



Nota Bene 15
Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society Anthology

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It is with great pride that we at Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society present to you the 21st edition of *Nota Bene*, our literary anthology showcasing excellence in writing among two-year college students.

In this ever-changing and ever-advancing world, the ability to write and to write well remains a highly sought-after skill. Some of the greatest minds in our history have been poets, playwrights, storytellers and researchers; perhaps some of the works showcased herein are authored by the next generation of great thinkers.

When we first published *Nota Bene* in 1994, we were overwhelmed with the gratifying response from members who flooded our mailboxes with submissions and from the audience who enthusiastically read the printed book. Today we continue to see a fervent response to the call for submissions, and selection for publication remains a great source of pride and honor for the authors within.

Each of our chapters is receiving two printed copies of the 2015 *Nota Bene*, and a digital copy of the issue will be available on our website, ptk.org, under "Programs." There you can learn more about submitting works to *Nota Bene* and request additional printed copies. Previous issues may be found there as well, allowing us to not only display the talents of Phi Theta Kappa members but to also affirm the commitment to academic excellence displayed by the two-year college arena throughout the years.

We are also pleased to once again offer scholarships to outstanding *Nota Bene* authors. The Ewing Citation Scholarship Award has been awarded to the top overall entry, "Liars and Thieves" by Caitlin Vander Meulen, and the authors of three other exceptional entries have received Reynolds Scholarship Awards.

Nota Bene takes its name from the Latin expression for "note well." We hope you will take note and be inspired to join us in our scholarly obligation to nourish good writing and exceptional authors.

We thank you for your continued support over the last 20 years. Without our members, chapter advisors, college presidents, librarians and friends, *Nota Bene* would not be possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lynn Tincher-Ladner", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Lynn Tincher-Ladner, Ph.D.
Interim Executive Director
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LIARS AND THIEVES or, The Raid on Uncle Stew's



CAITLIN VANDER MEULEN
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Middle of August — the air is filled to the brim with blister-inducing Carolina heat. Swarming in the dust around your dirt-caked knees, the fire-red ants send you running out of the ditch where you and Lucia Faye have been playing “Bless His Heart,” jumping out at cars driving past before disappearing again into the ditch. You know that Lucia Faye is the real brain behind this and all other games you play with her. She knows everything: which side the moss grows on and what “state of the art” means and how lovemaking works. She’s even seen mountains out in Asheville, a place you’ll likely never see as you’re stuck living here in a place as flat as your old Meemaw’s corn cakes.

You and Lucia Faye scramble across the street to your yard. Meemaw is kneeling in the grass, pulling up dandelions, but she looks like she could be praying, on her knees like that.

“You two rascals better stop botherin’ them cars now, you hear?” Meemaw calls out. She’s shading her eyes, separating her forehead from her steel-gray beehive hairdo (you’ve seen her teasing it with a long-toothed comb). “Nobody needs to be frightened by two dusty-faced children now. Lucia Faye, you better get on home. Your mama will want you to help her with supper most like.”

Lucia Faye shrugs in your direction then heads across the lawn for the trailer next door, jumping from one dusty patch to the next, her sun-bleached hair swinging side to side. You’d give anything to go with her.

“Boy, stop lollygaggin’ and help me get these gosh-darn dandies up.” You kneel beside her and yank at one of the golden heads. The stem comes up, but the roots are still stuck in the ground, ready to grow again. You look up, worried Meemaw is going to scold you.

“You get me them cigarettes?” she asks. “Yes, ma’am.”

"Good. You didn't take Lucia Faye, now, did you?" "No, ma'am, you said not to."

Meemaw glares, her hard hazel eyes glittering in the sun. "That's right," she says.

She works a few minutes in silence, pulling up more dandelions and clover heads; she hates anything she didn't plant herself. The whole yard is bare except for the grass and empty patches and holly bushes that look like they're suffocating in the heat. You swat a mosquito that's buzzing around your face.

"I've got another job for you," she says. She stops weeding and stands up so she can look down at you and make sure you're listening. "I want you to go back to your Uncle Stew's after supper. He'll likely be takin' a nap. I want you to sneak into the backroom and look behind the bowling trophies on the shelf. Your Uncle Stew keeps a moneybag behind there, and I want you to take out one hundred dollars and bring it to me. Are you listening?"

"You want me to rob Uncle Stew?"

"He owes me; he's just forgot and I need money so I can feed you, you hear? Just bring me the money, and he'll never know."

"But if he owes you —"

"Just do what I say. Lord Almighty, you are a handful. You should be happy I let you live with me, after all your mother put me through. Shameful disgrace to us all. You listen to me and you won't end up like her. Just listen and do what I say."

"Yes, ma'am."

After supper you clear the table and wash the dishes. The kitchen is hot, and the warm soapy water makes you feel sick to your stomach. As you put your shoes back on to walk to Uncle Stew's store, you hear Meemaw, whimpering in the other room as she watches "Wheel of Fortune" on TV. She's still moaning about Paw, even though he died nigh on two years ago. You still remember his bloated body stuffed in a suit and sandwiched in the coffin, his hair combed over the bald spot on his forehead. Meemaw blames the doctors, says the surgery did nothing but starve her poor Merle. You know better. He would have died anyway with or without his stomach being tied up. He couldn't climb five stairs without heaving like an asthmatic troll.

You open the back door to slip outside, but Meemaw calls you back. "Don't you cross the crik barefoot this time, boy. You'll get ringworms!" "Yes, ma'am."

Outside, the evening hovers between light and dark. You crawl under the living room windows then sprint over to Lucia Faye's yard. She's sitting on the step, eating peanuts and spitting out the shells.

"I have to go back to Uncle Stew's," you tell her.

She smiles and spits out another shell. "Your old lady likes to take what ain't hers an awful lot, don't she? I'm going with you this time."

"I don't know if she'd like it..."

"Come on, you big baby. Are you afraid of mean ole Stew?"

Lucia Faye grins at you, her freckles puckering in smile lines. You would do anything for her.

Running through the woods behind the trailer park and across the creek, you revel in the cool of the shade against your face as the water splashes around your ankles. "What did you mean, Lu — about being afraid of Uncle Stew?" you ask, stepping nimbly rock to rock, trying to avoid thinking about ringworms and what they must look like eating through your body.

"Don't you know?"

"Meemaw says he's just a loner."

"Well, your Meemaw is a liar and thief. Stew got in trouble with the law a long time ago."

Long before we were born." Lucia Faye picks up a rock and tosses it downstream before clambering up the bank.

"What do you mean, trouble?"

"He touches kids. You know. My ma says he got fired cuz of it, and he had to work at his daddy's store since no one else would hire him."

"You mean Paw's store?"

"Mmhmm. We better be careful is all."

You feel like you're entering enemy territory as you get closer to the general store that Uncle Stew has run by himself ever since Paw died. The sun is almost set, and the Coke machine on the porch hums along with the crickets out by the crepe myrtles. The bottle cap driveway clicks under your feet as you nod at Lucia Faye. It's time.

You've planned it all out in your head. You will walk up the steps, open the door, and tell Lucia Faye to stay outside. There's no need to let her near Uncle Stew and his dirty fingers. Then you'll sneak past Uncle Stew who's bound to be asleep at the counter, into the backroom, and out again with the money before you can say "moon pie."

But as you open the creaking screen door and turn to tell Lucia Faye to wait for you, she slips by you and into the store.

"Hiya', kids." Uncle Stew is awake and sitting behind the counter playing solitaire. He's wearing a stained t-shirt and smoking a cigar. Plan B — why did you forget to make a Plan B?

Lucia Faye walks over to the corner where the comic books are. "Psst. Come here."

You follow her and pretend to look at one of the comics. "What do we do?" you ask. You're glad Lucia is here now; she'll know how to get through this.

"You've gotta get in the back and grab the money. I'll stay up here and distract him."

"Maybe we should just go back..."

"You're such a worrywart. Just do what I say."

Lucia Faye grabs a comic book and waltzes back up to Uncle Stew. His thick hands take the book from her, brushing against her skinny wrists. Lucia Faye reaches in her pocket for change and shoves you with her eyes. You have to hurry. Tiptoeing back through aisles of dry goods and cat food, you find the door to the backroom slightly open.

It's dank and foul smelling in here. You spot some dirty magazines on the floor next to a mostly empty bottle of whiskey. Empty beer cans and cigarette ash litter the desk. You can hear Uncle Stew talking to Lucia Faye. You're running out of time. Find the moneybag. You scan the walls, finally finding a shelf full of dusty trophies. Wait for a cockroach to move before reaching for the long leathery pouch poking out behind the trophies.

"Boy! What the hell —"

RUN.

You duck under Uncle Stew's hairy arm, grab Lucia Faye's hand, and bolt for the front door. Uncle Stew is stomping after you, yelling about private property and stupid kids. Then, Lucia Faye pulls away from you, turns around, and kicks at the bottom of a shelf. She keeps kicking, cans flying off the shelf and Uncle Stew coming up the aisle. Finally, with another kick, the whole shelf tumbles down in an avalanche of canned goods and bags of flour, burying Uncle Stew from view. You grab a hundred-dollar bill out of the bag before you throw it back at Uncle Stew who's hollering and thrashing on the floor.

As you run outside and make for the woods, you hold onto Lucia Faye's hand like she might pull away again. Night has come, but you've forgotten that you have to go home. Lucia Faye runs next to you with her head back, laughing to the starlit sky.



MI SANTA ABUELITA

SHERI LOPEZ

University of New Mexico-Los Alamos
New Mexico

She mutters promises under her breath
Alone
in the dark.
She is pleading
words
to saints I have never known
to exist.
A rosary rests on her palm
stretching prayers
around her aging hands
dangling glorious mysteries
and Hail Mary's.
I don't know faith like hers.
If I did I would pray to her.
Mi abuelita,
the patron saint of my childhood

smelling of coffee, *ristras*,
warm fires, and tortillas.
The woman who could perform miracles
of her own accord
With *manzanilla*, healing
and a fresh pot of *frijoles*.
To her, I utter prayers under heavy breath
In words she will never hear
in the dark
with her necklace
wrapped around
my aging hands,
dangling glorious memories
and the Spanish slang she taught me.
I hope she hears...

CELESTIAL FRONTIERS: The Fruits of Space Exploration



EUGENE AHN

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The observable universe could be seen as a lonely and mysterious place. It is a body of space and time that expands seemingly infinite along with the galaxies, gases and grounds of planets it carries. David Kornreich, founder of the Ask an Astronomer service at Cornell University, estimates there may be around 100 octillion stars in the observable universe (Howell). Of these stars, several will hold planets, and even fewer potentially habitable planets. In these specks of dust along an endless void, the only sentient creatures known so far are those of Earth. If humankind were so alone at a colossal radius of space, it would yield great potential for exploration and understanding of this expanding sea of infinity. From butterflies to black holes, the universe could be seen as the engine for everything that exists. Research efforts for this “everything” would only be a logical step for the societal advancement of humankind’s knowledge. In contrast, an emphasis in the research of Earth would restrict the domains of discovery to Earth alone — to one piece of rock and soil of octillions of star systems. In spite of the endless problems to solve locally, space exploration could hold the keys to move humankind forward. For economic and societal benefits, and the outlook of global unification, all encompassed by tremendous innovations in technology, funding space exploration in the United States is a necessary component for the advancement of humankind.

To understand how the exploration of the spatial voids boundlessly around Earth actually helps Earth, the nature of scientific discovery and how it is conducive for the economy should be understood. Neil deGrasse Tyson, astrophysicist and director of the Hayden Planetarium, explained that innovations in technology could be stimulated by space exploration. He pointed out that scientific advancements were the epicenters of growth since the industrial revolution and that space would be the modern frontier to continue that trend of growth. Tyson emphasized that leading by example and initiating bold projects would revitalize and popularize the disciplines of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields

(Foreign Affairs). Tyson refers to leadership by examples and ideas rather than specific results as a foundation for economic and societal growth. Funding space programs allows a field where inventions could be made to observe or travel to other cosmic bodies or destinations. This gives a vast opportunity for implicit technological advancements that would benefit the economy.

A strong example of these implicit factors could be viewed by the discoveries by Sir Isaac Newton involving the laws of gravity. Dr. Michio Kaku, Henry Semat Professor of Theoretical Physics at the City College of New York, showed that the discovery of calculus by Newton was inspired by a comet. After questioning the mechanics of gravity by comparing a falling apple and the moon, Newton discovered calculus when finding that the current mathematics in his time were insufficient to solve why a comet passed Earth twice. His work unlocked what physics is today, responsible for the majority of the technological advancements in modern time. Kaku pointed out that prior to Newton's discoveries, several thought the comet's existence was due to pious causes (Big Think). Consequently, this means that one individual's work acted as an anchor for several inventions used today. Newton's curiosity of a comet gained an implicit effect of a paradigm shift in how the world thought of mathematics and science.

If one person had the capability to have such an impact of economic acceleration, it would be sensible to popularize the beneficial aspects involved in an attempt to continue that growth. Newton looked at one celestial object, a comet, to unveil mathematical concepts used for all academic fields of engineering. Tyson's idea of popularizing space exploration would essentially mean that octillions of star systems, and even more spatial objects around those systems, could be used as a playground by prospective students and scientists for additional discoveries. Studying space at that magnitude would foster an environment of curiosity akin to Newton's interest in a comet. This gives great potential in economic growth, as demonstrated by the benefits given to the economy from the use of physics.

Since physics is applied to various forms of engineering, the origins from Newton implies that studying space results in inventions that benefit Earth and the human economy. To reinforce this notion, the inadvertent connections between inventions used to study space applied to societal benefits could be viewed. According to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) website, the quest for space has resulted in various technologies that have stimulated the economy or assisted medical technologies. A few include vacuums, food enhancement and quick medical devices. Cordless vacuums, originally convenient for use inside space shuttles, ended up becoming a popular market concept. Researching enriched foods for space travel led to modern baby food formulas used today. Working on infrared technology combined with thermodynamics resulted in efficient infrared ear thermometers used in hospitals, and miniaturization methods led to a small device that pumps blood into a body during heart transplants (NASA Technologies). These technological achievements show that outside conveniences created by an original quest of space exploration are numerous. Even more, the results reinforce that the connection between Newton's interest in a comet and the vast extraneous yields was not an anomaly.

Though the prospects of space exploration seem immense, there are arguments that the funding allocated into space programs needs to be reduced. Jeff Foust, reporter for *National Geographic*, pointed out that spending on NASA was reduced from 1.35 percent of federal spending to 0.6 percent in 2014. These budget cuts are justified through vague plans presented by NASA that did not appeal sufficiently for investments (Foust). A lack of rationale to fund programs would be understandable if progress was viewed in terms of clear results. If politicians were to base funding on clear and tangible results, then the implicit nature of scientific discovery and inventions would be too nebulous to justify federal expenditures. It should be noted that funding "vague" plans are at the cost of taxpayers. As a result, concrete goals such as social programs may be more appealing for funding allocation.

Digging deeper into the justification of expenditures, the events of intense funding in space

exploration involving the Cold War could be evaluated. Tyson showed that the Apollo Program of the 1960s was driven by the Cold War. He explained that former President John F. Kennedy coveted a mission to the moon to show how the “path of freedom over the path of tyranny” would be triumphant. After the Apollo Project landed a man on the moon, political incentives to fund space programs declined as the government failed to grasp reasons to consider the importance in them (Foreign Affairs). Because there were no wars involving the technological prowess in space since the Cold War, it would be understandable to cut budgets if war was considered to be a primary driver. It is certain that the Apollo Project stemmed from a battle of democracy versus socialism, making space exploration of that era a tool for political supremacy. As a result, budget cuts would make sense from the position of incentives involving government integrity and security.

There are similarities between government priorities and public opinions. Tyson continued by explaining that public opinions shifted over time, emphasizing the funding needs in social programs. Consequently, the expenditures of space programs were seen by some as a less-important factor for the United States (Foreign Affairs). This means that a general consensus over viewing a lack of importance in space funding was formed from prioritizing more local needs. It is understandable to see why the enigmatic, implicit benefits from space exploration are unappealing when compared to strikingly visible problems such as welfare.

Though financing could be used for social programs, there should be consideration of what impact the money used in space exploration could have for other needs. Tyson stated that the space budget was one fiftieth than that of social and educational programs in the United States. He argued that adding such a small amount into social programs would provide a negligible effect (Foreign Affairs). Inventions such as optimized thermometers and blood pumps for heart transplants would have great synergy with medical social programs. Enriched, nutritious foods for infants would positively impact social programs involving the welfare of children and nutrition. In other words, it could be argued that instead of boosting social programs by such a small percentage, expenditures at a factor of 50 on space exploration are more beneficial for those social programs.

While space exploration provides social and economic benefits, it addresses a deeper aspect of global trust. The International Space Exploration Coordination Group of NASA demonstrated how the International Space Station (ISS) united nations together in spatial projects for nearly 30 years and counting. Sixty-eight nations utilized projects involving the ISS, proving that the station acted as an equal ground for everyone to participate in. This gain in trust fosters an environment where nations could work collectively to face global challenges (Benefits Stemming). The unification of nations under a similar goal of space exploration means that an environment of curiosity would be stimulated globally. This could magnify the same positive results that NASA has given the economy and social programs through implicit inventions.

Further, the unification of nations could provide means to set a path of alignment in international interests. This means that in the case of the ISS, space acted as a neutral ground where various nations worked together for the sake of discovery and science in an amiable atmosphere.

Global unification through international interests could be the key for future sustainability and planet integrity. Kaku analyzed the current state of Earth as a Type 0 planet, meaning that the civilization of Earth is unsustainable and relies on temporary fossil fuels. A transition into a Type 1 civilization would mean the ability to control all aspects of a planet to ensure efficiency and sustainability. In order for this transition to happen, global unification would be needed to focus goals on Type 1 advancements rather than war and conflict. Kaku pointed out that Type 1 technologies were those that tended toward unification. Examples included the Internet, the European Union and the English language. He concluded by saying that the world is currently in process of this turbulent transition (Big Think). Since the International Space Station is a platform to unite multinational projects, that area of space exploration would also be classified as a Type 1 technology. Long-term goals of sustainability and political integrity would be aided by the elimination of political differences and war. In

other words, the federal budget used in wars could be used for sustainable concepts such as solar energy on a global level once a civilization evolves from Type 0 to Type 1 due to an alignment in political objectives. Unified space exploration would act as an additional catalyst to aid Earth's civilization to a sustainable state through that alignment.

When combining the observations of Michio Kaku and Neil deGrasse Tyson, the idea of a unified vision is revealed. This vision is a quest of knowledge, where economic growth and amiable civilizations could work together in the scientific field of space. Kaku's idea of a Type 1 civilization would mean that the costs of war would be eliminated. Tyson showed that expenditures for space exploration in the United States is one fiftieth than that of social programs and education. The elimination of war to expand to a Type 1 civilization would mean the potential to give additional funds for research endeavors. More importantly, the political work given to war efforts could be shifted to other objectives in an environment where political views are aligned. This environment means that space exploration gets a chance for a spotlight, leading to global opportunities that would foster the implicit advantages of research to economy, health and technology. These factors combined create a perpetual engine of improvement that tackles several issues simultaneously.

When considering the cost of space exploration in the United States, one should consider the advantages given for a fraction of the price compared to social programs and education. The environment of exploration gives an implicit improvement that encompasses a wide spectrum of utility, ranging from household vacuums and lifesaving medical devices to mathematical concepts that change the world. While war was the primary motivational force behind the Apollo Project, a shift in objectives would sharpen the image that space could provide. Viewing space as a realm for technological improvements in conjunction with international unification would open new gateways to strengthen the foundations of civilization. With a strong infrastructure of technological growth, the potential for improvements in global economy and societal integrity makes space exploration a multifaceted tool. When viewing space as a pool of potentially infinite observations conducive for societal growth, it's truly no surprise that it offers a vivid, vast array of benefits waiting to be found.

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THE POWER OF STEAM



JUSTIN WOOD

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Michigan*

How many kids growing up in a Midwestern residential neighborhood ever got to experience the thrill of hearing a steam-powered whistle go off in the middle of the day? I suspect that I was one of a lucky few. The long powerful whistle blasts were heard often on my block. Whenever my kind, elderly next-door neighbor and his son (both known as Mr. Briggs to the local children) would fire up the one-eighth scale locomotive that ran over tracks crisscrossing their properties, the whistle would blow loudly, echoing between our houses. The younger Mr. Briggs' house one street over shared the property line with his dad's backyard (which was next to ours), allowing them to form one giant open lot in the middle of our small residential block. Hot moist steam belched and sputtered from a small but capable engine that pulled narrow train cars whose hand-cut, wooden seats were often filled by the bright-eyed neighborhood children, whose glee was evident in their smiles. I can still remember being too young for my parents to allow me to go visit, peering through the rusty wire fence and feeling awe and curiosity at the fact that grown men could have such powerful and pricey toys and be willing to share them with anyone who came by. The smell of the coal-fire filtered through wisps of steam still has the power to transport me back to my childhood, a time when the complex motivations that drove adult men to build and share their passions were as mysterious as the fire-breathing machines they rode upon.

One courageous summer when I was only 12, I began working for my neighbor despite the admonishing fears spewed forth by my mother. "No man his age would live alone and show so much attention to kids if he was alright," my mother would often say. "If he ever tries to touch you, you kick him in his balls and run straight home screaming," she fearfully demanded before I would be allowed to make a visit next door. She often shared her imagined and twisted reasons for the dark motivations that left him single in his late forties and willing to hang out with other men and neighborhood children. Now approaching my own middle years, I have seen plenty of scary news stories depicting abuse to understand

why my mom had suspicions of my neighbor's lifestyle, even though I never have shared her fervor or pessimism. Mr. Briggs' dad had passed away a few years prior, but the younger Mr. Briggs kept building and running his trains. He still offered rides back and forth across what were now his two lawns every time someone showed an interest, and I was no exception. No, whenever my neighbor blew three long, loud blasts on his steam engine's whistle, I perked up. When one sunny July day, after blasting his common call, he came over to the fence that separated our yards, I put down my rake and walked over to talk to him. As a blindly trusting youth with a growing need for video game money, when he offered me a job doing yard work I immediately agreed to do it, my mother's fears be damned. I don't know why I felt brave enough to dismiss my mother's warnings, but because I made that snap judgment my life quickly jumped to a new track than it had been on.

By the end of my twelfth year, I would often spend the afternoon at Mr. Briggs' workshop barn after finishing any outdoor chores he had for me, assisting with whatever increasingly technical challenge he would have available. One particularly memorable afternoon, the metal lathe that sat huge and heavy along the sidewall of his barn was loaded with a large puck of steel. After ensuring that I had put on goggles, Mr. Briggs showed me how to line up the cutting tool so that we could cut down the side of the metal disk, shaping it so that it would eventually become a valve gasket on the new steam engine that was being created. The room smelled of machine oil and stale cigarettes, Ray Stevens' greatest hits belted goofy tunes in the background, and I slowly saw something powerful and useful take shape under the guidance of a master but shaped by my own two pale, thin, inexperienced hands. As I look to my calloused digits today, I know the worth that has come from them. That day, my breath fogged my safety glasses, and sweat coated those little hands; but pulling the newly created gasket from the lathe's grip, I realized that more was being built than just a steam engine. I too was being engineered into a finer shape by a man whose motives I still couldn't fully discern but had decided to trust for reasons I just couldn't explain.

The summer I turned 14, we completed our creation. The new steam engine was a masterpiece when it was finally finished and was nearly twice the size, weight and power of its older cousin. Really, it was too large for the tracks that filled Mr. Briggs' two lawns, the turns too tight to risk injury to either the thin rails or newly minted locomotive. In order to show off and test the coal-guzzling beast, we packed it carefully into the bed of Mr. Briggs' specially fitted pickup truck and began the journey to the tourist trap named Turkeyville, which offered a large, gentle track to test how well the steam engine hauled. Arriving late morning, we unloaded and started the coal fire that would power the day's adventures.

That afternoon, in the dugout encampment area allotted to the train enthusiasts for setting up, I first experienced the thrill of controlling this fire-breathing iron monster that we had built. Smells of burning coal and soot dust wafted through the air, mingled with smells from cooked whole chickens and rhubarb pies laid out on checkered cloth over picnic tables. Several steam engine locomotives (ours being first in line among them) sat upon raised track tables, coal fires burning, slowly approaching the temperature at which steam power could be converted into forward motion. The atmosphere was one of intensely subdued anticipation for the moment when warm and ready engines could enter the loop that led to the passenger pick-up station, where guests already milled about. As the steam pressure climbed, Mr. Briggs reminded me of how to control the dangerous beast that we straddled between our legs. Thinking on it today, the trust he placed in me that afternoon was more courageously given than any I had placed in him. We rode with knees splayed over the water box and tinder, with the controls and fire hatch immediately before my hunched form and Mr. Briggs leaning in right behind me suggesting the correct moment to brake as we left the table and entered the main track. Just past the switch, with a nice long approach ahead, I was told to give more air and coal to the fire as we brought this great chugging hulk to a fast-chugging pace. Alerting the station of our approach, I blasted the whistle in three loud, successive bursts as I applied the squealing metal-on-metal brakes. In the final moments before the station, my mind bounced between expectations and fears about the pivotal moment that would make up this final true test of my and the engine's abilities.

We had arrived.

As passengers gleefully loaded into tiny bucket seats of pressed metal lined up behind a small replica of the baddest beast of early industrial America, I felt something shift. It wasn't the train; it was me. I was now looking out for these people. Their safety was in my hands, all of this fiery pressure suddenly demanding that I respect it not for itself or my desires, but for the safety of the people in my care. I understood for the first time in that moment what I have reflected upon a thousand times since. What we create in this world can have meaning and power but comes with a grave responsibility to care for those we share it with, and the trust placed in me was the greatest example of that power I had known before and perhaps since.

In the evening light, purple-tinged against orange, hot moist air poured out of the exposed boiler on our engine. She had performed well (now that I had ridden her all day, it seemed appropriate to call it a girl, fickle and hot beneath me), and her efforts had left her carefully engineered guts caked with soot. We scrubbed the flues clean of the black powdered carbon that had left her breath weak by day's end. The passengers, all safely delivered to the end of their loop around the estate, had disappeared. Mr. Briggs and I were left standing as the engine cooled among the remnants of rhubarb pie and awkward departing chitchat from the other exiting hobbyists whose trains had already been packed for travel. Something had shifted in our relationship by the experience he had allowed me to share with him that day that years later still reminds me how powerful such trust can be in transforming who we are. Grateful to have removed the invisible barrier of uncertainty in each other, I was finally able to begin to know Mr. Briggs for who he was, and not just the speculative battle between my mother's distrust and my own blind faith.

"Why did you stop dating?" I courageously inquired.

"I found it worth less of my time, especially after my accident. Have I ever told you about the pipe that blew when I was in the Navy?" he began, now revealing a security in our relationship neither of us had previously felt.

I shook my head no.

"I was alerted to a problem with the engine boiler pressure and was going down the stairs into the engine room when it happened. They were those open slat metal stairs you find on ships."

He looked at me expectantly, so I nodded that I knew the kind of stairs he meant. "The pressure blew the side of a pipe right then. Took a lot of me right down to the bone. The pipe that blew was right behind the stairs where my right leg was. Woke up in the infirmary in a lot of pain. Took a long while to heal." I wasn't quite sure how to process what Mr. Briggs told me about his leg and the boiler explosion. "Do you want to see my leg?" he asked. "Sure," I replied. "It doesn't hurt much anymore, and I learned to get over it," he assured me as he pulled up the wide leg of his pants from the ankle, revealing most of his leg. I wondered if his love of steam was an attempt to feel some small measure of control over a force that had so much power over him.

As the early evening rays provided just enough light, I got to see. It was grisly. The flesh had been stripped at odd angles and removed in ways that even many long years of healing and scarring did nothing to hide. Bent and twisted shiny lines of marred flesh that crisscrossed his entire leg from the lower calf to upper thigh glowed in the fading light. A heavier mist than sitting upright behind a two-ton iron dragon belching steam from a fire made of burning rock could ever produce settled upon my eyes. This wall of salty water obscured my vision as Mr. Briggs rolled the pant leg of his light blue pinstriped overalls back down. He undid the side buttons and rolled up the edge of his stained white t-shirt. The same deeply pocketed and scarred tissue stopped at his belly button. I cannot imagine even now how brave he had to have been to not just endure many years with a ruined body, yet still seek and find meaningful connections and even joy in the world around him. I was blown away by the implications of the loss he suffered in the space between his belly and thighs, more certain than ever of the needlessness of any fears of this beautiful, wrecked man.

This was the first time I had ever been allowed to see how a person can transform pain and loss into a reason to live, to trust and to help others. I have never and hope to never lose myself the way my neighbor had when the power of steam shattered his body. If I do face such tragedy, I know now the possibility of recovering with dignity and the promise of still using whatever is left to shape the world into a better place. Although I moved away later that year, the sight of steam in the air, a whiff of burning coal, or the rattle of a train rumbling down the tracks will always take me back to a place where trust is built readily and shared with anyone who cares to earn it.

THE GAS CHAMBERS

OLIVIA PAGÁN

*Rowan College at Gloucester County
New Jersey*

That horrid sound
Pierces my ears
It comes not from the
Choking
Gasping
Cries
But from the scratching
Nails running across the walls
Begging to be freed
Gas
Snaking its way into
Our nostrils
Stealing our breath
Bodies
Falling to the floor
One by one
Men
Women
Children
We are all alike
In this deadly shower
They promised us.

SNOW WAVES

CHRISTINE GRANT

Manchester Community College
Connecticut

Snowflakes fall in tangent waves.
Their flight path

looks almost stagnant
repeating the same motions
as their antecedents:

They form, fly, fall and then melt
into

lawns

drains

roots and mouths

They are filling in our snow angels now
layer by layer

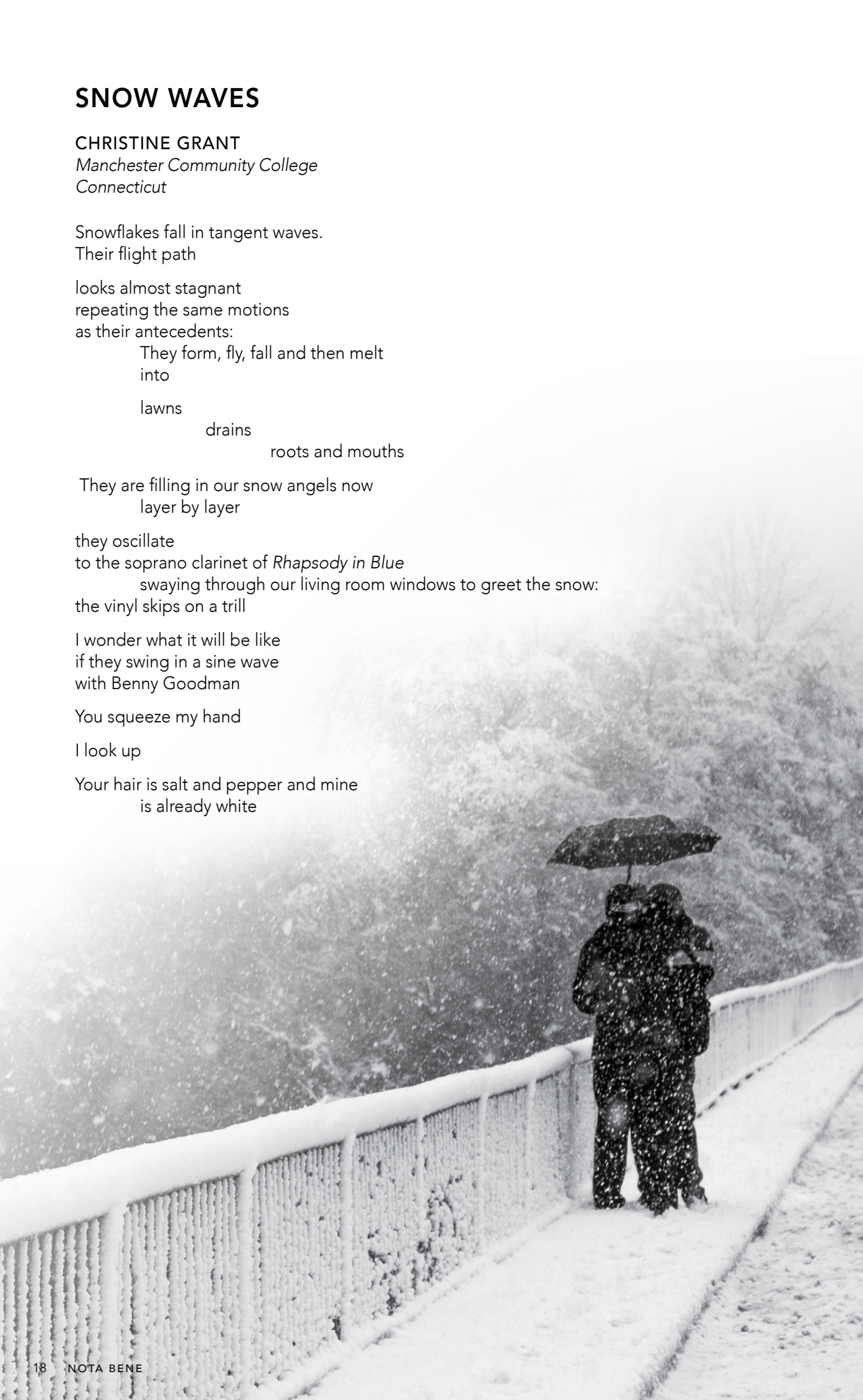
they oscillate
to the soprano clarinet of *Rhapsody in Blue*
swaying through our living room windows to greet the snow:
the vinyl skips on a trill

I wonder what it will be like
if they swing in a sine wave
with Benny Goodman

You squeeze my hand

I look up

Your hair is salt and pepper and mine
is already white



SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND ITS EFFECTS ON OPPORTUNITIES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES



CODY THARALDSEN

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In this world the demand for higher education is ever increasing. Because of this, developed countries all over the world are stepping up and increasing their college-educated populace. Despite this fact, however, the United States has stalled its gains in overall college attainment (US EOP 3). According to the Executive Office of the President, the U.S. currently ranks 12th in the world for four-year degree attainment among 25-34 year olds (2014). In 1990 the U.S. was ranked first (US EOP 3). The stagnation in the U.S. education system is clear, but what is truly frightening is the education gap between the social classes created by the persisting socio-economic inequality.

The Executive Office of the President states, "While half of all people from high-income families have a bachelor's degree by age 25, just one in 10 people from low-income ["Low income" refers to the bottom 20 percent of all family incomes] families do" (US EOP 3). This statistic alone identifies the obvious existence of an unequal distribution of educational opportunities among the social classes, with the upper class having the most opportune position in society. The National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) *Digest of Education Statistics* clearly demonstrates the aforementioned persistence of the education gap with its data on recent high school graduates' college enrollment rates from 1975 to 2011. Enrollment rates among low-, middle- and high-income classes have all increased since 1975, but they maintained significant gaps in percentage enrolled (US NCES 335). The enrollment gap between low-income and middle-income competitors is shown to have grown slightly, illustrated by 1975's low-income percent of 34.7 and its middle-income percent of 43.5 increasing to 52.1 percent and 66.5 percent respectively. In the case of the middle-income and high-income competitors, the gap decreased by a few percent since 1975 (US NCES 335). However, the size of the gaps remains relatively unchanged, and the inequality among the classes undeniably persists. The lack of progression in closing these gaps illustrates a clear case of the dominant maintaining dominance.

As a result of the limited options available to the lower class, less socio-economically advantaged students tend to be much less likely to seek higher education (Roksa 295). If they do seek it, they often resort to attending community college (Roksa 295). Josipa Roksa, an Associate Professor of Sociology and Education, finds that two-thirds of students who begin their postsecondary education attending community colleges expect to transfer and earn bachelor's degrees, but only 10 percent actually succeed in that pursuit (Roksa 295). In her study on the relationship between differentiation and employment, Roksa demonstrates one possible explanation for this low degree-attainment rate. From her study, she concluded that "Students who begin their educational journeys in community colleges as well as students from less advantaged family backgrounds are more likely to dedicate longer hours to paid employment, which has negative consequences for degree attainment" (Roksa 304). In other words, students from less-privileged backgrounds have to work to pay their own tuition while simultaneously attending college. In the case of full-time students, this results in more stress, less time to study and ultimately relatively poor academic performance. The students who choose to balance their education by attending part time while working extend the time needed to complete their degree, which may cause loss of motivation and sense of direction. In both cases, academic performance and focus are put at risk. Robert Bozick supports these notions in his article, "Making It Through the First Year of College: the Role of Students' Economic Resources, Employment and Living Arrangements," stating that low-income working students have less time to spend on school-related activities and are at the risk of dropping out (Bozick 263).

Beyond the struggles of degree attainment, there lies the issue of acceptance into four-year institutions. Many low-income students may struggle to compete with students from more affluent backgrounds for acceptance into the more distinguished universities. Dr. Nathan Martin insists that "Students from wealthy and well-connected families enjoy an advantage during the admissions process..." and that "This advantage extends from the use of private tutors and educational consultants to policies favoring legacies and students from families who can be expected to make substantial financial contributions" (427). Furthermore, individuals from lower-class families lack the cultural capital that the middle- and upper-class families are privileged with, hindering them with yet another disadvantage in the process of applying to the universities (Martin 429-430).

As illustrated above, much of the troubles the low-income students face in their pursuit of higher education stems from lack of funds and the preferential treatment of the upper class. In order to make higher education a collective and attainable goal among all social classes, certain steps need to be taken. First, action to encourage higher education by mitigating the severe financial strain needs to be instituted. President Barack Obama has already begun to take some much-needed action on this issue with his effort to engage with the Department of Education and leading experts to increase college opportunity (US EOP 4-8). He has doubled federal investments in Pell Grants and college tax credits, increasing the maximum Pell Grant award and expanding access to 3 million more students since 2008 (US EOP 4-8). Beyond this initial success, President Obama and his administration laid out four key areas where educational opportunity can be improved for low-income students. The first area is guiding and informing students on all of their options and connecting them to colleges where they can succeed, then encouraging their completion while they are attending (US EOP 4-8). The second step is the early promotion of a college-going culture in middle and high school with summer programs and college visits. This serves to increase "the pool of low-income students ready for college" (US EOP 4-8). The third step is reducing inequalities in college advising. Increasing access to counselors and advisors to help students through the processes of applying for college and financial aid will serve to increase college-going among low-income students (US EOP 4-8). The last step in the four areas of proposed improvement by President Obama and his administration is remedial education. Many low-income students arrive to college unprepared, end up in remedial courses and rarely reach college-level work (US EOP 4-8). In order to reverse this, steps will be taken to reevaluate the remedial programs and seek areas of possible improvement. The Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Columbia University is currently researching and compiling case

studies on how to improve placement testing, and the Carnegie Foundation's remedial math programs are already making gains in over 100 campuses (US EOP 4-8).

President Obama and his administration are certainly making efforts to lead the United States to a more equally opportune place for education, but there are still some other areas that have yet to be addressed. The Department of Education needs to take the necessary steps to ensure that proper measures are in place to prevent inequality in the admission process of students applying to universities. New policies for low- and middle-income students that would work similar to Affirmative Action should be considered to promote equal educational opportunities. Lastly, reduction of student loan interest should be considered. High interest rates paired with tuition costs too often leave students and their families in crippling financial debt after they complete their degrees. Therefore, attention to this area is vital for the improvement of the education system and the promotion of equal opportunity. The Student Loan Fairness Act introduced by Representative Karen Bass is an excellent model to consider. It follows a "10-10 standard for student loan repayment in which a borrower would be required to make 10 years of payments at 10 percent of their discretionary income, after which their remaining federal student loan debt would be forgiven" (US Congress 15). This bill would also prevent fluctuating interest rates with its cap at 3.4 percent (US Congress 15).

The persisting socio-economic inequalities that many low- and middle-income American families have to overcome in order to obtain higher education are certainly daunting. However, if the education system rids itself of the oppressive tendency of distributing benefits according to socio-economic status, great gains can be made in achieving equal education in the U.S. The people of the United States need to educate themselves on this issue, encourage continued efforts by the president and government, and continually strive to improve educational opportunity. As former President Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "Competition has been shown to be useful up to a certain point and no further; but cooperation, which is the thing we must strive for today, begins where competition leaves off" (Roosevelt).

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SOUNDS OF SILENCE

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Sock feet shuffle down corridors.
Pillows brush against each other —
their threads creaking with friction.
Somebody slips on
a cotton, springtime jacket.
Muffled words seep through walls
while honks and sirens from the streets below
pulse against windows; an airplane's propellers
slicing the gossamer air above.
Dust settles on the things of someone,
a bored finger scratches epidermis and keratin
as waves of molecules hum in subtle syllables.

HOW TO THANK YOUR HERO



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**Editor's Note: This was a short story assignment modeled on "How to Talk to Your Mother" by Lorrie Moore.*

2013 You watch him, the ever-vigilant caretaker; he has had lots of practice. Sean: husband, brother, best father out of your three. Hero.

He kisses her head, fills her tube that now feeds her, washes her hair. He still makes her laugh. His love of two decades, his wife, trapped in a cage of decaying nerves. You are pacing the house anxiously looking for something, anything to do to be of use. You picture a better time of you and your sister-in-law feeding the baby ducks, the painted turtles getting hot dogs. Everything she loves is right out her back door but might as well be on the moon. He tells you to listen for the bell to chime, do not leave her waiting for arms and legs to move for her. You long to take his pain away, to just once lift his burden from his strong and weary shoulders.

Vanquish the injustice that is her disease and his loss.

He picks on you and you still cannot take it. Your Dad tells you to relax; it is his way of telling you he loves you. You ask your Dad why Sean's opinion is still so important to you. Your father says with a flatness of humiliation, "Well daughter, he was more involved in raising you than your mother or I ever was." You wish your brother could have heard him say that.

You cook, you clean and you leave him there alone to watch over her, as she dies one nerve ending at a time. You hate yourself for leaving. Before she fades away from this world for the heavens, your brother's wife tells you they are proud. You have made them proud.

Nelson Mandela finally leaves the hospital for home; you suspect it is to die. You fear peace will die with him.

Diplomats proclaim, "Rescue the Syrians!" with bombs dropped on the road to Damascus. You cry a lot in 2013.

2012 You start over, you hope for the last time. As you sit with the college advisor, you are terrified you will fail again. Your only sustained success thus far has been in fleeing from yourself. You are VP of the honor society. You surprise yourself, delightfully certain for the first time of your capabilities. You have strengths now, a shiny armor resilient to your bullets of self-doubt. You walk the crowded beach, earphones on, listening to the music from your youth. You relish the solitude.

You have moved back in with your mother and stepfather. A tenuous treaty signed by all parties, followed by none.

Your brother's wife is diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease. You have not spoken to him in over a year. Another self-inflicted exile.

2002 In Karachi, Pakistan, Daniel Pearl is murdered. You pass by his bust every morning on your way to your cubicle. You think you should be doing more with your life. You are jealous of Daniel; his wife will honor his memory and never let their son forget how loved he was by his father. You spend the next decade trying to find yourself, to make everyone proud. You have little success. Your only solace is the occasional weekend with your brother and sister-in-law. You do things you never thought you would do and enjoy them because your brother is there laughing with you and not at you. Suddenly goose hunting and NASCAR races are your weekend outings.

2001 You move to Princeton and dream of going to school there. You ask your ex-husband to keep your children for a year while you get yourself settled into a new job. He agrees. He does not let you see them. You spend weekends driving to the mountains of New York just to get a glimpse of them. You have no idea who you are now. You begin to fall apart. He teaches your children to call you Kelly, "It's too confusing having two moms." You think to yourself, "They do not; they have one." It is no longer you. You learn to build walls so no one can ever hurt you like that again. You wish your brother would beat him up, after so many empty promises to when you loved him.

You are standing on the balcony of the Dow Jones building upstairs from Daniel Pearl's office and watch the smoke from the World Trade Center as the towers fall. You try to find your friends, your family. You call Lake Placid, momentarily grateful he stole your children, for they are far away from the chaos, the fear. You huddle in your clique, everyone afraid to go home, glued to the television. There is a shift, a change. America is never the same. Two weeks after 9-11, there are 27 cars unclaimed at the Princeton train station. You hope their children knew how much they loved them. Your brother was in the Pentagon three days prior. You realize you could have lost him. This scares you to the core. You decide you must call him and yet you do not.

1998 You run away with your children to Lake Placid, to enemy territory. You are too naïve to know what is in store for you. Your ex-husband's parents are the forward recon unit, gathering the intelligence for the campaign to have you removed from your life. They call you the incubator and you pretend to laugh; you go home and cry. You wish you could call your brother, but he is mad at you for moving there. He thinks it is stupid. You learn you should listen to your brother's advice. It takes you decades to.

Osama bin Laden publishes his first fatwa on the West.

1997 You are in Cuba watching your husband fall in love with another woman. You call your brother to cry. He blows a duck call in your ear; he does not want to hear. You feel as if it is redneck for "I told you so." You pack up your children and fly to Virginia. Your father picks all of you up at the airport. He takes you all to your mother and stepfather. Everyone fights all the time; your mother tells you how she thinks you should be. You must do everything perfectly. Your children are her redemption. You are supposed to offer them up on the altar to her. You refuse her counsel, her expert opinion. It is the beginning of your darkest time.

The Princess of Wales is murdered for her celebrity.

1996 Your son is born. He looks just like his father. Your husband stays away, always in the field, playing Marine. Your best friend is now your German Shepherd. You are lonely.

Surrounded by commotion, noise, little feet, sticky hands and runny noses, you are alone. You begin to think your husband does not love you anymore. You begin to notice you do not particularly like him. You feel guilty your son never saw the two of you in love.

1995 Your brother marries Tara. Your husband acts like a jerk at the wedding. You are humiliated. Your brother dives head first into his new life and family. He is grateful for a new life away from his old one. You understand.

1994 Your daughter is born. She looks just like you. You sit on your deck in North Top Sail Island, watching the dolphins at dawn, chasing the shrimp boats, seizing every opportunity. You feed her, dress her and wander down to the docks for the day's catch. Your husband is on the other side of the world. You are in love and happy. In his absence, he has given you perfection.

Apartheid ends in South Africa with Nelson Mandela elected as president.

1993 You elope.

1992 All of your friends are away at universities. You are a hostess at Friday's, your future husband walks in. A man, not a boy, walks in, a midshipman. You find out he wants your phone number. You hide in the kitchen. He follows you. You still run away, now it is just away with him.

Your brother cannot stand him. This makes you love your new boyfriend even more.

Rodney King is beaten. Los Angeles riots.

1989 You are smoking too much pot. You are skipping too much school. You are tired of the pretty, wealthy girls who make things up about you, especially the one who has called you a slut for years, so you sleep with her boyfriend. Your stepfather suggests if you get on honor roll then you can smoke all the pot you want. Your mother throws a fit, screaming at your stepfather, she thinks he must be insane. You think everyone is.

Your brother is ashamed of you; he ignores your very existence. You never see him anymore because he lives with Dad and you rarely see Dad. You are too busy screwing up. He never calls you and you never call him.

The Berlin Wall falls. The Exxon Valdez bleeds crude all over Prince William Sound.

1987 You hate your father for loving someone more than you. You beg to move back home to your old life and friends. Your mother relents. Your brother stays put. You realize when you get back to the bay that nothing is as you left it. You wonder why your high school has a sorority. You learn how your memory can play tricks on you, letting you only remember finer things. For the first time in your life, your brother is not there to tell you how you are screwing up.

You are like a ship on the bay without a pilot, without the master who can draw a map of every sand bar and jetty from memory, the one who knows where the safety of the deep channel hides. You must navigate your teenage years alone. You begin to make the many mistakes that shape your future.

The world population reaches 5 billion. You wonder how in the hell are all those people going to get along when four people in one house cannot.

1985 Your mother wants to be alone with her new husband. You and Sean go to live with Dad and his fiancé and her son...in her ex-husband's house they once shared.

You could not make this shit up.

Your brother hates his new brother more than he hates you. You begin to have something like a friendship. You learn a common enemy is a strong bond.

You and your brother watch LIVE AID and sing, "We are the World." He makes fun of the starving Africans. He does not subscribe to this philosophy. You begin to.

1984 Your mother marches 12 steps toward an abstemious life. She begins this march on your birthday. Your birthday is now her anniversary. You learn nothing is sacred. Your father is dating a ballerina. You hated ballet but think she is like a star to be on a stage. Your brother is hostility embodied. No one is ever home; he does everything for you. He teaches you swear words; he feeds you supper, walks you to school and tucks you in.

He pins you down while he mock spits in your face.

He stays in your room when she is home and feeling brutal. You rest assured that he must hate you for it. You help him with his English homework. He starts sipping whiskey on the way to school. Your father dumps the ballerina and it pisses you off. You liked her cats.

Ethiopians begin to starve.

The United States invades Grenada. Islamic Radicals bomb the embassy in Lebanon.

1981 Dad is sleeping on the couch downstairs. Then, the first man who ever loved you, the only man you will ever love without conditions, without regret, moves to Baltimore. Your brother bets your best friend Candice's brother that you can beat her up. She is certainly getting the better of you. You reach inside and seize all the disappointment, the shame, the rage, veiled by pigtails and boat shoes. You scream and wail like a hell-bent, preppy banshee toward your friend, knock her down and purge your soul. Your brother is proud of you.

You watch "Video Killed the Radio Star" on MTV.

Ronald Reagan is the elected president. A lunatic who is trying to flirt with Jodie Foster shoots him. You do not understand. Jodie Foster is not even that pretty.

1980 Your mother is drunk again, dancing with the mascot on the 50-yard line at your brother's football game. You are a cheerleader, so you cheer. He is more astute than you. He is aware that is not what the other mothers do. Your brother is angry again. Your mother is ashamed again. Your father is trying to keep it all together again.

John Lennon is murdered. You remember the music already died.

1979 There is a place called the Killing Fields.

1978 It is dawn on the bay, the quietest time on earth. Water so smooth and still you wonder if there ever was a wave. Ducks float over to your piling looking for breakfast. You ask your brother if they eat chicken necks. He shushes you. You pull the string up slowly, methodically, finger by tiny finger. He swoops in with the net and snatches the blue crab into the basket. You finally have done something right! You watch him stealthily wading through the grasses pulling out peelers and wonder if you will ever be that contained. You crack the claws and feed them to the cat. You eat the back fin. You are a big girl now.

Smiling Jimmy Carter is President.

1976 Your mother records you and your brother singing "Bye Bye Miss American Pie" on a reel to reel. You do not care that it is five years old now. Everyone loves that song, that anthem for an era yet to come and an era long gone by. You tell your brother, "Shut up, I'm singing!" You already know you will not be friends; you can tell he wanted to be an only child.

GENESIS OF THE PERFECT POEM

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Texas*

The poem stood tall on its page overlooking the margin;
its caesurae clung to its lines
(all of which were long and awe-inspiring),
and the meter sung through the glyphs of its words.
It stood proudly when it suddenly realized
that its last couplet leaked onto another page... and screamed.

It recalled all the ink, the boiled and cold coffee,
the piercing lamp light, and the songs of inspiration —
and the ballpoint pen and the page's faint-blue lines,
and the noisy brood of any home study
that went into the effort of its creation.

It lamented the rings of any mug and the grains
that suspended themselves so aggravatingly in that drink,
and the caffeinated steam with its graceful lifting
as though all that effort was for naught,

to say nothing of the day-squares of the one month and of the next
and the season-marked pages that had altered the poem appositely —

The poem reminisced of its author.
The foreign woman bore the poem as she has born her own.
She, while at home, sewed darkening red ink on its pages,
sawing its bones apart and siphoning its blood —

The poem's fetal stage had come to fruition then.

Before a village on a highland seen from afar at sunrise
(fog and wind gliding about her)
the author trotted forward, the wagon behind clanking over rocks.
The little carrier was heavy with stacks of unbound pages,
with folders and letters (to Whom It May Concern),
with the poem and its brothers,
with quills and journals and broken envelopes —
She trekked through long-muddied troughs at the city's edge,
which smelled (of course) of defecation and old rain.

And now, the perfect poem brought on that wagon
so long ago stands proudly within its book —
disregarding its last couplet.



PLAYING BEETHOVEN HEARTBROKEN

NANCY MANTICK
*Ivy Tech Community College
Indiana*

All alone at three a.m. again.
But tonight, I feel
the tumblers in the lock
on my heart ease
over one by one
like a chromatic scale
on the piano.

The wood floor feels
like a frozen lake
under my bare feet.
They make their way
toward my neglected friend,
its curves and keys
silent and morose
in the dim light.

I sink onto the bench,
and lay one finger
onto one key.
Pling...pling...pling...
over and over, like
a death knell.
I close my eyes.

My left hand finds a chord
down deep in the bass keys.
Then my right hand fingers
the first notes of Beethoven's
Pathétique sonata.

The heartbreak, the
desperation of the piece
pull me in.
The notes ringing
from my piano
match the longing
in my soul.

It is perfect.
Not perfect in technicalities,
but perfect in the flow,
the flowing out of all the
turmoil I feel.

Now I am playing my own
music that shifts and turns
as my mind urges it on.
Time no longer exists.
Only the notes, merging into chords,
separating out again,
phrase after phrase.

My soul is singing,
and the pain is draining
out my fingertips.
I play until
peace returns
and I can,
at last,
sleep.

I, IN THE HALL OF MY ANCESTORS



TERESA LANE

*Walters State Community College
Tennessee*

For the last time, I drove through the night to my grandmother's house. Outside the town, which aspired to be a city, the darkness was thicker. Although it was August, cool air rushed in through my opened windows as the car careened around curves. Elvis Presley rode shotgun, singing sweetly to me on the radio, on hometown radio station WCRK.

I didn't need to flash my high beams; I knew these roads like the back of my hand. I'd walked them and driven them so many times that every turn was etched into my heart. This was my land, my childhood home, the place that I return to at night, in dreams.

I turned off Reeds Chapel Road onto Jaybird Road, and I pulled into what was once my grandmother's driveway. Grass had grown up over the old driveway, as it had been a long time since anyone had put a new load of gravel down. I put my car in park, turned the ignition key off and killed the headlights. In the darkness, I saw the old house, standing neglected and forgotten, with moonlight reflecting faintly off its windowpanes.

There was a faint pinging sound under the hood of my car. I dialed a familiar telephone number on my cell phone. It turned out to be the wrong number. Although I hadn't dialed her number in years, I had accidentally dialed my grandmother's old telephone number through some arcane trick of memory, and love.

Quickly, I dialed another number, another number that I'd known by heart since I was in grade school. My aunt answered. "You still own the house?" I asked. "It's not being sold until tomorrow?"

"It's still ours," she replied, "For right now, at least."

"Good, because I'm sitting in the driveway, right now."

"Your cousin Allison thought you might be."

I started crying. I told my aunt goodbye, and she told me that if the man across the street came over to throw me off the property, to tell him that he wouldn't own it until tomorrow.

I hung up and called my mother to tell her that I was at her mother's old house. Sometimes weird things happened to people out alone at night in the country. It never hurt to tell someone where I was.

"Are you by yourself?" my mother asked.

"Yeah," I said. "I just wanted to come home, one last time."

"Be careful," she said, and I hung up my cell phone.

I walked down the old driveway to my Memaw's house, passing by invisible versions of myself from other times...myself at 17 wearing a white cap and gown coming to pick my grandmother up for my high school graduation; myself at nine throwing green apples at the neighbor boy; myself at 12 posing for a rare winter photo with my brothers Duke and Dennis; myself at 15 raking leaves in the fall with my little brother while we sang "Witchy Woman" by the Eagles; myself at some indeterminate age high up in the tall tree in the front yard laughing with my cousin Sherri while being beaten by my granny, who was standing on a ladder wielding a tobacco stick, for a prank we'd played; and myself at 10 bending over to smell the blood red tulips that grew in the yard in the springtime.

I stepped up on the porch, remembering the rummage sale my granny had held for Fairfield Baptist Church for many years to raise money for their building fund. I remembered how, when we were children, my cousins and I would go through the donated purses that were arranged for sale on benches on the porch, looking for loose change. I remembered the customers that had stepped up onto that porch to have custom sewing done by my grandmother, who was a skilled seamstress. I remembered a rainy afternoon spent playing Monopoly on that porch with a boy I'd had a crush on. I remembered trying to hypnotize my cousin Sherri, who was lying on a bench on the porch, by reading a passage we'd found in a book about psychic Edgar Cayce.

I looked at the front door, and I remembered the thousands upon thousands of times I'd seen my grandmother take her antique key out and unlock that door. I remembered knocking on that door and yelling "Trick or Treat" for many Halloweens. I remembered her opening that door to me when I'd knocked on it crying after I was expelled from high school. I recalled the many times she'd taken me in when I was sick, and how she'd closed that door behind me, and then rubbed my chest with Vick's VapoRub and tied a clean cotton handkerchief around my neck and bundled me up on the couch to sleep while she sewed.

I stood and mused for a moment about how my cousins considered my Memaw's old house haunted. I waited a moment to see if my beloved grandmother or her father or mother would knock or tap to make their presence known. There was nothing but the sound of crickets chirping. There was no one there but me, and the unseen versions of me from years past, and the bittersweet flood of memories that had started the tears streaming down my face.

I looked up one last time into the night sky, and I saw the stars sparkling just the way they had all the times I'd looked up at them in this same infinitely special place my whole life. I remembered how when I was three years old my grandmother had taken me by the hand and walked me three houses down to my parent's house under a star-filled sky, and how she'd taught me that night about making a wish upon the first star, and I remembered the words I'd learned that night. "Star light, star bright, first star I'd see tonight, I wish I may, I wish I might, have the wish I wish tonight."

Although I sorrowed at losing our home place of over a hundred years, I knew that my sweet Memaw would want me to keep some room in my heart for bright hopes and wishes. And tomorrow I will dry my tears, and do the best I can to do just that. Like my mother reminded me, my granny lives in our hearts now, and no one can take those memories away. Novelist Thomas Wolfe believed you can't go home again, and perhaps he was right; but on this last

night while I still had the chance, I wanted to show respect and reverence to the place I loved so much that to me it verged on being holy.

On the way back to my car, I stooped and picked up two rocks as mementos, one for me, and one for my mother. The past defines us. There is nothing wrong with tucking a reminder in your pocket, to remember days gone by.

ELIOT SAID APRIL IS THE CRUELEST MONTH...

RHIANNON MARTIN

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Pennsylvania*

I remember falling down my stairs
the day I got the call.
You always had a way of sweeping me off my feet.

The bruises that blossomed
from head to toe were nothing,
compared to the violet ring
that wreathed your neck.

You tied the knot with Death,
but she never loved you like I did.
She was never there to clean up your messes,
or answer your late-night confessions.

We used to devote ourselves to God's verses.
One, two, three, four days — I counted, I waited.
I prayed you would rise like Lazarus,
but you were always the type to sympathize with Judas.

My prayers just seemed to sink
like your body in that casket;
Like the sun over the hill
where you now reside.

We were all there for your big day —
black suits and skirts to match the mood.
I saved my tears for later;
You never were one for sorrow...

But here we are,
so what do I really know?

I know that I still hear your laugh in Kaden,
see your face in Kaleb,
and Stephanie hasn't stopped writing love letters
begging you to come home.

Her letters are stained with tears like the pages of books I can't bring myself to open.
Books, we once shared, where you left your mark —
strawberry soda stains as red as the anger in some friends' faces
when I mention your name.

You were always one for making messes, but
I don't know if this is one that I can clean.
I've spent too many nights holding your mother's hair instead of her hand,
And I know that she still blames herself.

So tell me, my dear Judas, was Death's dowry worth it?
Is the silver lining you sold out for still shining,
or tarnished like the hearts you left behind?
Either way, I can never hold it against you.

I haven't graced God's halls since you left, but
I always find myself at his door.
Four days has turned into four years,
and there's still no answer.



MARKETING FOR A HEALTHIER SOCIETY



TESSA ENNS

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Watching television, driving to work, reading the newspaper, surfing the Internet, grocery shopping and other daily activities are consciously and unconsciously providing an array of advertisements that influence decision making. Even when commercials are fast-forwarded or ads in magazine pages quickly flipped, if the product is seen even for a split second it becomes more familiar, forming an unconscious positive association. Psychologist John Watson applied this knowledge of behavior to revolutionize the advertising industry. Watson associated appealing images with a certain brand name to manipulate sales. With his psychology background, he succeeded in directing consumer's behavior solely through alluring ads. Advertising is a very powerful tool, and advertisers use this knowledge to their full advantage.

The "Pepsi paradox" proves the influence advertising has on its viewers. The participants in this experiment were given two glasses of pop, one containing Pepsi and the other filled with Coke. Without labels on the glasses, the majority of participants preferred Pepsi, but with labels, the participants chose Coke instead of their intuitive choice, Pepsi (Koenigs 1-2). The association one has with a product can make the product more desirable, a fact marketers use as a weapon to deceive. Since advertising can negatively influence children, adults and the environment, the government is morally obligated to regulate advertising of products or services that harmfully manipulate viewers. To fulfill moral obligations, the government must ensure companies are fully articulating the realities of their product or service, and if not, prohibit their ads from public display.

It is important to note that government does currently express some control in advertising. In 1980 the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), developed through Congress in 1914, agreed to follow a four-step process to eliminate illegal advertising. The first step states advertising can be immediately banned if it is deceptive or portrays unlawful activity. Second, to ban an

advertisement, the court must agree that it would significantly benefit society. Third, the ban must prove to continue providing society with a positive impact; and lastly, the banning of an advertisement must be done as generally as possible to accomplish the precise results desired (Marshall 61-62). Although this four-step process has delivered positive impacts on society thus far, such as enforcing a “do-not-call list” for obtrusive telemarketers with the passing of the Telephone Consumer Protection Act in 1991, the vague and complex nature allows several issues to continue to leak through the cracks (Marshall 63). Companies have the right to market their products or services, but the government’s responsibility to protect the public from negative consequences of advertising outweighs those rights.

To start, companies express particular interest in young children. They are an easy target and are often used as bait to hook, line and sink products into. The particular interest in securing favorability with a child comes from the fact that they are the future market. Since young children are still in the critical stages of learning about the world, their environmental surroundings are continually influencing their behavior unknowingly. Sadly, marketers harvest and profit from their naïve characteristics and target them at their most vulnerable and relaxed states, such as watching a favorite cartoon show. Peggy Charren, founder of Action of Children’s Television (ACT), highlights “unlike adults, children do not zap the ads when they use a remote control device...the ads feature more children and better animation than the programs they interrupt...children like commercials, and corporations know how to take advantage of this sad fact of TV life” (Clark 6). One common product in television commercials is the vast assortment of unhealthy foods, such as sugary cereals represented with animated, friendly and harmless cartoon characters. However, cereals high in sugar are far from harmless — if eaten in excess, they will likely produce an overweight, unhealthy child. And even though advertisers know this fact, it does not stop them from excessively marketing their unhealthy foods to the young age groups. Each year in the 1990’s, children watched over 40,000 product-induced commercials; and with the rise of technology, that number is only increasing (Kunkel 376). Likewise, child obesity continues to be an ongoing problem in America. To believe advertising is not partly responsible for the high obesity rates is at the same level of gullibility children possess when unknowingly watching a product designed to sell (Kunkel 375). Everyday parents and schoolteachers strive to educate children about their health and well being, but despite their attempts advertising contradicts their efforts. As the “Pepsi Paradox” proves, even if something is knowingly better, advertising has the power to overrule instinctive thought patterns.

Furthermore, young children are not the only ones being swarmed with ads. Older children too are unknowingly marketed. For example, in 1982, the chocolaty peanut butter candy Reese’s Pieces was displayed in the popular film *E.T.*; and right after its big movie debut, sales went up 66 percent. Advertisers, quick to recognize these astronomical figures, hurriedly joined the bandwagon, paying to have their products used in popular children’s TV shows and films (Marshall 66). Dr. David Walsh, founder of the National Institute on Media and the Family, notes, “snack-food companies that advertise effectively are influencing people to consume large quantities of foods that contain trans fatty acids and high fructose corn syrup, and that’s a health problem” (Marshall 60). Children of all ages are especially vulnerable to manipulation, and advertisers are relentlessly after their approval, bombarding their minds with appealing but unhealthy products.

The outlash of criticism for junk foods forced companies to compose a defending argument. Advertisers justify their work, testifying they are not the ones responsible for children consuming unhealthy foods; instead it is the responsibility of parents to enforce good eating habits (Marshall 58). Though parents are the authoritative figures in the household, they cannot protect children from the influence of advertising. Children buy candy with their own money, pressure their parents to succumb to their temptations in a store, or provide an effective means of positive reinforcement. For instance, a parent who knows their child loves Reese’s Pieces candy bars may use it as a reward for doing something desirable, instead of a healthier, less-desirable and less-advertised alternative. On top of that, parents cannot monitor their children in every group setting. For example, in 1990, young inner-city kids brawled over the expensive Nike brand shoes at a time when basketball legend Michael

Jordan was featured in their advertising campaign. The fight led to numerous killings, and Nike's advertisement became subject to full attack (Clark 2). Imagine, if instead of advertising Nike shoes, the basketball superstar advertised education and non-violence, or all three, perhaps some lives may have been saved.

In addition, advertisers believe censoring information will not solve poor eating habits (Marshall 58). However, if advertising can contribute to the sales of unhealthy products, it can certainly contribute to the downfall of sales or the up rise in sales for healthier activities as well. It is not surprising that advertisers who profit from consumer choices are not in favor of the government interfering with their business's successful operations; but a group of people whose objective is to serve the public is in a far better moral state to regulate marketing than that of a company whose objective is solely to make a profit. It is inevitable that messages revealed to society will go through a filtering process due to time and space constraints, but filtering the bad to emphasize the good promises more for one's health and well-being, especially for the fragile sponge-like minds of children.

Children are not the only victims of marketing though; adults, with more money to spend and at an independent age, are targeted every day to buy unnecessary and potentially harmful products. For example, pharmaceutical drugs are being peddled to the public like a ruthless drug dealer on the prowl for their next sale. Direct to Consumer (DTC) advertising allows pharmaceutical companies to market their own products. Companies enjoy massive financial gains due to DTC advertising, regardless of the consumer's actual need for their product. In just one year, drug prescriptions elevated 25 percent due to advertising, but drugs not being advertised only saw a four percent increase in prescriptions (Marshall 56). Zooming in, the antihistamine Claritin profited \$500 million (Marshall 56). However, "from late 1997, when the FDA relaxed its broadcast advertising regulations, until early 1999... [out of] 33 products [fully advertised], 17 were found to violate the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act" (Marshall 56). Advertising a drug to a wide spectrum of viewers, in which neither the marketer nor the consumer is in a position to diagnose a problem, is immoral and consequently has negative impacts on society.

Of course advertisers disagree, believing that as a result of their advertising more people are seeing their doctor to review issues they never talked about before (Marshall 56). Perhaps there are good reasons for that though — why discuss a problem if it does not exist? The problem with so-called DTC advertising, critics say, is that it encourages consumers to pressure their doctors to prescribe unnecessary or even inappropriate drugs, inflating health-care costs and, in some cases, harming patients. "I'm seeing many more people asking for a particular medication based on their own assessments of their conditions," an internist in Haverhill, Massachusetts, said. "They're basically asking me to rubber-stamp their thought processes" (Marshall 56). Marketers put a lot of money into their advertisements and in return expect financial gain, but their gain can be a consumer's loss. Damaging one's health is a loss far more expensive than the price of a pill. In order to stop the vicious cycle, government needs to actively speculate and take affirmative action when necessary. The public does not have the resources to investigate every product, but because advertisements are promising, they are more vulnerable to gullibility. Unless the government takes responsibility for public welfare in advertising, viewers will continually be victims of deceptive ads.

Likewise, environmental activists developed a heightened awareness on the misrepresentation of environmentally friendly products advertised to the public. For instance, the American chemical company, DuPont, was misrepresenting environmental facts and found to be "the single largest corporation polluter in the United States... Using pups and dolphins [in its television advertising] to gloss over the fact" (Clark 8). The FTC is looking into the issue, but if advertisements were to go through the FTC before being marketed to the public, the problem would have been avoided. The First Amendment allowing the freedom of speech makes it difficult to find a healthy balance between the freedom of expression and the government's social responsibility. But when everyone is being marketed, whether it is minorities, children, political gurus, men, women, teenagers or even environmental activists, "advertisers take advantage of innate desires for the good life...and there [is] nothing

pushing on the other side for a moderate, more civic-orientated life," imposing problems on our culture (Clark 11). Without government, society would be lost in chaos and anarchy; and as the world is being engulfed in advertising like a spiraling tornado, government is morally obligated to ensure society is not negatively influenced by the overwhelming amount of information. Advertising directs consumers to buy a product, even if the product has negative consequences; therefore the government needs to take accountability, for they are the only organization with the power to seize the corruption.

Advertisers are very clever with the combined use of marketing and psychology to charm society, and they are successful at advertising to each unique person. The abundance of diversity provides "all sorts of values in our rich society," but "the commercial ones are getting drummed in more and more at the expense of more enduring values," a defeating and powerful threat (Clark 9). The chore to clean up advertising is not a simple procedure, as John O'Toole, the president of the American Association of Advertising points out: "The more ads, the more sales; and the more sales, the more tax revenues in state coffers" (Clark 11). But using advertising as a resource to influence society to strive for a healthier nation has unlimited possibilities of producing a brighter future. Advertising provides a very resourceful tool when used wisely. Even in this research essay, advertising has served its purpose through the use of the recency effect and primacy effect, in which I state my main point at the beginning and end of this paper so it is more likely to be remembered. Advertisers do the same thing, most often using logos at the beginning and especially the end of their ads for emphasis. Since statistics and research prove how persuasive advertising is, why not use it to market a healthier society? To take away company's power, whose eyes are on money, and to negatively influence decision making, governments need to properly inform their citizens. Enlightening citizens of the facts behind advertising will allow decision making to solely rely on the eye of the beholder.

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THIEVES



BRANDON JOHNSON
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When she turns 40, Mom steals my high school clothes and goes to an Atheist church. I don't know what they worship there. Around Christmastime, the Atheist church holds a bingo night to celebrate nothing and Mom meets a guy named Leonard. Leonard is old but not no-hair old. He takes her to his high-end trailer park. I stay home, watch "Grey's Anatomy," and do Algebra homework online.

Reminds me of something:

I'm 15 and Mom's 30. She steals my cheerleader outfit and goes to prom with my boyfriend. He's 18. "He's too old for you," she says. The limo driver — my uncle with a fake mustache and a bad French accent — stays home. We play Monopoly.

Mom never returns what she stole.

Next morning, I'm 25 again, and Leonard brings Mom home. He makes breakfast, asks if I have my own place. I tell him about my former rent-stealing landlord. "We were on one of those court shows," I say. He asks if it was "Judge Judy." It wasn't, but still, I was on TV. He likes that.

When he leaves, he forgets his trailer keys.

The trailer park has a bunch of flags. Some Confederate, some Dallas Cowboys. His trailer has a waterbed that jiggles like his stomach. I can smell Mom's perfume on his beard.

Morning after, a rooster wakes me up. I'm alone and the lights are out, because I guess he didn't pay the light bill. Don't know where my dress went.

I find some clothes in the drawer. Mom's. I put them on and leave, eyes darting like a shoplifter.

THAT PLACE

ELIZABETH ENOS

*Montcalm Community College
Michigan*

It's not what they think...
It's not a world of pure darkness,
It's an endless expanse of white
As pure as can be,
Stretching out from horizon to horizon.
It's not dark,
It's painfully blinding.

I see the people,
Hazy specters wandering the landscape
Only partially aware of my existence.
I hear the voices,
Like whispers barely reaching
The far reaches of a quiet room,
But meaning reverberates through the soul.

But there is still that Cimmerian shade,
An emptiness more complete
Than the spaces between celestial bodies,
That burrows deep and takes root
Anchoring itself among the echoes
Of pain, fear, sorrow and anger,
Numbing, desensitizing, slowly killing.

And every morning
I relinquish myself to the glaring white
As I wonder how I made it through another day
Or if I will survive again to see another tomorrow.
And every night
Is an acknowledgment that the whispered lies
That have been thrown at me, are truth.

Sticks and stones
Cannot terrify more than words,
Hurt more than dying piece by piece,
Stab and cut as deeply as the knowledge
That I am nobody, nothing, worthless
Cannot cripple more than knowing that I exist
Only to be broken.



THE LIFE OF POE GABRIEL



ANDREA GABRIEL

*Skyline College
California*

After a 6 a.m. newspaper route and a full day of fourth grade, my stomach is growling so loud that I can barely concentrate. The three-mile gap between George Washington Elementary and home seems like an eternity.

As I trek through downtown San Diego, the hustle and bustle of my neighborhood cuts through the air like a broken foghorn. The white men of corporate America flood the sidewalks like perfectly assembled mannequins, their three-piece suits and blond hair always flawless. Some men offer me a puzzled look, probably because they are unaccustomed to a 9 year old walking through “Wop Town” by himself. Other gentlemen even turn to watch as I continue down the street, fearlessly greeting my neighborhood drug dealers, beggars and bums who know me by name. These social outcasts are littered on each street corner and every bus stop, but their very presence is comforting to me. It’s the cold mannequins that make me uneasy. As they stare at me, none of them ever ask if I’m okay. No one offers me assistance. They don’t even say hello. Perhaps it’s because the color of my skin matches the brown cow hide on their belt? Who knows? Who cares? I don’t! I’m starving!

As I pass Filippi’s Pizza Grotto, the mouthwatering aroma of parmesan cheese, fresh pasta, mortadella and white wine hold my hunger hostage. This leg of my journey especially sucks, since my big brother, Vesi, recently got fired from his busboy job there. In Vesi’s defense he only stole the food to bring home for our family. When raising three growing Samoan children, food becomes a hot commodity — just ask my mother. My mind wonders, “What did mama make for dinner tonight?” Whatever it is, I only get one serving. In this household seconds don’t exist; we can’t afford it. Plus, everyone knows that the “big piece of chicken” is reserved for Grandpa Tony.

He is a mean bastard with an alcohol addiction that keeps him up all night. Ironically, I’ve never seen him drunk, and I don’t think he has ever missed a day of work. Not a single day! I believe the educated folks would call him a “functioning alcoholic.” I just know him as my

Dad. He is like a damn machine. Every morning at 4 a.m., I can hear him getting ready for work, and he's out the door before the sun rises. When I arrive home from school, he is in the bedroom, door shut, bottle open, television on. Sometimes I can smell his awful cigarette smoke through the apartment walls. Come to think of it, I never even see the guy anymore. If it weren't for his hacking cough in the evenings and the mountain of beer bottles piled in our tiny kitchen sink in the morning, I'd think he was a ghost. He never says a word, not even to my mother, but he single-handedly keeps our family afloat.

As I approach Columbia Street, I spot the neighborhood hooligan, Antonio, who also happens to be my best friend. I ask this wise guy, "Where'd you get the bike?"

"STOLE IT!" he replies mischievously. (I guess bicycle retrieval was more important than fourth grade today.) "But hey man, you need to go to the hospital! They took your mom in the freakin' ambulance a couple hours ago!"

Antonio's news didn't worry me as much as it annoyed me. The hospital is another two miles in the opposite direction, and I haven't eaten since lunch. So my adventure continues. As I wander from block to block, I count how many times Mama has been in the hospital in the past month. Six visits? Has it really been that many? Goodness, she should take a load off. I'll wake up extra early tomorrow to help her cook breakfast. That always seems to lift her spirits. When I reach the hospital, the green-tinted double doors slide open silently, like a thief in the night. I walk up to Norma, the receptionist, and her eyes look like a bucket full of water.

"Poe, where is your father?" she asks.

"He's not here? I guess he's still at work." I reply. "What room is my mom in?"

Suddenly Norma begins to sob. As she climbs out from behind the counter, I realize that she is a very tall woman. I have never seen her legs before. Then she does something really weird. She reaches out for a hug, and holds me so tight that I can smell hints of her deodorant. Or is it hairspray? Whatever it is, it smells good — the scent reminds me of my teacher, Ms. Belle.

My parents don't believe in public displays of affection. Actually they don't show any affection, period. As you can imagine, hugging Norma, the hospital receptionist, for the first time is extremely awkward. Although her embrace is foreign to me, I like it, and for some reason I close my eyes as she tightly wraps her arms around my small body. When she finally lets go her head drops to the ground as if gravity has somehow become stronger. Without looking up she holds my hands and whispers, "I'm sorry Sweetheart, your mama died today."

I didn't cry, not even a single tear. I know my mother; she is a tiny old Samoan woman, but she is as tough as nails. If she was here now, she would say, "Poe STOP CRYING. Now is the time to be strong, not weak!" So I gathered myself and prepared for a long walk home.

My voyage back to Columbia Street plays through like a silent film. I can see the cars, workers closing their shops for the night, and the airplanes flying into Lindbergh Field. But I don't hear a thing. All is quiet in the world and for the first time in my life, I can literally hear myself think.

As I stroll into my neighborhood, the familiar sights and sounds begin to comfort me. I chuckle because the white mannequins wouldn't be caught dead in "Wop Town" at this hour. Our teachers always warn us to be careful when we leave school. I honestly don't see what all of the fuss is about. I love my neighborhood. The streetlight just came on, which usually signals I'm late for supper. Tonight however, it's just the light at the end of a tunnel.

Goodbye Mama. I am home.

FARM BOY

NANCY MANTICK

*Ivy Tech Community College
Indiana*

Farm boy feeding
oatmeal to his cats.
Picking peaches with his dad.
California sun that dries
the skin like raisins.
Spearing salmon in the streams.
Mother churning butter, curing olives
and his fever. Scarlet fever
hurt his heart, but it's still
beating after all at ninety-four.
Driving drunken neighbor home,
but the boy is just a teen,
sent away to work
that neighbor's farm all summer.
Sees his father bowed and stooped,
working farms and picking fruit,
growing plants and growing old.
Farm boy wants a different life.
Acts in plays and aces math class,
plays his trumpet in the band.
Teacher tells him
he can be an engineer.
Goes to college, finds his future,
helps his nation win a war.
Finds a wife and has some children,
grows a garden and a life.
Plants some fruit trees, tends an orchard,
tells his kids about his dad
long gone.





BURST OF BRILLIANCE

NICK ALLEN

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Mixed media, you say to me,
Your lips spreading
In a pleased grin.

Time after time you've amazed me
And I thought for sure
I could be amazed no more.
I've seen for years
Your talents flourish
Your style evolve.

But then.

Mixed media, you say,
Eyes sparkling.

A simple round brush you dip
Into an old blue mug,
Bringing cracked squares of watercolors
To a swirling state of liquid life.
Suddenly your blank page
Erupts with tints and shades,
Each artful decision carried out
With whimsical wonder.

Crayons,
The tools of our childhood,
The cheap sticks of wax
They hand out like candy
To every kid in IHOP,
You use to create
Enthralling, mind-bending
Abstractions and backgrounds.

Markers,
 Not just for labeling
 Or declaring to the world
 Whose underwear this is,
 But for outlining,
 For filling in,
 For making the characters of your
 imagination
 Pop off the page.

And your white pen,
 Your signature detail,
 How it creates an added layer
 Of depth,
 Of care.
 That inky white pen
 You aren't the least bit whimsical with,
 But full of artistic intent,
 Wielding it while your brow
 Furrows in concentration.

With a critical eye
 And a nonchalant flick of the wrist,
 You apply stroke after stroke of
 Graceful curves, sharp edges,
 Smooth lines, and rough textures;
 Designs that lead my eye across your page
 As seamlessly as a figure skater
 Glides on ice.

And by the end?
 By the end,
 You've amazed me again,
 Left me wondering at the
 Intricacies of your imagination.
 By the end,

It's not I who is creative,
 Not when your world comes to life
 So much clearer than any words
 I've ever written could.
 By the end,
 It's I who silently showers you with praise,
 But outwardly only manages a breathless
 "Wow."

By the end,
 You deflate.
 You hold up your masterpiece and smile,
 You say mixed media is the future,
 And you set it aside.
 You exhale
 And in that exhale I can hear
 All your insecurities,
 All your self-doubt and belittlement.
 I wonder how you can find such enjoyment
 And yet such sorrow.
 I wonder what you're thinking
 To tear yourself down
 As I struggle to find the words
 That might build you back up.

By the end,
 I wonder if you will ever see yourself
 In the same magnificent
 Burst of brilliance
 That I see you.

TO TELL ABOUT IT

SARAH MYERS

*St. Charles Community College
Missouri*

I go back
to the night of the first
horror.

Eyes drift
to me,
like I am a car accident on
the side of
the highway.
Reluctant hands hold everything from metals
to paper, still
unwilling
to hold my human
skin.

Suicide scares them,
the way a Catholic child playing with
her genitals scares her mother.

We are
a snow globe of
expensive metals and ideas,
stealing the labor from the
best-kept secrets in the world.

Pain is hidden, but
in the Olds fashion
it will live
to tell about it.

A BROKEN SYSTEM



ELIJAH EVANS

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Standardized testing is a term that elicits sighs of relief from some, while arousing feelings of trepidation in others. Standard tests are defined by the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as “a test which has an established level of credibility, achieved by averaging the scores of a large sample of individuals, and used as a benchmark for assessment” (“Standard Test”). A number of benefits can be gleaned from standardized testing. According to Harvard Professor Daniel Koretz, not only does standardized testing allow us to see how American students are performing in a number of fields, but the results of the tests also allow us to compare students in America to students in other countries (Koretz). Results from these tests can be objectively measured and empirically documented with a high degree of credibility. Yet, for all its benefits, flaws exist in the system. Due to the nature of standardized testing, the tests themselves are much harder on certain demographics, and the tests produce multiple undesirable effects in the classroom. This would be tolerable if not for the reality that superior methods exist. Standardized testing should be abolished because the method of evaluation is a flawed system with superior alternatives.

High-stakes tests are unfair to many students, the most obvious example of this being children with learning disabilities. An affliction such as dyslexia could easily prevent a child from performing well on a test; when the difference between a right and wrong answer may be as little as a single letter, the inability to read a word correctly would be a major disadvantage. To find evidence of this, one need do little more than compare the graduation rates among children with learning disabilities to children in the mainstream population. According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities, from 2008 to 2009 a mere 64 percent of students with learning disabilities graduated from high school with a normal certificate of graduation; this is in comparison to a graduation rate of 73.9 percent among children without learning disabilities (“High School Graduation”). Another group that is unfairly penalized is children attending poorly funded schools. Large class sizes and

inadequate facilities, such as libraries, laboratories and computer labs, make covering the source material difficult. Children attending schools in economically depressed areas suffer from subpar resources and circumstances. In a comparable fashion to children who attend poorly funded schools, children who come from low-income families often face similar issues. The Southern Education Foundation released a study that showed that in 17 states spread throughout the south and southwest regions of the United States, more than 50 percent of students come from low-income families ("A New Majority"). Problems such as poor nutrition, housing or medical care plague low-income students. How then is holding children from low-income families, who attend poorly funded schools, to the same standard as students from high-income families, who are attending well-funded schools, a reasonable practice? Is testing a child with dysgraphia and evaluating that child in the same way as a child without learning disabilities a fair course of action? The answer is simple: the practice of standardized testing is not fair.

The focus on test performance is producing multiple undesirable side effects in the classroom. A common problem is overt focus on test preparation in favor of covering the source material. In an article written by David Miller Sadker, Ph.D., and Karen R. Zittleman, Ph.D., entitled "Test Problems: Seven Reasons Why Standardized Tests are Not Working," 79 percent of teachers interviewed by the news organization Education Week said they spend varying amounts of their class time specifically instructing their pupils in test taking (Sadker). A focus on test preparation pulls time away from more important things, such as covering the source material. Another issue associated with too much focus on test performance is that children who receive bad grades are significantly more likely to quit school. In the same article, Sadker and Zittleman referred to a study conducted by Harvard University, which found that the dropout rate among students in the bottom 10 percent of performance was 33 percent greater than the average rate (Sadker).

Another shockingly prevalent issue is that cheating among teachers is becoming more common. In an article written by investigative reporter Jack Gillum entitled "The Methodology of 'Testing the System,'" an investigation by *USA TODAY* is detailed in which 24,000 schools spread across six states and Washington, D.C., showed cheating, indicating anomalies that suggested test alterations (Gillum). In another article written by Gillum, Greg Toppo, Denise Amos and Jodi Upton titled "When Test Scores Seem Too Good to Believe," an incident is related wherein an elementary school teacher was caught feeding his students tests questions before the test occurred (Toppo). But the problem does not stop with the teachers; in some instances, the issue extends as far upwards as the principal. In an article entitled, "New Jersey School Teachers and Principal Suspended for Helping Students Cheat," writer Samreen Hooda relates an event wherein three teachers and two principals from New Jersey were suspended after accusations surfaced that the teachers and principals were helping their students to cheat on standardized tests (Hooda). The cheating is reprehensible; when coupled with the issue of overt focus on test preparation and the debilitating effects that bad grades have upon children, the negative side effects of standardized testing become more than enough reason to do away with the current system of evaluation.

These shortcomings would be acceptable if not for the fact that better methods of evaluation exist. Finland is an often-cited flagship for educational expertise, yet they use few standardized tests. The educational differences between America and Finland are contrasted in an article entitled "Standardized Testing a Foreign Concept in Finland with World's Top Students." In the United States, schools give high-stakes tests in order to determine a child's eligibility for graduation and to see if the school needs reform, and the results are used as a benchmark to measure teacher performance. Conversely, Finnish students take very few low-stakes exams; the results of which are primarily used to gauge a student's academic growth and are never used for accountability. In comparison to other countries, Finnish students perform exceptionally well. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a standardized test taken by students in dozens of countries. Finnish students constantly rank near the top in all fields evaluated by the PISA ("Standardized Testing"). Finland is not alone in this; homeschooled children take few, if any, standardized tests and

consistently outperform children in the public school system. According to the Home School Legal Defense Association, homeschoolers regularly outscore public school students by 30 to 37 percentage points in every subject ("Academic Statistics on Homeschooling"). The results of homeschooling and the Finnish public school system make a convincing argument on their own to support the dispelling of standardized testing; together, they show the destructiveness of high-stakes standardized tests.

Not all are opposed to standardized testing. In point of fact, many may argue in favor of standardized testing. Evidence can be found to show that standardized testing positively affects achievement. In an article titled "Top Test Scores from Shanghai Stun Educators," *New York Times* writer Sam Dillon reports how, in 2009, Chinese students scored higher on the PISA than students from any other country (Dillon). This is significant in that China is a firm enforcer of standardized testing. The argument could be made that China's application of standardized testing is the culprit behind their exceptional scores. The next logical step could be to say that the same would hold true in America. However, China and America are wildly different countries; a much greater emphasis is put upon education in China than in America. Lauren Mack, a freelance journalist, summarizes the Chinese system of education in an article titled "School in China: Introduction to School and Education in China." In China, children are required to attend school from age 6 to 15. After the age of 15, parents are required to pay for further schooling. Chinese students attend school five or six days a week, and classes last from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. or later. Many schools hold required morning classes on Saturdays. In addition, many students attend class in the evening and on weekends. Chinese students have fewer breaks, and their summer break lasts for one month (Mack). While Chinese students are in school for fewer years than American students, the increased length of time that Chinese children spend in school during the school year more than makes up for the disparity. For America to glean the same benefits from standardized testing as China, the whole ideology held by Americans toward the educational system would have to change. Standardized testing is unfair, yields multiple negative effects and is thus an inferior system of evaluation.

A quote commonly makes its rounds on social media: "Everyone is a genius; but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid." The quote is often attributed to Albert Einstein. While no substantive evidence exists to show if Einstein indeed said these words, the truth of the words themselves is self-evident. Undeniably, everyone is different. Inside each and every person is a unique skill set. Therefore, judging all people in the same way is foolish. Standardized testing does just this; standard tests use one set of factors whereby to evaluate everyone. In doing so, standardized tests leave out all chances for the innate uniqueness held by human beings to shine through. Standardized testing considers everyone as a single, congruent, homogenous mass. This would be fine if human beings were ants, but human beings are not ants. Each and every person alive today is inimitable. So why then do we judge human beings as if they were ants? Many answers could be given to that question. Perhaps standardized testing is employed out of convenience. Or maybe, standardized testing is used simply out of indolence and apathy to undertake the monumental task that would be revamping the United States' educational system's main form of evaluation. Regardless of the justification, standardized testing is a broken system in desperate need of replacement. If the practice of standardized testing is not reworked, the flaws associated with the current system of evaluation will inevitably continue to plague the American school system and its students.

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BEHIND THE BEGUILING EYES OF A BROKEN WIFE

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If only you knew the truth...
behind these beguiling eyes
Sepulchral secrets locked away within the deep.
Cavernous catacombs of my soul...
A sundry of thoughts never to unfold.
Never
Told...
I must confess that every time we touch I die a little each time...
I'm sorry to say that I feel this way.
A sordid woman I feel the infidelity between every ounce of my aching bones...
Behind these beguiling eyes lies the wretched truth
the putrid truth.
Deceptive eyes
Lying eyes...
If only you knew the truth.
I'm crumbled inside,
like the ruins of Pompeii.
You beg me to stay
and so I do...
But now I wonder who's killing who...?

A MEAL FOR THE WEARY



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In the dim reflection of an ordinary shop window, fingers grapple clumsily with wisps of faux silk against cotton-poly and the occasional lost button. The battle long-since decided, Dad lets out a content sigh as Mom's delicate fingers straighten his tie. Pulling his meager old trench coat around him tightly, she places a calming hand on an abdomen swollen with months of malnourishment. Her warm gaze and affirming smile sink deep into his sunken, exhausted features. There's no need to worry; Elinor is resting peacefully.

Making their way into the tiny eatery, they share a glance of fear and excitement. Past the frosted water pitchers and contraptions that steam milk and make the tiny cups of coffee, they sink into a cozy booth and impress their every hardship onto its cushions. His eyes dart around the room discreetly like a child that is somewhere they shouldn't be.

The waitress approaches, speaking fluently in a language they are now unfamiliar with. She doesn't want them to answer questions, write checks or make painful decisions. After calm, soothing banter, she departs before returning, two long-stemmed glasses and a modest Malbec in tow. They take conserving sips with the smirk of those pretending to know the exquisite from the paltry, an approving nod like two first-year drama students. The waitress delivers her monologue, an "Ode to the Tuesday Night Specials," speaking of proteins and produce that are like myths to them. The order decided, she scurries away and retrieves a delicately arranged plate.

His calloused fingers tear at unassuming bread — a crusty, scorched exterior surrounds a delicate interior, not unlike its assailant. He sinks a piece into the translucent green puddle, searching and soaking, trying to form perfection. She raises an eyebrow and smiles to notice the affection he is giving that first morsel. He smiles back and holds it up. Moved by his considerations, she leans in and enjoys it before it can touch her lips; for it is perfect, because he thought of her. They explore the aged balsamic, extra virgin, cracked peppercorns and

sea salt until the waitress returns. The plate now decimated by their thorough assaults, the couple shares a pink expression of humor and slight embarrassment. Surprised and yet pleased for their zeal, the waitress offers a bright smile as she clears.

Left with no distractions, they share a moment of reflection as somber eyes hang over conciliatory smiles. He deflects her gaze to the window where the gentlest of raindrops accumulate with increasing relevance on the glass. Battle-hardened hands find their way across the minefield of tablecloth and condiments before dancing fingertips lock together.

As if conjured by spirits, the waitress reappears, holding two plates and beaming with exuberance. She whispers a pardon and delicately places the vessels in their respective homes before disappearing to let them speak for themselves. Several seconds of wonderment pass as Mom and Dad take in what's before them. Transfixed and wide-eyed, they struggle to imagine how one can take cutting implements to such grandiose displays.

Mom shows the first act of bravery and raises her fork. With the attempted delicacy of a surgeon, she sinks it into a perfectly caramelized scallop and the bed of autumn-kissed risotto beneath. Careful to procure with modesty, she secures a dollop of each before raising it to her lips as though asking for permission. Dad smiles and watches as the symphony of savory and sweet blazes across her palate, her pursed lips displaying the appropriate levels of enjoyment he sought.

His task was decidedly more cumbersome. Unctuous shards of oxtail peek out from delicate blankets of pappardelle. He knows his training at the mercy of canned pasta hasn't prepared him for this. He resigns the attempt at dignity and sloppily slurps the first mouthful. They share a hushed chuckle as the flavors wash over him, and his closed eyes and nodding head give the dish his resounding approval.

Attempts at inconspicuousness cause him to pause and take stock of his surroundings. His once-darting glance now focuses on fellow diners. The old money wives at a window table, poking their plates with contempt, speaking churlishly of vacations returned from, granddaughters in college and dry salmon. At another booth sit the day traders, young men with loosened ties and looser language, sipping scotch that may have had a few years on them and trying to fight the appearance of a grimace. Their food gets cold as they fill the air with abrasive boasts.

A reflective yet confident smile slithers up his cheek as he returns to his meal with a renewed vigor. Though his palate has grown accustomed to the flavors, every bite is given its proper attention. He pours more wine and searches for his wife's glass only to find her in a state of static yet sarcastic horror. Sitting before her lies a naked plate, save a few lonely grains of Arborio. Sharing is now a distant memory. He can only laugh with approval before noticing his own plate. Two modest bites left, he musters them up in a single stroke before making them vanish to the muffled laughter of his companion.

The waitress returns to collect the near-mint condition flatware and discuss dessert. Faking a disinterest, he requests the check with a somber yet content resignation. Their hands find each other again as they look to the window and listen as the rain plays its erratic symphony on the glass until the waitress returns with the check. He glances at it and nods while retrieving his wallet. After thumbing clumsily, he produces the entirety of its contents and lays it on the tray. He continues to stare into the empty wallet and ponder the ramifications of its void. There would be no more haggling with the insurance company or the bank. No more radiation treatments or overpriced Jell-O packets. There would be no more bus trips to the hospital to watch their daughter writhe in agony and wither away in lost potential, no more pleading with doctors for answers that didn't exist. The battle had long been decided. Three weeks since they put her in the ground, Elinor was resting peacefully.

This time Dad displays bravery and rises, extends his hand. They make their way to the door with a quiet dignity and stroll out into the night. Looking in through the restaurant window, they spend a moment watching the world they had just sampled. The stiff night air and steely cold droplets tickle the backs of their necks. They walk along the quiet avenue, feeling every

whisper of Mother Nature's assaults. Making their way back to the shop window where the evening began, they assess its dimensions and find it will be suitable enough for two.

They lie down on the unforgiving concrete. Dad muffles a groan as his creaking knees hit dampened stone. Virgins to the street, they struggle to find enough bedding in his musty old trench coat. She rests her weary head on his shoulder and is met with a kiss on the forehead. A gust of wind draws her deeper into his arms. She rests her head on his chest and is lulled to sleep by the calming strokes moving through her hair and the rhythms of a heartbeat. Enveloping her with his arms and gazing into the night sky, he watches the swirling sea of midnight blue and prepares for the battle that dawn will bring.



ARE YOU STILL THERE?

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Catch me,
But delicately please
For at this moment,
I am fragile
Like the crystalline flakes
That dance around me.

Hold me,
But gently please,
Hold together my pieces
But don't break me more;
These feathered cracks
Are between healing and splintering.

I'm afraid...
If I open my eyes
Will you be there?
Or will I find myself
Shattered upon the ground?
Just tiny fragments of myself.

I'm falling...
And as the ground
Rushes up to meet me
I pray to our Creator
That you'll still be there
My friend, as you always have...

DOES CORRELATION IMPLY CAUSATION?

The Rise of GM Crops and the Decline of Bees



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Worldwide we are facing an epidemic; the catastrophic decline of one of the most prolific pollinators known to humans: the bee. This is also congruent with another trend: the spread of genetically modified (GM) crops. A common fallacy in science is that correlation implies causation, and this is not always the case. The decline of bees can be attributed to many sources: pesticides, parasites, GM crops, fungi, mono-agriculture, a decline in farms and/or viruses; but none can be definitively pointed to as the cause. Rather, like many things, it is most likely a multitude of causes. However, one thing is painfully clear: we are losing bee populations in the millions, and this deserves attention as if our livelihood depends on them, because it does. The plight of the honeybee is not their plight alone, but it is also ours. To quote Albert Einstein: "If the bee disappears from the surface of the Earth, man would have no more than four years left to live."

Bees have been around as an integral part of the ecosystem for a long time, with the oldest fossil being 100 million years old (Jacobsen, 2008). It is hypothesized that bees are wasps that evolved to collect pollen, though this can be misleading because there are a few species of wasps — 12 identified — that do collect pollen (Proctor et al., 1996). This family of pollen wasps, subfamily Masarinae, is seen as a possible intermediary in the divergent evolutionary tale of the bee (Grissell, 2010). The major thing that separates bees from wasps is that wasps have simple hairs while bees evolved branched or feathery hair. Additionally, bees carry a partial positive charge that allows pollen to stick to them, and they have special structures on their hind legs to scrape off the collected pollen to be stored in a storage compartment called the corbicula (Proctor et al., 1996).

The simple mention of the word "bee" makes one think immediately of honey, and consequently of the honeybee specifically. They are far from the only members of the order Hymenoptera; in fact, the honeybee is not even the sole ambassador of the subfamily

Apidae — that spot is shared with 19 other species. There are 20,000 known species of bee in the superfamily Apoidea that are then separated into seven to nine recognized subfamilies (Grissell, 2010). In America, there are currently 2.5 million colonies of honeybees, each comprised of about 30,000 workers and drones under the rule of the queen. This is down from 5.8 million colonies in 1950, a substantial decline (Grissell, 2010).

Worldwide commercial pollination is big business. A third of the world's food supply — that's one in three mouthfuls — depends on pollination, and most of this is done by bees (Jacobsen, 2008). In Maine, 90 percent of blueberry crops rely on bees, and the mega-almond crop in California relies 100 percent on bee pollination. Since almonds are California's top agricultural export, worth an estimated \$2.2 billion, countless numbers of bees are trucked in yearly for pollination (Grissell, 2010; Amos, 2011). Each bee species provides crucial ecosystem services. Bees are ubiquitous, found on six out of seven continents and in every habitat that contains insect-pollinating flowering plants. The most social, most prolific at pollination, and therefore the most widely studied is the honeybee. Honeybees are responsible for about 80 percent of all pollinating insects (Han et al., 2010). There are currently seven recognized species of honeybee, with the most common being the Western honeybee, *Apis mellifera*, which inhabits temperate regions such as North America and Europe. For those reasons, they are the primary topic of this paper.

Unfortunately for bees, and us, we have been losing them in catastrophic numbers on a yearly basis since 2006. Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) is the moniker given to the relatively new phenomenon that is the decimation of entire bee colonies due to the disappearance of the worker bees. The worker bees disappear, and this leaves a much too weak and young brood to fend for itself. Honeybees are different from most other social bees because the colony remains in being over winter (Proctor et al., 1996). It is not uncommon for bee colonies to die off over a harsh winter, but the numbers seen in the last decade are. Winter mortality rates were typically around 40 percent; since CCD was identified, it has jumped to nearly 80 percent (Jacobsen, 2008). An estimated 21 million Western honeybee colonies have been lost since 2006, which has translated to an economic impact of \$2 billion USD. Over the same period, food prices were driven up nearly 37 percent (Jacobsen, 2008). U.S. beekeepers claim to have lost 65 percent of their bees; and if the world were to lose them all, that would translate to an anticipated loss of \$14 billion (Latsch, 2007).

Strangely, in most instances there is not a pile of dead bees left in a nest, but rather many of the worker bees simply go out to forage and never return. CCD has proven itself extremely hard to identify and impossible to treat and prevent because usually there are no bodies to conduct an autopsy on. Also, something even more disturbing is that when a colony dies, it is usually pillaged shortly after by other bees or scavengers; but even the most opportunistic scavenger, the wax moth, will completely avoid these dead hives until it has been irradiated (vanEngelsdorp et al., 2009). CCD has been analogous to AIDS for the honey bee, and to add to that analogy I would say that GM crops are the HIV. Studies have shown that GM crops can weaken the immune system of honeybees, and this can quickly spiral out of control (Amos, 2011). However, there are numerous possible causes for the extreme decline of honeybees and numerous factors that can affect a bee's immunity.

Genetically modified crops have made huge impacts on agriculture and apiculture alike over the last few decades. Nearly 90 percent of all American corn crops are now genetically modified (United States Department of Agriculture, 2013). GM crops do have some benefits — corn has been engineered with a natural soil bacterium gene from *Bacillus thuringiensis* (bt) that gives it its own insecticidal properties over its lifetime, making it resistant to many pests without the use of pesticides (Han et al., 2010). This is part of a new wave of "Terminator" seeds that are produced and distributed by powerful multinational corporations and then endorsed by many governments. Terminator seeds are also pre-treated with herbicides. The genetic modification of plants leads to the genetic modification of pollen, and this pollen is sometimes even sterile. For bees, this altered pollen can lead to malnourishment, which will then be followed by decreased immunity (Amos, 2011). Bees in a study that were fed bt corn and then exposed to a parasite showed an alarming trend: they

suffered a significantly greater decline in population compared to those just exposed to a parasite (Latsch, 2007).

Corn is not the only GM crop in use in America; cotton, sugar beets and soybeans are now 90 percent genetically engineered as well (United States Department of Agriculture, 2013). It has been shown that bt corn — which is actually wind-pollinated, but bees still forage on the protein-rich pollen from its tassels — may impact learning and lower the immune system of bees (Han et al., 2010). Studies have also shown that GM proteins bees acquire from foraging on GM crops are causing bees to develop digestive tract infections at an increased rate, which can also damage a bee's immune system (Amos, 2011). Another side effect of GM crops is how agriculture itself is conducted today. The days of crop rotation are gone; most industrial agriculture companies now practice mono-agriculture. Mono-agriculture is when acres of the same crop are planted and cultivated, with no rotation. This grossly cuts down on plant diversity, which also may impact a bee's immune system.

Although GM crops are not off the hook, it may not be the GM crop itself that is killing our bees, but rather many treatments used on them. With these GM crops, companies are able to use herbicides, which eliminate even the small amount of diversity that weeds or wild flowers brought to the land. Pollen from hives has been found to be contaminated with an average of nine different fungicides and pesticides (vanEngelsdorp et al., 2009). Nicotine derivatives are another possible culprit in CCD that has been widely studied. Neonicotinoid is a grouping of extremely prevalent neurotoxic pesticides (European Food Safety Authority, 2013). They are now approved for use on 140 crops in 100 different countries (Jacobsen, 2008).

Meta-analysis of studies have shown that while they may not be lethal, they surely have sub-lethal effects. Neonicotinoids have been shown to drastically reduce associative learning in bees; learning in bees is of utmost importance to the colony because worker bees need to know where their food source is and how to get back to the hive after they've found it (Han et al., 2010). Studies on these chemicals are often flawed because they focus on single doses, in terms of what a bee may pick up in the field from one plant; however bees may visit 100 plants in one outing (Cresswell, 2010). It is not a far leap for one to assume there may be compounding effects here. Conversely, the link is so strong that the European Union has recently banned the use of neonicotinoids (European Food Safety Authority, 2013). In studies where bees were fed a neonicotinoid and then sent out to forage for the hive, nearly 35 percent didn't return and autopsies on those that returned showed signs of brain damage (Cresswell, 2010).

Alas, there are even more pieces to the puzzle. Biological contaminants are also a suspected culprit. CCD-depleted colonies were not infected with just one virus or pathogen, but nearly all of them (vanEngelsdorp et al., 2009). A descriptive study on CCD found that on average a combination of five to six different viruses, parasites and/or bacterial infections — in addition to fungi — were identified in hives that have been identified as CCD positive (vanEngelsdorp, 2009; Latsch, 2007). Bees found dead around a hive, which in itself is a rare occurrence, have been incubated in a petri dish and within 48 hours were found to have fungus growing out of their mouths and anuses (Jacobsen, 2008).

To be more confounding, more problems could also be built on each other with one aptly named parasitic mite at the bottom of the pig pile: Varroa destroyer. Varroa has been a prolific problem for the Asian honeybee (*Apis cerana*) for eons, but it is believed that it made the leap to our Western honeybee (*Apis mellifera*) in 1976 (Jacobsen, 2008). This parasite is related to ticks, so it latches on to a bee and continuously feasts on its haemolymph. This can be a problem for many obvious reasons: it will lower a bee's immunity to other pathogens and will impair learning, but even more damning is that it can act as a vector and transmit bacteria or infections to its already weakened host (Cresswell, 2010). Treatment of Varroa destroyer will cause issues all in itself. It must be treated with a pesticide; however, it is hard to kill a smaller bug without harming the bigger bug, and studies show that since the introduction of these chemicals, a queen's lifespan has been cut in half (Jacobsen, 2008). Monsanto is currently working on an RNA-Interface technology that can kill varroa mites by disrupting how its genes are expressed (vanEngelsdorp et al., 2009). Two other well-known

suspects, Israeli Acute Paralysis Virus (IAPV) and *Nosema ceranae*, are widely found in CCD-affected colonies (vanEngelsdorp et al., 2009). Nearly 90 percent of all CCD colonies had both of these culprits (vanEngelsdorp et al., 2009).

At the end of the day, and after examining countless studies, there is no definitive causal link between GM crops and CCD. I however still stick with my analogy that if CCD is likened to AIDS, then GM crops should be likened to what causes AIDS: HIV. It seems more than coincidental to me that in the same period we have seen a rise in our use of GM crops, we have also witnessed a rise in CCD. Once the immune system of any organism is weakened, it doesn't take much to finish it off. At any rate, we are facing an epidemic of catastrophic proportions; and if something isn't done to remedy the situation soon, we'll certainly be paying a high price, both figuratively and literally. So the plight of the bee is not only their problem, but it is a shared problem, and we must work to solve it like our lives depend on it.

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MY GRANDMA'S TEETH



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Punching in the code to access
The memory ward of your new not-so-home
Gut-punches me every time.
I hate the number 1203 now.
The smell of antique medicine greets me
As I walk down the quiet hall
Past old frames and older pictures.
Stepping into your memoryless room,
I'm met with a gummy smile.
You have no idea who I am and
You have no idea where your teeth are.
I can accept the blank, childish stare
But not your toothless grin.
You were always so proud of your falsies
As long as I can remember.
Now, in your new not-so-home,
Their absence reminds me
That you will be moving again soon
Down the hall to that room I never look at
Where visitors can't go.
I love you, grandma, but this slow loss is
crushing me.
You laugh as I dump the trash can
Desperate to find those teeth.
"Have you seen Mary?
She was here earlier," you say,
"She might have 'em."
There's a headstone in Memphis that would
disagree.
"Gimme my purse," you say,
And I hand the empty bag to you
Making sure you didn't put them in there.

Your dentures are nowhere.
Second pair this month.
I give up.
Sit by you on the bed and brush your thin
silver hair.
You smile as if you want to remember me.
I'll make you eat at least a fruit cup and
maybe some soft snacks.
But there they are,
In the cheese puff's cardboard tube
Among candy wrappers and yellowed
tissues,
Your teeth.
I chuckle through my tears
And you giggle with me.
We may not be laughing at the same thing,
But it's good enough for today.

NIGHTS LIKE THESE

NICK ALLEN

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It's hot summer nights like these
That make me feel like we're
In the womb of the world.
We're young,
The night still pulses with energy,
A swirling in the middle of the sky
Like the perfect peppermint mocha latte.
We think perhaps in a few days,
Or a few years,
We shall be going on big adventures.
For some it is years shed on a battlefield,
For others it's the markings of madmen.
Some of us will feel as though
We pilot the universe,
While others will waste time
Analyzing shades of black.

We think of the instability
Of the language that consumes us all.
We think of the frailty
Of heartbeats and breathing.
We imagine our friendships tonight
Fading away when the sun rises.
People so present today,
Out of our lives forever tomorrow.
One minute we are here so vividly,
The next we don't exist at all.
We're aware of time and space
In a remarkably vague way.

It's cold nights like these
That remind me why
We need to stay together,
To hold each other.
The flames from our affairs
Only illuminate so far.
Darkness awaits around the edge,
Leering intently, always ready
To grab hold and pull us in.
We are different this year,
Different from the year before.
Same things with new meanings.
Several years from next Monday,
We will not be going on big adventures.
A decadent rose made of icing
Sliced in half on our anniversary.
Librarians put on shelves
Other people's memories.
We dare each other to hold hands
And look up to the sky.
We try to find God
And only find each other.



RESUSCITATION



RACHAEL O'NEILL

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I wait.

Wanting.

All floats to trauma bay! Stat!!

Incoming

ETA 5 minutes

Purple gloves stretched taut.

Excitement. First call. First code.

The ambulance bay is still. And then — not. NOT at all. Not at all quiet.

Doors flung open. An endorsement — *Take her! Take her! She's good.* I am?

I would be proud if I had room for thoughts other than the blood gasping on the floor.

A nod and an order: *bag.*

I bag. I bag and breathe for this boy.

A boy, not so young that he reminds me of my son.

Tender young so that he reminds me of my husband
when we met and his skin was soft like this.

His eyes staring. Skin so very, very grey. Dull, blue-grey.

His body looks empty.

His eyes are empty.

Desperation.

Around me all is desperate.

I am not desperate.

I do not know enough yet to be desperate.

Stretcher briskly racing down the hall
 around the corner. Everything is too fast.
 Pumping compressions so quick
 that I can't
 get enough
 air
 in between.

Around a corner into the waiting trauma bay with
 more greensmocked people than I've ever seen
 assembled.

Everyone has a place,
 even the onlookers.

I am relieved of my responsibility.
 My hand removed from the bag,
 someone else resumes breathing
 for the boy.

I am nothing but eyes now. I see all
 impediments cut away.
 Clothing, skin, ribs.
 Each limb is claimed,
 blood is hung and drips into four veins.
 The shears slip and fall.
Shears!
 Five pair appear in an instant.

Gravity is too slow.
 Blood is now squeezed and
 forced into four veins.
 More is retrieved and
 hung.
 An incision.
 Tearing at flesh.
 Cracking and stretching.
 Heart is within reach.
 A hand enters the cavity and grasps a
 Warm, fist-sized organ
 quivering uselessly.
 Compressions again,
 but oh so gently now.

No longer crushing, body weight compressions that shake everything.
 But now deft and timely squeeze.
 Precise.

But still desperate.

Frantic, shrill determination becomes quiet, rapt observation.

There is nothing to do. There is nothing that isn't already happening.
 This is all and everything that we have — complete array of modern medical brilliance
 on display.

And it. Is not. Enough.

It is not going to be enough.

In truth, the only reason such futile attempts have been made is
the boy's face.

Too young,
too tender.
Someone's son.

An old police officer looks on,
distressed. Looks away and fidgets.

A middle-aged surgeon drinks his coffee
as he looks over his colleague's shoulder
to see today's offering:
mutilated thorax,
a ragged incision,
ribs spread,
precise compressions,
coordinated movements.
He sips and grunts approval.

The scene shifts, slows, becomes less frenetic.
Some — more seasoned,
more jaded perhaps — leave
knowing the outcome already.

I am eyes.

I am porous.

I am hollow.

I am filling up with words and motions and
all the things that must be done to save a life.

Not this life, not today.
But another.
Someday.

LESSONS FROM *THE LORAX*



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In his book *The Lorax*, Theodor Geisel, also known as Dr. Seuss, addresses an environmental issue that is as significant today as when the book was released in 1971. For many children, *The Lorax* is their first introduction to mankind's responsibility to care for plants and the entire web constructed around the leafy centerpiece. In what can be seen as a recent attempt to reach a broader audience, *The Lorax* has also been adapted into a full-length movie under the guidance of Seuss' daughter. The book and movie share the same core storyline in which an older, reclusive fellow named the Onceler recounts the tale of his youth to a young inquirer.

The inquirer, nameless in the book but named Ted in the film, discovers that despite their current absence, lush Truffula tree forests were once abundant. The Onceler regretfully reveals that his own greed, disrespect for nature and shortsightedness caused the tree eradication. In the hopes that someone can reverse the damage he has done, the Onceler passes along the last remaining Truffula tree seed with his tale. Dr. Seuss' book and the cinematic adaptation both provide us with this cautionary tale to illustrate the pitfalls of overusing natural resources, such as trees, to fulfill greed-laden desires.

As is the case in a majority of his books aimed at children, Geisel relies on his childhood experiences in Springfield, Massachusetts, to create his fictional realities (Pease 6). While growing up in Springfield, Geisel observed his hometown grow from a small frontier town into one of the most expansive manufacturing centers in New England. He witnessed the clearing of forest-covered land to make way for cotton and steel manufacturing as well as an armory for making rifles bearing his hometown's name (Pease 3). Even as a young adult, Geisel had a knack for creative expression of his views and actually began using his middle name, Seuss, as a pseudonym while illustrating politically motivated caricatures for PM newspaper articles (Miller 26). Years later, *The Lorax* provided a platform for the artistic and politically minded Seuss to express his concern for mankind's arrogant disregard of plants in the pursuit of making money.

The manufacturing industry's apparent view of forests as obstacles in the path of progress left a deep impression on Geisel, and evidence of this appears in his portrayal of the ambitious Onceler. In the book version, the Lorax, a short, fuzzy spokesman for the trees, confronts the Onceler regarding the increasing destruction due to the over-harvesting of Truffula trees to knit the highly sought-after garment called Thneeds. The Onceler, aghast at this accusation, fails to see the connection between his actions and the forest's destruction and replies,

"I meant no harm. I most truly did not.

But I had to grow bigger. So bigger I got.

I biggered my factory. I biggered my roads.

I biggered my wagons. I biggered the loads.

Of Thneeds I shipped out. I was shipping them forth,

To the South! To the East! To the West! To the North!

I went right on biggering...selling more Thneeds.

And I biggered my money, which everyone needs" (Dr. Seuss, 39).

This block of poetry exemplifies how the Onceler's focus on expansion and riches encourages his ignorance of the Truffula forests' plight.

In the film version of this tale, another character by the name of Mayor O'Hare is introduced to help reiterate how greed can overshadow the importance of the relationship between plants and humans. In a blatant conflict of interest, O'Hare is the mayor of Thneedville and the owner of a corporation responsible for selling canned air and plastic trees to his townsfolk. After learning that Ted has begun to ask about Truffula trees, O'Hare intervenes and attempts to derail Ted's inquiries. To prevent a decline in canned air sales, O'Hare tries to impede Ted's discoveries and the resultant spread of information, especially the fact that trees give off oxygen. In *The Lorax* film, while trying to scare Ted away from his line of questioning, O'Hare makes the following statement:

"Here's the deal. I make a living selling fresh air to people. Trees, they make it for free.

When I hear people talking about them, I consider it a threat to my business" (31:15-31:28).

Because he has been blinded by his own greed and concern for his business status, O'Hare does not view his own actions as detrimental. O'Hare places his own personal ambition above the needs of everyone else, which results in malicious attempts to suppress information that proves plants play a key role in human life.

With the potential for greed and corruption flowing through every person, one may be apt to think that our own forests are destined to obliteration by our own hand, much like the bountiful Truffula forests prior to their encounter with the Onceler. This idea resonates even more so when compared with mankind's similar maltreatment and destruction of Amazonian rainforests. To help avoid analogous instances in the future, mankind has to learn to set aside personal ambitions and greed. *The Lorax* presents the idea that in order to preserve the lives of our photosynthesizing brethren, each person has to make a conscious decision to acknowledge and respect the important relationship between mankind and plants. The book and the film both conclude with the passing of a seed to the next generation. This shows that although the upcoming generation may inherit a deteriorated version of a healthy relationship, the opportunity still exists for them to rebuild and correct the course of that relationship. However, for such an undertaking to be truly effective, the current generation cannot wait and hope that the children will make the right decisions. Immediate action and leadership through example is needed in order to prevent the prevalence of a more prolific problem.

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SARASVATI, GODDESS OF LIBRARIES

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Sarasvati, Indian goddess of libraries,
Athena, keeper of owls, goddess of intellect,
And Sophia, Gnostic goddess of wisdom,
Please provide me with celestial tech support.
Because the world is seldom kind,
To girls who wear glasses and work in libraries.
It is very lonely being a science fiction girl,
Stuck inside of a reality show world.
Grant to me a well-appointed library,
Animal companions to comfort me,
And the ability to transform myself periodically,
So that I might never bore myself.
Lend grace to my virtual and real-life presences,
Build for me a sanctuary, or a dream cathedral,
Where I can polish my fragile self esteem,
Until it gleams like the Hope Diamond.
Protect me from those who are envious,
Give me glasses with built-in lie detectors,
And friends like those that my girl
Velma rode with in the Mystery van.
Give me lucid dreams, and strange adventures,
Like Barbara Gordon had in Gotham City,
And speak to me through Magic 8 Balls,
Synchronicities, and rock operas.



NATURAL OBSERVATIONS



ASHLEA KENNEDY
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The miniscule green bug studies me. Its microscopic deep red eyes focus intently on me, as if it is pondering my existence. Perched delicately on my mountain of a hand, the tiny creature moves in a way a spider does, with oddly bent legs working in fluid motions, though this is no arachnid. I know because it only has six legs and it sports long antennae that jut out from its tiny forehead. It studies me, so I study it. Out here, I feel as if everything is studying me. I hear the sweet, lilting song of birds. They speak to each other with their trills, chirps and squawks, and I wonder if the different species can understand each other. Humans cannot talk to other species, but I wonder if birds have cracked the code, if they have broken down a barrier that is impenetrable to the dense and imbecilic *Homo sapiens*. Does the crow say to the mourning dove, "Look at that human, writing on a tree with a tree about trees"?

As I look out over the water, I study all of the colors my eyes are receiving. Every shade of green is represented here, from a light and delicate chartreuse to a deep and dark pine green. The lake is even green, but you could mistake it for a navy blue if you were just glancing at the surface. I notice how the vibrant rainbow of wildflowers breaks up the green, drawing my attention from the bright yellow of a Brown-eyed Susan to the deep purple of chicory petals. I look up to the heavens and see clouds drift lazily across the wide expanse of cerulean sky.

The bench I am sitting on is right along the shore, so the sickly sweet aroma of the wildflowers mixes with an earthy-fishy smell that is wafting off of the lake. It smells like a bluegill plucked from the water by a silver hook, flopping to and fro to escape. It is not unpleasant to me, as I was raised along the banks of the Ohio River. Often on breezy days, the same fishy smell would drift off of the river, adding a complex layer to the smells of my hometown. The fishy aroma would mix with the greasy and peppery smell wafting out of Abdalla's Steak House and the dirty smell of car exhaust floating in off of the highway. All of this would culminate to a unique and interesting aroma that always made me feel like I was at home.

Suddenly, I become aware of the distant crunch of a jogger's shoes on the gravel path. The jogger passes by, listening to music on her iPod, blissfully unaware of the nature around her. Sure, she might see the trees and maybe notice a squirrel cross the path, but she is not looking at it from the perspective of an observer. I hear the engine of a backhoe fire to life and the driver throws it into reverse, causing a string of electronic beeps to fill the air. A car horn blares on the bridge above the gorge at the end of the lake. This causes me to notice the way people have shaped this area. A gravel path snakes its way along the forest floor, the walkway to the concrete bench I am sitting upon is made of hand-picked flat stones, and there are round wire cages surrounding the bases of some trees, protecting them from an imagined enemy. We have made ourselves unaware of the fact that nature can hold its own, and that we should respect it. People litter, dump toxic chemicals onto land and into water, and otherwise damage the Earth. Humans also have a tendency to claim nature and "fix" it. Before the dam was put in, this area was swampland. Humans wanted to harness the power of the waterfall at the end of the swamp, so they installed the dam and made a pond, and then enlarged the pond to a lake. The scenic aspects of the lake made me almost forget that it isn't completely natural.

Humans have an innate drive to tame nature. We put up fences to keep some animals in and others out, we mow our lawns to keep the grass short, and we pull weeds out of gardens as if one plant is more important than another. There is no way to tame nature without hurting it. Pesticides poison the land and the wildlife, fences prevent animals from roaming freely and enjoying life, and the introduction of "pretty" vegetation can cause the choking out of native species.

Nature has played a big part in my life. I was raised in a rural, wooded area where I could go hiking anytime I wanted to. I went fishing more times than I can count every summer with my family, catching catfish, crappie, walleye, large-mouthed bass and other freshwater fish that lurked beneath the murky depths of the lakes near my house. A ripple of sheer excitement would course throughout my entire body every time a fish would nibble on my hook. Catching fish was almost like a game, and I soon found that it was especially fun to catch the tiny rock bass that would convene near the shore but were usually too small to get hooked. They would instead just eat the night-crawler right off of your hook while you felt the electrically charged tugs it made on the line. The vacations my family went on were almost always camping trips. My favorite part of these camping trips was the food. We would make hobo pies, burgers, hot dogs, s'mores, baked potatoes, corn on the cob and the like. Once, we even fried bacon, eggs and pancakes over the fire on a crisp morning. It was always calming for me to eat under the stars, listening to deer crunch through the woods and birds cooing softly in the trees.

Last fall, I traveled to my birthplace, Savannah, Georgia. A large attraction is Forsyth Park, which covers several blocks in the heart of this historic city. Although there are grand old trees and large expanses of grass, the area does not feel natural. It feels manmade. The stone sidewalks cut up the grassy areas into small bits, a volleyball net bisects a field, and a marble fountain is the main feature. Although the park is magnificent and beautiful, it has been shaped heavily by human hands.

Sitting on this bench by the lake, being studied by nature, I realize how important nature is to me. An article published in the *New York Times* in 2005 stated that about 17 percent of the world's land has been untouched by humans. Reading this information shocked me to the core. The Earth is vast, and yet we have already explored 83 percent of the land upon it. This is a staggering but also saddening figure. As a child, I would read stories about adventurers of the 19th century who would traverse miles of uncharted land, seeing things previously unseen by human eyes. I always felt like that was the most incredible thing a person could do. I can imagine the thrill that would course through your body during such an adventure, along with the fear pumping through your veins – fear of the unknown. I think that these tantalizing experiences are now out of reach for us. One day, all of the world's land will have been touched by humans. It's almost depressing, thinking that there may be nothing completely, magically, excitingly new to discover in the world.

MEMORY

COREY HANKINSON

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*Like an eyelid atrociously and forcibly uplifted
I am looking.*

— Pablo Neruda

I see bare hands, ropes
woven into nets like spiderwebs,
I see mirrors, photographs,
and bookmarked pages in dusty yearbooks.
I see memories, like water in a colander, draining,
I see droplets fall through the seams
of cupped hands, through bare hands,
the memories fall like rain,
landing in riverbeds
that slip into the sea. I taste salt, thrust
into air by heavy waves, and I feel their undertow
reaching up with misty fingers
as if to drag me into the tide.
I see teenage boys,
drenched by swimming pools and sun,
wet lips and open mouths,
I see lamps on hotel nightstands,
drawn curtains, showers, bibles
wrapped in pallid arms,
I hear melody, mumbled
in place of forgotten words,
I see sunsets, nursing homes,
old men with untied shoelaces
and bedside photographs labeled with names.
I see shadows, nets and buckets
laid out like the tongues of children,
trying to catch the rain,
I see the ocean
and also the water,
seeping slowly into the horizon.

ETERNITY SPOT



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She wasn't entirely sure what she was doing there, or what she was looking for — which one she was looking for, that is. The girl browsed the books, lined quietly on shelves that slept in de-saturated rainbows and smelled of dust and thoughtfulness.

She found the call number that she had been searching for, and she opened the book, breathing in its yellowed and weary age. She thumbed through the pages, her fingers expertly slipping through — this was old-hat to her. Her hands stilled and her eyes, dark and tempted, lit up. She had reached the back cover and she found a little piece of paper patiently waiting and expecting. She, obliging, picked it up.

She smiled and she read. And then she wrote.

Taking the first note, the girl wrote Hemingway on the reverse, and lightly and silently she ran through the shaven forest of letters. Abruptly she stopped, and in a swift heel-to-toe manner, placed an unprejudiced finger on the spine of a novel. She loved to be difficult like that, making the search more intense — generous with excitement and challenges. This was the game. Also, this random selection was in place partly because she wondered once if she would leave a note in a book and another patron find it before its intended did. So in being careful, the girl made sure her choices were obscure. Sometimes it would be a garden manual, a reference journal, or poetry from someone truly unheard of — she couldn't be put to pattern, and if she were being honest, it was really the inconsistency that delighted her.

But that day, it would be *For Whom the Bell Tolls* — Hemingway. A little more straightforward, popular, but unpredictable in its predictability — irony was another flavor that suited her.

That day she left her note, nestled within that classic's arms — and she hoped.

The girl smiled and walked out the long red doors of the nostalgic old library and into the modern day. She held a secret that she was not lonely in keeping. Perhaps she was thinking about the co-founder of the conversations — the person behind the opposite pen. It could be, though, that she was possibly just smiling at the memory of the day it all started, when something forgotten effortlessly slipped into something found.

When first she stepped in through the archaic doors, she had the imprint of determination with an afterthought of worry on her face. The search was for something that she had lost and was desperate to find. She had asked at the desk if there had been any unlabeled books that were turned in, anything without a code. The little worn book she described, shabby and handmade, was well loved and fought with. She had just returned these other books, but somehow had left it there.

Her eyes saddened at the news, a disappointed and delicate look, and she went off through the shelves. She wasn't given to defeat that easily. Casting a hopeful glance back to a noise in the librarian's station, that was nothing more than the swivel of a desk chair, she went to the poetry section. It was then that she found it, with surprise and enthusiasm. However, surprise won over a little more at the notice of something unfamiliar. She traced a page foreign to the binding, and then she read,

Nice to meet you.

-Wolfe 2345.34 CF

She frowned at it, and turned it over many times, when realization finally dawned. Heading off to the classics section, she found what she was looking for — a book, *Look Homeward Angel*, with a note inside, in the card flap.

My sorrow when she is here with me, thinks these dark days of Autumn rain are beautiful as days could be.

There was poetry written on the paper, "My November Guest," by Robert Frost, and then an added,

Insert call number here.

The girl understood immediately but was bewildered nonetheless. It wasn't just letters on a page that were required. Trust, faith, they wanted a second in a game that she had no idea how to play — or even if she should. It was visible her wrestling with this — this person had read some of her journal to know she liked "My November Guest."

There was potential, dangerous and inviting, in this initiated and mysterious correspondence. But as it happened, she liked invitations and long hand.

So she wrote and left, and hoped.

The next notes that followed would be placed in the card slot that sat lonely on back covers. No one ever bothered the cardholder — the oldness was off-putting to hands trained for screens. It was an unfortunate truth that paper and gradual gratification had fallen out of fashion. This library was a struggle, the personification of the advancement in technology leaving relics to stand still in the long shadow of achievement and intangibility created by modernism. The girl hated it. Sometimes a person just needs something that can be felt and experienced. She took the long way around and was never sorry for it.

However, being a rare audience to this school of thinking, not many patrons were found roaming the aisles that held such valuable information but,

Had the misfortune of requiring effort.

That was how she put it in her letters to her faceless friend, so there was no real foundation for worry of any interruptions or intercessions of their correspondence. If there were, one would find talk of opinions, avoided arguments of politics, and sometimes just scribbles about things that she found to be easier in words on paper than in words from her own

mouth. Her replies would be honest, and in return she would receive honesty — which at the end of the day was all she really cared for.

However, the bits that were learned in-between were still of great value.

The girl could write about anything and make it something important and immense or at least something to think about. Even the weather.

Ugly heat, she wrote, At least the cold has the decency of being pretty.

That day had been humid and unseasonal and not very much to her liking. She loved the snow, the colder weather and its consequences: sweaters, grain bins filling at local markets waiting to be bread, and leaves falling into their colorful repose.

She liked Frost's poem for some of this reason, and she felt it had been for her. She felt a *vague and slightly narcissistic attachment to it.*

When asked how she would put the eloquence of autumn herself, she responded,

And by September everything had changed.

The earth fell into these Autumnal responses as the leaves deadened in lovely amber hues. Nature is fickle as it seems that only yesterday the trees were triumphant in their emerald (or vibrant green) childhood.

She would explain in the next lines, her habit of second guessing herself.

Too much transcendentalist poetry.

The girl would prove surprising sometimes. As sweet as she could be, there was a quick and dismissive bite about her that was decisive in its striking. Her handwriting would slant and almost warrant a scrutinized translation when describing off-color occurrences.

Just spit out what you are trying to say.

One thing that frustrated her that she often wrote about was "the OCD librarian" who,

Couldn't stand to let alone a little piece of paper. Books are paper — it's not like we are gluing them in — so I don't see the harm. I think he is just nosy or anal-retentive. Or both.

She was irritated, and it was obvious that you shouldn't cross her. However, it seemed that her anger was rather funny at the same time. Yes, this girl could be surprising.

Sometimes, though, she would write about the sad things. She wrote about her reflections on the painter Vincent van Gogh and one of his more famous creations, "The Starry Night." She explained that the stars in the painting represented people that van Gogh had lost, and this was the manner in which they were kept by the artist. She wrote that she connected.

There are too many stars in my sky.

Even more, she once wrote about sitting in her car — *the Tercel humming to itself in warm and repeated rhythms* — and staring at those stony stars, stuck cold and determined in the earth. The names would be foreign to most that would see them, but they would never be forgotten or left alone too long. Memories are tolerable, but moments can be unbearable. So she felt this strength in her conviction that she should never enter again — that she would let lie what was laid low long before. Still, she needed something to be left nameless. Something that she had buried long ago, let go long ago, and would not go to the trouble to exhume. Let it alone.

It's easier to let it alone.

To rub out the unhappy that sometimes dampened her letters, the girl would receive funny anecdotes, or just long (possibly amusing for the sheer blandness of the topics) paragraphs of no consequence. There were tried conversations where it was quickly learned that she had no head for schematics, and history was not so present in her mind as was the future. Still, she seemed delighted at the stories that were shared with her. These would make her smile, and,

Not make her problems go away, but just make them seem less. Like perhaps they weren't as important as first thought to be.

The best story yet, for many reasons, was in the following of a particularly hard day. She came to the library restless and heavy with some unnamable burden, but she read,

Do you ever wonder why the elderly sit on park benches? Perhaps they want to watch the world go by instead of the world watching as they fly by. Perhaps they like to just contemplate — something they never had the time for before. To just sit and gather ideas and conclusions to long-put-off questions and at the end of it, whisk them back to a little hovel in the mind. Not unlike the animals they so dutifully feed retreat with their treasures to their stockpiles for winter. These are their hollows of things to survive on, that others may survive on too. I wonder if this is where they find the time to be wise?

There it was, the sunshine had made its first breakthrough. She smiled.

And it was remarkable, because at that moment, one could swear the girl looked like she was in love.

Sometimes, after long intervals of seriousness, she would just set the tone for a long periodical of nonsense. The mere stating of Emerson's sentiment, *Be silly, be honest, be kind*, set off this spiraled match of 20 questions.

Therein was learned:

- 1) Her Saturday morning cartoons: the DIY channel and malt-o-meal.
- 2) She had spent some time as a barista — a caffeine-intolerant barista. It could be surmised that this combination was purely for irony because that was just her way.
- 3) She was an introvert — of no surprise — but not so far as a misanthrope. She was okay alone, but sometimes she found she was a lonely place to be.
- 4) Sometimes when she would enter this park in the city, she would slow her normal pace of flight, and she would just listen. She would hear the music — *faithful in reoccurrence, classical and momentous* — and she would feel strongly within her bones that she should be dancing. She wanted it.
- 5) There was an incidence of a failed flying attempt in kindergarten that she had received. The girl had smiled widely at the idea of the five-year-old boy who believed he was a lost boy and had subsequent flying abilities. Unfortunately, he found he could not — a painful moment of discovery.
- 6) This five-year-old boy would later learn how to parallel park on the fly when once trying to find a free place on a busy street section. Apparently someone had left their lights on, and apparently it was just a delivery truck. So much for Samaritan-ism.

The day that things began to change, however, was when she left it in one of the more complicated of her observations. She wrote,

Do you know what we have?

There were many things, but it seemed she already had an answer.

An eternity spot. One of those places where time stops — or maybe just us — and it feels as though you exist in a place outside of clocks, schedules for trains and obligation. Outside of measurement and judgment. Like being still right when the rain stops, or being in that place where the sun suddenly goes out, and it's night. A place taken for what it is — beautiful in its honesty and unpolluted by social contracts.

The next day, she received her reply.

Have you ever wanted more? Something to keep outside of theoretical boxes and something to live beyond mere words? Do you want more?

She smiled again, a sad and fractured thing that was more worried than warm. The girl wrote, and left it there in the same book without much hesitation. When she walked away, based on her response, there was question if she ever would come back again.

Dear friend,

Words are more of a danger than they seem. You think you spend words, but if you're not careful, you will find that words have the greater capability of spending you. It seems that they break as much as they build. They are not free and don't play nice. And yet sometimes, when words become reality, that is when the real trouble begins. Sometimes, words are all we can handle.

This seemed very much an endnote; but as it happened, she did come back. She thought she was writing notes and learning about someone else, but really she found she was just discovering herself in the process of being learned about. That scared her — seeing something she didn't want to and, worse, being viewed in that manner.

You look at me as if I had really been seen.

Eventually, it seemed that she became more comfortable with that, because it followed,

You make me want to try.

Weeks went on in this manner, and months ensued. The girl would write and receive responses. With so much learned it seemed foolish to want more, except one vital thing was always left unnamed. Potential is endless fractures of everything that could go right. Embarkment, decision, they seem to be the daunting cracks that can splinter and shatter everything that you thought you could see.

Perhaps we shouldn't upset the balance. Perhaps we should leave it alone?

And so these conversations of immense and simple things were left in this infinite corner of Maybe and Someday.

But eventually, infinity became too long and Someday couldn't wait anymore. And I found I couldn't either.

So I hold them here in my hands, these conversations. How we met, before our first person-to-person contact now. I hold our *Eternity Spot*. She knows me, and I know her, intimately from this collection of moments and possibilities and figuring out another human being. I shouldn't have kept it in the first place, her book, I should have told her right off that she left it at the library that day she dropped it off with the others — the day it all started. I didn't mean to read it, I was just looking for the name, her name — but I fell upon her words, and into them, and I found her heart instead. I am not sorry for it — not really. The truth is, I can't regret finding it because I can't regret loving her, or the spaces that were in-between that brought us here.

I had been shelving books when I had first seen her in the library, and as I watched her leave I had to correct the books that I had just miss-shelved. I should have told her that I was the librarian, the correspondent, her faceless friend. That I ran swiftly between shelves to put this book back where I had been shelving. That I had left the note. That I had to know her and was grateful for the introductions. I think now that I watch too many Richard Curtis films.

I am insane, but it is what it is. I had to know her, though, face to face — the poetry-in-person format. She makes me better, she makes me think, and I would like to think that, hopefully, I'm not lonely in this thinking.

Maybe it's true, because I am waiting here where *she* said to meet. I wasn't sure if she would talk to me after I explained the journal ordeal, or if she would even show up after the conversation about *Eternity*. But then, in the midst of negotiation with reality and what I wished would play out, here she was. She stepped off and down onto the street, her coat a synonymous red with that of bus No. 5. She smiles seeing me — shy and unsure. I wave, an awkward and short thing, but she seemed to take that as a confirmation. Striding over to

me, her lithe and steady gait, it's hard to imagine us as strangers. We knew every line of our letters, but not a line of each other's face — apart from the days at the library. I would see her and know who she was — the little figure dancing down aisles. She would see me, and I know she had to wonder. It seemed now, however, as her smile continued to grow that she didn't have to anymore.

"So,"

I cleared my throat of things that I should I have said. I didn't think that she knew what to say either.

She smiled.

"So."

I hoped.

She bit her lower lip, taking her eyes off of the book in her hands (she had brought it as I had our letters), and looked up at me with dark green eyes.

"Coffee?"



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