



Nota Bene 16

Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society Anthology

FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society is proud to present the 22nd edition of *Nota Bene*, the nation's only literary anthology featuring excellence in writing among two-year college students.

When we first published *Nota Bene* in 1994, we were overwhelmed with the 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.

We are pleased to once again offer scholarships to outstanding *Nota Bene* authors. This year's Ewing Citation Scholarship has been awarded to the top overall entry, "The Lie" by Mark Chevalier, a student at Blue Ridge Community College in Virginia. The authors of four other standout entries have been recognized as 2016 Reynolds Scholars.

Nota Bene takes its name from the Latin expression for "note well." We hope you will take note and be inspired by the good work of these exceptional authors. We are grateful for the continued opportunity to showcase the talents of Phi Theta Kappa members and to affirm our commitment to recognition and academic excellence in the two-year college arena.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lynn Tincher-Ladner", followed by a horizontal line.

Lynn Tincher-Ladner, Ph.D.
President and CEO
Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society

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AWARDS

The Ewing Citation Scholarship Award of \$1,000 is given to the author of the *Nota Bene* manuscript considered to be the most outstanding of all entries. It is named in honor of Nell Ewing, long-time Phi Theta Kappa staff member who was a driving force behind *Nota Bene*, beginning with its conceptual design and establishment. Ewing retired in 2012 after serving 26 years with Phi Theta Kappa.

The Reynolds Scholarship Awards of \$500 each are given to up to four authors whose manuscripts were deemed outstanding. These awards are endowed by the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and honor the memory of the late Donald W. Reynolds, founder of the Donrey Media Group.

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THE LIE



MARK CHEVALIER
Blue Ridge Community College
Virginia

Hear ye, hear ye!
Everything is fine, just fine...

Ease your mind
Take your rest
Be at peace
All is well.

For the incongruent, incoherent, insufferable idiosyncrasies of the world
For the bantering, bombastic, blatantly bursting commercial machine
For the derogatory, detrimental, disadvantageous political wheel
For the noxious, notorious, ne'er-do-wells of religious strife.

They turn, all turn
Grinding thought and expression
Unknown and underfoot
To powdery dust
Lost on the winds of time
Gone forever and never recurring.

The quick hit
The quick fix
Need to fix it
Run like hell
Work like hell
To earn the privilege
To buy things you don't need.

Not to worry, not to fret
Calm your spirit
Compose your soul
Accept, acknowledge, agree

Glossy dull eyes, to feed the machine

So hear ye, hear ye!
Everything is fine...just fine...

THE DEVIL CAME TO PRAY



JENA PICARD
*Palm Beach State College
 Florida*

He calls me baby, and I laugh; nobody has ever looked at me like that before. Parker takes my hand in his, and I find home in his touch. His usually dead eyes are now vibrant. I had known from the moment I laid eyes on him that he would be the closest version of heaven I would ever get to. He would flash that sinister smile of his and instantly have his way.

The thing about Parker was that he always had to have his way. He would keep me his dirty little secret in front of our friends, telling me I only belonged to him in the early hours of the morning when we were all alone. The chemical reaction that sparked every time his mouth pressed against mine made me want to die.

We are sitting on the bed in his room, and I focus my attention on the blue walls surrounding us. Parker says he wants to take me to an abandoned building on the other side of town. I ask him if it's safe, and he tells me nothing ever is. My judgment is clouded; all I see is the boy with the light green eyes holding out his hand, and I take it.

It was almost midnight as we made our way into the cold, dark December. The streets were pitch black, and the only sound that could be heard was that of our footsteps. Parker wasn't afraid of anything, except himself. He didn't want to turn into the man his father was, but being around me always brought out that messed up side of him. As we got closer to our destination, I held on tight to his jacket-clad arm. He smirked at my insecurity, kissing the side of my head. Don't worry baby, I'll protect you, he would often say, although it never made my worries go away.

"DO NOT ENTER" was graffitied in red paint over a wooden door; an unsettling feeling lingered in the core of my chest. A rusty chain-link fence was the building's only defense mechanism against intruders...*like the two of us*. This was not the first time we were surrounded by warning signs, but Parker always found satisfaction in doing what he wasn't allowed. I watched as he climbed over the fence; he eventually coerced me into doing the

same. The inside of the building turned out to be a slowly decaying cathedral. I could see the vague imprint of stained glass on the windows above. The cross that must've once hung on the wall was now shattered in pieces around the dirt-covered marble altar. I questioned Parker, asking if he knew how the place got so destroyed; *the devil must have come to pray*.

We lay down, our backs pressed against the scorched wooden floor. He told me I'm his only, and I tell him he shouldn't lie so much, it might get him in trouble one day. The feeling that I was not good enough lingered in the pit of my stomach. Parker tells me no one will ever love me the way he does; I believe him, because his voice is dripping with passion, and I've never been loved before. He places a cigarette between his lips, igniting the tip with his baby blue lighter. He exhales, a cloud of smoke mixing in with the cold atmosphere, the burning embers falling like snow against the ground. A smirk plays across his mouth, and I want to know what he's thinking.

Parker puts out his burning cigarette on my upturned palm and I feel my flesh coming undone, but he could carve off my skin if he wanted and I wouldn't say a thing. I trust him the way I shouldn't, but he's home in ways I can't explain. His hands are shaking as he begs me to never leave... *Leave? God, that's something I'd never do*. He takes me into his arms, placing his mouth roughly on mine. It makes me forget where I am for a moment, and I don't really want to remember. He wraps his hands around my throat, I can't breathe; I like suffocating with him, because at least if I die, I'd known what it was to be happy. We fall asleep, under a galaxy of dust and fractured moonlight.

Morning comes slowly, his body pressed up against mine; I want to stay there, but eventually I will have to leave. Out all night, someone should be looking for me, but my parents never cared where I slept, they never cared about me much at all. Parker walks me home, my house is empty as usual, and the loneliness sets in. I try convincing myself that everything is okay, *it's not okay, you're not okay, and he's not okay*. I look at myself in the mirror; phantom burn patterns across the places where his fingers caressed my skin. My memory is filtered, emotions on high alert, the room around me closing in. I turn on the shower, letting the ice-cold water wash away all my sins.

It was midnight now, and Parker sat beside me, his jet-black hair falling in his face. He passed me the whiskey-filled flask, and I felt warmth in my chest. Parker would always carry that silver flask around, thinking it made him look cool. *What does he see in me? I'm nothing good. He's a burning fire, and I'm the cold rain, I'm going to burn him out and make him die inside*. His combat boots kicked back and forth against the dirt, he seemed nervous for a change. His hands fumbled with his pocketknife, and his eyes bore into mine, "Run away with me, Violet." I laughed at his request, *I could leave with him, no one would know, it's not like anyone would care if I left*. He took my hand and told me that I was all he needed, nothing else mattered, and my heart ached in that moment.

I turned on the television, 2 a.m., in his apartment, my eyes dilated from the drugs swimming around in my bloodstream. White powder covering my bare flesh, and his fascination with needles showed from the marks covering his left arm. I haven't come down from the high yet, Parker told me it wouldn't last too long. He told me that I would like it, and who was I to object, he knew me best. *He won't want me if I'm not high, he won't want me if I say no*. I watched the static-filled screen. My body ached, my mouth burned. I wanted to feel alive, but now all I felt was dead. "Death is easy, Violet, we all succumb to the darkness, it'll be easy for me too." *I'm scared, if he dies what happens to me, should I die with him?* I can't sleep much anymore. Everything's changed, and I'm alone.

One night, in the empty apartment, a bottle of bourbon on the floor, Parker tells me he wants me; his fingers brush against my bare flesh. *No, don't touch me, not like this*. I don't say a word as he tears off my dress. *No, No, No, No!* He pressed his mouth against mine, but there is no more chemical reaction, just the lingering taste of mortality. I never told anyone what happened in that room, when I was out of my mind and he was out of his soul. I flinched, as his hands pried my legs open, my body frozen with fear. I lie still, as his body moves roughly on top of mine. Stop, please. I don't make a sound, and I pray to a God that must not exist.

Parker leaves me lying there, the room is spinning, and my body is aching. I pick myself up, making my way to his bathroom; the scalding hot water burns my flesh, but I scrub until I'm bleeding, until I can't feel the pain.

This hell feels a lot like home. Parker's now sitting on the edge of the staircase, his eyes blood shot, a hole in the wall, his fist bruised. I hate him, I hate that he doesn't feel the pain coursing through his veins like me. I want to leave, because this is the ninth circle of hell that no one dares mention, and Parker is a Satan-laced drug that has managed to get hooked inside my bloodstream. He doesn't admit to his sins, he doesn't look me in the eye. Our bodies stay in opposition now, and there's no going back to what or who we were. Parker used to be the reason for breathing, but now I'd rather die. *Death is easy...so let me just die. Please just let me die.*

AMERICAN DREAM BOUND



JONATHAN ZELAYA AVILA
*Palm Beach State College
Florida*

The time is 2 a.m.; the location is on a train in the middle of nowhere in Mexico. A 6-year-old boy and middle-aged man are facing each other while standing on a three-inch ledge that holds two railcars together with only a belt wrapped around them keeping them from falling into a dark empty void. The only visible lights are the sparks of the wheels of the train against the rusted metal tracks appearing every few minutes. The only other sound besides the train is coming from the man telling the boy to stay awake because falling asleep may cause them to slip from the ledge and be crushed by the several 20-ton train wagons. Although that would be a quick and painless death, it may not be the prettiest. How would a parent handle the news of such a tragic form of death for their son that has not even reached a third of his life, a son that doesn't know what it feels like to be held by both parents? Not old enough to even know what death is like or what it is, the little boy still thinks about how his parents would react to his untimely demise, that by the looks of it may be inevitable.

It is now 4 a.m., and the boy is exhausted, he has not slept in almost 18 hours. He continues to hold on for dear life, and he doesn't dare to even blink because he is afraid he might fall asleep in the process. It turns out coming to America isn't as easy as "jumping a fence." Right now you're probably thinking "Oh my God, this poor child," but I'll have you know the current situation this boy is facing is a walk in the park for him. He has been through a hell of a lot more in the past 11 weeks, and this is barely scratching the surface. He's actually lucky, he's almost there, lucky he's even made it this far. His father is only a few thousand miles away waiting to hug his son for the first time, and his mother is back at home agonizing and pacing day and night, waiting on the return of her husband with her now 6-year-old son, a son she has not seen in five and a half years.

Without warning, the train suddenly and quickly begins to slow down. Looking onto both sides, the boy begins to see several dark figures pass by. "This is it," he thought. He remembered overhearing the middle-aged man he is traveling with talking to a few other

men saying that when the train reached a stop and you began seeing “the people,” you made it. “Made it,” that sounded like a place where his father would be. The boy began getting anxious and forgetting how worn out from the trip he was. He pictured finally being with people that cared about him; though his parents were complete strangers to the boy, he was looking forward to meeting them. He looked up, the man seemed anxious too, but not in a good way. Instead, it was the kind of anxious you get when you know you’re about to get caught by the teacher while you’re cheating during a test. The man became sweaty and told the boy to be quiet. The train finally came to a complete stop. The boy heard shouting “Sal ahora, sal ahora” meaning “Come out now!” The boy had never heard this type of Spanish accent before; it was completely foreign to him. The shouting got closer and closer, when out of nowhere two figures shined a bright light at both the boy and the man. The boy could not see what these men looked like. One of the male figures began untying the boy and the man from the belt bonding them onto the train. They grabbed the man by the arm and pushed him against the side of the wagon and began placing handcuffs on him. The other man held the boy by the hand as they both watched the other gentleman cursing and yelling at the man that rode with the boy.

Before they knew it, the sun barely began to poke out of the horizon. The man and the boy were now behind a large white and green van. It was back to square one. By now you could probably guess what happened — border patrol got ahold of them before they made it to the other side. Had the last 10 weeks the boy suffered not been enough? Had wearing the same soiled pants for three days not been enough? Was being chased by a drunk man armed with a knife not enough to go through to finally meet his parents? It turns out that coming to America is no easy task, especially for a boy his age.

That scared little boy was me, Jonathan Zelaya. I am finally here in America, temporarily legal of course. Though I made it, I have not yet *made it*. The struggle continues, and I have yet to come out of the mud — I know how to stand in it now, that’s all. I’ll be out of it soon though; staying here is not an option.

The time is now one in the morning; the location is my parent’s bedroom. I am currently typing a portion of my story to hopefully win an honorable award. Like I said, I am not out of the struggle just yet, and it is why I am typing this so late, it is why it took me so long to submit. I currently take four classes and have a full-time job, and I also baby-sit for my parents every night of the week until they get home around one-thirty in the morning.

I was contemplating whether it would be a good idea to even share this story with complete strangers. Only a handful of people know about my past. I didn’t choose to write about this for pity, I chose to write about this to show everyone that it’s never easy for an immigrant child to make it to America. There are many roadblocks in between. The hardships I faced only taught me to be the man I am today. I don’t regret anything. If I could go back and change my experience, I would not. I am only grateful for it all and everything it has taught me.

FINALE & ENCORE



KIMBERLY SMITH
Wenatchee Valley College
Washington

By the time she retired, my ballet teacher had collected so many pairs of old ballet slippers they filled a box the size of my nightstand. At the end of a performance season, girls would toss out their scuffed shoes and buy new ones. The used shoes came in every size and color — red, black, lilac — all painstakingly spray-painted to shine. The names of their old owners were tenderly scrawled on the inside of each shoe in the same elegant cursive.

The shoebox was a safety net for dancers like me, with vacant minds or an affinity for losing things. Each time a shoe disappeared into the backseat abyss of my dad's car, the teacher, scowling, sent me to pick out a new pair. Excited, I would peek inside and see whose legacy I was dancing in that day. There was always a shoe to fit everybody. However, recently a burly man in jeans and hiking boots carried the box away forever, one of many boxes sealed tightly and carted out the heavy glass doors into the parking lot, where they would be taken to a new home or to the dump.

After my teacher announced her retirement in the spring of 2014, she slowly began to clear out her ballet studio. Shoes, costumes, pictures and props all had to be abandoned; her tea kettle and old television were packed into her car and delivered home. The process was difficult. The studio, built in an apartment above a downtown union building, held her entire lifetime.

For as long as I can remember, the studio has been cramped. It was never big enough to house the decades of ballet history my teacher had accumulated over the years. But despite the crowding, until recently the studio was jumping with life; preschoolers bounced in to sing nursery rhymes and learn how to skip, and teenagers came dutifully every day to take class and rehearse, returning home only after the world outside turned dark.

Class wasn't necessarily fun; hers was a traditionally serious school, and hard work was expected from every student. Playing sports was forbidden. Bullying ran rampant. And her

studio, with creaky floors and unreliable air conditioning, couldn't compare to the newer, more popular dance schools springing up across town. So why did my teacher's enrollment numbers continue to soar? It could only be because she had her own way of attracting students.

At age six, when my mother, who had danced all through high school, sent me to her old ballet teacher instead of a soccer field, I was first disappointed. The studio was dark, dusty and crowded, and the teacher was strict. She spoke in a fading New Zealand accent and counted sharply. She donned sweaters in June, long pants and shoes that tapped loudly with each step. She didn't show her age — she snapped up quickly to adjust our posture. "Lock your knees!" she would cry. "And don't grip the barre like that — you're dancers not monkeys."

To a child, she was scary. But as I continued with my training, my intimidation turned to wonder. I recall gazing at a wall of portraits. Most were of old students and professionals, but a few featured my teacher herself, much younger and very pretty. In her pictures, I fell in love with the idea of the glamorous ballerina: a tall woman surrounded by cast members and directors, fawned over by journalists and philanthropists for her poise. This was my instructor, and I was convinced it could be me.

Captivated, I threw myself into my studies, seeking out the world my teacher described in her ancient legends of the dance world. I remember listening avidly as she quoted Mr. Balanchine and watching, mystified, as Baryshnikov and Makarova performed on VHS. Most 10 year olds found this form of study tedious, but it only deepened my infatuation with the art form. Despite her strict training regimen and crumbling studio, she provided for her students a glimpse into the polite and gleaming world of ballet as it was years ago, before hip hop and before reality television.

But even though her students lived in a bubble, sheltered from the changing times, the rest of the world did not. Most parents deemed her, at over 90, too old-fashioned to teach their children. My teacher's world, and the world that she captured in her studio, had died long ago. By the spring of 2014, she had only five students still caught under her spell. It wasn't a surprise to learn that much of the next year would be spent dismantling the world she had built inside her studio.

Still a dedicated follower, I helped her pack up. She reminded me that years ago she promised she would never allow herself to sell her company's costumes at a yard sale, as one of her associates had. But there we were, peeling nametags off wire hangers and organizing leotards in order by size. When the final sale arrived and customers bought ornate tutus for their daughters, we wrapped up their purchases and waved them off.

After the costumes, the pictures on the walls came down. They left ghosts, white squares lingering on graying walls. Then we packed up the kettle, which had greeted me, whistling, nearly every afternoon for 10 years. As for the hundreds of videos memorializing all the productions my teacher had directed? Those went home as well, along with the CD player, which she'd never learned how to properly use.

And so, she taught her last class in silence.

At the end of the class, I changed into street clothes and took one last look around, remembering. When I first arrived at the studio as a child, I found myself surrounded by evidence of a life that had seen enormous change. Every day the studio welcomed me with the light whistling of a teakettle, a polite greeting from my teacher, and the distant sounds of a soft symphony. Now everything is packed and gone. But I can still hear the kettle; I can still see the box of spare shoes on the bench where it belongs. The studio may be empty, but my teacher is still here. And somewhere, a little girl is wearing Clara's nightgown from "The Nutcracker" and dreaming of the stage.

STATIONARY



ZARIAH HEDGE

*San Jacinto College – North Campus
Texas*

I wander down the block to clear my head and gain some semblance of control over my emotions. I head in the general direction of the nearest park.

I've just got to think about me, and everything I've done with life, or not done rather.

And I ask:

*Where do those hours go?
The minutes?
The days that evolve into years?*

*What does it all amount to when all the things I had promised,
everything I swore I'd get done,
sits still,
scrawled onto papers back home.*

*Papers strewn across my writing desk,
that stare back at me,
And all the things I thought I would have accomplished,
Just sit there.
On paper.
Unfulfilled.*

*All the dreams, once alive with fervor now sit in still ruin,
Disappointed and glaring back at me.*

All the things that I have ever dreamt pass through me like a torrent of angry rain. A storm of regrets and 'should haves' tear through my mind, and tear me to pieces, as I round the second block.

*I never held tightly enough to my dreams,
the things so effervescent in nature.*

*Lists upon lists are what I've collected in this life,
An enormous archive belonging to 'someday,'
A day that has yet to arrive.*

*Mountains of lies are what I stockpile now upon that desk.
Things I had sworn I'd get done.
Old hopes I suppose,
of material possessions
of careers
of education
of love.*

I think of all this until I feel sick. I consider all these dying ambitions, gasping desperately for more breath.

I think of how they stare me down each day that ends with no change in progress. Each day, I clock out of work, eat a microwave dinner from my armchair, watch a little TV, and head to bed afterwards.

And each morning, as I get ready to hit the replay button again, I pass by that damned writing desk.

*Helplessly
it sits.
Frozen in time,
begging me not to forget.*

But each day I manage to squeeze by it without a glance of acknowledgement, without an outward indication of the recognition of my own feelings of disappointment. I really don't have the time to, I only have an hour to shower and get dressed before I clock in at seven. But today... Today was my day off, and I just couldn't brush past that yellowing stack of papers this time.

There was no place to be to hide from those dreams.

So I left and started walking.

*And I realize,
just how confused I still am.*

*Even after high school,
Even after college,
Even after nearly a decade of being out on my own.*

*I realize how lost I still feel,
and all I can do is watch the lists,
Wheezing.
Each morning.*

*Growing colder,
and dimmer.*

Losing the last shred of vivacity they cling to so dearly.

And I wonder now if this is normal. If life is always supposed to feel like it's ending. If that sweet, rosy picture of the future that everybody painted for us as we were growing up is supposed to taste this sour.

Because I had done everything by the book. School. Graduation. Job. Nothing in my life is terrible, yet here I am, nearing the duck park down the street on a Saturday morning, waging

an internal war with myself just to avoid that stack of old dreams. Dreams I still want, but see no way of plausibly attaining.

And now I'm walking around, probably living someone else's pile of desperate dreams out. But in this moment, I'm looking down at the frozen pond sprinkled with a dozen or so children doing figure eights, little twirls, racing from one end to the other, recalling a brief memory of doing the exact same many years ago, in the same exact place.

*And all I can hear,
is the very last wafer-thin gasp, six blocks away,
upon that desk,
of ancient stationery.*

INCOME INEQUALITY

Policies and Effects



NORA SHESKEY

*Southcentral Kentucky Community & Technical College
Kentucky*

Income inequality and fair compensation for work are important topics in recent news. How much decision makers should earn in proportion to amounts paid the common laborer continues to be hotly debated between the socioeconomic classes. Labor unions, minimum wages and regulations during the early 20th century related to employment practices helped to moderate the management/worker compensation ratio. This ratio remained relatively stable until the 1980's, when it began growing at an increasing rate. Policy changes favoring business, which began at that time in the forms of easing regulations coupled with substantial reduction of taxes on upper incomes, allowed management/worker earnings ratios to grow exponentially.

According to some studies, from 1973 to 2013, worker productivity increased by 74 percent (White, 2015). This would lead to the assumption that worker compensation should, likewise, increase by 74 percent. However, this has not been the case. Virtually all gains from increased productivity went to those in upper socioeconomic classes. Additionally, the Internet and the ability for companies to operate globally have further enabled organizations to move manufacturing and operations to countries having lower economic bases and to reduce wages, further stagnating worker earnings and increasing the gains going to the decision makers — increasing management/worker compensation ratios even more.

A deeper examination of income inequality raises many questions. First, what factors have most influenced the changes in income inequality? Second, how have changes in income inequality affected people in various socioeconomic classes? Third, what can be done to reverse changes in income inequality? Fourth, what are the future implications of allowing current trends in income inequality to continue undeterred?

In examining income inequality, the first question is what factor(s) have most influenced income inequality. In "Evening the Odds," Lemann writes, "In 1979 members of the much-discussed '1 percent' got 9 percent of all personal income. Now they get a quarter of it. The gains have increased the farther up you go. The top tenth of 1 percent get about 10 percent of income, and the top hundredth of 1 percent about 5 percent. While the Great

Recession was felt most severely by those at the bottom, the recovery has hardly benefitted them. In 2010, 93 percent of the year's gains went to the top 1 percent" (Lemann, 2012). Lemann further states, "During the five decades from 1930 to 1980, economic inequality decreased significantly, without imperiling 'American exceptionalism.' So it's especially hard to put a good face on the way inequality has soared in the decades since. Even if you think that all a good society requires is — according to the debatable conservative mantra — equal opportunity for every citizen, you ought to be a little shaken right now. Opportunity is increasingly tied to education, and educational performance is tied to income and wealth. When it comes to social mobility between generations, the United States ranks near the bottom of developed nations" (Lemann, 2012). Lemann presented the case that income inequality exists and is becoming worse with time.

In order to further determine what factors have accelerated income inequality, we can examine "Income Inequality and U.S. Tax Policy." Crocco, Marri and Wylie present the fact that current levels of income inequality were last seen in 1928, just prior to the Great Depression. From the time that the 16th Amendment was ratified in 1913 until the 1970's, tax policy moderated income inequality and kept it at a fairly stable level. However, beginning in the 1980's, tax laws began to favor top income earners. Crocco states, "From 1947 to 1994, the ratio of income received by the top quintile (20 percent) relative to the lowest quintile grew from about 8:1 to 11:1. By 2007, this ratio rose to 12:1. Put differently, the top quintile received about half of all income; the bottom quintile received about 3.4 percent" (Crocco, 2011). Additionally, "two-thirds of the nation's total income gains from 2002 to 2007 went to the top 1 percent of U.S. households. The author concluded that the top 1 percent of the population held a larger share of income in 2007 than at any time since 1928" (Crocco, 2011). Further, "The incomes of the top one-tenth of 1 percent (0.1 percent) of U.S. households have grown more rapidly than the incomes of the top 1 percent of households as a whole, rising by 94 percent, or \$3.5 million per household, since 2002. The share of the nation's income flowing to the top one-tenth of 1 percent of households increased from 7.3 percent of the total income in the nation in 2002 to 12.3 percent in 2007" (Crocco, 2011). Crocco, et al, present evidence that rising income inequality has been exacerbated by fiscal policy and that all gains realized earlier in the 20th century were wiped out by the end of the century due to those policies.

Having determined the main factor(s) in income inequality, the second question is how income inequality has affected people in various socioeconomic classes. According to Corak, as income inequality increases, working harder is less likely to lead to upward economic mobility and future success. He states, "...an emerging body of evidence suggests that more inequality of incomes in the present is likely to make family background play a stronger role in determining the adult outcomes of young people, with their own hard work playing a commensurately weaker role." The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011a, p. 40) has gone so far as to state that rising income inequality "can stifle upward social mobility, making it harder for talented and hard-working people to get the rewards they deserve. Intergenerational earnings mobility is low in countries with high income inequality such as Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States, and much higher in Nordic countries, where income is distributed more evenly."

Income inequality seriously affects those in the lower socioeconomic groups. Duncan and Murnane examined the effects of income disparity on educational achievement between children in the lowest 20 percent and the highest 20 percent socioeconomically. They write, "Children growing up in families with greater financial resources score higher on many dimensions of school readiness upon entering kindergarten. An obvious advantage of a higher family income is that it provides more resources to buy books, computers, high-quality childcare, summer camps, private schooling and other enrichments. In the early 1970s, high-income families spent just under \$3,000 more per year (in 2012 dollars) on child enrichment than low-income families (Duncan & Murnane, 2011). By 2006 this gap had nearly tripled to \$8,000. Spending differences are largest for enrichment activities such as music lessons, travel and summer camps (Kaushal et al., 2011). Differential access to such activities may explain the gaps in background knowledge between children from high-income families and those from low-income families that are so predictive of reading skills in the middle and high

school years" (Snow, 2002). They found that parents in higher socioeconomic groups spend more time interacting with their children, further improving their educational development (Duncan & Murnane, 2014).

Reardon and Bischoff stated, "Income segregation implies, by definition, that lower-income households will live, on average, in neighborhoods with lower average incomes than do higher-income households. If the average income of one's neighbors (and/or its correlates) indirectly affects one's own social, economic or physical outcomes (and a large range of sociological theories predict such contextual effects; see, for example, Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Morenoff, 2003; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Sharkey, 2008), then income segregation will lead to more unequal outcomes between low- and high-income households than their differences in income alone would predict. In a highly segregated region, then, higher-income households may be advantaged relative to lower-income households not only by the difference in their own incomes, but by the differences in their respective neighbors' incomes" (Reardon & Bischoff, 2011). It is apparent that income inequality substantially effects academic achievement when comparing students in lower-income households to those in higher-income households and in comparing the educational opportunities available to each group.

Having examined the factors leading to and the effects of income inequality, the question is how to resolve the issue. Taking the viewpoint that what has worked in the past can work in the future would indicate that restoring tax policies to those existing from 1913 to the late 1970's should help to resolve the problem. Referring again to Lemann, "Because groups with wildly different perspectives dominate politics, the observation that 99 percent of Americans are being left behind economically isn't of much use politically. The 99 percent is too big a category to be an effective political force. For all that, inequality already is a political cause, though in strange and unexpected ways. (Cost is upset about inequality and comes close to predicting that the Republicans will be the party that takes it on, because the Democrats have become the party of Wall Street.) But if we are to go further — and get the political system to try seriously to reverse the trends of the past 30 years — somebody will have to figure out how to stitch together a coalition of distinct, smaller interest groups that, in their different ways, care deeply about inequality and, together, can pressure Washington in favor of specific policies. It's an unlovely business, but if you believe that government is the best instrument with which to address the problem, it's also a morally urgent one" (Lemann, 2012).

Many Americans support this position. In "Income Inequality and U.S. Tax Policy," Crocco wrote, "A growing number of Americans believe that the gap between rich and poor is getting bigger, while more also say it is the government's responsibility to help the needy. Likewise, in 2008, Gallup found that 58 percent of Americans believe that money and wealth should be more evenly distributed in the country, although only 46 percent favor using heavy taxes on the wealthy to achieve that goal. The Harris poll's "Alienation Index" reported in 2010 that 68 percent of all Americans believe the "rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer." The tax cuts established by the Bush Administration for the wealthiest Americans — those earning \$250,000 or more — were extended at the end of 2010 by Congress in a compromise agreement on economic stimulus between Republicans who supported the cuts and Democrats who opposed them. The disagreement about these tax cuts will continue to be a political issue. A USA Today/Gallup poll conducted between August 4 and August 7, 2011, found that 66 percent of respondents favored increasing income tax rates for upper-income Americans to reduce the federal debt, while 33 percent opposed these increases. A CNN/ORC poll conducted at the same time found that 62 percent of respondents favored increases in taxes on businesses and higher-income Americans to reduce the federal budget deficit, while 36 percent opposed such increases" (Crocco, 2011).

Considering that changes in policy increased the income gap, reversing it will require changing those policies. Per Duncan and Murnane, "By widening the gap in educational opportunities between children from low- and higher-income families, increasing income inequality jeopardizes the upward socioeconomic mobility that has long held our pluralistic democracy together. Improving educational outcomes for children growing up in low-income families is therefore critical to the nation's future and requires a combination of policies that support low-income families and measures to improve the quality of schools that low-income

children attend. The United States has implemented a range of policies to raise the buying power of low-income families, including the Child Tax Credit, the Earned Income Tax Credit, cash assistance programs and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly Food Stamps). Recent studies show that the increases in family incomes produced by these programs result in improved educational outcomes for young children and health in adulthood (Hoynes, Schanzenbach & Almond, 2013). Unfortunately, these programs are under attack as Congress seeks ways to reduce the federal budget deficit" (Duncan & Murnane, 2014).

A final question is what is the future impact if current trends are not reversed? Based on past trends, we can extrapolate possible results. Since the 1980s, little or no wage growth occurred for common workers, whereas cost of living has grown at a regular rate, resulting in a loss of purchasing power and increasing the number of people at or below the poverty level. Additionally, there continues to be a disconnect between the upper level view of what is required to survive and the realities of what is required, resulting in higher-level earners believing that poor and lower classes are lazy and do not want to work. Also, this perception permeates the opinions of many politicians and decision makers, resulting in laws and regulations that further degrade the situation of those who have impaired earning potential and increase the earnings of those at the top. These factors have resulted in a depressed economy that favors those at the top. If no actions are taken, the result will be a domino effect that works its way up the economic chain and impacts everyone, including the upper levels.

So, what can we conclude about income inequality? Scholars have determined that the biggest factor influencing income inequality is fiscal policies favoring highest income earners. Additionally, income inequality affects the lowest groups hardest financially, educationally and in many other ways, tending to be multi-generational. Researchers agree that the most effective way to remedy income inequality is to reverse policies that lead to it. Finally, problems associated with income inequality will continue to worsen if nothing is done to reverse it. The amount decision makers should earn compared to the amount paid to the common laborer is hotly debated between the socioeconomic classes. Income inequality and fair compensation have become an important topic in the news in recent years and are likely to remain for many decades to come unless, through wise leaders, the issue can be resolved.

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A FEARFUL HERO



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Timothy Clark sat quietly amid the buzz of over-excited voices and tried to quell his rising panic. He clutched the damning piece of paper in his hand and wished, for the thousandth time, that fate hadn't selected him to participate in the upcoming horror that was sure to come. Why God had seen fit to throw him in the thick of it all, he had no idea. Surely this nearly suffocating anxiety was a sign that it had all been a mistake.

A lovely redhead in a fetching green dress the exact shade of her bright eyes stepped out of the door to his left and walked toward him, a deceptively inviting smile on her face. Timothy felt his heart slam and then pick up wildly. Fear clawed at his belly; an overwhelming panic threatened to close his throat as he tried desperately to pull in a breath.

"Mr. Avery Smith?" She smiled warmly, her eyes locked on someone behind him. "Dr. Palmer will see you now. If you will follow me, please." She turned smartly around and led the young fellow through the door she had just exited.

The relief Timothy felt was so strong it was briefly paralyzing. He felt his head fall into his hands and tried to control his shaking form. He took in a deep breath and sat up, determined to compose himself. He looked down at the paper he still clutched in his hand, unfolded it, and stared, unseeing, at the words that blurred before his vision. The tears obstructing his eyesight did little to keep the words from forming in his mind. He had memorized the horrid missive more than a week ago, when the life-altering letter had been delivered into his hands. The letter read:

You are hereby ordered for induction into the Armed Forces of the United States of America. You are to report on the 17th floor of 1000 Liberty Avenue, Pittsburg, PA, on the 22nd of June, 1970. Present yourself at 7 a.m. for forwarding to an Armed Forces Induction Station.

All that was missing was a "congratulations," he thought bitterly. "Mr. Timothy Clark?" Timothy's head snapped up in surprise as the soft voice of the redheaded secretary broke through his reverie. He had been so immersed in his thoughts that he hadn't heard her

approach. "Dr. Reed will see you now. If you will follow me, please." Without waiting for a reply, she swung around and made, again, for the door to the left of the room.

Timothy rose slowly, willing his legs to move. His heart was pounding deafeningly in his ears. He followed her in silence through a sparse, white hall lined with doors, each closed to the outside world. The secretary led him through the fifth door on the right of the hall and gestured for him to sit down in the chair opposite a large, oak desk. After informing him that the doctor would be with him shortly, she left the room, closing the door with an ominous sense of finality.

After spending the remainder of his morning getting tested, assessed and approved to be both mentally and physically able to join the noble cause in Vietnam, Timothy was sent home with the congratulations he had been missing and informed that he would have but two weeks to make the necessary preparations to proceed to Fort Dix, near Trenton, New Jersey, for official training.

Throughout the hour-long bus ride home, Timothy remained in a state of numbed shock. His brain still hadn't fully comprehended the ill-fated events of the day when he walked through the front gate and up the short path leading to his father's front door. Instead of entering the house, Timothy sat down on the porch's old, wooden rocking chair that his father favored when he sat outside to smoke.

He didn't want to tell anyone he was going to be shipped off, like cattle for the slaughter. He feared that, somehow, saying the words out loud would make his situation all the more real. Instead, he leaned back against the rocking chair's familiar, slightly curved back and gazed up at the magnificent expanse of glittering diamonds dotting the night sky. At that moment, the sky was flaunting a small, crescent-shaped sliver of light that had managed to escape the clouds that so often shielded it from view. The beauty of the sight took his breath away, as it always did.

As he stared, he felt the tightness that had been squeezing his chest since he had been cleared for duty loosen slightly. He didn't feel quite so helpless when gazing up at the vastness and brilliancy of the universe. He took a deep breath, savoring his small moment of peace, for he knew, once he walked through the door, everything would change.

The next weeks passed in a blur of activity; Timothy rarely had a moment to think. He was constantly occupied, either by preparations for his leave or by emotional encounters with his family and friends. Through it all, Timothy remained, most blessedly, numb. The overpowering fear and dread stayed coiled under tight control until he found himself exiting the bus at Fort Dix.

As Timothy stepped down from the bus, he slowly took in his surroundings and felt his numbed mind spring instantly to attention. Following suit, Timothy made to stand with the rest of the men that had formed a neat line in front of a squat, older man with a face resembling that of a bulldog and wearing a camouflaged uniform engraved with the name "Dobbs." He stood at severe attention with his spine stock straight, his legs braced apart and his hands hidden behind his back. The glower that he offered in welcome did nothing to soothe Timothy's dismay.

Once the bus emptied and every draftee stood, staring expectantly at the obvious stickler in front of them, the man turned and, without breaking his rigid pose, began slowly marching up and down the rows of men, speaking in a loud, authoritative voice.

"I am Sergeant Millhouse Dobbs, and I will be your drill sergeant for the next 10 weeks," he informed the assembly in a gravelly voice. He stopped, peering at the sea of anxious faces. "Welcome to Fort Dix. Here you will learn to shoot, work as team and, most importantly, survive." Sergeant Dobbs stopped for a moment, then turned and resumed marching up the line of men. "Look to your left," he paused. "Look to your right. These men are your new family. You will sleep together, eat together, train together, leave together and protect each other. You will all guard the back of the man in front of you as you want the man behind you to guard yours. Wars aren't won by one man alone," he paused again, turning to face the

men gathered before him. "We will all need to do our part, and your part starts here. So let's get to work."

Sergeant Dobbs turned and began walking toward a long, single-story brick building boasting an American flag. Timothy and the other draftees followed, wondering, warily, what "their part" included.

After an overwhelmingly long day, Timothy lay in his bed, eyes closed, trying in vain to block everything out. Childishly, he hoped he could disappear. He wasn't meant to be a soldier. He was the furthest thing from brave it was possible to be. He would never survive. One day of training had proved that. After Sergeant Dobbs' inspiring speech, they had all been shown their barracks, given a plain green uniform and sent back outside in order to begin their training.

They had spent the remainder of the day learning the correct way to march and being lectured on the behavior and responsibilities expected from everyone for the duration of their stay.

Over the course of the ensuing weeks, fear was Timothy's constant companion. Fear he would somehow fail and disgrace his family, fear of his impending departure overseas, and the fear that he would not survive consumed him. The most overriding fear racking his body, however, was that others would be able to see how truly terrified he was. Compounding his already-heavy distress was the notion that his fear would make him weak when he needed to be strong, and that would result in his death. Or worse! What if, because of his panic, he was the cause of the deaths of those around him? He didn't think he could live with himself if that was the case.

These dreadful thoughts engulfed him day and night. The only solace he found was in the late hours of the evening. As sleep eluded him, he would gaze up at the twinkling sky and imagine himself back on his father's farm, back among all of the beautiful, safe simplicity he had once taken for granted.

As time passed, Timothy found his anxiety steadily increasing. The knowledge that each week that flew by brought him closer to leaving for the carnage taking place in Vietnam kept him in a constant state of restless tension. He tried to avoid counting down his remaining days at Fort Dix, but, despite his efforts, he always knew how much time he had left and was very aware of how fast that time was slipping away. Timothy felt as though his future was a ticking time bomb, one that was wholly unavoidable.

Finally, his stay was over. As overwhelmed as he had been when arriving at Fort Dix, Timothy now felt that anxiety heightened by his departure. The time had flown by so quickly that he held no true confidence in the training he had thus far received. Instead, he boarded the plane to Vietnam with an intense mixture of fear and dread that threatened to make him sick. He hardly felt prepared for anything, much less war. In fact, the idea of going into a completely foreign country, filled with violent and hostile enemies, was the furthest thing from what he considered inviting.

Timothy closed his eyes and leaned his head against the cold window to the right of his seat. He thought back to the words Sergeant Dobbs had offered the night before in an attempt to encourage them all before their departure, trying to find comfort in them. All he felt was despair. While Sergeant Dobbs' poetic words had indeed been inspiring, the brutal truth, which he had so kindly included in his speech, did little to reassure him.

After a brief stay in Saigon, Timothy found himself, at last, stepping down from the helicopter that had carried him and his squadron to Ben Hat Camp in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. It was hard to believe that it had been less than three months since he had been cleared for active duty; the time had flown by so fast. Too fast. Following his squad leader, Timothy found his eyes searching warily ahead of him. He wasn't sure what exactly he was looking for, but when he looked out at the men playing cards and joking loudly amongst themselves, seemingly at ease, he found himself in a state of disbelief. The sight before him was nothing like the nightmarish visions his imagination had been conjuring since receiving his draft notice. Nonetheless, despite being surrounded by American soldiers and friendlies, Timothy

couldn't shake the severe anxiety threatening to destroy his composure. There was just no getting around where he was and why.

Timothy's mandated year in Vietnam crawled steadily by without much incident. His squad regularly patrolled numerous areas and often escorted convoys carrying supplies to their various locations. While each mission was completed successfully and without any problems, the stress of not knowing friend from foe was continually nerve wracking. No matter how many times they left Ben Hat or how familiar the terrain seemed, it was impossible to know for sure which side the natives were on and, therefore, impossible to know if and when there was danger. This precarious uncertainty kept Timothy constantly tense.

Finally, thankfully, his time in Vietnam was at an end. After this last job, he was free. In just two days' time he would board a helicopter and begin retracing his steps until he made it back home. The excitement he felt at seeing his family and friends again was tainted by the fear accompanying it. What would he do when he got home? How would he be treated? He had not been blind to the treatment of veterans before he left the states.

"Alright men. Let's move out."

His squad leader's voice halted his thoughts. As he fell into step behind the two men in front of him, ordered to protect a convoy carrying supplies to Ta Bat Airfield, he felt his body tense impossibly. The familiar anxiety he felt at leaving the security of Ben Hat filled him as powerfully as it usually did. Like always, he couldn't stop himself from glancing around warily.

About three leagues from their destination, he felt an odd dismay that he couldn't place. Something was wrong, he just wasn't sure what. Instinctively, he slowed, scanning the area around him.

Suddenly, he flinched as something hot struck the side of his neck. He choked as the bullet lodged itself in his skin and blood started welling up in his mouth. Stunned, he lifted his hand to his neck as his knees gave out, and he crumpled to the ground.

Oddly, Timothy felt no pain. Instead, he had an overwhelming urge to help somehow.

He knew his squad was in trouble. He tried desperately to sit up but was unexpectedly weak. He saw the carnage and chaos ensuing around him, but it took a moment before he could appreciate the sounds accompanying the horrific images. They had been ambushed. They had been ambushed? Shot and bleeding, he could still barely believe it.

He saw a movement in his peripheral and swung his head to the right just in time to see an enemy soldier throw a grenade in his troop's direction. As if in slow motion, he saw all of the men from his squadron, fellow soldiers, friends, his new family, too caught up in the battle to notice the bomb in their midst. He tried desperately to shout a warning, but the blood was thick in his mouth, preventing a sound. With a speed and strength born of desperation, he flung his body to the right and managed to roll closer to the bomb. Not pausing, he rolled again and felt the grenade under his back. He looked up, gazing at the calm of the sky, so out of place with the mayhem around him. He looked at the fluffy white clouds and lovely blue background and, for once, he felt no fear, only peace. He sighed in contentment as the bomb exploded.

**Dedicated to Thomas Creek; a true American Hero.*

THE CREATIVE MEDICINE



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Bertie couldn't write. On top of that, he was diagnosed with several serious medical conditions, ranging from depression to anxiety. This man was angry with the world because he could not express himself thoroughly in his writing. He felt cheated by his society's education, particularly in the area of literacy. This was when sociologist Olivia Sagan brought a creative writing program to the psychiatric hospital Bertie attended. By writing vigorously every day through Sagan's program, Bertie and several other patients participated in what is known as "writing therapy." Writing every day made Bertie's skill flourish. It made him more open and more willing to talk about his own past in a vivid way that he never thought possible (Sagan). In light of this, writing therapy can be used in several ways. It improves the health of those with physical and mental disabilities, and it also amounts as a stress reliever for everyday people. Writing is therapeutic because it relieves stress and assists those with mental and physical disabilities by giving them the ability to express themselves.

There are three types of writing therapy that have been used in both private and public settings such as homes and hospitals. The first type of writing therapy is poetry. Writing in verses that have melody gives patients the ability to organize their thoughts and understand themselves better. Furthermore, the second type of therapy is writing memoirs and journals. Memoirs are often personal narratives or biographies, while journals are a recording of one's daily activities. Both journal and memoir writing are used for emotional release. People who engage in these styles of writing are able to express themselves by recording their personal stories in a written, concrete form. For some, documenting one's life can be cathartic if done daily. This emotional release allows patients to understand their own emotions. Finally, the third type of therapy is creative fiction, particularly the stream-of-consciousness type. Writing from the viewpoint of someone else can be a catalyst for emotional expression. By imagining a viewpoint other than their own, those who write creative fiction are able to convey their thoughts without it being directly related to them, as opposed to a memoir. Of creative writing, published writer Melissa Greene says that it is "a combination of psychology, art and the spirit" (qtd. in Schweigert). Writing takes time and effort, and using it as a treatment is an indispensable tool for therapists.

Poetry, memoir and fiction writing therapy can be used for those that suffer from mental disabilities. For instance, poetry therapy has been used in hospital programs. At Coler-Goldwater Memorial Hospital, creative writing graduates from New York University set up a creative writing program to participate in writing sessions with patients (Hajela). Along with being a means of emotional expression, poetry therapy gives rhythm to the mind. As Coler-Goldwater patient Elaine Telson said, “It allows you to express yourself” (qtd. in Hajela). Furthermore, writing memoirs or journals has been used to express extreme emotion. This personal writing is also used to handle the memories of traumatic events. Tara DaPra, an MFA graduate from the University of Minnesota, coped with her depression over the suicide of her boyfriend by writing memoirs. She states that writing an emotionally driven memoir is initially cathartic — meaning that it is not necessarily the writing itself that is cathartic; it is what comes after. Therefore, writing is the “trigger” to relieve stress and pain. Moreover, writing therapy has been used to alleviate the stress of an unorganized mind. For example, Ross O’Donovan, suffering from ultra-rapid cycling bipolar disorder, committed to a writing group when he was institutionalized in a hospital (65). By participating in creative writing, both fiction and poetry, O’Donovan “found” himself. He was able to redefine himself as a human being who had rights — and not just as a “mental health patient.” Writing allowed him to evaluate his moods and understand himself better.

Writing therapy has also been used to treat those with physical disabilities. In a study on journal therapy, patients with rheumatoid arthritis and asthma experienced an overall improvement in their health after four months of writing therapy (Slomski 1877). Also, a study in 2012 conducted by researchers at the University of Stavanger discovered that patients suffering from chronic pain were better able to cope with their discomfort by writing daily (Furnes and Dysvik). Since chronic pain is so debilitating, writing helped these patients become aware of their condition. With this awareness, they were able to manage the pain in their day-to-day lives. Writing did not take away that excruciating pain, but it provided the patients insight into their condition in new ways and allowed them to articulate their emotions in ways they could not before. As one of the patients in this pain management experiment said, “My notebook is my ally and I often feel that I have parked a part of my anger and frustration between the covers of my book, and out of myself” (qtd. in Furnes and Dysvik 3377). Another example comes from a man at Coler-Goldwater Memorial Hospital. Yi Mui suffered from a cerebral hemorrhage, and because of his condition he was unable to function properly. However, with the creative writing program, Yi Mui was able to vent his frustration — and his anger — about life. By writing creatively, he was rehabilitated. This allowed him to release his pent-up emotion and put his thoughts on paper. Even more, Yi Mui plans to write a novel when he is released (Hajela). Therefore, writing therapy not only helps those with physical disabilities; it also helps to put a “creative spirit” into those who receive the therapy. With such experience, they are more likely to continue writing after they have received such therapy.

Writing therapy is not only for those suffering from physical and mental disabilities. It is also a stress reliever for people involved in everyday activities. For example, published writer Melissa Greene held weekly writing sessions for older women to write and share their work (Schweigert). These women had stress issues and went to Greene for help in order to relieve their stress. By writing about anything in their lives, from what happened the previous week to describing an object, these women were able to engage in a therapeutic process of writing. They broke away from the daily trials that life presented to them as mothers. Many of the women reported that writing had a positive effect on their mental and physical health, from finding lost passions to improving serious health conditions like diabetes. Moreover, writing therapy has been used to help with recording memories, especially in biographies or memoirs. It also reduces anxiety and fosters self-awareness (Slomski 1876). Journal therapy in particular is helpful in that it provides stressed individuals an outlet by which they can vent their frustrations of everyday life, from the mundane to the extraordinary. The most poignant fact of writing therapy is that anyone can participate in it as a stress reliever.

Additionally, one may write therapeutically without a healthcare professional instructing them. A 2003 study conducted by researchers from Syracuse University showed that writing is extremely useful in psychotherapy, but there is also potential to use it as a self-help tool (Smyth and Helm). The study centered on focused expressive writing (FEW), which is a

therapy tactic designed for participants to write about their deepest thoughts in relation to the most stressful event in their lives. The results showed that participants engaging in FEW released their negative emotions from trauma and stress. This led to a significant increase in their health. One reason this particular therapy is believed to work is the view that FEW encourages the reorganization of memories of the traumatic event (230). By structuring their memories into the process of narrative writing, patients are better able to express themselves. They may feel as though they have released a burden that has been plaguing their mind for a long time. Furthermore, this study found that when using writing as a self-help mechanism, people who are unwilling to participate in psychotherapy — where they reveal their innermost thoughts — are more likely to engage in writing (227). Using writing as a self-help tool is extraordinarily beneficial for therapists if the patient is unwilling to share their thoughts. Because writing is a private endeavor, patients who dislike the idea of disclosing their life stories to an individual may be more willing to express their thoughts on an “anonymous” piece of paper. Additionally, writing is easily accessible. It is not necessary for people to travel to an office 17 miles away because they will often have access to writing right in their own home. A pen or pencil and notebook are all that one needs to start a memoir, a poem or a creative piece of fiction. With the ease of access and therapeutic effect that writing has, it is an excellent substitute to psychotherapy.

It is clear that when writing, one will always express himself in the written word. This part of the process gives freedom of thought to individuals who write. Although writing therapy is used for those with mental and physical disabilities, it can also be used as a stress reliever for healthy individuals. As studies have shown, writing can be used as a self-help tool and therefore encourages unwilling participants of psychotherapy to engage in this healthy method of emotional expression. However, due to the massive success that writing therapy has provided to patients, some trained health professionals are distrustful of this therapy. The results are seemingly too positive, and some find it hard to believe when “so much measurable improvement in health status can occur in just a few brief writing sessions” (Slomski 1877). Nevertheless, one cannot deny that the success from formal research in hospitals and informal therapy in small group sessions leads to the conclusion that writing therapy is effective as a medical tool. Indeed, it is hard to fathom that a human being can recover from an illness simply by putting words on paper, yet that is the crux of it: by putting the words on paper, people can express their very being in ways they could not before. Just like Bertie — who was once unable to explain himself properly — those who put words on paper can find themselves. Writing therapy is a pathway to emotional expression and discovery.

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WHO KNEW

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Who knew the pain could run so deep?
Or the grief so bitter;
A sour taste in my mouth
Like copper like acid in flavors of metal it burns
Churning inside me, a calamitous juxtaposition.
Slicing through me like a mace or a sword
With shattered bones, and broken sores.
They bear me up and on wings of sufferance take flight
And into my misery they receive me, verily...

Who knew that life was so fragile?
The cancer, the car wreck, or old age;
A shot in the darkness, or the glint of a blade
Their dreams are all gone now
And their memories fade
On the ashes of time they flee.
They bear me up and on wings of sufferance take flight
And into my misery they receive me, verily...

Who knew that nothing would matter?
Does the house, the car, the rent?
In the rush of life itself, and owned by it
Indentured servants we are
The machinations of the flesh;
We weep as humanity, captured in the crosshairs
Unreasoning hands groping and clasping.
They bear us up and on wings of sufferance take flight
And into our misery they receive us, verily...

Who knew what was really important?
Is it not in the things that we take for granted?
Is it not in the touch of a lover, or the embrace of a friend?
Is it not in the comfort of a companion, or a gentle word of compassion?
The gleaming eyes of a child so bright
Or the dreams of adults, like you and I.
They bear all of us on the wings of their sufferance
And into our misery they receive us, oh verily
So who — knew — who knew — WHO KNEW!

I knew, and I will never forget them...



THE MAID TRADE

The Abuse of Foreign Domestic Workers in Singapore



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Human rights violations are rampant throughout the world. Many of them make headline news, but, unfortunately, other severe issues regarding human rights protection are less commonly known. In Singapore, thousands of Southeast Asian women are employed as domestic workers and suffer countless human rights violations behind closed doors. The government of Singapore must change its policies concerning the employment of foreign domestic workers to prevent their ongoing physical and emotional abuse.

Singapore, a prosperous city in Southeast Asia, grants temporary work permits to young women, primarily from Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, to work as domestic maids (MTO 2). In 2013, over 200,000 maids were employed in Singapore (Tan 1). The maids, most of whom hold two-year contracts, live and work in private homes performing domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning and raising children. They are often poverty-stricken and desperate to escape difficult living conditions in their home countries. In Singapore, they are able to find more secure and higher-paying employment and may have the opportunity to send money home to their families. Singapore has a huge need for maids due to its thriving workforce. It is difficult for businesswomen to work full time unless they have maids to care for their home and children (MTO 2). One in five households in Singapore employ a live-in maid (Tan 1). The number of maids in Singapore has increased significantly since 2005, when maids were employed in only one in seven households (MTO 2).

Foreign domestic workers face a difficult journey after they apply for employment in Singapore. Many countries in Southeast Asia do not provide structured ways for women to get employment abroad. Therefore, many maids go through unlicensed agencies where they are subjected to inflated agency fees and receive unfair contracts. The agencies may confiscate the maids' passports and family contact information, increasing their isolation and vulnerability. In Indonesia, women waiting for an employment position to open in Singapore may be locked away in an overcrowded training facility by their agency for up to six months

at a time, where they may be subjected to physical violence and may not have adequate food. Once the maids arrive in Singapore, their struggles get worse (MTO 2).

The government of Singapore and employment agencies use foreign domestic workers to make a profit, unfortunately at the expense of the maids' well-being. Intense competition between the over 600 employment agencies in Singapore has prompted agencies to reduce the costs to employers and increase the fees charged to the maids themselves. Maids are forced to relinquish four to 10 months of their salary to pay off agency fees, and some employment agencies in Indonesia threaten to force the maids into prostitution if they do not pay off their exorbitant debts (MTO 2). The wages for maids are very low. Maids make less than half the money as other workers employed in domestic pursuits in Singapore, such as gardening (MTO 1). Employers must pay a monthly levy of \$200-\$295 SGD (\$118-\$147 USD) to the government of Singapore, which is more money than the maids themselves are paid. The government does not use these funds, which amounted in 2005 to approximately \$360 million-\$531 million SGD (\$212 million-\$213 million USD), for services for migrant workers (MTO 3). In addition, employers pay a security bond of \$5,000 SGD (\$2,950 USD) to the government for each maid. If employers lose control over their maids and she runs away or refuses to work, the employers must relinquish their bond to the government. While these policies are financially beneficial for Singapore, they give the employers the incentive to exert inordinate control over their maids (MTO 2).

The policies in Singapore regarding the treatment of foreign domestic workers during their employment are inadequate because they do not provide the maids with basic rights and protection. Foreign domestic workers are excluded from Singapore's Employment Act, and the few existing policies regarding the maids' employment give the employers great discretion regarding the lifestyle of the maids (MOM 2). The policies also provide employers with the opportunity and incentive to take advantage of the maids. The policies were developed by Singapore's Ministry of Manpower (MOM 1).

The Ministry provides some basic guidelines regarding safety, healthcare and payment for maids; however, the employers are basically the sole dictators of the maids' lifestyle. The Ministry only "encourages" employers to make agreements with maids regarding rest days, hours and payment plans, and there are no requirements that maids be allowed to leave the home (MOM 2). If employers wish to terminate a maid's employment, they must provide her with "reasonable notice," which is open to wide interpretation (MOM 4). Also, there is no clear course of action for conflicts that may arise between maids and their employers. Even though maids are allowed to lodge a complaint with the Ministry and the Ministry will try to negotiate a solution, employers are rarely disciplined. As a result of these inadequate policies, some employers may try to take advantage of the maids.

Employers who do not want to lose their maids or relinquish their security bonds may restrict their maids from ever leaving the home. Also, many employers overwork maids simply because they can, especially since there are no home inspections to enforce proper treatment of maids. As a result, maids do not have many basic human rights while they work in Singapore, and their employers have a huge amount of power and control over them (MTO 2).

Since the employers are allowed to determine the working conditions, maids are often extremely isolated and overworked. In certain situations, they endure conditions amounting to forced labor. The typical work hours for maids are 13 to 19 hours per day, seven days a week (MTO 1). There are government regulations that forbid maids from becoming pregnant, getting married, having a relationship or leaving the country of their own free will, which increase their isolation and hugely limit their freedom. Maids also do not have equal access to healthcare as other workers in Singapore, and, often, maids will be deported if they try to get an abortion (MTO 3). One maid claims, "I was not allowed to go outside. I never went outside, not even to dump the garbage. I was always inside; I didn't even go to the market. I felt like I was in jail. It was truly imprisonment. I was not allowed to turn the radio on either. I could only see the outside world when I hung clothes to dry" (MTO 1).

The government's inadequate protection of maids has produced devastating results. Between 1999 and 2005, over 147 maids died from workplace accidents or suicide. The workplace accidents were likely caused by the maids balancing precariously outside to hang laundry or clean windows. The suicides were likely caused by "poor working conditions, anxiety about debts owed to employment agencies, social isolation and prolonged confinement indoors" (MTO 1). The Indonesian embassy alone receives over 50 complaints per day from maids working abroad. It is also believed that many abuses are never reported because employers may try to stop maids from seeking help. Also, many maids refrain from complaining and risking the loss of their position due to their need to pay debts and desperation for employment (MTO 2).

In response to the growing number of problems regarding the abuse of foreign domestic workers, the government of Singapore has initiated a number of reforms. In 2012, the government granted domestic workers one day of rest each week. Unfortunately, this policy only applied to recent contracts (beginning January 2013). Also, employers are allowed to compensate maids in lieu of their rest day, and due to the imbalance of power between maids and employers, many employers may convince maids to sign away their day of rest (HRW 1). A later report stated that only one-third of maids receive the weekly day of rest (Tan 1).

Singapore has made other recent efforts to improve the lives of maids, including instigating mandatory orientation programs for employers and enacting more severe punishments to employers if they abuse a maid. However, according to Human Rights Watch's Senior Women's Rights Researcher Nashia Varia, "Singapore's reforms are only a fraction of the change needed to protect women workers, who are too often undervalued and overworked. Singapore should join countries around the world that have recognized the injustice of discrimination against domestic workers and are making comprehensive reforms to guarantee them the same rights as other workers" (HRW 1).

Foreign domestic workers in Singapore are desperate and hardworking young women who have risked their own well-being in order to support themselves and, often, their families. Many maids must endure unfair policies and violations of their human rights in order to escape the difficult conditions in their home countries. The government of Singapore should not allow these women to be exploited and should institute stricter policies to protect them from physical and emotional abuse. The employment of maids is of great value to Singapore because it provides much-needed assistance to many families. It is important that the government of Singapore guarantees their maids basic human rights, safety, reasonable working conditions and freedom from all forms of abuse.

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NEWTON'S CRADLE

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Perfect in design
but so very flawed in action.
Air friction creates the bind,
gravity,
the attraction.

Hit me.
And I hit the next.
A chain reaction
that returns yet again.

Conserving all we have
and still we're running out.
If problems persist like this
there'll be nothing more to give out.

So we grow slower every second,
something that was not drawn in our sound scheme.

But in an imperfect realm,
deficiencies rub off on our esteem.

Now we're a broken toy.
One with a faulty guarantee.
One with shortcomings and insufficiencies
One that never works seamlessly in reality.

But that is the story of our tainted world
Continuously ruining everything for ourselves,
Returning the book of Precision back to the shelf.

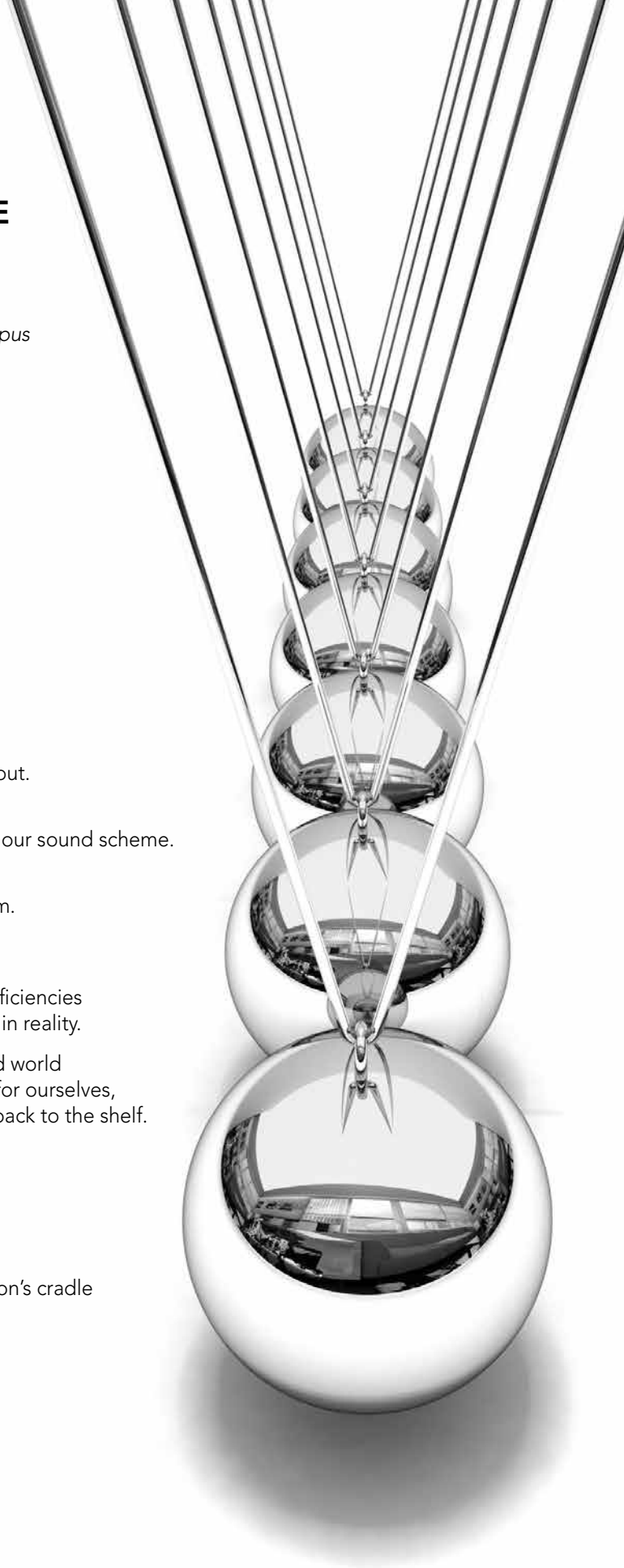
And I think we know it
all of us.

Deep down,
In all our abstractions,

That we are all creatures in Newton's cradle
The entire world.

Perfect in design.
but so very flawed

In action.



AQUACULTURE

The Benefits of Aquaponics and Hydroponics in American Samoa



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With extreme weather changes taking place around the globe, global warming has caused major concerns about agriculture. According to Cline (1), "the risk to world agriculture stands out as among the most important." Aquaculture has been introduced as a solution to aid in the prevention of the destruction of agriculture. Also known as aquafarming, aquaculture is a general term used to refer to the "breeding, rearing and harvesting of plants and animals in all types of water environments including ponds, rivers, lakes and the ocean" ("What is Aquaculture?"). Aquaculture has since been introduced worldwide and has become a medium that many use in order to grow their crops and so forth. In American Samoa, the usage of two forms of aquaculture is present: aquaponics and hydroponics. Aquaponics and hydroponics have been introduced as a new method of farming on the island. The introduction of these mediums as a means for growing crops during these extreme weather changes will prove beneficial for the island and may alter the way farming is done on the island, both privately and commercially. In order to achieve this goal, it is vital to understand why American Samoa needs to introduce aquaponics and utilize hydroponics as mediums for cultivating our agriculture; understand what aquaponics and hydroponics are as well as the similarity and difference; understand how each medium works; and understand its presence and benefits to American Samoa. Aquaculture and its usages and efficacy will provide benefits for American Samoa, which will provide a means of sustaining and stabilizing the island's agriculture.

WATER DEFICITS IN AMERICAN SAMOA AND THE PACIFIC: DROUGHTS

It has been documented that droughts are still a serious problem in the Pacific due to "global warming and human activity" (Liu). Of the four types of drought, American Samoa is known to experience three: meteorological, hydrological and agricultural. According to previous studies conducted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific back in 2007, the Pacific has always suffered from irregular and arid weather patterns over the years (Liu).

This dry weather greatly impacts the land and causes the bodies of water on the island to dry up and the soil to lose its nutrients and become dry and unviable. This is a severe problem for the island because the people rely heavily on the land for local crops, since imported crops are often costly. As a solution for the agricultural drought that is present on the island, aquaculture exists in two forms: aquaponics and hydroponics.

AQUAPONICS AND HYDROPONICS: THE SIMILARITY AND THE DIFFERENCE

Understanding the primary difference between these two systems is vital in order to fully grasp the concept of each and how each system works differently for the same purpose. Aquaponics are often confused with hydroponics since they are both soil-free methods of cultivating agriculture. However, the main difference between aquaponics and hydroponics is the environment of cultivating that is utilized.

Aquaponics is the integration of aquaculture with or without a medium (Sawyer) in a controlled environment in order to create a well-adjusted environment that allows for the cultivation of crops and fish simultaneously ("The Difference Between Hydroponics and Aquaponics"). In contrast, hydroponics is used primarily to cultivate crops in a water-based system without the incorporation of fish into the system and can either be a circulating system or a non-circulating system. Both systems are fundamental solutions in the growth and cultivation of agriculture in areas of the world where soil may not be viable for the cultivation of crops — this includes American Samoa.

AQUAPONICS: HOW IT WORKS

Aquaponics cultivates fish as well as fruits and vegetables that are organic. This method works in a two-system way: the use of a hydroponic pond to cultivate the crops, and a tank for cultivating the fish ("The Difference Between Hydroponics and Aquaponics"). This two-way system is an efficient way to avoid the wasting of water. The water in the tank that contains the fish becomes filled with fish waste, which is an excellent nutrient for plants. Instead of getting rid of the water, this water from the tank is cycled into the hydroponic pond, which uses the nutrients from the water. In this way, the crops in the hydroponic pond use up the nutrients from the water, and their roots cleanse. This newly cleansed water is then returned to the fish tank clean and ready to begin the cycle again.

HYDROPONICS: HOW IT WORKS

Hydroponic systems use nutrient solutions and cultivate the crops in this liquid-based system ("Overview of Hydroponics"). Unlike aquaponic systems, hydroponic systems are only for crops and do not cultivate fish simultaneously in a closed controlled system. However, hydroponic systems are open systems where the water present is either recycled or more nutrients are added to the system once the crops have absorbed the nutrient solution from the water. This is so due to the fact that in a hydroponic system, once the nutrient solution is absorbed by the crops' roots, the solution is not reusable and no surplus of the nutrient solution is recycled.

AQUACULTURE IN AMERICAN SAMOA

Now that the two systems of aquaculture have been clearly defined and differentiated, it is imperative to analyze the status of aquaculture in American Samoa. Aquaculture was a fairly new concept in the Pacific (Adams). However, over time Pacific island nations began to realize the benefits aquaculture provided in terms of the long-term sustainability of fisheries (Williams 41). The problem with many Pacific island nations was the lack of chances to produce revenue (Adams 40-50).

This age-old problem still applies today, especially in American Samoa where 70 percent of the landmass is mountainous and full of forested areas ("Geography") and the ocean and inshore water reservoirs are heavily relied on within the island. Though aquaculture had been present over the past several decades, its uses and potential benefits to the island have become more blatant now than ever.

In 2006 the usage of aquaponics in American Samoa was present ("Aquaculture Development Advances in American Samoa"); however over time, the usage of this method

faded slowly. According to Larry Hirata (Personal Interview. 23 Apr. 2015.), aquaponics is a “novelty” on the island, and aquafarming on the island is yet to be used commercially. While the potential benefits still exist, the usage of aquafarming commercially on the island is not present but may be with further experimentation.

Aquaculture, more specifically the usage of aquaponics and hydroponics here in American Samoa, has become an increasingly experimented-on concept and has produced several good results over the years (“Local Aquaponics Farm a Success, with Hopes to Expand”); so much so that workshops are often held to draw awareness to the potential benefits of aquaculture to the island of American Samoa (Chen).

According to Hirata, who owns Hirata Hydrogardens, the usage of hydroponics has been beneficial to him, and he believes that the general public can also use this method to grow crops as long as basic needs are met. This gives rise to the potential benefits that aquaculture may have for American Samoa and its people.

BENEFITS OF AQUACULTURE TO AMERICAN SAMOA

The usage of aquaponics and hydroponics in American Samoa has several benefits to the island. Aquaponics as well as hydroponics do not require the usage of soil to grow the crops. In this way, pollution from soil has no effect on the crops and allows for a full range of various crops to be grown and cultivated. This is especially beneficial to the island of American Samoa because of the constant weather changes the island undergoes that greatly impact the cultivation of crops. In addition to this, American Samoa may be able to grow a diverse amount of fruits and vegetables over time with the proper incorporation and usage of both aquaponics and hydroponics.

Another benefit that comes with the usage of aquaculture is the type of fruits and vegetables that may be cultivated; all crops grown through the usage of aquaculture will be one hundred percent organic hereby lacking any chemicals (“Why Aquaponics?”, “The Benefits of Hydroponic Growing: Why Hydroponics as Opposed to Traditional Growing”). Even more so, because the crops are grown and cultivated locally, the local economy will be boosted and this will encourage the buying and selling of local goods rather than imported fruits and vegetables, which are often costly and contain many chemical additives to keep them fresh.

Hirata also mentioned in an interview that in his experience with growing lettuce in a non-circulating hydroponic system, he has been able to cultivate the crop all year round. This shows the potential of growing crops without worrying about the constant weather changes that American Samoa tends to experience. This is a huge benefit for the island because arid weather is always a constant concern for agriculture.

Utilizing these benefits that aquaculture provides will greatly benefit the island of American Samoa since many of the products found on the island, especially fruits and vegetables, are imported. The use of aquaculture will allow a means for the long-term sustainability of crops despite extreme weather patterns and will also provide for the growth of the local economy by encouraging the buying and selling of local goods. Aquaculture provides a means to stabilize agricultural development on the island without much waste and has the potential to produce healthy, organic and sustainable crops on the island.

CONCLUSION

Although the usage of aquaculture is still rather experimental on the island, the potential benefits of this method to sustain crops on the island are very high. Extreme weather changes often dictate the type of crops we are able to grow on the island; but with the usage of aquaponics and hydroponics, this may not be the case. These two intricate liquid-based methods of growing crops provide a system that may combat the arid weather conditions we are so often plagued with. With this in mind, the agricultural stability of the island will be able to remain constant throughout the years, and the revenue that may be developed from this system of cultivating crops as well as fish will most definitely benefit American Samoa. Water is one of the greatest resources mankind has, and utilizing water systems such as aquaponics and hydroponics provides a steady means by which to fully utilize American Samoa’s resources as well as expand on them for the betterment of the island and its agricultural future.

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WAITING ROOM

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This is the kind of waiting room with plastic flowers

in a vase filled with ancient potpourri and,
no magazines waiting to be read.

All of the brochures have been poached
from their dusty and chipped display cases,
leaving only faint guesses of what conditions they may have
described.

If

we don't know what to call the illness,
how can we pretend to seek a cure?

This is government mental health care.

This is where I've landed myself at noon on a Monday.

Imminent Risk is a phrase that holds no light
On the darkest night or day.

Scripted lines full of scripted questions. Connect dots with scripted
directions.

Doctors so weighed down by the heavy that their caseloads bring
That any relief or light is out of the question.

And so they hand me my

Plastic bottles

Without

Ever

Looking

up.



THE METAPHORS THEY CARRY



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Tonight I walk through the doors of another country on the opposite end of the world. A confetti of colors flecks the sidewalk in a ritual known as rangoli. Today is Diwali, the Festival of Lights. Brilliantly bold powder forms swirls and stars on the cement. Teal is the brightest and most playful of all the other colors and intertwines its fingers with violet.

Tonight my best friend Dishveen, born as a Sikh in the Northern Indian province of Chandigarh, has brought me into the doors of her temple, a piece in the puzzle board of her culture. Tonight on a Thursday in November she and her family and the rest of India celebrate this festival, and I have tagged along to witness the subculture that has found its way to Poway in the suburbs of Southern California...the art of tradition that has traveled approximately 8,290 miles from India and goes back to ancient times from Hindu history that branched out and influenced the rest of India's customs.

I've come into this temple as a foreigner, a stranger. I am Irish and English and French and Filipino and Spanish and Catholic. I am far from them and their untainted heritage where only insiders blood is perpetuated. I am outsider blood. I am not one of them, and they can see it in my skin; they can see it in my eyes and nose. My only means of blending in is wearing the black and purple jeweled "anarkali" dress Dishveen loaned me and the matching silky scarf to cover my head. With my gawky body, I try to imitate my best friend. "Just copy me and you'll blend right in," she says. Walking into a room never felt so artificial and strategic before. She slips off her shoes, I slip off mine. We step barefoot through the doorway onto the carpet. She walks down the slanted room. I stay close to her side. She kneels down. I kneel down. We bow in the center of the room and I hold my breath, no time to look up and examine my surroundings. I somehow feel like these tedious, nearly identical actions make me look as guilty as a convict. I try too hard to go unnoticed in a room of large extended families where everyone knows each other. They all know if someone is out of place...

It feels like a year has passed as I stare at the baby blue carpet with small specks of black dust and traces of long hair. Finally our heads lift, and we walk to our designated sides of the room according to our gender; women to the left, men to the right. I feel like I am crossing

a border right into a new world; the language barrier and a mild fever of culture shock dribbles down my arteries. I am walking into an ancient tradition and have barged right into this culture's prayers. The man at the front wearing a royal blue dastaar (head wrap) murmurs phrases in Punjabi while fanning a large book with a long white feather stick. I lean in close and whisper to Dishveen, "What's that?" She smiles suddenly at my curiosity. "The Guru Granth Sahib," she says. "It's our main religious text of Sikhism." Realizing I have a personal translator with me, a small swell of comfort rinses and drains through my pores. The man continues to speak monotonously in utterances, as if he is mumbling to himself the whole time under the microphone.

During this time, I think of Sunday mornings at mass when I was young, the little black dress and tap shoes I would wear to Saint Patrick's Catholic Church. Click, clack, click, clack; always making my entrance known as I walked hand-in-hand with my mother and father through those heavy mahogany doors. We would sit in the pews, our backs and bums aching on the hard wood, my knees aching as we prayed. And when the hundreds of us stood to acclaim the Apostles' Creed, I would move my lips up and down like a guppy, listening to the flat intonations of the voices around me that sounded mechanical. My eyes would wander and an eerie feeling swept down my spine. I'd look into my father's bluish gray eyes for comfort. When the priest spoke then, I was 8 and didn't know if his words meant anything. When we are young we take everything so literally. As the Sikh man speaks now, I have no idea what he is saying, but I bet his words are as similar as what I hear Father Rowland speak every Sunday now that I have the attention span to sit and listen in church.

The ceremony ends. Barefoot and beautiful, the ladies strut gracefully out of the walls of the temple, the bangles on their wrists jingling with each step. To the fresh night air, they carry tea lights in their palms. Their bright dresses and wraps drag behind their footsteps. What a million metaphors they carry in their henna-dyed hands. They carry light, they carry good, they carry knowledge, they carry hope. And the candles, all hundreds of them, are placed in union along the bricks, wax of all colors, flames of one hue.

I recall three hours earlier at Dishveen's home, the hustle of wiggling our legs into the pants that go under the Indian dresses. As soon as I walked into her room, it looked as if Crayola had hurled up a collage on every article of clothing that piled on her bed. This was, of course, surprising to see, due to the contrast of the usual deluge of colors, or lack thereof, in the clothing I owned — 20 different shades of black, gray or blue that I called "classy," "minimalist" and "modern."

A young girl beams up at me, gleaming the most brilliant set of teeth. Her eyes smile the brightest as she hands me a candle stub. Her smile becomes contagious as I light a candle with Dishveen. The cool rustling of the wind hugs our bodies but does not kill any of the flickers we hold. Suddenly, the familiar scent of masala (spices) waltzes through the air. We line up outside waiting for our turn to be dished out food. Daal (lentils), paneer makhni (cheese), roti (tortilla), dahi (yogurt), chawal (rice), all Sikh staples, each prepared in unique ways. It was amazing to think how different something can taste with a hint of Indian spices. We sat in between the warmth of others on the floor, criss cross, in socks. We leave our shoes outside. The men and women eat and laugh, the children are full of zest, they smile and run around, the babies are swaddled by their mothers, a soft look of peace in their innocent eyes and pursed lips.

* * *

There really is this cycle and relevance to everything. No matter how many layers of differences Dishveen has from me — she believes candid shots are the most beautiful and laughter and chocolate are the best medicine — she is a slice of a beautiful country I have yet to visit. Maybe I will never realize the true significance of this day to my best friend and her family. And maybe their customs will always remain a labyrinth that I have the pleasure of revisiting whenever I walk into their home, but firecrackers exploded that night and lit up the entire sky: a million creations of constellations. My world illuminates and I am at harmony in a hundred new ways.

NIGHT ONE



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CPS on the caller ID.

I'm checking the list
of questions we were told to ask.

Remember, it's ok to say no.

"Sorry, we don't have that information yet."

Then how do I know if I can help? What is the point of this list?

"He goes to Jonestown Elementary.

Not sure where his siblings are. Or the mother."

I can't let him sit alone at a shelter.

"We'll take him in." What will I say?

"We're on our way." What will he do?

Headed 'home.'

He's rubbing his brown recluse eyes.

Or wiping away tears.

Ask lots of questions. But don't push, don't scare.

"How old are you, buddy?"

"Nine," says a mousy, high-pitched voice.

Keep smiling. Build trust.

"Nine! You look too tall to be nine." False.

He stares out the window, searching
for answers.

Try to be funny. Kids like that.

"I hope your feet don't hang off the end of the bed!"

He didn't laugh.

Of course he didn't laugh.

We're home.
This is where he'll be staying.
Please don't ask me how long.
Project Harmony gave him a bag that holds
one set of pajamas,
one outfit for school,
one toothbrush and shampoo.
It weighs heavy on his slim frame.
Was there nothing else?
Case worker said he was left
on a stranger's doorstep. Mom told stranger it was
'his turn.'
Guess it's my turn now.

His new room.
Bunk bed cloaked by Iron Man.
Shiny Avenger's poster on the wall.
I hope he likes it.
"Time for bed. Gotta get rest for tomorrow"
 "Will I see my mom tomorrow?"
The anticipated plea. The dreaded sentence.
How did my foster care manual say to respond to this?
"Sorry buddy, I don't know. But we're gonna try
to see her as soon as we can, ok?"
His wet eyes look to Iron Man
for strength, for rest.
*I will hold you! Kiss your head of black hair
spiking in all directions and say, 'It'll be alright.'*
What I can say is, "Goodnight."

GUILT IN "THE ONES WHO WALK AWAY FROM OMELAS"



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Compared to novels, short stories are especially good in conveying a message to the reader as briefly as possible. Ursula K. LeGuin relies mainly on symbolism and tone to describe the setting in "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas." Looking in from the outside, Omelas seems like heaven on earth before the narrator allows the reader a view behind the curtain and introduces a suffering child. Omelas is not even close to being perfect. The distraught child and its treatment affect every single one of its citizens whether they admit it or not. LeGuin's short story deals with a secret guilt that is hidden under a beautiful appearance.

The narrator expresses difficulty in describing the people of Omelas correctly because the view of the rest of society is vastly different. According to the narrator, "only pain is intellectual, only evil interesting" for them (LeGuin). Happiness and intelligence are two traits that cannot possibly exist together. Joy is an emotion that makes the person experiencing it seem naïve and unfit for this world. People put much more effort into being miserable and lose themselves in the violence that their culture adopted over time. The people of Omelas defy this kind of reasoning because their happiness is not shallow or born out of ignorance. It is an ingrained part of them; it is the life they have actively chosen.

At the same time, nothing is ever what it seems like at the first glance. "Omelas sounds in my words like a city in a fairy tale, long ago and far away, once upon a time," the narrator explains (LeGuin). Many small towns and cities provide a traveler with a peaceful and perfect impression of harmony, and the same can be said about an individual person. From afar, no flaws can be seen because people try to hide imperfection whenever they can. They hide flaws in metaphorical basements or cellars behind a locked door, which is what the people of Omelas literally do with the child. Their "old moss-grown gardens," their "avenues of trees" and "great parks and public buildings" try to disguise the reality of the city and the imperfection the child stands for (LeGuin). The beauty portrays a certain innocence that is misguided because they are "not less complex than us" (LeGuin).

Being different is rarely considered positive, and Omelas reflects this belief. It is one of the many justifications for keeping the nameless child in captivity. It was given a life sentence of imprisonment by the rest of the city because "perhaps it was born defective," and it became feeble-minded due to the horrible treatment by its captors (LeGuin). Not only does the child get punished for being different than the rest of the citizens, it is feared because of something they do to it. No matter what the actual reason is, the city knowingly puts its happiness over the happiness of this particular child. They turn the child into this wretched creature who begs to be freed. The people "never come close, but peer in at it with frightened, disgusted eyes" (LeGuin). On top of that, the child is also deemed too far removed from society to be let out. Its condition is another explanation many of the people of Omelas use to justify their turning away from the empathetic instinct to not let the horrible abuse of the child continue. Giving in to this sense of compassion would mean that they would "let the guilt within the walls indeed" (LeGuin). Instead, they pour all of their love into their own children, while telling themselves that these acts of kindness balance out the injustice on which their city and all of their achievements are built. Like in so many societies, the accomplishments of Omelas are constructed upon the shoulders of the inferior.

Despite the belief of the narrator, the guilt is already a part of Omelas' civilization. It is never explicitly mentioned how the exchange of the child in the basement for the goodness of the city comes to be. Nevertheless, it is easy to conclude that the people of Omelas make a deal with someone or something. The pact might even be a reference to selling souls to the devil. The citizens of Omelas "know that they, like the child, are not free" (LeGuin). It may be that the child is actively suffering, but the people carry the knowledge of the child's existence with them everywhere they go. There is not one person in Omelas who does not know of this terrible secret because it is even "explained to children when they are between 8 and 12, whenever they seem capable of understanding" (LeGuin). While most people carry on with their lives as usual, some of them are riddled with rage and eventually leave their homes. They leave the city and are never heard of again, and where they are going can only be guessed at. They sacrifice their constant happiness and admit to the guilt they have carried around for so long. It can be argued that they settle in other areas, but it cannot be denied that they leave everything behind. For the first time they are truly free and leave for "a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness" (LeGuin).

The child is the foundation of the city of Omelas as well as the foundation of LeGuin's short story. Everything is built on it. The secrets every single person harbors represent the child in the basement, and denying its existence does not make it disappear. Whether it is admitted or not, guilt does not need to be let into the city since it has always been there.

THE OIL PRODUCER'S DILEMMA

A Game Theoretic Analysis of the Oil Price War Between OPEC and the U.S.



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ABSTRACT

There has been a recent shift in power between the U.S. and other oil-producing nations. Currently, the U.S. is the highest oil producer, a position once held by Saudi Arabia, the frontrunner of the OPEC cartel. As a result, oil is being produced at record levels, and consumers worldwide have benefitted from the drop in price. Even though the reduction in price has benefitted consumers, producers on the other hand have created huge market inefficiency. Why would producers' output exceed demand? The answer is market share. Profits are important to the energy sector, but strategy seems to have a higher priority. This study explains the framework behind the oil price war and market share using game theory, the branch of economics that models strategic behavior within a specific market. In this case, the market of choice is oil. Let the games begin.

INTRODUCTION

There is a war going on between the United States and a multi-trillion-dollar cartel. If you're thinking of the war on drugs in Latin America, you're mistaken. Actually, this war is being waged between the U.S. and a perfectly legal cartel whose prominent member is in the Middle East. This war has little to do with radical politics, terrorism or any other semblance of commonly thought of conflict between the U.S. and the Middle East. This is not the war on terror or the war on drugs; this is the war on oil pricing, waged between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and U.S. oil and gas companies.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), OPEC has about a 60 percent market share on all oil that is traded internationally as of December 8, 2015. OPEC data concludes that they command about 81 percent of total oil reserves as of 2014 (OPEC 2015). Because of their market power, they for the most part set the global price for oil based on their production levels. Analysts at Bloomberg have termed OPEC as a swing producer and

U.S. producers as price takers (Bloomberg 2015). Due to their immense market share, the barriers to entering the oil market and their freedom of action, OPEC essentially determines the price that other producers must accept or leave the market.

Since 2014, OPEC has flooded the market with more oil than the market demands. As a result, the price of oil has lowered significantly. According to the supply and demand model, OPEC is producing at a highly inefficient level. Some may see this behavior as irrational with respect to profits and optimization. However, OPEC's strategy is not geared towards profits. The cartel is competing for market share; and in this respect, their strategy is quite rational. Since the advent of fracking in the U.S., OPEC has lost market share to the biggest consumer of fossil fuels worldwide — the United States. Overproducing, their primary strategy has helped OPEC to reclaim market share (Bloomberg 2015). In fact, OPEC's overproduction has led many U.S. oil companies to bankruptcy because they can't compete. As of December 4, 2015, OPEC has announced that they will not reduce production any time soon. So the question many economists, investors and even the Federal Reserve are asking is, "When will OPEC lower production?" This is the question my study plans to answer.

Because of its reserves, OPEC has the lowest production costs per barrel of oil. U.S. companies, on the other hand, have higher costs. According to a recent Morgan Stanley analysis, U.S. producers have to set prices around \$35 a barrel in order to remain competitive (Slate 2014). West Texas Intermediate, the NYMEX US standard for crude oil prices, is currently being traded slightly above the \$35 price point (MarketWatch 2015). Most of the recent U.S. entrants to the market are swimming in debt that is outpacing their cash flow (EIA 2015). Since many smaller domestic producers cannot afford to produce around this price level, many of them have left the market or have filed for bankruptcy. According to 2015 bankruptcy filings, at least 30 domestic producers are on their way out of the market (Hayes and Boone, LLP Oil Patch Bankruptcy Monitor 2015).

HYPOTHESIS

Given recent market data, I speculate that OPEC will continue to produce oil at around 32 million barrels a day to maintain market share. I anticipate the U.S. companies maintain their production levels as well. I base this hypothesis on the presumption that both producers are likely to lose a greater value of market share by producing less than they are at current production levels.

ECONOMIC MODEL

Game theory is a branch of economics used to model strategic behavior amongst competitors. The Prisoner's Dilemma game models rational competition between individuals and/or firms. Each player has a given set of strategic moves and a given set of payoffs. Other models, such as the supply and demand model, don't explicitly explain the rationality in producing at an inefficient level. Therefore, I will use the Prisoner's Dilemma game to model OPEC's and U.S. oil companies' strategies for maintaining market share in the oil market.

I will use an "Oil Producer's Dilemma" game to denote current strategies and market share in the payoff matrix. This "Oil Producer's Dilemma" game will consist of two players, OPEC and U.S. oil companies. There will be two strategies each player can use: either to maintain current production, Strategy 1, or decrease oil production levels, Strategy 2. The payoffs for each player are designated as a gain or loss in market share to be interpreted in terms of percentages.

In this model there are several assumptions to be noted. First, we assume that OPEC and U.S. oil companies are collectively two firms instead of a cartel of oil-producing nations and a U.S. national energy market sector of producers respectively. In this assumption, Player 1 will be designated as the U.S. companies, and Player 2 is assigned to OPEC. Second, we assume that the oil market is imperfectly competitive between OPEC and the U.S. producers, noting the oligopolistic oil market. Third, we assume that these players will base their decisions on

a strictly strategic dominance strategy. In a strict strategic dominance game, both players base their decisions on what they perceive is the best strategy irrespective of how the other players play. Fourth, we assume that each player moves simultaneously as is the nature of the Prisoner's Dilemma game. Lastly, for the purpose of the model, we will assume that whatever percent of market share that is gained or lost will be attributed in opposite to the opposing player for Strategy 1. For example, if Player 1 experiences a 1 percent gain, then Player 2 absorbs a 1 percent loss. For Strategy 2, loss or gain in market share represents the differences between the global oil production market share and the forecasted market share (an 8.5-percent lowered production) in 2015. The results of the payoffs will be used to input current and theoretic production levels and market share for the "Oil Producer's Dilemma" payoff matrix.

THEORETIC METHODOLOGY

In this study, two variables will be examined. Imposing a condition of *ceteris paribus*, production levels being the independent variable and market share being the dependent variable, current OPEC data will be used to model market share and production levels, which will be input into the payoff matrix. The market share determinant will be based on the historical rate of U.S. rigs shutting down because of OPEC's overproduction strategy.

OPEC has reported that the U.S. produces on average [in 2015] 13.77 million barrels of oil per day (OPEC 2015). Likewise, OPEC reports its own production levels at a 31.70 million barrel-per-day 2015 average (OPEC 2015). In addition, OPEC estimates that the global production ceiling is around 95.58 million barrels per day [in 2015] (OPEC 2015).

The Baker Hughes U.S. rotary rig count report from December 4, 2015, will be used to calculate average 2015 production per oil rig in the U.S. As of December 4, 2015, there were about 1,920 oil-producing rigs in the U.S. Given 2015 data of 13.77 million barrels per day, each of those rigs produced an average of about 7,172 barrels per day. As of December 4, 2015, 62 percent of those rigs have stopped drilling due to OPEC overproduction, leaving only about 737 rigs left. Collectively, the 1,183 rigs that have shut down have left a nearly 8.5 million annual barrel dent in U.S. production to be accounted for by other firms. Per day, that is an approximate 23,245-barrel loss in market share or about 0.0243 percent. Using marginal analysis, the payoff matrix will model market share fluctuation at the .0243 percent rate for current production levels for Strategy 1.

The U.S. supply ate into the demand for OPEC's crude in 2014, resulting in OPEC to lower its production levels to 29 million barrels a day. This data will therefore be used to approximate OPEC lowering production levels to 29 million barrels a day, influencing market share i.e. Strategy 2. This reflects an 8.5 percent drop in current production levels. Likewise, an 8.5 percent drop for U.S. companies is equivalent to a 12.6 million barrel-per-day production level. Imposing a condition of *ceteris paribus*, let's assume the global production ceiling remains at 95.58 million barrels in order to calculate market share loss between the U.S. and OPEC. You would therefore see 1 percent and 3 percent losses in market share for OPEC and the U.S. respectively for Strategy 2.

FINDINGS

I have elected to use Gambit 14, an open-source game theoretic modeling software, to construct the "Oil Producer's Dilemma" game. This software displays rational numbers that are to be interpreted as percentages per the "Economic Model" section of this study. Figure 1 shows the strategic relationship between daily production levels and daily market share volatility between OPEC and the U.S.

		Maintain Production		Decrease Production	
US Oil	Maintain	<div><div>-243</div><div>1000000</div></div>	<div><div>243</div><div>1000000</div></div>	<div><div>3243</div><div>1000000</div></div>	<div><div>-3243</div><div>1000000</div></div>
	Decrease	<div><div>-1243</div><div>1000000</div></div>	<div><div>1243</div><div>1000000</div></div>	<div><div>-1</div><div>100</div></div>	<div><div>-3</div><div>100</div></div>

Figure 1: Oil Producer's Dilemma Game

According to this model, as OPEC and the U.S. maintain production at its current level, OPEC gains about .0243 percent market share. In this scenario, the U.S. loses .0243 percent market share. If OPEC maintains production and the U.S. decreases, OPEC gains 1.243 percent market share and the U.S. loses the same percentage of the market. If both OPEC and the U.S. drop their production by 8.5 percent, they lose 3 percent and 1 percent of the market respectively. If the U.S. maintains its production, and OPEC decreases, OPEC loses 3.243 percent of the market and the U.S. gains 3.243 percent.

Figure 2 models the Nash equilibrium for this game. Both players are given a higher value for maintaining production than for decreasing. This model illustrates that it makes rational sense for both firms to continue production at the current level.

One Equilibrium by Logit Tracing in Strategic Game				
	Maintain	Decrease	Maintain Production	Decrease Production
1	1.0000	0.0000	1.0000	0.0000

Figure 2: Oil Producer's Dilemma Nash Equilibrium

CONCLUSION

My hypothesis has been substantiated by the findings in the “Oil Producer’s Dilemma” game. The rationale of the recent oil glut has little to do with profit margins but rather market share. In the model, the options are to lose .0243 percent, 1 percent or 1.243 percent for the U.S. Or in the event that OPEC lowers their output — highly unlikely — the U.S. could theoretically gain 3.243 percent of the market. OPEC, on the other hand, only stands to lose market share if they decrease their output. As stated in my hypothesis, both OPEC and the U.S. will maintain inefficient high oil production levels because they both stand to lose more of the market if they lower output.

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THE COLOR OF HEARTS



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Life was simple.

As an only child and the first granddaughter in a string of eight grandsons, she came into the world a month and a half early — a tiny, sassy, red-headed princess. They wrapped her in a fuzzy yellow blanket covered in tiny pink hearts. She had a wonderful family — loving parents, doting grandparents, and a mess of cousins who acted more like siblings. They lived in the country, and all of the extended family lived within spitting distance. The world was small, and she was the center of it.

At five years of age, after she begged and begged, her parents enrolled her in ballet classes at the only dance studio in their small town. She dutifully worked through leg extensions and straddle splits and barre routines. She was smaller than all of the other girls; but between her passion and dedication, she excelled.

The day she started kindergarten, she chose her own outfit: a red tutu with pink hearts. Every subsequent day she made a point to wear something with a heart — a shirt, shoes, a hair bow. When her teacher inquired about this habit, her sweet little voice replied, “I just like hearts, that’s all. I like to be surrounded with love!”

Naturally, middle school was tough, but not as tough as it is for some people. Love did, indeed, surround her. She knew her family loved her beyond measure, and that kind of security goes a long way in staving off the more torturous aspects of growing up.

She began to grow into her own person. She appreciated pop culture, but she did not prefer its products. While her peers raved over the latest blockbuster action flicks, she read Nancy Drew, Sherlock Holmes and Jane Austen. While they blared new chart toppers, she played old hymns on the family piano and listened to Glen Miller, Sinatra and Mancini on vinyl. She sent handwritten letters to those she loved and preferred simple, home-cooked meals to fine dining or fast food.

She joined the Future Farmers of America, which was natural for a farm girl. She quickly developed a taste for blue corduroy and black stockings, but she still loved pink hearts. Her leadership skills also began to emerge. She was organized, level-headed, and she exuded an air that inspired people to accomplish more than they believed they could.

Her high school career consisted of good grades, good friends, ballet and the FFA. Senior year her FFA chapter unanimously voted her their president.

At officer training camp, she met a boy.

Fun, food and country-western dancing filled the last night of camp. For the festivities, she wore a blue dress with yellow hearts. She enjoyed watching her friends line dance, but begged off of dancing with, "Ballet is really more my style," mingling around the perimeter of the room instead. As she stood chatting, a boy approached her. She recognized the boy from one of the training sessions the day before.

"May I have this dance?" The boy's hand shook as he reached out for hers.

Both the request and the boy's nervousness surprised her.

"Who? Me?"

The boy smiled and nodded.

She placed her dainty hand in the boy's large one and found herself quite literally swept off her feet.

When the boy discovered she had never learned, he taught her to two-step. "Keep your feet on the ground."

"I can't! I'm a ballerina — I don't know how!"

But the boy proved himself a determined teacher, and she a fast learner. They danced a few sets and she fancied herself in love.

She came home from camp proclaiming she had found her Mr. Darcy. This reference was lost on her father and cousins, but her mother grasped the significance and waited to see where this first major romance would lead.

She pursued the relationship. He returned her attention and affection. Things appeared to be going along swimmingly, but she always felt as though something was off. He would say things — just little things — that were thrown casually into conversation but made her feel positively degraded.

The boy's demeaning ways worsened, and she mentioned her hurt. The boy brushed her off. After weeks of being made to feel small, the girl's heart was weary. Finally she confronted the boy with new resolve.

"What's the big deal?" The boy was oblivious.

She sighed. "Just because a boy's hand shakes when he asks you to dance, and he writes you love notes, and he can charm your parents doesn't mean he's the one for you." "What are you saying?"

"Real life doesn't work like a Jane Austen novel, does it? Sunshine and roses and vows of undying love and happily ever after's don't exist, do they? Not really."

The way she saw it, life was black and white; so were hearts. She had come to realize the boy's was black. She supposed he hadn't always been that way; she figured he had grown into a creature, conniving and exceedingly insensitive. She knew the boy must be hurting, but that didn't give him a right to hurt her.

The boy crooned, "You know you'll always be mine."

That was the last straw. Her heart was ripping at the seams. She knew it would fall apart if something didn't change.

The boy stepped closer and brought his hand up to touch her face. She brought her foot down on his. Hard.

"How's that for keeping my feet on the ground?"

Directly after graduating high school, she left her small town, her family and that boy from the dance; she never looked back.

She went to university for an agricultural science degree in environmental and social sustainability. She left with new stationery with heart-covered paper, her books, her vinyl collection and a resolution not to give away her heart ever again.

She came home with most of those, plus a man — not a boy — who had made her rescind her resolution.

This young man never demeaned or degraded her; he was always encouraging. He was respectful and kind and attentive. He always urged her to pursue her dreams, to spread her wings and fly. He never suggested she keep her feet on the ground.

Some said his heart was red, white and blue. She knew the young man's dreams involved serving in the military. She didn't love that idea, but she loved him. "I have to go," he told her.

"I know."

"I'll come back. I promise."

"I know."

"And you'll wait for me?"

"Wait for what? I'll write you every day."

"On the paper with the pink hearts?"

"On the paper with the pink hearts." A thought occurred to her: "Oh! Will they laugh at you?" "Let them laugh."

He joined the Army. He went to war. They sent him to the Middle East, which was public knowledge, then to somewhere in the heart of Africa, which was not.

He came home with every single letter she had written.

He came home with scars, stories he had no desire to tell and the Secretary of the Army Award for Valor, among other commendations.

When he stepped out of the small plane, they tangled up in each other's arms and held on as if they would never let go. Neither wanted to break away first. He was relishing having her in his arms again. She had her ear pressed hard to his chest, listening intently to his heartbeat, reminding herself he was real, he was here, he was hers and he was alive.

She felt something cold on her cheek. Pinned above his beating red heart hung a purple one.

They both found jobs and lived 15 minutes away from each other.

One day in the park near her apartment, he went down on one knee.

"Would you do me the extreme honor of spending the rest of your life with me?"

She cried.

His eyes did mist over.

"So?" he asked.

"I can't."

She ran all the way home.

She didn't have much sleep that night; she did quite a lot of thinking...and more crying.

She came to the conclusion that he was not Mr. Darcy or Mr. Wickham; he was not Mr. Knightly, Ned Nickerson, Sherlock Holmes, John Watson or any other fictional man for whom she had fallen as she read. He was himself — with all of his flaws and quirks and lovability. He was absolutely, imperfectly, irrevocably unique. He was not a complicated man. He had three loves: his God, her and his country — in that order.

That day she realized four things:

- 1: He was real, unlike Mr. Darcy and the rest.
- 2: He was flawed, and though he would always make mistakes,
- 3: He would always love her despite her insecurity and her own flaws.
- 4: Most importantly: he was not the boy from the dance. They were two entirely separate people. He would not hurt her like the boy had because his heart was not the same crusted-over black as the boy's had been.

The next morning, she pulled on her coat and was at his apartment before the sun had risen.

Before he had opened the door fully, she said, "Yes."

"Yes?" He barely dared to hope.

"Yes, I would be so incredibly happy to spend the rest of my life by your side."

They again held onto each other. This time they both relished in the knowledge that this was where they were meant to be — for remainder of their days.

The wedding was beautiful.

She wore a gorgeous gown embroidered with hundreds of tiny pink hearts.

He chose not to wear his uniform — he didn't want the glory. He opted for a traditional tuxedo and a bow tie embroidered with their initials intertwined inside of a single pink heart.

They settled nicely into married life.

A red flag raised at a routine check-up called for further tests. The doctor delivered the news as gently as he could.

"It's a benign tumor. It won't pose any major health threats. It will, however, prevent you from ever having children of your own."

She left in shock.

At first her heart filled with anger — anger at God because maybe it was His fault, then anger at herself because maybe it was her fault. When she realized infertility was no one's fault, the anger subsided.

Her heart felt...gray — not burnt and black like the boy from the dance — just...drained. She knew she would certainly survive; but she didn't know how she would live.

"Hon?"

"What's wrong?" He knew from the look on her face.

She didn't have to say a word. He held her; they both cried.

A few months later, they began to talk about adoption. She wanted to adopt internationally.

"You told me when you came back from your deployment that the color of a person's skin didn't matter. You said all hearts are the same color. Well, I want white babies, black babies, Asian, Middle Eastern and — oh, hon, I just want to take care of them all!"

"Sweetheart," he reminded her, "there is an abundance of kids who need loving homes right here — from all different ethnic backgrounds. Why don't we adopt locally? We can have a rainbow of kids and never leave the state! I know that's what you want, right?"

"Hon, the world is huge, and I haven't seen much of it."

He remained quiet.

"You don't want to go back, do you? You don't want to go back to Africa, do you?"

"No."

His voice was deep and sad — full of memories. "I've seen things."

His chin had fallen to his chest. She raised it gently. "I know. And I want to see them, too."

"Believe me, you don't."

"But I need to."

They set out to tour an orphanage. For the people in this country, life was short of days and full of trouble.

Their hearts broke for these people — and not just the children.

The couple knew they would never be the same. They knew they could never again be satisfied in their old life; so they laid it down.

With the money they had saved, and with the help of lots of friends, the couple began a foundation to improve orphanages and to teach sustainable agriculture and English classes so the children would be well provided for.

The first orphanage in which they lived and worked was tiny, but it impacted them in an enormous way. She became the red-headed, pale-skinned mama with 15 dark-skinned babies that she loved beyond comprehension. He was the papa bear, their protector.

They would say, "See you soon" — not "Goodbye" — and move on to make the next orphanage better for more little ones. They spanned continents. The moves were tough; but he knew, as did she, that they were doing exactly what they were meant to do. It was a good life. They thrived even as they lived in the midst of poverty.

Time passed and he came under conviction.

"We have to go into war-torn countries, too. They need help, and no one else is willing to go."

She smiled. "Let's go."

Going into active war zones, they always knew they might not make it out alive.

He had always said he would take a bullet for her.

And then came his chance to prove it.

Rebels met them on the road as they walked back to the orphanage with two of the children. One rebel pulled out a gun and threatened them in French.

He planned to diffuse the situation. "Look, just let them go. You can do whatever you want with me."

The gunman laughed and pointed the gun at the children.

She threw herself over her babies, and he threw himself over her.

Some claimed it was a miracle; others said it was pure luck that he didn't die immediately when the bullet ripped through his middle, and that she wasn't paralyzed when the bullet left his body and hit her in the spine.

He lay apparently dying, and she lay confined — both unable to take care of their babies, and both pleading with their Maker for time. They had no desire to live for themselves. They were perfectly ready to die; but many others' lives depended on the couple. Truly relentless love is as great a miracle as anyone could ask.

He survived. She was mended. They both made full recoveries.

The couple lived the rest of their lives loving people and working to make the world a better place.

Some said her heart and his bled red, yellow, black and white — for all the children who had been so precious in their sight.

He passed away at a ripe, old age; she followed him a few weeks later.

They buried her in a grave next to his with a shared tombstone: two connected hearts — one pink and the other purple — with the inscription, "This is how we know what love is. 1st John 3:16."

GIRL WHOSE BROTHER HAS REGRESSIVE AUTISM



MICHELLE A. JONES

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The stone caused ripples to slowly radiate out from the center of the water. They fractured the reflection of a solitary figure that stood frozen on the lake's quiet shore and then lapped sluggishly against a pair of sneakered feet. All was still and unmoving, as if in sympathy and concern for the lonely girl with large, agonized eyes who had escaped to this desolate place. Not a sound escaped her pursed lips to mar the silence. A wandering breeze lightly entangled itself in her hair and wound around her legs, catlike and carefree. It caressed her cheeks, drying the trail of a single tear that had slipped from the corner of her eye. But she did nothing except clench her trembling hands into tight fists. She stood there, statue-like, as daylight faded into dusk and a single point of light appeared in the sky far above her. The star shone brightly in the velvety twilight and was reflected in the calm water of the lake.

Sometimes, it just felt so unfair that Thomas should have Childhood Disintegrative Disorder. How agonizingly hard and emotionally painful it was to watch someone you loved literally fall apart! To watch pieces of them — their loves, hates, interests, characteristics — fall off and become so lost that when you looked at them you could hardly even recognize them. All you could do was stand by and mourn for them when they had regressed so far that they no longer even remembered who they used to be so they could mourn for themselves. When her emotions became stronger than she could bear, she found that she would hold herself very still and stiff; as though, if she moved, she too would shatter into a million heart-broken pieces. It felt easier to hold it all in and dam it up inside her unmoving body than to deal with the consequences of releasing it.

A scream of anger and frustration shattered the quiet and echoed off the desolate lakeshore as she hurled another stone far out into the solitary, unruffled water. It sank with barely a ripple and without a sound.

LUST



JESSICA RIGBY
Clinton Community College
Nebraska

You are the tiger who stalks
through my lonely plains.

I watch entranced
by your majestic moves,
regal beauty.

Wishing you closer yet fearing that
one embrace
could be the death of me.



A BLESSING

LUISA BLACK

*Tidewater Community College
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I sing the body imperfect:

Bless you, funny smile.

Bless you, protuberant, awkward tuber of a nose.

Bless you, toes (I like you the most).

Bless my too-long mid-face, keen eyes,
focused and soft with green gravity and easily collapsible:
two cups to an eager pitcher.

Bless these piano hands, long thumbs, narrow reach.
Bless the surgical scar across my right-hand knuckle.
Bless the coltish buckle of my knees.

Bless you, spindly-speckled arms,
pin-hole dusted with dark gold
like a lightly toasted slice of white bread.
Bless my freckled breasts, small buttons of a little jacket.

Bless this hippy pelvis, vast and hairy and
altogether a woman's.

Bless the collarbones of my broad shoulders,
jutting out, my mom says,
like budding angel wings.

Bless these ribs like ladder rungs.
Bless the limitless wind of my lungs.

Bless the muscles that shift like restless actors
behind the milk-colored curtain of my back.

Bless you, divoted stomach, bless your holy hunger.
Bless the warm curve of the back of my neck,
kitten-cushioned by baby hairs.

Bless the goofy, insistent outward poke of my front teeth.
Bless this swollen pout of lip, round
chunky cheeks, stolen from
the museum giftshop of my girlhood.

Bless the offset of their softness by
too-high,
too-dark,
too-arched eyebrows and
my mother's cheekbones.

a blessing

Bless my forehead, smooth rectangle.
Bless my two temples and bless
the worshiper between them,
laboring behind a veil of bone.

Bless this serious face and bless the continuous breaking of it,
like a wave on a California coastline,
into laughter.

MEDITATION ON MOTHERHOOD



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With each drowsy exhalation, his sherbet-scented breath fills my nose, and I wish I could save the moment's sweetness as a balm to soothe future heartache. His tiny body curls into mine, unconsciously searching for comfort, for warmth. For unconditional love, of which I would wring every last drop from my veins to give to him.

Of course, love comes easily. It's the entirety of the role that looms heavy, its pervasiveness dissolving large chunks of my confidence. Spiraling, because it's my familiar route. Because I'd failed to find my footing in high school, always shortsightedly trading schoolwork for parties. Because I never got a degree, and never landed a successful career. Because I indulged a little too much at times. Because I haven't been a great or even a decent friend, too unwilling, maybe too scared, to give of myself and submit to true intimacy. Because I lack a positive outlook. Because I'm riddled with self doubt.

For now, though, I am present. Critical thoughts abate. I breathe deeply of his familiar scent, kiss his soft golden head. Exhale anxiety. Feel his radiant warmth and lulling heartbeat. Record his every melodic sigh and whimper in my memory. Rarely anymore do I get to cradle him as he sleeps, and he is so deeply asleep. It's all so devastatingly transitory, over before we know it.

This enormous gift of life, this tiny tether to humanity has left me raw and exposed. I need to not fail at this. I need to give him good food, limit the TV and read to him every day. I need to teach him how to be a good citizen, show him the importance of compassion. I need to set limits, I need to make sure he gets more physical activity and less sugar. More play dates, and less yelling. More fun. Less angst.

Breathe. I'm here.

I will always be right here.

NEO-LYNCHING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A Comparative Analysis on Jim Crow Lynching Practices and Modern-Day Extrajudicial Killings of Alleged Offenders



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to examine the correlations between mob-like lynching practices during the Jim Crow era and the killings of alleged offenders by law enforcement personnel in more recent years. In reference to Jim Crow lynching, I am using a comprehensive study from the Negro Year Book. This data categorizes documented lynchings in the United States from 1882-1946 by geography, race, cause of death and alleged offense. In respect to recent extrajudicial killings of alleged criminals in the U.S., I will be using recent data from several media, academic and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) sources. This data is compiled based on geography, ethnicity and cause of death.

METHODOLOGY

This research has been conducted with a meta-analysis approach. I have aggregated data from several sources (primary and non-primary) in order to synthesize my findings. My sources have collected their data based on reports from law enforcement and media attention. I have elected to exclude sources whose data has primarily been obtained from voluntary law enforcement submittal due to collective inaccuracies. I have used statistical and time-series analysis to group my findings based on race, geography and time period. Particularly with respect to recent extrajudicial arrest-related deaths, my findings focus on post- and pre-apprehension deaths in which the alleged suspects were not armed or posed no threat that warranted the use of deadly force. In these instances, the cause of

death is presumed as homicide irrespective of the official cause of death as deemed by the medical examiner or other factors such as grand jury indictments and subsequent criminal prosecution.

INTRODUCTION

Lynching

The term “lynching” has become synonymous with terms like “Jim Crow,” “Ku Klux Klan” and “The South.” Although these institutional monikers capture the popular opinion of lynching practices, lynching was not at all exclusive to southern states, the KKK or to white-on-black violence. People were lynched in every state across the United States. Lynching was also an equal-opportunity horror that harvested victims from both white and non-white backgrounds. According to Guzman and Hughes, authors of anti-lynching legislature recognize lynching as:

“...three or more persons which shall exercise or attempt to exercise by physical violence and without any authority of law any power or correction or punishing over any citizen or citizens...in the custody of any peace officer or suspected of, charged with, or convicted of any offense” (2).

Racial and political implications aside, the simplest definition of lynching is the premeditated murder of alleged offenders or civil wrongdoers absent adequate due process of law.

It is important to take into context the nature of Jim Crow laws that were in effect between 1937 and 1946, on which this portion of the study focuses. During these times, actions such as speaking to a white woman implied rape, attempting to shake a white man’s hand implied assault or attempted murder, and qualifying to vote implied a political coup — all of which were at the time illegal and constituted stiff prison sentences or execution. Individual lynching details vary on a case-by-case basis. People were lynched for a variety of offenses, some seemingly serious and others overwhelmingly trivial and skewed against those on the opposite end of the Jim Crow laws. In some instances, the alleged offenses included murder, rape, assault and robbery. On the other end of the spectrum, the alleged offenses were “attempting to qualify to vote...failure to call a white man, ‘Mr.’...replacing white men on job...[and]...no charge” (Guzman and Hughes 3).

Typically, lynching victims were tortured and executed by “lynch mobs” that consisted of civilians, law enforcement and in some cases judicial officials. In most cases, individuals were removed from their places of confinement and then executed. For example, in Alabama, “Wes Johnson [was]...taken from jail, hanged and shot;” in Mississippi, “Roosevelt Townes and ‘Bootjack’ McDaniels...taken from officers of the law. Shot and burned to death;” and in Florida, “Miles W. Brown, white [male]...taken from jail, shot to death (...dissatisfaction because he failed to receive the death penalty in a murder trial)” (Guzman and Hughes 3-4).

In other cases, the alleged were executed without any due process of law. For instance:

“Joe Rodgers...‘He refused to accept a weekly deduction of \$5.50 from his wages’... shot, tortured by hot irons, brutally cut and...thrown into the Pearl River...Robert Hall...resisting arrest...severely beaten...by Sheriff M. Claude Screws...and a county policeman. Died early on January 30” (Guzman and Hughes 4).

Extrajudicial Killings of Alleged Offenders

Recently, extrajudicial killings of alleged offenders have sparked civil outrage nationwide. These events are the advent of the “Black Lives Matter” movement and other civil demonstrations urging decision makers to reform criminal justice policies and practices.

Like lynching, these killings have run rampant in many communities across the United States. These crimes are likewise indiscriminate, spanning various age groups, genders and ethnicities. One component that has remained constant is the absence of due process of law. Although details vary, in each case individuals have taken the administration of the death penalty into their own hands. In a moment's notice, officers have become the judge, jury and executioner, completely violating the Constitution and various other legal statutes designed to protect the rights of the accused.

One event that drew national attention to the practice of extrajudicial killings of individuals is the Trayvon Martin case. In this instance, George Zimmerman, a Florida neighborhood watch captain, killed Martin, a 17-year-old African American male. Zimmerman was later acquitted of murder due to the "Stand Your Ground" Florida self-defense statute. Although Zimmerman is not a member of law enforcement, this case set the trend for the subsequent scrutiny of unarmed black males being killed without due process of law.

Since the Martin shooting, numerous other events involving law enforcement and the arrest-related deaths of unarmed individuals seem to have become commonplace. Similar to Jim Crow lynchings, the alleged were suspected of committing a varying degree of offenses. These offenses range from assault and drug distribution to resisting arrest over the illegal selling of cigarettes. It is important to recognize that unlike Jim Crow sentences, these offenses, mostly trivial, do not constitute the death penalty or a lengthy prison sentences. In all of these matters the accused were presumed guilty until proven innocent, losing their lives as a result.

Some of the most egregious examples have video and photographic footage to nullify the use of deadly force. For example, NYPD officers choked Eric Garner, an unarmed man suspected of selling single cigarettes and resisting arrest, to death on video in New York. Likewise, officers in Chicago killed Laquan McDonald, an unarmed man suspected of lunging at the police while evading arrest. In addition, Freddy Gray, an unarmed male, died while in custody of the Baltimore Police Department. The advent of camera phones, video footage and social and news media have led to a sophisticated evolution of the public spectacle we once called lynching.

FINDINGS

Lynching

Figures obtained from the Negro Year Book detailing lynchings by state and race between 1882 and 1946 show individuals were lynched nationwide, both black and white. Although whites were lynched along with blacks, blacks were lynched at a higher rate than their counterparts were. Blacks accounted for about 73 percent of all lynchings. Therefore, for about every one white person lynched, three blacks were lynched. In respect to time, over the 64-year span between 1882 and 1946, a black person was lynched about every seven days, whereas a white person was lynched about every 18 days. In respect to geography, several southern states lynched people at much higher rates than the rest of the country. Texas, Tennessee, Arkansas, Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Georgia and Mississippi accounted for 78 percent of all blacks lynched across the country.

Extrajudicial Killings of Alleged Offenders

Data obtained from "The Counted," a real-time comprehensive list of arrest-related deaths in 2015, shows that, contrary to public opinion, unarmed whites are more likely to die in police custody than blacks are — 45 percent compared with 33 percent. In respect to time, this year, an unarmed black person is killed by police about every five days, whereas whites die from police violence about every three and a half days. However, the causes of death for each racial group vary disproportionately in frequency. This data also shows unarmed black suspects are much more likely — 24 percent — to die from gunshots or suspicious deaths while in custody than whites are.

CONCLUSION

According to my findings, there is an alarming statistical relationship between Jim Crow lynchings and the extrajudicial killings of unarmed suspects. Not only has the trend of Jim Crow-style killings continued, it has worsened. The frequency of these occurrences has increased over time. During Jim Crow, an African American was lynched about every seven days. In 2015, an unarmed black person is killed by police about every five days. The likelihood of an unarmed black person being killed by police is greater than the odds of being lynched during Jim Crow.

In my opinion, lynchings have never stopped. I believe that the practice has become more sophisticated and has adapted to modern society. In 1940, a black man was highly likely to be killed by the police for arguing with a white man or refusing to call a white man "Mister." These days, an unarmed black man's chances are even more likely to be killed by the police for selling cigarettes or slashing tires, as was the case with Eric Garner and Laquan McDonald respectively.

Overall, the extrajudicial killings of alleged suspects have become the "Neo-Lynching" in modern-day American society.

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LITTLE GIRL

Real Memories of My Childhood



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The wind is howling through the pines as she stands at the edge of the gravel road throwing rocks, trying to reach the ditch on the far side. Wisps of her matted curly hair whirl around her head like a dervish. The rocks and red clay are hot beneath her bare feet, but she ignores the hard pinch and heat under her toes and the rumble of her stomach, instead focusing on her task of hitting the ditch with the hard stones. The direction of the wind changes, and the air feels cool. She lifts her dirty face to the sky. The clouds are swirling, gray and heavy with rain. A fat drop lands on her upturned face and traces a line in the dirt and rolls slowly down her cheek like a newly shed tear.

She looks around to see if anyone else notices the rain coming in. She is utterly alone except for her little spotted dog busily scratching fleas. She stretches her arms out to the wind and the rain, trying to hug it tight to her bare bird-like chest. She has a sense of glory and freedom, almost grandeur that she has rarely felt in her short 5 years. She holds it for a moment as more fat drops begin to pelt her scruffy little body. The cool splash of the rain feels good against her skin after the sweltering Mississippi day. Her dog whines, and she turns to see her younger brother standing at the door of the house. He is thin and small, wearing only a pair of dirty under-rooms. He calls to her "SISSY!!!!" She turns away, knowing that she will be in trouble for being by the road. He calls again as the rain begins to come down in earnest. Begrudgingly she turns, calling to her dog, and heads for the ramshackle shotgun house.

The screen door screeches in indignation as she enters the house. It is hot and dark inside, filled with the residue and odor of years of chain-smoking adults. As her eyes adjust she sees her mother flicking ashes into an overflowing ashtray. She has a faraway look on her face that lets the little girl know that mommy has taken her medicine and is having a drink to wash it down. The little girl feels a shred of relief because mom won't notice her enough to hit her

for being by the road. Little brother is back on the floor playing with some old grungy army men. The spotted dog plops down beside him. She hears a commotion from in the kitchen and quietly, like a shadow, approaches the doorway and squats so as not to be noticed.

Her grandmother, possibly the meanest woman ever to live, is slamming her fist on the long bench farm table to iterate her point as a cigarette dangles from her mouth. Her great uncles are sitting around arguing with her grandmother while puffing their own smoke or spitting into cups. Poor great-grandma has her back to everyone and is busy cooking at the old stove. Great-grandma is always cooking. She exudes a sense of sad pragmatism that comes from being married young to a mean man, birthing him 15 children — 11 of whom lived to adulthood, surviving the Great Depression and outliving the bastard that beat her every day of 30-plus years of marriage, only to realize a good half of those 11 children are just like him.

Great-grandma's shoulders are always heavy. She takes a deep breath and sighs. She turns from the stove and wipes her hands on her apron. She calls to her daughter to calm down. Grandmother is more infuriated than ever and begins to scream. Everyone is yelling. The little girl hears her and her brother's names in the yelling. Grandmother is angry and is saying really nasty things about the little girl's mother. Things that the little girl always hears from the family about her momma and sometimes about herself too. All the uncles finally get grandmother to stop yelling and one says, "She is yer'n daughter and they are yer'n grands. You gotta take em. We ain't this time."

At that moment, little girl realizes she is going to be heading into town with grandmother. She freezes in terror. At least at Great-grandma's house she almost never gets hit. But when she is not... things get bad. She shrinks back from the doorway, quiet as a mouse because it is not polite to listen to adults, and big Uncle would whoop her if she is caught. She turns back and eyes her mother who has fallen asleep, cigarette dangling from her hand and drink overturned on the floor. Little brother and the spotted dog are still on the floor. Little brother is now using the dog as a mountain the army men are fighting to conquer. Little girl is silently crying and wishing she could run away but she can't leave little brother.

She heads deeper into the house. She passes through several bedrooms that lead from one to the other. Each has a big bed covered in handmade quilts and ancient feather pillows. She has to get out of the house but the front screen is too loud and she would get caught. But the back door screen is broken and she can crawl out of the bottom without opening the door.

The rain is coming down in big, bulbous, warm drops. As she scrambles out of the bottom of the door the drops start splashing across her head and shoulders. She looks around for a dry place to hide for a bit. The barn is down the hill a ways and she can get up in the rafters where no one can see her. She trudges through the furrows and ruts in the yard towards the leaning structure that possibly was red a million years ago. Her toes squelch in the red clay mud and dye her feet and legs a bright orange. The side door to the barn is ajar and she slips inside.

The cool dry darkness envelops the little girl. She inches sideways to put the door to her back while she gets her vision back. The rain is making a clatter on the old tin roof of the barn. A few cows and the old plow mules huff at her as she moves farther along the wall. Thankfully the goats are still in the field or they would mob her. She and the goats have an understanding. They follow her when she has to find them, and she gives them treats.

The ramshackle ladder is just some boards nailed to a pole along one side of the barn, but the little girl is part goat herself and shimmies up deftly. The hayloft is musty and full of dust, but it is dry and a great place to hide. She comes up here a lot. She feels like this is her little hidey-hole. She goes to the back corner and finds the old cigar box with her little treasures in it. She pulls out the music box that is missing teeth and plinks funny. It came out of a doll or some other toy that belonged to a cousin. She ferreted it from the trash burn pile before it went up in smoke. She winds it and listens to the tinny sounds of a song she can't name and sighs.

She feels safe for the moment. Hidden among the animals, hay and dust. No one but the barn cat really knows she is here. Black comes slinking into sight and rubs his head against

the little girl's knee. She likes this old cat. He is skinny and ragged just like she is. Sometimes she will bring him a scrap from the table if she can squirrel it into a pocket without getting caught. Just like the spotted dog, Black's archenemy, the cat seems to understand the little girl. She is alone in the world and the cat is too.

Little girl absently pets the old cat as the rain plays across the barn roof and the music box plink plinks its little tune. Despite the clatter, the music, the cat's purr and the barn animals lowing, little girl feels like this is the quietest place on earth. For a time it is. For this moment she feels still and calm and safe. She is still just a little girl and doesn't know what the world holds for her, but for this moment she has this. Years in the future she will look back on this time and sigh and feel the sharp pain of nostalgia. But for now she just feels safe and wants all the moments to be like this. She leans her head against the nearest bale of hay and drifts off to sleep surrounded by the quiet of noise.

THE PIANO ON 54TH STREET



CAROLINE FRANCE
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Damned repo men chipped the paint off the doorframe on their way out. They left a silhouette of dust bunnies on the oak floor and a thick black smudge on the wall where our pullout sofa used to be. No more TV, no boom box, they even rolled up our dingy rug with the chunk cut out so it fit around the radiator. Only one more hour until Jane would storm in, throw off her temp job blouse, and squeeze into her cocktail waitress uniform. *Sis is gonna be pissed*, Stella thought. *The only thing Jane enjoys since mom died is watching "Seinfeld" on the idiot box.*

Her left pinky finger, black nail polish chipped from unpeeling it with her bottom teeth, began improvising by pressing the A in A minor below middle C. Out of tune, the garage sale upright box of strings begged to be scrapped for kindling. Not even the repo man wanted it. Its uncushioned, loose-legged bench was one jolt away from splintering in two, but it managed to support Stella's slight frame. Teetering there was the only place Stella felt safe. It was her escape from all of this. She paused for a moment and crunched a corner off her brick of dry Ramen noodles, dipped her finger into the seasoning packet, licked it, and shuddered from its salty intensity. Stella still heard echoes of her classmates.

"What are you doing following us? Find your own friends, freak," dismissed Darcy, who had been Stella's childhood friend but had since found popularity in the in-group. "I... I wasn't. I'm sorry," Stella grumbled.

More than anything, Stella wished for friends her age, but there were no takers. Instead, they made fun of her ill-fitting hand-me-downs, her dark quips and her squint as she intricately etched graffiti into a high school cafeteria table. The closest thing she had to a friend was that clunky box of wood. It greeted her silently at the end of the day, waited patiently for her tender caresses or pounding frustrations and never complained.

It was Stella's true voice. Heartache, humor and anguish permeated the room and dampened the beeps of backing-up buses below. Stella slowly propped the coffin-like cover open and

walked her fingers along the unfinished wooden slats connected to suspension bridge-like threads. Using the back of her middle fingernail as a guitar pick, she strummed left to right. She was surprised by the softness of the felt hammers. A band of fading sunlight captured the apparatus like a DaVinci sketch. Stella sank to the floor, laid her head against the cool metal pedals, and waited and waited for Jane.

Her uniform's here... where the hell is she? Stella got up, squirted 409 on a brush, and scrubbed back and forth over the sofa mark with both hands, putting her weight into it. It slipped loose, gouging the drywall. Dammit! She moved on, cursing under her breath, and proceeded to exterminate the dust bunnies. The apartment had never felt so barren. Should I go look for her? Stella put her hand over her mouth, closed her eyes, and took a deep breath. Placing her palm on the over-painted window frame, she searched down the path where Jane should have come home. The void grew. Stella didn't dare to think of what would happen if she lost Jane. She would have to quit school and get a job or two, but worse, she would be completely alone in the world. Jane had warned her never to go out alone in the city after dark.

"There are predators everywhere," Jane had warned.

Defying Jane's wishes, Stella grabbed her tattered sweatshirt and headed out the door; she hurried down the stairs of the three-story walkup. She weaved around pedestrians past the Chinese dry cleaners, the yoga studio, the corner deli, the bicycle shop, the Mexican restaurant, the hardware store and the hospital. Eyes looked her up and down as she passed fluorescent-lit sex shops. As she waited at the flashing DON'T WALK sign, she avoided eye contact with the middle-aged man whose hot bourbon breath moistened the back of her neck. The crowd, closing in, was a blur of colors and sounds. Stella's heart quickened. She sped across the intersection and arrived at Jane's restaurant, Tony's on 43rd Street, and peered through the window. *Please let her be here.* No Jane.

Maybe I just missed her? Stella headed back home. Passing a heap of a homeless woman on the curb, she dropped her last 12 cents in her hat. Almost home, Stella walked down the quieted 54th Street. Then she heard it. Her name... moaned from a dark pit below a fire escape leading to a basement. Without looking, she knew what she would find. A slowly passing taxi's headlights revealed a sunset of swollen hills where Jane's green eyes used to be. Dark red stained Jane's favorite crepe blouse; the pale blue one with the conservative bow that should have gift wrapped her delicate neck, hung limp and undone. Her gray pencil skirt ripped up the back revealed trickles of blood dripping down her pale inner thighs.

"I can't... I can't lose this job," Jane's hoarse voice drifted off.

Stella trembled. Jane wasn't moving. *Get up!* Stella's words caught in her throat. Was she breathing? Without thinking, Stella took off, leaving Jane behind. In a daze, she dodged angry drivers through red traffic lights. "Get out of the way!" she screamed. Pounding the sidewalk so hard and so fast, she bumped into shoulders of passers-by who dismissed her as just another crazy New Yorker. Running until her throat was raw, her rib cage twisted, she ran until she collapsed at the feet of an Irish policeman in Times Square.

Sunk down in her seat behind the glass divider, Stella's blurry eyes watched as they locked Jane away behind the ambulance doors. She wondered if the state would split them up. *If I say something, will they take me away? What do I do?* As the lights swirled, creating a kaleidoscope of autumn colors on the brick apartment facades, Stella heard the siren's wail, and it reminded her of the piano.

A black and white photograph of a faucet, likely made of metal, with a single drop of water falling from its spout. The drop is elongated and has a small bubble at the bottom, creating a teardrop shape. The background is a plain, light color.

I'LL DIE A CHILD

BAILEY MCMANUS

Columbia Gorge Community College
Oregon

*I can feel the dust
Hit my skin like an avalanche
I cringe and hold my position
In the line waiting for life
My brother stands next to me
Reaching toward the faucet
His skin moves over his bare ribs
Hurry, water. Come quicker.*

We need water.

*Thirst drives the village to madness
Emptiness creeps through our bodies
Wriggling like a corpse from hell inside of me
Tongues bleed a river
Rocks lay naked in the heat
Where cascading waterfalls used to hold
The dreams of our ancestors
Please, God, bring us water.*

We need water.

*We knead moments of happiness into
Our sorrowful lives like flour
Into the dough we wished we had
Our mother is gone
Don't look down to us. We'll be seeing you soon.
I pray for her to be mute to our cries.*



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