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Skunk River Review

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Fall 2013

Skunk River Review, Fall 2013 and Spring 2014

David Bowles

Nora Mandil

Julia Peterson

Tammy Harris

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Authors

David Bowles, Nora Mandil, Julia Peterson, Tammy Harris, Kristine Williams, Sarah Weldon, Amanda Betz, Jason Savioli, John Kirchner, Paige Boston, Michael Latessa, and Nick Stuetelberg

Des Moines Area Community College

Skunk River Review



Essays from Fall 2013 and Spring 2014

Composition and Literature Classes



Table of Contents

Composition 1

David Bowles, "The Quiet Punishment"	1-5
Nora Mandil, "Understanding is Our Greatest Weapon Against Fear-Terrorism"	6-10
Julia Peterson, "Coming to America"	11-17
Tammy Harris, "Growing Up Just in Time"	18-21

Composition 11

Kristine Williams, "The Deeds of the Wicked"	22-26
Sarah Weldon, "Yellow Brick Road"	27-32
Amanda Betz, "I'm Leaving on a Jet Plane...Maybe"	33-43
Jason Savioli, "Eating Goats"	44-48

Literature

John Kirchner, "The Low Man in Capitalism "fetching diamonds" from a "dark jungle": A Marxist Interpretation of <i>Death of a Salesman</i> "	49-55
Paige Boston, "Society and Psyche: An Examination of Marriage and Psychological Motivation in British Literature"	56-62
Michael Latessa, "Of Man and Beast: The Organic Genius of Walt Whitman"	63-68
Nicholas Stuetelberg, "I Am The Sky"	69-72

Awards	73
-------------------------	-----------

Credits	74
--------------------------	-----------



David Bowles

I like to write philosophy and fiction. I have three brothers. I am from Missouri, and I am an uncle to a niece and two nephews.

The Quiet Punishment

It's amazing how a person's perception of his or her parents can change when he or she is being punished. I don't know how many times I sat on the other end of my father's wrath as he yelled through clenched teeth, turning red to the roots of his curly brown hair and looking far more monstrous to my childish eyes than he actually was. However, once when I was nine, he didn't yell. He said no more than six sentences in a calm, serious, voice, and he needn't have said any more than he did, any louder than he did, to teach me one of the most important lessons that I've ever learned.

I ran through the bathroom door and sank to the yellow linoleum, leaning back into the cold tan wall. It felt like there was a lead weight in my gut. I couldn't stop thinking about the blood soaking into my brother Daren's short brown hair.

On our way to school, we'd stopped in a narrow alley way between two decaying, brown-brick buildings. Our breath puffed visibly in the cold winter air as we spat obscenities at each other. The argument originally had some reason, but it was buried beneath insults and accusations. It was only a matter of time before things got physical.

My shove sent Daren stumbling, his back impacting solidly with an oak that grew from the foundation of the building behind him. He launched himself back at me, and forgetting about the hard text books in the bottom of my book bag, I swung it without thinking. It struck with a sickening thud, the reverberation of which I felt through the bumpy black strap of the red and black bag. The impact sent Daren to the ground, his hands bleeding on the sharp, dusty, white, gravel. Dirt and dust billowed around him for a moment then settled. Then I saw the blood soaking into his hair--spreading out in a circular pattern.

I closed my eyes as I sat on the bathroom floor, but I couldn't close out the memories of the blood that soaked Daren's hair or the thud that I'd felt when the backpack made contact. The exchange was so quick. That's what I kept thinking. How could something so serious happen in so little time.

We'd hurried to a neighbor's house and called our mother at work; she had since taken Daren to get medical attention. I'd felt too sick to go with them--sick at what I had done--and worried about what my father would do when he got home from work.

I feared the usual punishments--the belt, grounding, ridiculously long hours of yard work for the neighbors, and yelling. Suddenly the barricade of the bathroom door felt fragile. As I imagined the possible punishments, my idea of my father warped into a monstrous parody that tore down the hall like a raging bull, his large shoulders suddenly too broad for the thin space, splintering the wall as he approached. I could picture him on the other side of the door, his blue eyes blazing over his long hawk-like nose. I was no longer sure what I feared more, the idea of what I'd done to my brother, or my father's presence on the other side of the door. I knew that at any moment, his voice would slam into the door, amplified beyond reason,

shaking the door with its power. However, when his grave voice drifted hollowly through the door, it was calm, quiet, and deadly serious.

“Your brother came very close to needing stitches today. He still might have a concussion.”

Stitches, concussions--I felt like I'd been punched in the gut, and suddenly my father's wrath was wiped from my mind. These are words that are vilified by children, like broken bones and electrocution. They are what happen when things get serious. The fact that Daren *didn't* need stitches and *might not* have a concussion didn't dissuade my feelings of guilt. My gut clenched with nausea—stitches and concussions sent people to the hospital.

Hospital was a word that had an especially terrible place in my mind. I never saw my grandfather after his son had attacked and killed him, but in my mind a terrifying image had developed from fragments of whispered conversations that I'd heard throughout the years—stabbed fifteen times, face swollen beyond recognition, strapped to life support.

As the terrifying image flashed across my mind, I was suddenly horrified by what I could have done to my brother—hit in the head with a backpack, head swollen beyond recognition. I couldn't catch the tears that escaped my eyes. I tried valiantly, but the image of Daren's head, grotesquely swollen, came too quick and vivid. My father's words had the desired effect.

“But it could've been worse,” he continued mercilessly, “You hit Daren in the temple. Getting hit there hard enough can be deadly. Now I want you to imagine your brother dead because that's what you could have done. I want you to see him in your mind and imagine what your life would be like without him.”

I suddenly thought of Daren lying in a coffin: brown hair caked black with blood, brown eyes frozen round with shock, face swollen and distorted, my family gathered around the shadowy confines of the church, wailing in agony. The sick feeling that had plagued my gut finally got its wish, and I flung myself to the toilet just in time.

When I left the bathroom, I expected to find my father waiting with belt in hand, its silver bull-head buckle gleaming. Instead, I found him sitting on the pea green Lazy Boy recliner, in the brown panel-walled living room, looking haggard in his blue mechanic work clothes. When he stood, I flinched, sure that he would take off his belt. He stood there for a moment, scrutinizing the tear stains on my face, then nodded, and left the room. For the rest of the night, I remained as inconspicuous as possible--waiting for the gavel of judgment to fall. Finally, I could take no more suspense. I broke under the pressure and asked about my punishment. I'll never forget his reply.

"I've seen enough of my children get hurt for one day, and I think that you have too."

He was right. I didn't want to see any more of my family's blood. I felt like Scrooge after the spirits' visits. In my mind, I'd seen what the ultimate outcome of violence could be, and I never wanted to see it again.

I don't think that physical punishment would have been nearly as effective as the talk through the bathroom door. The sting of a belt would have just taken my mind off my personal anguish over what I'd done and made me worry more about what he was doing. I don't know if he really was just tired of seeing his children get hurt for the day and didn't have the heart to physically punish me, or if he knew that the sight of Daren's blood was like a knife in my gut and had decided to twist the blade a little. I'm guessing that it was a little bit of both.

In the years that followed this incident, I have hit very few people. I've often wanted to, but any time that I feel like I might lose control, I look back on the images evoked in my mind by my father's words as they filtered through the bathroom door, and I remember that all that it takes is a moment in time to do something that I might regret.



Nora Mandil

Mohsina (Nora) Mandil is on the pre-med track majoring in psychology. She is transferring this fall to the University of Iowa via the two-plus-two program. While at DMACC, she acted in the Huff Theater productions and directed one. Under the direction of Dr. Laurie Linhart, Nora presented her research on executive clemency to the Iowa Sociological Association and the Minnesota Academy of Science. Her poem submission won third place in the DMACC literary competition and was published in *Expressions*. Nora has volunteered at Downtown Des Moines' Young Women's Resource Center and Methodist Medical Center's ER during school. In six to nine years she hopes to be working at a hospital in the emergency room or neonatal/preemie unit.

Understanding is Our Greatest Weapon Against Fear – and Terrorism

We are not passive observers in this world. We affect everything around us just as strongly as it affects us. It is human to react. We may feel overjoyed, horrified, elated, enraged, but society interacts through this feedback cycle. The world is a beautiful and awful place, and I, for one, want to know everything about it. How can we be world citizens if we are not informed of the good and the bad?

If my English teacher hadn't assigned this paper in light of the protest about Jahar Tsarnaev making the cover of the *Rolling Stone*, I wouldn't have thought it was at all controversial. The First Amendment comes to the defense of this article to begin with, but it's more than that. People have a natural curiosity concerning the world around them, including, and especially, their fellow human beings. Scientists have dedicated multiple branches of psychology to simply understanding not only how but *why*. With the knowledge and understanding we gain from formal and informal case studies, we gain the most powerful weapon possible: knowledge. With knowledge comes the first steps of prevention.

Lastly, before I launch into my full argument, I'd like to introduce some food for thought. Is "Jahar's World" by Janet Reitman one-sided? Somewhat. No one article or piece of research can hope to answer every question or explore every angle. This is exactly why more articles like this need to be written.

I've heard the argument that the prestigious spot on the cover of *Rolling Stone* should have gone to someone important who earned the title. This is the milestone that makes people's careers, after all. It's the moment Dr. Hook and the Medicine Show yearned for in their song "Cover of the *Rolling Stone*"! Here is where we as a nation need to question our priorities. What is more important? A distinguished musical group, or one of the men behind a tragic massacre? The editors even explain themselves in advance as a preface to Reitman's article:

Our hearts go out to the victims of the Boston Marathon bombing, and our thoughts are always with them and their families. The cover story we are publishing this week falls within the traditions of journalism and *Rolling Stone's* long-standing commitment to serious and thoughtful coverage of the most important political and cultural issues of our day. The fact that Dzhokhar Tsarnaev is young, and in the same age group as many of our readers, makes it all the more important for us to examine the complexities of this issue and gain a more complete understanding of how a tragedy like this happens.

The media is in no way rewarding Jahar for his part in the Boston Bombing. He is not being celebrated or encouraged. An average sensible person will not think of Jahar Tsarnaev as a celebrity instead of a terrorist now simply because his face was plastered on a popular magazine. Sure, he doesn't deserve the publicity, but we are not living in an ideal world. People will know about what he did, whom he helped kill, and whose lives he helped ruin. Think about

this: would you rather that our nation try to cover up events like this? Think about how that's gone in the past. Historically, the public is enraged at secrets and scandal taking on a "just admit it" attitude. Area 51? The degree our communication is monitored after the 9/11 attacks? Watergate?

It's not the magazine cover that's spreading his message by sharing his story; it's the fact that he helped blow up the Boston Marathon. No, I'm sure *Rolling Stone* does not support terrorism. The act of terrorism would have been successful regardless of *Rolling Stone's* decision to publish Reitman's article because people lost their lives.

Newspapers and magazines have the right to report big stories almost any way they want to, and the Boston Bombing was a big deal. Stanley Hainsworth of *The Huffington Post* writes, "Being a creative in today's culture means that you can never truly please everyone. Compromises of your creativity are inevitable, and sometimes even with your conscience." The magazine chose to publish this article because of the reasons they explained in the preface: "to inform the public about a relevant person of the time, providing details and background so that he could be understood" (Hainsworth). *Rolling Stone* wants to help the public gain understanding. If that isn't the most pure and noble purpose of media, I don't know what is.

Not only does the magazine have a right to put him on the cover, but it wasn't a half bad idea. This stuff is *important*. It's a story I'm interested in reading: an "insightful, informative and a relevant piece of journalism, helping to lend background information on how a young, seemingly sweet and good-natured student could become a monster" (Hainsworth). Isn't that one of the biggest questions of this world? How do people become who they are? How did this happen then? Doesn't everybody want to understand?

Our greatest weapon is knowledge and understanding. The value of the *Rolling Stone* story is priceless. While it isn't a scientific study, it's something the public can more easily comprehend and process. How can we as a nation fight something we don't understand? A disease can't be cured without understanding the nature of the sickness, so we can develop a cure. In addition, a terrorist's greatest weapon is fear, and people will fear what they don't understand. If we keep stories like this under wraps, we actually help their tactics.

Jahar is not from some far-away terrorist cell, though. He's an American student who created his own hate, with the guidance of his misguided brother. He's not an incredible anomaly in this age group. What got him to where he ended up is not so different than how other teenagers get to the place where they bring a gun to school or sell drugs they know will eventually kill the people using them.

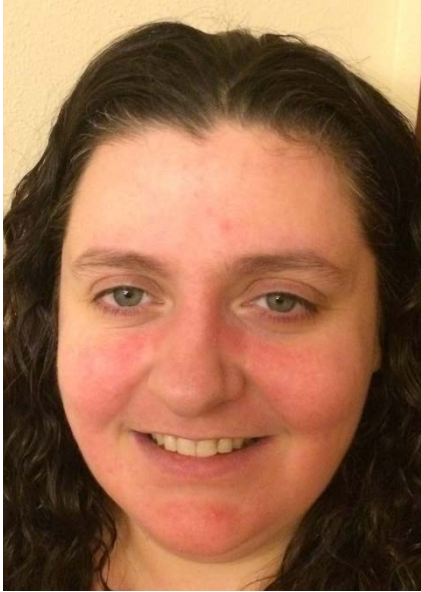
'There are kids we don't catch who just fall through the cracks, but this guy was seamless, like a billiard ball. No cracks at all' [Peter Payack says]. And yet a deeply fractured boy lay under that facade; a witness to all of his family's attempts at a better life as well as to their deep bitterness when those efforts failed and their dreams proved unattainable. As each small disappointment wore on his family, ultimately ripping them apart, it also furthered Jahar's own disintegration – a series of quiet yet powerful body punches. No one saw a thing. (Reitman 48)

This boy is my age. That's all I could think about when I was done with the article. This boy is 19 years old. Even kids who have grown up in America their whole lives can feel the way Reitman describes above. Smooth on the surface but crumbling inside. The ones with severe chronic depression. The ones who smile to everyone while contemplating methods of suicide.

The ones found dead in their bedrooms hanging by the rafters...and “no one saw a thing” (Reitman 48). Jahar is just so much more similar to other teenagers than I could have thought. Others are struggling, and if the public remains uninformed, we will not be able to detect and prevent these catastrophes in the future. This isn’t about Jahar killing people in the name of Islam or in the name of all those who died in the Middle East. This is about Jahar being a teenage boy who was driven past the breaking point and killed innocent people.

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Julia Peterson

Julia Peterson recently decided to complete her education 19 years after leaving high school. Having grown up in the United Kingdom, the American education system is completely new to her and an exciting challenge. She is currently working towards a BA in Political Science with a view to moving on to law school. Outside of school, family consumes her life, and she has a seven-year-old son named Sebastian. She enjoys reading in her free time and loves to learn.

Coming to America

I had waited for this day for nine long years, since November 4, 2004, when I landed in Atlanta, Georgia, and was ushered by security from customs through to the Department of Homeland Security. Hearing the federal officer say, “Ma’am, I will need you to step this way and surrender your passport” did not strike me with fear as one may assume, but it brought me excitement and maybe a little relief. My husband, Kent, was in the US Navy and had been transferred back from Italy, where we had met, to the West Coast of the United States. Without a green card, I would not be able to join him. Once my visa had been verified and I had been finger-printed, I was free to enter the country. My green card would arrive in the mail, and our new life together in America could begin.

I knew that it wouldn’t be long before I had to go through the process again. Because we were newlyweds, I had only been given a two-year visa. At the end of these two years, I needed to provide proof that I didn’t just marry to gain entry to the country. I had been

planning for this well in advance, as the date I had been given to submit this proof by was also the due date for our first child, October 3, 2006. I had collected letters, cards, and photographs proving our relationship, as well as official documents from our state-run foster-to-adopt class. Our son made his appearance almost a month early, so we could also include his birth certificate. I was very confident that the evidence I had would allow my green card to be renewed.

The day the letter arrived telling me that my petition for renewal had been denied is forever etched in my memory. At first, I was confused. I wondered, "How can this happen? I gave them everything I had?" As I read on through the letter, my confusion turned to fear and terror. I would have to leave the country by February 1, 2007 if I could not provide proof that we were living at the same address. Could something as simple as this really tear my family apart? Would I be separated from my new baby if I was deported? The hormones present in the first few weeks after childbirth did nothing but exacerbate my fears and eventually turn them into determination. We lived in base housing; everything from rental agreements to phone bills had to be in Kent's name which is why I had no proof I lived at the same location as he did. Intervention on our behalf by the base legal department finally convinced the Department of Homeland Security that we lived together, and my green card was renewed. We could live in peace for up to ten years without having to deal with this again.

Over the next few years we moved around, going from Washington to Guam, and eventually back to Kent's home state of Iowa when he was medically discharged from the military. We settled in a small town, and our son started school, leaving me at home all day.

With all the free time I had, I found myself paying more attention to the news channels, which were consumed with talk of the upcoming 2012 general election. Kent and I would get into heated debates as we had differing viewpoints, with most of these discussions ending with him pointing out that I could not vote anyway. We discussed applying for my citizenship but had put it off for several reasons, including the \$700 application fee. Suddenly, this was no longer a good enough excuse. I had lived in the United States for over seven years. I had raised my child here, and this was my home. I no longer felt connected to the life I once had in the United Kingdom, and I believed that if I was going to continue to make my home here, I should be an active member of society. I wanted so much to be a part of the process of electing a leader, but I could not vote. I wanted the same rights and responsibilities as my family.

I sent in my application for naturalization in April, 2012 and waited to hear back from them. I continued to wait, growing impatient. Did they not realize that I had a November 6th deadline? In July of that year, I had to go to the federal building in Des Moines to have fingerprints taken. I was in the building less than ten minutes and was told I would have to wait for another appointment, this time for my citizenship test and interview. This time around I heard from them fairly quickly. My test would be on October 25, 2012, at 8 a.m. I could not find it in myself to be as excited as I had expected to be. The date stared back at me from the page, and I knew then that there was no way I would be able to complete this process in time for the election. I brooded over this for several days, at one point thinking that it had all been a waste of time. It was my eight-year-old nephew, Hunter, who snapped me out of this funk when he asked me if I only got to be an American for that one day or if I would get to always be an American? His question made me realize

being able to vote was a benefit to becoming a citizen, but it wasn't a reason for becoming a citizen.

I had studied sporadically for the citizenship test, knowing roughly what I would need to know. During the drive to Des Moines, I played a cd of questions that would be asked and had a last minute cram session. I was the first person to arrive in the waiting area, but it soon filled up with people like me, hoping to change their futures. I was promptly called by the security guard and escorted to the office of my interviewer. At this point in time, I was regretting my decision to skip breakfast. My stomach was doing flips, and my heart rate seemed to rise to the same level it did when I had been in trouble at school. I felt completely intimidated by the situation and so nervous that I tripped and literally fell into the chair when I was told to sit down. I needn't have felt so scared. The federal agent introduced herself and put me at ease immediately, talking about how much she likes to visit the town I live in. She talked and asked me questions as if we were old friends reconnecting for the first time in years. Her questioning was so subtle that I was surprised when she suddenly said, "I am approving your request for citizenship. You will receive a date in the next few days for your ceremony." It was over, and it wasn't painful. Happiness suddenly seemed to slap me in the face, and I did not lose my smile for the rest of the day.

The date of my citizenship ceremony, November 30, 2012, soon arrived. Kent, Hunter, and my son, Sebastian, accompanied me. The boys were happy to get a day out of school. I asked Kent to drive us there, as I was feeling very nervous. We took the now familiar elevator up to the skywalk and proceeded to the Neal Smith Federal Building. This

time when I entered the waiting room it was already full. I recognized some of the same people I had seen when I came for my interview, but this time their families joined them also. The room was humming with excitement, nervous chatter, and children running around in their best clothes. There were many cultures and nationalities represented.

A booming male voice started calling names, one by one, in what appeared to be no particular order. My certificate of citizenship had already been signed and was waiting for me to collect once I had handed over my green card for the last time. I would have liked to have kept it as a souvenir but understood why I had to relinquish it. The room I was led into had a completely different atmosphere than the waiting room. It was very quiet and professional, and it reminded me, not in appearance but in energy, of a courtroom. There was a stage back-dropped by a very large projector screen. At the front of the stage was a podium displaying the seal of the FBI, and to the left of stage were two large flagpoles, displaying the Iowa and American flags. Four rows of chairs were lined up in front of the stage, each chair containing a large packet of information and a small hand-held American flag on a stick. There were areas on either side of the room where family and friends would be seated when the ceremony was about to begin.

Early on in the ceremony, I knew I would need to control myself in order to make it through without my emotions breaking me. I tried to think about more practical things like errands I needed to run or chores I needed to complete at home instead of taking in the weight of the occasion. I fiddled with my flag and looked through my information packet while videos of immigrants through the years were shown on the big screen. It was then that I found two note cards, one containing the Pledge of Allegiance and the other, the Oath

of Allegiance. They were completely different! I had not prepared for this at all, memorizing only the Pledge of Allegiance. I panicked for a couple of seconds before common sense kicked in, and I comprehended that the words were written on the paper in front of me; I would be fine. A few minutes later, President Obama came onto the big screen, congratulating us on the occasion. This calmed me as I always enjoyed listening to him talk. Even though I had somewhat calmed down, I could not look into the crowd for my family because I knew that seeing them would once again raise my emotion level.

The federal agent that was conducting the ceremony went back to the podium and explained that we would now be raising our right hand to take the Oath of Citizenship; this would be following by the playing of the national anthem. He also made a point of stating that he would be available afterwards if we would like to take pictures with him and the American flag. We all stood to take the oath. I had the already slightly dog-eared piece of paper containing the words I needed to say in my hand, but why did I have it in my right hand? I raised my hand to my chest and the paper flew away, landing under the seat of the lady behind me. She must have understood the pain in my eyes, as she put her hand on my shoulder and pointed to the big screen where the words were displayed for us all to see. At this point, the sheer ridiculousness of my worries took over, and I tried to stifle a laugh. I giggled my way through taking my Oath of Citizenship, not even hearing the words but thinking that I had let my array of emotions take over and not let me enjoy this experience. I had missed most of the ceremony by concentrating on how I could avoid my emotions rather than embrace them.

When the national anthem began to play, I no longer had any control and began to quietly cry. All I could feel now was pride and joy. It felt wonderful to see how happy everybody was, and when my son asked me why I was crying, I bent down, kissed his forehead, and said,

“They’re happy tears, kiddo.”

The day I took my Oath of Allegiance is very special to me. I may not have had my wish to vote in the election, but I knew that I was now going to be a part of the future of this country. I was and still am very proud to now be able to say, “I am an American citizen.”



Tammy Harris

Tammy Harris a happily married 44 year old woman with two grown sons. Now that they are grown, she has decided it is time to follow her dream of becoming a nurse. When she is not at school, she works full-time at Mainstream Living with adults that have special needs. She finds this to be very fulfilling. After graduating, her goal is to work in a neonatal unit with premature babies.

Growing Up Just in Time

In 1987, at 18 years of age, I became a wife for the very first time to a man named Dan. Then I became a parent by 21 and again at 24. However, it wasn't until the night of April 28, 2000, when I was 29, that I grew up just in time and became the mom my children deserved. Before that night, my life was filled with working forty hours in three days each week then drinking beer, smoking pot, and snorting crank with Dan for the remaining four days of the week. I didn't see a future, nor did I care to. I only lived for the moment, which in all reality wasn't living since the drugs and alcohol gave me a false reality of a happy life that did not prepare for the future.

On that night in April, it was 11:30 p.m., and Dan was already four hours late getting home from work. I had no clue where he was or what had happened to him. I could only feel the anger and frustration building up inside me since I was already late for work. I finally called the Jefferson Police Department to see if he had possibly been arrested. The answer I got was that two police officers would be down to my house to talk to me. The voice in my head began

shouting at me: “This isn’t good. This isn’t good.” When they arrived, the first thing they said was that Dan was in a car wreck, but they didn’t know how bad it was. All they knew was that I needed to get to the Boone County Hospital immediately.

As we drove out of town the boys began asking questions about what was going on. I could only say, “Daddy was in a car wreck and was headed to the hospital.” That’s when I saw the flashing lights of a police car in my mirror. Instantly, I thought, “Oh come on! I just want to get to the hospital.” When I pulled over, the officer that had been at my house looked at me and gently said, “Tammy, we need to go back into town.” I could feel the blood drain from my entire body, and I felt as if it was replaced with ice water. I began to tremble as I stared forward and said, “He’s dead, isn’t he?” He again repeated that we needed to go back into town. All I could do was squeeze the steering wheel, as if somehow that would stop my world from crashing. But the steering wheel was of no use, as he quietly said, “Yes. Now let’s go back into town.” My heart felt as if it had ripped from my chest. The voices in my head were replaced by the screaming and crying of the boys from the back seat. They had heard what the officer had said, and even worse, they understood what it meant.

A month later, I found out exactly what happened. Dan was drunk and high as he sped down Highway 30. Just past Grand Junction, he passed a car, but when he got back into his lane he got over too far and hit the loose gravel on the side of the road. His car went into the ditch where it began to flip, a total of 17 times, before landing on its wheels. Even though he was wearing his seatbelt, Dan was killed on impact. We had been stopped from driving to Boone on Highway 30 because we would have driven through the accident.

Suddenly, there I was at 29 years old, a widow and a single parent. Dan was gone forever, taking with him my so-called-happy world of laughing in smoke-filled rooms as the sounds of our quarters bounced off of our shot glasses. Those moments were replaced with tears of pain and sorrow and the realization that I hadn't yet grown up and wasn't prepared to be a mom, let alone a single one. We had no life insurance, car insurance, or health insurance. We had no money to pay for a funeral. But what I did have were two young boys, six and nine, who only had one parent to be responsible for them. The first thing I had to do was grow up and be my boys' mom.

Planning my husband's funeral was incredibly hard. The boys and I wrote letters to Dan and chose things we wanted to bury with him. The boys chose stuffed animals, and for me it was the shot glasses with our names on them. On the day of the funeral, I refused to have what I referred to as "funeral music" played. So I made a tape of songs that reminded me of him. When the funeral came to an end, the Catholic priest asked for a moment of silence and then played the one song that reminded me of Dan the most, John Lennon's "Imagine." Silence filled the room; when the song began so did the muffled tears. But not one tear fell down my face as I felt so completely dead inside. I was wracked with confusion and guilt for the effect our choices had made on the boys.

I immediately stopped all the drugs and alcohol, moved in with my parents, and took a month off from work. In that month, I got my finances in order and got to know my children like I had never known them before. We talked about where our life was at and where we wanted it to go and just plain got to know each other for the first time in a very long time. I was amazed to hear my boys genuinely laugh until tears rolled out of their eyes because they were finally

enjoying life. For me, this was better than any treatment program I could have gone into since I had to sit there day-to-day with the realization that I had not been a mom to these boys. I was merely a provider of food and shelter. Nothing more. Nothing less. The new sober grown up in me knew there was no way I could leave them with that.

I started by moving us back to Jefferson, going back to work, and working on becoming a family. I began by spending every minute I had with my sons, and every chance I got I told them how much I loved them. We were doing things as a family, taking little get-a-ways, and having family nights where we camped out in the living room watching movies all night long, talking about their dad, promising to always be there for each other, and to never lie to one another. This started with me telling them where their Dad and I went wrong with drugs and alcohol, but most of all we always told each other we love each other no matter how mad we got at each other.

Now here I am, almost 14 years later at 44 years of age. I'm back in school and married to an amazing man, who loves the boys as much as I do. They are now 20 and 23-years-old, and from time to time we still talk about Dan, sometimes with tears and sometimes with laughter. We are closer today than we have ever been and still tell each other every single day that we love each other. But most importantly, their memories are no longer of a drug-using, alcoholic parent, but of a parent who stepped up and became the mom they deserved because I grew up just in time.



Kristine Williams

Kristine Williams is currently enrolled at DMACC while pursuing her Liberal Arts Degree in the field of Biology. Her long-term goal is to transfer to Iowa State University and pursue a graduate degree in the field of Biology, with hopes to find a career in the medical field. She is also employed part-time at Hy-Vee. In her free time, she does a lot of writing and also enjoys reading and watching Netflix. She lives with her companion, Shane, and the two of them are the proud owners of a cat named Taz and a dog named Banjo.

The Deeds of the Wicked

How easily we can proclaim a man guilty of a crime. Staring at the stranger in orange, we find it comes naturally. Without bias, passing judgment comes as easily as each breath. Always, ever impartial, we pass the verdict. “What a sick man!” we proclaim. “He deserves the death penalty, doesn’t he?” The more heinous the crime, the more severe the punishment, and, of course, the punishment always fits the crime. How easily we can make that call when it involves someone we have never even met. How easily we can judge when faced with a stranger.

But what about when it is not?

What happens when the person in orange bears a face you know? What happens when you recognize the stature, the face, the eyes, and the hair? What happens when the lips twitch in a nervous smile as familiar to you as the image of your own in the mirror? Worse, what happens when it is not just someone you know, but someone you trust?

September 7, 2006. It is early autumn. I do not have to work today. I have decided to spend some time playing on the computer. It is a lazy day, the sort of day when you have no worries. I have not even changed out of my pajamas, but it seems alright. I do not mind. I am not expecting company anyway, and I am home alone.

I am also in a fairly good mood. Maybe this is in part due to the lazy day, but it is nonetheless a happy day. I scarcely remember why; now, as I think back on that day, I realize it does not actually matter.

There are so many trivial details of that day. Someone outside is burning leaves. I can smell the smoke even though the window is only cracked. The cat is lounging on the chair nearby; I can reach out and pet her with my hand even as I wait for someone's response to a message I sent over MSN Instant Messenger.

The telephone rings. I have a landline and no caller ID, but it is insignificant. I do not care who calls; I pick up the receiver and am just happy to talk to someone. I like the connection with the outside world.

But a single sentence turns everything around.

"Your brother just confessed to murder."

I hear the words clearly, but I am having difficulty processing them. I can scarcely feel the receiver as it slips from my fingers; they seem to have grown completely numb. They, like me, are completely devoid of feeling.

It seems as though time has stopped. It seems as though my heart has stopped, but I know that is not true since I can hear the pounding echoing in my ears. It is the only sound I can hear at first. Then I hear sobbing.

The sound is coming from so far away, and at first I react with dull alarm. *Who's crying? The voice on the other end of the line?* I scramble for the telephone again, my movements like that of a drunken person. The movements are slow and sluggish. But the world crashes in around me when I realize where the sobbing is really coming from.

The person sobbing is me, I realize. I am sobbing. Even though I hold the telephone to my ear, I can hear myself sobbing. I think I keep mumbling something to myself, but the person on the phone thinks the words are for them.

My mother, I realize. She is the person on the other end of the line. The numbness starts to fade, and the reality of the world begins to sink in, crashing over me like waves breaking upon the shore. It leaves me feeling incredibly bereft.

Early September of 2006, five young adults were arrested for the murder of 18-year-old Matthew Stegman. Among them was Terry Joe Williams, then 22-years-old, and also my younger brother. Williams and four of his peers lured Stegman to Woodland Cemetery in Des Moines, Iowa, with the intention of beating him. The situation escalated, and Stegman was left to die alone. That was the abridged version given to the public. I, however, was intimately familiar with the smaller, gorier details of the murder, whether I wanted to be or not.

You see, my brother and I had always been inseparable. We were only nine months apart in age, and as a result, the two of us had been extremely close. He was also psychologically unstable, having been diagnosed as a child as ADHD. Later in life, he learned that the diagnosis was invalid and that he was borderline schizophrenic. Having grown up with him, I can see this clearly. Ever since high school, he had been prone to strange delusions, the

most prominent of which was his religious role. He had come to believe that he was a servant of God, meant to serve him in his role as Death, a Horseman of the Apocalypse.

I cannot count the times I heard his assertion, "Faith implies that you believe in something you have no proof exists." His delusions led him to believe that not only did he speak with God directly, but he had seen this Higher Power. One of his peers, Robert Myers, used Terry's delusions for nefarious purposes. He convinced my younger brother that Stegman not only deserved to die, but that it was my brother's duty to see it done.

The rest of the details are best left vague. The other three individuals involved had no idea that Myers and my brother intended to murder Stegman. They only knew Stegman was going to be lured to the cemetery, where they would beat him senseless. After this task had been seen through, the three of them departed, leaving the gruesome task to Myers and my younger brother.

Knowing this was more of a burden than I was used to, but it had also taught me an invaluable lesson. I learned that knowledge and innocence cannot coexist. There is profound truth to be garnered from that statement. For instance, before this, it was easy to judge the men and women appearing on the news in an orange jumpsuit. I could get angry; I could emphatically proclaim what I thought their punishment should be. The more heinous the crime, the more absolute the judgment I could decree. When I saw the person in orange, I could objectively view the crime. I only saw the transgression, the perpetrator, and the victim. The three existed simultaneously, affected by one another, yet I had no idea that things could spill over onto other unsuspecting people.

Knowledge has formed me into an entirely different person because I am now painfully aware that I was viewing things with a sort of tunnel vision. Where there had only existed two people affected by the crime, I came to realize that it was not the case at all. I came to realize that there are many others affected. There are friends and family, not only of the victim, but of the perpetrator as well. Having been one such individual, having borne the brunt of abuse and harassment for a crime my flesh and blood committed, I can say with certainty that there are so many others touched by a single horrific act. For all of them, their life will never be the same, yet we tend to overlook them, particularly the families of the perpetrator of the misdeed.

Yet even in light of my epiphany, the deeds of the wicked are made no less wicked by my knowledge. The newfound awareness I gained has not given me sympathy for those who commit immoral and depraved acts; it has opened my eyes. I have been changed for the better, for the circumstances have given me cause to sympathize with the ones left behind to bear the stain of a single individual's ill choice.



Sarah Weldon

Sarah Weldon, originally from Texas, is currently obtaining her AS degree in general studies. Due to her many interests, she is unsure at this time which career path she will take, but she hopes to acquire her Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and begin there. She enjoys the outdoors, especially when accompanied by her mini-dachshund, Ernie. Other activities include reading, crocheting, archery, and anything that requires creativity and imagination.

Yellow Brick Road

Upon completion of my senior year of high school in May, 2005, my life came to an abrupt standstill. The formidable questions of adulthood flooded my mind as I pondered what I would do with my life. In an attempt to buy myself more time in mapping out my future, I enrolled in a local community college about two miles from my apartment in Lufkin, Texas. Angelina College, or "AC," was often referred to as "almost college," and I soon understood why. It operated similarly to high school, and I felt that I was wasting my time. Without a backup plan, it was all I could do to continue, until I hit a brick wall. It was as if I had been driving a car on cruise control for so long that I had zoned out and forgotten to check the fuel gauge. My life, once again, came to a pattering halt. The stagnant waters of my reality became a breeding ground for fantastical daydreams in which I often compared myself to Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* as she was torn away from her home by a tornado, carried to a far-away place, and stumbled upon the yellow brick road that eventually led her to the Emerald City. I thought to myself, "If only it were as easy as finding a road that would lead me to a fairy tale-

like future.” So after hanging in limbo for two years, I set out in search of the yellow brick road of life. What I found instead were the yellow foot prints of the Parris Island Marine Corps Recruit Depot, and the journey they sparked can only be attempted to be described in words.

Marine Corps boot camp was everything I had imagined it would be. That was the thing; before, boot camp had only existed as a figment of my imagination, where I could mentally control my projected thoughts and feelings in the form of meditation. I would envision myself enduring grueling hours of physical conditioning and keeping my cool when the infamous drill instructors spit insults in my face. I would tell myself, “It’s only three months, you can handle it; you’re strong.” But when my feet were physically planted on the cold pavement of reality in the shape of yellow foot prints, those yellow foot prints engulfed my life.

On October 29, 2007, at approximately 3:00 a.m., those meditations became bittersweet memories from a past life that I was no longer living. The eerily quiet, yet peaceful, bus ride from the Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport turned apocalyptic in the blink of an eye as drill instructors invaded the bus, screaming with voices like sirens, and I knew if I didn’t follow their every instruction and command, I would surely die. After a couple of minutes, I could only wish for a wicked witch of the west, and I frantically racked my brain for the answer to the only question I could muster in my useless, “nasty-civilian” brain: “What did I get myself into?”

The next three months of my lowly existence can only be described as a sort of hell on Earth. The first few “receiving days” were absolute torture as I, and the rest of the lifeless souls, hopelessly awaited our new identities as “recruits.” Luckily, my younger sister had enlisted with me, so I had a little piece of home to keep me going. That proved to be somewhat of a mistake

when the receiving days came to an end and our new drill instructors learned that “Weldon A.” and “Weldon S.” were sisters; in fact, we were the only pair of sisters in our platoon, which called for extra torment. My sister, Ashley, and I both came to expect routine bouts of incentive training, or “IT” in Marine terms, which consisted of being singled-out – or doubled-out, if you will – and pushed to the point of physical exhaustion in the form of whatever creative exercise our drill instructors could conjure up in their twisted minds, simply for being sisters. In the midst of our peril, we grew stronger. As days went by, I eagerly welcomed the challenge put forth before me, and even though I was hungry, immensely sleep deprived, and physically, mentally, and emotionally drained around the clock, I was somehow able to summon an inner fighting-strength, a prideful determination that simply would not allow me to raise my white flag.

That didn’t mean I never wanted to raise my white flag. Ninety days really isn’t a long time when viewed in retrospect, but at the time, in my mind, I was entangled in an eternal purgatory, and there was no escape. My ears were in a state of constant ringing from the monstrous voices that screamed at my every move, my throat was sore and hoarse from screaming back, my legs ached under the weight of a heavy pack that was lugged around on what seemed to be endless hikes, during which my tired eyes would often flutter shut, and I would doze off while walking and slowly veer out of formation. “WELDON, GET BACK IN LINE!” a drill instructor would yell, and I would snap back to reality from the snooze I so desperately longed for. Minutes turned into hours, turned into days, turned into weeks, turned into months, and each transition birthed a new experience. When we weren’t suffering the immediate wrath of a drill instructor, I and my fellow recruits were engaged in some sort of

training: close-order drill, hand-to-hand combat, swim qualification, the rappel tower, the gas chamber, basic warrior training, and land navigation, to name a few. Each brought its own obstacles that I was forced to overcome, but the training I actually enjoyed was rifle qualification, which turned out to be the highlight of my boot camp experience.

It's funny how a little incentive can go such a long way when presented in the conditions of an all-or-nothing scenario. We were told that whichever recruit could out-shoot all of the others would be awarded with a small treat and a five minute phone call to the person of her choice. The thought of such things was oh-so-deliciously enticing, especially since we were all severed from our families and loved ones during the major holidays of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's. Those incentives, combined with my natural ability to shoot, somehow transformed from a fanciful wish-upon-a-star to a reality, and after the final shots were taken at the five hundred yard line and the scores tallied up, I emerged with the title, "Company High Shooter." When a bottled Starbucks frappuccino was placed in my left hand and the receiver of a landline phone in my right, I swear I could hear angels singing. Even though the glory was short-lived, it gave me the high I needed to make it through the final phase of boot camp, which included the dreaded "crucible," a fifty-four hour rite of passage – the ultimate test that would earn each surviving recruit the sacred title of "Marine." Not only did I make it out alive, and not only as a "Marine," but also as a meritoriously promoted Private First Class. My positive attitude, strong will, and determination to push myself to my full potential earned the respect of my drill instructors who decided that I was worthy of skipping the lowest rank of "Private." When graduation day finally arrived, I couldn't have been more proud of myself.

Proudly donning the single red chevrons on the sleeves of my service Alpha jacket that denoted my new rank, and my rightly earned Eagle, Globe, and Anchor, I stood tall as my platoon marched to the cadence of my senior drill instructor as she guided us to the graduation ceremony. With precise sync, we all came to a halt at her command. After having practiced this several times, we looked the part of newly-made Marines. With the next command of “right face,” we all turned to face our audience, most of which consisted of fanatic moms and dads, family members, and friends of the soon-to-be graduates. There were six platoons graduating that day – four platoons of males and two platoons of females. All together, there were over five hundred graduating Marines, so the audience numbered somewhere in the thousands. When the announcer called my name over the speaker, I stepped out of the formation to take my place in the spot-light. I was met in the middle by my favorite drill instructor who shook my hand while presenting me with a plaque, recognizing me as the Company High Shooter. I later learned that I had not only out-shot my own platoon, but every other platoon in that graduating ceremony. I stood in the spot light with the poise of a statue, head held high, and soaked in the glory as time stood still. For a fleeting moment, I felt like the main character of a real-life fairy tale. Just as my journey began three months earlier on those yellow foot prints, it ended in the blink of an eye. But that was just the three month journey through boot camp; I still had another four years to go before my enlistment was over. So really, those yellow foot prints were just the beginning of a far grander journey than I ever could have imagined.

Even though my journey that began on the yellow foot prints of a Marine Corps Recruit Depot might not have been as magical as Dorothy’s journey down the yellow brick road, it

taught me strong character values like honor, courage, and commitment, and gave me a life-long sense of self-worth and self-confidence. I now know in the deepest corner of my soul that I can do anything I put my mind to, as long as I apply myself and give it everything I've got. Unlike Dorothy's story, I wasn't searching for a brain or a heart; I already had those. I just needed the courage to embark on a journey that would bring them out in me, and that is exactly what I found on my yellow brick road of life.



Amanda Betz

Amanda Betz is currently enrolled at DMACC and is currently taking credits as an open option student. Her long-term goal is to receive a BS degree in finance and accounting. She enjoys writing in her leisure time, as well as knitting, reading, and travelling. Amanda spends most of her free nights sitting on a couch, curled up with her beagle-corgi mix, Jasmine, reading or knitting.

Ever since my first trip to Paris, France, at the age of 7, I have been enthralled by world travel. A year doesn't go by that I don't find myself somewhere new, or old, enjoying a reprieve from my everyday life in the United States.

In my short 25 years, I have travelled to 20 countries, everywhere from Laos to Lichtenstein, speak six languages, and I have spent the last 14 years living on and off in Germany, England, and the US. Experiencing new cultures and lifestyles has become a lifestyle of my own, an addictive rush, commensurable to the need of a coffee addict who hasn't yet had his or her morning coffee.

I'm Leaving on a Jet Plane... Maybe

The world nowadays has gotten smaller than ever. American living rooms have become part of the Amazon rainforest, Thailand's floating market, and the Alps. Travelling outside of the country has become a luxury, something only a few lucky souls achieve every few years. In 2012, only 20% of leisure travelers from the US were ages 25-34, and only 8% were ages 18-24 (Travel Facts). Why don't more young and middle age Americans leave the comfort of their daily routines more often? What holds people back from going out on an adventure and leaving the comfort of home behind?

Debt

In an economy where jobs for college graduates are hard to come by, our student loan system has set younger generations up for failure from the beginning. This debt holds people back from spending time travelling and enjoying their well-earned freedom from a classroom.

Young Americans carry a lot of debt. Student loan debt is the largest debt Americans hold. It totaled more than \$1 trillion last year, making it count for 6% of national public debt (Denhart). According to The Institute of College Access and Success (TICAS), the average student borrower in 2013 will graduate with an average of \$26,600 in debt. In 2012, the average student loan debt was \$29,000 for an undergraduate degree (Denhart). These numbers are staggering and a substantial cause of stress and anxiety. When graduates start life after college, they are starting in the red, and this is a large burden for young people to harbor. These are the prime years to wander and travel the world, meeting and learning about other people and their cultures. Instead, time is spent sitting at desks staring at a computer screen, praying endlessly to meet a specified deadline, and tediously planning for a monthly \$100 grocery budget after numerous monthly debt payments.

American students are not the only students in the world who carry copious amounts of student debt. The average debt of a student from England was £20,000, or about \$33,500 USD. However, the student repayment system in the United Kingdom (UK) is notably different than that of the US. Students in the UK are exempt from starting to repay their loans until they make £21,000 (about \$35,200) in yearly salary. Then a 9% deduction is automatically taken from their paycheck and applied to the debt (“How Repayment”). As annual salary rises, so does the payment.

For example, if you had a monthly salary of £2,083 (about \$3,500 or \$42,000 a year), you would have £30 (about \$50) a month deducted from your paycheck for student loan repayment. This is much more affordable for people just starting out than a \$600 monthly lump sum payment.

The theory behind this method is that it allows students to graduate and make a salary high enough to sustain living and still be able to pay their debt. In the US, students graduate and within six months are required to pay hundreds of dollars a month in student loan payments regardless of their yearly salary.

Many European countries don't charge students for their higher education. These countries include Scotland, Finland, Turkey, Denmark, France, Norway, and Germany. In these countries debt is incurred due to payment of living expenses and school related expenses, but their loans are not used to pay for tuition directly.

Cost

Tied directly to debt, the cost of travel outside of the US is very high. First, you need a passport. This is an expensive and timely process. It can take up to 4-6 weeks to receive a passport, and for someone who is applying for a passport for the first time the cost is \$135 ("Apply"). Depending on what country someone is flying to, a travel visa might be prudent. The cost of these can vary. We haven't even gotten to the cost of flights and accommodation yet, and already our cost is nearly a few hundred dollars.

Flight prices can vary from day to day, but visiting a large discount airline website, like Cheapoair, shows that a round trip flight in August from Chicago O'Hare to London Heathrow will cost around \$1,300. It will also cost 7-8 hours in the air, not including transfer time, and jet

lag from a 6-hour time difference. Accommodation cost can vary depending on the traveler's needs and wants. It's safe to assume travel costs for an American travelling to London can cost a couple thousand dollars without adding in the cost of expenses while in the country.

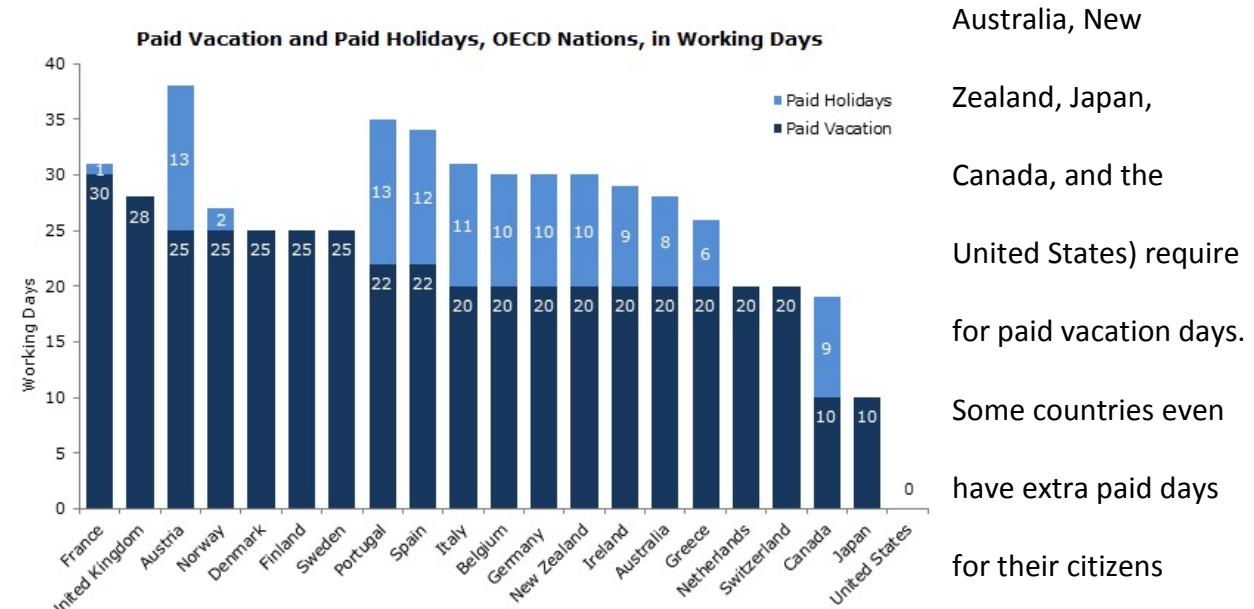
Compare this with someone living in London traveling to Paris. Round trip flights are about \$150 and are only about an hour long. The Eurostar train is available as well. Round trip tickets on the Eurostar cost around \$300 from Paris to London ("Eurostar"). Train travel may cost more than a flight, but travel times are very flexible with up to 18 different trains leaving for the same destination a day. The Eurostar makes stops in multiple European countries in which you can transfer to other trains to get to your destination. The extensive train system around Europe makes travel much cheaper and easier for those wanting to take a short week holiday. Not as much time is needed to get from one country to another, and it is much cheaper than having to fly over an ocean.

The United States itself is a large country. According to the CIA ("World Factbook"), the US landmass is 9,161,923 sq. km. The UK (not just England itself) has a landmass of 241,590 sq. km. By those numbers, the UK would fit inside of the US 38 times! Being such a large country, it is easy to stay within the borders of the US and experience different cultures right in our own backyard.

Travel within the US is also expensive though. Domestic flights can be very expensive, and traveling by car is very time consuming as well as expensive. The US does not have an extensive train and bus system spanning multiple states as Europe does. This makes train and bus travel an unfavorable and expensive form of transportation in the US.

Work Culture

As a nation, we “live to work” instead of “working to live.” The United States is the only advanced economy in the world that does not require paid vacation time for its citizens (Mohen). In the chart shown below, a study conducted by the Center for Economic and Policy Research in May of 2013 shows the number of days 21 rich countries (16 from Europe,



<http://cepr.net>

Number of paid vacation days by country

Source: www.cepr.net

Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada, and the United States) require for paid vacation days. Some countries even have extra paid days for their citizens depending on their age, shift differential,

or for doing community service. This analysis does not cover sick leave, parental leave, or leave to care for sick relatives. In this research, paid holidays “are organized by particular fixed dates in the calendar” (May).

Not having paid vacation is a large reason why most Americans don’t take the time to travel. Leisure is not highly pushed in the work culture in the US, because time is money.

In May 2013 the Paid Vacation Act was introduced to Congress by Rep. Alan Grayson (D-Florida) in an attempt to mandate that employers with 100 or more employees give a minimum

of two work weeks paid vacation time annually. This bill has been referred to the Workforce Protections subcommittee and has yet to pass on to the Senate.

The current economic situation in the US has lent credence to the definition of American work culture. Many Americans do not want to take a large vacation in fear of it interfering with their jobs. An employee might be afraid that an employer might think that he or she does not appreciate or take his or her job seriously. An employer might also think the employee doesn't like his or her job and needs to get away to be able to deal with the stress, and the employer will start the process of replacing that employee. The ironic thing about this thinking is that it does cause stress and anxiety in workers when they don't get time to relax.

According to a nation-wide poll in 2007 conducted by the American Psychological Association (APA), three-quarters of Americans listed work as a major stressor in their lives. Half of those polled also stated that they did not take their allotted vacation time for the year. Prolonged stress can lead to long-term serious health issues, including hypertension (high blood pressure), depression, smoking, and comfort-eating ("Overwhelmed"). Some of these issues lead to the use of prescription drugs, such as metoprolol tartrate (generic Lopressor), which is used to treat hypertension, to help counteract the side effects of stress. These medications themselves have other side effects, which are sometimes treated with other prescription medications, causing the cycle to be repeated over and over again.

Fear

While tragedies do occur, they are not as common as coverage on news channels would have us believe. Research has shown that people are more aware of risks when they are brought to our attention (Ropeik). People are also more aware of risks that are more

catastrophic and kill multiple people at one time, which can help magnify a fear someone already harbors. The more gory or horrible the death may seem, the more fear is built up towards that form of travel. When people feel more in control of their surroundings and immediate future, like when driving, they tend to view that form of travel as more safe. When the travel is not controlled by someone's immediate actions, like flying in a plane, that form of travel can seem scarier due to the person's lack of direct control (Ropeik).

News stories show the American public the perils of travel, almost on a daily basis. For about 50 days now, news channels have broadcast the disappearance of Malaysian Airlines Flight 370, which mysteriously went missing en route to Beijing from Kuala Lumpur, with no trace (Molko et al.). Also in these last few weeks, international news channels have been running almost constant coverage of a ferry that capsized in South Korea. The ferry was carrying more than 400 people, including high school students and teachers headed on a school trip, when it suddenly listed (leaned very sharply), and quickly sank, taking with it hundreds of still missing people (Rauhala).

It is easy to see why someone would fear getting onto an airplane after hearing about a missing plane or watching a rerun of the airplanes crashing into the side of the World Trade Center on 9/11. While these tragedies do not dramatically change any statistic of the number of plane crashes a year, the extensive coverage of these stories give the illusion of large catastrophic tragedies being more commonplace.

Ignorance

Americans are ignorant of the importance of speaking multiple languages. This is shown by how we treat secondary languages in our primary schools, or, more appropriately, the lack

of a secondary language taught in primary school. The fact is most schools do not require a second language be taught in primary school like most European schools do. From a young age, children who are born in a non-English speaking country are taught to speak, read, and write in English, usually starting in year one and continuing all the way through the end of secondary school.

In my personal experience, it is always a welcome gesture while travelling to make a concerted effort to speak to the natives using their own tongue. While some natives may view it as annoying when they can't understand your butchered pronunciation, many accept it as a peace offering and a respectful acknowledgment that you are not at home.

When Americans do travel, they expect English to be readily available to them, and when people travel to the United States, Americans expect them to speak English. In my opinion, this is the epitome of ignorance. It

is an extremely close-minded, self-centered point of view. While living and travelling throughout Europe, I have been witness to multiple scenarios of Americans travelling in a non-English speaking country complaining

of the lack of English available to them.

These complaints have ranged from not having English signs in public to restaurants not having English menus.



Poster from www.zazzle.com

When travelling around the US with foreign friends, people have made hostile comments towards me for not speaking “American.” They were unpleasantly surprised by the fact that I speak English very well, being that I am American. The look of an embarrassed adult who has just been caught making false assumptions is a face I have seen many times. Taking the time to learn the language of another country is a prodigious form of respect and one that is welcomed by those who receive it.

Conclusion

Travelling throughout the world is one of the greatest forms of diplomacy there is. We are able to show others that we are interested and care about them. We show that we are all humans, similar in many ways, but we have a plethora of cultures filling our world. Taking time from our everyday lives and spending it with someone of a different culture and belief system is a form of respect and an exercise in our patience of others. Showing others we are willing to embrace their way of life, even if for only a vacation, shows others our deference and tolerance for cultures and lifestyles other than our own.

Personally, I have benefited from the effects of world travel from such a young age. I have a hard earned respect for the hardships of other lifestyles, and I have become more thankful than ever for the blessings the American culture provides. Here in the US, we are sheltered from war on our front doorstep; we are sheltered from epidemic disease, and we have access to advanced medical care; we are sheltered from the realities of thirst and severe hunger; we are sheltered from dictatorship. These are all tribulations I have witnessed, and I have become immensely aware and grateful for the lack of these things in my everyday life.

As a country, we need to slow down and take time to appreciate the beauties and wonders our world holds. We should all take time to stop and smell the roses, or maybe, take time to smell the begonias of The Flower Carpet at the Grand Palace in Brussels, Belgium.

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Jason Savioli

Jason Savioli has found his voice in writing. After spending five years in the Marine Corps, Jason is pursuing his education. Jason has been fortunate enough to live or travel to many places around America, as well as locations overseas. This exposure to culture has given Jason a wealth of experience from which to learn. With the utmost support of his lovely wife, Jason hopes to attain a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science.

Eating Goats

The sun set on the far crest of the desert as I slouched back on my pack. The relief that the sun was finally setting was cut short by the periodic engine heat and noise that passed by twenty yards away. I wanted to get some sleep since I would be sitting here until one in the morning, but the runway of a camp in Afghanistan is not the place to do that, but then again, sleep was relative. I found a way to close my eyes and call it sleep as the helicopters and planes screamed by behind me. The least of my problems was sleep, though, as I should have been worrying about what awaited me at the other end of my early morning flight. Being a lowly rank at the bottom of the totem pole, I didn't exactly get the whole scoop. In some regards, I thought someone up the food chain must have some faith in my competencies, or maybe they just needed someone, anyone, to go. The unit that awaited me at a distant place would only be there for my support anyway, as the only detail

I received was that I would be working directly with the local ANA, or Afghan National Army.

After about a thirty minute flight, we landed. The usual lack of light made the trek across the rocky landing zone unnecessarily dangerous, and after a frustrating version of Marco Polo with the graveyard shift, I finally found someone who could point me in the right direction. It wouldn't be until the next morning, though, that I would meet those who would be my family for the next month.

The staff sergeant in charge of the group I would be hosted by was ecstatic that I had arrived. I wasn't sure if it was because of his genuine concern for his job or that he was simply sick and tired of dealing with the ANA himself. Either way, he was quick to introduce me to his crew of two and escort me to the Afghan side of the camp. As a mutual force for fighting terrorism and because of a lack of funding for the ANA from their own country, Afghan camps were generally located in proximity to the American bases, if not physically attached, but always remained divided. Strict rules were in place for any Afghan soldier entering the American side, but this was not so for the opposite situation.

As the staff sergeant, an interpreter, and myself made our way over to the Afghan side, they ran down a laundry list of things I might need to know: how the ANA can still be terrorists, how they serve tea regularly, their general lack of hygiene, and so on. It was at the mention of hygiene that we crossed the gate into the other side of the base, and upon overhearing our conversation, the Marine standing guard added, "Yeah, watch out man, they shit in the showers." The staff sergeant clarified that the brand new shower units that the Americans recently installed were immediately tainted that same day by an Afghani who didn't quite understand what they were for. Looking around at the rest of their camp,

I was convinced none of them knew what a shower was for. There was a lingering smell of garbage and body odor that was exclusive to the ANA side of camp, complimented by the utter disregard for any organization or cleanliness.

As we approached the communications tent, the interpreter gave me a phrase in Pashtu for introductions that I quickly butchered upon trying. The group laughed in good fun; they knew what I was trying to say. By way of the 'terp, the staff sergeant and I discussed the game plan for the next month with several ANA soldiers, over tea of course. If I didn't like tea at that point in time, I would learn to love it in the coming weeks as I was consistently served it twice every day. Several sergeants and a jovial officer, reminiscent of a middle-eastern Santa Claus, were quick to like me and anticipated the plan we laid out, which was to train their team of communicators to become technicians.

A week into training I began to notice some trends. Aside from the copious amounts of tea, the general disarray of the soldiers was evident, as only three of an approximate ten consistently showed up. Those three, though, were not far in thought from myself. They were much more accepting of me than I was of them, though I had my reasons, and despite the fact that we had to communicate via interpreter, the broken conversations played out as similar as with a friend back home. Two of the three had their own businesses in Kabul before joining the army and were relatively well-off, and all of them had similar hobbies to Americans. I came to learn that at least this small group of strange little brown men were not all that different in lifestyle, albeit more humble. But, it wouldn't be until the second week that I would completely immerse into their culture.

The days passed, and for the better part of each day, I spent my time teaching and learning from the soldiers. The same three soldiers were well-versed in electronics

already, so we would throw in a quick lesson and then focus on solving and fixing other problems at hand, all in time to return to the American camp for dinner.

One night was different, though. The three soldiers invited me to have dinner with them which was an honor, I learned, since Afghans take their meals very seriously. Afghan culture dictates that a man will serve all of his food to his guest before feeding his own family. Even if they will not eat again for another week, it is an expected courtesy to furnish their guest appropriately. Knowing this, I could not decline, and after a short trip back to the American side, the interpreter and I proceeded back for dinner. As we rounded the corner of the outside of the tent, we encountered one of the three soldiers looking over the truck parked in front of the tent at a shed across the path. We stopped and talked for a bit and eventually inquired about one of the other three. The soldier with whom we spoke simply pointed at the shed and said, "Get food." From behind the truck the other soldier looked up and with a bloody hand, waved and smiled. "Goat there, now gone," the first soldier tried to explain. "Well, at least it's fresh," I thought as we went inside the tent. The other soldiers insisted I sit as they readied the table on which we had been working these past couple weeks. A pot of tea, several cups, and a stack of *naan* lay waiting for the final piece. Shortly thereafter, the last soldier entered bearing two large plates piled with whitish-grey meat in some oily, orange goop. As we began to eat I held back momentarily, which one soldier quickly picked up on. He was not shy in showing me the proper etiquette of ripping off a piece of *naan*, folding it like a slice of pizza, and grabbing a clump of goat meat off of the plate. We few men gathered that night around that fine international delicacy to affirm a strange and subtle friendship. For these few soldiers, my bitterly wary eye could temporarily ease.

Several weeks of training had passed and the soldiers of the ANA were ready to complete the cycle. A final practical exam of sorts was proctored by the staff sergeant and several of his

peers, not only to assess how much the Afghans had learned but also to scrutinize how well I spent my time with them. Sure enough, the soldiers passed, and the rest of the afternoon was spent with the original three soldiers in the tent. One soldier was completing a toy carved out of wood for his son when he handed me another block of wood, implying an offer to carve with him. I pulled out my knife with no intention of creating art, but the blade caught the soldier's attention. He moved his hand towards him, wanting to see the stylish American blade. He flipped it opened and closed a few times before grabbing his own knife and moving both hands back and forth, signaling a trade. Hesitant, I told the interpreter to ask him if he was sure, as his knife's weathered and handmade appearance assumed it had much more value than my run-of-the-mill "folder". He maintained that it was all right, and we both reveled in our newfound possessions. I was grateful for the uniqueness of his knife and he was satisfied with the sleek precision of mine. On these terms, we soon parted ways, each with a small piece of physical memory from the fraction of time spent there. It is not the knife alone, though, that serves as memory; no pictures were taken or awards given to justify the cultural learning experience. That story remains my own.



John Kirchner

John Kirchner is a student at DMACC presently in pursuit of his AA degree in Liberal Arts. He seeks to further pursue an education within the humanities following completion of the AA degree. John's passion is composing in both written and musical forms. His times of leisure often lead to fishing, accompanied by a good book or good music.

The Low Man in Capitalism “fetching diamonds” from a “dark jungle”:

A Marxist Interpretation of *Death of a Salesman*.

Antagonistically defying every tenet of Marxist ideology, economic competition and self-preservation dictate policy, culture, and society in modern America, but what are the negative realities of such a society and mentality? Following the conflicted Loman family through mounting tragedy as their false sense of reality crumbles and their head of house, Willy, slips into madness and desperation, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, when viewed with an anti-capitalist sensitivity, provides multifaceted social criticism through the perspective of a singular and dysfunctional nuclear unit. *Death of a Salesman* offers the unique opportunity to see capitalism manifested in human form; thereby the interactions, hallucinations, desires, dialogue, and all manner of description and perspective related to the Lomans can be applied through a critical Marxist approach to capitalism. In varied forms, throughout the play, Marxist commentary can be found pertaining to competitive resource acquisition coupled with

proletarian class disparity, empathetic suppression/self-obsession, and the socially disturbing effects of economic predominance in every necessity and want.

Willy's portrayal is one riddled with ego-justified resource acquisition, and ironically the unrealized plight of the proletariat, two interrelated concepts within Marxism. A key commentary on resource acquisition takes place in a dialogue between Biff and Willy surrounding a stolen football. Willy says, "Sure, he's gotta practice with a regulation ball, doesn't he? [To Biff] Coach'll probably congratulate you on your initiative" (1411). Instead of punishing his son for theft, Willy reinforces the behavior and praises Biff's "initiative." This incident is analogous to the excuse and reward system set up for private enterprise in a capitalistic society. Monopolizations of industry, deprivation of worker rights, and misappropriation of profits are a few examples of the competitive means by which corporations *show initiative* economically and, as in the conversation between Biff and Willy, these methods are overlooked or even outright encouraged in capitalism.

Willy further shows the cognitive dissonance at play in the capitalist mentality of resource acquisition as he takes pride in his boys' continued and intensified thievery despite his own brother's sensible concern and warning of consequence. Charley cautions, "Listen, if they steal anymore from that building the watchman'll put the cops on them!"

[Willy in response:] You shoulda seen the lumber they brought home last week. At least a dozen six-by-tens worth all kinds a money. . . . I got a couple of fearless characters there" (1421-22). Significantly solidifying the commentary's relevance with greater societal application, Charley then states, "Willy, the jails are full of fearless characters.

[Ben retorts,] And the stock exchange, friend!" (1422). Thievery is an appropriate description in Marxist eyes for classifying capitalistic resource acquisition. Fundamentally the products and labor of the lower class are exploited and stolen then appropriated in a hierarchical manner with levels of gradation. This places those who must actually do the work and provide the service, or product, at the bottom.

Because Willy is an unaware, mentally distracted, and delusional man, his condition helps him avoid the realization that he has been exploited his entire career. He and his family live the proletariat's life of economic insecurity and hand-to-mouth employment. Representations of the proletariat even surface in the setting of the Loman family home, which is one where apartments have "massacred the neighborhood [and] the grass don't grow anymore" (1405). Such details help paint the poverty of a dedicated worker's family, but beyond setting, the proletariat motif can be observed in direct dialogue. Willy remarks at Linda's tally of monthly debt, "A hundred twenty dollars! My God, if business don't pick up I don't know what I'm gonna do!" (1414); the line invites allegorical interpretation of Willy's economic trouble to that of generalized proletariat plight and oppression. The various inclusions of the Loman's low status (in name alone) are all the more striking because Willy is an incredibly dedicated worker/salesman; it's his life focus, yet he can barely make ends meet.

The Loman family's consistent lack of empathy could be founded in its suppression under the Social-Darwinistic attitudes and related narcissistic perpetuation in capitalism. The establishment of a universal sense of community, trust, and equal respect are the opposing core Marxist social-ideology. The society and characters within *Death of a Salesman* solidify the importance and need for said values by showing the tragedy that ensues in their absence. A

glaring moment in which basic dignity and respect are taken from Willy is when he loses his employment, and this can be best shown in Linda's defense of her husband when she says, "He works for a company thirty-six years, opens up unheard of territories to their trademark, and now in his old age they take away his salary.

[To which Biff replies:] Those ungrateful bastards!

[And Linda questions] "Are they any worse than his sons?" (1425).

The conversation relays the absence of empathy and consideration in not only the company Willy worked for, but also in his very own family, which is an institution considered to be the stalwart and bastion against corruption and a sacred bond in many societies, but even family can be torn apart and brought to ruin when its members are reduced to existing in a strictly economic relationship. Willy has multiple remarks that show his egoism and unsympathetic view of others. He remarks about young Bernard accordingly, "But when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are both gonna be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank the almighty god you're both built like Adonises" (1413). Here Willy props up the egos of his children (and of course himself by proxy) by first diminishing their childhood friend and then insinuating that his children are god-like and a product of divinity fit for the *most sacred* "business world." The statement, besides bringing in religion and its exclusionary nature, which is directly discredited and discouraged in Marxist philosophy as a bourgeois, divisionary establishment, shows how self/nepotistic obsession can lead to division by serving self-interest above collective understanding and often coinciding with the damage or dismissal of another class, creed, or individual.

Willy's dangerously out-of-whack ego and lack of concern and respect for his own family is displayed in such additional passages as "[to his brother Charley when offered a job] You big ignoramus . . . I'll rap you one! I don't care how big you are!" (1444). He disparages his grandfather, an entire profession, and son with the line, "Even your grandfather was better than a carpenter. You never grew up" (1427). These dialogues serve as further commentary on the societal void that is capitalism and its ability to pit brother against brother, son against father, and worker against employer in its unrelenting degradation of every bond, except the bond between money and man.

In *Death of a Salesman* humanity itself and all its encompassing social contracts, interactions, and orders are all subverted by economic predominance and unyielding want, portraying the world Marx feared existed. Materialistic want is never so clearly displayed as when Willy decides to ask a favor of his boss and enters to find him (Howard) fiddling with a new recording device. He claims, "This is the most fascinating relaxation I ever found. [And] they're only a hundred and a half. You can't do without" (1435). Howard, however, can do without his employee of decades should he ask for a fraction of the money spent on the gadget as salary. Begging and pleading can't sway the man away from his consumerist desires and material infatuation. The toy is more important than a man and his family, and not an ounce of hesitation follows the decision. The moment is deliberate in its Marxist tone. The Loman lineage is prime commentary on the destructive and subversive nature of economic necessity and want. Each character has his favored materialistic object like Willy and his Chevy, Biff and his sneakers, and Happy and his luxury apartment. None of these objects provide them any

lasting contentment. The reflection of these objects' intrinsic values is wrongly associated to the memories and status attached to them by the beholders.

Each character has also been betrayed and stunted by their necessary employment, which diverts passion and potential into retail, or in Biff's case, simple thievery. Climatically, Willy's very life is physically taken by his need to provide for his family. The conversation between Willy and his internally anthropomorphized (ideal capitalist personality) "Ben" happens as such: "[Ben:] The jungle is dark but full of diamonds, Willy. One must go in to fetch a diamond out.

[Willy:] Can you imagine that magnificence with twenty thousand dollars in his pocket?" (1463). Here, veiled in symbolism, Willy accepts that suicide is the only way to retrieve a *diamond* from the *darkness* that is capitalism. With the death of the protagonist, every last morsel of life was drained from the husk of a proletarian man.

The Marxist approach and corresponding perspective sees the lowly member in capitalist society that Willy is, and his struggle to simply acquire resources is that of the entire proletariat mass, while the mentality of Social-Darwinism and superiority-egoism suppress humanity, destroy essential social contracts, and smother empathy. The protagonist is robbed of absolutely everything to accommodate his economic obligation and singular materialistic perspective of value. *Death of a Salesman* seen through the Marxist lens is a story of economic penetration into social structure and essential humanity. Marx identified these same observations in his philosophy and formed his ideology as a reactive solution. Miller arguably furthered his philosophy and applied it uniquely so as to make it undeniably real and close to home for a naïve nation.

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Paige Boston

Paige Boston recently graduated from DMACC with her AA in Liberal Arts. She will be transferring to Iowa State University in the fall to pursue a degree in English Education. She enjoys cooking, fishing, writing, discovering new shows on Netflix, and spending time with her cat Thackery Aloysius Binx Boston-Lange.

Society and Psyche: An Examination of Marriage and Psychological Motivation in British Literature

In a literary landscape dominated by men, it is hard to believe that two women in distinctly different time periods were responsible for groundbreaking novels that showed both the positive and negative outcomes of society imposed on women amidst the growth of England. Despite their unlikely authors, these novels, written over one hundred years apart, speak volumes about the formal institution of marriage in British culture, while delving into the motivations and psyche of women left with no other options. The first of the two is Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, first published in 1813, which centers around a young English woman's attempts to be her own person against the constraints of society and the relentless approaches of an incredibly wealthy bachelor, while its counterpart, Doris Lessing's 1950 *The Grass Is Singing*, shows the struggle of a Rhodesian farmer's wife to maintain her sanity and humanity in the isolation of the African plain with Britain's colonization serving as a background. Though each of these novels approaches the female mindset from a different perspective, they both accurately portray British culture and its role in the institution of

marriage, as well as the psychological outcomes leading to and resulting from society's expectations.

Pride and Prejudice's opening line, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife", very clearly shows the mindset of the British public at the time before delving into the life of the Bennet family (Austen 1). As the first sentence of the book suggests, marriage is a matter of money rather than love in this time period, and though considerable emphasis is placed on wealth and manners, the latter tends to be ignored when much of the former is present. With these standards in place, the introduction of Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy and his magnificent income automatically makes him the object of every girl's attention, despite his antisocial demeanor...that is, every girl except for Elizabeth Bennet. Throughout the novel, Elizabeth exhibits behavior considered outlandish and bizarre by her female counterparts (such as trekking three miles in the mud to visit her sister), so it seems appropriate that her views on marriage are not in line with those of the time as well. Though she accompanies her sisters to balls, socializes over dinners, and dances with gentlemen, she shows no real desire to be a part of the formal, transactional nature of marriage: "Her father, captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her" (155). Perhaps it is because of her father's misfortune that Elizabeth seeks a marriage founded in love and spends much time contemplating her feelings over Darcy. Throughout the novel, Mr. Bennet frequently contradicts his wife's statements regarding wealth and checks with Lizzy to ensure that she will be happy spending the rest of her life with her fiancé. Still, even he seems

to be coerced by Mr. Darcy's fortune, commenting to his daughter that he would refuse nothing to him if asked. In the end, it is uncertain whether love or money is the true winner in the battle between Darcy's pride and Elizabeth's prejudices, though there is evidence for each.

Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing* presents a graver situation, with characters that are far from Austen's charming nobles. Though well over a century had passed since Austen spoke of the universally acknowledged truth of marriage, the expectations of matrimony are similar in *The Grass Is Singing*: namely, that love need not be present in order for a couple to be considered successful. Lessing's novel focuses on the marriage of Mary and Dick Turner, two poor whites living in southern Rhodesia in the age of British colonization. Unlike Elizabeth, Mary is unaware of the romantic expectations forced upon her by society until she overhears a conversation insulting her naivety and single lifestyle at a party. Though her friends' words cut her deeply, she takes them to heart:

And she began looking around for someone to marry. She did not put it to herself like that; but, after all, she was nothing if not a social being, though she had never thought of "society," the abstraction, and if her friends were thinking she should get married, then there might be something in it. (Lessing 40)

Without *Pride and Prejudice's* elaborate courtship rules, the union of Dick and Mary instantly feels grittier from the start, a marriage born out of frantic necessity to conform to society's expectations. While Mary finds herself desperate to follow the marital norms of her friends (whom, it should be noted, she loses contact with after marriage), Dick is in need of somebody to care for his shoddy home and perhaps produce children. Their first encounter with each other sparks a mutual interest that leaves both miserable upon their separation,

while their second “date” leaves much to be desired when they both realize that they have exaggerated their feelings in their minds. Despite this, they decide to get married immediately, and spend the next years learning of each other’s flaws. Mary is appalled by Dick’s incompetence, both as a farmer and as a human being, and Dick learns of Mary’s hard nature and unwillingness to soften or compromise. The novel’s narration directly comments on the incompatibility of the pairing with vague optimism, stating: “There are innumerable marriages where two people, both twisted and wrong in their depth, are well matched, making each other miserable in the way they need, in the way the pattern of their lives demands” (57). The two continue to struggle against each other silently, which does not go unnoticed by their neighbors, who seem to have mastered the art of a plain existence and loveless relationships early on.

Unlike her counterpart, Austen’s Elizabeth Bennet is entirely aware of the emphasis placed on marriage in her time, but unlike those around her, she chooses to ignore it – until the novel’s end when she accepts a marriage proposal from a man whom she once claimed to despise. The controversy over Elizabeth’s choice to marry Mr. Darcy still burns deeply in the minds of readers today; does Lizzy truly love Mr. Darcy, or is she finally swayed by his persistence (and his fortune)? At the start of the novel, it seems that Lizzy’s unconventionality will prevent her from ever becoming a wife, but her continued struggle against the current of society seems to take its toll by the end. Could it be that wealth does indeed win out over love in *Pride and Prejudice*? Though Elizabeth does seem to have a change of heart in regards to Darcy after rejecting his first marriage proposal, her feelings seem even more reciprocal after she discovers that he was responsible for facilitating the marriage between her younger

sister and Wickham, saving her family from certain disgrace. It is at this point in the novel that Elizabeth allows herself “to comprehend that [Darcy is] exactly the man who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her” (Austen 202). However, upon this realization, society launches its expectations onto Elizabeth once again, and her stand-off with Lady Catherine de Bourgh results in a resurgence of her fiery independent nature, assuring readers that she has not been entirely brainwashed by her family’s desire for her to marry well. Anger and determination shine through in her speech as she informs Mr. Darcy’s aunt: “I am only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to you, or any person so wholly unconnected to me” (233). Despite this, in the novel’s final pages Lizzy seems to have second thoughts regarding her impending marriage, with Austen stating: “Elizabeth found that, though in the certain possession of his warmest affection, and secure of her relation’s consent, there was still something to be wished for” (247). Though this dissenting statement seems evidence contrary to the happy ending that many readers of *Pride and Prejudice* believe exists, it should be noted that Elizabeth does indeed go on to marry Mr. Darcy and “live happily ever after,” at least as far that the novel’s ending is concerned.

Conversely, Lessing’s approach to the psychology of her characters is much more complex, indirectly alluding to mental illness and, in the final chapter, allowing readers to peer into the jumbled terrain that is Mary’s mind. Early in the novel, it is easy to distinguish that Mary’s mental state deviates from what most people would consider normal. Growing up in an unhappy household, her father was an alcoholic, while her mother was a cold, overemotional housewife who thrived on confiding in Mary. An only child by the hands of tragedy, she counts the death of her brother and sister the happiest time of her childhood, perhaps because it led

to fewer disagreements between her parents. It is briefly mentioned that the lack of privacy in her home had led to her witnessing her parents engaged in intercourse numerous times, which leaves her with a profound distaste for sex” that carries on through her marriage, though she learns to sleep with Dick in order “to bestow the gift of herself...and remain untouched” (Lessing 37, 56). In addition to her disinterest in sexual activity, which appears to border on asexuality, Mary is plagued by a constant depression upon moving to the farm, spending hours upon hours sleeping to escape from her unfulfilling life and taking out her frustrations on Dick and the native servants violently when awake.

It isn't until the arrival of the native Moses that a discernable change is present in Mary; what begins as fierce repulsion and hatred grows into a curiosity and a relationship that, while not overtly sexual, still violates the unwritten codes of conduct between natives and whites in a major way. What starts as a violent encounter with a slave worker in the field builds to intensifying attraction that pulls Mary out of her depressed stupor and into the strangest of affairs. One day, after witnessing Moses wash himself, Mary finds herself overcome with a mixture of feelings that she cannot process, though she notes the change in her mood afterwards, with Lessing remarking: “She went back to the house, for the first time in months jerked clean out of her apathy, for the first time in months seeing the ground she walked over” (163). Mary's attempts to avoid Moses after this incident show that she is aware of her attraction to him, though it is not long before she finds herself spending more time with him, ultimately allowing him to see and touch her naked body while she changes, an act completely unheard of at the time. Perhaps it is farmhand Tony's discovery of this practice that leads to Mary Turner's downfall, for the book's final chapter details Mary's thought process upon the

day of her death, in which she seems to be very aware that the end is coming. She paces through the house and the yard, constantly reminding herself that Moses is lurking somewhere in the shadows. When Moses finally appears, Mary's demise and subsequent escape from years of depression is almost a relief to the reader after following her downwards spiral throughout the novel.

Although *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Grass Is Singing* are set in two distinctly different time periods and offer opposing perspectives on the human experience, both share a valuable message with modern day readers about the expectations of marriage in times past and the potential psychological experiences that occur prior to and after a traditional union is formed. Sentimental readers and lovers of classic romance will find satisfaction in *Pride and Prejudice*, while those interested in the painful nature of existence will be captivated by the blunt, yet poetic nature of *The Grass Is Singing*. Though many works regarding British culture and customs have been written since the time of their publication, Austen and Lessing's definitive novels have served as formative pieces of British literature, introducing and expanding upon topics that will be studied for years to come.

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Michael Latessa

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

Of Man and Beast: The Organic Genius of Walt Whitman

Through the use of imagery and symbolism, Walt Whitman establishes a link between man and nature with his poem “A Noiseless Patient Spider.” Whitman employs language full of metaphors so his readers can feel the thoughts he is trying to convey, not only from the perspective of an outsider, but also from the perspective of someone inside, leaving the reader with a very personal, introspective experience. In the poem’s first line, Whitman introduces his readers to a key subject of his story: the spider. The words “noiseless” and “patient” (Whitman, “Noiseless”: line 1) may be the two most important words in the poem, since they are the fiber, or perhaps filament (4), that connects the spider to the other subject of the piece, the speaker’s soul. The soul is the main focus of the poem, and Whitman subtly detaches himself from the spotlight by engaging the speaker as more of a narrator witnessing these events from outside, much as an author of a third-person narrative would. The first stanza gives two examples of how the narrator expresses his point-of-view, both incorporating the same word: “I mark’d where on a little promontory it stood isolated” (2). “Mark’d” is the keyword in both lines, expressing a viewpoint conventional in a third-person narrative. The author keeps the focus on the spider throughout the first stanza, establishing its importance to the big picture.

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

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

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

Another human quality Whitman explores is the question of what happens after people die. This poem, along with several others sharing the theme of the unknown, reside within "*Leaves of Grass*" under the cluster entitled "Whispers of Heavenly Death." Vast, unbounded spaces are a central metaphor of many of these poems, which include "As If a Phantom Caress'd Me" and "Night on the Prairies." A strong similarity exists between the shore on which the speaker is walking along in "As If a Phantom Caress'd Me" and the vast emptiness of "A Noiseless Patient Spider." The correlation is stronger yet in "Night on the Prairies," in which Whitman offers the prairie of the title and the nighttime sky as links. The two poems could easily succeed one another, as they nearly do in Whitman's "deathbed" version of "*Leaves of Grass*." With "Night on the Prairies," the author has given his audience a grand explanation of the concept of transcendentalism, replete with metaphor upon metaphor extolling the virtues of its philosophy. Reading "Prairies" should be a delight to fans of Whitman's style, for it does not disappoint. However it does not leave any opening for its readers to interpret, either. The language is beautiful and wistful, but the topic is fully explored by the end. Subsequent readings

will bring a sense of satisfaction, but not one of discovery, which is a rarity for Whitman. On the other hand, "A Noiseless Patient Spider" requires its readers to search for meaning within its lines, to explore the dogma of transcendentalism. The language is equally beautiful, equally wistful. With "Spider," Whitman has asked his readers to work a little bit for the payoff; he does not spell out his meaning as frankly as he does with "Prairies."

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

The spider's self-prescribed loneliness is a topic touched on by Phyllis J. Scherle, in which she concludes that the spider intentionally isolates itself. "It is significant that loneliness arising from separation from one's kind is self-generated and voluntary" (Scherle). She goes on to discuss Whitman's choice of the word "detach," suggesting that it implies a higher force as the cause for the separation (Scherle). This argument is not compelling, given the fact that the detachment occurs to the speaker, not the spider. A reasonable argument could be made to support the speaker's assessment of the spider's plight in comparison with his own: He sees the spider spinning web after web and draws a line to his own situation in parallel. However, this argument, too, is not compelling, given that the speaker's detachment is communicated in line

two of the second stanza. The speaker has just begun to examine his own situation relative to the spider's, so it is unreasonable to assume that the speaker has drawn such a conclusion which would effectively breathe humanity into the spider. The correlations are not drawn by the speaker until the third line of stanza two, in which he is "seeking the spheres to connect them" (Whitman, "Noiseless" 8-9). A link is established in this phrase, and the mystery is unraveled with each successive line, until the end of the poem.

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

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Nick Stuetelberg

As a student at DMACC West, Nick Stuetelberg is an active member of the Student Activities Council, taking part in as many events as he can and getting involved in rewarding projects like Earth Week. He rekindled his long-lost love of writing when he began attending DMACC last fall. He hopes to graduate from DMACC with an AA degree in Liberal Arts before moving on to pursue his BA degree in Chicago. Besides eventually publishing his first novel and getting his feet wet in teaching, Nick hopes to join or create an educational research company to revolutionize the way students- both young and old-learn through technology.

I Am the Sky

Things aren't the same here as they were just a while ago. A new scent has planted itself in my nostrils now, and there is no escape. I miss them so much, but they had to go. Night after night, I knew we weren't really getting back home—if anything, we would have to find a new home. The crew spoke loudly at night as I slept alone, apparently I wasn't welcome at the *King's* table, seated by the geniuses that first got us into this mess and swore they'd get out "if we have to get out and swim our way back." They weren't ever going to get that chance though.

I'm not sure about when I decided to do what I did. *God, they were sweet looking.* Maybe it had been after the seventh week—yes, the seventh week. It was then that I realized what must be done to ensure my own survival—*that sweet scent- and oh, the taste-of survival.* Abused and neglected, the engine had decided their fate for me. Our giant world

had been taken away and instead replaced with the knowing that here we now sat, some 4,000 meters above our seductive graves of blue. I was doing them a favor, really.

I love them and dance with them still. They know me better dead as they are now than pretending to be alive before. The deck still gleams with the evidence of their glorious fate.

My plan was brilliant. The only problem was that, ever since they told me I had lost my mind, they watched me *so* closely. One glance at my bible of truth that they couldn't comprehend had solidified me as the outsider. But really, I was their mother and father on this boat. I would take care of them and rid them of their pain. One of them- the old one- accepted my plan. Not a peep came from him before or after the first shot went off.

Running, in came the others and down they all went. My new family was home.

That first night was a celebration as I danced around them. *They were so stubborn that night, not wanting to come upstairs and see the stars like children.* I made sure God saw what I had done for him. Never had a family been so alive in death as mine as I bathed my face and body in the crimson paint.

Every piece of my family had been held up in celebration before becoming part of me. *We were becoming whole for once. The screaming was over with, no more pointing fingers at me—it wasn't my fault after all. Delicious Green Fairy, my family, and I. I told them not to take the bottles away from me, and now that it's all gone, look where we are.* Laying out under the sun, you'd never think it's bad until the sun takes away your smile. I kept my promise to them and made us into one. *Why isn't there any left? God damnit! One last drink from one last bottle. Look—they're smiling at me now.*

Those smiles couldn't keep the sternest parent in anger. *Falling?* My body feels free now. Who knew the sea could be such a loving person? One last glimpse of the blue horizon

as I lay on my back in the comforting troposphere. *It's beautiful, this grave of ours. Who could ask for a better headstone marking all that we are and once were?* The faces keep smiling though as I hit the water in a cacophony of turbulent seawater. Quickly, I get pulled under as my children shout and cheer. Sobering, stinging salt overcomes my eyes as they disappear above the murky water. But it's okay; this was all planned—they told me so.

I am my family's coffin, and we are going home.

Writer's Statement

While trying to come up with ideas for a literary adaptation course that would both challenge me as a writer and make sense in the right context, I felt the need to go back to Emily Dickinson's "The Brain—is wider than the Sky—" for inspiration. Something I had realized during a group discussion in my *Intro. to Literature* class was that the poem could easily be interpreted as something of a mantra for seeing the vastness in what the mind is capable of in conjunction with our terrestrial partner, the earth. The problem, though, was that I couldn't exactly sell myself on spending time exploring an aspect of the topic that has already been thoroughly covered in the class discussion.

My original idea for this work came about out of that understanding that retelling what's already been told would serve no one. So, I tasked myself with looking at the ideas of mantras, rolling rhythms of consciousness, from another perspective: what if the person experiencing this happened to be crazy? Beauty, after all, is in the eye of the beholder. What if that beauty turned out to be the most horrible thing imaginable to most people? That became my overall goal for this paper.

One of the most important parts of writing this adaptation for me was the search for telling this man's delusional story in a mixture of first-person narrative and inner dialogue. With that emphasis placed on this story, I used aspects of his inner thoughts to reveal some of the delusions, so the reader could begin making assumptions starting with just the second paragraph. Hopefully by the end, the reader would still have some questions while thinking that just maybe the would-be cannibal was actually a drunk with an absinthe problem who eventually got thrown overboard (the truth of it). Regardless of end impressions on the story itself, I hope readers can come away with a desire to bend rather than break poems to see them fit life in new, and sometimes scary, ways.

Awards

Composition 1

First Place – David Bowles, “The Quiet Punishment”

Second Place – Nora Mandil, “Understanding is Our Greatest Weapon Against Fear-Terrorism”

Third Place – Julia Peterson, “Coming to America”

Honorable Mention – Tammy Harris, “Growing Up Just in Time”

Composition 11

First Place – Kristine Williams, “The Deeds of the Wicked”

Second Place – Sarah Weldon, “Yellow Brick Road”

Third Place – Amanda Betz, “I’m Leaving on a Jet Plane...Maybe”

Honorable Mention – Jason Savioli, “Eating Goats”

Literature

First Place – John Kirchner, “The Low Man in Capitalism “fetching diamonds” from a “dark jungle”: A Marxist Interpretation of *Death of a Salesman*”

Second Place – Paige Boston, “Society and Psyche: An Examination of Marriage and Psychological Motivation in British Literature”

Third Place – Michael Latessa, “Of Man and Beast: The Organic Genius of Walt Whitman”

Honorable Mention – Nicholas Stuetelberg, “I Am The Sky”

Credits

Skunk River Coordinator...Ruth Dotzenrod

Skunk River Review Editors...Dan Nelson and Ruth Dotzenrod

DMACC Ankeny Campus Copy Room Personnel

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Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences...Kari Hensen

A special thank you to all Composition and Literature teachers for encouraging your students to enter this contest.