

Fall 1995

Skunk River Review Fall 1995, Vol 7

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Skunk River Review



Skunk River Review is a collection of student writing produced by students who have been enrolled in composition courses at DMACC.

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on four field trips to various locales on the Skunk River.

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Photo Field Studies class
On the North Skunk River / Marshall County, Iowa

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"I never realized how important writing was until I became older. When I was little, I always did my math first. If I had the time for English, I then did it. I felt that once I could read and write that was good enough. Later, I found that writing was very important. I learned that people judge me by how well I write and speak. When I specialize in something, people can't only judge me on my specialty, but also how well I communicate. In our whole lives, we get to where we are on how we present ourselves."

Chris Kaas □ Composition I □ Liberal Arts □

□ Introduction □

The *Skunk River Review* is a collection of writings by Des Moines Area Community College students enrolled in composition courses at all levels from Basic Writing to Composition II. Most of the submissions were produced by students enrolled in Composition I. The selections appearing in Volume VII have been chosen from essays written during the 1994-95 academic year. As in the past, our goal has been to create a quality publication that represents the student writers at DMACC.

The number and quality of essays submitted made the selection process difficult. This year's publication has eight more selections than the 1994 edition. We used the previous years' criteria — an essay's focus, organization, style, and originality — as well as our intention of selecting essays from all DMACC campuses and representative samples from a variety of genres. The task was not an easy one. The work submitted was generally excellent. We do ask that students proofread final drafts before submission.

To the Student

The compositions in the *Skunk River Review* are to be read, analyzed, and enjoyed. Written by students like you, the selections are examples of college-level writing and may be used as a basis for evaluating your own writing. The skills you acquire in English composition courses at DMACC will benefit you throughout your life. When you study composition at DMACC, you join a community of writers. This publication is intended to make that writing "community" visible to you. Realize that as you refresh your study of English through reading and writing, you have valid and valuable contributions to make for yourself and for an audience of your peers. The topic selection, style, and format of the essays will provide material for class discussion and for your personal inspiration.

If you are interested in submitting essays for the 1996 edition, please see the information located on the final pages of this volume. Included are release forms which must accompany submissions. All papers will be considered. *Note: To assist the Skunk River Review editors, we ask that you submit two copies of each paper. This is a new requirement for 1996.*

To the Instructor

Originally, the *Skunk River Review* was created to provide DMACC composition students with a vehicle for sharing their writing with a broader audience. While we agree with that philosophy, we have specifically designed the format of this volume of the *Skunk* to make it an anthology of student essays that exemplify the types of essays taught in our classes. We hope these essays can be utilized as models and that this body of work may supplement the main text of a composition course. Because the essays have been written by their peers, students relate easily to the subject matter and enjoy discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the pieces. The *Skunk River Review* represents a cross-section of teaching methodologies to allow instructors flexibility in its use.

"Writing to me is a communication process used by many. Although I prefer verbal communication, I have learned a lot about written communication in my Composition I class. The things I have learned will help me in many aspects of my career. There are many times when writing is required in my line of work and this course has helped me considerably."

Mike Weber Composition I Computer Programming

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Find out how to submit your compositions for the 1996 edition!



Childhood

The Boys Club

□□□□

Marcia Johnson

Composition I

"It's a man's world!" I think we have all heard that statement in our life and, whether we believe it or not, we have all had to deal with the hypocrisies that it implies. Women, especially, have had to prove themselves capable of "keeping up" with the other gender. I believe I learned that lesson earlier than most.

I grew up in a very small town named Dana. There weren't a lot of kids my age living there or a lot of things to do besides play at the grain bins with the boys or play dolls with the girls. I preferred to play with the boys because they tended to play more adventurous games and came up with more exciting things to do! However, being a girl, the boys felt I should stick to playing with dolls, putting on make-up, and babysitting.

I was determined to show them that I deserved the chance to prove that I could do anything they could do, and therefore deserved to be a member of their club. I challenged the president of the club, Greg Riely, to come up with an initiation test for me to do to prove I could keep up. They voted on it and agreed to let me try; actually, I knew they would at least let me try because both of my brothers and my best friend were club members and there were only five members to start with.

So the tests began, the first of which was the test of speed. We had to ride our bikes two miles out of town and back. The first one to make it back won. I not only was the first one to make it back, but I beat Greg by over two minutes! The next test was climbing on top of a building and jumping from building to building without falling or getting scared. In this test I tied with Greg, but they counted it as passing because I was able to keep up.

Then Greg decided that those tests were too simple and that it still didn't prove anything, so he said the next test would be a test of courage which involved going into this abandoned house, including its cellar. The house was huge and it had been sitting empty since we had lived here. There were rumors that a guy hung himself in the attic and you could still hear him moaning at night. I didn't really believe those rumors, yet I often wondered why it had sat empty all that time, some of the furniture still there.

Marcia Johnson

I couldn't think about all of that now, though; I was determined to prove I could take anything they could dish out. It was decided that I would go in right after dusk with only a candle for light. I had to travel the entire scope of the house, including the attic, taking something from each room to prove that I had gone through it.

The first room I entered was the living room, which was furnished with a couch, an old chair, a small table with an old phonograph player, and a few books. To the left was another room that was essentially empty with the exception of a few magazines scattered on the floor. To the right of the living room was the kitchen still cluttered with dishes, a table, and some canned goods. Next, I had to go upstairs where there were only two small rooms and a pull-down ladder leading to the attic.

I ascended the ladder, wanting to get the attic out of the way first. As I reached the top, the first thing that hit me was the rank dusty, musky smell of years of rot and decay. My view was limited by the range of the candle's light, but I could see a few boxes and pieces of furniture covered with a blanket of dust and cobwebs. I climbed off the ladder, raised the candle to get a better look, and saw a figure looming in the far corner. I couldn't quite make it out, but it looked like a person. When I crept closer to get a better look, it appeared to move! I was so scared, I couldn't move or scream or anything; I was totally paralyzed! Suddenly, the moonlight shone through the holes in the roof and revealed that it wasn't a person at all, just a coat rack with a few clothes on it!

Wanting to get out of there quickly, I grabbed a book lying close by and headed back downstairs. There wasn't anything in the two rooms upstairs, so I went on down to the living room and took the record off of the phonograph, took a cup out of the kitchen, and a pencil that I found in the other small room. Then I headed outside relieved that the "test" was over.

When I rejoined Greg, he said, "You're not done. You still have to go through the cellar."

"And don't forget you have to bring us something from the cellar to prove you were down there," the other boys chimed in. By this time I was ready to quit, but Greg started making fun of me for being scared, so, reluctantly, I headed toward the cellar. As I descended the stairs, I could hear them all laughing and taunting me, calling me a sissy and a girl, telling me I should just go home and stick to playing with dolls. This only made me angrier and more determined to prove myself.

The stairs were split, broken, and weathered from years of neglect; the doorway sagged and collapsed slightly on one side. The disgusting fumes that came from within made me nauseous. The door creaked loudly as I shoved it open. The cellar was cold, dark, and damp; the pungent smell of

The Boys Club

rotted food and wood filled the room. The walls were lined with jars of beans, peas, fruit and jam. Some of the jars were open and whatever had been in them was rotted beyond recognition. Some of the jars were broken on the floor with moldy slime oozing around them.

The light of the candle was going dim, so I began looking for something to take up when suddenly I saw something moving on one of the shelves. I raised the candle and there about two feet from me was a big bull snake! It had to be at least three or four feet long! I went to the shelf and grabbed the snake just before it disappeared behind a box of canning supplies. As I grabbed the snake, the box tipped over and there was another slightly smaller snake, so I grabbed it as well and headed back outside.

I guess I must have been down there for a while because the boys were yelling at me to hurry up. I shouted back that I was on my way and when I reached the top of the steps I hurled the snakes at Greg, exclaiming, "Here's something to prove I was down there!" Realizing what I had thrown at him, Greg turned and ran home screaming all the way. After that, the rest of the boys not only let me in the club, they wanted me to be the president! I declined, but I said I would settle for treasurer. But that's another story.

Change of Season



Chris Stanley

Composition I

Riding my bike along the edge of town, I looked at the rows of freshly sprouted crops. With ever-increasing fear, I realized that by the time they were harvested, everything I had previously taken for granted would be changed.

It was summer of 1982. My birthplace and hometown exists on the far edge of western Dallas county in Dexter, Iowa. My mother remarried in August of that year. She, together with my sister and me, moved 25 miles east to Waukee. Geographically, not much of a move, but to my 12-year-old mind it was a terrifying event I anticipated with apprehension and a growing sense of dread.

We had the largest yard in town. Almost every night, an hour or so before dark, all the neighborhood kids would congregate at my house. There we would indulge in intense games of hide-and-seek, kick the can, or whatever else we could devise. Our games always lasted until well after dark. The delicious cool of the night would coincide with our utter exhaustion. Beneath a glowing, white, full moon we would collapse into the damp, dark grass, having played our hearts out. I remember my apprehension growing as the summer progressed. Between games I had only to look toward the edge of town to see how tall the corn was getting and to know how short the time had become until our impending move. At the time it all seemed a horrible impossibility. It couldn't happen, but it did.

As the long, hot days of August drew on, and the corn stood seven or eight feet tall, I vividly remember the yellowish-white tassels gently swaying on a warm summer breeze. I also remember looking out the back window of our car as our old house faded from view, and I remember feeling despair.

When we got to our new home, there wasn't a lot of time to settle in before our next terrifying leap into the future — our first day at our new school. I no longer had to look toward the edge of town to see the corn. We were now living on a farm right in the middle of a field of it. We were surrounded by it. It was everywhere I looked.

Change of Season

Finally, the fateful morning arrived. It was one of those bright, dewy mornings of late summer: the kind that starts out cool and damp, and winds up muggy and oppressive. I remember the sun-kissed dew dripping off the wide leaves of each plant in the rows of corn flanking both sides of the lane we walked to catch the bus. It was good having my sister there. She looked up to me. I knew that if for no other reason than that, I would somehow get through it all.

After what seemed a few moments and forever, we could hear the bus grinding its way through the gears and chugging its way toward us. I had just a few more seconds to look toward the open fields. I reflected on everything that had happened and was continuing to happen. As I glanced, memories of the previous season swept through my brain: riding my bike, late night seek and destroy, lazy days fishing at the river. In that brief moment my fear abated. My memories and view of the rows merged. I knew I would make it. I knew I would be all right. It was just a change of season. As I turned around, the bus doors had swung open. My sister and I climbed aboard and into our new life.

Memories of a Timber



Mike Schrader

Composition I

For me, the timber has always been a place to escape to, a place to explore and enjoy. The timber is still there, and I still visit it. My memories of the timber, as it used to be, will always be with me.

My first visits to the timber found me on my father's lap as we searched for his small herd of dairy cows that grazed there. These tractor rides to the timber were so exciting, especially if we went to the "Indian Patch." This section of the timber was the farthest from the house and was justly named because of the numerous arrow heads that my grandfather and mother had both found there. Bordering a perceived endless stretch of wilderness, the timber seemed so huge. I would dream of the Indians who once hunted there; I imagined them viewing the same scene that I did. For thousands of years, different people had explored and experienced the timber's beauty, and now it was my turn.

As I grew a little older, I was given the chore of finding the cattle and herding them back to the barn. This was not a chore to me. Sitting anxiously during the bus ride home from school, I would picture the timber in my mind and know I would soon be there. A box-culvert cattle crossing under the road was a "magical" entrance that separated the real world from this huge "wilderness" of mine. As I emerged from the crossing and entered the timber, my youthful imagination would suddenly come to life and once again I would dream of the Indians who had been there before me. The cow paths provided a perfect route for me to play my childhood games. Quietly edging into the timber with my B-B gun ready, I would begin the evening's escapades, while forgetting about the cows and the worries of the day.

The timber was so quiet. The large oak trees blocked out the sunlight and calmed the wind. The only sounds heard might be the gentle rustling of the leaves, or the barking of squirrels as they played, jumping from tree to tree. If I were very quiet, I might see a coyote or a fox sneaking through the undergrowth. On especially lucky days, I might even glimpse small groups of deer browsing for acorns. I once witnessed two bucks fighting each other for nearly an hour. I always hoped that I would not hear the cow bell clanking (signaling the location of the herd) until the

Memories of a Timber

entire timber had been explored. The bell meant the end of the evening's adventures, and the beginning of the long walk back to the crossing under the road.

As time went on and I grew older, the timber sadly seemed to shrink in size. I had expanded my explorations by this time and discovered that my wilderness was actually a relatively small tract of land, spared from the plow only because of its untillable slopes. My games also changed as I discarded the B-B gun for my grandfather's 22-caliber rifle. My father sold his dairy herd, and the timber quickly covered the cow paths as if erasing one era of the timber and starting the next.

The timber continued to yield exciting trips, filled with sightings of the abundant wildlife and excellent hunting opportunities — until the day the timber was logged. This "harvesting," as it was called, changed my view of the timber and ended my youthful fantasies. My huge oak trees that I wandered through as a child were all gone now. When I see the remains of the timber, it's like visiting an old run-down cemetery with tombstones that are leaning or knocked over and weeds that are growing unchecked. The scattered groups of tree trunks are tombstones, and the discarded treetops are the weeds. It's like paying respect to an old friend who is no longer alive.

There is still a quiet in the timber. It is a different kind of quiet. The squirrels don't bark, and the wind doesn't rustle the leaves. It is a dead quiet.

Clarity In Little League



Greg Patterson

Composition I

I was just finished with the fourth grade and right at the end of my third little league season. The year had gone just like the previous two. My team was by far the most dominating in our division (being undefeated for the second straight year), but I was having another dismal year. In three years of ball, I had the statistics of a moron: one hit, 14 hits by pitches, and one catch in the outfield. My coach was puzzled because I had good mechanics, eye-hand coordination, and great speed — but just no production. None. Zilch. I was put in center field because even though I couldn't catch — none of the outfielders could — I was fast enough to cover left-center, center, right-center and back up the other two.

I loved playing baseball, but I was just so damned discouraged that I felt this would be the last year of hardball. And then it happened. For some reason my mother decided to get my eyes checked. Whalaa!!! I was as blind as a 78-year-old bat! Oh my God, I never even knew that the world was so detailed. I walked out of the office into a whole new environment. It was great.

In our league championship game two days later, I had the best game of my career. I caught everything hit to center and was able to charge balls and everything. My timing was still off, so I didn't get any hits, but I had plenty of foul tips, which was a big improvement. Man oh man, I was ready for next year, which was my first year in the "majors" — the top division in our little league. This was the division where we got full uniforms: snow-white pants, white socks, colored stirrups that matched our jerseys, stripes on our jerseys, and an official team hat with the full logo imprinted on it.

I was so pumped that I rededicated myself to baseball. I practiced all winter, even coming to Des Moines once a month to the indoor batting cages. Draft Day was the first day of the new season. Every baseball kid in the city awaited anxiously by the phone to see which team would draft him. I was looking forward to getting onto another championship-caliber team since I would now be able to contribute more.

Clarity in Little League

As luck would have it, I was drafted onto the Padres, the most experienced team on the league. They had eight returning starters and 10 players in all. I was one of the three players drafted to them. The bad news was that it had been two years since the Padres had won a game.

We had three weeks of practice, and, boy, did we practice! I believe I was a pleasant surprise for the coach because I was a totally different player from before. I could catch, hit, run, steal — everything but pitch. And about pitching, the other two players drafted with me were two of the top three coming up from the "minors." So what we had was an experienced team that was tired of losing, a new coach with fire in his belly (I think he drank a lot), two ace pitchers, and me — an unproven in commodity when it came to game-time pressure.

Opening day arrived before we knew it. As luck would have it, our opponent was the Cards. The Cards had most of the "studs" in the league (most of my former teammates were on it) and had won six of the last seven games. As we took the field, I received many cat-calls from my "friends" on my minor league team, most of them nasty. Many of them were surprised that I took second base (I got the big promotion a week before), not knowing that I had "blossomed" over the winter. The Cards went three and out and it was our turn at last. I saw many surprised faces as I came up to the plate as lead-off hitter.

Oh, buddy, was I nervous. Here I was, with no career hits to my name, batting in the lead position against Mark Olson, the best pitcher in the majors, and batting against most of my former teammates who were the dynasty team. Overmatched? You bet. I swung at nothing but air on three pitches. We ended up losing the game four to three, but it was closer than anyone thought it would be. I did better also. I got my first hit at my next at bat, and ended up going three for four with a double, two RBI's and one run scored.

That game was a springboard for the year. We finished the season fifteen and one, tied with the Cards for the division title. We beat them on the last day of the season, one to zero, for the tie to force a playoff game. Ultimately, our catcher, Toby Kruse, hit a two-run double to take the title six to five. I'll tell you, the best sight I ever saw as a 13-year-old was the view of all of those a--holes on the Cards crying their eyes out because they had lost their title to a bunch of scrubs.

That year (leading our team in batting and fourth in the league) was my first on the All-Star team, and I owe it all to my eye doctor. Thanks Doc! By the way, the Doc's son was on the Cards, and we swept them the next year on our way to an undefeated season and a repeat title.

Adoption



Cheryl Veenstra

Composition I

Almost my whole life I've known that I was adopted. My mother shared this information with me very matter of factly when I was almost four years old. My brother and I had heard the word "adoption" and questioned our mother about what it was. After giving us a simple explanation, she added, "You're adopted, too."

"Both of us?" we asked.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because your mothers weren't able to take care of you. They gave you to someone who wanted you and was able to provide for you," my mother explained.

At that age, that was all the information we desired. My strongest reaction at the time was that I felt I was unique. My brother and I thought it was neat that we both had two mothers and two fathers. Because we were so young, though, we couldn't count high enough to add up all the grandparents. We did know that there had to be a bunch.

Discovering that I was adopted did not cause emotional problems for me. Because I was so young when I learned this, I was better able to accept it and incorporate it into my developing identity. If I had been raised for years with the belief that these were my "real" parents, I would have been very resentful when I found out the truth. And under no circumstances do I believe that it's okay to keep this information from children.

As I grew, I had more questions for my mother. "How did you get me?" I wondered. The first time I asked my mother this, she responded with a fabricated story that was meant to make me feel special, I guess. I believed it for years and would even repeat it to friends when the subject of

Adoption

my adoption would come up. It wasn't until I was a teenager that I came to realize that what she had told me was untrue. Her charming story, meant to build my ego, went like this: "Your dad and I went to the adoption agency, where they had lined up all the babies for our inspection. After looking over all these babies, we chose our favorite one, and that was you." I had become aware that the number of children who are available for adoption is inadequate to meet the demand. When I thought about it, I realized that a small adoption agency in central Iowa would not have many babies available for adoption. Therefore, they would not be able to line them all up for potential parents to pick their favorite. I was a little hurt that my mom had lied, though I never told her so. It's important that children feel special and wanted, but it's even more important that parents never lie to their children.

As I grew, I developed the need to find out where I came from; I've always wanted to find my birth-parents. At the age of 18, I registered in ALMA, a national registry that matched adult children with their birth parents. It required the voluntary registration of all those parties involved. My parents were not registered, however, so no match was made. Since I couldn't afford the annual registration fee, I cancelled my membership after only one year.

Since that time, I've given birth to three of my own. I had always longed to have a family resemblance with someone, and I had hoped that my children would look like me. Unfortunately, this isn't so. My two youngest children look just like their father and his relatives. My oldest child doesn't look like anyone we know. I often wonder if somewhere there is a person who looks like my daughter. Is it my father or mother, a grandparent or a half-sibling?

Many adoptees have unanswered questions about what their parents look like and what their talents and interests are. Discovering who their ancestors were and learning about any hereditary medical conditions is also important to some adoptees. These are valid reasons for a search, and all people deserve the right to learn where they come from.

Before beginning a search, however, it is important to have realistic expectations and to be prepared for a potentially negative outcome. My friend Leslie had a somewhat painful outcome as a result of her search. For as long as I'd known her, I was aware that she needed to find her birth-mother. When she reached high-school age, her parents shared with her all they knew about her birth parents and the circumstances of her birth. She learned her birth name, her mother's age and educational status at the time of her birth. Most surprising of all, she discovered that she was half Asian!

As a young girl in an all-white family, she had enjoyed her own comfortable niche in a small Dutch community. Like many others in our town, she'd carried prejudices against other races. Included in her vocabulary were words like "gook" and "chink," both of which are disparaging labels

for Asians. But because she was still young at that time, her prejudices and values weren't firmly ingrained. She'd "adopted" the values of those around her, mimicking what she had heard those around her say, and speaking without thought. To find out that she was what she previously had labeled as inferior was a serious blow to her self-esteem, and she was forced to re-examine her values.

It wasn't until after graduation from high school that Leslie's search was successful. After locating her birth-mother in New York state, she hired a third party to make contact for her. At this time, she discovered that she was the product of date rape. Happily, though, her birth-mother didn't reject her, and this made the circumstances of her birth a little bit easier for Leslie to accept. Since meeting one another, Leslie and her mother have shared a rather guarded relationship. Her mother's husband has no knowledge of Leslie's existence. They meet very occasionally for lunch and send each other cards at the holidays. She even had the opportunity to meet her half-brother and she has remarked that they look nothing alike.

Not all biological reunions are worthwhile or successful. Marshall, my mother and father-in-law's friend, experienced difficulties after reuniting with his long-lost siblings. He was almost 60 years old when he found his brothers and sisters. They had been separated and "put up" for adoption after their father's death. None of them except Marshall are well-adjusted, productive members of society. Some have spent time in jail. Because they are uneducated, they can't hold a job with good pay, and, as a result, they are dependent upon government programs for their livelihood. These siblings, after seeing how successful Marshall is, have begged him for money.

There are other issues that may arise when a search is attempted. It's important that adoptees prepare themselves for possible disappointment. The person you find may turn out to be someone you would never choose to associate with when meeting under other circumstances. Rejection by a birth-parent is also a possibility. It's also possible that a birth-parent will never be found, and searchers must be prepared to fail.

As an adoptee, that is my biggest fear. I'm afraid my search will hit a dead end, and I'll have to accept the fact that I'll never find my birth-mother. I'm not afraid that I'll be disappointed in the person I find because I don't expect anyone to be perfect. I'm not looking for a mother because I already have one. I would like to meet my birth-mother and share our histories. I would like to see if she looks like me. To expect more than that is setting myself up for disappointment. I do know there is an empty space in my life that aches to be filled, and that empty space is reserved just for her.

A Separate Piece



Heidi Wadsworth

Composition I

I have an assortment of knickknacks which I keep in one of those plastic containers obtained from buying some junk toy in a gumball machine. Inside of this container are several miniature items — a plastic lightbulb necklace from vacation bible school; a cute, tiny doll from my mother; a transparent, turquoise-green plastic ring from my best friend next door; and a puzzle piece found at my grandma's farm. Each item has some significance to me no matter how slight it may be. The puzzle piece, however, is of great significance. At the time I don't even remember why I kept it, but it was something I found the year of our country's bicentennial at my grandma's farm during summer vacation. My brother and I stayed there for a week with our cousins, Sandy and David. It was the last time we played with David.

One night, after a couple of days of being home from our stay, our parents came home from work to tell us that he'd been killed. "Killed? Who? David? Who's David?" we asked, astonished. We figured it was some David they knew but we didn't. They explained to us that it was *our* David and we were to go to the funeral home to be with the family. No way. We wouldn't go. We were afraid to go because of what we would see. But, of course, there was the funeral and we couldn't get out of it no matter how hard we tried.

I remember our drive to the church. It was a small, white country church along the edge of the highway. We drove by that church every time we went out to the farm since it was on the way. The farm was such fun and I thought about our past week together as we drove. We had played ferociously all day, every day, for six or seven uninterrupted glorious days. We played tag and hide 'n' seek; we explored the barn, the pasture and woods; we took turns driving a dirt bike to the end of the long, bumpy dirt driveway and back. We climbed the huge, lone oak tree in the middle of the pasture; we pretended to be the Swiss Family Robinson. We ate corn on the cob, fresh peas from the garden, and we had fresh strawberry sauce on our ice cream. We never even took a bath the whole time. I think someone got stung by a bee, but it wasn't a big deal. It was the only time I ever stayed overnight with my grandparents, and to be there with my cousins was heaven.

Heidi Wadsworth

We were all happy to spend time together, but I especially enjoyed being with David. He seemed like a friend or even a brother. We were close in age. The things which were shared between us were apart from the adult world — an unexplainable kindred spirit. We had this, David and I. He was my ally. I think I loved him. It was an adoring admiration. We were finally getting to know each other.

I dreaded the drive out to Leaf Valley that day. I had asked, worried, if they would have the casket open, and because we were so late, my mother said she didn't think so. I was relieved. But my relief was only temporary when I noticed what was in the church entrance — a small body in a small coffin. They had put it there for all to see and I would have to go right past it to get into the church. It was a dirty trick to put it right there, to put *him* there. I could either look away or see for myself if it was true — that *he* was there. I decided I needed to know. My split-second decision was made. I looked. His lifeless, unfamiliar body lay within the eerie softness of the rectangular-shaped container. He looked out of place for someone his age. I had seen "this" before. It suited the old ladies who were my grandmother's egg customers, but not a 12-year-old, or was he 11?

The clothes he had on were not what I expected to see — a short-sleeved T-shirt with thin, green stripes and his barely worn Toughskin jeans. I half expected him to be in a suit and tie. His hand was purposely placed over his Good News Bible. It was not David. It could not possibly be him. His face was puffy and enlarged; his closed eyes were purplish and bulging. The hand holding the Bible was the only part I could identify as David. I received this whole unforgettable image in but a lingering glance. A child. Some dead child, I thought. How did he get here? What happened? His body wasn't very big, and he seemed kind of scrawny, but in the box it looked even smaller than I remembered . . . just days before.

They said he had been driving a tractor. It slid on a hill, toppled over, and when he fell off the tractor, it landed on him and crushed his body, pinning him under it. *Why was David driving a tractor?* I asked myself. He was only a boy. I was disgusted that an adult would allow him to actually get behind the wheel of a huge machine when he was so young. I never wanted to even get near one, let alone drive one. He must've begged. They still should have said no. In my mind I blamed them.

For the first time in my life I really didn't want to go back out to the farm. I didn't want to be there. The previous week was so fresh in my mind, replaying over and over. David had been so energetic and vivacious. Now David was gone and the shock of his death was a shot of reality running through my veins. The fun and games ended. The boogeyman had vanished and the witch

A Separate Piece

under my bed had disappeared. I had crossed over a boundary, there was no turning back. Suddenly, I had a new fear — death.

David's family lived out of town, only two hours away, but they stopped coming to Leaf Valley except on special occasions. There were other relatives and cousins, but it seemed as if no one really wanted to go there as often. Maybe everyone needed time to heal. Maybe the tragedy was something everyone avoided facing. David's death seemed to put an abrupt stop to family gatherings. His death became a definite demarcation line in my mind. It was the separation of having innumerable, wonderful memories of playing on the farm and memories less vivid and harder to recall. What I have left is the memory of that week and a stray puzzle piece.

Somewhere at the farm there is a puzzle with this piece missing. It is apart from the whole puzzle. I carry the memory of David around like that puzzle piece. I often wonder what things would have been like if his death hadn't separated him from us, from life. I think about that sometimes when I'm at a family gathering — a birthday, a wedding, or at Christmas. David is and always will be a missing part of our lives. I will keep this puzzle piece to remind me of David, and I will never forget him.

Discovering Death



Sean Holdridge

Composition I

I was young then, and didn't really understand the facts of life or the way things were. To me, the world was my neighborhood: the trees, the kids down the street, and my grandparents' farm. All I knew was what I could see around me. My parents saw to it that I didn't see much.

I always knew that my grandmother was different. I didn't know too many people her age who had to be cared for. I guess I kinda figured she was sick. I honestly didn't know what was wrong.

As I grew older, I began to realize that my grandmother had a disease that affects the mind. Sometimes I guess I didn't really respect her condition and treated her like a child, although she was a good 40 years my senior. Some of her behaviors resembled a small child's; at times she forgot where the restrooms were and messed herself. I didn't understand that such behavior was induced by this disease.

One day my uncle came in from working out in one of the fields on the farm and started to microwave a couple of hotdogs for a quick lunch. Apparently, he was refueling one of the tractors and, yet again, the temperamental pressure switch had failed and started overflowing the tank. My uncle ran out to shut the blasted thing off. Grandma was sleeping in the bedroom adjacent to the kitchen and woke up to the smell of cooked food. Grandma went out and got the hotdogs out of the microwave, and tried to eat them. Unfortunately, the disease that affects her disconnected the thought process that orders the mouth to chew. She choked on a hot dog.

We visited her at the hospital for several months after that. I learned a new word, "coma." And what exactly is a "vegetative state"? Eventually she was transferred to an old folks home.

I remember waking up early one morning or late one night, one of those in-between times that doesn't really have a classification. The phone rang, and Mom ran out the door in tears. I recall the barking tires announcing her rushed departure. I asked Dad what was wrong. He said, "Son, your grandmother is dead." I went back to bed wondering if she got to count to 30 like we did in our kiddie-commando games or if this was the one you don't wake up from.

Discovering Death

After news of Grandma's death, my days were pretty ethereal. I pondered about what it would be like to be dead, if it's possible to hear people or know that people are there if you're in a coma. Guess not.

The family and I went to a place called the funeral home where it looked like a family reunion, only no one was laughing or throwing a Frisbee. Everyone was dressed up and walking up to a neat-looking box, but they were all crying and shaking their heads. I walked up and peered in. I saw Grandma lying there and wondered why she looked like my G.I. Joe toys, all plastic and fake. My dad tried to explain something called embalming, while the older people patted my head and called my brother and me "poor boys." We went home, but I still didn't really understand what was going on.

A couple days later we had to go to her funeral service. It was a weird time, the middle of the day, and very crowded in that little church in Farrar. I had a pretty good idea then about what was happening, but it all hit me when I saw the guy in the robes shut the lid on my grandma's box. I realized that "dead" meant "gone" and that the only place I would ever see her again would be in picture albums. The tears started rolling then, but even more so when I started remembering the way I had treated her. I couldn't bring myself to say "I love you, Grandma" in the hospital, but I wanted nothing more at that time than her love. I realized how childish I had acted and wished for all the world that it was me in the box instead of her. Seeing her being lowered into the ground only helped drive home that utter finality that is death.

As the years passed and I came to understand more and more about the world and its workings, the concept of death has become a household term. I hear it on the news, I deal with it in the games I play, and I lose friends and relatives to time and disease. I know what it means to know someone and the next minute say, "I *knew* them." There is no power higher or stronger than death. It is a part of life that must be accepted. When my time comes, I know that there will be someone who wishes that he told me something one last time, just as I will if my parents and friends go before me.

The Day Santa Claus Died



Jennifer Walker

Composition I

I'll never forget that feeling for as long as I live. It was an all-consuming numbness that started with a buzzing in my ears and worked its way throughout every vein and every nerve in my body. It was the kind of feeling you often hear people describe who have had a near-death experience. One minute they're there; the next minute they're looking down at their lifeless bodies. It was one of those little truths that is just so traumatic that your mind has to disconnect itself from your body, or someone might get hurt.

It was Christmas 1979. The snow lay thick upon the ground. Trimmed from trunk to star in store-bought ornaments and those my brother and I had so skillfully crafted in the hallowed halls of Lincoln Elementary, our shaggy little tree stood proudly in the living room. The air was filled with a certain excitement, electricity if you will, that only happens when tiny little minds know that presents are coming and lots of them.

But it wasn't just the new toys so carefully wrapped in brightly colored paper. It wasn't the sheer joy of jumping out of bed a half-second after your eyes popped open and racing to the tree to see what treasures had been left this year. It wasn't even the thrill of wondering if any toys had been left and then having your suspicions proven right. It was knowing that your life — no matter how small and insignificant in the grand scheme of things — had been touched by something so wonderful, mythical and magical as Santa Claus. It was knowing that the letter you slaved over had traveled all those hundreds of miles to the North Pole, to the "Man" himself. And you usually got exactly what you asked for — except for the pony, of course. But you warned yourself not to be too picky because, after all, everybody has limitations, even legends. It was knowing that the very toy you held in your hand had been made by genuine elves even though the box it was in looked exactly like the ones in the store. It was knowing that if you hurried fast enough on Christmas morning, there might be just a little of that magic left in the air, and maybe some of it would rub off on you.

Santa Claus. He was just somehow better than the Easter Bunny or the Tooth Fairy. No one really knew how or why. It was just accepted. And no child ever questioned it. That would be like the Greeks wondering why Zeus was the supreme power on Mount Olympus.

The Day Santa Claus Died

So you can imagine how it was when my little mind was faced with something so inconceivable as the unreality of Santa Claus. You spend your entire life (all seven years) running from realities that are just too ugly to face. Every Christmas morning you pause and think, "What if there were no Santa?" And then you laugh. Yeah, right, and money doesn't grow on trees. And then one day, there it is, the ugly truth staring you in the face. And you can't run anymore.

I guess I walked right into it. Oh, if I had known then what I know now. My older brother had been teasing me all day. He claimed to have some top secret information about the big guy. And, being the faithful follower that I was, I felt it was my God-given right to know what was going on. There are certain rights an American has, and I was pretty sure information on Santa Claus was covered in the Constitution.

So I begged and pleaded with him to tell me what he knew. Was it bad? Was he sick? He didn't break a hip, did he? The reindeer are okay, aren't they? Oh, please don't tell me the elves went on strike! Just tell me! I can take it! If Christmas is going to be late this year, I can handle that! Just tell me. Tell me. Mooooooooooooom!

And that was probably my big mistake. He probably never would have said it if I hadn't yelled for mom. After all, when you're a kid, telling mom is like pressing charges. She never even knew it was coming. Her eyes almost popped out of her head when she learned what my brother had done. I'm not sure who was more traumatized, her or me. I stared in disbelief; I couldn't believe the blasphemy spewing from my brother's mouth.

Mom moved in right away to put "operation damage control" into play, but it was no good. Once I learned the truth, there was no going back. Christmas was never quite the same after that. For a long time I would refer to that moment as the "day that Santa died." The Christmas that followed that revelation was probably the hardest one to face. It got a little easier after that. But never again did I experience that wonderful childhood thrill of the ritual that is Christmas where Santa Claus lives and reindeer fly and elves create toys.

Christmas is still my favorite time of year. It's like a special brotherhood of mankind, a unity that isn't there the rest of the year. It's the way that people gather together and put their differences aside and a feeling of love and peace on earth overwhelms hate and suffering in the world. It's the way everything is magically transformed into a winter wonderland. I don't even mind that the stores take advantage of this time of year to bleed you dry. When the Christmas season arrives, I fall into a trance reminiscent of the days when Santa lived.

The Door-to-Door Terrorist



Angie Lenz

Composition I

"She's coming," my mother groaned as she backed away from the window.

I ran across the room to get a look. "Who's coming?"

I caught a glimpse of her as the curtains snapped together. "Why are you closing the windows, Mommy?" I asked as I pulled an olive-green curtain aside for another peek.

"Don't touch those curtains," my mother glared.

I could barely see the lone figure outside through the crack of daylight between the curtain and the wall. The person was systematically checking every house as she came closer and closer. Her white suit was so bright in the afternoon sun it made my eyes ache, and she carried the biggest, black purse I'd ever seen.

"Is that lady coming here?" I asked as I wondered what was in her giant purse.

"We can't let her know we're here," my mother hissed.

"How come?" I asked. I wondered what the lady would do if she caught us.

"Because if she knows we're home, I'll have to let her in, and she'll never go away," my mother growled as she turned to lock the door.

"Why are you locking the door, Mommy?"

Fear stepped from the shadows where the boogeyman lived and made me shudder. "Mommy doesn't like that lady," said Fear. "She'll come in the house and never let you leave. She'll tie you up in a kitchen chair so you can't run away. She'll probably put YOU in the chair with the nail that pokes your leg when you sit on it. Bet she'll even put a rag in your mouth so you can't scream. And

The Door-to-Door Terrorist

Daddy won't be able to help because she'll catch him, too!" My mouth went dry as Fear ran away with my imagination. "Nobody will ever find you because she'll never open the door or answer the phone."

"Angie," my mother whispered, "go hide and be quiet."

Terrified, I ran toward the kitchen. I had to get to the trap door because I knew the lady would look in the closets.

Spotting the tell-tale square on the floor, I slid across the dingy, white linoleum, grabbing the cold, steel ring that marked my secret hiding place. With a mighty tug, the door swung open.

As I jumped into the hole, I realized why Daddy had built the massive pine shelves that reached from the basement floor to the rafters. He knew I would need a good place to hide someday, and I was too small to jump from the secret door to the musty floor below.

Landing on the uppermost shelf, I looked across the darkened basement toward the stairs and closed the door as quietly as possible.

"If she comes downstairs, I'll push the secret door open and run to help Mommy. Then we can run away," I whispered to Fear.

My escape plans were interrupted when the doorbell shattered the silence with an ear-splitting "ding-dong."

"She knows you're home," Fear breathed. "I'll bet she comes in the window like Mommy did when she lost her keys."

I cowered farther from the trap door above my head and held my breath.

THUD, THUD, THUD.

"She's in the house," Fear warned.

Suddenly the trap door flew open and my heart leaped into Fear's arms.

"You can come out, now," my mother smiled. "The Avon Lady is gone."



**Life
Moments**

"If I have learned anything about writing, it would be that it's like an emotion. Emotions are very difficult to describe, but everyone feels them. Writing is very hard to describe and everyone has an individual style. Emotions are felt and dealt with differently by each individual. Writing has become extremely important to me this past semester because of the ability to find and use my creative side. I have discovered that I have a side to me that loves to analyze everything. Improving my writing skills will help me to get my ideas across in the future. Expressing myself verbally has always been easy, but now I feel almost as comfortable writing. I know that the future holds many papers and I now feel I'm ready to take them on."

Rachel Jackson Composition I Liberal Arts

My Life In 800 Meters



Charles Nolte

Composition I

School was finally over. I shut my book and made my way to the locker room. I was noticeably grouchy and I was beginning to get on everyone's nerves. That night was the night of the last track meet of my senior year and for all practical purposes, the last track meet of my life. It would be a final shot at a school record that had stood for 23 years. My relay team and I had been running together for our entire high school career. After all of the meets and races that we had been to, it was hard to believe that it had come down to one race, one last shot at a goal that had eluded us for so long.

Our race had four parts: 200 meters, 200 meters, 400 meters, and then my piece of the puzzle — one-half mile, 800 meters, the anchor leg of the 1600-medley. Our relay team was notorious for running "good enough to win." On that night we had purpose, we had desire, and we had a team to run against. One of the teams at this meet had run times better than our school record. Maybe this opposing team tonight could push us up on to the school record board.

I had been running 800-meter events for quite a while. I patterned my entire theory on how to run the event on something my coach told me before my first track meet.

"First 200, all out, establish position. Second 200, get comfortable, run hard. Third 200, toughest part of the race, good form, stay strong, no fear, no doubts. Last 200, go for it, rest when you're dead, push hard, be a winner. No pain, you can do it."

I concentrated on those ideas before every race and dreamed of the day when I could run flawlessly.

The bus came to a lurching halt and I snapped back into reality. I went through warm-ups and prepared for my first two events. I won them both, but I could not have cared less. I still had one event to go, the medley, and the stage was set for a record-breaking evening. Everything was going right according to schedule until all of our hopes and aspirations crumbled. The team— our challenger, our pusher, our stair step to the record board — they were gone. They had canceled for

My Life in 800 Meters

an unknown reason. No one else at the meet could push us, and without someone to chase, I was worthless to my team.

I remember thinking to myself: Oh well, the record's not that important anyway. We can win one more race, with one more average time and my career will be over. It was a good career I suppose.

I finished stretching, and the race time drew near. The starter raised his pistol. "Runners to your marks, set..."

It had begun.

Our first runner was on his way. He pulled away easily and was having a great run. As he neared our second runner, I could see they were going to have a nice exchange. The second runner also looked good, pulling away even more. As he tore down the final stretch, our third runner was shivering with anticipation. Their exchange went smoothly and it was almost my turn. When our 400-meter leg took off and I stepped on to the track, I realized that 800 meters was all that was left of a very special part of my life. Even though my last run would be meaningless, I went through my routine one more time.

First 200, all out establish position. Second 200, get comfortable, run hard. Third 200, toughest part of the race. Good form, stay strong, no fear, no doubts. Yeah, sure. Last 200, go for it, rest when you're dead. Hell, my career would be over in a couple of minutes. Push hard, be a winner, you can do it. Maybe I couldn't do it, but why not try. No other runners. No one to push me but myself. Nothing to chase but my goals. Just me versus the stopwatch.

Our 400-meter leg had pulled away from the rest of the field and was tearing down the track. Closer and closer. As he neared me, I thought about everything the team wanted and what I needed to do to make it happen.

The baton and I took off with a reckless abandon. First 200 all out. Boom! Boom! Boom! My feet pounded on the track. The only sounds I heard were my footsteps and my breathing.

Get comfortable, run hard.

My second 200 was great. My form was good and my breathing was solid. My legs, on the other hand, burned like hell.

Charles Nolte

Third 200, toughest part of the race. No kidding. Form is breaking down, concentrate. Breathing is getting ragged. I have to stay under control. Stay tough. This is your last shot.

Last 200... ever. My career had come down to this. The toughest 200 meters I had ever run. My three teammates and best friends in the world were counting on me. My coach was almost as intense as I was. And my dad was making a serious spectacle of himself as his voice rang out like thunder above everything else. "Be a winner! You can do it!"

I knew that I was close to the record and that this last part of the race was the deciding factor.

Stride out, push it, faster, stay in control, want it, go, go, 50 meters, 30 meters, 10, lean hard.

Two minutes and one second. My time was 2:01. It was a great time. The best of my life. I needed a 1:59 for the record. Two seconds away from my goal was tough to handle. My teammates were handling it fairly well. They treated me as if I had won an Olympic medal instead of contributing to the second fastest time in school history. My coach, sweating more than I was, used me as an example to the younger guys on the team. My dad was still hollering something about his son and how proud he was. I guess I was pretty proud myself.

Although the record didn't fall, and I was disappointed, I couldn't help but feel good about myself. I had conquered. I ran a great time, and I did it all by myself. Other runners were chasing me; I set the pace. I didn't need someone faster than me to push me to a good time. I needed confidence in myself and my abilities. Self-confidence can take anyone a long way. It not only took me 800 meters in two minutes and one second, it continues to take me any direction I choose to go.

After that race I seemed to get motivated to get my life headed in the right direction. Instead of procrastinating, I was the first one to finish. Instead of standing back for fear of failure, I stepped forward in hopes of glory. My plans to go to college had been thrown a curve when UNI denied me admission. At first I decided to forget about college. After the race and a few weeks of smooth sailing with my new attitude, I decided to enroll at DMACC in the liberal arts program. When I am finished here, I plan on transferring to UNI. Believe it or not, that trivial little race has given me a new look at things. It made me realize that just trying makes me a champion.

Dark Shadows



Dorothy Elings

Writing Skills Review

The night I spent on the streets of New York was one of darkness and sadness. The day marked the end of fall; the night marked the birth of winter. My thoughts take me back to this particular morning, which now seems so long ago.

"Next stop, Poughkeepsie," the conductor's shrill voice rang out. Along with other commuters, I was on my way to New York City. I stuffed my portfolio under the seat and relaxed my head against the warm window. After my last class, which would end at 6 p.m., I had made plans to spend the evening with my friend Carmen. I was more than ready for an evening of relaxation and friendship.

My expectations of the early morning were shattered. I was supposed to meet Carmen at a restaurant and then spend the night, but she never showed. No one answered the phone at her apartment. I was left alone on the streets of New York City.

Yet, as I aimlessly walked along the streets, I discovered I wasn't alone. Along with me were the discarded and the lost. The homeless — cuddled close to the buildings with a torn blanket or coat wrapped around them — would gesture for money as they stretched their arms out with their hands spread wide. My heartbeat raced as I scurried to the other side of the street in search of safety. I looked back to see if anyone followed. No one was in sight. I have never felt so lonely and scared as that night. I used the last of my money on the pay phones and tried to call anyone who would care.

When I stepped out of the phone booth, I realized how alone I was. The buildings overpowered the streets with their shadows. I stood cowering in the darkness, afraid of the slightest movement. The scraps of food discarded from the day before filled the air with an undesirable stench. I stood outside the phone booth trying to compose my thoughts. I needed to make plans, head somewhere safe and warm.

I walked in haste as drug dealers, like barterers, tried to sell me their goods. Unkempt men walked beside me and told me the prices of their drugs as if they were selling watches or jewelry.

Finally, when they realized I wasn't buying, the attention of the dealers focused on other potential victims who happened into their territory. I kept moving.

I started planning where to go and what to do. In a frantic search through my purse, I found a subway token at the bottom. Finally, after several blocks, I reached a subway entrance. Relieved, I quickly crossed the street. My heart stopped when I saw a group of people standing in the front entrance. Maybe they didn't see me. I glanced around for a place to hide, but my feet wouldn't move. I was mesmerized by their purple hair. I have never seen anything like it. I wanted to get away from the darkness, from the strange people. Slowly, I inched my way up to the entrance, ready to run from the scene if there was any trouble. I hastened my pace as I neared the steps. When I walked past, they stared at me as if I were the freak. I quickly directed my attention to the stairs. As I reached the bottom step, mice scattered at my slightest movement. I noticed a man singing for his dinner as he sat among the discarded scraps of food.

When I reached the platform of the subway, my thoughts were of death and pain. I kept thinking of an old woman who was pushed in front of the train. I imagined my sisters reading a morning news flash that said: "Woman fell to her death when pushed in front of subway train." I tried to banish these sinister thoughts from my mind and replace them with memories of my hometown, my family, and good friends.

A subway train clattered to a stop. A man and I stepped into different cars. Because of a spilled soda, the floor stuck to my feet as I walked to the back of the train. When I took my seat, I noticed a man and a woman staring at my every move. The man was dressed in a rumpled uniform and looked like he had just finished his shift as a watchman. The woman was dressed in tattered clothes and carried a bag that looked like it probably contained her whole life.

By the end of the line, Grand Central Station, I noticed I was the only one left in the car. I wandered aimlessly through the station and smelled the food cooking for the morning crowd. By this time it was 2 a.m. I went to a pay phone in hopes of getting in touch with my sisters, but the operator said no one was answering at this time. I could imagine them home in their beds in deep dreams and oblivious to the rings of the phone. I decided to wait until morning to make another phone call.

As I walked in search of a place to spend the night, tears began to run down my face. It seemed morning would never come. With anger, I thought of Carmen at home and safely in her bed. I couldn't take the train home because she was to give me the money she owed me for the return trip.

Dark Shadows

That was our arrangement. When I sat down in a corner of the station, I began to realize how hungry I was. The fragrance of pastries baking reminded me I had not eaten since the morning before. I remember nodding off. I woke to the bustle of feet running to their destinations. It was 5 a.m. I had made it through the lonely night unscathed.

Again, I went to the phones in hopes there would be an answer, a familiar voice at the other end of the line. It was a joyful "ring" in my ear when I heard the operator say, "Collect call from Dottie." My sister was on the other end. I was finally going home.

Now I know how Dorothy felt in the Wizard of Oz when she said, "There's no place like home!" Except, unlike the scarecrow, the tin man, and the lion in Dorothy's dream, there were no familiar faces in my nightmare. As for Carmen, she called with all sorts of apologies, but no explanations that would suit me.

As Time Stands Still



Mary Brantley

Composition I

The loneliness engulfs me as I sit on the hard cot in the 9-foot by 6-foot cage. Chills of revulsion and self-contempt reverberate throughout my being. Cold, contemptible self-hate saturates my emotions as I stare through the iron bars. Steel keys clank against each other and echo down the long, endless hallways. My internal being screams out in anger with each clank of the keys. My life is on hold in this vacuous pit that spins around me. Everything is out of control as my life spirals downward to the depths of hell.

It is a cold and lonely place, this place called jail. As I walk down these "hallowed" halls, chills run up and down my spine. My privacy has been violated, and my self-respect has vanished. When the massive steel doors close behind me, a feeling of emptiness overcomes me. I am sitting on this hard cot in this small, rectangular-shaped space as I look at all of the people who share this empty piece of property. Reluctantly, I must accept these people as my new family.

Memories sweep over me as I remember the day the legal papers were served on me. I was working at the local nursing home. It was an unforgivingly hot day for October. Sweat trickled down my spine. As I finished making my last bed, I heard my name being paged over the intercom. A sense of urgency vibrated through the voice on the intercom. The hot sweat on my back turned to ice when I walked out into the hall and saw who was waiting for me. A lone man stood rigid and stared back at me. His eyes bore straight through to my soul. This man was a deputy sheriff. He held a sheaf of papers in his hand. As I approached the deputy, my dread began to mount and my feet turned to lead.

A stern voice boomed through my consciousness as I heard him say, "Are you Mary Brantley?" My voice quivered as I responded weakly. The deputy stated gruffly, "You are under arrest. The charges are writing multiple bad checks." These words are forever etched on my brain cells. I was going to jail. He shoved the court documents into my shaky hands. Stunned, I scanned the papers. I remember seeing my name. The charges were typed in bold print. My knees felt like they were about to give way when the deputy's voice penetrated through the chilling fog that was wrapping around my inner being. He was giving me my Miranda rights in front of all my co-workers. Shame and humiliation spread through my body. Hot, scorching tears streamed out of my eyes. A

As Time Stands Still

quick flash of steel streaked past my face as the deputy pulled my arm around my back. The sharp, unforgiving metal snapped around my wrist and a loud click of the handcuffs echoed across the room. Murmurs from my co-workers imprinted upon my brain; their unkind comments forced their way into my new world.

Now my world revolves around a strict, sterile schedule. I have no idea what is happening or where I am going in my microcosm. Wake-up call is 5 a.m. Why at this ungodly hour, nobody knows. It is a hellish ritual. Day in and day out I sit and do nothing but think about those checks I wrote so casually. Suddenly, I hear a noise that sounds like the jingling of keys. My heart races, while my hands become clammy. Short, shallow squirts of air penetrate my lungs as my anxiety heightens. Could this be the day that would release me from this torture? The door swings open with an icy clang, and I jump with fear. Shuffling footsteps echo down the hallway, and a second set of doors are slammed. Reality raises its ugly face. I turn to gaze at my new partner. Despair riddles both of our faces as we look at the ugly, sterile environment that surrounds us. Those eerie feelings come flooding back as the cold, steel door shuts once again.

Shuddering, I look around the cage as it begins to close in on me. The dingy, rectangular-shaped living quarters lined with rock-hard bunk beds offer more torture for me. Everything surrounding me is cold, hard and black.

As I sit in my cell, my thoughts linger on the word "hell" when I think about my new lifestyle. I sit and wonder what it would be like on the other side of that big, steel door where the lights are brighter. It seems like light years since I drew a breath of fresh air and felt the grass tickling my toes. What I am accused of, this ill-fated crime, has stripped me of all my personal rights and freedoms. My biggest reminder of all my mistakes is when that steel door slams shut each time. I pay an enormous price as the sound of the door bangs shut. That sound will reverberate through my being for all of eternity.

Like a game of poker, I played for keeps and lost. You win some and you lose some. And I lost, big time. The clock ticks ever so slowly as I wait for my moment of freedom. Eventually, the door will open and I will return to my own home and my own life. But for now this cruel cage is my home and my life. I look at it as a payment I need to make to society for my mistakes. Believe me, everyone should sit in this cage for one day to learn what it is like to be on the wrong side of life. Jail is a dark and empty hole of despair and anger.

The sliding steel doors come crashing open and my name is called. I take one final look at this empty hole as relief floods me and I walk out on this nightmarish memory. The wait is over, but the dreams continue to haunt me. My freedom is restored, but am I really free? The sound of the

Mary Brantley

door and the jingle of the keys continue to keep me awake at night. I try to run away from the burden the cage has left me with, but I cannot escape the hold it has upon me. It bores a piercing hole into the very depths of my being. I have seen the cage, I have lived in the cage, and I have survived the cage, but the cage still traps me. Will it suck me back into its vacuous pit? My skin crawls as I think about it, and my hands start to shake. God, no, I can never return to the cage. Since the clock has finally started moving again, time no longer stands still.

Top Gun



Glenn Atwell

Basic Writing

The two Chevy Chevelles sat there on the cool cement of the dark runway. The low rumble of their idling engines sounded somewhat like the engines of the fighter craft that had once used those runways. Sundowner Drag Strip had once been part of a long abandoned bomber and fighter training base for the Air Force. Though the base was officially closed, the drag strip was always open. It kept the racing fools off the highways — not off the streets from stoplight to stoplight — but at least the quarter-mile races were away from the public roads. It was obvious that both the cars and the people were not new to what was about to happen. It was the summer of 1976, and I had just graduated from high school. I was about to race the most famous run of my short-lived drag racing career. Official drag races were fun, but night racing on the streets was like riding a wild horse. This is where the true local hotrod champ was determined and this race was for that always short-lived championship. This time my opponent was the champ and I was the challenger.

"You need to get out," I said to Joe who was in the passenger seat.

"I want to ride with you this time," Joe said.

Keith began to move to get out of the cramped back seat of my 1969 Supersport Chevelle. "I'm out of here," he said.

As the squeak signaled the opening of the passenger side door, the smell of burnt rubber and fuel rolled into my car even more strongly. But Joe wasn't in any hurry to leave.

"Joe, I never let anybody ride with me," I said. I looked over at him. Here was my best friend from high school and he looked like I had just kicked him in the gut. He'd seen me race many times before, but most of those times were official and nobody could ride. Even now when the upcoming race wasn't official, I told everybody dragging was dangerous and they always got out. When Joe looked up, I said, "Ok, lets go." There it was, that girl-killer grin of his. He would not be smiling long; his expression would soon be a look of bit-through-the-tongue pain and I-just-ran-into-Count Dracula terror.

I felt my heart beat. I was ready — pulse fast, breath shallow, and adrenaline surging through my body, bringing my muscles and brain up to full speed. The Chevelle was ready too. The 396-cubic-inch engine purred like a lioness, strong and steady. The smell from the headers told me the high octane gasoline was burning well and the lack of gasoline smell told me no fuel was spilling out of the 850 Holley double-pumper carburetors.

I revved the engine up a couple of times and let the clutch pop so the tires could warm up a bit against the cool cement of the drag strip. Keith walked out in front of the starting line about 20 feet. I pulled up to the starting line until someone signaled that the nose of Bestymay, the name for my Chevelle, was even with the fading line. Keith raised his arms with a red shop rag in his hands. I pushed my right foot down until the engine came up to a screaming roar. My left foot shook from pushing in the clutch pedal on the Zoom racing clutch plates. The rpms of the engine continued to climb until they reached 5500. The car shook, the smell of gasoline was on the edge of being detected, and the thundering of the dual exhausts rang in my ears. The ringing would last long after the race was finished.

My eyes strained to see Keith's hands with the red rag. Suddenly, Keith's hands moved and the rag began to drop. I popped the clutch and the car leapt forward like a giant lioness springing. Keith was gone. I was past him in less than a second. The dust and smoke of the burning clutch plate was so strong I could taste it. It tasted like when I'd fallen on my head real hard or got hit in the chin and my teeth had ground together. Bestymay couldn't handle it. I'd put too much power to the wheels. She began to hop like a crow on the ground.

I heard Joe cry out. I didn't understand him and I didn't care what he was saying anyway. I was busy. Very busy! Bestymay and I were in this together and right now she was doing her job and I wasn't.

I let up on the gas, she gripped the road, and the crow hopping stopped. Now where was my rival. I'd learned to turn my head a little to the side that he would be on so I could see the tachometer in my dash, the road in front of me, and my competitor, if he got to within one car length of me. He was not there. We were in the lead even though I'd made a mistake. I crammed the clutch to the floor, jammed the shifter into second gear, and crushed the gas pedal to the floor. Bestymay jumped forward into a giant crow hop. The vibration was so bad I couldn't see. I'd messed up big time. Joe cried out in panic. My opponent had gained on me. If I kept going this way, we'd flip over the passenger side door. If I let up off the gas too much and over steered, we'd flip over my side of the car. But, most importantly, if I drove smart, I could still be in the race.

Top Gun

My senses of sight and internal motion told me I'd turned at around a 45-degree angle to the driver's side. I let off the gas a little and turned to the right and gave her the gas again. Bestymay responded and clawed into the cement. We were out! I don't think Joe was breathing, but I didn't care. I was behind and it was my fault. I was too greedy. I pushed the engine up to 5500 rpms and caught my opponent. Shifting to third, I fell behind a half of a car length. I drove the engine up to 5500 rpms again. I was ahead by a nose, but if I shifted again like last time, I would lose the race. I forced the power plant to 6000 rpms. I knew the engine could go to 7000 rpms in theory. I also knew that for every rpm of increase the chances of blowing the engine multiplied. Bestymay was now moving over 100 miles per hour and still going up. The rpms were at 6200. I didn't think 7000 rpms was going to win anyway. I'd have to shift.

I'd practiced and even done a skill of shifting without the clutch in street racing, but never at this speed. If I did this wrong my new \$200 Competition Plus Hurst shifter would have been junk in my hands and I'd lose the race. I looked at the tach. Bestymay was at 6300 rpms and something was smelling hot! I quickly jabbed the gas pedal down and let up, ripped the shifter out of third, and gently but rapidly slid toward fourth. In my right hand I felt the transmission go into fourth. My nemesis slid out of view.

Bestymay and I had won. We rumbled across the finish line. We were the fastest team in the area. The thrill of victory was short-lived, but I'll never forget it. Oh, and by the way, nobody ever rode with me in the quarter-mile again, especially Joe.

The Crossroad



Eric Buitenwerf

Composition I

Never before had I been in a car accident. Never before had I come so close to death, nor have I since the evening of Monday, September 6, 1993. Both my life and car came to a crossroad that warm, fall night, and neither have been the same since.

It all began with a phone call. Placed a few days earlier, the call set into motion a series of events which came close to sealing my eternal fate. Chad Wallace was the caller. He inquired about my 1977 Datsun 280Z, which was for sale on a lot next to the Prairie City car wash. I answered his questions and soon a time was arranged from him to see the car. We agreed upon 7 p.m. the following Monday.

Monday came and I soon found myself by the car wash. I greeted Chad and showed him the car. Boy, I'm going to miss you ol' car, even if you've been a pain in the butt. You're still one slick son-of-a gun. I love the rumble of your exhaust, your aggressive lines, and how your gears shift so effortlessly. Don't worry, he won't get you unless I see cash. I went to school with him, remember. I know his background. Sure would be nice to have the money, though.

"Okay, I've seen enough," said Chad. "Can we take it for a ride now?"

"Sure. Here are the keys," I replied.

"Oh! No! I don't want to drive. If something would happen, I wouldn't want to be responsible. You drive."

"Okay."

Little did I know that within minutes of turning the ignition key, I would find irony in Chad's words. Truth is, I would find irony in a lot of things.

The Crossroad

"See, it runs fine. Pretty fast, too. We just hit 110 mph without a problem," I said as we raced south of town on Highway S6-G.

"Yeah. I believe you. I like it. Think I'll take it," Chad said.

"Good. We'll turn around in the Brethren Church parking lot when we get to the intersection with F-70. Then we'll head back to town and settle things."

Yes! Sold! Finally! Money! No more problematic sensors! No more smiling mechanics! No more worrying . . . waxing . . . wondering. But . . . one more trip through the gears. Despite its flaws, this is one fun car to drive. It has the word "muscle" written all over it. Oh, well. There will be others. Turn around and get your money before he changes his mind. There was a pleasant atmosphere in the car as we got back on the highway to head north to Prairie City. We were both elated — Chad, because he was getting the car of his dreams, and I, for being freed from its control. I casually glanced left and right before entering the intersection. I saw no traffic and knew the oncoming traffic had a stop sign. I ran the tachometer up to 3000 rpm and began to shift from second gear to third.

"Watch out," Chad screamed.

My senses scrambled to react to his cry. Overcome by shock, I was only able to lock onto one terrifying thought. No! Not me! Not now! Wham!!! My thoughts became reality as a white mass slammed into the right front end of my car. The impact whipped my car around 180 degrees and sent its dead body reeling backward on its previous course. Frantically, I stabbed with my foot for the brake pedal. Panic replaced shock. I found a pedal and trounced on it . . . repeatedly. We didn't stop. I couldn't focus. Finally, my brain processed all the confusing stimuli and clear thought returned. I located the brake and brought us to a stop on the shoulder of the road.

We sat in silence. We stared at the smoking remains of what once was the front of the car and tried to comprehend what had just happened. When I realized I was okay, I spoke. "Are you all right?"

Chad said, "Yeah. You?"

"I think so."

Then it hit us. The other vehicle. How many people were in it? Were they okay? We got out of the car and began to walk in its direction. Our pace quickened when we saw the extent to

Eric Buitenwerf

which it had been damaged. A white GMC S-10 Jimmy lay upside down in the ditch. It had rolled at least once. My heart began to race. A person lay on the ground surrounded by three others. No! Please God! Don't let him be dead! Please! Fortunately, he wasn't hurt. No one else in that vehicle was seriously hurt. Providence had looked kindly on all of us.

People stopped to help; some stopped out of curiosity, others out of kindness. The highway patrol investigated and the ambulance crew treated those who were hurt. Wreckers took away the remains of the vehicles. The debris was cleaned up and life continued.

For two weeks following the accident, the crushed, disfigured body of a once magnificent car sat on my driveway. Its lone headlight seemed to follow my every move, burning into my mind the event that had transpired so that I would not forget.

I haven't.

Even though the car is gone and only a photograph of it remains, I haven't forgotten what the accident taught me. Each time I enter a vehicle, I am reminded how precious and fragile is God's gift of life. Knowing that my next breath could be my last, I am freed from the chains of doubt, chains which once held me captive. It was no coincidence that a church was at that fateful crossroad where the accident occurred. God's method of teaching may be symbolic, weird, and at times tumultuous, but I am living proof of His mercy.

A Lesson on Life



Jarin Teed

Composition I

Do you recall rushing to your burning house and on the way hitting a car and killing a person? That person you killed was a very close friend of mine, Royce Fleming. It angers me to know he was killed because you failed to stop at a stop sign. I don't think you realize what kind of pain you caused his friends and family. I believe I speak for everyone associated with Royce when I say you will never be forgiven. Although I may never forgive you, through this tragedy I learned a valuable lesson: how precious life is and how drastically it can end.

Royce was a very close friend of my brother Justin. They went to grade school as well as high school together, worked at E-Z Mart for three years together, and carpooled to DMACC in Ankeny. Because of their relationship, over the years Royce and I also became close. He and I played football, golf, and baseball together in high school. Royce often transported me where I needed to go. He became another big brother to me.

The night of the accident I was out of town. On my way home, I noticed the ambulance leaving Colfax. I had a funny feeling that someone I knew was in trouble. As I pulled into E-Z Mart, the lady on duty, Maxi, was crying. When I entered the store, she hugged me and told me Royce had been killed in a car accident. How would you like to hear that one of your good friends was killed? Probably just the way I felt. I was speechless, dumbfounded and in shock. I just couldn't believe it. How could something like this happen to someone so young and close to me?

As some of my friends gathered at my house, all we could wonder was how it happened and why did it have to be Royce? My thoughts weren't only going out to Royce and his family, but also to my older brother, Justin. You have caused a great deal of pain and stress on my brother. An hour and a half before the accident occurred Justin had just dropped Royce off at home. They had been together all day at school. They were close and, as in any relationship, a loss of a friend or a loved one is hard to accept.

The next morning your name was revealed in the *Des Moines Register*. This was the answer to the big question: Who did this to Royce? After reading the article about the accident, my brother,

Jarin Teed

a friend of ours, and I went to the scene of the accident. We hoped to find what had happened. Did Royce have a sudden death, or did he suffer? Glass and debris were scattered around the intersection. Orange paint and skid marks revealed you were heading west. After colliding with Royce's car, you plowed over the stop sign and went into a ditch. The paint also showed that Royce's car had been lifted off the pavement and thrown into a ditch. In the ditch there was a mud spot where the heat from Royce's body melted the snow. Next to it was vomit. As I looked around the area, through the maze of footprints left by the rescue workers, I noticed a white bag. In the bag were two bottles of Dr. Pepper with the bottoms blown out from the impact of the crash and two orders of "breadstix" — all from E-Z Mart. Although you fled the scene, you could probably picture it.

According to officials, Royce was heading south on Highway 117 and you, as you rushed to your burning house, ran the stop sign at the intersection and struck Royce's car. I'm angry you didn't stop or even hesitate to see if any cars were coming. Also, I'm angry to know you fled the scene. Didn't you care about what you had done?

When I travel on Highway 117, I always seem to pass through the intersection (just a few miles east of your home) where you killed Royce. I always seem to catch myself looking in the ditch where Royce's mangled Dodge Charger came to rest. I try to picture what happened, but I will never know the truth. The only person alive who may actually know what occurred is you. I realize you rushed to your burning house, but what could you have done once you arrived. You were too late to save anything. The fire department was on the scene. Your problem was in their hands. Why didn't you stop at that stop sign? Perhaps you should take notice of the lesson I learned: Material things can be replaced, but life is precious and can end at any time.

The Long, Hard Journey



Hien Nguyen

Basic Writing

I left Vietnam when I was 15 years old. It was the last time I said goodbye to my family and my relatives without promise of seeing them again. It was the saddest situation I have ever experienced in my life and the biggest decision I ever made. I still remember well how my tears rolled down my face as I took my first step away from the only family I had ever known. The sadness, the loneliness, and the struggle, however, had just begun. This incredible experience of being so far away from home has become a battle for me to win and I have overcome many obstacles and challenges while living far away from my family.

In Vietnam, I was unable to attend college, but in the United States I can progress in college as far as I desire with no political restrictions to hold me back. In the United States, everyone has an equal opportunity to get a higher education; on the other hand, in Vietnam it is extremely difficult to get into college. The decision about the number of people who can get into college is made on the basis of family history. For instance, my older brother was a superb student, but the government refused his eligibility for college because of my family history. My dad had served as an interpreter for the American Army during the Vietnam War, and my mom was the secretary of a rice company located near Hue.

After the Vietnam War, the Communists from the North took over South Vietnam, and they forced my dad up to the mountains to clear the land and work in the fields. This was done to punish him for his cooperation with the Americans. Therefore, because of my family history, there was no reason for me to set goals. The time I spent performing daily activities seemed meaningless. No matter how hard I worked, the government would not allow me to achieve any reward. For example, the only job I could obtain in my country was no more than a common laborer doing farm work. Because I saw there was no future for me in Vietnam, on March 20, 1987, I escaped from my home country.

During my journey to escape from Vietnam, there were many difficulties. I had to hide under the cover of a 10-meter canoe for about 10 days while we traveled across the Gulf of Thailand. Crowded in the canoe were 23 frightened people whom I had never met before. Each day I drank

a small cup of stale, warm water and ate a few scraps of rice. The boat smelled of gasoline and sweat. The waves sounded like thunder against the side of the canoe and huge fish followed in our wake. I tried to keep myself warm and healthy as much as possible under these conditions. By the fifth or sixth day, I was almost unconscious, and I thought I was dying. The journey got longer, and I was exhausted. I was very worried because I never saw a bird fly or any other indication of land. All I could see was rough, dark-blue water. I prayed to God to please help lead us in the right direction. Finally, after 10 long days, we reached our destination — Malaysia.

In the Malaysian refugee camp, I knew no one. I had to struggle there for about a year before I came to America. While in the camp, I did not have even enough money to send a letter to my family. I had to babysit for other refugees to earn a few dollars. This helped me to purchase food, buy clothing, and obtain postage to send a letter home. During this time, I worried I would not be able to come to America, and that the Malaysian government might send me back to Vietnam, where I would face continuous threats from the communist government. In my heart I really missed my parents and all of my brothers and sisters. I loved them so much, but I still did not want to go back. I became a nobody — a survivor with no family and no country.

My dream of freedom eventually came true. On February 24, 1988, the United States government allowed me to enter the United States. Although Lutheran Social Services located a foster home in Garner, Iowa, coming to America still presented an overwhelming challenge. I was unable to speak any English and I had difficulty communicating. I did not laugh for months and felt sad, lonely, and depressed.

In my mind, I believed my dream to attend college was impossible. Recalling the first day in eighth grade, I had no idea of what was going on in class, and I did not understand a single word the teacher spoke. It was difficult to find the classroom; consequently, I held my schedule in my hand so the teacher or students could lead me to the right class. The struggle in school continued for the next two years.

In addition to the obstacles in school, I had problems with my foster family. Often, because of my limited English, I was not communicating with them. I didn't laugh; I continued to feel very sad and lonely, but I couldn't express my feelings. My foster family did not understand much about me, and I became very frustrated living there and not being able to communicate. Eventually, my social worker decided to move me to a new foster home in town. The thought of moving frightened me because I knew I had to adjust to a different school again. I considered quitting the new school because I was so scared, but I remembered my older brother in Vietnam who desperately wanted to attend college. Now I had the opportunity to eventually be a college student. I asked myself, "Why don't I keep trying?" This question pounded in my head, and the more I thought about it, the

The Long, Hard Journey

harder I studied. In order to have time to study, I gave up all my enjoyable hobbies such as spending time with friends and playing outdoors. Almost every night I stayed up late to study English, and I woke up early in the morning to complete my homework. Everywhere I went, I brought my dictionary with me, and each day my English improved. Finally, I was able to communicate and to understand with less effort. The relationship between my new foster family and me was a good one. During my four high school years, I consistently made the honor roll. From then on, I knew college was possible for me.

Fortunately, I received a scholarship and a grant to assist my first year of attendance at Des Moines Area Community College in Ankeny. Now in my second year at DMAACC, I am performing well above average, even though English still presents a challenge for me. I have strong faith in my abilities; therefore, I am confident I will achieve my goals.

When I arrived, unable to speak or write English, I felt strange and isolated — as though I had come from another planet. I thought college would be impossible for me, but now I have proven I have the ability to achieve in college. In addition, I have also adjusted to a new culture. To make my dream come true, I continue to pursue my higher education and to work toward my goals. I always remember my uncle in Vietnam telling me, "If you work hard enough, you can make a piece of iron into a needle." Since I left my family in Vietnam, that is exactly what I have done.

A Few Months In Saudi Arabia



Kurt Steffes

Composition II

It was almost Thanksgiving and I was a little homesick. It was quite a shock thinking that I would be spending the holiday in Saudi Arabia. We had been preparing and training for war for the last three months. I learned a lot about myself in that short time. The situation in the Persian Gulf showed me how much my family and friends at home meant to me, what my buddies in my squadron were really like, and if I could make it in a hostile environment. It was an eye-opening experience.

Before the crisis in the Persian Gulf, I decided to take leave in August so I could attend my friend's wedding at home. We graduated high school together. The Christmas before his wedding, I promised him that I would make it. As luck would have it, it was scheduled in August. Iraq invaded its neighbor to the South, Kuwait, on August 2, 1990. I was actually surprised when my squadron allowed me to go home. We were not on alert; however, they wanted me to call in every day.

I arrived at the airport and my friend was there to greet me. On the drive home we talked about the possibility of war. I was truthful with him. After all, he was my best friend. I told him that there was a high probability that this could turn into a large war. This little conflict was in the Middle East. The people over there might see this as a holy war if we get involved. Who knew what might occur if that happened? The entire region might flare up. I didn't want that to happen. That could be the beginning of World War III. He asked me if I was going to be sent over there. My little brother was over there already. I told him yes, but asked him not to say anything to my mom. She was already worried. She would find out soon enough if I had to go.

I was home for three days when my squadron sent me a message ordering me to be back on Monday. I was relieved. It was Friday and my friend's wedding was on Saturday. I would be home long enough to see him get married. I only told my mom and dad that I had to go. I didn't want to depress everybody at the wedding, especially the bride and groom. Instead, I went to the wedding and had a great time. Nobody knew. That was good. After I danced with the bride for the last time and shook the groom's hand, I left without saying a word.

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My parents gave me a lift to the airport on Monday. We talked a lot, trying to steer clear of the subject that was on all of our minds. We did this for Mom's sake. Instead, we talked about my plans for the future. I talked about going back to school, or getting a job or even becoming a bum. They told me that they would never let that happen to me. At the airport, I gave them both a big hug.

Mom had a tear in her eye. I whispered, "I love you," in her ear. I shook Dad's hand. I said, "Take it easy, old man."

He replied with a sparkle in his eye, "Keep your ass down!" We both knew what the other meant. It was hard for us to say, but we knew. I grabbed my bags. I said, "Later!" I'm not the type of person to say, "Goodbye." As far as I'm concerned, goodbye could be forever; whereas, later means see you soon. It was time for me to go back to my home away from home.

My state of mind changed on the flight back to California. It was time to get out of the family mode and switch into the Marine mode. I had a different personality when I was in the Marine mode. I was harder, rougher, and sharper. These qualities would help me where I was going. It was time to focus on the mission at hand. When I arrived at the squadron, I was informed that the mission was to get all of the birds up and flying within two weeks. Our departure date had been set. It was nearly impossible to get all of the birds up during peacetime; however, during wartime, the parts we needed to fix the birds came flooding in. The squadron turned into an ant hill. We were well organized and we went after our work aggressively. Every person in the squadron wanted to get over there. This is what we were paid for. This is why we practiced so much during peacetime. This was the real thing. It was time to put our knowledge and skill with technology to work. We accomplished our mission and had all of our birds ready to go by the departure time. We loaded them into C-5 air transport planes and took off for Saudi Arabia.

Unfortunately, our plane broke down in Germany. We were stranded there for two weeks, while the rest of the squadron was setting up camp in Saudi. Looking back, I guess it was a good thing that we broke down. We were able to hang out and drink German beer. The rest of the squadron was working in 120-degree weather. I couldn't help but feel sorry for them as I drank another beer. The German people were great to us. They called us *Teufel Hund*; translated it meant *Devil Dog*. They bought us beer and wished us good luck. Those beers were the last we saw for seven months. The mechanics were able to fix the C-5. The next day we took off.

When we left Germany, it was 40 degrees. We were in for quite a surprise. Our arrival time in Saudi was around 9 a.m. It was already 95 degrees. We started to unload our birds. Every hour it went up another 10 degrees. We finished unloading the birds around one that afternoon. By that

time it reached 128 degrees. When they say culture shock in Saudi Arabia, they mean culture shock. I had never been so hot in my life. I had spent time in the desert before in California, but I think Saudi was a little hotter.

Our buddies, who arrived there two weeks prior, gave us some bottled water and showed us to our tents. I lived in a 10-man tent with 14 other guys. We had permission to take it easy for a couple of days to acclimatize to the weather. Everyone sat around in shorts, drinking water and sweating. We were dehydrated all the time because we sweated out as much as we drank in. The showers weren't constructed until two weeks after we arrived. We didn't exactly smell like a dozen roses. Somebody found a fire hose and we stripped down to finally get some water on our bodies. The chow hall wouldn't be constructed until the end of September so we had to eat Meals Ready to Eat (MREs). They were packaged meals that could be eaten anytime or anywhere. I actually liked them.

When the chow hall finally opened in October, I stood in line for a whole hour to get a hot meal. It was worth the wait. After chow, I went for a walk around camp with my buddy. The camp consisted of an air strip that the Saudis donated for our use. It was used by the Saudi Royal Air Force. They only had four combat helicopters there. We had six times as many aircraft in our squadron. We noticed a mosque outside the front gate. It was a beautiful building. Every four or five hours some guy would start chanting out of it with a loud speaker. It was really annoying. While we were looking at the mosque, two Saudi men were approaching us. We laughed because they were holding hands. We found out later that it was a common custom with their people. When they were about twenty feet away they went around us. The Saudis gave us a wide berth all the time. We thought at the time that we scared or intimidated them. We decided later that it was probably because we were Christians. It reminded me of an essay by Brent Staples. He wrote: "And I soon gathered that being perceived as dangerous is a hazard in itself" (461).

We tried to make our life there as comfortable as possible. By stealing wood from the combat engineers, we built a front porch and a back deck. Ours was the only tent in the neighborhood with a deck. When we weren't at work, we would hang out on the front porch and have some conversations. We would talk about home, the possibility of Iraq invading Saudi Arabia, and what we would do if they did invade. We always ended up having those "what if..." conversations. We talked about the enemy as if they were animals. It was easier that way. The words were tough, but someday the words might have to be backed up by actions. There was an interview given by Leon Bing that reminded me of the tone we used in our conversations. In the interview, one person said, "The highest honor you can give for your set is death. When you die, when you go out in a blaze of glory, you are respected. When you kill for the set, you earn your stripes — you put work in" (Bing 49).

A Few Months in Saudi Arabia

In September we were strong, but in October we became weak. Everybody in camp had developed dysentery. The corpsman told us that it had originated in the chow hall. The vegetables we were eating were from Saudi. They used their own waste to fertilize the vegetables. The people at the chow hall were unable to clean the food satisfactorily. That was probably the weakest feeling I experienced in my life. I hardly ate for three weeks. If I did eat, I was running towards the outhouse within five minutes. The most I could eat in one day was a cracker or two. It was a good day if I could eat them with peanut butter or cheese spread. I lost twenty-five pounds in three weeks. We walked around like the living dead. I didn't see a man there walking upright. Even though we were sick, we still had to work twelve-on, twelve-off. When there was no pressing work, we would lie around the shop curled up into little balls. If Saddam had been smart, he would have attacked us at that time. Fortunately, he wasn't very intelligent.

We felt better when November came around. I could eat an entire MRE. I didn't feel comfortable going to the chow hall. I would wait until Thanksgiving to try it again. Thanksgiving was just around the corner. In the Corps, it was thought of as just another day. It would come and go. The year before, I had spent it in Okinawa. I hadn't made it home for Thanksgiving for three years. We kind of shrugged it off. Deep down, I wanted to be home very badly, but I knew it was an unrealistic dream. I was there to do a job. I would be there until the job was done. I had to think of Saudi as home. That was where I was hanging my hat at the time.

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Waterlogged



Allison Wisecup

Composition I

Water seems so innocent. On the other hand, it can be very deceiving, and take on several contrasting forms. From the tranquil beauty of a lake on a still summer day, to the elegant fragility of a snowflake gracing the winter ski slopes, water can also become the roaring fury of white-water rapids, or the gentle trickle of a stream. During the summer of 1993, it became a silent, stalking beast, lurking in the night like a prowler. Regardless of the fact that it is essential for our existence, water can also destroy us and our material possessions with little mercy.

I rented the basement of a duplex on Des Moines' south side that dreadful summer. As the summer progressed, I saw more and more scenes of destruction caused by the "hundred-year" flood. Never before had I been so thankful that I didn't live near the river, that I wouldn't have to deal with the flood first hand.

However, that summer the rain seemed as though it would never end. One cloudy day followed another, and storm after pummeling storm drenched the earth. Holding us prisoner in the city of the lost summer, gray, ominous clouds blanketed the city daily. Puddles and swollen gutters were an everyday sight; rivers and streams statewide struggled to contain their contents through the rainy days.

When I woke up one Saturday morning, I lay there for a while and tried to get enough energy to get out of bed. As I stepped out of bed, I found myself treading in a pool of icy-cold water. Startled, I quickly turned on the lamp. After my eyes adjusted to the light, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. My bed had taken on the true meaning of "water bed." Jacob, my dog, was floating across the basement in a laundry basket, sailing like a passenger in a ship on the Caribbean.

Hurriedly, I ran up the stairs, made a few phone calls, then clamored back down in attempt to salvage a few things. I began snatching up everything in sight; if it was above "sea level," it was fair game. Like a robot, I methodically raced up and down the stairs with my belongings, not realizing the real effect this ordeal was beginning to have on my emotions.

Waterlogged

After numerous trips up and down the stairs, I entered the cold, murky water one last time. By this time the aquatic invader had climbed halfway up the stairs and reached depths of four feet. Helplessly, I stood there, my eyes searching for anything that was still dry. Suddenly, something caught my eye. Just to my left, I saw that big grinning face, the smile that had comforted me for several years. I swiped Curious George up from the chilling clutches of the intruder. I held him close to my chest and began to cry uncontrollably; the emotional trauma had finally taken its hold.

I ended up losing everything I owned; however, George, the dripping, soggy survivor recovered after a few cycles in the washing machine. I did receive money to replace material things that I lost, but no amount of money can take away the memories. Today, when I see clouds taking over the clear blue sky, or I hear a crash of thunder — especially when I feel a raindrop and see puddles begin to form — it takes me right back to that dreadful Saturday. I now have an enormous fear of thunderstorms, a paralyzing fear, never present before the flood. When I hear thunder or see the flashes of lightning, I sit curled up on my couch with an army of candles and matches and hope I will never have to do battle with that beast again.

The Influence of a Nuclear Station's Explosion on the Natural World

The Chernobyl Incident



Yelena Polyakov

Composition I

Chernobyl was a very peaceful, nice place with wonderful natural settings. Huge areas were occupied by virgin forests, wide and deep rivers fed by plenty of streams and different kinds of fish, wild animals, and birds. Fat cows grazed on bright, green fields; barking dogs guarded the homes, shouting roosters announced the rising sun in the clear, blue sky above.

Suddenly, on April 26, 1986, everything for hundreds of miles around was changed. An explosion occurred inside the nuclear reactor at a power station located in this enchanted wilderness. It wasn't an accident; it was bound to happen. The nuclear power station was built through a program filled with boundless immaturity and lack of knowledge. The explosion happened, and it destroyed everybody and everything around it.

The wonderful forest next to the nuclear station suffered the most because the first radioactive precipitation fell on it. By the second day after the explosion, the trees, once lush with springtime leaves, were noticeably red. Several days later, they were dead trees surrounded by dead grass. The vegetation over a huge area was destroyed. The track of precipitation that fell down from radioactive clouds stretched over the whole country. And it will be not one or five years, but centuries before the situation improves. The heart of the country, its best land, was destroyed by one rash push of a button.

Millions of fish in the rivers were killed by the radiation. A few days after the explosion, the rivers died, as mounds of dead fish floated to the surface and were carried away by water as delegates of death. The birds close to the explosion perished within the next few days; many of the other birds that came flying over the contaminated area later started to spread radiation over other countries. The birds that survived gave birth to monsters — birds with two heads, one or three legs, two tails, and so on. It was frightening. Looking at nature, one had the impression that one was suddenly thrust into the world of a science fiction novel. But this was not fiction; it was bitter reality.

. . . The Chernobyl Incident

Similar deformities occurred in larger mammals. Nobody counted how many dead were lying in the forest and now many survived with radiation sickness.

The explosion has a positive effect on rats and insects only. They started to multiply with lightning speed. The rats born after radioactive infection were visibly bigger and considerably more aggressive than ordinary ones. They came out onto the empty streets, enjoying the full rights of proprietors. Finding food wasn't a problem for them because hundreds of dead cows, sheep, pigs, cats, dogs and chickens were lying on the ground; there were also plenty of dead or sick wild animals who weren't able to protect themselves in the forests.

Yes, there is not only physical suffering. There was another side of pain — the loss of morale. According to a government decree, all residents needed to evacuate from the regions with maximum radiation doses to less contaminated areas, but they were not allowed to take anything with them, neither belongings nor animals. I saw a documentary movie on TV about how people didn't want to be separated from their pets — children and old people sobbed side by side, one leaving his dog and another leaving his wet-nurse cow. They didn't have a choice because everybody had to evacuate. Some preferred to die and didn't move out; they hid in wells or in cold cellars. So they stayed — stayed to die.

It was painful and agonizing to see documentary movies about empty villages. The un milked cows moored because of pain and lack of understanding and wondered where the people were and why nobody was taking care of them; the homeless dogs had gone wild, and ate cats or dying birds and fought with the uncontrollable rats. I have a dog, but I cannot even imagine how I would leave him, how I would look at his eyes and say goodbye. It isn't easy to give up a pet — even to a good friend — but to leave it for death from starvation or illnesses, or to be eaten by somebody is even more than cruelty; this abandonment is inhumane. I think that children who experienced this separation from their beloved animal companions will remember it forever.

Now there is only the dead forest, surrounded by the dead meadow and the white bones of animals lying by the porches of their houses. The empty villages stand in silence without children's voices. All these images will be in our minds for all of our lives to serve as a reminder of a dreadful mistake that will remain as an inheritance to our children and grandchildren.



**People
&
Relationships**

"Writing is important to me because it gives me a chance to express myself. It is a form of communication where I can put down my thoughts, feelings and ideas on a page or a screen in front of me, but I can change them before anyone reads them. My expressions are not truly concrete until someone reads what I have written. This allows me to clear up my thoughts so when the reader gets my theme there is no miscommunication."

Jodi Zelnio Composition I Liberal Arts

A Man I Once Called Father



Shannon Wood

Composition I

My father wasn't like the ordinary father. I suppose he tried at times to set good examples, to be there when I needed his love and support, to reassure me that life gets better when I felt out of place. But he always failed.

My relationship with my father was non-existent when I was a child. He was simply my dad and I was simply his daughter. Dad was the type of man who would promise the world, but when it came time to keep that promise he wasn't around. However, he could always be found sitting on a bar stool at the local bar, a drink in one hand and a strange woman in the other.

If it wasn't for my mom, I don't know how my family would have survived. While my dad was on his own adventure, from bar to bar, woman to woman, Mom was working morning till night to support her children and an alcoholic husband. Dad did have a job as a floor installer and he worked very hard -- when he wanted something. He was the type who had to impress his friends by buying and showing off expensive items.

I remember my brother and I needed school clothes. We didn't want much, a couple pairs of pants and maybe a shirt or two. Well, as usual, Dad didn't have any money for new clothes; he saw nothing wrong with old ones. Mom worked extra hours in order for us to have the clothes we needed for school. She always did her best with what she had. A few weeks later Dad came home with a ham radio. His CB wasn't good enough. All his friends came over to see his new toy. I've always wondered if they noticed the holes in our shoes or the rags on our backs.

After nineteen years of marriage, my mom finally divorced Dad. I don't know why, but I decided to live with him. I guess I felt sorry for him. He was so pathetic. The more he drank the more violent he became. I moved out after an incident with a bowl of cherries. Dad was drunk and I suppose still upset that Mom left him. He came home after sitting in the bar all day and started telling me how much I reminded him of my mother. I was standing in the kitchen, not knowing what to expect. I tried to leave distance between us, when all of a sudden he picked up a bowl of cherries— not your ordinary bowl, it happened to be an old heavy metal vegetable strainer — and threw it at me. I managed to duck just in time. The bowl hit the wall and embedded there.

A Man I Once Called Father

It was a few months before I saw my dad again. And when I finally did, nothing had changed between us except for the fear I felt deep inside. Still, I always longed for a father-daughter relationship. I had hopes that Dad might change someday.

Sometime after my first marriage, my dad decided to seek help for his drinking problem. He got involved in the Alcoholics Anonymous program and managed to maintain sobriety for five years. During his sobriety we saw each other on occasion, but because of all the havoc that he caused in my earlier years, I was always hesitant to see him.

When my marriage became sour, I made the mistake of counting on my dad for emotional support. He promised he would be there if I needed him. As before, he never came through like he said he would. I don't know why I trusted his word. I set myself up for disappointment again. I had a hard time forgiving him this time. It was the last promise he would break, or so I thought.

A couple of years passed, and I only heard from my father when he was in need of something. One day I received a phone call at work. It was my dad telling me that he was getting married. His girlfriend and he wanted to know if I would be their maid-of-honor. My first thought was to reject this honor. I could really care less if he got married or not. But I couldn't resist the opportunity to get revenge. I accepted the honor knowing I would be a no-show. I wanted to show him how it felt to be let down. The day of the wedding, I went to work. Odd as it might seem, I felt no guilt. My deceitful ploy cut our ties as father and daughter for several years until his marriage dissolved.

Dad contacted me by phone two years ago. To my surprise he was calling from Iowa. He didn't even call collect. He proceeded to tell me how his life had changed: he had bought a house, he had a good job and was making good money. He told me he had quit drinking except on bowling nights. He told me he wanted to be a better father, and asked if I would come visit him. Given his past record, his apology seemed implausible. I gave him several reasons why I couldn't possibly come, one being I couldn't afford it. In return he offered to pay my way. I accepted because I knew he would not come through. He told me he would make arrangements for me to pick my tickets up at the airport. Sure, I thought to myself.

I was stunned when the airlines called to verify my flight. Because Dad made the effort and actually came through on his word, I decided to make the trip to Iowa.

Our visit was a success. I actually became close to my father. We did a lot of talking about our feelings. He confessed to his mistakes and, in return, I did the same. He really had changed.

Shannon Wood

During that year I made several trips to my father's. With each visit we became closer. I no longer had to secretly long for a father-daughter relationship.

California, my home, seemed to "wreak havoc" with my emotions after spending time in Iowa. The city I lived in was a constant battle zone of drugs, crime, and pollution. I saw opportunity in Iowa for me and my new husband. My husband and I decided to move here. My dad promised my husband a job in the floor-covering business. Our decision to move was based on that promise.

Once we arrived in Iowa, we rented a house until we found something we wanted to buy. My husband began his new job working with my dad. Five weeks went by and my husband was not once paid for his labor. Thank God we had money set aside.

One thing after another happened. Dad and I were constantly bickering over something, mostly about money. It finally became so bad that I began to resent him and my move to Iowa.

My father started drinking on a regular basis again. Dad and my brother got into a huge fight. Dad called me. He was drunk. He started complaining about my brother being so irresponsible, among other things, and he wasn't going to deal with it anymore. I told him that he was a poor excuse for a father and that drinking was the only way he knew how to deal with anything. I told him that he hadn't changed and he never would. These hateful words just keep flowing out of my mouth. They were words that had been building up for years, words I never had the courage to use before. In rebuttal, my father fired my husband. That was all it took. Now there would be war. I told good ol' Dad that I was going to move back to California. I told him that moving anywhere near him was the biggest mistake I had ever made. Dad responded by having a heart attack.

I spent a great deal of time at the hospital during his stay. I decided to let the fight end, although there was much more I needed to get off my chest. He told me not to worry, that things would get better. As soon as Dad recovered from his heart attack, I decided to dissolve our relationship.

I have found that my father never changed his ways. He is the same man that I have known all my life. He's the type of man who thinks he's the most important person in the world. His needs come before anyone else's needs, even his children's. This is a man I do not admire, a man I don't want to be like. He's a man I do not want to know, a man whom I don't cherish. He's a man I once called father.

Daddy's Girl



Colleen Englen

Composition I

The chair was hard and cold; I kept moving around trying to get comfortable. Looking around at the white walls, I kept thinking to myself I must be crazy. There was not a doubt in my mind it was time to seek help.

"Hi, my name is Diane." She was a tall, sleek woman who had a kind look to her face. "I realize that you are probably nervous, but I want you to relax." My neck began to tense up. I was very nervous. I tried to relax, but I knew that this was going to be very hard for me.

"I want you to tell me what it was like growing up, especially anything that you can remember about your father." I closed my eyes and began to speak as the memories came flooding back . . .

When the old truck pulled up, the windows shook in the house. The door slammed. My sisters and I quickly finished picking up the house. My oldest sister, Virgene, quickly put the plate of food on the table. We all stood in a straight line and waited. As he walked in, his tremendous body filled the entryway. His hunter green uniform fit tightly around his large biceps. On the sleeve of his shirt his rankings were sewn in. Across the broad chest was his nametag — Virgil L. Smith, Warrant Officer. His gut hung out over his pants, and his black shoes glistened in the light. The weathered face held deep crevices of wrinkles, showing his age like an old leather glove. Ice blue eyes, which you could skate across, stared blankly at us. What hair was left was wind-blown and hung over his face. From his lips hung a cigar puffing out smoke signals. His teeth were yellowed. I watched him begin to chew on his cigar like a dog chewing on a bone. He took off his shirt and exposed a white t-shirt with grey hair poking out of a v-neck opening. Under the armpits yellow stains were present from his sweating.

"Where the hell is my coffee?" he thundered. My sisters and I looked at each other with fear. Jeanine quickly started the coffee. As he sat down at the table, we all remained silent. He looked over at me and tears filled my eyes. "How's Daddy's little girl?" A smile filled my face. I ran over to him and gave him a big hug. "At least someone appreciates me around here," he said with a disgusted voice. I was on top of the world. I was four-years old and I was my Daddy's favorite girl.

I looked up at the ceiling, tears running down my face.

"Being your father's favorite was very important to you."

"Yes, it was extremely important; I just wanted him to love me." I watched my counselor make a few notes in her book.

"You wrote that your parents are divorced."

"My parents were officially divorced when I was five-years old. My mother worked three jobs to keep food on the table. My father still came to our house, whenever he pleased. He was a very powerful man."

"Did you still want to be Daddy's little girl?"

"Yes, more than anything in the world."

"Did your father ever do or say anything that hurt you deep inside?"

Tears began to fill my eyes. My mind began to wonder.

"Colleen, are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm okay. It just hurts." My heart began to pound and I went back . . .

One day I was messing around with the scissors, and I decided to cut my hair. I had very long hair and I cut as far as I could on each side. I was around five years old. Well, to say the least, it was very short; I looked like a boy. That same day my father arrived at our house. I remember hiding in the ditch because I didn't want him to see me. I knew he would be mad. I heard my mother and father yelling. It was about me. I wished I could just disappear. The ground began to shake from my father's footsteps. My heart began to pound so hard it hurt. All at once the sun disappeared. I looked up, and my father stood with light coming out from around his enormous body. My eyes moved to his face. His once ice-blue eyes now looked red. His hair was blowing in the wind. He looked like a big grizzly bear. I knew I was dead. My throat felt like it was starting to close up. I couldn't breath.

He grabbed my face, "Let me see your hair," he yelled. His grip was so tight that I wanted to scream. A smile came across his face. I thought for a moment that I was OK. "You look like a

Daddy's Girl

little fat boy. You will never ride horses again. Girls who have short hair don't ride horses." With the grip that he had on my face, he pushed me down and left. I remember sitting there and hurting so much inside I couldn't even cry anymore. The next day he sold my horse.

"Is that one of the reasons you have such long hair now?"

"Yes, I suppose it is."

"Do you still talk to your father?"

"No, he doesn't want to see me anymore."

"When was the last time you spoke?"

"The last time we spoke was the day I graduated, almost seven years ago. He came through the line to congratulate me. He told me he loved me, and he was sorry. He was crying."

"How does that make you feel?"

"To me, he is dead."

"What do you mean?"

"The last time I saw him I decided that I would no longer consider him my father. He doesn't want me in his life."

"But you really do want him in your life, don't you?"

"It affects my life everyday in choices that I make."

"Do you remember anything good about your father?"

"Just that he was a respected man, but I think it was respect out of fear — not earned respect."

"Why did you come here today?"

Colleen Engle

"I want someone to tell me why my father doesn't love me."

"I can't answer that. It looks like we are out of time today."

As I walked out of the office, the sunlight hurt my eyes. My eyes were red and puffy, and my bottom hurt from the hard chair. I heard a loud truck, and for a moment I pictured my father smoking his cigar. Then it was gone.

Understanding 'Home'



Suzanne Gillespie

Composition I

It was December when I came to Iowa. The cold was bitter, and the vast white landscape reflected the vast nothing I felt inside. Through the little round windows of the airplane I watched as snow crept gradually over yellow-brown fields and prairies until they were covered by an icy blanket. I closed my eyes and wished I could go back to Texas.

My father was waiting for me at the airport. He was somewhat of a stranger to me — I had visions of a stern, assertive, fatherly character, ready to take on the parenting role with strict rules and lengthy lectures about how my recent behavior was unacceptable and how I must return to school or my life would be a shambles. I was completely wrong. Instead, I found a rather reserved, business-like, gray-haired gentleman, who said very little but whose face was lined with concern, not with anger, as I had expected. He carried my bags, bought me a pack of cigarettes and asked if I was hungry.

We drove to his apartment, tucked cozily in a corner of a large, white brick building. I had imagined something much more extravagant. This place was small, simple and unique. Hanging neatly on the wall were two M.C. Escher posters, and one of an airplane. My father owned little furniture: a couch, a coffee table, a small dining table with two mismatched chairs, a bed, a dresser, and, of course, a desk. I thought later that if my father was only allowed to keep one item, it would be his desk.

For seven long months I slept on the fold-out sofa. I didn't really mind; it was warm and comfortable and my father would wake me up every morning with a hot cup of coffee with cream and sugar. Saturday mornings were my favorite. On these days he would cook an elaborate breakfast, and I was awakened by the delicious aroma of bacon, drifting out of the kitchenette and all around the house. I would lie still under the covers in anticipation until I heard plates clattering. Then we ate together and, without fail, watched Looney Toons at 10 a.m. Sometimes my friend, Heather, would spend the night, and Dad would make breakfast for her, too.

Suzanne Gillespie

I never returned to high school. My father was not surprised, nor was he upset. Over dinner one evening, he told me that he, too, had dropped out of high school. He had worked hard, married, and had children before he received his diploma. After my parents divorced, he attended college classes and earned two degrees. He was still in school part-time and in only one more year he would have a Ph.D. And that night, for the first time, I saw a shimmer of light at the end of my blindingly dark tunnel.

Christmas and Easter dinner were painstakingly prepared in the kitchenette and heartily consumed at the little two-person table. We opened presents under a tiny, artificial tree on the coffee table. I prompted my father to string colored lights throughout the apartment. He said he had never celebrated Christmas very much when he lived alone. We drank burgundy wine, listened to jazz music, and watched *Saturday Night Live*.

In August we moved into a townhouse. I remember how excited I was to acquire my own room. I chose the basement to be my quarters because it was very large and set apart from the rest of the house. My father permitted me to decorate it in whatever manner I pleased, a decision I'm sure he regretted when he found that I had spray-painted the walls red and black with crosses, skulls, and the names of my favorite bands. But he never complained. Perhaps he understood that I had never been allowed to express myself so freely before, certainly not in Texas, or perhaps he shrugged it off as a passing stage (which it was). He even bought me a waterbed.

Dad, too, was happier with our new, spacious living arrangement. He obtained not only a bedroom, but also a room in which he kept his desk, books, and computer. He called this room his study, and it must have been his favorite part of the house. One night, I remember, he was ecstatic because his Iowa State computer system had been linked to those of every university in the world. What he had acquired was no less than a universal library right on top of his desk.

As fall faded quietly into winter, I spent my time decorating my room and exploring my new neighborhood. Dad began to spend more and more time in his study, reading and typing vigorously for hours on end. During this time we did not see much of each other. But I did not mind; I knew the reason. He was working on the final requirements of his Ph.D.

Still not willing to return to school, I went out with my friends quite frequently and was given no curfew. When I returned, at whatever hour, I always found the leftovers Dad had saved for me in a Tupperware dish with little dividers to separate meat from potatoes and potatoes from vegetables.

Understanding 'Home'

Twice a year or so, my father's friends from England would visit. They amused me with their thick accents and brought me unusual gifts. When I came home late at night, I sometimes found them drinking and singing and dancing in the living room. I was always glad when they left and our home could return to its usual peace and solitude, but their presence gave the house an interesting atmosphere of spirited liveliness and celebration.

Overall, my father was very lenient, but there were just three things he stood very firm on. I had to be very quiet when he was sleeping, I could not have my boyfriend stay overnight, and I absolutely, by no means, could have any pets. The landlord did not allow them and they were expensive and difficult to care for. So I was not sure what had come over me when I fell in love with a motherless kitten and, on an impulse, brought it home.

The first reaction I received to the kitten's presence was not promising, so I hastily explained that I was merely "baby-sitting" for some friends who were out of town. I consequently spent the next two weeks making sure that Dad and the kitten spent as much time as possible together, hoping they would develop a bond. And my efforts were not in vain. I will never forget the night I came home from work to find my studious, reserved father kneeling on the floor and playing kitten games with Tyler, as we came to call him. Tyler became a great favorite of mine and of my father's, and he never questioned why Tyler's stay had been extended. I believe Dad knew when I brought the kitten home that I intended it to be a permanent part of our family.

Today my father and I live two-and-a-half hours away from one another, so we don't see each other very often. When we get the chance to visit, it is a treat. On holidays I spend a few days at his apartment. It is bigger and nicer than our first residence, but within it I can still find all of the things I have always loved about my father's home: uniqueness, simplicity, warmth. At Christmas I bring Tyler, who is much larger now, and he sleeps on Dad's desk and is fed luxuriously on table scraps. I sleep on the sofa bed and Dad makes my breakfast and wakes me with a cup of coffee. We watch Looney Toons at 9 a.m. now.

"Home" was a word I didn't understand before I lived in my father's house. I thought it was the place where one sleeps and eats and watches TV, but I came to realize that "home" means much more than that. In a real home there is acceptance. In a real home there is understanding. In a real home there is love.

The Painter



Stephanie Benson

Composition I

I saw him for the first time one day last May. I lived near Drake University on the top floor of one of those older style Victorian homes. I was leaving one morning, and as I walked down the stairs and reached the sidewalk, I noticed him scraping old paint off the house next door. He was prepping the house to be repainted.

The painter was about my height, maybe an inch or two taller, and very skinny. His ribs were visible, but in contrast his arms were loaded with sinewy muscles. His greasy, black hair hung nearly to his waist. At times he wore it in one thick braid; other times he tied a red bandanna around his forehead to keep the sweat out of his eyes. Tattoos were scattered across his arms, the kind that any Joe Schmoe with a needle and Indian Ink can put on. The tattoos were mostly names of girls. His dirty, corduroy Levis hung from his narrow hips, his BVDs peeking out above them. He rarely wore a shirt, preferring instead to show off his white, bony chest. The thought flitted through my mind that he probably got the tattoos in jail, where he had been serving time for rape.

I continued along the sidewalk to my car. The sidewalk divided my house and the house to be painted and led behind the house to the alley, which was where I was parked. His blue '74 Pontiac beater was parked next to my car. I figured it was his because of the long, steel ladder attached to the hood, and the paintbrushes scattered around on the ground. I was halfway to my car when I heard someone say, "God Damn!!!" and here he came, trying to walk fast and casually at the same time towards his car. Arriving first, he turned around, and leaned against the hood, his arms crossed on his bare chest. He studied me, his black eyes squinting over his hawk nose. Despite the toothpick hanging from his mouth, his thin lip curled up in an unmistakable leer.

I looked back at him directly in the eyes, smiled, and said, "Hello." I wanted him to know I was not to be intimidated. He said nothing, just worked the toothpick around in his mouth, his eyes crawling over me as I got in my car. Pulling away, I looked in my rear view mirror to find him still watching me, or rather my car. After that first encounter, I didn't attempt any communication, I just tried to ignore him without being obviously unfriendly. But he was always staring.

The Painter

Staring as usual, one day he spoke. Perched on his hood, he said, "You know, you're really beautiful. I've been wanting to tell you that for awhile, but I've been afraid to." He said this as I was unlocking my car door. I turned my head slightly, said "Thanks," coolly over my shoulder, and continued about my business. He didn't fool me; he wasn't afraid or shy. I was the one starting to feel fear, but I was also feeling intimidated, and this made me angry. After this, I completely ignored him and didn't care if I was being obviously unfriendly.

The stairs leading up to my house were on the outside, facing him, and fully visible. This creep seemed to have a sixth sense every time I got ready to leave my house, no matter how quiet I was. He could be on the roof on the opposite side; it didn't matter. Somehow he would manage to get within eye range by the time I made it to my car. I felt like he sensed my fear and was toying with me. I started leaving the house either very early, or waiting until after 5 p.m. to leave. But he proved to be quite dedicated to his work, staying later all the time, sometimes until after dark.

One day he was painting the side that faced my house. He was near the roof of this huge house, at the top of his very tall ladder. I started down the steps, and he slid, not stepped, but slid right down the ladder, slicker than snot. He was on the ground before I was, and he stood next to the sidewalk I had to use, one foot planted on the sidewalk, as if staking his territory. He faced me, forcing me to acknowledge him.

I was glad for this opportunity. I was sick of this bullshit anyway, and ready to confront him. I opened my mouth to begin, but when I saw the fierce anger — almost hate — in his eyes, the words died in my mouth. Shaken, I just stepped around him and walked to my car. Locked in my car, I discreetly raised my eyes to look at him. He had turned around to watch my progress, and continued to watch me. I started waiting until I was sure he was gone for the night before I went home, and I began parking my car down the block behind the church. I didn't want him knowing when I was home.

I really felt vulnerable. The painter was around enough to observe that I was probably single and didn't have a lot of visitors, male or female. He also had a ladder, which enabled him to look into my rooms under the pretense of painting. Unfortunately, my bedroom faced his direction, and two times I caught him looking into my room. The first time, I left the bedroom for the rest of the day. The second time, I stared at him until he realized I could see him. I thought surely he would back off, look away. But he stared back at me, mockingly, the ever-present leer on his face, until I left the room.

I called my landlord the next day to see if he owned the house next door, or knew who did. He had no idea who owned the property. I tried to ask the people who lived there who the landlord

Stephanie Benson

was, or if they owned it. They didn't speak English. I wanted to talk to whoever had hired this guy, explain my problem, and get him out of there, but I had no luck. I began spending a lot of time with the lights out, and kept a knife nearby. Sleep was hard to come by because every time I heard a noise I had to get up and walk through the house, peering out the windows, looking for something suspicious lurking outside.

I mentally sized up the safety of my home. There was an attic above me that I used for storage. I thought it was real handy when I first moved in. Now I just thought about how handy it would be for the painter. There were plenty of big oak trees surrounding my house, the branches stretching over the roof. I thought this was real convenient when I first moved in; the shade made the lack of air conditioning bearable. Now I just thought about how convenient these trees and branches would be for the painter. The attic had big windows on each side, two of which were broken out. It never occurred to me to point this out to the landlord. Now, the most recurring thought I had was how all these elements would make it very easy for the painter to get in my house.

All he had to do was climb up a tree (or a ladder for that matter), get on the attic roof, and step through one of the broken attic windows. Once in the attic, he could sneak down the stairs leading to my apartment, open the door at the bottom of the stairs, and he was in.

The door leading to the attic had no lock on it. I made my own lock, or I should say, block. I stacked two kitchen chairs, one on top of the other, and jammed them firmly under the doorknob. The front legs of the chairs were about 7 to 8 inches from the ground; my block was secure enough. After that, I couldn't sleep without my kitchen chair block in place.

One night, I jolted awake from a sound sleep. I lay on my stomach for a minute, disoriented, wondering why I woke up like I did. Had I heard something? The room seemed unearthly still, the silence palpable. Suddenly, I had a bad feeling. No, not just a feeling. As I lay there face down, eyes wide open, I simply knew there was someone standing at the foot of my bed watching me sleep. I was dead certain; my skin could feel it. I was petrified at first; I couldn't move, and expected to be attacked at any minute. This paralyzing fear seemed to last an eternity. I felt like I would die waiting for the inevitable. My paralysis finally broke, and I slowly reached under my pillow for the knife I had begun sleeping with. As if in slow motion and with knife in hand, I turned my head in the direction of the presence. There was nobody there. The room was empty.

I started to cry with relief and disbelief as I stared at the empty spot at the foot of the bed. I cried myself back to sleep with the knife still clutched in my fist. The next morning, I went into the kitchen to make my morning coffee, while the previous night was still foggy in my head. I walked past my attic door two or three times before I realized my kitchen chair block was no longer in

The Painter

effect. My chairs were sitting upright, all four legs on the floor. I literally could not believe my eyes, and for several seconds (minutes?) I stood there with my mouth hanging open, looking at my chairs.

Shortly after this, the painter completed his job. I guess a week or two went by. I had already started to forget about the whole thing when I saw his car parked in the driveway of my neighbor on the other side of me. He was looking over the house with somebody, probably the landlord, nodding his head frequently in agreement. I watched this as I noted him glancing casually up towards my apartment a couple of times. They came to some sort of agreement, shook hands, and went in opposite directions to their vehicles. I continued watching the painter.. He began getting in the car, but stopped to tighten the ladder down with a rope. He took his time adjusting the rope; his eyes never left the window where I was looking out. His face was expressionless. I know he didn't see me, couldn't have, but he winked, then got in the car and left.

I moved out before he finished prepping the house. Now I live in a standard, two-bedroom apartment (no attic— thank you very much) and I sleep much easier at night. I'm proud to say that the knife is back in the kitchen drawer where it belongs. I sleep with a rolling pin now; it seems more fitting for West Des Moines.

Lance



Anonymous

Composition I

It is hard to describe someone who was such an angel and yet such a monster. He was capable of destruction and at the same time could induce incredible healing. I could see both life and death in his eyes, and he always left me feeling like I had to choose one or the other.

I met Lance in September of my sophomore year of high school in my biology class. He was a striking individual, something I had noticed from day one. But I was too shy to approach him. One day while trying to complete an ecosystem drawing, I had a great amount of difficulty trying to draw a hawk. After a few moments of utter frustration, I turned to my friend Kris, who turned out to be no help, but he directed me to someone who could be.

There he was. Lance was happy to help. Lance impressed me as the "All-American Boy." He had good grades, he started on the football team, he was involved in extracurricular activities, and he seemed to be every teacher's "pet." He had a beautiful body and an incredibly handsome face, and his deep, demanding voice just lured me in.

From that day on, we were inseparable. He gave me life. He breathed confidence into me. He made me feel pretty, and every word I said was important to him. He made me the person I always wanted to be. Ultimately, he made me into someone I hated, someone I never wanted to be again.

For the first six months of our relationship, things couldn't have been better. We were considered the perfect couple, and we seemed to be — even in my eyes. Nothing about us was "ugly" or imperfect. I was the petite little cheerleader with long legs and long hair. He was the big football player with broad shoulders, big biceps, and a kind heart. We never fought. Then it was a sign of perfection; now I can see it as the sign of a storm brewing inside him, the storm that would take me to a place I never anticipated, the storm that would destroy all that was familiar, all that was secure, the storm would eventually destroy "us," the storm that destroyed me.

After the first six months of sheer bliss, Lance was prone to fits of anger. At first, they were nothing more than a few harsh words, but as time passed, his fits of anger turned into fits of rage.

Lance

Instead of raising his voice, he began to raise his hand. Because I was so young and so apparently in love, I was made to feel guilty for these outbursts. Before the beatings, I was systematically cut off from all my friends by Lance. He had convinced me I was better than the people I had chosen as my friends. He made me believe they were no good and, inevitably, they would destroy us. I believed him. I had no support system and there was no one to find out. I was 16, scared, and alone. Hiding it was the hardest part. I became a very good actress. I started to depend on him for everything. That was exactly the way he wanted it. But I wasn't the only one he was depending on.

His ability to lie was incredible. I now see it was his greatest skill. In the fall of my junior year, I was peer helper for a seventh-period drama class. Shortly before the end of the period, two of my good friends came to the classroom and requested to talk to me privately. Class was nearly over, so my instructor allowed me to step into the hall and talk with them. They obviously had bad news. In what seemed like hours, they stood there looking at each other, silently debating who was going to speak. Finally, one of them took the initiative and told me there were a dozen roses in the office for Lance. Immediately, I panicked. After a moment of complete silence, I asked who they were from, but before I could finish the sentence, they told me there was a card and it said, "Good luck on your game tonight, Love Angela." Both of my friends had sincere looks of pity on their faces. They wanted to say, "I'm sorry," but they just couldn't.

The bell rang and I thanked them for being such good friends, and then I set off to find Lance. He was standing by his locker, the place where I was supposed to meet him after every class. He knew immediately that something was wrong, and without wasting any time, I asked him about the roses. He was silent for a moment, and I could see the anger rising within him. He said they were from his cousin. He was furious because I was accusing him of cheating on me, and he told me just to drop it. I ran into the auditorium, found a corner, sat down, and cried. After a few, long minutes, he came in and tried to comfort me. I said I wanted to talk about it, but he had a football meeting. After all, it was game day. He asked if I would PLEASE meet him after the game. When I asked why I should, he said, "I would really hate to see something this stupid ruin us." I agreed.

Later that night I met him at the school like I was supposed to. I was ready to talk and get to the bottom of this, but that was not in the cards. He brought along his frustration from the game, and when I brought up the subject of the flowers, he became furious with me for being so suspicious. He let me know just how mad he was. It was after he was "through with me" that he let me know that if I were bad I would be punished. "If you want to cry and whine and act like a baby, that's exactly how you'll be treated."

Lance believed that forewarned is "fair warned." I had been warned and he made it clear what

Anonymous

behavior was not tolerable. From that day forward, I was treated like a child. If I were "good," I was rewarded. But if I were bad, I was punished. My days were spent trying to do and say the right things and, more often than not, I spent nights alone.

One night before a seven o'clock play rehearsal, I decided it would be a nice surprise for Lance if I cut my hair. In a matter of minutes, my waist-length hair was up to my shoulders. I thought I looked beautiful. I arrived at rehearsal before Lance. Everyone was surprised, but seemed to love my haircut. When Lance finally showed up, he immediately noticed the change. He was a little less than pleased. He stood and stared at me in total disbelief. When I approached him to ask him if he liked it, he told me just to get away from him. Through the entire rehearsal he sat "shooting daggers" at me from across the room. After rehearsal was over, I was a little more apprehensive about leaving with him. I asked some fellow cast members to take me home. This was like throwing gasoline on a fire. He grabbed me by the arm and made it clear that he was the only one I'd be going home with.

On the way home, he yelled and screamed about how I was ruined. He used to think I was perfect, and now I was "ruined." He said he wasn't going to have me doing things like this behind his back. That night was the end of any freedom I had left. Because I avoided a beating, I figured I got off easy. I thought maybe he forgot what he said. In time, I thought, he'd get used to my hair and eventually learn to love it.

From that day on, he "helped" me decide what to wear, who to be friends with, and how to carry myself in a way that would complement him. One day he decided that I didn't need to eat lunch; I was getting too fat. That began my fight with bulimia. I had no control over my life, but behind closed doors I could control what I ate, when, how much, and whether or not I chose to "keep it." In four months I went from 138 pounds to 111 pounds.

After he found out the method behind my sudden weight loss, he was furious. He looked upon it as an embarrassment. He threatened to tell my parents and throw me in some hospital until I could "get a grip." I lived in fear for a long time after that day — in fear of Lance, and in fear of myself.

A few months after I developed my eating disorder, I had made two very good friends. We became very close and eventually I confided in them. There were no more secrets and no more lies. They convinced me to leave Lance and get help. They made me see the error of my ways and of his. They convinced me no one deserved that sort of treatment and for the first time, I believed it. They told me I know the answer all along; I just needed to hear it aloud. Beyond hearing it, I needed to believe it. They protected me from him and from myself. They helped me save my own life.

Lance

After a long, hard year, I was ready to go on. I was ready to get back to being me, but I wasn't "me." I was someone new, someone bold, someone confident, someone exciting. In my own way, I was a survivor. A person emerged from me that I never knew existed. This person had the courage to go on and do more. She had the courage to live. Through all of the misery and destruction Lance caused, he also brought about all these changes. I know I wouldn't be the person I am today if I hadn't survived the things I had. I don't justify his actions, but I thank him every day for helping me create this person, this me, I have grown to love. Through all the grief and devastation, Lance helped me become the person I have always wanted to be.

'D' Day



Sela Kirkegaard

Composition I

"Do you know which courtroom has been assigned to us?" asked my lawyer as we paused before continuing down the marble hallway. The man seated on the bench outside the attorneys' cloakroom didn't answer or even look up as he raised his right hand and pointed his crooked finger toward a door. It was as if Charles Dickens' character, the Ghost of Christmas Past, had himself gestured to me and I shuddered before I took another step.

Walking down the remainder of the hallway, I realized how many ghosts of the past would probably come forward as I divorced the man seated on that bench. I followed my attorneys into the courtroom, taking a seat between them at the board table in the center of the room. The lawyers meticulously arranged files and exhibits upon the table. I fidgeted in my seat, and nervously smoothed my navy skirt and sweater. Hoping that wearing something particularly conservative would help me appear grown up, I had chosen my clothing carefully that morning. Truthfully, I didn't feel grown up at all. Certainly not like a doctor's wife, which I'd been for the previous eight years.

"Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Hear Ye! All Rise. The honorable Judge Schechtman of the Second Judicial District Court of Iowa presiding."

After all of the introductions were made, the judge was stern as he warned the counsel of his lack of patience concerning property disputes. "I will listen to your points once, but don't expect me to hear them raised again."

The morning hours went by with an endless legal banter as witnesses were ushered on and off the stand. The issues of marital assets and equity, real-estate and insurance policies, interest rates and jewelry appraisals began to run together. I found my mind had taken me back to another formal setting with the man I faced across the table in the courtroom. It was not a marble hallway I had walked down then, but rather the aisle of a church. That evening I walked blindly toward my groom because I believed a child-like fantasy where wedding rings meant living happily ever after. I held my head high; I was the bride. No more shame for me. See the diamond on my hand? Maybe the

'D' Day

heavy scent of white roses masked all of my senses that night, including my common sense. At age 19, I could not imagine feeling any more grown up than I did at that moment. It was a fairy tale that I tried to live, and it began with the church, the music, the candlelight reflections.

I wondered if the wedding candlelight reflected off my husband's bald head the same way the sunlight did in the courtroom? Had he always had such dark age spots on his shiny scalp? Dot to dot, I drew with my imaginary pen until the line I drew intersected the scar from his face-lift. He really needs to have a second one, I thought to myself, and, suddenly, I saw how old he looked. I thought the word I'd searched my mind for years but never dared to think — *old*. It really fit; he was 65. How strange to have ignored his age so completely. I looked to his eyes. I expected and half hoped to find them recognizable, but instead I saw his eyes as if for the very first time. The eyes I looked upon were undeniably mapped with tiny veins, yellow where the white should be. I couldn't even distinguish their color. Was it the sunlight playing tricks upon my own eyes? Abruptly I reached for my reading glasses because I knew that wearing them would make the man across the table blur.

The blurry figure stood and bobbled toward the witness stand for his cross-examination. It was evident by his gait that the knee-replacement he'd had would need to be followed by a second on his other knee. I took off my glasses when I found it hard to see whether my husband looked like a man or a gargoyle perched upon the stand. Removing my glasses didn't help. When he began to speak, his voice boomed out across the room. I sat up straight.

"Mr. Hutchinson, did you testify earlier that you have received Social Security benefits for your son, Jacob, since 1988?" It seemed bold for my attorney to completely drop the "Dr." and use "Mr." instead. I saw the anger rise red upon his face, and I cowered internally recognizing the emotion expressed as frighteningly familiar. His anger terrified me; I sat up straight again and smoothed my sweater sleeves so they covered the entire length of my arms. The years of wearing long sleeves and turtlenecks (to cover the bruises I kept secret) still haunted my mannerisms. The fear and pain I'd known were fresh in my mind. I hoped no one noticed me as I cringed.

"Ekstrom, you heard what I said this morning!" He, in return, dropped the Ms. of her name. Arrogance personified.

"Mr. Hutchinson, I asked you a question that you could answer with a simple yes or no. Please answer."

"Yes."

Sela Kirkegaard

"Isn't it true that Jacob was born in 1990?"

"Yes."

"Did you receive benefits for a child who wasn't even born in 1988?"

"Ekstrom, it must have been for something else then. I sent you my financial affidavit. You have the fax. It was completely clear there. As I sit here, I am not sure I should have agreed to the terms of the custody settlement signed last week; I might want to bring that up now!" An exaggerated wink was directed at his own attorney, but replaced quite quickly with smug arrogance as his gaze returned to Susan Ekstrom.

"I will take that as a no."

"I'd like to further elaborate on that subject." Susan was not intimidated by his attitude and cut him short.

"I did not ask you to elaborate. It was a direct question and you will abstain from explaining further. I ask the questions; you answer."

Silence. I was glad she was on my side. In fact, I was glad that I had an attorney seated on both sides of me for the trial. The intensity of the day was wearing on me and I searched for a distraction. Doodling sunflowers on the legal pad in my lap, I realized the obvious; this was it, this was "D" Day. This was Divorce Day, a day I had both dreaded and awaited. Looking down at my left hand, I saw how much better I thought it looked without the wedding rings.

I took my diamonds off when I walked out of Susan Ekstrom's office a year before after telling her I needed to leave my husband. I remember it clearly because it was one of the first times I'd made an independent decision. Afraid of how my husband would respond, I didn't know what life held for me. Changes followed, never simple or pain-free, but somewhere in the year that followed I began to believe I was worthy of making choices for myself.

"During the litigation, you made lists of items you believe Sela has in her possession, didn't you?" Susan's voice brought me back into the courtroom as she continued to speak.

"Yes."

'D' Day

"Mr. Hutchinson, I'd like to direct you back to those lists. Did you include such items on your lists as canned vegetables, a container of cocoa mix, and three thermometers?"

"Yes I did. And she also took a large roll of aluminum foil that was given to me by a former patient. That foil was mine!" My husband appeared to act like this statement made him look astute, but I questioned whether the judge agreed when I saw him begin to tap his pen repeatedly upon the bench. I wondered if the surprise registered visibly upon my face when I looked up. The listed roll of foil had been an item Susan and I had joked about all fall. Who would make an issue out of a roll of aluminum foil, we laughed. But it was in seriousness. She warned me not to mention it at trial because any judge would scorn me for raising such a trivial item. Ironically, my husband bragged about the foil.

"I have no further questions." Susan returned to my side and my husband limped back to his seat. The squeeze she gave my arm made the rest of the trial move a little faster. I listened as each attorney gave closing statements. I was anxious for the day to end.

"All rise! This court is adjourned." The bailiff's words announced the end of the courtroom scene. I doubt he knew the meaning those words held for me as I collapsed and sobbed silently into Susan's shoulder. I struggled with the emotions I'd kept locked inside myself for years. In her arms, I wept the tears that I couldn't cry while married to the man I'd tried so hard to love. Divorce: It's meaning had descended. No longer would I live in fear of what small infraction of mine might provoke my husband's temper. No longer would I live in shame of the bruises I learned to hide. No longer would I be forced to deny my own feelings to feel safe. It was finally over, but I was unprepared for how this end also brought transformation. A freedom I had never felt was sparked. I looked up at Susan and saw that tears had begun to fill her own eyes, but it was the warmth of her smile that showed through. I accepted the comfort she offered when she put her arm around my shoulder.

"Sela, I have to give you my standard trial line right now. Don't send out any wedding invitations until I get the formal decree in the mail," she joked in a mock serious tone. I couldn't help but return her smile, remembering all of the times during the litigation when I'd emphatically repeated how I'd never marry again.

The bald old man sat at the table and continued to sort and resort his stacks of papers. He muttered on about the appraisals of the diamond he'd given me and accumulated interest of his annuities. The only listener left was his own attorney who'd already put on his coat and picked up

Sela Kirkegaard

his briefcase. I wondered if the old man knew it was over. I dried my tears, raised my chin, and walked out of the courtroom knowing I'd left much more behind than the title "Mrs." An eight-year marriage; I let it go. In leaving what I'd feared the most, I left some fears behind.

As I stepped through the doorway of the courtroom, I hesitated and took a final look back. It wasn't the Ghost of Christmas Past I saw still sitting at the table; it was Scrooge. He can have the roll of aluminum foil.

Skinnin' Critters with Wilma



Charles Nolte

Composition I

"It looks kind of cruddy to me, Dad."

"Shut up! And remember your manners."

I looked at the small house and wondered. It was rough, if not run down, and I had trouble with the thought that we would be staying there for the next three days. We were on "family vacation," and it had been Dad's brilliant idea to visit the family with whom he stayed when he was in the army. When Dad said that we were going to West Virginia, I pictured some people living in a huge plantation-type mansion. This little shack with a porch swing was sort of a surprise.

When I entered the structure, I felt I had stepped into an episode of the *Waltons*. Maybe it was because we were actually halfway up a mountain in the middle of the Appalachians, or maybe it was because the residents were not engaging in the art of watching television. They were listening to the radio. They didn't even own a TV.

"This week is going to be a hoot," I whispered in my mother's ear.

She looked down at me, not with disapproval, but with a look that said, "If I have to suffer, so do you."

The residents of this interesting home were none other than my father's parents away from home, Bill and Wilma Dunn. Bill was an old fellow who made his living working in a coal mine. The lines on his face made him seem older than he actually was. Then there was Wilma. She was not your standard old lady. I had no idea how old she was, and I never did ask. Her hair, at least what was left of it, was grey. Her eyes had wrinkles around the edges that made her appear to be squinting all the time. She stood about five feet, two inches, and she was incredibly thin and fit-looking for her age. There were several things that caught my eye about this lady, but the first was that she was smoking a pipe. I had no idea at the time that women could smoke pipes. For all I knew, it was against the law. As we entered the living room, she stood up and hollered, "Dougie, how the hell are

ya? Sit yourself down and I'll git you a beer."

Now, my grandma didn't drink beer and I had never heard a woman of her age swear before. And why was she calling my Dad "Dougie"?

We stayed up late and talked and told stories. My parents decided they would go with Bill the next morning to see some sights. I would get the privilege of staying at the shack with Wilma. I went to bed that night scared of the woman with more bad habits than I had ever known existed. I prayed to God that she would not hurt me the next morning, and if He would just grant me this one prayer, I would be good for the rest of my life.

I awoke the next morning to the smell of ham and eggs frying. I ventured out into the kitchen only to find that Mom and Dad were already gone, and I was alone with "her."

"Sit that little butt down and have some breakfast."

I couldn't argue with her because I was scared that she would put me in some sort of wrestling hold from which I could not escape.

When I finished my breakfast, she asked me, "Do ya like bein' outside?"

I let out a timid, "Yes."

"Good, go git some clothes on. Hurry up, now. It's gittin' late."

When I emerged from the bedroom full dressed, I could not believe what I saw: an old lady wearing overalls, a straw hat that looked about 50 years old, and a .22 rifle in her grasp. "Come on, them squirrels is out and about."

It wasn't squirrel season, but she didn't seem to care as we walked through the cool West Virginia woods. We walked slowly, and her eyes never left the trees. Suddenly she stopped, pulled up the gun, and fired into a tall cottonwood. A squirrel tumbled down, and she nonchalantly walked over and picked it up.

"Boy, he's a youngin, not real big but ya can suck the meat off the bones."

Then it happened. She reached into her pocket and did the one thing that old women should never do. She pulled out a pouch of Red Man and stuffed her cheek full of tobacco. She offered

Skinnin' Critters With Wilma

me some, but I declined. She mumbled something about the tobacco keeping me from getting worms and walked on. We went home that morning with four squirrels. When we got back to the shack, she shocked me again. This woman was full of surprises. She asked me, "Yer dad ever show you how to skin these?" as she held up the squirrels.

"Sure," I said. My dad had shown me how to skin a squirrel years before and I liked to think I was pretty good at it.

"Dougie never could skin 'em proper." And she proceeded to give me a lesson in how to skin "critters" like squirrels and groundhogs.

We spent the rest of the day out in the garden, and in between spits of tobacco, she told me dozens of stories about my dad and her kids getting into all sorts of trouble. Every story was accompanied by fits of swearing and laughter like a possessed hyena. By the end of the day, though it bothers me a little, I was no longer scared of Wilma. I thought she was cool.

My parents came home that night and sat down to fried squirrel, mashed potatoes with squirrel gravy, and green beans that we had picked out of the garden. Wilma and I had prepared the meal, and every time she took a bite, she made the point to say, "Damn, this meat is just right. Your boy done good, Dougie."

Mom and Dad offered to take me out the next couple of days, but I told them, "No thanks, I think I'll just stay here and hang out with Wilma."

Wilma and I went hunting every morning, and we filled the freezer with squirrels. We made supper every night and never had to go to the store. She taught me how to spit tobacco and not get caught by Mom. Wilma was a very special individual. I had dozens of questions about her unusual lifestyle, and she usually had an answer in the form of a story. She told me about her parents and her grandparents and the way things used to be. I learned a lot of things during those three days with Wilma. The thing that she stressed the most in her gruff, goofy sort of way was not to get completely caught up in new and different things because the things that have always been here like the trees and the rivers and the squirrels need some attention too.

When it was time to go home, Wilma gave me a "big old bear hug" and told me, "You come on back, and me and you will go huntin'."

She had a glaze of tears in her eyes that she was far too tough to let out. The woman who smoked a pipe, drank more beer than a small town, and was the best spitting coach on the mountain,

Charles Nolte

was sad that I was leaving. I hugged her back and told her that I would teach my dad how to skin a squirrel "proper."

On the ride home, Mom found the pouch of Red Man that Wilma had slipped me during our good-bye hug and that was the end of my spitting career. But somewhere on an old mountain in the middle of the Appalachians, there is a 125-year-old woman spitting into a coffee can at 20 yards and skinning a squirrel for supper.

Cat vs. Cat



Cathy Jones

Writing Skills Review

I am a great lover of animals with a special fondness for cats. I find that all cats, from the wild cat to the domestic feline, are very mysterious. I have two cats who are very enjoyable to watch. They provide many hours of entertainment for me, whether it be day or night. I love to watch the way they move and how they act around other people. As I watch them, I always find myself wondering what they are thinking.

I've had Penelope for three years. She is a beautiful, short-haired Tabby. The colors in her coat are very prominent, with browns and tans and very distinct black markings all over her body and her long, flowing tail. Her tail reminds me of a raccoon's tail with black rings all the way to the tip. Her eyes are very piercing. They are light green and almost hypnotize me as I catch myself gazing into them while she stares into space.

In addition to Penelope, I have Stinky. I have had him for only two years. He, too, is beautiful, but he looks very different from Penelope. Stinky is a short-haired Manx. His thick, black coat glistens with just a tuft of white hairs on his chest and a small patch on his stomach. Because he is a Manx, he has no tail. Manx cats are related to the Bobcat family and carry that physical characteristic into the domesticated species. His little stubby tail pulsates up and down when he gets excited; and, like Penelope, his green eyes are just as piercing and hypnotizing..

Penelope has her own personality, though. That is to say, she is kind of stuck up. When she walks through the house, it is with grace and ease, and that long tail stands straight up and glides smoothly from side to side. She will only be bothered if she wants to be; otherwise, she ignores everything and everybody. She stops ignoring, however, and talks to me when she wants something from me. For instance, she loves milk. If I'm going to the kitchen, she's on my heels, meowing and rubbing the side of my leg. I know she's saying, "Give me some milk." And I always break down and do so.

Stinky, on the other hand, has a cocky personality. He struts from side to side as he walks with an occasional sidelong glance to see if anyone is watching him. He has the strong, forceful movement of a tiger and walks with no fear. He also has forceful conversation whether I'm talking

Cathy Jones

to him or not. He will interrupt with a few gruff grunts to let me know he's there. He's more inquisitive and not as afraid or "stand-offish" as Penelope.

My favorite thing about Penelope is when she suckles on my ear lobe. She does this because she was taken from her mother too early and was not weaned. She jumps in my lap and looks at me with such a sad expression and meows. Suddenly, before I know it, she has grabbed my earlobe with a vengeance. Her arms wrap around my neck she begins her little ritual. Then, she falls fast asleep until there is movement. I would miss this affection very much if I ever happened to lose her.

I'd miss Stinky just as much because my favorite thing about him is the way he talks to me. When I get home, he is waiting at the door to greet me. He gives me a few meows, a stern look and then he flips on his back. He is telling me, "You're home now; give me all your attention and don't stop until I've had enough." Then when he has had enough, he is off and running to beat me into every room. It's like a foot race and he has to be first, no matter what.

When Penelope plays, she likes a piece of paper crumpled up so she can play fetch. She's been doing this since she was a kitten. I'm not sure exactly what is so interesting, but she chases it and brings it back to me, time after time. Sometimes, she attacks Stinky, and, when he least expects it, she chases him all over the house. This usually doesn't last long because Penelope gets mad and leaves him alone so she can pout.

Stinky will play with anything he can get his paws on. For instance, he'll get on the coffee table and one at a time knock anything that is on the table off. I never leave anything of importance out for him to find. He also loves to attack Penelope when she least expects it. He usually comes running around the corner and jumps right over her like he is playing leap frog. He's very persistent and if that doesn't get her attention, he goes for her tail until he gets her undivided attention.

Unlike Stinky, Penelope is not very difficult to care for. Her basic requirements are to be fed and watered and, of course, empty her litter box. As long as these three things are attended to daily, she is very happy and content. She pretty much takes care of her own grooming, but I do help a little. Once every other week, I put a raw egg over her food. This helps keep her coat shiny and is good for nutrition. I also brush her as often as she allows me to. It's not that she doesn't like it, but she'd rather play with the brush than be brushed.

Stinky requires a little extra effort. He is the slob of the two. He's always knocking the food out of the dish and the water always manages to end up all over the floor. Whenever I do anything special, like give him treats, he has to be a pig about it. He would rather eat people food than cat

Cat vs. Cat

food. He loves french fries, ice cream, and potato chips. I always have to keep the kitchen counters clean and the garbage out of the house because he snoops for food. As far as keeping him groomed, forget it. He refuses to be brushed, but he does enjoy the egg and that helps his coat.

Even though cats are not perceived as very personable or loving animals, you can see if you give your love and commitment, you will receive that love in return. Cats are always full of mischief and entertainment from the kitten stage to full grown. They are wonderful companions because they are able to take care of themselves except for their feedings. They like to play and be petted and cuddled. They each have their own crazy personalities, too. You have friends who will never betray you. I would never give up Penelope and Stinky because they have been my best friends through thick and thin, giving me unconditional love and acceptance.

Retreat



Rob Winget

Composition I

Occasionally, I need a subtle reminder to help me realize that making room in my routine for a retreat is not ducking responsibility, nor a waste of time. It is good therapy for my soul. I am thankful I have a four-legged therapist who reminds me of this daily. Such was the case on a cold Monday afternoon when I was between chores and my dog was nagging me to play with him. Surrendering, I put him in the car and headed to Grandview Park.

His name is Trey. He is all black, except for yellow cheeks and a white breast. He stands four feet high on his hind legs and weighs in at 60 pounds. He's not a huge dog, but he is very muscular. His mass and strength make him impossible to ignore.

As we drove the gray, asphalt road into the park, Trey became excited. The huge, snowy clearing lined with pine and oak trees sparkled like a treasure in his eyes. As we parked beside an uninhabited field littered with fallen oak branches, Trey could hardly contain himself. Sensing his obvious tension, I leaned over and opened the door.

Trey leaped from his seat and bucked wildly across the white turf, then suddenly spun around, took his mark, and looked at me as if to say, "Let's chase some sticks." My furry, fetching machine sprinted after every stick with energetic strides and blurring speed. However, he eventually found sniffing the ground much more interesting.

Following my fetching-machine-turned-bloodhound around the rough brush of the field's edge, we discovered a path that stretched into the forest. I walked the path while Trey chose to climb over limbs and under bushes to give the trees an in-depth sniffing. My eyes wandered from my hound to the sides of the path where I noticed animal tracks cast in the snow. I kneeled to investigate. Thin, delicate bird tracks covered most of the ground except where small dog prints lingered.

After my investigation was complete, I walked to the end of the trail and faced the wind. Gusty blasts flung my hair back and revealed its iciness to my unsuspecting scalp. The Arctic air chilled my airways and made me feel every breath.

Retreat

Beside me stood a mighty oak tree. The trunk stood strong and solid like a stone pillar. Its scab-like bark was cracked and jagged at the base of the trunk, but it gradually smoothed out as it ascended to the body and limbs. On the smallest branches, the bark stretched smoothly like a baby's new skin.

I stepped back to the rim of the tree's canopy and looked up at the knotted limbs that kinked and curved in every direction. The bare, brown branches were easy to see against the glowing, cloud-covered sky. They looked like lightning bolts of a mad electrical storm caught in a photograph.

Turning my back to the mighty oak, I looked down the long slope of the valley. I slowly hiked my eyes up the opposite hill when suddenly I spotted a fox just before he disappeared into some dense pine. Although the creature vanished in the blink of an eye, its rusty coat and wispy tail were distinct. As I glanced down at what I thought were merely dog tracks, I realized that Trey and I were treading on his turf. A chill of fright iced my spine as I frantically searched for Trey. I knew that if he were to spot a fox, he would surely try to play with it and probably get hurt. Fortunately, Trey was busy cleaning snow off an old tree stump with his tongue.

Somewhat relieved, I calmly muttered, "Come on, Trey. Time to go." Reluctantly, Trey obeyed and sniffed his way back to the trail. Paranoia plagued me as I scanned for a den and another fox who might be staking us out. The trail seemed endless.

The glorious snow-bleached field at the end of the trail washed away my anxieties, but I didn't dare look back until we reached the sanctuary of my car. Trey sat quietly in the front seat and stared through the windshield. He looked like a nap was next on his agenda. As I drove, my mind raced with images of throwing sticks and fox tracks. I spontaneously laughed out loud as I remembered the playful canine responsible for this little adventure. If he weren't so insistent, I might have wasted the afternoon cleaning the bathroom or doing homework. No, this winter journey had been a much better idea.

Celebrating 50



Marsha Griffith

Composition I

Imagine the number "50" a mile high and flashing red, blue, and black neon lights going off and on in cadence with a symphony of joyful noises — sirens, whistles, firecrackers, and Model-T horns.

It seems like only a couple of years ago I reached the half century mark, and it was only a couple of years ago in all actuality. Time accelerates as the years accumulate, rolling with more and more momentum on its downhill slide.

I watched as friends went through the misery of a surprise 50th birthday party, and sensed their extreme humiliation. Anyway, I saw it as humiliation that their so-called friends and loyal family would announce to the world that so-and-so is now fifty, read: over-the-hill, physically failing, no longer mentally alert, out of the mainstream, on the back burner, a has-been or never-was.

I watched the forced smiles as they opened the gratuitous cards with their witty sayings. "At this milestone in your life, maybe you'll want to start doing what millions do to stay young ... lie about your age." "Being 50 doesn't mean you're too old to have sexual fantasies! You're just too old to have them come true." And from my best friend, "Another birthday? Being the mature, sophisticated people that we are, there is just one thing to say...you're older than I am, you're older than I am, Nyah-nyah-nyah-nyah-nyah!" "Look at the bright side of turning 50. A cake that can hold 50 candles has gotta be huge!" "You know you're getting older when somebody mentions multiple... and you immediately think of vitamins." "How many 50-year-olds does it take to change a lightbulb? Answer: None. They prefer it dark. Better for napping." "What do you call a 50-year-old with a good sex life? Answer: Liar." This is just a sample of the subtle jabs of deprecating humor. The presents are even better.

Hemorrhoid medications are required — Preparation H is the heavy favorite, and anything that has to do with constipation — Ex-Lax is especially thought of as highly amusing. Trusses, hearing aids, eyeglasses, toupees, girdles, sex enhancers, foot powders, dentures, diapers, whoopee

Celebrating 50

cushions — there is no end to the "practical" presents people will lavish on you.

The most insulting are the T-shirts and ball caps with quaint sayings: " Old Fart," "I'm not really 50, I'm 39 and a few months." Or "Oldee but Goodee," "50 and still counting," or, even worse, "Middle age is like underwear; it creeps up on you." You get the idea.

Then there is the cake with all its candles lit up like a Christmas tree. My cake was decorated with an old woman almost completely naked with every protruding body part sagging perilously close to the ground. Not an attractive sight, but my friend, Daisy's, was even worse. Her cake was shaped like a toilet seat and in the middle was some chocolate... pretty funny, huh? They also made her ride around all day in a wheelchair. I think a law should be passed declaring the date of one's birth to be a secret known only to the individual, and whomever he or she trusts with such privileged information.

My feelings about surprise birthday parties were well known in our family, especially by my husband, so I thought my wishes would preclude such an occurrence. It was Saturday; I worked all day with only a carton of yogurt for lunch, so I was starving when I came home. Tom said, "Change your clothes and we'll go out to eat." For some reason, I dressed up more than usual. I even wore earrings. Meanwhile, a limousine stopped in front of the house. Tom said it was my birthday present. Just the two of us would go for a ride, then we would eat, and have a romantic evening together. There was champagne, a rose, and some presents inside. So like many gullible women, I was lured into the trap. We drove around never seeming to find a restaurant. I drank a lot of champagne (which I hardly ever do). Just as I was reaching oblivion, we stopped at 3000 Grand Avenue. Tom ushered me inside, and guess what? It was a surprise party! Everyone was there, even my oldest son and his wife who live in Phoenix. Relatives, friends I hadn't seen forever, co-workers, who are also friends, but they had no need to know my age. They had known about this all day at work, and I hadn't. That night is still a blur to me and thankfully so. I floated on a champagne cloud high above the hilarity of hemorrhoids. I completely ignored this rite of passage into senior citizenry, but I've never forgiven my husband.

The bad news about being 50 is that most of that physical stuff is true. There is no good news, other than you no longer care what other people think. You can go around looking however you want to, and it just doesn't matter; or, better yet, saying whatever you want to because nobody listens.

As a woman of 50, you will suddenly have these urges to bake cookies, plant flowers, or buy yarn. A man facing fifty starts scrutinizing the back of his head, chasing young women, and counting his money. Happy Birthday!

The Legacy



Kathy Garrison

Composition I

I bent to wipe the flour from my daughter's nose and succeeded in smearing flour further along her cheek. We both looked as though our goal was to be covered in flour rather than to make sugar cookies, but sugar cookies were indeed our final goal.

The first time Hannah and I had embarked on an endeavor of baking she was two weeks old. The boys were asleep, Thom was studying, and Hannah was on a baby's timetable. When it was time to be awake, it was time to be awake. So, here we were at 10 p.m., beginning to bake cookies. She was sitting in her infant's seat on the cabinet, and we began the sort of conversation that only a mother and daughter can have — eye gestures and a running commentary on how to make cookies (her first of many baking lessons.) Why I did this with Hannah instead of my two sons, Chris and Johnny, can perhaps be explained by a rolling pin.

I can only place her in the kitchen, though I know my Great Grandma and I sat other places together (we have pictures to prove this), and I can remember sitting on the porch step with her snapping beans. Mostly, I remember her being in the kitchen with her hands covered with flour. I remember my Great Grandma's hands. Rather pudgy, short-fingered, but strong. I remember their busyness. In my mind's eye, I never actually see her making anything — though there were pies and breads galore— but always there was flour, her hands, and her rolling pin.

This rolling pin had a number of purposes. I'd like to think that its main purpose was baking, but I had seen it used so often to emphasize my Great Grandma's many points that I'm inclined to think of the rolling pin as more of an "exclamation mark." It had been used more than once to get a youngster's attention. It's amazing how quickly the point gets across after a slight tap on the head with a floured rolling pin. My cousins, my brother, and I had walked away from the kitchen more than a few times with a mist of flour settling over our head and shoulders. The more fortunate would simply receive a shake from the rolling pin, being too far from her reach.

I never did receive any "formal" training from my Great Grandma on baking. I guess I was too young for her to bother, and I'm sure the last thing my Great Grandma wanted (or needed) was a pair of "helping" hands while she was baking. But I did receive the rolling pin that I feel honored

The Legacy

to use. I can never resist running my hands down the smooth form of the rolling pin, enjoying the fact that it is made from one piece of wood. I would like to think that part of my baking ability is simply because I have it, that part of my grandma's wisdom has magically been passed down through the rolling pin by osmosis.

Today, though, I just enjoy using it. My daughter and I roll out the dough, and we cut out the shapes. Gently we place each cookie on the pan, knowing that soon we will be enjoying the first taste of our efforts. Right now, Hannah is too young to understand the importance of this rolling pin, but when she gets older I will tell her of her Great, Great Grandma and all the wonderful things that she used to make. I do not know if Hannah will enjoy baking as I have; I would like to think so, but for now she is "too busy" with her friends to discuss such a far off idea as Great, Great Grandmothers. She has doll babies that need her attention.

Today, the kitchen moments are harder to come by than when Hannah was a captive audience, sitting in her infant seat. But I hope in time that she will wonder about the character and the past of this rolling pin that I caress every time I use. I hope that she will ask about my pleasure in baking, and why I sometimes stay up till 3 a.m. just to "make cookies." When that time comes, I will be able to tell her that I am not alone, that my Great Grandma stands with me, sharing special moments — sharing her legacy.

Hans



Carol Fick

Composition I

Trump! Hans stomped another one of my aces — and with the lowly nine to boot! I have been playing euchre with this man for over 20 years. In all of my card-playing experiences, I have yet to find anyone with the innate luck Hans has. He consistently is dealt the smallest trump that will trump all over an ace to take that trick and usually win the hand once again.

Hans is a short, round, stubborn German man who walks these days with a cane and wears a cap advertising the seed company of the last corn crop he harvested years ago. He also happens to be my paternal grandpa, but when we set up the table and dig out an old, sticky, worn-out deck of cards for another rousing game — he is Hans and he is out to win. He says it's never for the money — we play for quarters — but it's just for the power of knowing you're best. Needless to say, I want to be his partner, instead of an opponent, whenever I can manage. Hard, unwrapped candies line his shirt pocket, hence the sticky cards. He will share if I can get past wide suspenders to liberate the sweets. It is somewhat amusing to watch as his stiff, knotty fingers fumble for a small piece and with a frog-like action, the candy pops into the opening beneath a mousy grey moustache. As his guilty smirk appears, his eyes dart to see if Grandma is counting how many sweets he has been sneaking.

Part of my childhood memories revolve around our family playing cards together. One of my very first memories comes from the time I was about three or four years old. Both of my parents worked, so I allowed my grandpa and grandma to let me take care of them in the mornings. After devouring the personally ordered lumpy, hot cereal and surrendering to a short required nap, Grandpa and I set off on our daily "constitutional." Our walk "always" seemed to come to a halt when Grandpa would need a cup of coffee and a short rest. We "always" seemed to be just outside Mildenstein's Fertilizer Plant. The good old boys "always" seemed to be saving us a spot at the euchre table. Funny how everything "always" worked out for us. Upon arriving, I would coyly sit on Grandpa's lap. I remember feeling very special perched there with these other weathered and worn grandfathers. Someone would say, "Bring the little lady a soda." The good-humored boss would pour the pop in a plastic cup containing a disposable liner so it looked just like the coffee the old gents were drinking.

Hans

Hans had the cards: it was his turn to deal. The halo over my head had to shine extra bright to match the glow of pride on Grandpa's face as I very importantly cut the deck before the deal. The old adage was "cut thin to win." The signal was silently given. Just like a spy in a game of espionage, I would charm my way onto one of the other bony laps. As the cards were fanned out, I would inconspicuously, or so I thought, motion to Hans if they had a good hand or not. It was during these training sessions that I first learned the rules and various etiquettes of the game.

As I grew, it became apparent euchre was going to be an integral part of our family. When I was small, the aphorism that "children should be seen and not heard" obviously applied to the Fick Family Rules of Euchre. I could sit quietly on one of the player's laps, usually with Hans. If he was winning, and he usually did, he would let me throw the chosen card to the middle of the table and then rake in the conquered hand. Sometimes he would let me cut the deck for luck after he shuffled, and if that produced a jack — a notably choice card worth extra money and usually extra points — he would call me his "gluky joungs" (*lucky girl* in German), and tousle my thick, black hair.

As I matured, so did the Fick Family Rules. Girls were allowed to play on their birthdays and even on holidays. Eventually, I was allowed to strut my stuff when the family got together for dinner following church on Sundays. After the dishes were cleared and put away, out came the famous frayed deck. As the game got closer, our voices got louder. What we were lacking in points we made up for in stories. This good-humored ribbing was really the best part of the game. While away at college, I patiently looked forward to coming back and visiting with Hans over a good game of euchre.

The sharp sound of cards being thrust on the table in front of me brought me back into the present. Hans indicated it was my turn to cut the cards. I knocked one knuckle on the top of the stack as if to say pass; they were good just as they were. Hans dealt around the table, never looking up. He flipped up a heart that he eventually named trump. As I surveyed the running tally, I realized we didn't have a choice, we had to stay and play the hand or our opponents would have enough points to go out, winning the game. My partner led the first hand. We went round and round the table until each duo had two tricks. This was it — sudden death. Either we would take the trick and set our competitors, or they would take the trick to win the game. My partner had the lead again. He came out with a small club, the ten; I was relieved. Next, the Queen of Clubs was laid; I then proudly threw out the Ace of Clubs. We were sure to set them if Hans had to follow suit. I should have known — trump!!

Close At Heart But Decades Apart



Gale Adams

Composition I

From the very first moment we met, I knew we would be friends — not just friends, but good friends. He wasn't like my friends at school or the kids I played with in the neighborhood. He was different. No, "different" isn't the word. He was special. Frank was 92 when I moved to Spencer, and I was eight years old. But the age difference didn't matter because we were still the best of friends. Frank was tall and thin and spry for his age. He talked gruffly and used a cane. He had lived alone since his wife passed away a few years before my family moved in next door. I could tell from the expression on his face he was delighted to have me around. There was rarely a day I didn't spend time with him. I still played with kids my own age, but I always found time to visit Frank.

I fondly remember, even though it was so many years ago, sitting on his front-porch swing anxiously waiting for him to wake from his daily nap. I could see him through the front window lying on his worn plaid sofa. I even caught myself sometimes trying to make noise to wake him up. Like many older people, he talked about how things were when he was a child. He somehow always made his stories thrilling, and I could listen to him for hours. That's probably why he liked me so much; I was one of the few who would take time to listen to him. If we weren't in the yard or in his workshop, we would be in the house cleaning — or, rather, I was cleaning while he sat back and slowly rocked and continuously puffed on his pipe. He was very generous towards me and often, from his dust-covered shelves, would allow me to choose different little keepsakes, which I still have and cherish today.

I can still remember one afternoon when Frank and I were watching television in his living room and my little brother, Gene, who was four at the time, came knocking at the door. One thing Frank did not like was little boys. He thought they were trouble. Gene skipped in as soon as I went to the door and then plopped down on the sofa. Frank would continuously tease Gene and would get after him for touching something that probably was worth no sum of money but was very valuable to Frank. Gene ran home with tears streaming from his little eyes and Mom gave him a little sympathy and reassurance.

Close at Heart But Decades Apart

One evening I had been playing across the street with a friend when I saw Frank's car pull up in his gravel driveway. My friend Michelle and I ran over to greet him only to find out that there seemed to be something wrong with Frank. He had no interest in talking to us and immediately put the car into the garage and hobbled up to the porch. With concern, Michelle and I trailed right behind him. As the screen door slammed behind me I asked, "What's the matter, Frank?"

"Those blasted people took my doggone driver's license away!" Frank exclaimed then he began to rant and rave about some stupid test. He told us that within the next week he would be through driving.

"How am I supposed to go anywhere?" he sputtered. As much as Michelle and I tried to console him, nothing seemed to work. We were having difficulty understanding why it was such a big deal, so we said our goodbyes and let Frank have some time alone. It didn't take long before Frank got in the habit of walking places and relying on a taxi, but it was habit he didn't care for.

After four years, our many days of swinging and storytelling would come to an end. Unfortunately, our family would be moving once again. I still remember reluctantly walking towards Frank's big screened-in porch which needed paint and was overgrown with vines and shrubbery. He sat in his porch swing eagerly awaiting my visit. I dreaded telling him the news. For days afterwards he seldom talked to me. If he did, it was very cold conversation, as though we were strangers to one another. I avoided seeing him for several days. I busied myself helping my family pack for the move. Besides, Frank seemed angry with me. I felt as if I had done something to make him resent me. Mom and Dad both tried to explain he was just upset that we were leaving and wasn't quite sure how to react.

The day had come for us to leave. As we were loading things up, I looked over and there stood Frank at the end of the driveway. I ran over to him not knowing what he was going to say to me. He handed me a ring and said, "This is for you." It was a ring that had been his wife's, and I proudly reached out and took it from his wrinkled hand.

Bill and Vivian Cook, also neighbors to Frank, wrote us at Christmas and said Frank had been put into a nursing home. Vivian went to Frank's that day his son came to take him to the home. On the table was a snapshot that my mother had taken one sunny afternoon of Frank and me sweeping the freshly mown grass off his cracked patio with his geraniums in full bloom. Vivian knew of our valued friendship and said he had not been the same since we moved away.

Gale Adams

For a long time, I had thought it was my fault he was placed in the home in the first place. Now I realize I had no control over the situation. As I look back, I see how much life I brought out of Frank. As his dearest friend, I took time for him and he took time for me. George Santayana once said, "Before you contradict an old man, my fair friend, you should endeavor to understand him." And that is what I did. I understood Frank and could relate to him. I will treasure our unique friendship for years to come and hope to tell my children and grandchildren of a man I wish they could have known.

My Gift from God



Monica Bella

Composition I

"Monica, she said. My heart sank and my nerves became like shattered glass. Mom's words pounded more intensely in my ears each time she phoned to update me on the situation. "They're sending him to South Bend for a CAT-scan. His nose is broken. He has no feeling in his arms or legs. The doctors here think he may be paralyzed from the neck down."

"No, Mom. That can't be right. You must have misunderstood."

"I'm sorry, honey. You have to come to the hospital now. Jonathan needs you. You have to be strong."

It had been such a beautiful spring day. God was in His heaven and all was right in my little world. Little did I know an event that would change my life lay just around the corner. This day I would learn first hand how to come to God with the faith of a child.

The little ones were playing upstairs, and I was going about my normal routine when I heard a knock at the door. Glancing out the windows, I didn't see anyone. It must have been a squirrel on the porch roof. Heading back to the dishes, I heard another knock.

"Monica, there is too someone here. I heard it." said Elijah, one of the children I watched. That was when I noticed Ashlee, Elijah's little sister, sauntering down the stairs. She was wearing her "Who . . . me?" face. She wasn't followed by my son, Jonathan. That was unusual. Jonathan and Ashlee stayed close together as a rule. It was at that precise moment I realized that Jonathan had somehow fallen out of an upstairs window and was knocking at the door. He was waiting for Mommy to let him in and make the hurt go away.

Can I make it better? That window is 20 feet off the ground. The ground is clay, dry clay, about as resilient as concrete! He's so little and that ground is so hard and unyielding. Will he be bleeding badly? Maybe his teeth will be broken. Please, God, don't let him have any compound fractures! I couldn't handle that.

When I finally got the door open, I was totally unprepared for the sight that greeted me.

Monica Bella

There stood Jonathan spitting clay and pebbles out of his mouth! The only thing he said was "I need to brush my teeth." He wasn't even crying!

Jon had walked from where he'd landed to the front door on his own, so I didn't think he could be hurt too badly. The only injury I could find was a slight chip on one tooth. I wanted X-rays just in case there was something I had missed. Because I had a house full of kids and no car, I called my mom at work to take him to the hospital.

When Mom got to my house, she intended to baby-sit while I took Jon to the hospital. Kids make Mom as nervous as hospitals make me. It was easy to persuade her to let me stay home with the other kids while she took Jon to the hospital.

By the time I arrived at the hospital, a nationwide prayer chain was in progress, courtesy of Mom's co-workers. I was led to an exam room and told that the child inside was Jonathan. That can't be my son. Jon looked fine when he left the house. That poor baby is one gigantic bruise! Look at all the stuff he's hooked up to.

Then that little boy looked at me. It was Jon. I could only recognize his eyes, everything else was bruised, distorted. At that moment I began to lose control. Reality seemed to fade. This is wrong! Not my son! Not again, please God. The double pneumonia was a bad enough scare. Please God, don't take my son from me.

That's when they walked in--my pastors. They were total opposites: one was Baptist, the other was non-denominational. They didn't even like each other, yet here they both were, united for one purpose. Together, they prayed over Jonathan. Together, they anointed him with oil.

That little service sure did wonders for Jonathan. He didn't look so terrified. It was nice of them to come. But really, what difference could a few words and a bit of oil make? Could prayer really help?

I watched helplessly as Jonathan was loaded into the ambulance. I followed the ambulance 45 long, quiet miles to South Bend. No thoughts even entered my mind — it was blank. I got into ER before Jonathan was unloaded. While I was waiting, a blur of activity rushed by. It was Jonathan and the technicians.

One sole EMT walked toward me. The look on her face was that of total disbelief. She was shaking her head and struggling for words. I feared the worse.

My Gift from God

"I don't know what to say to you," she said. "I can't explain it. I'm not sure if the doctor can, either. Something happened on the way here."

The room began to close in on me. How could "something" have happened? The lights on the ambulance never came on.

"Jonathan started singing," she continued. "He was talking about Jesus as if they were friends. He entertained us most of the way with songs and stories about the Lord. He's fine. A sense of peace and joy was with us all. We could feel it. I can't explain it, but he's fine."

Jonathan appeared an hour and a half later. He was fine. The swelling was gone and only a few slight bruises remained. He was laughing and walking straight into my arms!

"Here are the pictures from your hospital," said the doctor, putting up films for me to see. "And here are the CAT results." He compared the two, pointing out a visible break across the nose on the first set. "But the tests I just ran show no signs of there ever having been a break."

He went on to say that due to the nature of the injury, Jon should have a concussion. "In my opinion, though, he's fine, no real injuries. You're taking home a miracle today."

As Jonathan stepped into a bubble bath later that night, he said, "Thank you Jesus. I love you God." Then he turned to me and said, "You know, Mom, they're our friends and sometimes we just have to say that."

Final Words



Kathy Smith

Composition I

Regrets usually accompany death, such as many thoughts of "I wish I would have done this," or "I wish I would have said that." One regret that I have is that my mother and I never said our formal good-byes before she died.

Even though we knew her prognosis was not good and her time here on earth was limited, we never talked about death because in my eyes I would be giving up hope on her, and I could not let my mother down in that way. She was a cancer patient, and cancer patients should never give up hope; they must keep a positive attitude because if they do not, they can go downhill quickly. I needed to fight right along with her.

My mother was my source of encouragement. She was the one I would share my hopes, fears, dreams, and my everything with. I feel fortunate that I had my mother for 31 wonderful years. She and I had a relationship like no other mother and daughter I know. She was my best friend, and she knew everything about me and my life. Because of the trust between us, she did not put many restrictions on me and trusted that I would use the good judgment that she taught me. I put my good judgment to use quite often.

Many times the parents of my group of friends would corroborate all the stories that were given to them about our Friday and Saturday night whereabouts. This caused problems for my friends when we were teenagers because they had to lie to their mothers about where we were when we would go to a "kegger" or other places that had the potential problems of drugs, sex, alcohol, and other teenage peer-pressure situations. My friends asked that I also lie to my mother in order to solve their problems. I had no reason to lie to my mother, and I am glad that I did not give in to the peer pressure of my friends.

My mother was the person I always wished could be with me when I was having a great time, whether it be a tropical vacation with a boyfriend or just a giggly night out with the girls. Because she was not always with me during the fun times, I would race home, go to her room, and share with her every last detail of my day or night. She loved hearing the excitement in my voice and seeing it in my face. This sharing became a tradition until one period in my life when I bypassed my

Final Words

mother and our nightly talk and went straight to my room. I avoided her because I was smoking cigarettes, and I did not want my mother to smell my clothing or my breath. She was so perceptive about any change I was experiencing that it did not take her long to figure out what I was up to. She gave me the standard "don't smoke" talk and again allowed me to use my judgment, which was not so good that time.

I would never have thought that my lifeline was about to become severed so early in life. In March of 1986, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. Her breast cancer was treatable with a mastectomy and chemotherapy, but eventually her cancer returned, and in November of 1991, she was diagnosed with lung cancer which led to bone cancer. This was a big blow to us all again. She had been in remission for five years. The doctors had told us that if she had made it past the five-year mark, she would be in the clear. We all knew there were no guarantees in life, but we were hoping and praying for just this one.

The symptoms slowly crept up on her, and before we knew it, they tied her to her bed, but she paid a big price. Just a simple trip to the bathroom would take her breath away for a good half hour, which would always cause a panic attack created by the fear that each breath was going to be her last. She even struggled with the help of oxygen which was turned up to its fullest capacity. Mom was weak and would fall to her knees on occasion; she had a difficult time getting up because of the back pain created by the bone cancer. When she finally made it to the bathroom, the reflection she found staring back at her in the mirror was disturbing. Instead of her previous glowing face, she stared at an oxygen tube hanging from her nose, a bald head, a bloated body, and a set of lifeless eyes. I cannot imagine going through this five or six times a day.

My mother was a strong woman and she put up a fight. She had her bad days when she would shed a few tears, which were usually done in the privacy of her own room. After all, she had to be the strong one; she was the parent. As for me, I did what I had to do at the time. Unfortunately, we are never handed an instruction book on how to deal with the horrible nightmare of death. Depending on our emotions for that particular moment, we do what we have to do. I could go days without shedding a tear, and I also had days when I could not shut them off. I also chose to do this in the privacy of my room, or on occasion in the arms of my father, as when I was a little girl.

I had never in my life felt as needed as I did during the time that I took care of my mother. This feeling gave me a sense of worthiness, like this was the one purpose for which I was put on earth. I told my mother over and over again that she was not a burden to me because I knew that we all have the fear that someday we're to become dependent on our families, and I did not want her to feel that way.

Kathy Smith

As time went by, my mother needed extensive medical attention. She was taken to the hospital and admitted for the last time. I have often wondered if during her struggle down our hallway and stairs, she thought of that trek as her last journey through the door of her home which for 21 years was filled with love. What a sad loss she must have been feeling.

My family spent the next month in the hospital waiting for our mother to die. One of my biggest fears was that I would not be there for my mother when she passed into that unknown existence. After all, no one really knows what happens to us; we just want to believe the best. And the best for my mom, in my eyes, was that she would follow the light of tranquility into the next eternal life that would be filled with only good and no pain as she had been experiencing on earth.

My mother's pain increased and her breathing became almost impossible for her. Although my mother had to fight for every breath, she never lost her sense of humor. She was sleeping during one of her respiratory treatments and I was trying to wake her up. My concern was she was not getting the fullest benefit of the treatment while she was sleeping because she was not taking full breaths. So I asked her if she could breathe while she was sleeping, and her witty response to me was "people have done it for years, Kathy."

The only comfort my mother found was through sleeping and a variety of pain medications. Her pain became so intense that her daily medications were not enough. Her doctor suggested a continual drip of methadone through her IV, which was one of the most powerful pain medications available. We were told that this might cause a medication coma, and she would probably not regain consciousness. Mom was not able to make a decision like this because of all the drugs, so the decision was left up to us. At this point, her comfort was all that was important to us. We were willing and ready to let her slip into a coma if this meant relief for her. Without her saying so, we knew she was also ready to give up this long, painful fight.

Right before my mother slipped into the coma the doctor had warned us about, I kissed her and told her I loved her. She spoke two words to me--two very simple words. Those two simple words had so much meaning and power behind them. Even today, the thought of those two words can either fill me with serenity or, depending on my emotions for the particular moment, can cause tears from seemingly nowhere to flow down my cheeks. I knew she wanted to say so much more, but she did not have the strength. I hold those two simple words very close to my heart with the memory of my mother's death and our final good-bye. Although I had anticipated and struggled with the thoughts of a lengthy and difficult good-bye, it only took two simple words because, after all, we knew how much we meant to each other and that she would be missed more than words could ever say. My mom made everything so easy, yet so complete when she whispered her last words to me: "Thank you."

The High Cost Of Serenity



Daniel Terry

Composition I

In my house I was taught men are men and women are women. Men are not supposed to cry, while women seem to have a faucet at their disposal. Men are tough and that's the way life is, and as a man I was expected to keep my end of the bargain.

This worked fine for me up until 1989. On November 11, 1989, the most wonderful thing in the world took place in my life — my first child was born. As I sat with her in the nursery, I was mesmerized by her beauty and the fact she existed. Two years later, I was able to relive that same wonderful feeling when my son was born. As my children began to grow, we shared many experiences together. I realized that all the barriers and walls I had created to protect myself were beginning to crumble.

Even when I was away from home performing my job, I still maintained that image of being a man. I was strong and nothing could hurt me; if you challenged me I would counterattack you into submission. Being part of the United States Armed Forces just reinforced this way of thinking.

Meanwhile, back in the safety of my home, I would be as caring, loving and as patient as I needed to be when it came to my little ones. There is no way I can describe the feeling I had seeing my children be brought into this world. Just as I had experienced that joy, I would later experience a pain I never thought possible.

My family and I had returned to Korea, my wife's home country. My children were introduced to their grandparents for the first time, and this would be the last time my wife would see her parents for some time. Everyone was excited. I called my family — my mother and father had divorced when I was young and both remarried — to inform them when we would be returning to Iowa. I had not been home in eight years.

Daniel Terry

At 3:00 a.m. the phone rang. On the other end was a shaky voice. As I was trying to gain my senses, the voice was saying something about my stepmother Nancy, a doctor, cancer. There it was, the key word that brought me out of a slumber and into reality. My stepmother had been diagnosed with terminal cancer and I needed to contact my father as soon as possible.

After I finished talking to the caller, I sat in stunned silence as my wife wept quietly and held the children. Before we knew it, we were going home. I had talked to Dad on occasion and he kept us updated on the situation. Nancy was fighting the disease with everything she had and seemed to be doing quite well. Chemotherapy made her tired and caused nausea, but she met it head on.

The plane ride back to the States was 15 hours long. My thoughts were with my dad and stepmother. We arrived in Arizona, picked up our car and drove to Des Moines, Iowa. Once situated in our apartment, I called my dad and told him we were on our way. My dad and stepmother lived 40 minutes from Des Moines. It was the quietest 40-minute ride I had ever taken.

Upon arriving, my dad came out to greet us. Nancy was fishing with her daughter, Kim. We all loaded up in the car and headed for the park. Prior to arriving at the park, we stopped at the cemetery where Nancy would be laid to rest. Eventually, dad would join her there where they'd be together for eternity. Dad told us he chose this spot because it was located on a beautiful hillside surrounded by trees and complemented by a pond at the bottom of the hill. Nancy would always be able to see the water and everything that was going on. My wife began to cry as Dad spoke of the afterlife. He comforted my wife gently, but sternly told us the time for crying was over.

Nancy and Kim had already left the pond by the time we got there, so we went back home for our reunion. As they pulled up in front of the house, we went to greet them. Nancy came across the street, straight into the loving arms of her two grandchildren.

As I hugged Nancy, I thought the chemotherapy had taken a lot out of her, but it hadn't taken her spirit. She had lost a lot of weight and was only a shell of her former self. I felt like crying and asking God why this was happening, why to her? These questions will be with me the rest of my life.

The next few months we spent as much time as possible at my dad's house. I enjoyed spending time with Nancy on her park bench in front of the house. We sat for hours at a time, reminiscing, talking about life's mysteries and so on. One day she told me she had certain expectations of me when she was gone. I promised her I would do my best to uphold her wishes.

The High Cost of Serenity

During her illness, the family scheduled our usual fishing trips and then there was the excursion to the tulip festival in Pella, Iowa. Nancy had to have some funnel cake — and if we didn't like it, she would get it herself at the festival. On other occasions, when she wasn't doing so well, we would have to take her to the hospital for some infrequent stays.

Though she was usually so full of life, she had come to grips with her situation. While staying in the hospital, she was concerned about everyone else in the family. Not once did I ever hear her complain or ask "why me?" I envied her strength; she was so at peace with herself that I was ashamed for not having the same strength she showed day after day.

Fighting to control my emotions, I tried to support the rest of the family the best I could. At times I felt lost. If I felt this way about my stepmother, then how were the rest of the kids feeling, knowing she was their biological mother.

As her condition worsened, her attitude never changed. The frequent stays at the hospital began to be more than over night. They began to be two and three weeks at a time. My family would visit and stay with her as often as possible, just to be there for her.

One particular stay she was supposed to be there for a week and then return home. That week turned into a second week. Concerned, Dad called to inform me of these developments. I called Nancy to ask her how she was doing. She said, "Not so good." I told her we would be up in the morning to see her. She said "fine" — that she would see us then.

The next morning I got up early to go buy milk so the kids could eat cereal before going to see Grandma. When I returned, my wife met me at the door and told me we had to get to the hospital right away because Nancy had passed away. Immediately, denial set in. My mind told me, there's no way! I just talked to her last night.

We dropped the kids off at my sister's house and took a direct path to the hospital. My stepsister, Kim, met us downstairs and said Nancy had passed away early that morning. I still didn't believe it. We went upstairs to her room to pay our respects. My body was numb as I walked to her room. I said good bye and promised to do the things she wished.

I watched solemnly with tears coming down my cheeks as they lowered Nancy to her final resting place. My daughter hugged and consoled me, the daddy who she saw cry for the first time. In the span of a few short years, I went from the ecstasy of life being brought into this world to the pain of a loved one being taken away.

Daniel Terry

An experience like this is not something I would usually share because I feel it leaves me vulnerable; it's that "man thing." I decided to share this because it ties in with the goals I have for myself away from career.

My goal is to reach that same serenity level Nancy had during the last months we spent together. I believe I have taken my life for granted and want to find that inner peace that everyone seeks.

"Writing is an important form of expression that allows me to convey ideas to one person or a group of people on a personal or professional level. This course helped me to refine my writing skills, to focus on argumentative writing – not just informational essays. Writing is important to my future as it relates to job opportunities, to personal achievement, to being understood by those around me."

Diane Van Zante Composition II Liberal Arts



Positions

**Experience-Based
&
Documentated**

Can I Help You?



Trish O'Brien-Edwards

Composition I

The other day my mother and I decided to go shopping. As we entered Younkers at Merle Hay Mall, we discovered that we were invisible. This seemed very strange to both of us. We walked from rack to rack, through every department, and not once did anyone ask us if we needed help. This was quite astounding to me. It wasn't as if they were short of help, or that the store was overloaded with shoppers. The people that I saw receiving help were older women who were dressed to kill. These women looked as if they had lots of money to spend, and the salespeople knew it. Looking down at myself, in my jeans and sweat-shirt, I realized that I would never be mistaken for someone with money. However, I had a wad of money in my pocket. I guess it was their loss.

People think that you are more important if you are beautiful, have nice clothes, and a high-and-mighty personality. They seem to think that if you look a certain way, you have more money to spend. If you work on commission, this can mean a lot of money. I have to admit I have judged people by their looks myself.

When I was employed, I worked on commission. Working on commission is not an easy task. I made sure to try to help everyone in my department. However, this was not always possible, especially at Christmas. I had to make ends meet, just like everyone else, so I would sometimes give more attention to the people who looked pulled together and more affluent, hoping they would buy more, and thus make me more money. I am not proud of this, and, knowing what I know now, I hope I will never give in to this kind of discrimination again.

Another reason why "looksism" is part of our culture is that everyone likes to have beautiful things around them. They like exquisite vases, impressive sculptures, and enticing flowers. We put beautiful things everywhere to make us happy. It is nice to see an awe-inspiring sunset or rainbow, so why not be drawn to refined, well-groomed, handsome people?

While discrimination in our society against religions and races decreases, "looksism" is one of the only ways we as a society can discriminate against one another. Judging others on the basis of appearance is okay because people can control most of what they look like. I know that I have been walking down the mall and have seen someone who is overweight. While wondering how

Trish O'Brien-Edwards

they let themselves get that way, I often stop to think that maybe they just can't help it, but are happier that way. I despise the fact that I am more critical of women than men. I guess that I look at women more than men because I often compare myself to others.

I sometimes hear people yell out hurtful things to people who are different. They might be overweight, handicapped, or just what is not considered to be a "normal" beauty. Yet I don't hear people who are just walking down the street yell at someone because they are a different race or religion. (If they did they may find themselves with a broken nose.) No, we as a society put too much emphasis on outer appearances.

I know that not everyone in our society judges people by their outer appearance. I really envy these people for being able to get through the covering and see what really is inside. I believe that we can all learn from these people. I know that I am trying. But sometimes it is hard to get through that outer shell to the person within.

I hope that while discrimination against race and religion decreases in our country, we don't pass over the fact that we discriminate on looks. We must realize that we can't always judge people by their looks. If you don't want to be friends with someone who is not a gorgeous bombshell or impeccably dressed, that is your choice. However, do you really want someone to judge you by your looks?

Author's Note:

Thanks to Kathie Harryman and Kim Van Sant for their constructive criticism.

Cartoon Capers



Patti Stockdale

Composition I

I have never really been a huge fan of Saturday morning cartoons. I realize I run the risk of being labeled anti-American, but I stand firm in my position. Even as a child, I couldn't fully understand the attraction that was undeniably pulling my friends to indiscriminately watch hours of Saturday morning cartoons. I occasionally indulged, but not because of some innate desire to fill a basic need. I watched as a result of peer pressure.

If I were in a room filled with kids watching cartoons, I conformed to the behavior expected of me. When everyone laughed because Lucy surprised Charlie Brown by pulling the football away from his foot at the last possible minute, I laughed with my friends. Deep inside my heart, I felt Chuck's humiliation. When everyone giggled because the Roadrunner bested Wily Coyote, I giggled with my friends; however, I was actually feeling frustrated with the futility of Wily's best efforts. When everyone snickered as Bugs Bunny outsmarted Elmer Fudd for the hundredth time, I couldn't partake in their frivolity any longer. I had my limits, and they had been pushed with the disgraceful chuckling at Mr. Fudd's expense.

I reluctantly admit that I have secretly logged several hours of carefully selected cartoon viewing. My allegiance has always been with the underdog, and I would like to take a minute to pay homage to the mighty Underdog. He was the epitome of one who is expected to lose a contest or a struggle. His very name dripped with humility. He was a weak, misunderstood canine better known during the bulk of the show as "Shoe Shine Boy." When need dictated, Shoe Shine Boy stepped into the nearest telephone booth (I realized this was a Superman rip-off, but I couldn't help myself), and he miraculously transformed himself into the fearless Underdog, who converted wrong to right, saved the universe in a humble, unassuming manner, and rescued the bitch (oops) female dog. Underdog was a cartoon hero I respected and admired without reservation.

George Jetson also earned my devout respect. Poor misguided George could never catch a break. He wasn't appreciated in the workplace, and he never reached his full potential as a father or as a husband. His dog, Astro, even thought he was smarter than his master. In spite of his circumstances, George generally rose above everyone's expectations, and that is what allowed him to win a special place in my heart.

Patti Stockdale

Yogi Bear also captured my heart. He had an easygoing, carefree personality not usually found in a bear. The fact that he was "smarter than the average bear" was also a bonus. His driving force in life was finding a delicious treat in an unsuspecting camper's picnic basket. This wasn't portrayed as stealing because it was a prime example of Darwin's own survival of the fittest. How could someone with a side-kick named BooBoo be all bad?

There were so few strong female cartoon role models that demanded respect in animation. Wilma Flinstone was an exception to this rule. She was a loving mother, an understanding wife, and a supportive neighbor. She tolerated Fred's inadequacies as a spouse, and she didn't depend on him to fulfill all of her emotional needs. She had a strong friendship with Betty Rubble that provided an outlet to counter her troubles at home. She was a true pioneer of innovative cleaning techniques; her style is legendary today.

On the other hand, there was Olive Oyl. Personally, I thought she was a tramp. She repeatedly led Popeye on and, at the same time, she flirted outrageously with Brutus. When Popeye was empowered by his spinach, Olive Oyl quivered at his masculinity. When he returned to a mere mortal man, she lost interest. Popeye was actually a pretty decent catch. He had great job security, he always whistled a happy tune, and he was very articulate. I am proud to say that I was a true fan of Popeye the sailor man!

My all-time favorite cartoon character was Scooby-Doo. He was the recipient of my sincere devotion. Scooby-Doo was the least likely cartoon character to ever thrive in animation. He possessed the inherent knack of being in the right place at the right time. He was unbelievably skillful in unmasking the villain at the last possible moment. His bumbling behavior was an excellent mask that misled everyone from seeing his hidden talents and intellect. Scooby do was a character I watched with admiration, and I still managed to maintain a feeling of self respect.

Through the passing years, few other cartoons have managed to rise above the level of mediocrity that I've associated with Saturday morning television. I do feel obligated to mention two more by name because they are worthy of a measure of praise. I admit that I have smiled at an occasional episode of Speedy Gonzales, even though his ego was larger than any human being's I had ever known. Garfield's wit and humor have also coaxed an occasional giggle from my lips; however, I feel that his general demeanor is too annoying and obnoxious to tolerate for sustained periods of time.

My final tribute is to Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. I understand that it is a seasonal cartoon, and this may actually be the key to the attraction the show holds for me. As a child, I eagerly searched the TV Guide to find the exact date and time my favorite Christmas show would

Cartoon Capers

air. I could easily place myself in Rudolph's place when he struggled with his inadequacies in striving to be a normal fawn. Because of his handicap, I felt a strong sense of protectiveness toward him. I was infuriated when he was teased and taunted by the other reindeer because he was different. The fact that he rose above his uniqueness inspired me. I felt an affection toward Rudolph, an affection that very few animated characters have ever stirred within me.

What has happened to these irreplaceable Saturday morning cartoon characters? I can barely endure watching cartoons with my son any longer. I sadly report that they have been replaced with unsatisfactory substitutes such as Beetlejuice, Dark Wing Duck, and the Power Rangers.

I can't begin to understand the fascination today's children have with the Power Rangers. The idea of transforming teenagers into prehistoric mammals is beyond the capabilities of my imagination. Their particular skill does not garner praise from my lips. I don't see their transformation as a talent. I see it as a desperate cry for psychiatric counseling. I wonder what subconscious message this cartoon is sending to our children.

Other current cartoon "heroes" I feel obligated to renounce are the Ninja Turtles. Reptiles that possess martial arts skills and have a strong pizza fetish are a little far-fetched in my book. Perhaps, if they longed for turtle food, I'd be a little more tolerant — but I don't think so. "Cowabunga, dude!" is their common self-congratulatory expression. What exactly does "cowabunga" mean?

Memories of long-forgotten episodes of Daffy Duck and Mighty Mouse flash across my mind as I reminisce about days gone by. As a society, we have allowed the powerful goodness of Tom and Jerry, for example, to be replaced with pathetic substitutes like Beavis and Butthead? Where have yesteryear's heroes gone? Let's bring back Fred and Wilma. Yabba Dabba Do!

Raising A Teenager



Cathy Jones

Writing Skills Review

Parenting a teenage daughter is an overwhelming and confusing job. Today's teenagers have so many moral and social obstacles to overcome. They face pressure from peers to experiment or participate in risky behaviors such as sex and drugs. These temptations aren't new. Although I ran up against these behaviors as a teenager also, 20 years ago they were not as intense as they seem to be today.

The reason I know how intense these pressures are is because my 17-year-old daughter has battled so many of them. Now, I have a great teenage daughter of whom I'm very proud, but we have had many conflicts over choices of friends, drugs and the pressures of entering into a sexual relationship. So as I try to provide consistency and good parental guidance to help her face the temptations, my relationship with her suffers.

There have been many battles over her friends and many hurt feelings over who she thought were her friends. Although Tricia has good judgment, she can easily be swayed by those she believes accept her. I try to let her make up her own mind about her friendships, but there are times I have to give my opinion and ultimately my permission. This has only happened a few times because I try not to make her decisions for her, but I am here when things go astray.

Most recently, my daughter and I had a terrible misunderstanding. It became a battle over who was the mother and who was the child. Because I'm a single parent, my daughter has taken care of me and I of her. For instance, we have cried on each other's shoulders and given each other a pat on the back when needed. Tricia has always been treated as my equal. Therefore, she has had great liberty to speak her mind and share her honest feelings. Tricia is able to share her anger in an appropriate manner and yet know she's loved despite her outbursts. This evolved into a power struggle for freedom and control and has made it difficult for me to assert myself and regain my authority.

I have walked Tricia through depression when she's lost a friend to suicide or became jealous of my attention to others. I have dealt with her experimentation with cigarettes and marijuana. I've

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been there when she has experienced severe bouts of insecurity; I've been there for her through the thick and thin of it all.

In the midst of the thinnest period, my daughter rebelled against my decisions and moved out of our home and into the home of my sister. Because of her anger and rebellion, she painted me as the "big bad wolf" to the rest of my family, completely destroying my credibility with them.

I went through weeks of horrible phone calls; I tried to understand what made her angry enough to leave. I called her week after week with no answer. It came to a point where I grew tired of Tricia yelling and screaming at me. Every phone call seemed to get worse and the bad feelings and tension grew stronger. So through counseling, I developed coping skills and learned techniques to regain her respect and need for me. When the phone calls turned to arguments, I started hanging up. I let her know, as her mother, I would not tolerate the disrespect. At this point, we had to work our way back to showing respect for each other and build for the future.

Therefore, instead of giving power to her phone calls, I ended them abruptly until she learned she could keep me on the line longer and explain things to me more clearly, calmly and respectfully. We began to break the old pattern of miscommunication and developed a new routine for sharing and listening. When she could not get a rise out of me, she stopped arguing a little at a time. I kept letting her know she had her home when she was ready to return. Slowly, conflicts started to work out and our communication became effective. It took a lot of time and patience for circumstances to turn around.

Today, my daughter has returned home. We missed each other so much that we are committed to re-establishing our mother-daughter relationship. We now share a relationship built on love and trust and mutual respect.

Trusting that our relationship would survive again gave me strength to follow my instincts and the advice of my counselor — allow Tricia the distance she needed. My mother and most of my family believed I was giving her up. But I wasn't. I maintained communication and learned to restructure our boundaries.

Even now that she's returned, several people find it hard to accept my decision to let her go when she felt the need to leave. I knew I had to, though. I allowed her to go and stay with a family member who would keep her safe. This decision to let her go instead of keeping her against her will might have ended up in a greater loss for both of us.

Cathy Jones

Parents need to know and understand that no matter how strained relationships are with teenagers at times, things can get better. I've learned that practicing patience, tolerance, and believing in tomorrow will provide a strong foundation for finding solutions to raising a teenager. Believe me, I would not change nor give up any of our experiences because I've learned so much and received so much for my persistence and faith.

Tricia is home and I love being "Mom" again.

Discrimination at School



Tim Hegarty

Composition I

Discrimination can affect anyone, even someone with a learning disability. I have a learning disability called dyslexia. The disability affects my way of reading and writing. I have no trouble with thinking about what I'm going to write, but when it comes to putting it into writing, I just can't figure out how to put it onto the paper. I also read at a much slower pace than other students my own age. There is one advantage to the disability; I have a really good memory when it comes to faces and names, so I can remember the faces of those who make fun of me.

When I was first diagnosed with having a problem with reading in the second grade, I was put into the category of behavior disabled. Because the school I was going to at the time had no resources for a learning disability type of problem, I was put into a special class one hour out of the day to help me with my reading and writing. This was to make sure I was not totally segregated from my classmates. The only problem with the class was that it was a class for behavior-disordered students. I went anyway for the help which I desperately needed. I had no problem with the other students because I grew up with them. My classmates at that time thought it was neat.

When I moved to West Des Moines in the seventh grade, it was a whole new story. I was reevaluated and placed into the learning-disabled instead of behavior-disabled classroom. The students at Indian Hills Junior High were bad. The majority of the students discriminated against anybody who was black, red, physically challenged, or mentally challenged. Basically, they discriminated against anybody who was different. That included me and my disability. I know it wasn't because I was the new kid because the first day I had no problem —my school papers weren't there yet. This meant I was in the regular English classroom. When my papers finally arrived, I was moved to the resource room— just for the English class — but no other class.

The only people who were in that room during that class were Lou and I. Lou just happened to be black, and he got more flack from the bullies than I did; though I got a lot of flack. In the hallway one day, I simply asked this kid why he didn't like me. He said, "You have to go to the resource room for English class." I simply explained to the young man that I had a little trouble with spelling. So he called me "stupid" and ran off. Two months later my little spelling class got a new student. It just happened to be the student who called me stupid. He was diagnosed with dyslexia.

He turned out to be a nice guy. He just needed to be at the other end of the stick to see how it felt to be made fun of. Once he started to go to that particular room for two classes, the other kids put him in the same boat as I.

When I finally reached Valley High School, my story took another drastic turn. The special room wasn't around any other classes, so I couldn't just slip into that room. The special education room was in a wing of its own right behind the cafeteria. The other students could see me walk down the hallway to the room, so I couldn't say, "No, that was not me." I was stuck with taking the abuse of the other students; there was no way to get out of it.

The only difference in this room and the room in junior high was that there were more people to take the abuse with me. Also, I attended the regular English class with an extra special class to help me with my work. Life at Valley was going fine until I started to get extra help on my English tests. I had to have the tests read to me so I would understand the questions. It was obvious that the other students didn't like me getting to leave and going to another room on test day. They would snicker and make comments like, "He's going to the stupid room." When I got to faster moving math and science classes, I had absolutely no problem because of the way my brain works. I made up for my "stupidity" in English by excelling in math and science.

The teachers and counselors also treated me differently when they found out I was in the resource room. Some of the teachers would not call on me in class even if I knew the right answer. They would even let my work slide. One day when I didn't do my homework, I heard my teacher say, "Maybe it's the disability." The worst thing that happened was when I took this aptitude test to see what jobs I would be good at. My teacher told me not to expect much from the test. My counselors also told me not to expect to go to college, that maybe I should find a good construction job. The school would not let me take the advanced science courses that I qualified for because I would have to lose my learning disability title and would lose my extra class and help.

I showed those people who gave me a hard time. I'm in college, a community college, but a college. I did very well on my ACT's and I'm doing well in college — all without their support and help. Who knows what I'll end up being. But if I stick with my major of physiology, I'll end up with two masters degrees and a specialty in medicine. That's one heck of a feat for a "dyslexic."

People discriminate against the learning disabled in many ways. It can be harsh like when people say "that's stupid" if I give a wrong answer, or even more painful when they come straight out and call me "stupid." People might not even do it on purpose. I have even caught myself discriminating without knowing. If it can happen to me, it can happen to you. So please be careful out in the world and watch what you say and do. You can hurt someone and not even know it.

Education or Manipulation?



Shawn Cowell

Composition I

It was my first day of kindergarten. After a good night's sleep and a mother who made sure I looked perfect, I was ready to board the bus. Thoughts of excitement and fear overwhelmed me. As I arrived at school, all I could feel was my heart pounding with anxiety. At the time, I did not really care why I was going to school or what effect it would have on my life; getting through school was my primary concern. Although I did not realize it then, I now understand how my education influenced me. A quality education made all the difference in my life.

During my elementary, junior high and high school years, I attended Grandview Park Baptist School, which is a small, private religious school in Des Moines, Iowa. While I maintained good grades in school, I was busy all the time with numerous involvements: basketball, soccer, band, choir (including some traveling ensembles), drama, senate and yearbook. Throughout my preparatory education, my teachers instructed and encouraged me to strive toward excellence and not settle for mediocrity — not just academically — but socially and spiritually as well. Now I see myself as a well-rounded person who attempts to experience and conquer new and challenging situations. It has become my personal desire to succeed — not anyone else's.

In Mike Rose's "Lives on the Boundary," Rose, the associate director of writing programs at UCLA, who lived through a rough childhood, shares how he was not truly educated until he had the desire to be (89). One cannot expect to learn the philosophy of Socrates or the tragedies of Shakespeare until he or she has obtained a true desire to learn. In the success that Rose had, he actually was not interested in books of higher thinking, which he called Great Books (88). He did not appreciate those books until he learned to appreciate reading and learning itself first. Like Rose, the desire to learn and succeed on my own was one of the major influences education had on my life.

College has the potential to furnish one with a sense of personal power or a sense of helplessness. In the short two-week experience I had at Pensacola Christian College in Pensacola, Florida, I received a sense of utter hopelessness that left me deep in depression. After packing my bags and traveling over 2,000 miles to Pensacola, I was handed a rule book that was anything but lenient. It instructed students to the following: use separate elevators for men and women, avoid

physical contact with persons of the opposite sex (not even handshakes, a formal greeting accepted by our American culture), refrain from conversation between men and women off campus (even in public places). Unfortunately, this rule book was not given to me or any other new student until we arrived on campus. I was completely unaware that any of these rules existed. The demand for complete control of students' social interactions, without the provision of advance warning about the policies, seems grossly unfair.

In bell hooks' "Keeping Close to Home: Class and Education," hooks, an African-American woman who struggled to maintain her culture while studying at Stanford University, makes reference to her own social struggles. "Studying at Stanford, I began to think seriously about my class differences. To be materially underprivileged at a university where most folks (with exception of workers) are materially privileged provokes such thought" (126). Although I did not have a faculty and student body telling me to forget about my culture, I did have ones telling me to forget my sense of independence and become a robot, so to speak. This instilled an extreme sense of hopelessness within me that I never really recovered from until several months after I arrived back home.

Now that I am attending Des Moines Area Community College, my personal independence is not an issue, which makes me breathe a tremendous sigh of relief. Rose states that education is definitely more "social than intellectual in origin" (89) That explains how social tensions have such a high impact on learning. When people from all different social statuses, ethnic groups and backgrounds can come together in acceptance of each other, learning is much more productive. This is one of the aspects of this college I have learned to greatly appreciate.

I have often wondered why people are encouraged to go to college. There are many opinions regarding this subject. Some believe attending college leads to good jobs. Yet, I have heard of many people with very little education who are making more money than college-educated people. So why should one go to college? I think Allan Bloom, a professor at the University of Chicago, summed it up quite nicely in his essay, "The Student and the University." In a statement regarding a liberal arts education, Bloom states, "A countervailing atmosphere in a university would be necessary to students to gain a taste for intellectual pleasures and learn that they are viable" (78).

Education is not just about picking a career, majoring in the field, and getting out as quickly as possible. It is about life and the satisfaction one gets by experiencing it. It is a desire to become a well-rounded person capable of flexibility through life's confusing twists and turns. I believe it is the college's responsibility to make sure all students receive a well-rounded education to ensure they are not cheated out of a full appreciation for life. With the education I am receiving, I am sure I will be prepared for whatever obstacles lie in front of me.

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Editor's Note: bell hooks uses lowercase letters in writing her name. In the text of this paper, her name appears in lowercase letters as is her custom. In the citation above, the capitalization on the last name is used to conform to requirements of form.

I Cry for a Return to Liberal Education



Sam Warren, Jr.

Composition II

University or higher education serves two distinct educational purposes in pursuit of a single goal. This goal is effectively defined by John Henry Newman: "If then a practical end must be assigned to a University course, I say it is that of training good members of society" (40). The first purpose served in reaching this goal is a technical education of information necessary for a career path. Every university and college in the country has this outlined in a course catalog. Generally, a course catalog will include a host of core requirements followed by those classes dealing specifically with a chosen field of study. The second purpose of higher education is what Allan Bloom calls "serious liberal education" (81). The liberal arts curriculum at many universities is systematically being altered to accommodate the needs of a multicultural society.

Let us look briefly at technical knowledge, the first purpose I mentioned above. This part of education is divided into colleges, majors, fields, and specialties. Each vies for the attention of students who must choose a career path. The result, as stated by Bloom, is that these disciplines "are competing and contradictory, without being aware of it" (78). However competitive and uncooperative these factions may be, we still must admit and even admire the impressive successes they have in producing technological advances. The complaints most often mentioned about this side of higher education deals with one group or another being excluded or discriminated against. For example, Virginia Woolf faced gender discrimination when she met the "guardian angel barring the way with a flutter of black gown instead of white wings" (46). In this country, general sentiment holds that everyone should have the opportunity to work for this education. The government even gives special aid to those who may not be able to afford the financial requirements. In my personal experience, I have found that because I am not a minority and my parents make a middle-class income, I do not qualify for the majority of financial assistance programs. They are specifically focused toward groups that have traditionally been discriminated against. This is a development of recent history and is not the case elsewhere in the world.

Liberal education is not so easily set aside. What is liberal education, this study of the humanities? Traditionally, it looks at human life, the problems people face, and how they overcome these problems. Humanities use history, art, drama, and philosophy to examine truths of life and

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how we live. Through these studies, students should be able to establish a world view comprising a belief system that will carry them through life. As universities take liberal education out of classes, what are they replacing it with? David Sacks is a junior at Stanford University. In a recent article in *Campus*, a student magazine, he mentions some of the lectures he received in an upper-level history class, including "The Rise of the Afro" and "Fade-O-Rama, Braiding and Dreadlocks" (4). Michael Newman, another student at Stanford, says that he majored in English to avoid the "clutches of politics." (18) But the politically correct English department "has pushed [him] to the political edge" (18).

If Stanford, a leading university where a four-year degree costs upwards of \$100,000, has instituted a politically correct, multicultural program in place of liberal arts, it is reasonable to believe that many universities across the country are doing the same. The question remains, "How does multiculturalism affect the student?" The professed goal of multiculturalism is to make all people equal and give everyone acceptance. The movement fails miserably in this pursuit. Bruce Frohnen tells how Harvard tries to promote multiculturalism. "Harvard's orientation week introduces incoming minority freshmen only to other minorities, segregating them from other incoming students and from any non-minority advisors" (2). Sacks describes the effects of these policies well: "Instead of helping students to surmount superficial differences, the multiculturalists have erected whole departments glorifying [the differences]"(4).

The replacement of liberal education with multicultural and politically correct education is causing a breakdown in the effectiveness of our higher education system. John-Peter Pham describes professors as "proselytizing" (16) students with political correctness. If these ideas are true, truth should "always emerge in an open market since truth is knowable to reasonable inquiry" (Pham 16). The professors should not have to force them onto the students. The solution to the problem is obvious: return to a liberal humanities orientation in education. The difficulty lies in parting from the special interests that control universities. How does one remove what Bloom calls "the diversity of perversity" (77)?

Bloom's solution to this problem is "the good old Great Books approach" (82). Though Bloom was correct in identifying the problem as a lack of liberal education, he is simplistic and a little off track in his solution. Simply teaching the great books is not enough. The crucial element is how you teach them. The multiculturalists want to extract all kinds of feminist and Marxist ideas that condemn Western culture from the very works that have in the past defined Western culture. It is the questions asked in teaching the works which constitute a liberal education. How does this work reflect life? How is this part of history repeating itself? How does this painting reflect human nature as it pertains to society? It is through these types of great questions that a unified world view is established. The politically correct views "culminate in the unwillingness and incapacity to make

claims of superiority, particularly in the domains in which such claims have always been made — art, religion and philosophy" (Bloom 77). Without a claim of superiority, there is no basis for a world view that dictates morals, social values, or a code of right and wrong. Therefore, the universities have lost the excitement of learning and are simply a place to take required classes to earn a degree needed for a certain job.

A "great questions" approach to learning should not be limited to the humanities. John Haas, author of an essay titled "Thinking Ethically about Technology" writes: "It is heard so frequently today it is taken virtually as a truism: the development of our moral systems has not been able to keep pace with technological and medical developments, leaving us prey to a host of dangers"(5). Medical students should be required to examine the ethics of using animals in lab experiments. Instead, students are simply asked to learn how the body functions and how to heal it. Engineers are not asked to theorize about the incredible orderliness of the universe and how that might reflect an intelligent creator. They are simply asked to work formulas and solve problems. If students were forced to pursue these questions of truth, the moral crisis we face in the technological world would be much less severe?

In order to change today's educational philosophy from politically correct to liberally shrewd, professors need to "organize in defense of their right to teach and research freely without fear of coercion for holding politically unorthodox viewpoints" (Pham 16). Some special interest groups have such an influence on college campuses that teachers have to be fearful for their jobs if they teach a view contrary to any one group's opinions. Presently, universities are requiring professors and teaching assistants to participate in sensitivity training and cultural awareness seminars and many other types of classes to force politically correct views on the faculty and staff. Professors are going to have to free themselves from this forced indoctrination by special interest groups.

The other step professors are going to have to take to get back to a liberal education is the "restoration of the student-professor relationship" (Pham 16). In most universities, professors spend two hours of a five-hour course with the students. The other three hours are handled by a teaching assistant. While I agree that a teaching assistant is helpful, that is all he or she should be: an assistant. Possibly for their own protection, professors have distanced themselves from students to the point that often they never learn the students' names. Because I come from a private school background with small class sizes, I know the value of having the teachers know me and my learning style so they can help me learn in the most effective way possible. If the teachers do not even know my name, they cannot hope to know how I learn.

While I confess I do not know the entire solution to the problems on America's campuses, I do know the steps I have discussed are a beginning. A return to the principles of liberal education

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will restore the desire to learn for the sake of learning. Today, too many students take classes for the credits to achieve a degree. Few actually have any desire to improve themselves other than financially in the job market. While securing a good job is a kind of motivation, it is often not enough. As a result, students find other interests to motivate them through college. Clubs and exclusive groups abound on college campuses as students try to find meaning and belonging to motivate them. The lack of motivation is a sign of the decline of our universities. This decline will continue unless there is a return to liberal education.

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A New Fee For An Old Freedom



Mike Schrader

Composition II

Two dollars is not much money these days. You can't see a movie for two dollars. You can't even get a decent meal for two dollars. But, ask most fishermen to pay two dollars to "wet their line," and they will probably tell you just how much value two dollars can have. This is exactly what has happened at Lake Red Rock in Marion County. Boaters arriving at any of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers launching ramps will be welcomed by a new sight: a collection box accompanying a sign that announces a two-dollar fee for the privilege of using the facility. I think this is a big mistake. This fee is unfair, and will only deter usage of the ramps.

According to a pamphlet issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at the Red Rock Visitor Center, in 1993, Congress provided authorization for the "expansion of its Recreation User Fee program." The pamphlet describes a new "user-pays" attitude that has developed, and reminds the reader of the need for federal deficit reduction ("User Fees" 2). Sherri Duey, assistant manager and supervisory park ranger at the Corps' Red Rock office, stated the decision on user fees came to Red Rock from officials of the corps of engineers at the Rock Island headquarters. Duey echoed the sentiments of the pamphlet, while adding that the program is very new (implemented April 1995). She said it remains to be seen how well it will work. As of now, all user fees go directly to the U.S. Treasury. This amount is totaled and deducted from the future funding provided the Corps by the federal government. Duey hopes these user fees will help "defend the Corps' programs" in the Red Rock area in the event of future budget cuts.

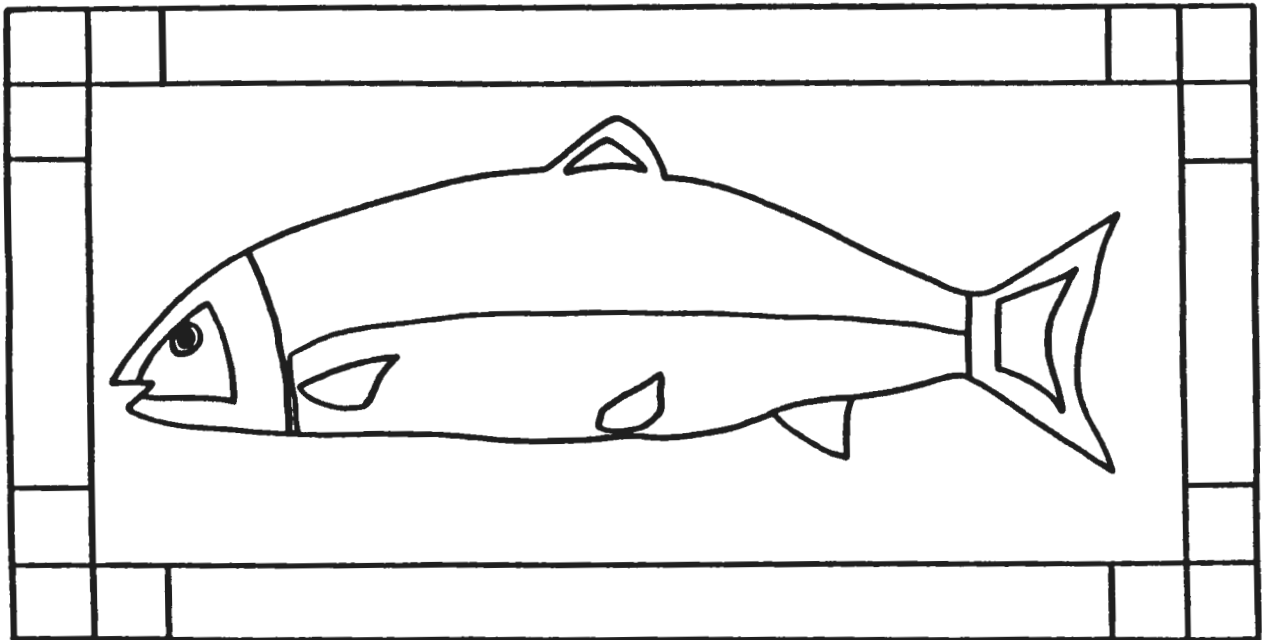
At first glance, user fees may seem like a no-lose situation. Why should someone who never visits the area be required to help pay for it? But what are we really paying to use? The Des Moines River, which feeds Lake Red Rock, belongs to the public, and the user fee is more a tax on the river's use than that of the launching ramps. Taxing a river's use is like taxing the wind, and it should be stopped.

In most of the Red Rock Lake area, the corps-operated ramps are the only access to the water. This is especially true below the dam. Free access to the main lake can be found at Marion County's Cordova Park facility and the state's South Elk Rock Ramp, both located near the mile-long bridge. And these two ramps do provide suitable access for those with larger and faster boats. But

A New Fee for an Old Freedom

a large number of boaters who rely on a smaller income and own smaller and less expensive craft had better use these ramps cautiously. They are both exposed to the full length of the lake, and except for windless days, can prove to be dangerous areas. On the contrary, the corps-controlled ramps at the marina, Whitebreast and Wallashuck campgrounds, and the South Overlook all enter sheltered bays, or at least have one nearby. Of course, the small craft owners can use these ramps — for two dollars a pop. And their two dollars will go toward reducing the multi-trillion dollar deficit.

What will these boaters opt to do? Tim Schantz, naturalist and park ranger stationed at Marion County's Cordova Park, states he expects the county's free access ramp to be "extremely busy this summer." He believes many boaters will simply not want to pay the fees and will naturally use the Cordova Park facility. Ed Liggett, an employee at the Trading Post Bait Shop, has encountered many angry fishermen who tell him they won't pay the user fees. Many retired anglers fish frequently because it is an inexpensive hobby. Ed says some of these people simply don't have the extra money to spend.



Tim Schantz and Ed Liggett are not merely speculating on the public's response to ramp fees. User fees have been tried before on the state level. Remember the state park user permits? Visitors to the parks were required to pay to gain access. People refused and just quit coming. Who wants to pay for something that is already theirs? Within a year, the user fees were abandoned.

Mike Schrader

Consider the thoughts of the hundreds of people who were forced to leave their homes when Lake Red Rock was first conceived. Several entire towns were abandoned. What once were Percy, Dunreath, Red Rock, and Cordova are all just memories to the people who once lived there. These residents were all reimbursed for their properties, but how can they ever be properly paid for their homes, their farms, or even the way of life they once enjoyed? Or consider the area farmers who have been flooded out many times more than the corps had estimated. Many of these farms were never flooded before the completion of the Red Rock Dam. These same people now must pay to gain access to what was created at their expense. These people have been betrayed. On a smaller scale, but with much the same emotion, many fishermen feel betrayed. I know I do.

I am sadly going to miss many of my favorite fishing holes because I can't bring myself to pay this fee. Fishing is one of the few simple and carefree pleasures that allows a person to escape the pressures and regulations of every day life. There is something fundamentally wrong with being charged for it. For me, the two-dollar fee might just as well be \$200.

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Sanity Is One Dance Away, and Other Truths of Domestic Abuse



Kim Winchell

Composition II

A collective experience of invisible women I know you see

"There's a drunken pilot buzzing a blood-red moon," is the first line of a poem in the journal I pull into light, one of two in a hidden attic box. The poem isn't mine, but I could have written it, with just a change or two. I understand the truth of another woman's sorrow.

I read through the pages, remembering the women who fill this book. I see their faces and remember the stories we shared in sadness, laughter and shame. I remember bonds of fragile strength and I remember angry words. I remember understanding and forgiving grace. And grace is what the bruised, broken women of my counseling group needed as we spent four years learning how to pick up the pieces of our sanity and start over again.

For several members of our group, regaining sanity meant spending time in a psych ward during those difficult years, one because of suicidal thoughts, one because of a suicide attempt. Some of us moved forward; some went backwards. Some found a new abusive partner; some lived the same mistakes again and again.

Sometimes we fell like dominoes and it took all of us to pick us all up.

We were a diverse lot of abused women; we were white-collar wives and blue-collar girlfriends, some lived in big houses and some lived on welfare, proving that domestic violence does not single out one type of woman, one type of lifestyle. We knew we were victims and wrestled with shame, buried anger and addictions we'd learned.

We were shell-shocked women breaking through battle lines of abusive relationships, the wounded taking back control our mothers had given away. We believed in mankind (an oxymoron

most appropriate) and had hope that someday the end of generational domestic abuse would follow our first baby steps.

And baby steps they were as we struggled to understand how generational abuse had warped us and turned us into women like our mothers. We embraced the lost little girls inside us and learned to comfort them when they cried. We swore we wouldn't be hit anymore, wouldn't give our sanity away again, wouldn't be destroyed. We struggled so our children wouldn't become victims of domestic abuse and prayed it wasn't too late.

"I'm taking care of Mama, I'm the child upon the stair," is the beginning of another poem in the journal, my first attempt to deal with my anger at my mom. Those middle years of individual counseling on childhood abuse fills the journal pages in smallest of script, sometimes two sentences a line. As a girl, I learned first hand about domestic abuse and was now determined to survive it whole as a woman.

Domestic abuse has long been ignored by society and male dominance has been encouraged by the Judeo-Christian Bible and its teachings of female submission and oppression. Writer Terry Davidson in her article, "Wifebeating: A Recurring Phenomenon Throughout History" (Roy 197), tells of the abuse men have had the power to dispense. The Emperor Constantine ordered that his wife Fausta be scalded to death and an amendment to a section of British common law legalized beating wives if the rod, stick or strap was no thicker than a husband's thumb, hence the "rule-of-thumb" expression. A disciplinary practice in Scotland allowed a wife to be punished with a brank, and "iron bridle with a padlock and spike to enter the mouth" (Roy 197). And only 20 years ago doctors were encouraged to count the number of stitches before claiming abuse. Even the heroic denial of women shamed into silence has given men the freedom to dominate and abuse.

Male dominance has been a subject of interest since Plato, but only in the last century have psychologists, sociologists and other experts studied its dark side and the effects of domestic abuse on the social family. Lenore E. Walker, a clinical psychologist, was one of the first to study domestic abuse in 1975. After researching evidence from more than 400 women, she estimated that 50 percent of all women are or will be abused at some point in their lives. Perhaps it was these shocking statistics that prompted her to write the book, *The Battered Woman*, in 1976. Her work was eventually published in 1979. The book discusses the characteristics of abusive men and abused women. She addresses the myths that have surrounded domestic abuse and attributes learned helplessness as an important factor that keeps women in abusive relationships.

Sanity is Once Dance Away . . .

I can imagine what impact this book must have had on those few women daring enough to read about themselves. The thought is bittersweet, for one of those ghosts could have been my mother; one used to be me. But one sure thing we ghosts-made-into-flesh learned is that we can survive wounds; we can survive rape. But once we believed our abusers owned our minds, we were lost.

Lost is the learned helplessness that we grew up with, the attitude of depression we inherited from our mothers. It is the devaluation of our worth, the manipulation of our self-esteem, and the threats against our safety that have trained us to accept abuse like Pavlov's dogs.

There have been many books written since Walker attempted to explain the complicated issues that keep abused women prisoners, but still the question is asked, why do women stay in abusive relationships? Another book, *Healing Your Life: Recovery from Domestic Abuse*, by Candace Henneken, also addresses the issues of learned helplessness, shame and low self-esteem as crucial factors that make women susceptible to choosing and staying with abusive partners.

I believe these are all intensified when generational abuse has been the norm in a primary relationship. Chaos may be frightening, but it's also comforting when it's all you've ever known. This truth makes it easier to understand why women pick controlling men to love. Control is a top priority of dominating men and the loss of it causes explosive reactions to situations. Control has many faces, including isolation, threats of death, economic deprivation, sexual, mental and physical perversion and often drug dependency all working together to create a prison around women.

What makes men abusive? Often these abusive men grew up watching their fathers abuse their mothers, or perhaps, as in my father's case, watched their mothers abuse their fathers, although the number of female abusers are estimated to be about 10 percent. The abusive man usually has low self-esteem, low feelings of worth and often has low opinions of women and old-fashioned ideas of ownership and equality.

These men are charming, playful, exciting — and sometimes deadly, as studies prove. A 1979 study of homicides in Kansas City and Detroit indicated "in 80 percent of all homicides . . . the police had intervened from one to five times previously, "suggesting that most murders involved persons involved in domestic violence. "Crimes of passion" are not usually spontaneous, but the result of a gradual escalation of violence (Walker 27). In the 16 years since the 1979 survey, statistics do not prove it is different today.

Kim Winchell

My own experiences with police intervention during my marriage, which ended three years ago, numbered almost 10. I had my nose broken, was slammed against walls and held by my throat, with my feet inches from the floor. I was held prisoner in my bedroom for hours, spit on, had heavy objects thrown at me and many pieces of furniture broken around me. I spent time in a psych ward because of the mental abuse and, at my lowest point, tried to commit suicide.

The final words in the first journal highlight the determination our group had as we howled at the moon, then ran with the wolves.

We've been kept inside where wolves never run, learned our place by the fire. We've signed in blood, we've given abusive men control — all in exchange for protection and offspring.

We are daughters, mothers, lovers, and whores.
We've grown up wounded.
We've grown up strong.
We've hardened our hearts to avoid our mothers' mistakes.
We've lived in denial when we settled for chaos.
We've learned to be helpless, accepted no choices.
We've buried the anger and hidden the bruises.
We've survived without options.
We've lived under his rule, believed his opinion was our own.
We've lived when our spirits were crushed.
We've given up our sanity, become ghosts in the safe mental wards.
We've survived when all seemed lost. We've committed suicide.
But it all stops here.
We won't pass the legacy to daughter or son.

Saving our children from the horrors of generational abuse is our responsibility, one that became all too real almost four years ago when I watched my three-year-old son attack his twin sister and attempt to choke her. I filed for divorce shortly after and within three months of living in peace, his behavior changed completely.

Yes, mankind is still far short of civilized and for millions of children and their mothers, safe shelter is a luxury as America's battered and mentally abused wives, girlfriends, daughters and sons well know.

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Today the cycles of abuse seem clearly understood: its causes, predictability and patterns properly defined on a chart. Abuse now needs to be aggressively addressed by the professional treating the woman s/he knows or suspects is abused. Getting out of a dangerous situation must be stressed.

Once the woman seeking help understands the learned helplessness cycle that keeps her trapped, the importance of developing a plan to get away from an abusive man is top priority. We must remember that many abused women are in denial, and might bounce back and forth between truth and falsehood.

I believe all women must call the police if possible when physical danger is an immediate threat. Having a plan of escape is also a priority when getting away becomes the only option for survival. Abused women must go to shelters or motels for protection when friends' homes are not available.

A powerful book, *Living With the Enemy*, by Donna Ferrato, is filled with graphic black-and-white photos of abused women and tells of the consequences when women must kill or be killed. Several of these women are in a Missouri prison for killing their abusive partners and received sentences of 50 years without parole. What does this say about our justice system and the unfair way women are treated when the average American murderer serves six years before being paroled?

Leaving the abusive man we still love and depend upon may be one of the hardest things we'll do, but choices are liberating and choosing to escape is the only way to stop the cycle of generational abuse. Our children deserve it.

(Note: This selection continues on the next page.)

My second journal is filled with this knowledge and ends with a poem that expresses most abused women's goals:

*I'm strong, I'm proud, I'm a woman of worth,
I'm kindness, I'm grace, I'm a waltz on the edge.
I'm older than time, I'm morning's first kiss,
I'm a crone, a maiden, and elusive woodland nymph.
I'm fragile, I'm weak, a ghost barely opaque,
I'm a changeling, I'm constant, a broken angel
set free.
I'm tenacious, I'm strength, I'm alone in my skin,
I'm steel, I'm sharp, I'm ice as it melts under your sun.
I'm lonely, I'm free, and I turn from you,
I'm fearless, I'm pride, I'm searching
for me.
I'm peace, I am fear, I'm a rosebud unfurled,
I'm a phoenix in free-fall
through seductions that lie.*



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'Am I My Brother's Keeper?'

A Discussion of Welfare Reform



JoLynn Thieme

Composition II

I have given a lot of thought to this question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" In the Bible, (Second Thessalonians) God says, "If a man *will not* work, he shall not eat [emphasis added]." On the other hand, God has blessed many of us with so much that I have a hard time justifying turning our backs on the less fortunate. As I contemplate the many aspects of this issue, I have decided my answer to the welfare question can be summarized in the following statement: "I am my brother's helper — not my brother's keeper."

There is a saying that if we give a man a fish, we feed him for a day; if we teach him how to fish, we feed him for life. I feel it is my duty as a human being to help those in need get back on their feet and regain their independence, dignity and self-respect — not simply give them handouts. I feel it is a gross disservice to those in need when we arrange our assistance in such a fashion that people have no choice but to be dependent on it.

Welfare reform has become such a sensitive issue in our nation. On one side, people feel more money needs to be given to those on public assistance, even if the government realistically does not have the financial resources to do so. On the other side are people who feel welfare needs to become more restrictive to curb system abuse and provide states with more control over money distribution even if it means some truly needy people suffer as a result.

When I first started researching the welfare system, I was outraged at all the abuse, outraged at those who were soaking the system and living comfortably on taxpayers' money. I was angry with the people on welfare who seemed to exert little or no effort to get off public assistance. I found myself blaming them for the state that welfare is in today. The more I studied and thought about what welfare is really about, the more I began to realize that, although there are instances of inexcusable abuse by recipients, the welfare system itself, with all its inefficiencies and detrimental regulations, is just as much to blame for the welfare crisis as the recipients themselves.

The problem is that whenever there is an overhaul as big as the one being proposed for the welfare system, there is going to be suffering. I truly believe Congress is trying to rectify the problems that have plagued this system and sent it into a downward spiral. The problem is no one is willing to accept the consequences that come from change. There is no way the welfare system, as it stands now, can continue supporting the millions of recipients indefinitely. There has to be a big change in the overall system. In order for there to be assistance for needy people of future generations, the change needs to happen now.

The first change that needs to be made is in the inner-workings of the system. When someone is determined to clean up his neighborhood, he needs to start with his own backyard. The government's backyard is filled with errors and inconsistencies that continue to abound in the welfare system. "The General Accounting Office (GAO) reported estimates that two billion dollars a year in stamps are being issued to ineligible recipients. In the 1988-93 period, a total of 7.4 billion dollars in food stamps benefits went to ineligible households, the GAO said, a result mostly of unintentional mistakes by the applicants or errors by state officials processing claims" (*Des Moines Register* 3A). In a regular business, if there was this kind of error rate with this much money being misappropriated, there would be some serious investigation. True, two billion or seven billion dollars may be just a drop in the bucket when it comes to the overall expense of welfare, but a penny saved is a penny earned. That is billions of dollars that could be given to the truly needy.

Another area the government really needs to crack down on is the administration part of the welfare system. According to an estimate given at a 1990 Conservative Leadership Conference, "only 30 percent of the money spent on welfare gets to the people it is intended to help" (Kronenwetter 124). Part of this gross shortfall in distribution is due to the complexity of the current system. The welfare programs are run by too many agencies with little or no coordination between them. If reformers are looking for a place to start, the system itself must be the very first project.

Another big problem with the welfare system is that it is set up so the recipients are almost completely dependent on the system. There are several reasons for this. The first deals with jobs. Right now, the welfare system does not require recipients to work in exchange for their checks. In fact, it is more beneficial to those on public assistance not to work. "Fewer than 1 percent of those on the dole work in exchange for their welfare check" (*U.S. News & World Report* 30). The Republicans' "Contract With America" hopes to have half of the adults on AFDC working 35 hours a week in exchange for their benefits by the year 2003 (*U.S. News & World Report* 31). In theory, this sounds like a wonderful plan. If it is going to be effective, though, there are some changes that need to be made.

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In talking with women who are currently on public assistance, one of the biggest barriers against them reentering the workforce is in the area of childcare. The amount of welfare they receive is not enough to pay for any childcare. There is nowhere for these mothers to take their children while they go to work. Some women explain that just receiving childcare support is not enough. They have found themselves on long waiting lists for daycare centers that will accept children on welfare. If the welfare system expects mothers to go back to work, it must not only provide funds to care for the children. The system also needs to provide adequate facilities to which mothers can take their children.

Another concern among welfare mothers with regard to going back to work is that their benefits are reduced by the amount they make in their job, so they are never able to get ahead. There is no incentive for the mother to go out and work. Actually, she ends up having to pay to go to work. If there is going to be a time limit placed on welfare benefits, those on welfare who have found employment should be allowed to save the money they earn instead of having their benefits decreased. This is the only way a single mother is going to be able to save up enough to break free from this prison of public assistance.

There is yet another barrier standing in the way of those welfare recipients trying to find a job. "One third of those who live on public assistance cannot read a street map or fill out a Social Security card application" (*U.S. News & World Report* 30). Education plays a big role in whether or not welfare recipients will be able to find jobs with adequate pay. "Two-thirds of the AFDC recipients, who have been on the dole for more than two years, have not graduated from high school and the average adult on welfare has eighth-grade reading and math skills" (*U.S. News & World Report* 31).

It is true that the welfare system needs to incorporate better education and training opportunities for those it is supporting. Yet in this area also, it is a two-way street. "Only 11 percent of the 4.6 million parents on AFDC participate monthly in any of the education, training or job search programs" (*U.S. News & World Report* 30). "Thirty-one percent of people who have been on AFDC for two years or more said they could not attend a school or training program because they, a child or a family member, had a health or emotional problem" (*U.S. News & World Report* 33). I don't understand why they can't continue their education at home. Many people take correspondence courses from accredited colleges and rarely have to leave their homes. I don't think that having to stay at home, whether for oneself or one's children, is any excuse just to do nothing.

An analysis in 1991, by Child Trends Inc., a national watchdog group with a focus on children's issues, found that "the TV is on seven hours or more every day in 55 percent of

JoLynn Thieme

all AFDC households" (*U.S. News & World Report* 33). That much time sitting in front of the television is not healthy for anyone. If individuals in these homes have enough time to watch seven hours of television per day, then they have enough time to continue their education or do community service. They could use the television in a distance learning program.

Some men and women on welfare claim they are unable to work due to their inability to find employment. Many blame the government for not creating enough jobs for those trying to get off welfare. This assertion is not entirely accurate. Project Match has been working to help women on welfare find jobs, but project officials agree the problem "is not getting them the job, but keeping them in the labor force" (*U.S. News & World Report* 33). They have found that over a three-year period, "70 percent either quit or are fired within a year, and more than half lose their jobs within six months" (*U.S. News & World Report* 33). Some of these job losses may be due to lack of experience and skills, but caseworkers explain that many women have trouble staying in the workforce because of their casual attitudes toward punctuality, dress, and coworkers" (*U.S. News & World Report* 33).

It is true that we as a nation have a responsibility to assist needy citizens with their education and help them acquire the skills they will need to get off welfare, but it is also the responsibility of welfare recipients to do as much as they possibly can to aid this process. Although many women on welfare do work outside of the home to try and get off public assistance, "some women on welfare candidly allow that they could work more if they wanted to" (*U.S. News & World Report* 39). In order for the welfare system to work, both sides have to put forth the effort.

Most of the burden has been placed on the government to singlehandedly clean up the welfare crisis. But who are we supposed to blame when the government sets up programs to help those on welfare find jobs and hardly anyone shows up? According to an official with the JOBS program, if program officials were to schedule 80 people for a job orientation meeting, typically only 25 would show up. Then they would reschedule the meeting for the other 55, but only 10 to 15 would show up (*U.S. News & World Report* 39).

Another concern I have, and one that Congress is trying to address in their reform proposal, is the issue of illegitimacy. For too long, the problem of illegitimacy has been swept under the rug. It seems we were almost hoping that if we didn't acknowledge it, the problem would go away. Instead, it has reared its ugly head in the arena of welfare. For too long we have kept silent and "as long as political America remains uncomfortable mentioning illegitimacy, we will continue to condone it. As long as we condone it, we will subsidize it. By now, it's our fault" (Jordan 11).

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As much as the problem of illegitimacy needs to be dealt with, I don't feel denying funds is the answer. The root of the problem is much deeper. I think it goes back to education. We need to concentrate on changing the attitudes among young Americans. "The next generation of parents must be disabused of the notion that birth without matrimony is an acceptable 'lifestyle' choice. Preachers and teachers have to be courageous enough to say it is morally wrong to bring a child into the world without benefit of both parents. Not only does a child suffer developmentally in a one-parent household, it also suffers economically" (Jordan 12). I don't believe punishing young mothers after the fact is going to solve anything. The only way to really move toward managing this problem is through education.

One reform proposal that has stirred up a lot of heated debate is whether or not women should receive added benefits for any additional children they have while on welfare. Critics of the proposal to cut spending say that cutting benefits "impoverishes children to punish mothers" (*Des Moines Register* 10A). This proposed cut in assistance is not a punishment to mothers. Instead, it is an attempt to keep mothers from punishing newborns by bringing them into a world where they will not be able to be cared for properly. People should not be allowed to have children they cannot afford. It is simply not fair to these children. The government is having enough trouble getting those in the welfare system off of it. They should not be expected to support the additional children of mothers on welfare.

Many fear that if the government cuts funds for additional children, many mothers who find themselves pregnant will resort to abortion. Unfortunately, this may be the case. Therefore, I propose the government establish a mandatory birth control rule for women on welfare that shall remain effective for the time they are on public assistance. Some say it is not our right to dictate how many children others can have. But let us not forget about the quality of life a child on welfare is going to have. Is it fair to children to bring them into the world if parents are not even sure how their children will be fed? Someone has to watch out for the well being of the children. If it is not the parents, then someone else has to step in.

My fear is that if we continue to allow mothers on welfare to keep having babies, we are going to end up with millions of children growing up dependent on welfare. "A child raised on welfare is three times more likely than other children to receive aid as an adult" (Wildavsky and Levin 49). I don't blame the children for this. Welfare dependence is the only life they've known. I blame the parents who decide, by their own selfishness, to bring children into a world where they will most likely have little or no future. In my eyes it is not the welfare system that is destroying these welfare children, it is the selfishness of their parents.

Many people are very critical of the Republican's proposal for welfare reform. Marian Wright Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund, said, "When the American people voted for change, and voted for less government, I don't believe they voted to hurt millions of children, or to make them hungrier or homeless, or to take them away from their families" (qtd. in Jordan 8). I am sure Edelman is correct in her observation, but starving children is not what Republicans in Congress are attempting to do. What they are trying to do is rework a system so that it will be more efficient for everyone. The way it is set up now, people are only sinking deeper and deeper into poverty. Something has to be done; we no longer have a choice.

The goal of welfare reform is not to further impoverish those on welfare, as many critics like to think; instead, the goal is to simplify welfare programs, restrict the number of people they serve, and reduce the size of the bureaucracy that administers them. In this way, money intended for those requiring public assistance will be more efficiently distributed (Kronenwetter 144).

It is truly a tragedy there are so many people requiring assistance to sustain them. But it is a greater tragedy when people refuse to accept responsibility and the consequences of their actions and choices. It is true there are many people who have ended up on welfare through no fault of their own. A personal catastrophe has sentenced them to reliance on the system. Yet there are others who have made unwise decisions and, unfortunately, are having to pay for those decisions. I think in particular of Olivia Nash [name changed], from the Human Services class, who spoke about welfare to our class earlier this semester. She admitted she fell into alcoholism, lost her business and faced financial ruin (Nash). I have a hard time being sympathetic for her because in life there are always consequences that follow our actions. I believe the only way for some people to learn their lesson is to make the consequences unpleasant enough they will think twice the next time they are faced with making a decision that could have an adverse impact on their lives.

I believe welfare is a very necessary part of our society. There will always be those less fortunate, those in need of assistance for whatever reason. Over the years, the picture of what welfare is supposed to accomplish has been blurred. People are confused as to the system's real function. There is a definite need for big reform. We need to set some standards so the welfare system will be able to carry out what it was set up to do. It is very important that the government and society make it clear that, although financial assistance through welfare is available if needed, it is designed to be a safety net — not a social contract for indefinite financial support.

'Am I My Brother's Keeper?'. . .

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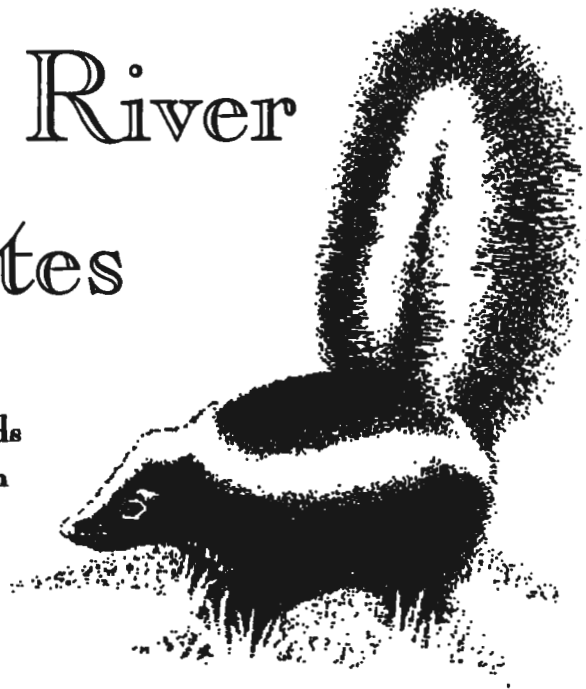
Note: Another reference that influenced my thinking for this paper included Theresa Funicello's work titled *Tyranny of Kindness*, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993.

"For me, writing is an exercise in organized thinking. "

Matthew McMillan **Composition II** **Accounting/Economics**

Skunk River Notes

"Skippy" Skunk reminds you that water quality in Iowa is a serious issue. All of Iowa's rivers are threatened by run-off from agricultural land. The Skunk River is no exception.



The Skunk River Basin extends from near the center of the state to the Mississippi River in southeastern Iowa. The basin is long and narrow with an overall length of 180 miles, a maximum width of almost 40 miles, and an average width of 24 miles. The total drainage area of the basin is 4,355 miles, or 7.7 percent of the total land area of the state that includes parts of 20 counties.

The Skunk River begins in Hamilton County and flows in a generally southeast direction into the Mississippi River about 10 miles downstream from Burlington, Iowa. The largest tributary stream is the North Skunk River with a drainage of 869 square miles. It joins the Skunk River in Keokuk County.

The flood plain of the Skunk River in Polk, Jasper, Marion, and parts of Mahaska and Story Counties is frequently flooded except where levee protection has been provided. Extensive drainage has converted much of the heavy soil of the river bogs to fertile farmland. Human alteration of the river basin area has also led to a reduction of fish and wildlife habitats.

Information courtesy of the Ames Water Dept. from a report published by the Iowa Dept. of Environmental Quality.

Release Form



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Marshall County, Summer 1995

Wind and water and time shaped this old tree root into the curious visage who seems to growl over the river, evoking the spirit of a beast primordial, earth's most ancient dragon — the dinosaur.

