shake their heads and throw up their hands when students recently graduated from Celebration School began to try and enter post-secondary education (Frantz & Collins 296). Yet the heartfelt desire to make the community work out as planned was what seemed to be holding the entire community together despite the problems they may have encountered. Without this cohesive aspiration to make Celebration their "ideal" community, all the tree-lined streets and walkable neighborhoods in the world would not have been able to keep the fabric of the neighborhood together. It seems that the more rigorous the design for a planned community, the more likely that it might fail. The core concept behind the community design for Celebration was its integration and lifestyle allowing for neighborhoods and areas in which to live, work and play together. Yet it was the size of the community itself, intending to house 20,000 residents over 10 square miles, and the inability to walk to amenities that the residents required, that became the overwhelming hurdle which Celebration was never able to fully overcome. We see once again in Celebration that neighborhood living and walkable amenities are key to a successful community design. Our next stop is a locally planned community, that of Prairie Trail in Ankeny, Iowa.

Ankeny's master-planned community has taken many of the same ideas to heart as what has been found in other areas of the country when looking at "ideal" community structure. As a matter of fact, Ashley Johnson, the Sales and Marketing representative of the Prairie Trail community's master planning company DRA Properties, told us in an interview that the Stapleton, Colorado and South Lake, Texas planned communities helped to shape the initial design of the Prairie Trail master plan. Designed as a "live, work, play" community, the inspirational development area took land originally used for munitions manufacturing during World War II and subsequently as a research dairy farm for Iowa State University and transformed it into more than 1,000 acres developed for residential and commercial properties designed to house more than 8,000 residents. While this community does have a style and pattern book that helps to keep an integrated look and feel to the project, the stringent rules that formed the basis for the Celebration community are not present. Any developer can be used to build in the Ankeny district, and most building plans that use a common style found in the pattern book can be constructed without a "spec" home building requirement implemented first. There is even some flexibility to the pattern book's colors and building requirements. Normally, a pattern book becomes the "holy bible" of rules and regulations for a developing planned community structure, without much flexibility or change in the look and feel of the housing contained within it. Yet Prairie Trail's design committee allowed residents to make changes to make the best use of contemporary building materials and to prove that a homeowner's taste in colors would fit in with the idea of the community rather than just by the written guide by which the housing was designed (*Prairie Trail: Pattern*).

Homes in the Prairie Trail community have front porches and face pocket parks or green spaces – spots of land in which there is more green growth, like grass or trees, than

buildings – in the community. Residents’ comments of “It’s not just walls and a roof, it’s a lifestyle. A simpler way of living, a more connected way of life” and “old school neighborhood feel with modern conveniences” (*Prairie Trail: Imagine*) make it easy to see that the initial success of the community is being felt and heard. Yet, the economic downturn has slowed the growth of this new entrant to the planned “ideal” community arena. When the economy slumped in 2008, DRA Properties had to take a hard look at their original expectations. A decision was made to slow the building for the “work” areas of the live, work, play community and to reduce the lot size on many of the plots available in the community. Sales of new land and homes also were halved from 250 per year to a more lethargic 125 per year during this downturn, but despite these unforeseen difficulties, the advancement towards the ultimate goal is steadily progressing (*Prairie Trail: The Vision*). With the glowing neighborhood referrals and a new commercial building, like the new Jethro’s Bar-B-Que restaurant in The District, the planned commercial and social area of Prairie Trail, sales have begun to pick up again. Prairie Trail’s master planners have even given a nod to the green Wild Sage community in the building of a NetZero home in the area, which boasts a negative-balance utility bill each month and renewable energy sources which recoup the extra cost of green building for the home within the lifetime of the home’s mortgage. During our interview, Laurie Culp, a Century 21 EcoHome real estate agent, mentioned that the home was being used as a model for other green building in the central Iowa area, and that the NetZero home’s builders hoped to spur additional resource-efficient building for years to come.

Local businesses and schools have been built right in the community, providing much-needed continuity for the young families moving to the area. Des Moines Area Community College has been an integral part of the offerings as well. With a shared border

on the eastern edge of the land, DRA Properties provides scholarship opportunities to residents of the community upon acceptance to DMACC of up to \$10,000. This measure of giving back to the community for additional education is a method of keeping up with creating an intelligent, creative environment where families can live and raise children. By allowing for the raising of an intellectual generation of children in an environment that is conducive to healthy community practices, Prairie Trail's planning committee realized that the success of any cohesive environment in which people intend to interact creatively has not been overlooked. Many aspects that have failed in other planned communities around the country have been examined and honed to a fine point in order to prevent those same failures here. Celebration, Florida, failed in part by its overreaching attempt of placing too many people too far apart and by promising their residents more in the way of education than they could provide. By contrast, Prairie Trail is keeping their development area small and connected and, at its outset rather than as an afterthought, began with a successful community college on one side and a new elementary school and planned secondary school on the other. Community involvement by the Ankeny city planners was integrated at the outset and cooperation via a community buy-in via a civic trust fund has ensured that the Ankeny public works have been well apportioned. For each dollar that Ankeny has spent in creating the ideal community in Prairie Trail, DRA Properties has returned \$1.25 back to the city to help in its own projects and ensure that Prairie Trail has a hand in keeping the Ankeny area vibrant and alive. As a result, the planned community is well thought of by residents of the other areas in Ankeny, and the new commercial and business district is being looked forward to as a shopping and interactive hub in the near future. All of these signs point to a positive outlook for Prairie Trail. Any community in which residents continue to upgrade within the housing district – and prospective homeowners might include the real

estate and marketing representatives of master planning development team as well – is one that deserves a closer look, and a careful inspection of goals and accomplishments would be in order before dismissing the community as just another neighborhood.

The common theme to all of these planned communities is the New Urbanistic ideal of providing a diverse selection of residents with walkable, tree-lined streets and green spaces, compact and vibrant community centers and sustainable land areas and trails that are situated close to amenities, schools and workplaces. Having houses and streets that provide character and depth to the community design and having close connections to shopping, local events and easy access to neighborhood get-togethers are also essential to the success of a well-designed planned community. With no more than a five-minute walk or bike ride from their home to a green space or park, parents with small children realize the feel of the close-knit neighborhood that they have come to live in. Even for couples without children and single members of these communities, it is the availability of local businesses and short distances to shopping and necessities that make living in an “ideal” community desirable to most people.

Throughout this paper, there have been many different ideas about what makes up an ideal community, how an ideal community is chosen by the intended residents and whether the chosen community’s characteristics are truly ideal for them. Before beginning research on this interesting and diverse topic, I knew relatively little and thought even less about the community and society that my family and I live in. While I did plan to move my family to the best possible choice of neighborhoods and area of the country that fit our needs, I never truly examined what was at the heart of these decisions. My wife and I have always sat down and talked about what was important to us as we raised our children, as this has changed as our children got older and new members of our family joined or left the core

of our family unit. Recently, my wife and I discussed some of the ideas surrounding the "ideal" communities about which I have learned through my recent studies, and she and I both believe that we've always been steered by a few main ideas: how we ourselves were raised and how we want to raise our kids differently. Neither one of us felt that we were raised in an ideal manner. I was raised with a set of parents who truly never wanted to integrate themselves with the community that surrounded us, and my wife was raised with a single mother and had a constantly changing environment in terms of its location and relative safety.

In the first portion of this paper, I've examined how I've moved from place to place in search of safety and security for my family; I had always felt that there was a certain direction in which I was headed. From the beginning in which I was just happy to have a roof over my head and a place in which to sleep, to the different housing and location choices I made to test the environment for the safety and security of my wife and family, I finally settled on an ideal for me. Further discussion in the second portion of this paper examined the different areas in which a family can reside; from inner cities to outlying urban areas, areas of urban sprawl to planned communities, each of these areas has their own positive and negative aspects and each person examining the areas for their own use in terms of a living environment must have a sense of what works for them and what might be available to them elsewhere. The last portion of this paper sums up my beliefs surrounding where to live my life, and how similar they are to other people's decisions around where to live their own lives.

There are many thoughts as to what makes up the quality of the spaces we decide to live in. Richard Florida, a senior editor for *Atlantic* magazine and former professor at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, theorizes that what makes up the value of where

we live relies on three different areas and combines to make a whole. Those areas are the setting in which we live, or "what's there," the interaction or community life that is present, or "who's there," and the availability of activities and excitement or "what's going on" (Florida, *Rise* 281). While Florida's work was specifically directed at the creative and intellectual members of society, my own thoughts about his ideas are that they fit the same criteria that most of us look at when deciding on where we want to live our lives. My father, though not the most creative of people, also took into consideration these three concepts in his own way. Our final residence, one that was close in proximity to where he worked, was a location that had other families, and was close to the newly developing area of the city, which promised good things to come, so his own choices were the "what, who and what was going on" for them as well. My own family's thoughts that helped to decide on our last home centered on similar beliefs. The location of the house in regard to the neighborhood and the nearness to parks, the kinds of families who made up the neighborhood, and how close we were to the things we all enjoy doing played a central role in our decision to stay put, once again a reiteration of Florida's feelings surrounding the "quality of place" (280).

Reflecting on each of the areas that I discussed in the second portion of my paper, we can see that each of the planned communities, from Wild Sage to Prairie Trail, also had successes and failures along the lines of these three questions. The Wild Sage community was largely successful in incorporating ideas for an ideal community into its planning and construction. The environment that the designers and residents collectively planned and built and the people who would make up their community there were components in which they took an active role. The third portion of Florida's recipe for place quality – "what's going on" – was where their planning fell a little short. While there were plenty of people engaging in a variety of out-of-doors activities in the areas surrounding their homes, an

engaging arts and cultural community was not a big part of their plan. They still had to leave their local community area in order to engage in the wider environment of social experiences. Celebration, Florida also had some good ideas surrounding the first and third of these components. The residents there provided the proper setting to pursue a creative lifestyle for themselves and their families, and they had plenty of activities going on in regard to arts, music, Oldenburg's third place and social interaction between neighbors, but the neighborhoods themselves were not very diverse. There were relatively few cross-cultural families taking up residence, with only a handful of black, Asian and other minority families deciding to live there. A memorable quote from *Celebration, U.S.A.* regarding life there, was by a resident black woman. When she was asked about why other well-to-do black families decided not to buy there, she said, "There is a community of blacks in central Florida who could afford to buy here, but for some reason they have not chosen to live here. I cannot put my finger on why" (qtd. in Frantz & Collins 218). The "who's there" portion of Celebration's quality of place was missing. Finally, looking at the three "T"s of Florida's place quality in regard to Prairie Trail, we have to keep in mind that the community itself is still in its infancy. The designer's thoughts surrounding what will eventually be there in regard to the building and the natural environment will satisfy the first "T," and the eventual availability of commercial, social and city-based community life will satisfy the third "T," but the second portion of who will be there to help make up the diversity of the community remains yet to be seen. There are relatively few residents currently living in the Prairie Trail development and, much like Celebration's residents provided the glue that held their community together, how they come together and interact with one another will help decide whether the quality of Prairie Trail is a success in terms of the plan community life there.

You may choose to develop your own line of questioning to decide where to live and what the quality of that place is that has nothing to do with the areas that I have examined in my paper. It may have little to do with how you were raised, your path through life till now, or even thoughts surrounding your family, but you will go through a process in making this decision, and what you finally focus on before moving yourself and your family to a new location is what makes up your "ideal community." Keep in mind that what is ideal for you today may not be so in the future. Each portion of our lives requires a different perspective from which we evaluate our "ideal," from early adulthood, to middle age, to retirement – and each might also incorporate a change in location. If you are willing to change your definition of perfection and evaluate what is at the core of your "quality of life" choice in each of the places you have chosen to live your life, your satisfaction with this ideal can only change for the better.

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Kyle Hecht was born in Des Moines in 1993 and has lived here ever since. He went to Roosevelt High School and graduated in 2011. He was on the cross country, swimming, and baseball team during his tenure at Roosevelt. He also was on the Student Council, Frisbee Club, and

co-founded the dodgeball club senior year. He has always enjoyed writing, but didn't realize his potential until he started writing at DMACC. He decided to come to DMACC to save money and spend some time figuring out what he wants to do with the rest of his life. He still has not figured that out fully, but is on the way to it. Next Fall he will be attending the University of Iowa studying in the Liberal Arts program. His main goals after graduating will be changing the world in some way and being as happy as possible.

Claim of judgment essay

Bicycling to Accolades

In 1830 the first bikes were sold to the public. They were extremely pricey and difficult to use. In the 1860s “velocipedes” were created and were operated by a crank, and then the 1870s brought in the “ordinaries,” which had one wheel larger than the other, and they were quite hazardous. The year 1880 was when the “safety” bike was made, a bike that is very similar to the ones used today. Bicycles became a big commodity during this period (Fee and Brown 1409). For more than a hundred years, bikes have been a popular pastime in America, and it has seen a large increase of popularity in the past few years. There are many reasons why people are choosing to ride bikes every day. Although many people label bicycles as dangerous, riding bikes is beneficial to human well-being, the environment, and it is a productive hobby that anyone can enjoy.

One reason riding bicycles is beneficial is because the activity not only improves physical health, but also it can help enhance moods. It is obvious that exercise is a very important part of life. Doctors recommend 30 minutes of exercise a day. Bike riding can provide that amount of daily physical activity quite easily, but people don't seem to take this advice very seriously. A surprising amount of people don't even work out at all. Author Jeff Mapes found that his bicycling was helping him recover his once exceptional fitness. He states, "something happened in my mid to late forties after I started bicycling around town regularly instead of driving or taking the bus. Gradually, after decades of slowly gaining weight, I was slowly losing weight" (227). Including exercise in daily routines can help people lose weight and make them more satisfied with their appearance. Not only that, it's proven that exercise improves personal health. In *The Futurist*, exercise and health care expert Kenneth W. Harris, lists the benefits bike riding and exercise in general can offer. He states, "Regular exercise prevents or mitigates a wide variety of health disorders, especially obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, substance abuse, and mild emotional and psychological disorders" (27). If the general public were better educated and more aware of the effects of working out, more importantly the consequences of not doing so, people would be much healthier than they are today. Studies have also shown working out, riding bikes specifically, can help improve moods. In the *American Journal of Public Health*, it states, "Bicycling . . . could free a person from any craving for artificial stimulants or narcotics; it could cure nervousness, conquer insomnia, and bring families together as husband, wife, and children all bicycled together" (Fee and Brown 1409). Riding bikes doesn't necessarily create a loving family, but biking has benefits beyond bettering physical well-being. Finding something to replace hurtful impulses that most people have is a very important contributor to good health. Riding bicycles can provide that substitution and much more.

Another reason why bike riding can be massively beneficial to people is its impact on the environment. Unlike driving cars, taking a cab, or riding a bus, bikes don't emit any pollution into the air. In fact, studies have shown that normal bike riding can have a huge effect on the atmosphere. Harris states, "The *Active Transportation for America* study concluded that short trips of three miles or less make up half of all trips taken in the United States; shifting these short trips to biking and walking could reduce carbon dioxide emissions by at least 12 million and up to 91 million tons a year" (28). So it really only makes sense that people should sacrifice their comfort and convenience to help reduce the harmful chemicals being put into the planet, and who knows, they might actually enjoy it. If the majority of people would take this advice that will subtly change their lives, the world could become a much cleaner, healthier place. But because riding a bike sometimes requires coming in contact with automobiles, including the harmful gases they spew out, it is recommended that people with cardiovascular issues choose roads without heavy traffic or bike paths (Barrett 443). Even if the rider doesn't have heart problems, it is much less dangerous to health and personal safety to take routes that aren't taken by many cars. But maybe the problem isn't bicyclists following cars, it's the number of cars on the road. Statistics show less cars being driven equals a better environment. It's been proven that "Vehicle combustion engines burn fossil fuels and emit smog, soot, and particulate matter containing toxic PAHs and carbon dioxide, all of which lead to respiratory disease" (Pennybacker 218). With evidence showing that cars and other land vehicles not only hurt the environment, but also people's immediate health, steps should be taken to reduce the amount of harm people cause to the Earth and everyone in it.

Although there are positive impacts bicycles have on the environment and to personal health, critics still try to find ways to prove that bikes are actually harmful to people.

Many studies have been conducted in attempts to prove that cyclists' physical safety and the harmful toxins they breathe in while riding outweigh the benefits people gain from riding. Most don't come up with much, according to *Primary Health Care*, a UK public health magazine "over 50,000 people die in the UK each year from coronary heart disease related to insufficient physical activity, compared to about 100 cyclists killed on the road. The actual risk of cycling is small, there is one cyclist death per 33 million kilometers of cycling" (Cavill 13). So from this information it can be assumed that people are much worse off not exercising than going outside and putting themselves in "danger." Another argument on the other side that needs to get addressed is the pain that can be induced from riding bikes. People complain about experiencing knee, lower back, hand, wrist, and buttock pain. Some even as far to say that bicycling can cause erectile dysfunction. However, all of these pains can be easily avoided with a few adjustments. These aches and discomforts come from improper bike positions. First the saddle's size, height, and angle need to be adjusted to fit the rider. Second, riders need to make sure to relax their shoulders, keep their elbows bent, and not put so much pressure on their hands ("Getting Back" 5). All these pains are easily remedied, but people just aren't properly informed on how to fix these problems. And if discomfort is still experienced after making these adjustments, bike makers have started creating bicycles that conquer these issues that cyclists have with normal bikes (Harris 25). Most of these arguments given against bicycles sound like excuses for people not to go out and exercise. So to anyone who still doesn't believe that bicycles do more good than harm, *Environmental Health Perspectives* states, "Better health and the reduction in air pollution more than offset the increase in accidents, injuries, and disease from cyclists breathing in polluted air" (qtd. in "Heart Beat" 7).

The final reason why bicycling can be an important part of everyday life is its ability to be a fun hobby and exercise at the same time. President Carter saw this phenomenon take place during the New York City transit strike in 1980. All the New York bus riders hopped on bikes and rode to work causing a huge influx of bicyclists on the road. Because of this crazy experience caused by the strike, Carter named May 1st National Bicycling Day (Podgers 550). The past proves that riding a bike to work is very possible, and anyone can do it, but people would rather take the bus, which is more convenient rather than getting active. But as the years have passed more and more improvements have been made to enhance the biking experience. Many good things are beginning to be said about bikes. Consider this, “the advantage cycling has over other forms of exercise is the way it can become part of everyday activity, rather than people having to find additional time for exercise” (Cavill 12). If people trade their cars with bikes and ride to school or work, transportation can become an enjoyable exercise. Another account of positive reinforcement for bikes and their growing accessibility is from *Harvard Health Letter*, which states “Cycling is also likely to become safer because of the growing number of dedicated bike lanes and paths, and bike routes, which are regular roads that have some accommodations for cyclists” (“Getting Back” 4). It is clear that many steps have been made to insure satisfaction to anyone who chooses to ride a bike. But still some people find exercising to be laborious and cumbersome. The key is to get out there and start riding. Riding a bike can be a pleasant hobby, but it can also save lives. Some people don’t understand how important exercise really is, and incorporating working out into everyday life is the easiest way for a person to stay in shape.

Bikes can be a source of multiple great advancements to life. They improve physical and emotional health, the environment, they can be a hobby that also acts as transportation.

The hardest part of working out is starting. People who don't already exercise are the most difficult to convince to adopt a healthy lifestyle, this group is why so many people in the US are so unhealthy (Harris 28). If people start to take up riding bicycles in their everyday lives, not only will they see boosts in their own well-being, but also in the world around them. And if enough people step up to the responsibility, then a real change will occur that will last.

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Kyle Hecht

Persuasive Essay

Hip-Hop: The Way of Life

When people think of hip-hop, most will see images of gang-banging, drug dealing, spending tons of money, and degrading women. And though there are many of these elements throughout the genre, there is also something much more that is hidden inside the music. Hip-hop is an uncut, straightforward look into the lives of whoever chooses to pick up the microphone, whether it's a gangster, a white kid from the suburbs, or someone just trying to make it out of the hood. When hip-hop is done well, it should give people insight on the lives of the emcee, another word for rapper, and the listeners should be able to gain some wisdom for their own lives. As Kevin Powell, an activist and writer puts it, "hip-hop, in its purest form, is about ghetto youth casting their buckets into dirty sewer water and coming up with hope, new identities . . . and, if we're lucky enough, something other than lint in our pockets, anger and confusion on our brows, and hunger in our bellies" ("Notes"). So this genre of music isn't what the majority of people see it as, because they only gave it a glimpse, instead of fully analyzing this unwanted genre of music. Hip-hop can improve peoples' lives through thought provoking lyrics, raw emotion, and well thought out story telling.

The critics of hip-hop have plenty to say about the atrocities that rappers commit countless on every song they release, even saying that the genre should never be listened to. It's been called materialistic, profane, and sexist. Jennifer McLune, a writer and activist, has very little nice to say about hip-hop. She states, "Hip-hop owes its

success to the ideology of woman-hating. It creates, perpetuates and reaps the rewards of objectification” (214). McLune does have a right to feel this way, but she can also avoid this sexist sect of hip-hop that really does drive the idea that women are lesser beings. There are plenty of rappers who write their rhymes about women, but don’t objectify them. The rappers give an honest look into how they really feel. Even Cathleen Rountree, a journalist, author, and educator admits to once having these same views. She describes her viewing of *Tupac Resurrection* saying, “The two-hour screening time was for me an epiphany and an entirely new world opened up: a world of beats, words, images, insights, raw expressions that were positively transporting” (212). Many people have these original views of contempt for this music because without the basic understanding of hip-hop, it’s very difficult to decipher. However, once the honest effort is given to wring some knowledge out of the words heard in the music, the real substance in it will show itself.

From the beginning, rap has been about helping people in their lives, saying something that they will remember, and presenting lyrics that will make the mind race, in a way that rhymes and flows with the music. Hip-hop has to have something to say; Powell puts it best when he says, “Hip-hop is a mirror for the world to look at itself, for America to take a good look at the children it has neglected, to see the misery it has been avoiding or covering up. And, no, it is not pretty or pristine” (“Notes”). To make music like this takes massive amounts of skill, and there are plenty of rappers not usually heard on the radio or MTV who accomplish this with every song they release. Mos Def, Black Thought, Common, Kendrick Lamar, and Big K.R.I.T. are just a few examples of emcees who don’t really get the proper recognition they deserve for their talent. Though they

aren't "underground" rappers, they all share a few common traits with their counterparts who don't make as much money. What makes them stand out from other popular rappers is they all share a passion for the music, and they all put the utmost effort into their lyrics. For example, Big K.R.I.T. describes how the world will turn its back on a person when one little thing goes wrong in the song "Boobie Miles." He raps:

They told me life is what you make it
So what you been creating with your free time?
I'll lend you bars if you need rhyme, or reason
Some people change it's a part of life, like seasons
Just be aware that everyone ain't your friend
They be gone with the wind once your jump shot don't go in
Or your ACL torn and you're a couple yards short
From a Super Bowl Championship and it was down 4.

K.R.I.T. offers real advice that people could actually use in their own lives, and it's on a topic that almost anyone could relate to universally. The average person who doesn't listen to hip-hop would never think that topics like this would ever even get addressed. When hip-hop is actually looked into, it gets deeper and deeper with each song.

Another reason hip-hop has more to give than what most people think is its ability to convey raw emotion to its listeners. At times, this concept can be very difficult to grasp. With all the trash heard on the radio, it seems like finding a rap song with something to say would be just about impossible, but that's why more effort has to be put in by the listener. Sometimes it even takes more than a few listens to actually grasp what the emcee is trying to say. And sometimes deep lyrics are found in unexpected places.

In 2008, Lil' Wayne released his Grammy winning album, *Tha Carter III*. The CD launched his already superstar status career off the scales. In the song "Tie My Hands" in the middle of the album, Wayne turns it down a bit and says:

And if you come from under that water then there's fresh air
Just breathe baby God's got a blessing to spare
Yes I know the process is so much stress
But it's the progress that feels the best
'Cause I came from the projects straight to success and you're next
So try, they can't steal your pride its inside.

Lil' Wayne isn't even considered a "conscious rapper," or an emcee who raps about relevant topics on a universal scale, but on his most popular work, he takes his rhymes to an emotional level for anyone who is struggling with life. Sometimes people just don't have their values straight. A few years back during the VH-1 Hip Hop Honors Awards, A Tribe Called Quest's DJ, Ali Shaheed Muhammad, reflected on what he was seeing in the hip-hop culture. He said, "We noticed that the world was kind of negative and a lot of people in hip hop talked about their love of jewelry and money. . . . We wanted to discuss the love of humanity, loving yourself, loving the real emotion that's relevant to life" (qtd. in Rose 227). So before people are so quick to judge the hip-hop genre, they should actually hear what the people inside of it have to say.

Not only does hip-hop have countless rappers who create thought-provoking lyrics, but also they have a small portion of emcees who have actually mastered the art of storytelling. They paint a picture in listeners' minds through rhyming bars, leaving the moral of the story for listeners to decide, just like a book. This style of rapping is

exceedingly difficult, and though many try, there are a few rappers who stand out as the best. In Kendrick Lamar's 2010 free EP *O.verly D.edicated*, he tells the story of a troubled kid from Compton just trying to make it out of the hood, but still runs into the many problems that a kid from a bad neighborhood would have to tackle. He raps:

Better pray that this chopper jam, like a radio single man
Police radio signals saying that a 187 land on your corner
Corners comfort you mama, mama he's dead
The next morning high toasted up with my homies
We drink and smoke marijuana, want us to change our ways? Uh huh
You see these games we play come from uncles who raised me in

Compton

Ask me what I have accomplished
I don't know I don't have conscious
I just load up and start dumpin' on enemies I'm head hunting
No sympathy, ain't no love when you in these streets just get something.

Within 20 seconds, Lamar paints a vivid picture of a boy unable to really make something of his life, who is lost in the streets he has lived in for so long. For him, hip-hop was his only hope for getting out of the streets, so not only does hip-hop give listeners something to get them through a hard day, but also most of the people involved in hip-hop give credit to it for getting them out of the terrible situations they went through. But all the stories told by rappers aren't just about living in the ghetto. Some of these stories are about personal battles that they fight inside themselves. Consider The

Roots front man, Black Thought, who in the 2011 album *Undun* tells his own story of inner conflict. He explains:

It's only human to express the way you really feel
But that same humanity is my Achilles heel
A leopard can't change his spots and never will
So I'm forever ill
Now I can never chill
What's keeping me from breaking out like Benadryl?
When my baptism of fire resulted in the kill
Sometimes it's cut and dry as a business deal
You gotta cause the blood of a close friend to spill
But you remember still.

Not only does Black Thought express how he really feels, but also he says what many people have trouble saying themselves. Taking substance from the stories being told in the music and applying it to life is one of the most moving components of rap. Without doing this, people will never understand the real meaning behind this infinitely deep genre of music.

Hip-hop is a genre of music that can often get confused for something that hurts world culture as a whole, but hip-hop is a culture of its own and people have a hard time relating to it when they aren't accustomed to the genre. As Rountree puts it, "the best of hip-hop culture is, in addition to artistic, both political and spiritual, and makes people think" (212). This raw, uncensored form of music can not only be uplifting and insightful, but also give people something they didn't see before in life. The main

purpose of the genre is to give people real substance to look up to and hope. Without looking into it, the average person will never actually see what hip-hop has to offer.

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Becca Olsen

Becca Olsen is studying Pre-Dentistry and minoring in French at DMACC. She hopes to someday travel to France. She loves being outside and spends most of her time running and spending time with dog, Howie. Becca plans to attend Iowa State University after DMACC.

Television Analysis essay

Popular Girls Portrayed in Television

Most people expect people who succeed in high school to be smart, hard-working, and self-confident. On the other hand, television portrays success as being popular and powerful in the high school food-chain. Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, “With great power comes great responsibility”. This quote could be interpreted in different ways but the media shows that power only comes from bringing other people down. Therefore, television is representing popular girls as materialistic, superior, vain, and unintelligent.

In the show, *Sonny with a Chance* which was a popular show on the Disney Channel, one of the main characters, Tawni is shown as vain and conceited. For example, as quoted on the show by Tawni, “... I know it must hurt to be so unpopular. Well, I don’t know. I can only imagine. Just like you can only imagine what it’s like to actually be popular”. This quote shows that Tawni is materialistic and only values things such as popularity and beauty. She is also shown being mean to the main character, Sonny more often than being a friend. This is providing a bad example to young kids who watch Disney Channel because they will most likely be influenced into bullying their own friends because of television. Television is

idolizing popularity and being mean to others which could cause teens to become more self-absorbed, conceited, and ego-centric. Since Tawni is shown being popular and pretty but unintelligent it may cause children to believe that beauty is more important than intelligence. In the report, *Heavenly Hair*, "...reports that 57 percent of women prefer nice hair than having higher intelligence" ("Heavenly Hair" 39). This quote proves that not only children who watch Disney Channel value beauty over intelligence. As quoted by Tawni on *Sonny with a Chance*, "[You] don't need another girl! I'm the funny girl, and the pretty one!" Notice that the quote only focuses on the qualities that make people like her, she did not include "but I'm also the smart one". On majority of television shows, beauty and brains are not put together to make a character, it is either one or the other. In this case, Tawni is a beautiful funny young girl who is popular but lacks intelligence. Tawni obviously does not value her intelligence as highly as her beauty and popularity since she is always shown on the show admiring herself in the mirror. Television is valuing beauty and materialistic qualities which could cause it's viewers to value the same qualities.

Another show, *Glee* portrays popular girls as beautiful but unintelligent academically. One of the popular cheerleaders on the show, Brittany fails classes and even doesn't graduate her first time around. She completes all her tests in crayon and draws pictures rather than taking the tests. Cheerleading and popularity are shown as more important than schoolwork within this show. She is always saying unintelligent things on the show such as, "Mr. Schue: 'Who can tell me what a ballad is?' Brittany: 'A male duck'". Brittany is shown being loved and well-liked by everyone, she even won the title of Student Body President by doing nothing but passing out pixie sticks because she was popular. This could send out a message that being dumb is cute and that if you act unintelligent, you will be more liked. It could also showcase that girls should act dumb in order to make men feel more powerful,

boys prefer dumb girls over smart ones. In the article, *Dumb Blond*, “In the darker recesses of the U.S. culture’s consciousness, dumb and blond have always equaled messy, malleable, sexy, and guilt-free” (“Dumb Blond” 27). This quote proves that dumb girls are more attractive in our culture, the same way that television is portraying it. *Glee* is showing popular girls valuing materialistic things over their education, which could cause young people to play dumb in order to gain popularity.

Suburgatory, is another television show that contains a mean and extremely vain character named Dalia Royce. Dalia is an only child that lives a very luxurious life; she lives in a beautiful mansion with her mother and Hispanic nanny which add to her rich mean girl persona. She rules the school she attends and has her own clique made up of four almost identical girls: Kenzie, Katelyn, Kara, and Kaitlin. “Popularity is the primary avenue to power available to girls[, they] use meanness to obtain power and position within the group. Behaviors such as shunning and humiliating serve to reduce another girl’s power “ (Chris, par. 15). Dahlia used this tactic to become the most popular girl in the school and is known for being brutally honest with everyone including teachers and her divorced parents. For example, she enjoys pointing out flaws in other people’s appearances such as unattractive body features and unfashionable outfits. This behavior not only makes Dahlia feel superior but causes the people whom she is criticizing to have lower self-esteem. “[Popular girls] superior social intelligence enable[s] them to wage complicated battles with other girls aimed at damaging relationships or reputations ... spreading scurrilous rumors by e-mail, making friends with one girl as revenge against another, gossiping about someone just loudly enough to be overheard” (Talbot). By showing popular girls gaining social status by being mean to other people, realistically they are teaching teens a terrible way to become popular. Teens watch shows like this and movies about “queen bees” that rule the school and by doing so,

start to imitate the characters in these shows in order to gain popularity. The shows display an unrealistic version of popularity by saying that power comes without punishment. It also teaches teens to try to destroy reputations, hurt other people, and dominate over the weak. What is power? Teens begin to misinterpret power by watching shows like this; power is not always hand-in-hand with popularity. By showcasing popular girls gaining social status by being mean to other people, they are teaching teens that power comes without punishment.

The media is showcasing success as being popular and pretty, which can cause viewers to become materialistic, vain, and do anything to become popular. It idolizes popularity and displays characters gaining power in wrong ways without being punished. This could cause viewers to try to imitate these characters in order to gain social status and to become “truly happy” when popular as the media portrays it. The media is creating a skewed view of success and popularity to its viewers.

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Michael Latessa

Michael Latessa wanted to write a witty introduction for himself, but he could not think of anything especially witty to say, so he decided to talk about his cat. Her name is Bubbles, and she has long, black fur. Bubbles does not like anyone but Michael. Michael also has a wife, two kids and two dogs, but they all take a back seat to the cat.

Michael is contemplating the enormity of not being able to think of anything witty about himself.

Literary Analysis

Of Man and Beast: The Organic Genius of Walt Whitman

Through the use of imagery and symbolism, Walt Whitman establishes a link between man and nature with his poem “A Noiseless Patient Spider.” Whitman employs language full of metaphors so his readers can feel the thoughts he is trying to convey, not only from the perspective of an outsider, but also from the perspective of someone inside, leaving the reader with a very personal, introspective experience. In the poem’s first line, Whitman introduces his readers to a key subject of his story: the spider. The words “noiseless” and “patient” (Whitman, “Noiseless”: line 1) may be the two most important words in the poem, since they are the fiber, or perhaps filament (4), that connects the spider to the other subject of the piece, the speaker’s soul. The soul is the main focus of the poem, and Whitman subtly detaches himself from the spotlight by engaging the speaker as more of a narrator witnessing these events from outside, much as an author of a third-person narrative would. The first stanza gives two examples of how the narrator expresses his point-of-view, both incorporating the same word: “I mark’d

where on a little promontory it stood isolated” (2). “Mark’d” is the keyword in both lines, expressing a viewpoint conventional in a third-person narrative. The author keeps the focus on the spider throughout the first stanza, establishing its importance to the big picture.

By implementing a third-person convention, then suddenly changing gears, Whitman gives his readers the first clue that his work is metaphorical: The speaker sees himself as a separate entity, a disembodied soul. It becomes quite touching to see the turn happen so quickly, and this immediately pulls the reader into the poem. “Ahh, so it isn’t just about a spider after all!” is the effect this quick-change has on his audience. Indeed, not only is the poem about more than the spider, but also is a journey into the emptiness and unknown that waits for every person when they die. *And Whitman does it in ten lines.* Once the metaphor begins in the second stanza, it continues with each successive line, more passionately, more emphatically than the last.

The genius of the work is not only the metaphor, which is dizzying in its basic complexity, but also the syntax employed by Whitman. Instead of the word “string,” or perhaps something a bit more creative with “silk,” Whitman applied the word “filament,” which has a threefold effect: First, it provides an onomatopoeic quality. He repeats the word three times in succession, neatly approximating the sound of a spider spinning a web. Second, without realizing it is happening, the audience is beginning to see the personification of the spider. A filament could be interpreted as a human invention, or perhaps used to explain something human in nature. Third, when combined with the word “launch’d” (4), the audience sees further into Whitman’s subtly overt exploration of the spider’s human qualities. A spider would not be characterized as launching its webs;

more likely it would fling them, or simply spin them. To launch something, as the spider does, betrays human qualities, enabling the reader not only distantly to sympathize but empathize as well.

In Whitman's original version of "A Noiseless Patient Spider," his syntax in line seven differs by one word, but is enormously transformed with that seemingly simple shift. In the final version, "detached" replaces a second "surrounded," effectively changing the meaning of the line by adding a progression of sorts. The ingenuity of the revision is noted by Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett: "The poet's effortless rededication of the published version shows brilliant artistry and impressive sublimation" (qtd. in Whitman, *Leaves* 450). This progression shows not only the distinctly human quality of a pattern, but it also parallels the next line in the poem, in which a progression is incorporated as well.

Another human quality Whitman explores is the question of what happens after people die. This poem, along with several others sharing the theme of the unknown, reside within "*Leaves of Grass*" under the cluster entitled "Whispers of Heavenly Death." Vast, unbounded spaces are a central metaphor of many of these poems, which include "As If a Phantom Caress'd Me" and "Night on the Prairies." A strong similarity between the shore on which the speaker is walking along in "As If a Phantom Caress'd Me" and the vast emptiness of "A Noiseless Patient Spider." The correlation is stronger yet in "Night on the Prairies," in which Whitman offers the prairie of the title and the nighttime sky as links. The two poems could easily succeed one another, as they nearly do in Whitman's "deathbed" version of "*Leaves of Grass*." With "Night on the Prairies," the author has given his audience a grand explanation of the concept of

transcendentalism, replete with metaphor upon metaphor extolling the virtues of its philosophy. Reading “Prairies” should be a delight to fans of Whitman’s style, for it does not disappoint. However it does not leave any opening for its readers to interpret, either. The language is beautiful and wistful, but the topic is fully explored by the end. Subsequent readings will bring a sense of satisfaction, but not one of discovery, which is a rarity for Whitman. On the other hand, “A Noiseless Patient Spider” requires its readers to search for meaning within its lines, to explore the dogma of transcendentalism. The language is equally beautiful, equally wistful. With “Spider,” Whitman has asked his readers to work a little bit for the payoff, he does not spell out his meaning as frankly as he does with “Prairies.”

Transcendence within Whitman’s work is further examined by Sister Barbara Ewell, in which she explores his seeming obsession with death: “Death as the means to immortality becomes its equivalent, because here, as elsewhere in Whitman, the process of achievement is, in fact, the fundamental element of experience” (38). “A Noiseless Patient Spider” is the precursor to this statement. The first stanza is the speaker witnessing the spider’s quest; the second stanza contains the speaker’s epiphany; and as the poem ends, the speaker realizes what must be done to achieve transcendence, so has taken up the quest. All that is left is to execute the plan.

The spider’s self-prescribed loneliness is a topic touched on by Phyllis J. Scherle, in which she concludes that the spider intentionally isolates itself. “It is significant that loneliness arising from separation from one’s kind is self-generated and voluntary” (Scherle). She goes on to discuss Whitman’s choice of the word “detach,” suggesting that it implies a higher force as the cause for the separation (Scherle). This argument is

uncompelling, given the fact that the detachment occurs to the speaker, not the spider. A reasonable argument could be made to support the speaker's assessment of the spider's plight in comparison with his own: He sees the spider spinning web after web, and draws a line to his own situation in parallel. However this argument, too, is uncompelling, given that the speaker's detachment is communicated in line two of the second stanza. The speaker has just begun to examine his own situation relative to the spider's, so it is unreasonable to assume that the speaker has drawn such a conclusion which would effectively breathe humanity into the spider. The correlations are not drawn by the speaker until the third line of stanza two, in which he is "seeking the spheres to connect them" (Whitman, "Noiseless" 8-9). A link is established in this phrase, and the mystery is unraveled with each successive line, until the end of the poem.

Whitman's engaging, wistful style enables his readers to explore the symbolic content of his work "A Noiseless Patient Spider," while at the same time forming a connection with his subjects. His use of metaphor and the concept of transcendentalism form a bridge between the subjects of his poem: The spider and the human soul. The metaphors are many and varied, and as the euphoria upon initial reading subsides, one pulls back and sees the connections drawn as that of a well-traveled roadmap. As threads of connecting points are spun and cling, new ones are spun; crisscrossing patterns meld, emptiness is filled in, slowly, slowly; Whitman's message is organic. The most valuable lesson his poem teaches is that a person must understand nature to understand oneself, or perhaps through understanding oneself, a person better understands nature.

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