

Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society Anthology

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15th Edition

From the Founding Editor

It is with a great sense of pride that we present the 15th edition of *Nota Bene*, the literary anthology of Phi Theta Kappa. We delight in the words of these outstanding Phi Theta Kappa members and are honored to showcase their efforts.

In 1994 we embarked on a bold new venture to publish literary works by Phi Theta Kappa members, promoting the ideal of excellence in writing. Our initial efforts were rewarded with a gratifying response, both from our members who flooded our mailboxes with submissions and by the audience who enthusiastically read the printed book. After 15 years we continue to see increased results as the number of manuscripts received escalates.

One of Phi Theta Kappa's oldest traditions is to encourage, promote and reward excellence in writing. We believe the writings contained herein not only showcase the talents of Phi Theta Kappa members, but also affirm the commitment to academic excellence displayed by the community college arena. In more than 1,700 libraries nationwide and abroad, *Nota Bene* carries its banner of literary excellence to an ever-increasing audience. We are also pleased to offer the Citation and Reynolds scholarships to five outstanding *Nota Bene* authors.

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

We thank you for your continued support over the past 15 years. Without our members, chapter advisors, college presidents, librarians and friends, *Nota Bene* would not be possible. As we move forward, we encourage your continued patronage.

Sincerely,



Rod A. Risley
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Founding Editor, *Nota Bene*

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Executive Director
Phi Theta Kappa
Founding Editor

Nell Ewing
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Phi Theta Kappa

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Phi Theta Kappa

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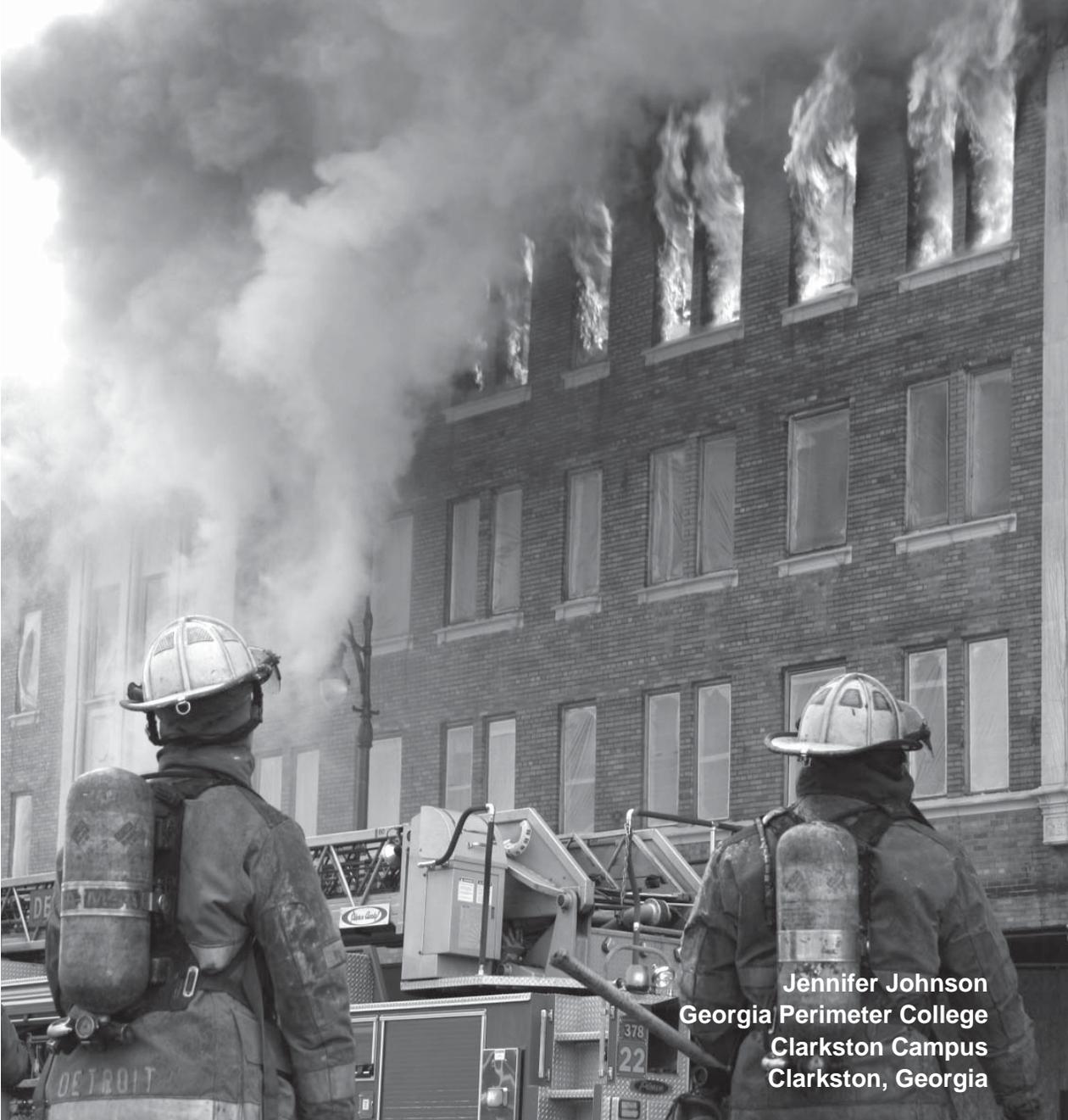
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Jennifer Johnson
Georgia Perimeter College
Clarkston Campus
Clarkston, Georgia

Citation Scholarship

The Act of Salvaging

June was not used to seeing the sky when she looked up at the ceiling of her apartment. Yet there it was, framed by the jagged edges of plaster, plywood and shingles, water from the firemen's hoses running in rivets down into her living room and pooling on her once-white leather couch. Most evenings, she had sat next to Conner on that couch, reading while he played video games or watching a movie together. There would be no more feeling the soft leather under the back of her shoulders or tucking her toes underneath Conner's thigh as they relaxed. June walked in to the apartment carefully, as if she hadn't been told the beams would hold, the hem of the jeans she'd grabbed from the laundry pile that morning slowly absorbing the water from the floor.

Their apartment looked like a disaster scene in some distant and faraway place she had seen on CNN when calling patients from the waiting room. The dining room wall — the one that separated them from the Osipovs' place — was

scorched and black in places where the fire had burned straight through the sheetrock. Through the holes was only darkness, and as she stepped further into the apartment, the tan carpet squeaking as she displaced the water it held, she could see into their blackened unit.

The windows in the living room were broken, the blinds in front of them mangled from the force of the hose's spray. Her mother's lamp, the vase that had held the dried red roses Conner had given her on Valentine's Day, his action figures and the clay he'd sculpted were broken and strewn about the room. Everything she ignored day to day, everything she had nagged Conner about cleaning — everything was destroyed.

"Holy crap."

June turned from the hallway leading to their bedroom to see the shock on Conner's face as he considered the devastation. She knew she should walk over to him, hold his hand and face it together, but couldn't bring herself to move toward him. He hadn't wanted her touch or comfort this morning as they'd stood silently, shoulder to shoulder, and watched the flames engulf the apartment building. Despite his emotional distance, she wasn't angry at him. She just felt guilty that the last night they'd spent in their apartment had been full of hateful words and temper tantrums. June swung her gaze back around the hallway. As her shoes ground the soot and debris into the carpet, she focused on salvaging what little she could.

After the first 10 minutes of dragging paintings, furniture and any possibly functional electronics into the parking spaces in front of their apartment, the firemen left them alone. "It's relatively sound. They'll be fine for a while." June had heard one say to the cop who lingered near the door that afternoon. June thought that he'd been stationed there to keep the homeless and kids from scavenging the charred shell of an apartment.

By what they pulled from 574, it was clear that more of June had been saved than Conner. His books and comics and artwork (even if they escaped the fire and the water) smelled heavily of smoke. The tiny chips and screws of his electronics had melted into solid masses and were pulled from the apartment in clumps. June had tried to pull the ruined books and papers that had meant so much to him from the apartment even after he'd accepted they were destroyed. She apologized repeatedly, making promises to replace what she could, but he rejected the comforts, and instead opted to joke about how little of his things remained as opposed to her very organized belongings. "Everything in its place — that's my girl," he'd said. June didn't think Conner calling her anal was funny, and so it triggered the first real fight of the day. It ended with Conner saying June was just tired and emotional — once again, excusing her tantrums.

June was extracting half-burnt boxes of paper and books from their office when she heard Conner on the phone in the living room.

"They don't know what started the fire," he said, explaining to his father that they were rummaging through the remains now. June thought it was strange to hear their story third-person. But at least they'd had things to salvage. The Osipovs had poked their heads in the door a few minutes before and, with their heavy Russian accents, wished them luck. June wondered if they thought about the couch that they'd bought a few months before, and how Conner had helped him get it through the door and into their own living room. Conner was good about things like that; helping people move in, move out.

“That’d be great, Dad. I really appreciate it. I know Junie will, too.”

Conner called from the living room to say his Dad was coming by to help move things from the apartment.

“And why the hell did you agree to that?” June asked.

“We’ve got a lot of crap to move out of here. It’s only getting more wet and nasty. We need the help.”

“Couldn’t you have called anyone else?”

Conner came into the office. “What’s with you? My dad offered.”

“I can’t take the drama right now, Conner, I really can’t.”

Normally she and Peter got along just fine, even after he’d told her that he didn’t think that she was religious enough to bring his son back to the Church. That was his ultimate goal, she knew, and she worried that he’d use the opportunity of their forced renewal, *rebirth*, to sway Conner’s non-existent faith. June didn’t feel she had any strength to shield Conner from another one of those conversations, and she definitely didn’t want his Dad seeing them fighting like this. It was why they’d avoided dinners and movies for the last few months.

“He’s going to help us,” Conner said, his slight frame filling the sagging doorway now more than before. “And we need all the help we can get to move your shit outta here.”

About an hour later, Conner and his father lifted great chunks of sheetrock from atop their melted mattress and fire-licked armoire to throw clothes out to Conner’s friend Tom. June waded through the water to pull dishes, pots and silverware sets from the wasteland of their kitchen.

The walls had always been paper-thin and now they were soggy, so June had no problem hearing her boyfriend’s father carry on as he worked to dig Conner’s sock drawer out of the mess.

“It’s kind of poetic, don’t you think?”

“What is?” Conner grunted.

“That this happened to you here, at this point in your life with Junie.”

“You mean when they’re shakin’?” Tom questioned, his words punctuated by Peter’s bark of laughter at the term.

“Well, you know, God has a way of showing you the error of your ways, and you gotta admit — fire is a pretty clear way of getting that across.”

“You’re saying that all my shit got burnt `cos I’m not married. Right. Okay. So the Indian couple two doors down — the *married* Indian couple — God was punishing them?”

June threw the already rusting pot against the counter, feeling overwhelmed by the tone of Conner’s voice. He hated it when his father pushed the “Jesus-issue”, and when he took that patronizing tone with his son, she wanted to strangle the man.

In the bedroom, Peter answered, “I’m not saying that God is punishing them, but God did say, ‘Thou shalt have no other God before me’, and Indians are polytheistic and don’t believe in the one true God —”

“I can’t believe you’re doing this now!”

At Conner’s yell, June stomped into the bedroom, her temper barely in check, and yelled — not at Peter, but at Conner.

“June, I don’t need this now.”

Whenever Conner was stressed, she tended to get upset if there wasn't something she could do to fix it right away. At times, he'd accused her of protecting him like a mother would. June didn't feel like that, standing behind the split spines and loose, sippy pages of the books that had been on her nightstand. Like an obstinate child with her hands on her hips, June faced an angry Conner, wanting to go toe-to-toe with him but not wanting to further grind the pages into the carpet.

"No, I don't need this now! Not when I'm barely holding all of this together."

"You? You're holding all this together? How's that, June? Are you folding the dishtowels before putting them in the garbage bags?"

Tom interrupted a retort, and loudly suggested they begin pulling what had been dragged out of the apartment and into the street up the ramp of the U-Haul he had rented for them.

It had taken all afternoon to pack the U-Haul of furniture, loose objects, and the garbage bags filled with wet, burned and smoky clothing. Tom and Conner's dad had left mid-afternoon, but not without Peter insisting the two spend the night with them. June and Conner spent the time alone getting along and then arguing, getting along and then arguing again. It was their normal pattern, June knew, but now, more than ever, she hated it. The car ride to Peter's was spent in uncomfortable, exhausted silence.

All throughout dinner, Conner and his family entertained the next steps in the process; finding a new apartment, tossing the really destroyed things away, cleaning clothes, electronics, furniture and dishware.

"What about all your clothes?" Peter's wife had asked. "Will you need to buy all new ones?"

Conner explained that June's mother had found something online to clean the clothes.

"That'll be a load off your hands," Peter said brightly. June was glad no one noticed the way her too-thin shoulders straightened when she'd heard her own name. June barely listened to the conversation after that, except for when Conner told his stepmother that they'd be looking into getting an apartment about the same size as the one that had burned because June would just buy more crap he hated and he didn't want it in his space. June had bitten her tongue.

After the bland and unsalted meal that couldn't overcome the taste of smoke, Conner's stepmother situated the K-Mart-bought toiletries and change of clothes in different rooms, sending a not-so-subtle signal that, in a good Christian household, only married people slept in the same room.

June was happy for the separation. Normally, she and Conner argued without resulting to biting comments, but she'd taken her share today (as well as doled them, she supposed). Today had been tough; but it had been even tougher while fighting with Conner. As he spoke quietly to his mother and sister in Ohio, June grabbed her toiletries and shuffled to the shower. When she took off her sandals, she saw the thin white lines the straps had made against her dirty gray feet. June washed her hair three or four times — she couldn't remember — until she decided the smell of smoke was only in her mind.

As June slathered on the conditioner, she wondered if she'd really be able to get the smoke out of all of her things. Sure, they might manage the clothes and curtains, but what about the plastic bowls that were in the kitchen? And things like her stereo or her printer? She'd probably have to replace those things, as well as all of the electronics that Conner had lost. He'd need a new computer, and,

knowing Conner, he'd probably want to upgrade it from his last version. *I don't have the money for that*, she thought, pulling her fingers through the tangles in her hair, becoming more and more frustrated by the process and the prospect. June knew her nice, relaxing shower was over when the tension began to creep back into her weary shoulders.

After showering, June returned to the sterile environment that was her room, and sat on the edge of the bed, not feeling a thing like herself. Her wet hair felt heavy and plastered against the back of her too-big shirt, its muted orange color making her boney legs seem more pale, and the new underwear's tag scratching at her lower back, making her more unhappy by the minute. She'd lost clothes in the fire, she knew, probably more clothes than Conner, but she wouldn't worry about replacing them. She spent most of her time out of the house in scrubs anyway. She didn't really need more than one nice dress and a couple of slacks and nice shirts. It's not like she went out all that often.

June looked around the room, thinking it was too big, too sparse, not at all like her room at home. She wanted to go there. Home — not "home" with Conner; it had never really been "home," even though she hardly went anywhere else anymore. No, her thoughts of home had always been her mother's house. Although she'd spent most of her time going rather than coming, at the end of the day, June had been comforted by the three-bedroom ranch. Right then, she longed for the bed she'd slept in as a teenager — whose coils were now fused together in their apartment, along with the rest of her possessions. June thought she should be more upset about them; they'd taken her a lifetime to collect, and here she was — without it all — trying to think of a single thing she regretted losing. The pages ripped from magazines with articles she wanted to read weren't really a loss, and the Christmas decorations she'd stored at the top of her closet could be replaced, as could the jewelry Conner had gotten her for anniversaries and birthdays over the last four years. No, the only thing she thought she might regret losing was the smell of Conner's deodorant on the sheets. It was the one thing she'd never complained about, and the one thing she would miss.

A few minutes after she'd heard Conner emerge from the shower, she crept down the hallway and eased the door of his room open. He laid there on his back, naked save for a pair of ugly gray boxers the color that her high school yearbooks had been when Conner pulled them from under a heap of plaster.

"Hey," June whispered as she entered.

"Hey." He moved over on the thin mattress, making room for her but not making much of an effort of it. "What a day, huh?"

June mumbled her response, not really wanting to talk but not really wanting to be by herself.

"Did you call the hospital?"

"Yeah. I'm switching vacation time with Rebecca. Don't have to be at work 'til next Tuesday."

"Good. That'll give us time. Tomorrow, we gotta go find a new place. It might be a few days before they let us move in because it's not the end of the month," Conner said.

"Or middle." At June's words, Conner moved his arm off his face and arched a brow. "We moved in on the 15th, remember?"

A grunt was his response, and June felt her anger flare again.

"I was thinking about those apartments I liked on St. Charles."

“Those tiny things? Those are ‘way too expensive for what they are, Conner.”

“They’re in a good neighborhood and it’s close to — ”

“Falling apart?” She barked.

Conner gnashed his teeth but said nothing. They sat in silence as June’s conscience pushed and pulled at her.

“Maybe you’re right. Maybe you should look at those apartments.”

Conner simply raised an eyebrow in her direction.

“I’m...” She began, but couldn’t figure out how to express her feelings. Conner waited to prompt her to speak for long enough that she thought he was ignoring her again. “I’m not sad, Conner.” When he sat up, he sat up slowly. “I can’t make myself care. All my stuff... all your stuff...it’s gone, we’ll never get it back and I ... just don’t care.”

She turned to face him, and he looked at her with surprise that registered only for a second before he diverted his eyes.

“I really think...” She shook her head again. “I really think that there’s nothing left.” Conner turned away, his fingers plowing through his now white-blond hair, free of the gray hue it had taken on that day. He stayed like that; hand on his head, eyes jumping from left to right as if he were reading. June watched Conner’s jaw clenching and unclenching, which she knew was something he did when he was sculpting with clay and was considering which way to bend bodies and mold dreams.

When he finally spoke, it was more of a grumble. “Yeah...yeah..” When he looked up at her, June’s heart clenched. Should she take it all back? Could she?

“You’re right. There’s nothing left.”

June counted her heartbeats as they slowed, looking directly at him, waiting for him to say something else. She made it up to 89.

“I think tomorrow I’ll look at the place over by St. Charles. The smaller one.” Conner finally said, his voice low. “It’s not like I need a lot of space for my things.”

June entwined her fingers through his, and slowly drifted down to lean against Conner’s frame. Together, they huddled under the crucifix on his father’s naked wall, and for the first time that day, June felt like she could cry.



Mariangela Jordan
Greenville Technical College
Greenville, South Carolina

Reynolds Scholarship

English 101

I think he smiled back once or twice,
But I don't remember him saying anything of value
On any of the English topics discussed.
As a matter of fact, I don't remember him saying anything at all.

I remember his eyes green
His arms long
His clothes neat
His hair wild
His name I could not recall.

At the beginning of class,
The teacher announced that Josh won't be
Be with us anymore
Reason of death — unknown.

“Next, we will discuss the mechanics of an argumentative essay
Study case — Manet's painting: “Boating”
The transition between Death and English hurt,
Yet we all seemed to speak indifference quite well.

Josh blew his brains out — he liked to play Russian roulette.
Josh didn't talk much; he laughed at life, he pushed his luck,
He died.

Manet didn't use any Red in "Boating,"
I argued. Yes, you can almost taste the aloofness
Of his boaters, but it seems artificial, merely guessed
Instead of truly understood, without Red.
You see, Teacher, when I was young,
My mom told me that Red completes everything
Class dismissed.

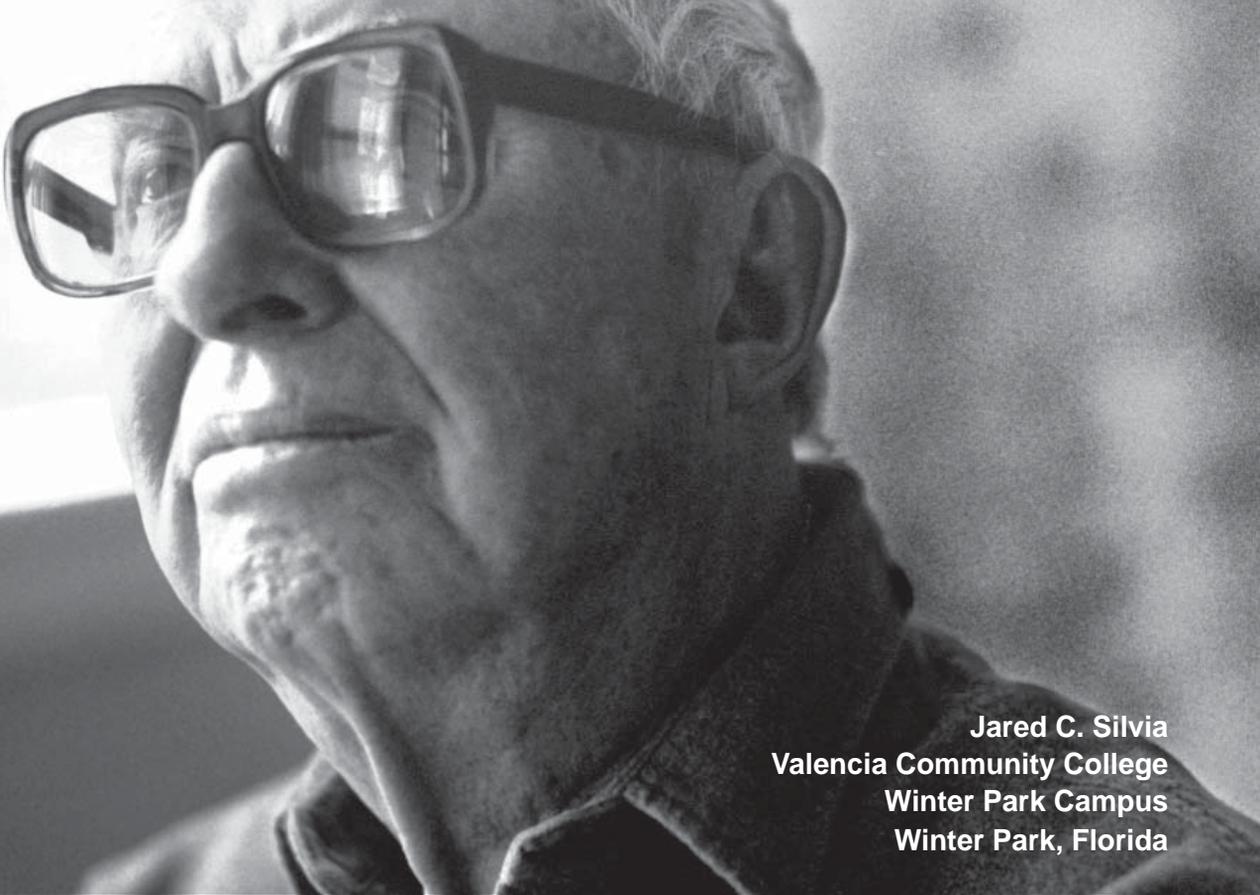


Jandra Oliver
Nashua Community College
Nashua, New Hampshire

Reynolds Scholarship

Future Memory

I want to find the words
Into which my world fits
And so expressed
A perfect slice of time
That I can slip into my pocket
To forget until much later
When I hunger for comfort
The rich texture of a winter evening
With popcorn beside the fire
And the sound of my daughters' laughter
Floating sweetly up the stairs
A memory like this
Can melt sadness into bliss



Jared C. Silvia
Valencia Community College
Winter Park Campus
Winter Park, Florida

Reynolds Scholarship

Uncle Benny

Uncle Benny used to hide his special pipe in my backpack. One day, when it fell out of my pencil case, I told the lunchroom lady that my dad owned a hardware store. That was a lie, though, because Dad works as a part-time border security guard. The border must be really far away because I haven't seen Dad in eight years. Uncle Benny says it takes five years to get there and six to get back. I hope Dad doesn't have to work too hard at his job.

Uncle Benny has always wanted to work as Goofy at Disney World because he likes big costumes, but every time he has a job interview he gets the whiskey sweats.

Uncle Benny taught me a bunch of important lessons, like beware of people who park in "Handicapped" spots but don't have crutches or a wheel chair because those people are either psycho or have AIDS.

Uncle Benny wrote a book once, but he lost it. He says it wasn't very good, anyway. Sometimes Uncle Benny passes gas in the middle of conversations he doesn't like.

Once while Uncle Benny was driving me to a birthday party, he got pulled over. He made me hide his bourbon between my legs. It was sort of cold, and the police took so long asking Uncle Benny why he was driving on the wrong side of the road that I almost cried. But I didn't.

The trash in Uncle Benny's house is taller than most of his furniture and all of the gifts I've given him for the past eight Christmases are in one plastic garbage bag, which makes me sad, especially since at least three of them were food. Once I saw him take a paper bag full of cockroaches to the curb. That was good because they kept eating the eyes off of my teddy bear.

Uncle Benny has a chicken neck and it wobbles when he eats. He snuffles while he talks and sometimes swears at the TV. His favorite food is donuts, but sometimes we eat hamburgers too.

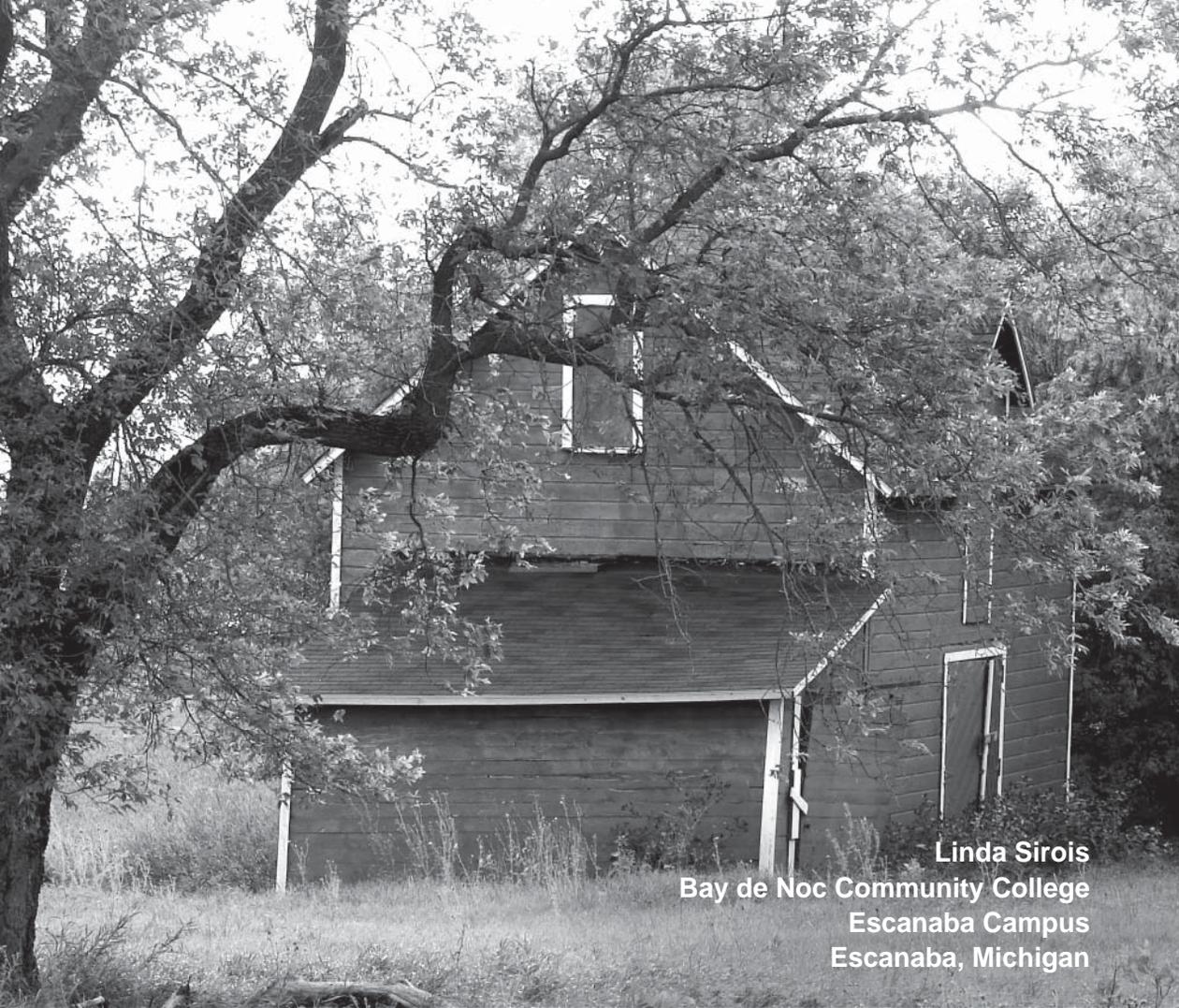
Uncle Benny keeps a close watch on his dumpsters. He and his friend Willy always pull things out of the dumpsters, like clothes and bookcases. He keeps the clothes in the bookcases because all of his books are in cardboard boxes with the instant noodles he gets from the shelter.

Uncle Benny's friend Willy has special dumpsters that he gets wilted flowers out of. Uncle Benny told me Willy sells the flowers so he can take care of his sick momma. I think maybe Willy wanted to be a geologist because I always hear him talking about rocks with Mr. Barscz at the gas station. I sneak down to the station sometimes to use the bathroom because Uncle Benny hates plungers. Anyway, I can always tell when Willy has been to visit Mr. Barscz. He leaves his old flowers in a vase at the front of the store and Mr. Barscz spends the rest of the night sweeping the aisles over and over again.

Willy must make good money with his flowers, because he goes on vacations sometimes and we don't see him for a while.

When Uncle Benny sleeps, sometimes I watch him. He frowns and shivers. He snores so loud that I have to wear earmuffs and my head gets all sweaty. Sometimes I think about stopping his snoring. I hug my dusty old pillow and think about pushing it down over Uncle Benny's sleeping face...just enough to stop the snoring. Just enough so I can sleep.

When I'm lonely, I go and sit in the rusty Buick in Uncle Benny's back yard. Its tires are all dissolved and it's sinking into the sand, but I always pretend I'm driving away from this house, away from Uncle Benny.



Linda Sirois
Bay de Noc Community College
Escanaba Campus
Escanaba, Michigan

Reynolds Scholarship

TERVA PAIKKA (Finnish: safe or secure place)

"We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love or otherwise have faith in." – Aldo Leopold

It was the land we fell in love with first. As we turned up the dirt drive, and rounded the bank of red pines, the views of the old Finnish homestead opened up before us. "Aahh," we both breathed at once. Sheltered by lines of coniferous trees on the north and west, and open to sunshine and southerly breezes, the huge open yard promised endless cartwheels and a hundred games of kickball. A mammoth sprawl of lilacs graced the eastern edge by the woodshed, and mature apple trees (badly in need of pruning) flanked the little yellow farmhouse. The vast sweep of barley fields and pastureland surrounding the homestead island were rimmed by hardwood forests promising colorful autumn vistas. Black and white cows were the only neighbors in sight.

By the time my husband and I noticed the peeling, cracked wooden clapboards, the debris lurking everywhere, and the gaping holes in the old stone foundation (and the suspiciously lumpy portion of the yard where they had apparently buried an entire collapsed barn), it was already too late. Instead of repelling us, it brought out our protective instincts. This overgrown, sunny acreage had all the raw material we had dreamt of for fashioning "home."

Considered by many to be the “grandfather” of the environmental movement, Aldo Leopold, in his 1949 essay, “The Land Ethic,” suggests that the major reason people don’t form a caring bond with the natural world – the land – is that modern society promotes a disconnection from all things simple and natural. He wrote, “Your true modern is separated from the land by many middlemen, and by innumerable physical gadgets. He has no vital relation to it...”(261). As we shoveled and cleared, rebuilt and renovated, tended and enriched the very soil, the deepest of ties grew between our family and this beloved place.

There was no “wilderness” left on this land. It bore the marks of over a century of hard living – timber was cut and replanted, fields cleared, lawn and shrubs and flowers were brought in, and barns built. Then, sadly, over the past generation trash and junk piles grew beneath overgrown tansy, farm implements were abandoned, and the buildings began the long slow slide into decay. Some of the junk was treasure to us: old rusted hay rakes and pitchforks, metal scraps re-purposed into furniture and garden art. Some of the junk was nasty: old car batteries, leaking containers, broken bottles, trash. We recycled or reused everything we could, but mixed with our pleasure over the good stuff was indignation at how disrespected this land was...uncherished.

And we worried. There seemed no “right” way to dispose of it all, only perhaps a “best” way, or a “less bad” way. Neighborhood old-timers thought we were crazy to rent a large dumpster. “Nah!” they said in disbelief. “Just dig a big pit and bury it all” The oil-laden debris? The ancient lead-tainted dry wall scraps? The tar paper? Strange as it sounds, words like “violated” and even “raped” surface in my mind when the chickens uncover yet another broken beer bottle, gleaming wickedly in the rich soil near the barn.

Yet for everything we have given, the farm has given back much more. We labored, we gave...and we were sheltered, nurtured, and enchanted in return. When the grueling demolition and reconstruction of the house became too much, we retreated to the front yard to enjoy pastoral views and the delicious breezes always found beneath the gnarled apple trees. Our small children lived outdoors all day long – safe from our fears of lead-paint dust and construction debris. They delightedly munched on apples and raw corn, made forts under the flowered shrubs, and chased their new kittens through the barn. This land is deeply interwoven through the fabric of their being; like bunnies, they burrowed in all its little nooks and crannies, bestowing names on each spot (“Secret Fort,” “Hiding Spot”, “Deer Blind”), and leaving toys to mark their places.

Our children, now nearly grown, have traveled to a fair number of different cities and suburbs. They find the prospect of living their futures disconnected from some land to be unimaginable. “But what would we do?” they wonder aloud. “What do people in cities *do*?” this said after an eventful weekend in Chicago, sightseeing and attending shows and touring museums.

We’ve seen double rainbows – double! – stretching from one side of the cornfield to the other. The daily music of wind sighing through huge red pines, the mourning doves, the plaintive August call of the sand hill cranes and the first droves of geese all compose the backdrop to our lives here. Our free-ranging flock of chickens offers a total education package about sustainability with the simple circle of chicken-egg-manure-compost. The small lessons can be expanded and applied to virtually any natural cycle.

Leopold writes of the value of land, which is far beyond simple economic value (261); I am certain he means the intangible value of bluebirds nesting near the clothesline, and the sensual pleasure of sitting beneath showering apple blossoms after a sudden spring gust. Economic self-interest has not been a part of our relationship to this place; as anyone who has ever been seduced by the

dream of renovating crumbling real estate can attest: Expense is an endless black hole. “An ethical obligation on the part of the private owner is the only visible remedy,” Leopold said over half a century ago in condemnation of mere profit dictating the value of land (251). As the opening quote states, the first step toward ethical obligation, for us as well as for many, is simply love of a place.

We have felt the embrace of this small corner of earth, which for now, at least, we call our own. As singer/songwriter John Denver said, “Sometimes this old farm feels like a long-lost friend.” Just tonight, we watch the orange harvest moon slip in utter silence up over the horizon. The evening is so calm and quiet – so full of peace – we can hear the low, contented rumble of the gray kitten curled up in the swing across the porch, and coyotes calling far off in the woods.

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Brittani Alexander
Glendale Community College
Glendale, Arizona

Mae

Drip. Drip. Drip. The rain created invisible dents in the floor of the earth, in the cars lining the street, and the house in which all the people had gathered. The sky was stormy and not in the mood for conversation, at least, not beyond the drip, drip, drip, which was its cadence.

Whispers and quiet chatter could be heard from below; it danced up the stairs and into her room where it filled her with feelings that seemed to mimic the sky.

She was young. They called her Mae, but that was not her real name. Her real name was...well, that she couldn't remember...but her mother always said she brought to her the month of May, the irrepressible sun of springtime. Her mother always said things like that.

She continued to stare through the glass. Its invisible barrier prevented the wet from seeping in; though it tried. Slowly the people garbed in black who had invaded her home gathered themselves and drove away in their dented cars. The sky perceived this as a triumph, having beaten them into leaving with its moist discontent. At long last the street lay empty.

Mae came out of hiding. Her feet felt heavy and quite unlike her own as they scuffed the face of each stair on her way down. Her mother was still in her black dress, the one with the lace that always reminded Mae of Christmas. Why? She didn't know.

Head in her hands, Mae could hear the sniffles and the collision of her mother's tears as the weight of her anguish met the floor. Mae couldn't talk to her.

What could she say? Mae's voice had been hard-pressed to create much that was audible beyond a few indiscernible mumbles. All she might have said was trapped in her throat, and so she stood there; the silence sitting between them... snickering. Mae tried to make sense of the past few days, which arrived in a whirl of emotion, but it didn't make sense...

The police had received a frantic telephone call from some unknown youngster. There was a body in the river. It wasn't floating, but could be seen from the bridge. The authorities pulled the body from its fresh water bed. It was a girl and the sky had been moody that day too...

The house was dark except for the light above the stove, where a kettle announced its water was ready to soak the waiting tea leaves. Her mother wiped her eyes and assembled two cups. Mae reached for her cup until movement in the corner indicated the cup might not be for her. Apparently there were three, and tea was meant for two. She recognized the movement as her mother's boyfriend. Since his addition, Mae didn't have tea very often. She walked out of the kitchen and took up residence in her hammock on the back porch. The sky was still having its opinion felt, pelting the earth below mercilessly...

Those who had pulled the girl from the water eventually came by the house to ask if Mae's mother would identify the body. The girl had brown curly hair and freckles, though it was hard to tell which were the freckles and what was dirt or bits of river bottom. Her mother had clasped her hand to her mouth. Her knees buckled. Mae had never been so concerned for her in all her life. When she came home, she confined herself to her bed and stayed there for a good while. Today was the first day she'd been up and about...but they put the body in the ground today. (Mae suspected if her mother could go on lying in bed, she would have.) Hoards of friends and family flocked in their black frocks and toted wiry umbrellas. Small children whined and complained about their frozen fingers, soaked stocking, and empty bellies. Smaller children screamed and bawled; voicing the unanimous emotion everyone else could not, as mature adults, express.

Mae could hear her mother and the man speaking. She caught her name here and there and thought it completely rude to be speaking about her, as she was so entirely near, and within range of hearing their inflections drift out of the door into the now-drizzly outside. Mae's head was hazy with agitation and the oppressive grey. She felt as though she had something to do but could not remember what it was. *What had she done this past week?* She could not remember that either... The body of the girl she remembered ...the rest must never have happened.

Mae picked herself up out of the hammock. The sky chuckled its thunder at her and continued to pour down its pity, but its laughter was becoming more nervous and its pity less sincere...

They looked at the body one last time before giving the earth its burden of holding yet another loved one to its breast. The only noise: the crying children, sniffles, and the sound of umbrellas fulfilling their respective duty. Mae peeked over the edge of the casket, the screams of the little children now becoming her own as she recognized the face within. HER curly brown hair, HER freckles, HER unmoving full lips...

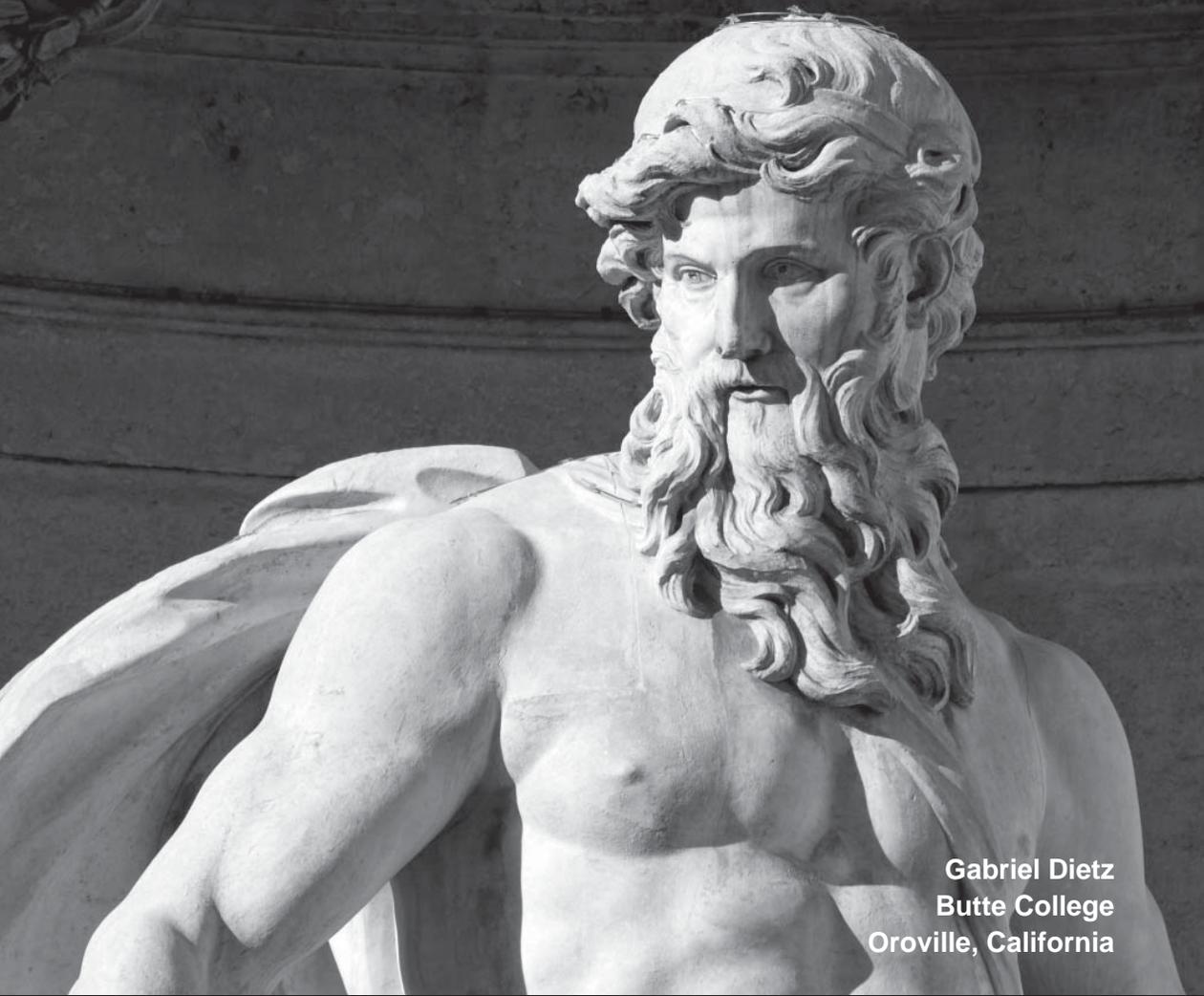
Mae had gone to a friend's house five days earlier, this she remembered. She walked the length of her street and turned the corner to follow the road parallel to the river, which would take her to Jamie's house. Jamie had met her halfway and they walked together. Suddenly, hands grasped her and Jamie's face grew steadily smaller and finally turned away altogether and quickly disappeared.

She felt the water hit her hard. It seemed to force itself through her body and sear her skin. She was screaming. Water penetrated her lips. She was choking, she could not breathe. The surface looked so far above her, so far, she could not reach it. She could not reach it and she could not breathe. All she could reach was her own helpless body and all she could breathe was the hateful water.

When they told her mother they said hatred was the only motivation. Apart from that, there was no motivation. Hatred seemed intent on weeding out her people. But hate had evaded them; those responsible for throwing her baby over the bridge were gone. They had snuck up on the two girls and just happened to grab Mae first. Jamie bolted...running was the only thing she could think to do... leaving Mae alone. They beat her, they taunted her, tied weights to her ankles, bound her wrists and hoisted her over the side of the bridge...

The drizzle stopped. The sky relented, but allowed only shafts of light from the hidden sun to escape. After their cup of tea, Mae's mother and her boyfriend packed Mae's things along with her own. She had to leave. She could not stay in a place so blinded by color and shrouded in cloud. *How had it come to this? What gave them the right?*

She packed Mae's books, her clothes, her shoes; dolls, paintings, poems, pictures. A tear for each item. She then came across a book containing pictures leading up to Mae's birth and the year following. The letters M-A-E had been scrawled out in Mae's eight year-old handwriting. It *said* Mae, but it wasn't her real name.



Gabriel Dietz
Butte College
Oroville, California

God, Man and the Mysterious Force: The Trinity of Fate in the Aeneid

The Aeneid is the quintessential work of Roman literature. Part Roman propaganda, part religious mythology, part history, it is wholly poetry and completely didactic, serving as a sourcebook for the ideals, philosophy and aspirations of one of the most successful empires in history. Although the work strongly reflects the Greek sensibilities that were so fervently embraced by the Romans, in many ways it represents the remarkable ways in which the Romans were able to adapt and expand upon Greek thought, forging their own distinct identity and existential perspective. Virgil himself struggles with Greek fatalism and, after seeming to grope in dark paradox at times, ultimately rejects the concept that fate is the final cause of all that befalls mankind. Instead, Virgil reflects on the complex interaction between the will of God, man's will to act, and the strange and mysterious force called the fates. This trinity of god, man, and fate is perfectly stated in the speech of Jupiter, when addressing the other gods. He says: "To each man shall his own free actions bring both his suffering and his good fortune. Jupiter is impartially king over all alike. The fates will find the way." (264). This slightly paradoxical trinity is a central aspect of *The Aeneid*, and although it is never explicitly reconciled in Virgil's work, it powerfully illustrates how practical Roman values challenged traditional fatalism, and empowered men with a degree of free will, and the ability to actively interact with these forces to co-create their destiny.

In the Roman pantheon, each god holds ultimate power over his or her sphere. At Neptune's command, the oceans obey; when Venus connives unbridled love, none can resist its hold, regardless of its cost; and when Mars sets out from Olympus, the rivers run red with blood, and men are lost in the frenzy of war. But even the gods are subject to the power of the fates, and all of their work is nullified by their final edict. Venus herself, in grappling with Juno, queen of heaven, says "But I am subject to the fates, whose design is obscure to me." (100). Not only is Venus impotent against the force of the fates, she is not capable of knowing what the fates decree, their design is hidden from her divine sight. And Juno, queen of all the gods, cannot argue with Venus on this matter, for she too is subject to that power, and is equally blind to these designs, save for that which is shared with her by the almighty Jupiter himself.

It is in Jupiter that we see the first aspect of paradox in Virgil's treatment of the question of fate. At times the fates seem to be the will of Jupiter, for only he can see the design that is hidden from all other eyes. Juno, when speaking to her fraternal husband, begging for the life of Turnus, who is fated to die, says "But, oh, if only my dread might prove a false mockery and you, *who alone have the power*, would yet change the course of *your designs* to a better end." (270). Indeed, regarding the life of Turnus, Jupiter says bluntly that he must die. "...realize that I ordain it so" (270), seeming to indicate that he is the whole dispenser of fate. Although it is clear that Jupiter and the fates are intimately connected, a close inspection yields the conclusion that Jupiter is not the fates. In fact, it seems that he too is subject to their power. This relationship is best illustrated when Jupiter tells Juno, again in regard to prolonging the life of Turnus, "so far I am at liberty to indulge you" (270). Why would the almighty king of heaven, lord of the universe, use this phrase, "at liberty," unless he was also bound by some force outside of himself? What could grant liberty to the omnipotent? This suggests that the fates are outside of his control, although he alone knows the designs, and perhaps has a degree of power to work within the bounds set by this force.

The second paradox in the trinity is that of man's will and the fates. This is a paradox that has been debated since long before the work of Virgil. It was quite vigorously pursued in the years during and after Rome's decline, by the early Christian writers of the time, and it is not a question that is easily resolved without resorting to pure fatalism or indeterminism. But Virgil treats the question dexterously, and with perfect grace, by not succumbing to the impossibility of trying to come to a definite solution. Instead, by allowing for an interaction of forces that ultimately shape one's path, he honors the role of powers beyond our comprehension and control, while emphasizing the importance of our actions and how they affect our lives and the world in which we live. The wise sage, Nautes, at once confirms and tempers the power of destiny with choice, when he says: "We should accept the lead which destiny offers us, whether to go forward or no, and choose our way accordingly. Whatever is to befall, it is always our own power of endurance which must give us power over our fortune." (141). Indeed, it seems that to Virgil, free choice is an essential element in our destinies. Perhaps it is the presentation of choices that lie in the hands of the fates, and it is for us to choose. The only place in the book where the fates are even remotely anthropomorphized, as the other gods are, is when "the fates were gathering up the last threads for Lausus; for Aeneas drive his tough sword straight through ..." (276). The threads are paths, each one a decision made in life and interwoven with the choices made by those around us, they become the tapestry of humanity's destiny. The fates have the power to present to us the many paths upon which we may tread, but it is in our own power to choose which paths to follow, and "fortune helps those who dare" (260).

This concept of choice, and the ability to obey or deny fates, illustrated when Aeneas says “Instead, my own valor, holy oracles from gods ... have all joined me to you and brought me here *in willing obedience to my destiny*” (205), would smack of hubris to the Greek mind, but serve to further the aim of painting Aeneas as a man of piety. If there is no choice, there is no virtue to be attained in choosing to obey the will of god, and submit graciously to fate.

The relationship between god and man, as treated in the work of Virgil, is dynamic, or even nebulous, at times. Jupiter demands of Aeneas to stay on track with his destiny when he is lollygagging in Carthage. In some sense, God is the force that propels us to act in accordance with our destiny. This obedience to heavenly direction is pious virtue, and the central aspect of Aeneas’ character, but Virgil at other times seems to question the very existence of the gods, reflecting the religious skepticism that arose in the Hellenistic period, and didn’t cease until Hellenism and the Olympic pantheon were in ruins. “Is it the gods who have put into our hearts this ardor for battle? Or do we attribute to a god what is really an overmastering impulse of our own?” asks Nisus in book nine (230). This oscillation between the gods’ direct interest and involvement in our lives, or absence in any sense except for a sort of archetypal force within, is not meant to be resolved in the work itself, but only delivered as a question for the reader to ponder in his own heart. Is there a guiding hand, or overarching principle, which compels us to choose as we do when presented with the many choices in our lives?

The trinity of man, god and fate is symbolically revealed in the climactic moment at the end of the book. Aeneas is engaged in the final duel with his nemesis, Turnus, “Jupiter himself held up a pair of scales, carefully centering the tonque of the balance; and then he placed the destinies of the two champions, to decide which one should come happy from the ordeal, and whose weight should bring death swinging down” (331). He did not make these destinies; he received them from the force beyond him, the fates. It is for him to weigh them, and perhaps ensure that destiny is enforced. But it is Aeneas who makes that somewhat shocking decision in the end, and he brings death down swinging upon Turnus, and sends his life “moaning, resentful down to the shades” (338).

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Alison Green
Illinois Valley Community College
Oglesby, Illinois

The Platte City Rabble-Rousers

...The little lady was standing alone on the dark sidewalk – oblivious, naïve. Clive knew her name to be Penny Waters, but he wasn't paying any attention to who she was. He was focused on the one thing he wasn't seeing – the diamond. It was the size of a baseball and Clive could imagine all the nice beachside condos it would buy him. He knew she had it. She had to have it.

Clive dropped his cigarette butt onto the alley's wet pavement and ground out the embers with his shoe. Then, tipping his fedora to guard against the bullets of rain firing down from the night sky, Clive sauntered up to her, a stolen billystick in one hand...

"Gimme the baseball," demanded Clive Thompson, the best homerun hitter in the third grade, as he chewed on the end of a candy cigarette while brandishing a baseball bat at the little girl in front of him. "Come on, kid, cough it up."

"I don't know where it is! I swear!" poor Penny Waters whimpered, the ends of her pigtails trembling. A crowd of girls was congregating behind her, frowning powerfully at the boys who stood behind Clive.

"Who's got the ball?!" he thundered, making half the Platte Elementary playground cower.

There was a pause, and then the reply came from the mob of girls,
"I do!"

The crowd parted down the middle as a little blonde girl ambled up to Clive with a faded beaten-up baseball in one hand. Penny Waters faded thankfully into the throng.

...Suddenly, a huge bouncer lumbered out of a nearby alleyway, stopping directly between Clive and his quarry. Crap. He hadn't known little ol' Penny had brought her hired help to guard her and the treasure. The bouncer grinned, the diamond clutched in one lean, ruthless hand. Just to make a statement, Clive let his own hand rest subtly on the .38 strapped to his belt...

Bonnie Barrel, the best pitcher in the second grade, planted her feet and glared up at the boy who stood nearly a head and a half taller than she. The little girl had a set of steely grey eyes, and she tossed her cropped straw-colored hair with an air of authority. The sticklike tresses were pinned back on one side by a blue ribbon-shaped barrette. Skinny as a chicken, she certainly looked as though anyone could take her on, but her withering stare was enough to make Clive think twice.

"Hand it over, Barrel." he snarled.

But Bonnie only tossed the well-worn baseball up and down in one hand...up and down, up and down. The crowd inched closer.

"Look here, us boys are gonna play ball, see? So take your cooties someplace else, toots!"

Bonnie popped her gum and replied nonchalantly,

"You talk funny. Anyhow, us girls are gonna play, so too bad for you."

Clive leaned on his bat like it was a jaunty walking stick.

"Rock, Paper, Scissors for it?" he proposed.

"No dice, Thompson. We had the ball first – we're playing."

"But we had the bat first!" came the protest from somewhere on the boys' side.

"Shut up, Bugsy!" Clive snarled over his shoulder, then turned back to Bonnie.

"Look kid, I'm done being nice, see? Gimme the baseball, or I'll make you an offer you can't refuse."

...The bouncer wasn't responding to Clive's threats. This was new. Usually one good snarl was enough to reduce the best of them to tears.

Clive sighed. He was going to have to dispose of this nuisance once and for all...

Clive pulled out a fully-loaded water pistol (he always kept two in the front pockets of his jeans), and pointed it pitilessly at Bonnie, who held the ball as if to throw it right at his face.

The moment hung heavy in the air as their audience waited for someone to make the first move. Clive and Bonnie circled each other, weapons held at the ready, murder in their eyes. Suddenly, they both aimed and –

"Red alert! It's the Recess Ladies!"

Screams of panic rent the air as children fought to scatter. Arms became entangled with legs, elbows crashing into noses as they all pushed and shoved to be the first to escape. Caught in the midst of the confusion, Bonnie and Clive found themselves back to back instead of face to face. The shrieks escalated as a Recess Lady lumbered into their midst, the tight red curls of her perm gleaming like a freshly waxed helmet in the afternoon sun. She shooed kids right and left, ushering them towards the ominous, gaping maw of the schoolhouse doors.

She turned towards Bonnie and Clive and advanced slowly, her giant belly preceding her by several inches, each foot sending out seismic waves as it hit the tarmac. The two kids stared up at her, suddenly feeling a lot more like allies than enemies.

"We need a distraction!" Bonnie hissed over her shoulder.

Clive's mind raced circles around itself, going over every single classroom escape he'd ever pulled.

Escape Plan Delta 12? No, that was only good near large bodies of water. Alpha-Beta 17? No...that would require a staple gun.

Clive sighed. He would have to create a new one.

"All right! Recess Lady, say hello to my little friend – Escape Plan Tango 23!" he bellowed. "Bonnie – spitball!"

Without wasting a moment, Bonnie hawked the world's biggest loogie right onto the baseball and chucked it high in the air. Clive glanced at the Recess Lady – she was watching it, just as he'd hoped. The ball began to descend, gaining velocity, and as soon as it was close enough, Clive yelled,

"Duck!"

Bonnie crouched low as he swung the bat with all his might. The bat and ball connected with a mighty CRACK, making the latter rocket though the sky in a perfect arch...right through an upstairs window of Platte Elementary, the glass shattering with a thunderous crash.

As shrieks sounded inside the school and all around them on the playground, Clive grinned at Bonnie. She wasn't so bad after all – maybe even okay, as girls go. He extended his hand. And she shook it.

The Recess Lady began to tremble as the frame of the broken window filled with a silhouette everyone recognized. The sharply angled shoulder, stiff hair, and cigarette-thin frame could only belong to one person...The Principal.

"Who is responsible for this?" she boomed from the window.

The Recess Lady turned to rat out the perpetrators, only to find that Bonnie and Clive were gone. But the pavement where they stood moments ago was not empty. In their haste, they had lost two objects. The Recess Lady waddled over and stared down at the two abandoned trinkets – a blue barrette and a candy cigarette.

...Turns out, the bouncer was a spy for Clive's bankroll, Monty. Clever, old Monty was. Always made sure his people came home with the goods. Clive and Beryl (turns out the bouncer had a name, too) skipped with the diamond, but not before good ol' Penny had a chance to rat them out to some passing cops...

"Look!" Penny Waters shrieked, pointing towards the outbuildings. "They're making a break for it!"

The elastic waistband of the Recess Lady's greasy grey sweatpants squeaked in protest as she turned, her beady eyes squinting through the waves of heat undulating over the tarmac. The Recess Lady came from heritage rich with defensive linemen (and gorillas), and she lumbered after Bonnie and Clive in a manner that would have made even her most stoic ancestors weep with pride (or thump their chests and grunt with approval). It didn't take long for her flat feet to gain ground.

"Get back here, ya little twerps!"

...The coppers were tight on Clive and Beryl's tail, sirens blaring madly in the heat of pursuit. Clive pulled Beryl down a side alley...

Clive and Bonnie whipped around a corner, the Recess Lady close behind... and she nearly bashed into them too, when they found themselves staring at the chain link fence blocking their path.

...Clive and Beryl found themselves staring bitterly at the high brick wall before them. No escape. Dead end...

"Look here, snot rags. You're comin' with me," snarled the Recess Lady, hoisting up the perpetrators by the scruff on their jackets.

And she carried her wriggling captives across the playground and up the crumbling steps of Platte Elementary, as their classmates stared with wide eyes and open mouths.

"They're dead," squeaked Bugsy. "They'll get the chair for sure!"

Deep in the confines of the Principal's Office, Bonnie and Clive sat side by side on brown plastic chairs in front of the gigantic desk. The Recess Lady stood in the doorway, arms crossed, feet splayed, surveying the scene with ruthless impunity as Bonnie and Clive received their just desserts.

"Bonnie and Clyde, you say?" the Principal asked the Recess Lady. The barrette and the cigarette lay in the middle of the giant desk, like the spoils of a nation conquered.

"Bonnie and Clive," corrected the Recess Lady, glaring darkly at them.

"The two biggest rabble-rousers in this school. If you recall, Clive Thompson's the one who set off firecrackers in the boys' bathroom last Friday, and we recently discovered that Bonnie Barrel's been heading an illegal poker game once a week at recess. They seem to have banded together."

"I see," replied the Principal, flipping through their files. "Gambling, robbery, extortion, fraud, defacing public property, running an on-campus eating establishment without a license...and now resisting arrest," she tossed the files down on the giant desk and glared down her sharp knife of a nose at them. "Perhaps I should reserve a permanent 3 pm detention slot for you."

"Could you make it 4:30?" Bonnie asked, popping her gum. "Me and the girls play poker at 3."

The principal slapped her hands down on the desk and snarled, "The point is, I've got enough material here to convict. We're talking daily detention, calls to parents, possible suspension. But...if you are willing to renounce your actions and swear off all future wrongdoing, I *may* be willing to negotiate. What do you say?"

...Clive and Beryl sat handcuffed in the back of the speeding cop car, glaring murder through the grill at the chatty cop cruising them to the clink.

"The authorities may be willing to negotiate. Whaddya say?"

But Clive wasn't listening. He was busy working his spare .38 out of his trouser pocket. He slipped it to Beryl...

Bonnie, who was sitting with her palms clasped behind her back, felt the pressure of cold plastic on the back of her hand and looked down to find Clive's water pistol sitting next to her. He had the other grasped in white knuckles behind his own back. Clive winked. Careful not to be seen, Bonnie wrapped her fingers tightly around the handle.

"Well, what do you have to say?" the Principal repeated, her strained voice rising in volume and octave.

Bonnie looked up, the same steely glint in her eye as when she first met Clive.

"No dice," she said.

Special recognition goes to Clyde Barrow, Bonnie Parker, and "The Story of Bonnie and Clyde" – all inspired this story in various ways.



Anthony Heyward
Borough of Manhattan Community College
New York, New York

Granddaddy

We always knew when Granddaddy was leaving to go to work in the morning because usually it would still be dark and the cocks had just begun to crow. My cousins and I were affectionately called his grandbabies, no matter how old or big we became. Joseph Smith Junior was a rather large, burly man. He stood six feet four inches tall and weighted 250 pounds, without an ounce of fat on his body. The father of six living children and the grandfather of ten, he was as abundantly loving as he was large. I would quietly marvel at his callused, hardened hands. To touch Granddaddy's hands was to touch leather. Smooth and dark, his skin shone like mahogany after a summer shower. I would always be asleep when he left for work in the morning, so the first time I would get to see him during the day would be lunchtime when he came home to eat. During the summers of my childhood, I spent my vacation "down south" with my grandparents. As a boy, there was no greater treat than to be in the presence of my mother's father. He would take off his work boots and reveal the smelliest feet one could ever imagine. He'd often get all the way down on the floor and join in whatever his grandchildren were doing. If my female cousins were playing jacks or turning double dutch, my grandfather wouldn't hesitate to jump in. He often joined the boys in the street for games of football or checkers on the porch. It wasn't until the summer of my 13th birthday, however, that I discovered Granddaddy's true strength.

It was a rite of passage for all the boys in my family, at the appropriate age, to spend an extended amount of time working with Granddaddy. My grandfather's father had been born a slave and instilled a strong and punitive work ethic in Granddaddy and his eight brothers. Granddaddy had only gone as far as the third grade because in the days of the Depression, a family needed all able-bodied boys to work. His experience living in the South without an education caused him to demand that all of

his children graduate from high school. In addition to schooling, his male children and grandchildren would have to be shown the value of hard work and maneuvering in a world that didn't have much use or compassion for colored men. It was on one of these early summer mornings that it became my turn to embrace my laborious birthright, riding shotgun in Granddaddy's musty smelling pickup truck. The thick pungent odor of sweat and axle grease never repulsed me; in fact, it seemed to personify the stench of a hardworking man. Granddaddy was a mechanic by trade, but he always kept a hustle to supplement his family's income. The hustle this morning was landscaping. We would be cutting the grass of one of the largest banks in North Eastern Carolina, and I was proud of the thought that I was helping with this grandiose task. The job went rather smoothly, with each row of my freshly cut green grass posturing in the morning sun. We completed the job, and I went to the truck to see the bank manager for our pay. Having no real concept of wages in those days, I imagined a lofty amount, enough for a fancy new pair of sneakers with my share. Instead what I saw were two arguing men; the bank manager, small, round, and white; and my grandfather, tall, muscular, and brown. It seemed they were having a dispute over the amount of pay we were supposed to receive. The complete conversation was not audible, but I was able to make out a "That's not what I was promised" here and a "you should be grateful" there. Granddaddy stood towering over that bank manager for what seemed like a lifetime. Finally, without a word, he reached out his hand, grabbed the envelope that was being offered and came back to the truck. I was terrified. Is this what happens? Is hard work rewarded with people that find ways to cheat you? Why hadn't Granddaddy stood up to this smaller man and taken what was ours? On the way home, we stopped at the Tasty Freeze, the town's ice cream parlor, and got some hot dogs and milkshakes, and for the moment all was right in the world.

My grandfather and I never spoke about what happened on that day. As I got older, I was able to reason that it would not have gone well for Granddaddy or our family if he had forcibly taken his correct pay from the bank manager. In hindsight, it took intellect and an incredibly strong will to be able to walk away after having just been cheated. It wasn't until my grandfather's funeral years later that I found out Granddaddy's true motives for taking me on that job. It is the custom in our family after the death and burial of a loved one for the surviving relatives to have a feast in honor of the lost person and share stories of the person's life. When it became my turn, I shared my story, thinking it would surprise and shock everyone at the level of restraint and strength Granddaddy was able to show while being swindled. Instead, all my uncles and older cousins erupted in laughter. My oldest cousin Eddie explained that they all had the same experience with Granddaddy and working on the bank yard. It seemed that Granddaddy took all his male progeny out to that yard so they could experience first hand what it felt like to be cheated and taken advantage of by someone of a higher social standing. For years, Granddaddy did this, constantly renewing this work agreement, completing the job and allowing this man to rip him off, just so he could teach his boys a lesson about ethics. Joseph Smith Junior was truly an amazing man.



Mitzi Kay Jackson
Wayne County Community College
Downtown Campus
Detroit, Michigan

Long Way to Go

My heart is beating so fast, so free

demons running through my brain

stealing my memories

my hands shake and it's hard to breathe

and I need something to fulfill put me at ease

and although everything's bright, I still can't see

my future's bleak

Lady Sings The Blues

Vanity

Donald Goines books

are calling me

I feel it streaming through my body

crack heads on the corner saying

thinking I can control....maybe

my eyes drifting thinking of the thrill

and yes I know it kills

my children I can't leave em' alone

but they don't need to know.....

I got a long way to go

Everybody loves Mary but there's no one there
stop short of rock bottom or am I already there

Star Wars Trilogy going on inside of me

I didn't know good vs. evil could

disrupted dreams

I am a Black Woman Goddess

I am a Carmel Queen

I am a Golden Brown Mother

I am Honey Supreme

I am a Beige Door Closet Hoe

and I have a long long way to go

Benediction how could it happen, in this day and time?

new recruits drooping dimes

well if it won't be televised

I guess I won't know very little history I store

my ignorance isn't bliss the fact that I'm in

this situation got me pissed

I can say it was my upbringing like others before

I can blame it on the rain and/or the storm

I can jump in the tides let my body wash along the shore

I can go back start over quote the raven forever more

Oppression Depression Compression pressed I know

and yet and still I have a long way to go

Everything I do I try to do right, every corner I turn I have to fight

Every tune I sing I close my eyes tight, every nerve in my body

bruise my insides

Black Power.....Black Pride.....Black Unity.....Blacks die

Fighting ring side trying to get a piece of the pie example living by

I know so much.....still I don't know

needles, rubber and plastic cases like mine are classic

I know so much yet and still I don't know but I have a long way to go



Mariangela Jordan
Greenville Technical College
Greenville, South Carolina

History

Soft-spoken and smart,
Drinks too much coffee
To stay awake,
Spends more time
In the hospital
Than in the classroom.

He apologizes for missing last class.

He introduces us to myths, symbols, early
Mushroom consumers – ritual makers,
The spiritual origins of the universe.

He tried to learn Sanskrit and Latin,

In graduate school; nothing came out of that.
Like nothing came out of his attempt to paint.
Just before she died, his wife asked him to
Try painting. She thought it would be nice
To put on canvas
The way he sees the world – bright, beautiful, kind.

He loves teaching – you can tell,
Knows everything and beyond about the subject,
But doesn't know quite well how to live without her.

The first and last painting he made was of her favorite
Landscape: a muddy, barren, red-brown, hilly place in Spain.
“It looked alright, you know,”
But not the way it was when she was there.

He drinks coffee to stay awake,
He teaches to stay alive.

Class dismissed.



Linda Lyons
Pima Community College
Tucson, Arizona

Beginnings

When you're four years old, you miss the undercurrents that swirl around the house like dust devils on a hot August afternoon. It didn't matter that Sundays there was muttering behind my parents' closed bedroom door, that I had to wear a dress with puffed sleeves that rubbed against my sunburned arms; and patent leather shoes my father tried to shine with Vaseline; and homemade gloves made out of stiff pink tulle; and a ruffled sunhat tied firmly under my chin with a blue ribbon.

We walked across the street and waited for the bus and my mother held my hand to stop me from crouching down on the sidewalk to find a stone sharp enough to draw a faint hopscotch on the grey concrete. My father peered down Pleasant Avenue, and at the first sign of belching smoke, scooped me up into his arms and we waited for the driver to open the doors so we could climb up the steps and into the bus. I didn't know that children under four rode the bus for free. I can't remember if the driver ever asked how old I was, or if my father was forced to lie – I was too busy watching my mother walk down the aisle, willing her to find a bench seat for three near a window that was open so the heat wasn't so stifling and I could kneel between them, my face pressed into the crack of rushing air that made my hat slide down the back of my head and blow the center parting in my blonde hair all askew – and feel my father's arm across my back, holding me firmly in place between them.

It was a long bus ride. People got on and off, raising their arms to pull the cord so the bell would "ting". I wanted to pull the cord, but my mother gave me a look and my father wouldn't let me stand on the seat to try to reach. At the very end of the route, with our clothes stuck to us like a second skin and my face dark and dusty from the exhaust blowing through the crack, my father took my hand and I hopped off the seat

and down the steps into the sun. After the bus pulled away we stood at the curb and my mother spit into a Kleenex and wiped my face and my father tightened his necktie and we walked down Moore Avenue, past the Shell station and around the corner to my grandmother's house.

We went to my father's mother's house every Sunday for supper – never my mother's parents. That was okay with me. My English grandparents cooked stringy meat and always had mushy peas. They made me eat everything on my plate and the milk was always lukewarm, never cold. My German grandmother was the best cook in the world. She let me lick the spoon from the whipped cream and only piled food on my plate that I liked. She didn't make me drink milk at the table. There was a bottle of lime rickey or orange kist or cream soda and I got as much as I wanted. My aunts would bustle around her kitchen, stirring gravy, setting the big table, slicing pies and cakes and my mother would sit in a chair in the corner. My grandmother said my mother didn't know how to cook.

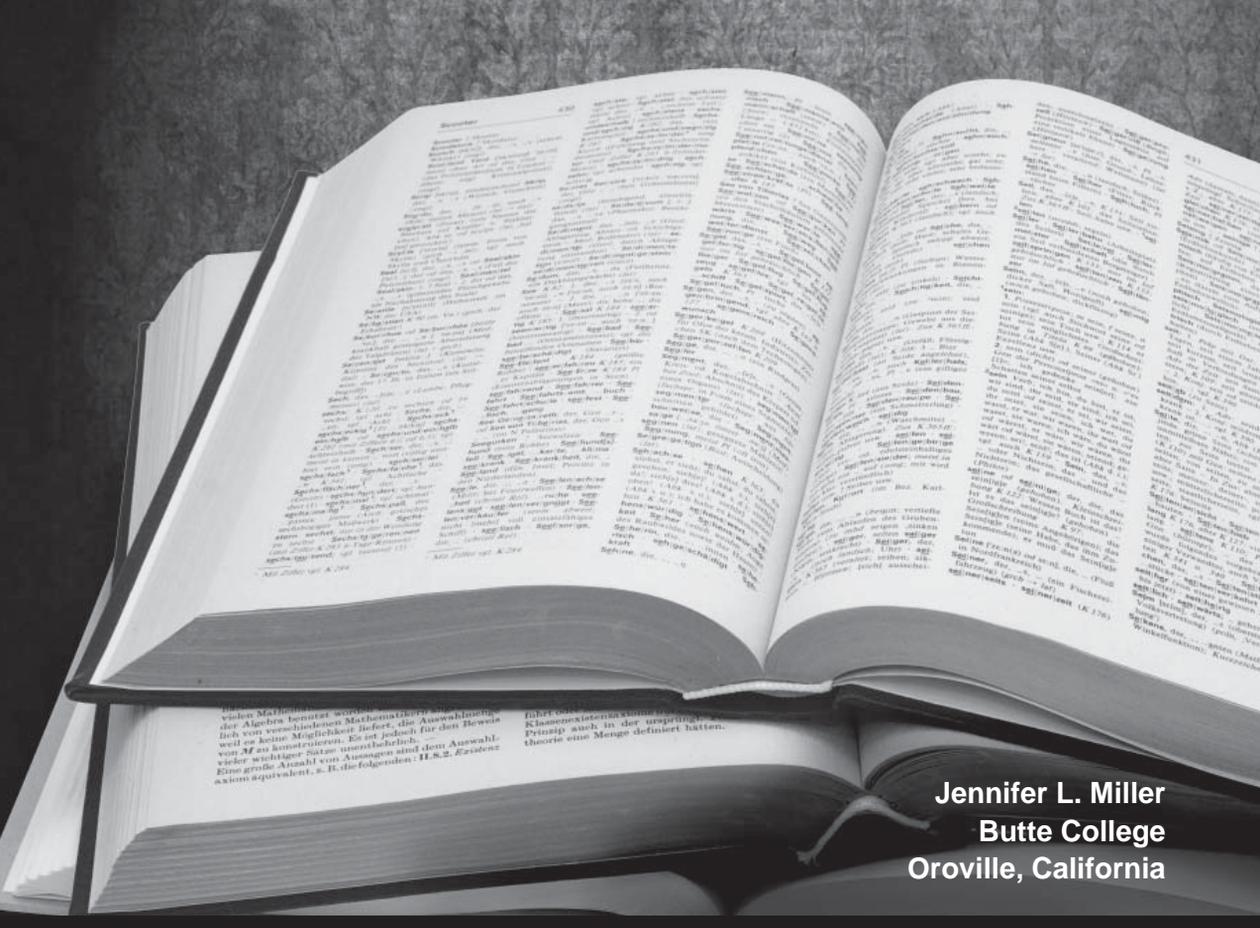
My grandfather had an old brown spotted terrier named Sparky. My grandmother told me to stay away from him or he would bite me, but my grandfather pulled me up on his knee and Sparky climbed up beside us and I would pet him.

After everybody ate, my grandfather took my hand and we would have our special adventure. We walked along the railroad tracks, across Schaeffer's backyard and over to Wuertle's corner store. Nobody in the whole wide world knew the secret way to Wuertle's but us. Mrs. Wuertle filled a paper bag with candy and my grandfather swore us both to secrecy and my grandfather and I chomped on black licorice cigars, sneaking back through the yards and down the tracks to the front porch. My grandmother would be waiting with a wet facecloth. In the growing dusk, she wiped the black from my lips and told me not to tell my mother.

Sometimes, my father's brother drove us home in the dark. He had a little car, a red Metropolitan. It was a big word and he tickled me and made me say it properly before I could get in. My aunt sat beside him in the middle and my mother sat on my father's lap next to the door. The only place for me was on the shelf in the back window. I had to lie very still or my uncle said he couldn't drive. When we got home, everyone got out of the car but me and my uncle and I sat on his lap and drove the car into the driveway before my father scooped me out and carried me into bed.

Sometimes, my Aunt Bernie's husband would drive us home. He had a gray Edsel. The three of us sat in the back seat. I wasn't allowed to talk. Nobody talked. When we got home, my father reached into his pocket and put some dollar bills into my uncle's hand that was hanging out the window, and my mother rushed me into the house.

When I was four, I loved trips to my grandmother's house. I would travel much farther before I understood why my mother cried.



Die
viele Mathematik
der Algebra
weil es keine
wichtiger Sätze
Eine große Anzahl
axiom äquivalent, s. B. die folgenden:

führt oder
Klassenmengen
Prinzip auch in der
theorie eine Menge

Jennifer L. Miller
Butte College
Orville, California

Note to the English teacher

I'm declaring war upon the dictionary
But please know that it is not preemptive or unjust—
The dictionary wronged me first

For a dictionary is a wonderful thing
(if one wants to kill poetry)
It murders context in furious,
little papercuts, crosshatching

I find pursuit of linguistic objectivity an excuse
which I cannot forgive
It makes "exotic" anything but exotic
Translating it into "oddly unusual" or
"introduced from another country"
exact and mathematic,
like balancing my checkbook

And besides that, Webster's wrong

"exotic" means

"slant-eyed, shamrock sky, an orchid under a mango tree"

or maybe

"salsa beat on a market street, female eyelash casualty"

Word and definition should never be

As numbers are —

an impeccable equation

"Down with

$$\frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$

Give me Art!"

I demand it.

So, I only wish to calmly make you aware of the fact

that if this class will require my participation

in systematic verbicide,

to make the flawed uniqueness of human communication

an unraveled tapestry of ugly, snagged, and now useless string —

the unfeeling joke of the Math Department —

Then I will simply take Calculus instead.



Jandra Oliver
Nashua Community College
Nashua, New Hampshire

Sorting Socks

I'm still in love with you
I realize
Standing by the window
A pile of our socks jumbled together in my arms
In the stillness of this moment
Sorting socks seems absurd
They are twined together like puppies, like snakes
Like the strands of a shared life
Yet I do separate them
Crossing the room to place
Some in your dresser and the rest in mine



Jared C. Silvia
Valencia Community College
Winter Park Campus
Winter Park, Florida

The Boxer

“Teach me,” I said, “how to defend myself.”

As the early morning traffic slipped away under the walking bridge next to the bus stop, the man, who had just a moment ago introduced himself as Jorge, crossed his arms and stared me down.

“What makes you think I would or even could do that?”

I stared back trying to look as tough as nails, a difficult task in my work apron.

“I see you out here every day. You’ve got fantastic form and you’re obviously strong. I’m sure there’s a ton I could learn from you.”

He frowned, rubbing his nose. Morning steam was rising from the sewer grates in slithering clouds as the bus pulled up.

“Fine,” he said, eying me skull to sneakers. “Meet me here before 7:12, tomorrow morning.”

I nodded vigorously as he tromped up the steps and down the aisle to his seat on the bus to wherever he went during the day. I watched the bus slink off into the line of traffic and turned to get into my car, back to my bed for some well-deserved sleep. It had been an especially long night at the restaurant, and nights at the restaurant were fairly lengthy to begin with.

No, before you consider thinking it, I had never planned for even one moment to make my living as a waiter at an all-night griddle house. I had never planned to be shunted back onto the overnight shift.

In those days I was sleeping in the spare bedroom at a friend's house, feeling like a pretty rotten tagalong. I was borrowing rent money from my parents and eating whatever food my girlfriend had to spare. No one likes to feel like a scumbag, so I went out and got one of those jobs that requires a pulse and little else.

The freezer at the restaurant smelled like sour milk, the other waiters were mostly damned idiots, the boss was a career "manager" with a smug jackass smile and the dishwasher was a belligerent psychopath with Down's syndrome.

That night before I met with Jorge at the bus stop, the dishwasher had continued to make clear his disdain for me. As I walked through one of the inexplicably long hallways that ran through the back of the restaurant, he had slammed through the double doors at the end of the hall and had pointed at me.

"Hey you with the girl hair," he said in his mongoloid drawl. He walked directly up to me and looked me square in the face. "I know karate," he said, "so you'd better not fuck with me."

I shook my head, and dried my sweaty hands on my green apron. He had a good foot and probably 50 pounds on me. There was no way I'd have considered giving him grief.

Quickly, he took a step toward me and I took a step back, finding myself against the wall. He made a grab for my wrist. I tried to roll it out of his grasp, but I was too slow. He twisted my arm toward and jerked it up under my throat, slamming my head back against the wall. I saw butterflies made of light.

"Why are you choking yourself," he said, again and again and again. I lost count of how many times. I couldn't breathe.

"Geddoff!" I squawked through my compressed larynx. Mercifully, he complied and shoved me roughly to the floor. I didn't see him slam back through the double doors into the dish area, but I heard him giggling as he went. I stood and brushed myself off in as dignified a manner as I could, then stumbled back into the prep area rubbing the red place on my neck. Billy, the other overnight server, was marrying ketchup, a term that seemed to cheapen the whole wedding process when applied to Heinz 57.

"That guy just choked me!"

Billy looked up from his unholy condiment ritual, glanced at my neck, and then at the double doors to the hallway.

"Yeah," he said, screwing the cap onto his newly filled bottle. "He does that sometimes. Oh, I seated a table in your section, by the way."

At 7:00, just off work, I found myself walking to the bus top to learn whatever I could from Jorge. He was there already, dancing fantastically up and down the sidewalk, punching hard-clenched fists at the steady stream of workforce traffic. I stood next to the bus sign and watched him for a moment, silent.

"Okay," he said, walking back from the sidewalk, dabbing at a bead of sweat on his forehead. "You want to learn how to defend yourself, right?"

"Yeah," I said, untying my apron and unbuttoning my sleeves to roll them up.

"What do you do?" asked Jorge.

I fiddled with the button on my left sleeve and looked up.

"I'm a trainee waiter."

He frowned.

"Over there?" He pointed at the restaurant.

"Yeah."

"Rough place?"

"Kind of...someone keeps giving me trouble.

Jorge rubbed his chin, then. The three-day stubble rippled under his oil-stained fingers...fingers that bore signs of an existence beyond forceful jabs.

"And what are you," he asked after a moment.

"Huh? A trainee waiter, like I said..."

"No," he interrupted, "I mean *what are you?*"

"I..."

I wasn't sure.

"I think we both know," said Jorge, "that you're more than your apron and name badge. So what are you?"

"I'm..."

And I thought about it until I had an answer, a real answer. *My truth.*

And I told him.

And he nodded.

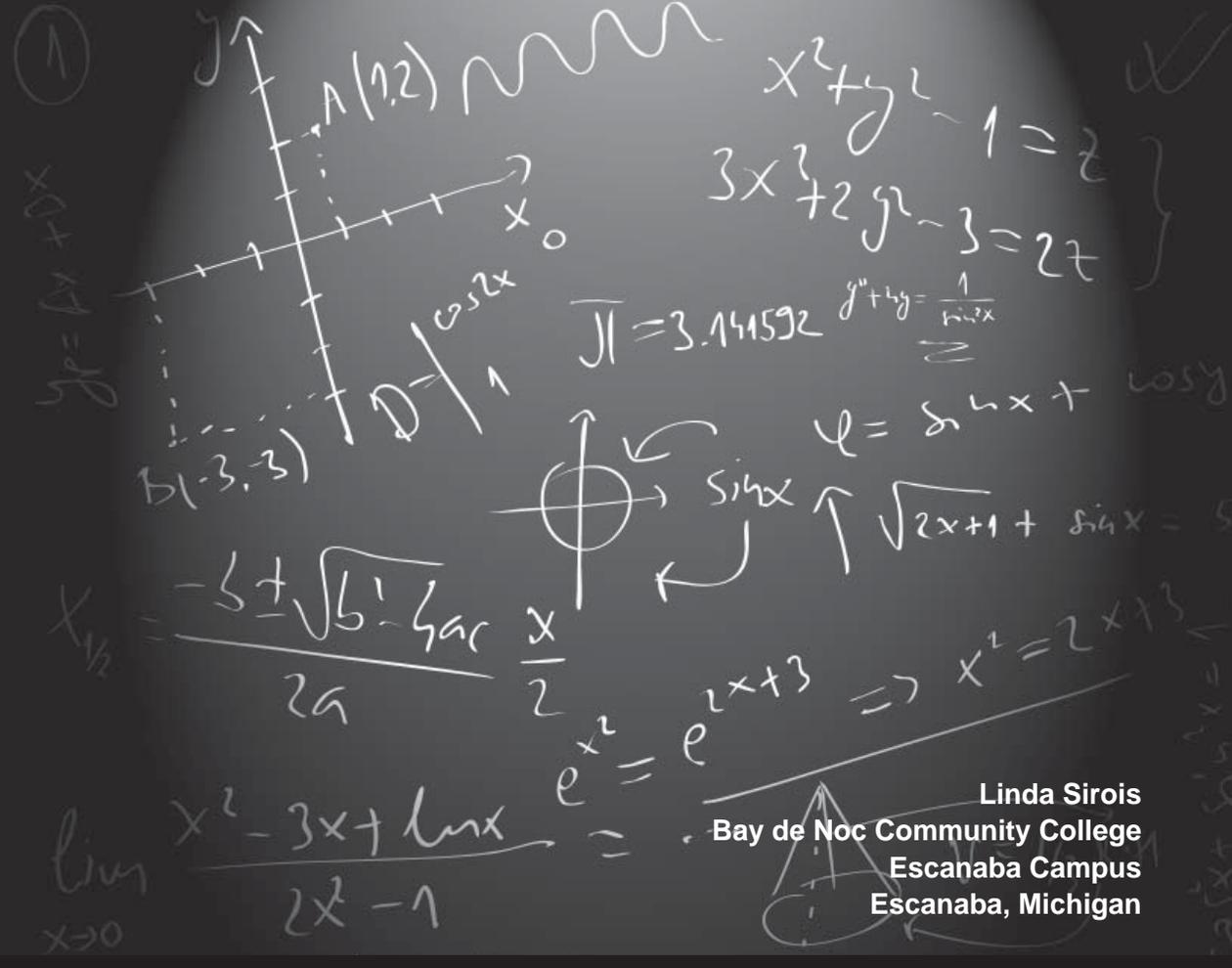
"What you are, what you truly are...*that's* your defense."

He turned back toward the street and watched the traffic slurring by. I just blinked. After a few seconds or maybe a few minutes, I can't remember which, it occurred to me to ask the obvious.

"What are *you* then?"

"Me?" he asked, still staring at the street. "I'm a boxer."

He stung a wicked left at an Audi, danced side to side, and then climbed onto the bus and drifted away into traffic.



Linda Sirois
 Bay de Noc Community College
 Escanaba Campus
 Escanaba, Michigan

A Few Words about Algebra

“That which does not kill us makes us stronger”- Friedrich Nietzsche (while being forced to graph “y” intercepts for linear equations in point slope form)

One unnamed faculty member in the English department has confessed to a disturbing and inexplicable recurrent nightmare about a college algebra class. This person dreams that they are registered for a required algebra class, and two-thirds of the way through the semester realizes, horrified, that they haven’t attended a single class.

I know that feeling. I’m living that nightmare. I do, however, attend almost all of my algebra classes, and I receive additional help, as well. There are those who work with lepers in Calcutta, and then there are those who tutor liberal arts majors in math. Who is kinder? Who is more patient? It’s difficult to say.

In my MA90 class, I was shocked to learn that not just philosophy, but also algebra and many of the higher mathematics originated in the days of Socrates and Plato. While I adore long discussions about philosophical abstractions, that left turn they took into numerical abstraction left me standing at the crossroads, scratching my head. As a communications and writing major, I can only sit here at the computer, helplessly bad-mouthing algebra – and all its mean big brothers: calculus, trigonometry, and analytical geometry, none of whom I will ever meet in person.

I do get that learning this benefits me, in the mental contortions I must perform in order to try and grasp that “x” is not “x”, but rather a malevolent (sorry, okay, not malevolent) little variable that could be any number... **even numbers that are imaginary or may not exist in life as we know it.** And this little “x” has an

invisible “1” attached to it at all times, which wreaks havoc in equations if I forget his existence. And we won’t even talk about the negatives and positives, and the convoluted way I have to count digits and do hand gestures to mimic number lines in order to subtract a negative from a positive. Or, worse yet, a negative from a negative.

As a “word” person, I do like the exotic language of mathematics: much like the Latin names for plants, or another spell from Hogwarts Academy, the words and phrases are wonderfully inflated and obscure – “remainder theorem,” and “synthetic division of polynomials.” My very favorite (which I pray we don’t try to do before the semester’s end lest they find my dead body somewhere in the Math and Science Building): “solving the discriminant of a quadratic equation.” I feel smart when I say these things.

It’s fun to sprinkle casual conversations with math jargon. Friend: “Hey, whatcha’doin’?” Me: “Oh, nothing...just simplifying some algebraic expressions in two variables.”

Now, mind you, fully one-half (.50,50% 50 divided by 25) of these simplified algebraic expressions are worked incorrectly. But it’s fun, fun, fun to say. And my friends – 20 years out of college – are awed and sympathetic. Briefly. It’s like tossing out a few little French phrases to impress: “Oh, mais oui!” “C’est bon!” Or, “Oooh la la!” Means nothing. Sounds pretty good. (Be careful around the natives.)

I’m off to Liberal Arts Math next semester (if I can swing that necessary “C” in Basic Algebra). Until today, when a teacher enlightened our class, I and possibly many other non-math types fondly imagined Liberal Arts Math to be a sanctuary... a veritable island of sanity in a world gone mad. I had looked forward to perhaps composing a haiku poem in Liberal Arts Math, expressing my deepest feelings about algebra. Or, like an Art major and fellow math confusee’, I dreamt of drawing a disturbing, jarring portrait of the chaos that Basic Algebra has wrought in our otherwise sane and ordered existence. We Liberal Arts majors might possibly, in class, write and direct (and design costumes and sets, ooh!) an original play analyzing the presence of mathematics in a world of artistic endeavor. We could sculpt, we could sing! We could write amusing essays. We could compose plaintive music... But, alas.

As I draw near the end of my time in Algebra Land, like an exotic voyage to an alien shore, it’s been interesting but I’m ready to go home now. I don’t pretend to understand why all the really warm and wonderful people here at Bay, in the Mathematics Division and all the rest who I have not yet met, would voluntarily live there in Math World. These delightful teachers and tutors are kindly interpreters in an inexplicable place as strange to me as any alternate reality. A weird sort of a land where the inhabitants might eat dragons and the sky has green and orange polka dots. These Bay College math people stand tall and they are not afraid!

At the end of it all, I will only shake my head; “Be careful,” I will whisper to these heroes, and bring in a big pan of brownies to thank them for gently dragging and prodding me through. It will sustain them as the next semester’s non-math people make their way to the classrooms...

And to the ghost of Plato and Socrates, and the noble Arabic scholars who invented the solving of algebraic equations for unknown variables, I have a special message. I wish to rise up on behalf of all us beleaguered, confused, tormented right-brainers who must suck it up and learn just enough college algebra to snatch our diplomas; I will stand and defiantly cry out to their spirits:

“Kiss our ‘X’s!”



**Alison Ann Springle
Bucks County Community College
Newtown Campus
Newtown, Pennsylvania**

Holiday Wish:

Let me see a winter
Without
The warm comforter over my eyes;
I know the lack of shelter is my own fault,
I walk past the newspaper beds in the city
Towards the department store
And feel in my gut

A day's meal:

A pack of frozen skittles that ache and chip uninsured teeth,
Half a hotdog from a trash can on the corner of Seventeenth and something
Shoved into a hungry mouth with
Dirty, dirty, dirty hands and nails —
I wash it down with cashmere sweaters
smelling of expensive perfumes.

I read about a homeless man who had died,
His home in some woods in Bucks County was decorated for the holidays:
Pieces of tinsel placed on the skinny arms of young bald maples and a half eaten
package of
stale Oreos. This was years ago —
Well forgotten, lost under a pile of clothes
and electronics
and the luxury of
Homework and
Paid work
And good fortune
Taken for granted.



Kaitlin Williams
College of the Desert
Palm Desert, California

BACK ALLEYS

In the back alleys, the temperature is dropped by ten degrees,
the excess moisture drips from rooftops,
trickles down the rotting outer walls
to form the putrid puddles you splash through.

In back alleys, the dumpsters are open and overflowing
and everything is covered in a film of oily dirt and dust,
and it coats your lungs, the chambers around your heart.

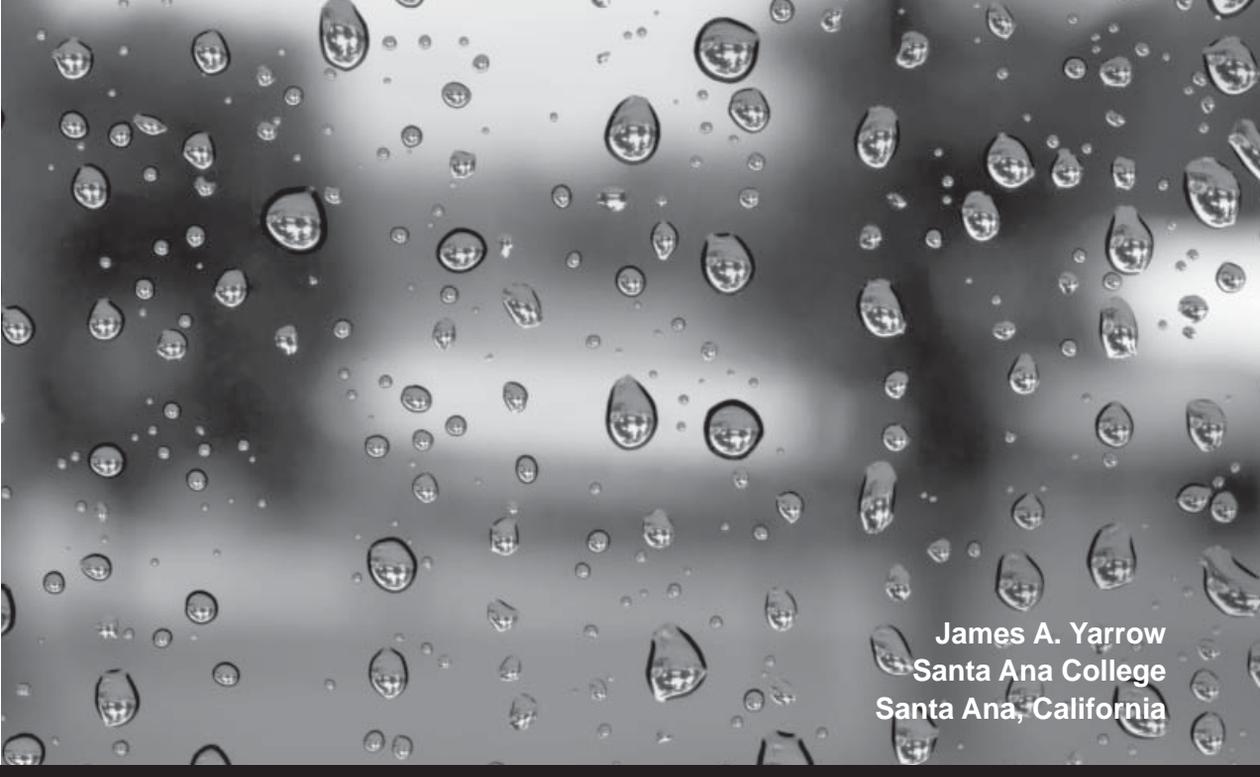
Back here, the asphalt is slick and wet
and the dead-bolted back doors are
decaying, splintering at the edges.

Shadows flit across the ground
in scattered fragments and ghostly remnants
of footprints and cigarettes litter the space around your feet.
Milky moonlight streaks the pavement and your bright eyes
are washed out in black and grey, colorless, erased by the dark.

City sounds ring out, forgotten, and your breath spills out
of your mouth in clouds of white as he pulls you closer.

In back alleys, his eyes are tethered to you, and his lips
gravitate sideways to yours in misguided feverish ferocity.

Back here, in the dark, your words are phantasmal sighs
that escape through your chattering teeth
and dissolve into nothing. Nothing.



James A. Yarrow
Santa Ana College
Santa Ana, California

for a rainy day

waterways
work themselves
in rivulets

ebbing
through grass
and sidewalks

freshness
bathes the air
refreshes

coursing
down windowpanes
thru gutterways

feelings
old, decrepit
wasted hours

are washed
cleaned up
refreshed

i'm bathing
washing out
inside.



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1625 Eastover Drive
Jackson, MS 39211
601.984.3504
www.ptk.org

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