

# Illuminations

Volume 10 | 2009





# Illuminations

A magazine of creative expression  
by students, faculty,  
and staff at  
Southeast Community College

**Volume 10**

*Sigmund Freud*

**Southeast community college**

2009

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*Illuminations* publishes creative prose, poetry, and visual art, as well as academic and literary writing. We encourage submissions from across the disciplines. Our mission is to feature outstanding artistic works with a diversity of voices, styles, and subjects meaningful to the SCC community. *Illuminations* is further evidence that critical thinking, creativity, and expression are valued at Southeast Community College.

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# Land of My Fathers

Robert Branting • Academic Transfer

West of Seward, Nebraska, is really where it starts—not merely a change of geography, but of culture and spirit. Some may argue it resides on the median of the Missouri River arriving into Omaha, but it doesn't.

My Nebraska exists from the eastern banks to Panorama Point southwest of Kimball from the Niobrara to the Republican. My plains, though, the prairie beyond the eastern rolling hills, have always been a sort of promised land, the land of my fathers.

When I was young, my family ventured to places far away from the plains' borderlands in Lincoln to the Great Smokey Mountains, a place of great beauty and expansive views, and the lands of plantations and bayous. Lastly, they ventured across the plains into the Rockies, but the heart, the soul, remained in Nebraska.

On the eastern border, it was easy to quickly become mesmerized by the vastness of the western horizon. It was a mysterious land worth exploring and understanding, where the sun set at night and the morning glow stirred up a curious haze on certain days. I had learned about the mythical West through stories of cattle drives and gold miners, of Pecos Bill and "Wild" Bill Hickok, much through the support of my parents.

My father descended from a line that settled the lands below and above the Platte Valley northeast of Grand Island. From Sweden, my father's descendents departed Europe for a better chance at life, and they found it in Nebraska amongst the rows of corn and wheat.

I remember bright Saturday mornings when blue skies blanketed the green land. The V-8 engine of the van roared as it crossed the boundary towards York and then north to my father's home.

They were the days of early inspiration, of a mind ready to be molded to the ideals of the Western culture. In many cases, I truly learned about the outdoor world there: how to catch a catfish, how to hunt, to swim, to make camp; I learned how to live in the rural West.

ose days continued until an outdoor paradise of lakes and beaches, of rooted cottonwoods speaking in the breeze, were shut away and literally dynamited. What survived were subtle childhood memories, but those wonderful Saturday morning drives soon ended.

In sixth grade, a long adventure was known deeper into the plains. Along the Platte, the van roared once more into the darkest of night. Severe thunderstorms flashed constant lightning across the interstate, and rain pelted our roof. We emerged through that night in North Platte with lightning still dancing across the eastern horizon. The puddles left behind soon brightened with the lights of that city and the stars above. We continued to Colorado the next morning, but not before feeling the joy and warmth of a crystal blue morning. I can never forget the dew upon the grass and the blue northern horizon there for the rest of my days.

rough the ensuing years, I began to dream of a Western life—perhaps North Platte, perhaps Kearney. My eyes found solace at my former elementary school where it appeared that those gates into heaven stood on the horizon. The tall lights lining the Northwest 48th Street interchange in Lincoln were on the last exit west on I-80. From there on, the path led into the high plains eventually. Soon enough, development blocked my sight, and there the horizon stood, made of brick.

It wouldn't be a stretch to figure the question would be, "Why?" What exists in Nebraska to remain? What beauty can be found on the desolate plains?

ose are questions that are difficult to answer. Perhaps it is the mystique of the western plains of Nebraska where the land is wide open allowing largely unobstructed views from horizon to horizon, although its waves of Sand Hills and ranges of blues and rock formations bring about romantic ideals of the Old West as well.

The peoples of the West (although political boundary seems too little along the Great Plains) are friendly and ready to help their neighbors. But they are toughened to the conditions as well,

knowing full well the calluses of hard work. They are among the islands of the plains to be found where the tall elevators and water towers stand, but also the Quonset and barn. The people of the plains define the word “community,” and while miles apart, they know their neighbors.

Most of all, they had captured my most wonderful memories of family and had spurred bright visions of the future—ideals that would extend beyond middle school.

While the prairie called, the city absorbed with more intensity. With campus clubs and urban atmosphere in high school, I felt like a stranger. There were no rural clubs like FFA or 4-H, only an ecology club, and while their mission was environmentalism, I quickly fell out.

Eyes continually lingered west to the lands that had captured my imagination. While classmates dreamed of something more in Kansas City, Chicago, or New York, I dreamed of Ogallala, Aurora, and Kearney. Into college, however, it appeared the West would be left behind. My love was destined for New York, and so I followed, exploring the land for a future on the east coast.

There I only found apathetic faces and concrete—the blight of industrial slums, but also the blight of suburbia, a foul taste in its water and air, a horizon blocked by hills and contained from the east by an ocean. I quickly became homesick, as the plains were continually in my heart.

In the planning for years, a solo venture into the very heart of Nebraska occurred after I returned. My old car, burdened with

less lonely to know one was consumed totally in the heart of the Great Plains. ere the tent was pitched, and among the tall pines and grasses, I stoked the fire in the decaying daylight. I had wondered what would happen if I became injured or struck by a rattler, but those thoughts disappeared with the orange glow of the sun on an active windmill nearby. e stars soon appeared, and while I dozed, a small companion joined me; a small lizard curled up outside of the tent attracted by my body heat.

Morning brought the small coupe racing over the fine sand of the barren yet majestic hills as I struggled to keep free of sink-holes. e hazy morning had brought out the greens of the hills and the curiosity of two pronghorn antelope—quite a sight.

e car coasted along tall Irish hills doused in the beautiful morning light. Upon the plains around Alliance, the car finally emerged and ventured north into the Pine Ridge region. Near Chadron, I hiked along the buttes and looked back upon the escarpment, attracting the interest of a family of mountain goats.

Soon the road opened into a vast plain, no, an ocean, of short prairie grass sided so often by tall buttes in the far northwest of Nebraska. I set foot in the desolate yet lovely Oglala National



out on his own. A significant part, if not most, of my whole outlook on life can be contributed to him. But, too, the memories of western Nebraska bring about a hope of a permanent return there.

The state of Nebraska, the Great Plains, is my home and will be for the rest of my days. There have simply been too many friends made, too many prairie lands visited and cherished. W

# Headdress



## My Daughter

I couldn't get enough—  
your smell, your touch,  
those eyes, emerald drops of dew,  
that hair, all curls aglow with fire  
around such ivory, soft petals.  
I knew when I met you  
I couldn't get enough—  
your smile, your laugh,  
such tiny fingers 'n toes.  
You, such a beauty to behold,  
a little fairy princess.  
I couldn't get enough  
of the big hugs, little kisses,  
such determination your brow;  
I didn't know then how much I could love  
'til now.



# Cara's Swing



## An Abrupt Awakening

Sarah Elizabeth Reddy • Academic Transfer

He held out his hand to me, aged and experienced, a hand that had beheld the broad spectrum of existence—the helpless newborns in delivery rooms to the rifles hot with the smell of gun powder. Exposed but not vulnerable, it held still in the air as though suspended by piano wire, astounding this skeptical audience of one. Sixty years his junior, I shook, I hesitated, a child behind a transparent trouser. I took my grandfather's hand and found myself surprised with the warmth and strength that emanated. He brought me closer, put one hand on my side, and arranged his fingers with mine. His dream was over to a fine start.

For the first time, I looked into his face—his eyes a dewy, periwinkle gaze that sparkled as if lit from behind, under folds of wrinkles and laugh-lines from jokes long since forgotten. He stepped left. I followed gracefully. He was slow but precise, as if bones had never been broken, muscles had never ached, and body had never shaken as it truly had during cold nights kept company only by the sound of artillery in the distance.

Under our feet were honey-stained floors. Colossal mirrors lined every wall, but my reflection was nowhere to be found. The grandiose piano, which in any other room would have earned its name,

eyes that matched mine, save the depth of wisdom. In his eyes was not sadness, but there was a moist tear threatening to fall, catching the moonlight, foreshadowing the importance of what was to come next. Leaning in closely, I could feel his warm breath, forever tobacco-flavored, on my cheek. Tucking the opaque white lily behind my ear and brushing fallen locks of hair magically back to their natural condition of plain understatement, he whispered, "Believe nothing you hear and only half of what you see." His tear departed and rolled slowly down his cheek and landed with a tiny splash onto the veil which neither cushioned its precious fall nor absorbed it.

A witness to the impact, I saw the veil turn bleak, barren, an absence of color, emotion, and meaning. No longer crisp, but ripe, rotten, a compost pile at my feet. Shocked, I lunged for his hands, and upon reaching them, my shock grew to horror. Warm, strong hands were replaced by cold, slimy fingers, sweaty palms, and softness not comforting, but alarmingly suspicious.

With a sudden craning of my neck, I beheld an entirely different man. My eyes were wide, overwhelmed with the task of rebuilding this new reality suddenly at hand. My stare was not met with compassionate blue-grey eyes but with muddy brown criticism. Deep wrinkles were traded for sunken cheekbones. He had been replaced. A crease deepened on the side of his mouth fashioning a malicious smile upon taut skin.

ese new hands slithered down my sides to my hips, groping my curves; I felt my skin under his tentacles begin to stick to the fabric that divided us. *Oh, why couldn't I have allowed the dress-maker another layer?* Pulling me closer, I was crushed against his boutonniere engulfed by taunting white lilies. As if showboating for the mirrored reflections, my fiancé brought his hand near my neck. Raising both my chin and my eyes, he leaned in closely and seemed to mouth the words "I love you," but suddenly I could not believe anything I heard.

# Old People

Max Reis • Custodian

Hey,  
    e only thing  
We've got on you  
Is TIME.  
Sometimes that's a lot.  
But  
Most of the time  
It shows.  
Just  
Look at my face.

# Pride and Joy

Mary Kerns • Academic Transfer

Once upon a time, there was a car. It was a shiny red car—“Tornado Red,” to be exact. The car had four doors, three rows of seating, four-wheel drive capability, all the toys you could ever want, and that “new car” smell. The interior was a soft, gray fabric that said, “Don’t even think of bringing a cup of coffee in here, or any other beverage or food choice, for that matter.” This car screamed, “BUY ME. I CAN GO ANYWHERE. I CAN HAUL ANYTHING.”

Once upon a time, there was a girl. She was a young girl with no attachments or commitments of any kind. The girl saw the car, and she said, “It is good.” She signed the papers and drove away, vowing to be a good steward of her new charge. Every week, she faithfully vacuumed and washed her pride and joy. She did research on which soap and wax was the best to protect the fine red finish. She bought a special brush to clean the wheels and even a power buffer to get the best shine. She checked tire pressure and oil weekly and always scheduled maintenance appointments on time. This car never had one of those ridiculous little garbage bags hanging from the cigarette lighter because there was never any garbage LEFT in this car. And, as for the windows and mirrors, totally smudge-free, thank you very much. It was her pride and joy. That was then.

This is now—one marriage, three children, one dog, one cat, and one guinea pig later. Today, it looks more like a storeroom than a car. Filled with remnants and reminders, it is a testament to a life containing too much hustle and bustle, showing no promise of change anytime soon. In the very back are extra blankets for those cold mornings when we are leaving the house before sunrise, a small box with books and a few toys to keep the little ones occupied, and a box with individually-wrapped snacks for the kids to have during the end-of-the-day commute to pick everyone up from their different locations. If that weren’t enough, I also have various book bags, a gym bag complete with smelly gym clothes,

and a case of bottled water to rid me of all excuses for not drinking enough.

The “Tornado Red” color has been modified to “Mud Brown/Road Salt White.” The wheels that once shone silver now are the same color as the tires. My nice gray dashboard has about an inch of dust on it, and my plush interior has more than one coffee stain from when my travel mug got bumped by happy little feet while climbing into their seats. That power button I bought collects dust as I write this. As for those smudge-free windows: a thing of the past. It no longer has that “new car” smell unless that particular smell has been renamed “McDonald’s French Fries,” and as long as the tires LOOK like they have air in them and my oil light fails to illuminate, I say, “It is good.” Vacuuming and washing have become an annual event, accompanied by much fanfare. It involves setting up bleachers, selling tickets, hiring clowns, dispensing hot dogs and cotton candy and, of course, printing up novelty clothing (i.e., “My parents went to the Kerns’ car cleaning, and all I got was this lousy t-shirt”).

As for that garbage bag I swore I would never have—I’ve got one now. I have bad memories of these garbage bags. As the youngest child in my family, I invariably got stuck in the middle of the front bench seat (this was many moons ago when it was still acceptable for a child to ride in the front seat, mind you). Whenever we would drive over the bumpy country roads to Grandma’s house, that bag was always slapping against my knee and, occasionally, spewing out a chunk of used Kleenex or something worse. Then I would hear those dreaded words, “Would you pick that up, please?” But I digress.

If you have no aversion to stale, and possibly fuzzy, food, I’m sure you could find a complete meal in my car. Here’s the obvious: a small bag of crackers that was dropped on the back seat floor and then trampled during a mass exodus to UTcu mas my knee

the three booster seats, I'm sure you'll hit the jackpot and find a half-eaten chicken nugget or an inflexible gummy bear. Consider it sort of like a treasure hunt.

I am plagued with visions that one day we will open the car door only to discover that a herd of wild mice has taken it over and claimed it as their kingdom. I envision tiny little huts all around and their "mouse nation" flag suction-cupped to the dashboard, and next to it, their "mouse king" sitting on his throne, adorned in his mouse king robe. A jeweled crown sits atop his little mouse head and a scepter in his little mouse hand. The other mice are bringing him their offerings—the largest of the crumbs—while he surveys his conquest. But I digress once again.

Sometimes as I sit in my car and look over the interior, I question how things got to this point: not just a messy car but a messy life. Why am I in this position of working, going to school, and trying to maintain a home? Then I look over at the section of floor next to my seat and see a small pair of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle nun-chucks. I quickly remember my purpose. Nourishing

After returning the backhoe I had rented and having the roll-over dumpster picked up, I had an epiphany: I really wish my car's interior was completely adorned with rubber; that way, I could just hose it out and be done.... I'm just kidding. Here's the true epiphany in all of its glory: With renewed eyes, I look upon my car now. Instead of a clutter of toys, I see proof of the children that I always wanted. Instead of ragged book bags, I see the luxury of being able to further my education. Food crumbs remind me that we are fortunate enough to have food. And as for the smudged windows: remnants of a happy little child that likes to tap on the window to say "Hi" to me while I'm putting gas in the car. Smudged mirrors: evidence that there is always time for a game of adjusting the mirror and playing "I spy Harrison, I spy Olivia, I spy Chandler" before dropping each one off at their destination.

Nowadays, as I walk my children up to the school building and watch them walk in, I realize the object that I once called my "pride and joy" has been replaced. My true "pride and joy" now consists of three parts: Olivia, Harrison, and Chandler—a writer,



**Oh, Boy**

# All A Day

Lydia Omondi • Surgical Technology

When did they ever come,  
When ever, all ever, an engine sound  
Wheels then ever, an engine a way drive in sound  
Early then ever, birds come in sound

Street across, I ever see them come  
Treat of glimpse, I ever held as they come  
Shoving all ever, dirt as the sound come  
Chattering all ever, birds theirs come a sound

Begging all ever, sun to sky and wind  
Powering all ever, chills to sun, sky, and wind  
Pouring all ever, rills, n chills speed and wind

Street all ever, pierced by cars speeding  
Streets all ever, no words or sound voicing, Weet ah j -0.005 TWheet e ah j

All a day ever, Provident and I to school  
All a day ever, parting us care n school  
Sleeping in rides ever, all a day to care  
Shivering in wait, all a day ever to school

Mama got no umbrella and it's raining  
Cars got to race, all a day speeding  
Mama got a shiver in wait, all a day ever ridding  
Sunny, windy, chilly, competing all a day ever shouting

I got a cling and clung, all a day ever breast feeding  
Enveloped warm, in bath and blanket all a day is gone  
Provident got asleep, mama got a sturdy, all a day is gone  
Gone, gone, gone ever, all a day ever is gone

# Pride



# Devocracy

try's bearing would require more of a commitment than popping open the tab of a can of Milwaukee's Best. Sacrifice, devotion, dedication—that and fifty cents—will buy you a cup of coffee in this country. It would be to my great satisfaction if this nation were to adopt a more selective and concrete foundation for doling out authority than the arbitrary age of 18. Monarchy is the divine right of one man to rule. Now I ask you, if the right of one man makes no sense, than why would the right of everyman make sense?

Every time we hold an election, the figures make it apparent that the ballot is taken for granted and undervalued by many, if not most. I therefore propose that to earn a vote in this nation, an individual must first complete a tour of national service, either military or civil. A tour of national service would separate those who truly value the astounding gift of governance from those who would rather not be bothered with the chore of self-determination. All who would participate in this necessary demonstration of commitment would receive their franchise upon completion and be fully entitled to make their voices heard in the halls of our nation.

I have taken the liberty of christening this new form of government "Devocracy," from the Latin "devoceo," which means to sacrifice or devote. In place of a government of the people, a government of the devoted. I can image no greater virtue than a willingness to place the whole above the self. Preserving community and country with the sweat and blood of a few years' time as a demonstration to the rest of this nation that yes, this individual, this person, this citizen, has proven he or she is ready to take responsibility for the group as a whole. Democracy, unfortunately, does not allow for the worst in people; it operates under the assumption that those who are casting their ballots are truly acting with the nation's best at heart. Democracy is not built for human inadequacy and selfishness. It is, most ironically, a perfect system for a perfect people. Lincoln states in the Gettysburg Address that "all men are created equal." Most unluckily, this has never been the case.

Devocracy, on the other hand, not only makes all allowances for the imperfections of the human soul, it relies on them.

Devocracy would be built on the very principle that those who are too selfish or nearsighted to see the value of putting the whole before the individual would remove themselves from a voting population as they would not perceive the worth of obtaining a franchise. But the path of national service does not simply weed out the more undesirable among us; it also facilitates the very best in us to step forward, past the grey rain curtain of our shortcomings, and burgeon with the opportunity to demonstrate our desire to serve, our ability to perform, and our courage to act. Would it not be better to require that before one has a voice directing the course of this country, one must have a hand in maintaining it?

Some would argue that taxes are the price we pay for our vote.

They are wrong. Taxes are the price we pay for the fire department to show up when we call, for the roads we drive on every day, and for the assurance that the water that flows from our faucets and into our children's drinking glasses is safe and clean. Taxes require resources from us and return resources many times over; they are the investment we make into this country's infrastructure, which we use every day. Franchise, on the other hand, allows us to direct this nation; shouldn't this nation first be allowed to direct us?

Implementation would seem the greatest challenge in assuring national service as a path to full citizenship. It would shake the very foundations of the world we have built, opening up the possibility that the all-great idea of Democracy may not truly be the best form of rule. The idea is no doubt an uncomfortable one to most people, yet that does not prove that it is incorrect. And if tradition and antiquated paradigms of thought are all that stand in the way of a government of the devoted, then let's tear down the walls of the past so we may clear the path for the future. Simply because we have always performed a task in a certain manner is no great assurance that we have been wise about our course of action. If we do not try to improve upon the past, then we are nothing but braggarts and hypocrites, undeserving of the great legacy we have inherited in this nation.

National service would instill in those who are to plot our course the very virtues most necessary in guiding a nation. Aristotle spoke of philosopher kings; I come to you with philosopher servants. Winston Churchill stated that, "Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those others that have been tried." I would argue Devocracy is a model worth a test drive.



# Ode to Red Toenails

## Chesney Christine



# Baby Girl

He lit up and took a deep drag. “You know I love you, don’t you?”  
“You love me, but you won’t marry me?”

“Here’s that word again.”

“Yep, there it is.”

“Kate!” Lilly yelled from the entrance. “What are you doing?”

“I’m coming. I needed a smoke.”

“I thought you quit.”

“I did.”

Kate flicked her cigarette into the darkness and started walking back inside.

“Kate.” Jake held out her lighter. “You forgot this.”

She kept walking. “Keep it.”

“That went well,” he said to himself as he pulled a note out of his pocket from the day they met, which he had come across the week before. He was going to show the note to her thinking they would have a good laugh. It was the first day of the winter semester at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln and one of the coldest days on record. Jake’s car would barely start. His route to campus was littered with accidents and congestion. By the time he arrived, class had begun. When he entered the lecture hall, the door made a loud bang causing the attention of the entire class to focus on him. The annoyed professor took a long sigh in the middle of his sentence. “Here’s a seat right here,” he said as he pointed to a seat in the first row.

“Thanks,” Jake mumbled as he lowered his head and quickly hustled to the seat. He set down his bag on the floor and fit his heavy jacket on the back of the chair. When the woman beside him looked up and smiled, he paused for a moment and smiled back. She had an enormous scar from the left edge of her mouth

She scribbled, *You should get a watch.*

He chuckled. *I thought I would save a few seconds by leaving it o .*

When the class finally ended, he anxiously turned to her.

“Would you like to grab a co ee in the Union?”

She began to button her coat. “You sure move fast for someone with no concept of time.”

“I’ll consider that an unenthusiastic yes.”

ey walked together out of Burnett Hall into the frigid January cold towards the Student Union.

Jake yelled over the wind. “So where did you go to high school?”

“What?”

He moved in close so their shoulders were touching and yelled loud enough to penetrate her hood through the wind. “Where did you go to high school?” He positioned his ear, waiting for a response.

She yelled back. “Crete High!”

“No way! I went to Beatrice. We played you in sports.”

“I didn’t play any sports!”

“Neither did I!”

ey speed-walked the rest of the way to the Union and hurried inside.

Jake pulled o his gloves and slid them into his coat pocket.

“Ah, now for some delicious co ee....”

“I don’t drink co ee.”

Jake laughed. “What?”

“Remember, I unenthusiastically agreed to come with you. I never said I’d have a co ee.”

He put his coat on the back of a chair in front of the co ee joint and sat down. “Well, that’s a relief because I don’t drink coffee either.”

She sat down across from him. “You asked me out for co ee, and you don’t even drink it yourself?”

“Well, I would’ve, you know, if you had.”

“Well, it seems we have two things in common. We don’t play sports or drink co ee. Okay, first things first, you’re probably wondering about the scar.”

“What scar?”

“Cute. I find it’s better just to get the awkwardness out of the way rather than having people assume the worst. I was attacked by a dog when I was ten. That’s the whole story, twenty-eight stitches and a scar for the rest of my life.”

“That’s horrible.”

bright opening was surrounded by four jewelry stores. The light was hypnotizing as it danced over the stones in the jewelry cases.

Children lined up in every direction impatiently waiting for a chance to go round and round on the colorful horses. Parents circled the carousel with cameras, waving and taking pictures. He started to think about how many of those children came from broken homes. He wondered how many happily waving fathers, like his, would eventually walk out on their families. How many of the smiling parents had cheated on their spouses?

An old woman pushing an infant in a stroller and trying to contain the excitement of a little girl and boy eased down next to Jake in an empty seat.

“Well, now you kids go on along to the ride. Grandma will be right here.”

“Come on the carousel with us, Grandma,” the children begged.

“Oh my, Grandma’s too old for childhood adventures. I’ll be right here. It’s time for your little sister to get some milk anyway.” She picked up the child wrapped in a yellow polka-dot blanket as the girl and boy ran over to the carousel. She turned to Jake. “Aren’t children delightful?”

“They sure are.”

“Do you have any children of your own?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Well, you have grandparents, don’t you?”

“Yeah.”

“Well then, what are you waiting for? You don’t want your grandparents to be disappointed, do you?”

Jake laughed thinking it was a joke, but the woman didn’t laugh.

“After Arnold died—he was my husband, God rest his soul—





## That's My Grandma!



## **Memory of Civil War in Sudan and the Death of My Brother**

In 1983, a civil war broke out in Sudan when southern Sudanese rebels took up arms against the ruling government in northern Sudan. Because of civil war, many people fled away

in a very cunning way. Their parents had been misled by the rebels' leader. The rebels' leader was John Garang. He made a very wicked plan and deceived the parents. He claimed he needed the children to go to very special schools in a certain part of east Africa. To win the parents' minds and collect numerous children from them, John Garang used educational philosophy because he knew that everyone believes that education is much better for everyone's future. Because educational philosophy convinced the parents' minds, they finally surrendered their kids to John Garang. Garang's plan to collect children from their parents to let them join the war was very, very deceptive. Garang was totally false.

There were no children taken to special schools somewhere else in east Africa, as Garang had said.

When Garang collected many children from different places in southern Sudan, he stationed them in very remote areas where the parents did not even have access to meet their children. Keeping children away from their parents or in the confinement camps, Garang trained them for his own. His idea was to send them to war after they were fully grown. He named them the Red Army. Desperately, my brother had joined the Lost Boys through dirty tricks.

When I was in Africa, I did not even know the name Lost Boys. I began hearing the name Lost Boys when they first arrived in the United States. The name Lost Boys was created when those kids were resettled in the United States. The only name I knew when I was in Africa was the Red Army.

expectations of bad or good news.

First of all, I did not know the newcomer. “Someone told me there was a guy who came from where your brother had been,” someone said.

“Let’s go, and I will ask him about my brother,” I said. I headed to ask the newcomer for my brother, and when I arrived where he was, I sat down beside him and waited as he finished talking with someone. When he finished talking, I began asking him about my brother. My first question to him was, “Do you know my brother?”

He asked me in return, “What is the name of your brother?”  
I said, “My brother’s name is Tut.”

He answered, “I know Tut, but he was killed in the very heavy fighting in August 1994.”

Terribly, my mind was about to explode with the bad news of what happened to my beloved brother.

## Stepping into the Unknown



## One Block

*is story was written about the most profound day in my life when the consequences of my addiction finally caught up with me. is event will forever be the most vivid of my memories. is is what keeps me clean. My story isn't rare; the fact that I am here now—telling it—is.*

I knew it was time to leave Joe's apartment when he began to nod off. I knew he was out, or if he had anything, he was saving it for later. His apartment was on the grounds of the Norfolk Regional Center in an apartment complex named Crown Point. It was converted from an old mental ward. Crown Point was a three-story brick building containing many one-room efficiency apartments—not to say the people living there now were any saner than the former tenants. The only difference I could detect was their willingness to live in complete insanity, having the power to leave, but refusing to do so. I couldn't say I was any better than any of those that lived there at the time. I was also embroiled in the insane lifestyle of those with a sickness that couldn't be cured. The sun had just begun to shine through the slatted, dusty blinds of Joe's apartment when I came to the realization—the quicker I walked among the day people to reach my destination, the quicker I would be able to hide from them. I was reluctant to leave and tired of having to feed some voice inside of myself that wanted the one thing I didn't. I was emotionally numb to the fact I was slowly

on the institutional-green linoleum counter. I didn't want anyone to take the few things I actually owned. I showered, put on my clean clothes, slung my backpack on, and placed the stolen Dollar General sunglasses on my face. I walked out of the former insane-

of some business. They were junk collectors and sold their useless wares to knick-knack collectors and the occasional uneducated antique hunters. In their backyard, they had a late 1970's wood-paneled station-wagon. It didn't run. It was used to store some of their less precious items. They allowed me to keep some of my clothing and other personal items there since I had no place to live anymore. Next to this car was a large, circular trampoline that looked across two backyards and more importantly, had a direct view of Mark's house, the place I wanted to go.

Mark's house could only be considered a house in the crudest sense of the word. It was a house on the outside. Inside, it was completely gutted without electricity and water. Mark's many ambitious home repair projects never seemed to reach completion before a new one was started. Mark had a large, orange extension cord running between his house and the neighbor's house he hijacked electricity from. If this cord was plugged in, I knew he was home.

I decided I would stop and make sure my possessions were still intact, knowing also I would be able to look at Mark's house before stopping by and would be able to see who was there and, more importantly, who was watching him. Mark was temperamental about people not checking to see what was going on before they stopped by. He knew his house was on the radar, and he attempted to take precautions at first. He set up certain rules for those wanting to purchase his precious commodity. Only certain hours of operation were allowable in the beginning. Now anyone could arrive at any hour and leave with whatever they were holding, something that never would have occurred in Mark's more cautious days. As he became more advanced in his sickness, he began to take more risks.

Mark prided himself on being "certifiable"—that is, he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. He took his medication for a while, and then he medicated himself with lab-cooked powders and alcoholic elixirs. He was muscle-bound, long-haired, and missing a couple of teeth. His many tattoos were mainly attained from brief stints of time he had done in the past without



regret. I knew Mark had probably been up for days, blowing glass and dispersing medicines without prescriptions. I knew not checking out the scene before entering his “compound” would be an upsetting mistake I would not be able to talk myself out of.

While I was standing on the trampoline in Rud10( 0 “)2bkinya10(e d,0( I k5( )] cnpounlet w tramph5( )]btat-1b10(escrde)-10(pou inispe7tina)5(ns.) hout pr( ) an ub di(ns.)eis10(kinar) disg5(ampobb misa)1 iri3(rithoutsa)b dianna R



bony wrists. I realized I didn't have to play the game anymore. I knew I would have somewhere to sleep and three meals a day. I was frightened, and at the same time, I knew I was secure, and the insanity would soon be behind me. I had put up the noble fight

## Destination

### Business Administration/Marketing

Surrounded by windows on all sides,  
I sit enclosed from the dust and noise—  
mesmerized by the constant motion  
of Eucs, loaders, and trucks.  
Mountains of rock removed from underground  
brought up into the light of day,  
to be separated by what minerals lie within,  
their destination now known.  
Up the hill in the Euc  
to be crushed and washed  
like fine driven snow  
or left untouched, large and whole.  
Down the hill the rocks go  
now a finished product;  
scooped and shoveled higher and higher  
dumped in piles, assigned a number.  
Loaders scoop from the piles  
raising the shovel way up high to  
dump amidst a cloud of dust  
into the waiting emptiness of a truck.  
Carefully aligning wheels on each side  
across my narrow scale, the truck arrives.  
Sitting still while the numbers roll,  
Hoping they don't go too high.

Waiting for me inside the glass to ask,  
Truck name? Truck number?  
Where are you going?  
What do you have?  
Patiently they sit  
Awaiting three words  
to be echoed through the speaker—  
Ok, you're good.  
O they go to their new destination,  
a road, a river, a driveway to create.  
Near or far they may travel,  
their new destination known.

## My Friend



## Business Administration

My dad was a go-to kind-a guy. You know the one. He was the guy who saw things from a different perspective—the one who could find the solution to a problem you had been fretting over for hours. He was the kind of guy who made friends at the drop of a hat. So infectious was the twinkle in his eye and the grin that looked like the cat's that had swallowed the canary, people were instantly attracted to him. He stood about 5'9, a wiry, 160 pounds dripping wet. At times throughout his life, he sported a bushy handlebar mustache that only added to his roguishness. He would twirl the ends into tight little coils that looked like a smile over his upper lip. Over the years when we would go out for dinner, it wasn't uncommon for people to stop by our table to reminisce with Dad about this job or that. It seemed to me that everywhere we went there was someone who knew him. And yet, there was a lot about my father that was a mystery to my sister, brother, and me.

If you're lucky, when the time is right, your parents begin telling you the stories of their life. They open up easily once the threat of setting a bad example for their kids is past. In my father's case, it wasn't until after my mother had passed away that we began spending more time together. He would finally answer some of the questions I had about his life. I would go to his house after work, and we would talk about his life as we sat around the dining room table, playing gin rummy to pass the time.

He was born in 1913 on the family homestead near Merna, Nebraska. He recounted the early days of farming when they used mule teams instead of tractors. Each and every mule had a name and distinct personality. Jack, the lead mule, would raise his head up at high noon and bray, signaling to men and mules alike that it was dinner time. All work would cease at that time and wouldn't

empty road on the edge of town. I looked at him in hesitation as he slid out of the driver's seat. I couldn't believe he was letting me drive. My only experience to that point had been on the simulators in class. I plastered us to the seatbacks as I shot away from the curb, only to nearly put the both of us through the windshield as I slammed on the brakes in surprise. Once we could look back and laugh, I asked where he learned to drive.

"I was eight years old the first time I drove. One on my chores as a kid was taking lunch out to the hands in the field. Normally, I would load everything up in the wagon or on the back of my pony. One day, I decided I was old enough to drive instead," he said with that twinkle. "I convinced my older sister, Elma, into helping me crank-start Granddad's Model T farm truck. With Elma riding shotgun, I strained to see over the steering wheel as I followed the fence rows down to the crew. I slid to a stop with both feet on the brakes and hopped out, proud as a peacock. Granddad and Dad never said a word about our feat of daring-do. Their only reaction was a chuckle as we headed back home. Neither Elma nor I knew how to put the car into reverse gear, so I drove around in circles until the truck was pointed towards home."

He told me of his first road trip with his cousin Lynn, of the excitement they felt as seventeen-year-olds on their first excursion into the wider world.

The year was 1930, one year into the Great Depression. Money was tight, and jobs were scarce. His father reluctantly agreed to let them go west on one condition. They would work their way across country by delivering a train car load of hogs to market in Seattle. From there, they could ride the rails to Long Beach, California, and visit their Uncle Tom. Tom had migrated west with the great wave of settlers at the turn of the century and had become the chief of the Long Beach Fire Department.

He spoke of his Great Aunt Sylvia, who took such a shine to him. She was a wealthy widow, whose only passion in life was playing blackjack. She would dress up in her Sunday best, and with Dad as escort, they would head for the water taxis that ferried



people out to the gambling ships, parked safely out of jurisdiction, three miles offshore.

“So how did you get home to Nebraska?” I asked

“Uncle Tom bought us a Model A. We drove it home,

her anger and resentment at being left at home to cope with the uncertainties of life.

I learned of how he had gone west to Denver and sought out his four-year-old son, who had been hidden from him, and how Dad had taken him back to the farm in Nebraska, only to have the sheriff come to retrieve him. He wouldn't see that boy again until the boy had become a man, eager to reconnect as he started a family of his own. The despair Dad felt at that time would haunt him throughout his life. He became much more guarded in his personal interactions with people. Only with my mother would he form the strong bonds of love and connectedness that we all seek in our lives.

We talked about after my folks were married. They lived in the small town of Fairfield, Nebraska. Dad partnered with my Granddad Drudik and my Uncle Ed. They made their livelihoods building houses and cabinetry for the surrounding community.

One day, as they sat in the café waiting for lunch, Dad's ears pricked up as he overheard the cook bragging about making \$1,000 a month. That kind of money was a king's ransom in 1951.

"Where can you make money like that?" Dad asked, as he was always open to new experiences.

"I don't know where the job is, but the recruiter was just in here looking for carpenters and cooks," he replied. "He was on his way east to Kearney and then to his offices at Peter Kiewit."

Dad told of his wild drive to Kearney, Nebraska, of missing the recruiter by an hour, and a final mad dash to catch him in Lincoln. After a week of hurried arrangements, Dad was flown to New Jersey for testing and evaluations. With no inkling as to what the job was, or even where they were going, Dad found himself among the two dozen men boarding a military plane, whisking out over the blue ocean, heading due north. It wasn't until many years later that he learned they had been working on the DEW line, North America's early warning defense stations that ring the North Pole.

He told me of the endlessly long, cold months they spent on the icecap, hundreds of miles north of Tulle, Greenland. Being a

clever guy, Dad managed to find a way of communicating with his family back home. The radioman would hook up with a ham radio operator in Nova Scotia who would relay a call stateside. My mother didn't have a phone back then and had to rely on friends and neighbors for contact. It would take many hours to make the multiple connections happen, only to be cut short by static or storm, and sometimes by the tears they both shed because of their longing for each other's company.

He spoke of the practical jokes the guys would play on each other to pass the long, lonely days in isolation.

"One of my first jobs in Greenland was working in the sheet metal shop. One afternoon, shortly before chow, a couple of my buddies came by to see me. They had a project they were working on and needed four strips of sheet metal, about six inches long by about two inches wide. After dutifully measuring and cutting the strips, I handed them over, thinking that was the end of it. As I turned to head over for chow, the guys grabbed me and wrestled me down onto a sheet of plywood lying on the floor. Out come the hammers and nails, and the next thing I know, they've nailed the strips around my wrists and ankles, pinning me to the plywood like a bug on a specimen card. They propped the plywood up against the wall and left for chow."

"How long did they leave you there?" I asked, giggling at the thought of him tacked up like a hide on the wall.

"Oh, just long enough to miss chow. But I got them back."

"What'd you do?"

"I waited until they were in the showers and nailed their boots to the floor. We called a truce after that."

We talked about the Royal Order of the Bluenose, an honorary degree conferred by the men who had dared to live the life of a construction worker in the harshness of the frozen north.

Dad told me of how short the summer working season was up on the icecaps, of how a sudden wind storm could turn the world into a white fishbowl, an all-encompassing sameness from horizon to horizon. All work would shut down at those times.

The only way to keep your bearings was by moving hand-over-

hand on the guide ropes strung up like lifelines from building to building. He told me of how the sun never set while they were there, and how he had to convince himself that it was time to sleep in that perpetual afternoon light.

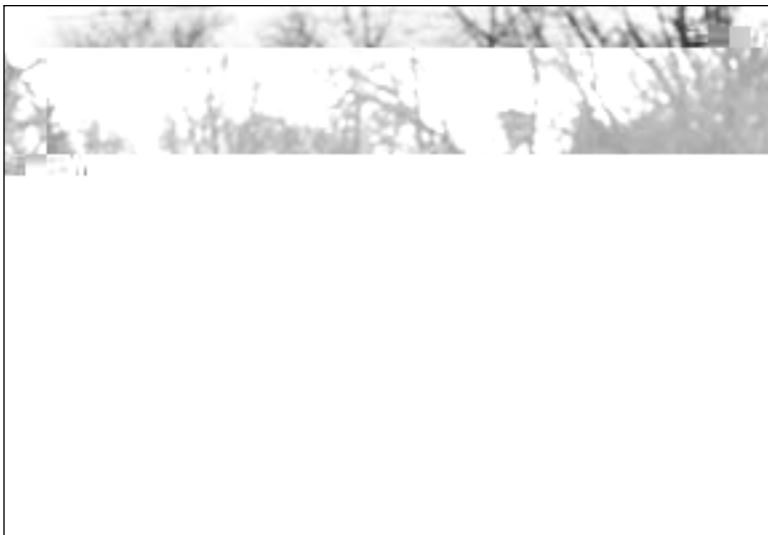
At the end of the season, the company began shipping guys home as space became available on military flights. When it got down to ten men left, management decided it would be best to winter over a five-man crew for maintenance purposes. Being the versatile guy he was, Dad was chosen to stay. He spent an even longer, colder winter on the cap.

Despite the loneliness and bone-chilling cold, he would return again the next year—that time to expand the runway at Tulle Air Force Base. He told me of working in the midst of an active base. Planes were roaring thirty feet over their heads as they came in for a landing. And once again, Dad came up with the solution to their biggest problem. How do you run cables under a runway, through fifty feet of conduit? To Dad, the answer was obvious—parachutes! He tied a miniature chute on the end of a string attached to the cables and with an air compressor blew the chutes clean through the conduit.

Dad would finish his working career with M.W. Anderson Construction. As a superintendent, he was once again the ultimate

that had shaped him, and given him that Cheshire cat's grin. I finally knew why he was so reluctant to share his feelings and why he was so well regarded by those who knew him.

## Little James Dean



## Rubber Hammer

As a toddler, I hid my beloved rubber toy hammer in my mom's oven. Later the investigation revealed that the source of the smoke that pearly through the house and insistent goo that covered the inside of the oven was my melted favorite toy. For years, this story was enjoyed by both family and close friends. I don't know why. It wasn't that interesting, though I confess I enjoyed the attention and notoriety—it helped me piece together my childhood self-image: an ornery kid with tangled hair who went around sabotaging adult machines, and who “didn't take to schooling,” as a kind person might say. Eventually, I cleaned up my act, pretty much, and these days I enjoy piecing together scraps of experiences like the smoking hammer by wielding the pen—and not the hammer.

I have never thought much of the toy hammer story as anything other than incriminating evidence of my early deviant behavior, which also included a pre-kindergarten trip to the slammer in Kearney to see where kleptomaniacs were kept—but that's another story. Recently, however, I thought about another anecdote I first heard in the mid '80s while studying journalism at Kearney State College. I was beginning to trust writing as a tool for not only thinking but for expression—and a way to engage readers. It was while I was managing the campus newspaper, *e Loper*, and imagining a writing career when I learned, quite by accident, that long ago my beloved kindergarten teacher, Mrs. B, believed that the kid who never read and sometimes stole Jodi Dietz's graham crackers would “always be better with a hammer than with a pencil.” By this time I had already taken to the habit of carrying a pen with me everywhere. Mrs. B's comment came as a painful shock of irony.

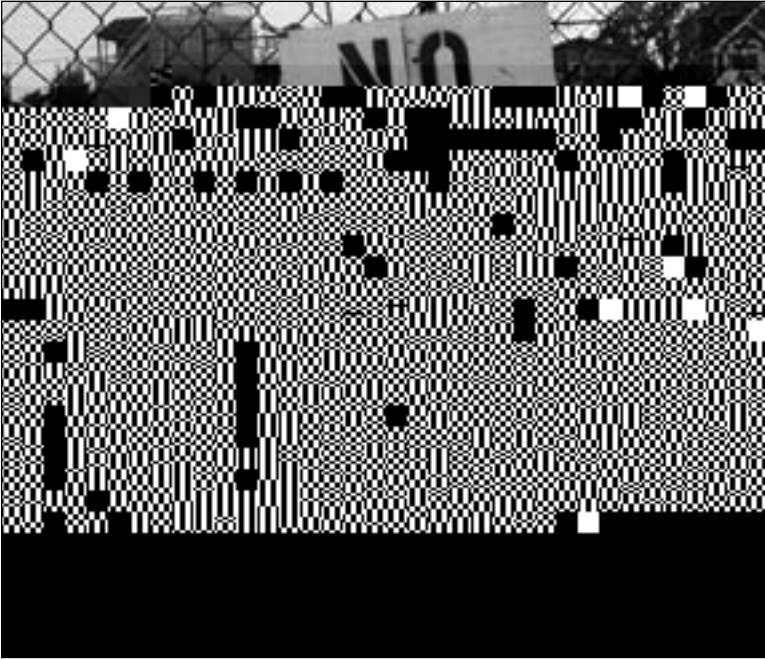
Years passed. Decades, really. And with them dozens of stories, poems, and essays that parse the experiences of a closet musician, over-protective father of three, and rumbling neighborhood jogger in need of a tummy tuck. None of the musings wending out of the life I was living involved a hammer. And then these two scraps

—the smoking hammer and Mrs. B’s prophecy—were written in a farmhouse north of San Francisco on the back of a post card. As I begin to write them alongside each other, I slowly stitch the two together with an idea. It is the idea that as a child, I was, altogether, a fairly senseless kid but prescient beyond my years. I knew somewhere and somehow that small things, like Barbies, pink tutus, rubber hammers, or football jerseys, might just need to be left in the oven at some point.

If not, they could play a role in restricting the possibilities we have for ourselves, nail us to a destination. This sounds right to me as the words I scrawl crowd onto the card. Maybe it’s partially a matter of releasing the responsibility I have for being that childish devil. But even more than this, I think the meeting of these two stories is a gift I’d just opened. The gift is permission to keep connecting the stories I’ve been given, especially these small threads of memory that can sometime be woven together to shed some light on the present.



# By the Dog of Egypt!





## **Kathie Has Left the Building!**

“You’ll come back,” asserted my Aunt Priscilla in her nasally, French-accented voice. “After all, this is where your family is.”

I smiled happily at my aunt while taking in her platinum-blond hair styled into an immaculate up-do, perfectly manicured nails painted her typical dark red, and clothes that would have been more appropriate in a corporate boardroom than at a child’s going away party. “Of course I will,” I assured her even as my entire being screamed, “NO! I am never coming back here again!”

The thought of living with my mother again dimmed my mood into a depth I’d grown used to experiencing over the six years I’d spent under her roof.

My mother was not an evil person at all, and only once did she ever raise a hand to me. She was a large woman on a petite, five-foot frame. Her nearly black hair was kept at shoulder length for ease of styling. After all, she didn’t want to have to say “no” to a date with any one of her boyfriends because it would take too long to do her hair. She owned more complete dancing outfits than could fit into her huge, walk-in closet. Each time she went to a dance competition or to a special event, she would pick a day and drag me over to help her pick out a dress for the occasion. “We’ll only be gone an hour or so. I just have to get a dress from the mall.”

Picking out a dress would then force her to buy new shoes to match since none of her two dozen or more pairs of shoes were exactly right. Once she found the perfect shoes, she’d realize a new horror. “I don’t have a purse to match these new shoes. We’ll have to go south into Springfield to find that, and we can stop at this cute little jewelry shop I know while we’re there. I need to find a new hairpin.”

When she finished, we had lost the entire day and most of the night as she purchased all of these items then added a contrasting scarf or shawl to complete the outfit. It was so late by the time she

had the shawl, the store employees had to unlock the doors to let us out.

I'd walk patiently by her side assuring her that her picks were perfect and praying to be done sooner than we normally were. I often wondered what people thought as they saw us together—my mother, obviously a woman of taste and breeding, selecting expensive items for a night on the town being followed by a little vagabond child wearing hand-me-downs from her sisters, and sometimes her brothers, that were sometimes too big, sometimes too small, and always looking worn down to the threads.

I know she cared for her children. The problem was that she cared more for her social life. She wasn't cut out to be the "nurturing mom" type. Her friends thought she was one of the kindest people they'd ever met. "I hope you realize how very lucky you are to have a mother like yours," I would hear on at least a weekly basis from one of her friends or another followed by rambling about what my amazing mother, Pauline, had done this time. Smiling and nodding at these ill-informed people became second nature to me.

"I wonder if they'd still think Mom's so great if they really knew what happened here at home," I wondered, all the while wearing a pasted-on smile convincingly. "Yeah, I know. Mom's awesome," I'd lie and quickly escape to the sanctuary of my bedroom under the pretense of homework.

I never actually did homework. My mother never paid attention to what I was doing or not doing and didn't care if it was ever finished or even what I was doing in school. Why put that much effort into a project I didn't even enjoy when there were so many other worlds to explore? Once inside my room, I'd grab whatever book was lying on the floor beside my bed that day and read until I'd arrived back in the mysterious, fantastical world that I'd grown to prefer. It was so much better than the depression of the real world. Aunt Priscilla brought me out of my thoughts by placing a light peck on first my left cheek then my right, being extra careful not to smudge her lipstick.

Breathing a soft sigh of relief, I watched my aunt wander over to huddle together with my mother and grandmother. No doubt they were discussing what a mistake I was making by moving in with my father, but I couldn't tell for certain since they were speaking in French and, to my grandmother's consternation, Mom had never taken the time to teach me the language.

My grandmother, or "Memere" as her grandchildren called her, was a woman of slightly under five feet tall (for whom the word "petite" would never fit). She was the epitome of a moral, Catholic housewife. She believed in staying home to care for her home and daughters. Her home was kept immaculately—not so much as a smudge on a window or dust on the television. She, herself, looked like the home she kept up so well. Even in her night-clothes, she always looked freshly showered and ready to jump up to make her best pork pie. She still woke up each morning at 6 a.m. to make my grandfather's lunch even though it wasn't necessary; he'd become semi-retired four years ago and was always home in time to eat lunch. That fact didn't matter in the least to my memere. "Making his lunch now means he has something to eat when he walks in the door, and he won't interrupt my afternoon show." The last part was added in a conspiratorial whisper with a wink in my direction.

I grinned at the memory of that conversation. Freshly cut pears (picked the night before from my grandfather's pear tree in the backyard), buttered toast, and hot tea had already been set out for my lady been set out for

was howling my innermost thoughts loud enough for the neighborhood to hear: "It's a nice day to... start again!"

I danced my way to the cooler in a way that only a 14-year-old girl who's escaping her old life and ready to start a new one can do and plunged my bare arm elbow-deep into the oversized aluminum tub of ice water to grab a Dr. Pepper then quickly headed over to the grill with my stomach already grumbling. When I caught sight of the man standing next to the chef of the night (Mom's current boyfriend, Ed), I hurriedly went into stealth-mode. Stifling a giggle, I silently made my way closer to the two men. In reality, I didn't need to be so quiet. The man I was stalking was involved in a heated discussion with Ed.

"No, George, bidding that low on such a large project, especially with the heat of July just around the corner, would be stupid,

I stared at his exposed back grinning mischievously, glanced at my ice-cold Dr. Pepper, then at his back again. Slowly and quietly, I began creeping my way towards my brother hoping Ed wouldn't notice me or, at least, wouldn't call attention to me while I sneaked up behind him.

On my way to my destiny with mischief, I noticed our dilapidated above-ground pool standing on to the side lonely and rusting. Mom hadn't filled it with water in two years and probably wouldn't ever again. She planned to have the above-ground removed in favor of a brand new in-ground pool. That would surely impress whichever boyfriend she was most interested in at the time. The ladder that led to the tiny dock at the side of the pool still lay on top of the wooden structure pleading with anyone to pass by, "Please take me down from here. I'm bored!" Two summers ago, it had called to me.

I was outside enjoying a perfect summer day. School was out, and the weather hadn't had time to turn as hot as it would later in the season yet. The sun was looking down on Ayer, Massachusetts, through soft, white, wispy clouds. It would have been the perfect day for a swim if the pool had been ready. I took it upon myself to take a look inside the pool to see how much work it would take to make it ready to use.

Being only about five feet tall, I needed to climb to the pool dock to actually be able to look at the lining and interior of the

ground right behind it. A quick survey of my body told me that I was fine. I'd had the wind knocked out of me, but otherwise I was



was gone on her two-week vacation. The day Mom left, my sister picked me up and immediately drove me to the Lowell General Hospital emergency room to find out that my foot had been severely sprained.

I shook off that memory and focused on stalking my prey. Stopping about a foot away from George, I held my soda can as far in front of me as possible and pushed it into my brother's back for a split second before I turned and ran.

"ACK! Who the hell? Kathie! What's it!" George bellowed as he took off chasing after me. I was almost to the safety of the house and my mother's long-standing rule about horseplay inside but, as I was reaching out to grasp the screen door handle, I was met by a hulk of a man walking outside.

"Well, what seems to be going on here, girly? Looks like your brother is..." John began as he reached down and swept me up and over his shoulder easily "...wanting to talk to you." I could feel my cheeks burning even though I was completely giddy with laughter. Maybe tonight, I could even steal a kiss goodbye from him.

As long as I'd been alive, John had always been around. He and George grew up together and graduated high school together. Standing at about six feet tall, he always seemed absolutely gigantic to me. His short, black hair was a perpetual mess, and he had the most infectious grin on his face almost continuously. In fact, the only times I remember the grin being gone was when he heard about someone picking on me and when his mother died.

John closed the screen door and unceremoniously carted me off to my brother who was standing against a tree grinning and waiting for me to be delivered to him. We arrived to the sound of a rustling plastic bag and the clunk of small items hitting each other. I barely had time to think about this when I felt the back of my own t-shirt lifted up and about a pound of ice fell onto my back. Each cube sent a new frozen shiver down my spine. If he'd done this a few hours earlier while it was still 95 degrees, I might have thanked him! But, by then, it was almost 7:00 at night and cooling off nicely already.

"No fair!" I shrieked, kicking desperately at John to make him

“That was a nightmare of a day,” I muttered only half aloud.

I could still see my mother standing there absolutely livid with my diary dangling from one hand. It's not that I'd been rebellious. In fact, by most standards, I was a calm girl. Outside of coming home a little late now and then or wearing my friend's makeup before Mom said I was allowed to, my “wild side” read more like a scientific journal's description of the innermost makeup of an atom than a topic that would be seen in a teen magazine. But Mom had decided that reading my diary would be an acceptable idea and apparently didn't like one of my entries.

“So, you hate me, do you?” she stormed. “How could you! I work hard all day to feed you, clothe you, and give you a home. This is how you thank me!”

I think she rambled on in her frustrated, whiny voice for awhile, but I didn't care and wasn't listening anymore. Rage from years of being treated like an embarrassment to her and being made to feel as though I should be grateful for any small crumb of kindness that was thrown at me by her had built up to a boil, and I'd had enough!

“You're not even listening to me!” roared my mother. “You ungrateful creature!”

She raised her hand to slap me across the face, but I saw it coming and raised my forearm to block it. I was not going to be slapped for expressing my anger and hurt in my diary.

She stared at the point where our wrists met—hers on the way to hitting her youngest daughter, mine blocking her. Glaring into my eyes, she stomped out of the room to tell George that I'd hit her.

But that was months ago. Tomorrow, I would be on a plane to Colorado. I didn't care that I was leaving most of my personal belongings behind. I'd packed my clothes and a few small items that were important to me. The items that I was leaving behind didn't matter to me at all. I was leaving the stress-filled house of arguments and confusion that was my mother's home and moving to my dad's place outside of Colorado Springs.

Mom woke me up early the following morning. We had to be at the airport by 5 a.m. to check-in for my 6 a.m. flight out

of there. My bags had been loaded into the car the night before, so we didn't have much to do in the morning. I jumped into the shower, threw on the clothes I'd chosen a week earlier for the trip, and was ready to go.

Mom was quiet throughout the two-hour drive into Boston, so I was able to sneak in a little more sleep on the way. I didn't wake up until we reached the airport parking garage, and as soon as she saw me stir, she spoke her first words of the trip.



# Black Christmas

## Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Technology

Fresh snow gracefully falls to the ground  
As Arctic air slowly waltzes in, nipping tender exposed parts  
Homes start looking like Broadway shows  
Everywhere you go your ears are filled with thick honey nostalgia  
Tunes dripping from the speakers  
Over-stuffed mail boxes filled with sprites, over priced junk, and  
Styrofoam stuffed boxes shipped from afar  
Immersing ourselves in the joys, excitement, and happiness,  
We become unwise, thinking that death takes a holiday  
'Til the rusty weathered scythe is swung  
A little boy chasing his hat in the blustery winter afternoon  
Ends his chase under the yellow bus's wheels  
The freshness of the new snow slowly darkens  
As the weeks 'til Christmas become less  
Toys hush, wrapped under the tree  
Never to be opened

## Floundering

He used to tell me stories about eating frog legs, taking care of pet baby alligators, and “floundering” at midnight. I would smile and pat his bald head as I said, “You’re such a li-ar, Dad.” But he swore up and down that that was his childhood. Truth be told, I was jealous. My dad grew up in the ‘60’s in southern Texas near the water with a nuclear family—the domestic mother, successful father, and two younger sisters. Me, I grew up as far away from water as you could get during the ‘90’s (post Beatles, Simon & Garfunkel) and with parents separated by an entire state.

When I was nine and my younger brother and sister were five, our parents went through a bitter divorce in which my dad first moved down the block in our smaller than small rural Nebraska town. In all actuality, I only say “bitter” because it was bitter to me.

They didn’t go through nasty custody battles or hurt each other financially. But they did take their anger out on each other by means of their oldest daughter. I heard it all.

“You don’t want to live with your mother, do you Liz?” my father would entice me. “Does she leave you at home by yourself when she goes out?”

And my mother would tell me, “You have to be careful, or you’ll end up angry and alone like your father.”

I remember one night in-between the time when my mother filed for divorce and the divorce became final. She had brought a counselor into our home (this was after my dad had moved out) to help her and us kids “cope.” I was so angry at her for making me talk badly about my father to a stranger. After my mom had put us to bed, she sat in the kitchen and had her counseling session. The door to my bedroom led into the living room, which was

as my mom was telling her these lies. I silently squatted there in my pajamas on the floor in front of my room as my mom continued.

“He gets so angry, and then he turns violent. I just can’t handle his anger. I’m afraid he’s going to hurt me. Sometimes, I just want to see him in a body bag.” And at this sentence, I hated my mother. She wanted my father *dead*? I went back to my room.

Even now, just thinking about the things they put me through, I get angry. But it only lasts for a minute because the older I get, the more I realize just how lucky I am to have them as parents. Together, they were a mess, but separately, they made a great parenting team. As an adult, I am very close to both of my parents. Everyone I knew dealt with rough childhoods by rebelling as teenagers. I never did, and at the time I couldn’t understand why I had survived my childhood without any damage. Now, at 27, I realized that my parents had nearly ruined me.

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Here’s the thing you should know about me: I love water—ocean water, lake water, pool water, any type of water. One summer during college I took a job on the coast of Florida and spent all my days in the ocean. I knew that as soon as I finished college I would move back to Florida to teach. But then I met a boy. Brett and I have been together since senior year. We met while student teaching at the same school and sort of fell into a relationship. We dated for three years before we took the plunge and rented a cozy apartment together.

I think we have a relationship that others want. We get along so well, have similar schedules, and have been together for over six years. Personally, I am perfectly happy with our relationship just as it is. But I get asked nearly every day when I’m getting married. And my blanket answer, “When I get knocked up,” just isn’t satisfying them anymore.

Brett and I are at a time in our lives when friends, cousins, and even younger siblings are getting married. In fact, we had recently found out that Brett’s 22-year-old sister, Carly, bought a house with her boyfriend and is planning a summer wedding. Hearing this definitely set off some emotion in me, although I’m not quite



sure what emotion that was. It wasn't jealousy because I certainly





hausted by the time I arrived. Yet, as usual, my dad and I decided to sit in the hot tub before heading to bed.

We made small talk for a little while, commenting on work and the weather. What I love about my dad is his outlook on life. Despite his two failed marriages, my dad is my relationship coach. He is so easy to talk to, and since he is a minister, he always has the best advice and the best stories. He teaches me by his and others' mistakes. We talk about almost everything, but we never talk about the divorce, mostly because I don't ask. Part of me doesn't want to know what happened between my parents. But that night I needed help... because if I didn't ask, I would always be afraid of where my own relationship could end up.

I knew why my dad's second marriage ended. He simply chose the wrong person. He was 50, she was 30 and eventually she was tired of playing second fiddle to his children. What I really needed to find out was how to avoid marrying the wrong person. I hoped that was something he could help me with.

"Dad? I need advice. I don't know what to do." He looked toward me, his hands resting on top of the water making light splashing sounds. I slid my big toe back and forth on the green granite surface at the bottom of the tub. "I need to know why your marriage to Mom didn't work out."

He stared at me and then smiled. I could tell he was recalling events in his head. Then, as he always did, he let out this laugh, put his hand on my shoulder, and said, "For lots of reasons."

"Oh." I had always heard from my mom that it didn't work out because he would get angry with her and get violent. I knew that my dad had gotten angry, but I'd never seen him hit anyone. I also knew that my mom could be manipulative. But beyond these things, I didn't really know much else.

"Liz, I was 34 when I met your mom. I wanted to get married and knew that if I didn't marry her, I would probably never find anyone else. And our age difference didn't help." My dad is nine years older than my mom.

"We simply grew up in two different worlds. I grew up in the South while your mother lived in South Dakota." He was still





“You know I love you, too. And when you get so angry at Brett that you want to hurt him, I have one thing I want you to do.”

I stood up out of the water, “What?”

“I want you to call me, and we’ll talk about it.” That was the best advice he had given me all night. “We can talk through the problem until you are calm and able to talk to Brett rationally. How does that sound?”

“I think that sounds great, Dad!”

He stood up and put his hand on top of my head. “You have to make the effort though Liz. You have to call me

# I Sang to My Dad

I sang to my dad on his deathbed.

Others held his hand  
or stroked his brow  
or kissed his cheek,  
but I sang.

It seemed the best part of me  
came out in his favorite hymns  
and melodies.

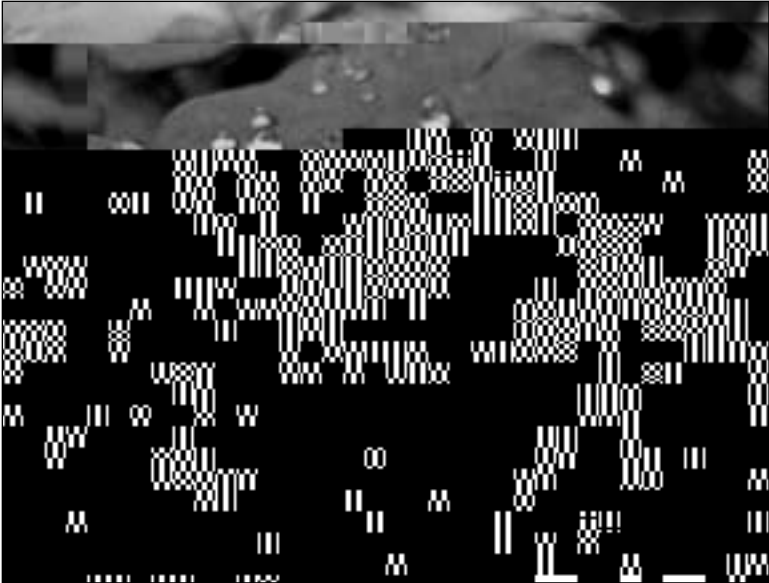
I'm not a great orator  
or mathematician.

I'm not gifted in science  
or painting,  
but I can sing,  
so I sang to my dad on his  
deathbed  
and eased his way to eternity.

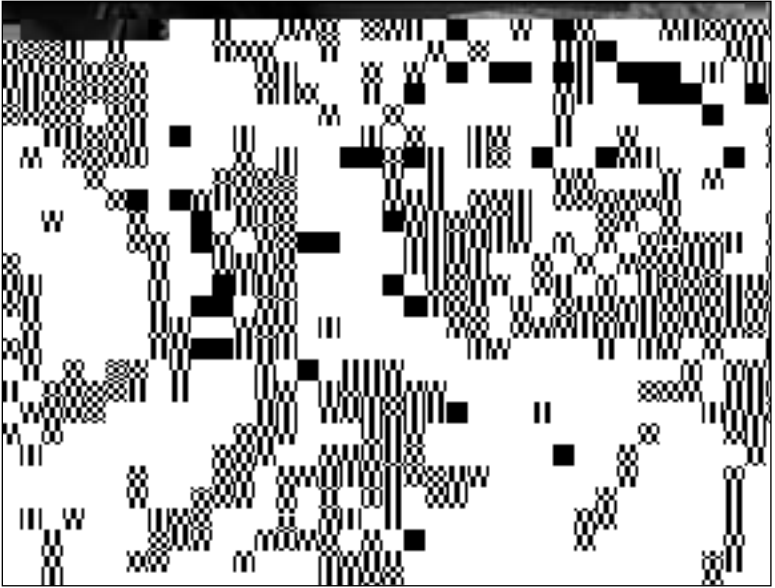


# Macro

## Radiology Technologies



# Spiraling Down





I have never quite understood my lack of outrage or dissent with the majority when it comes to promotions and firing. As I recall, I told Jeremy to unbutton his top button while casually and lightly pushing him in the shoulder. He simply looked at my offending hand. He wasn't his usual cynical self, wasn't smiling, and even now, the dry wit that had endeared me to him as a friendly acquaintance only escapes every once in a while. The employees try their best to leave their work as incomplete as possible, as if they think his failure to notice it has anything to do with his ability. Once or twice a week, his pride rises up like a snake until he strikes with a confusing combination of insecurity and determination.

I work with mostly teenagers and college students in their early twenties. Allow me to correct myself. I work with people that I never see outside of the kitchen or the dining area. They must have lives and goals that have nothing to do with Mexican-American cuisine. I have always assumed that their frustration has come from the same source as mine. I endure that which will one day be over.

As I look at the angry bulls and the aging faces of the cooks in the back, I have begun to realize something that had escaped me due to my incredulity. Some of these people, who are both intelligent and ambitious, have every intention of staying at this place. Some of these people are in exact accordance with their goals and might even find my dismissive nature for my current circumstances as offensive as I find most customers. For them, this restaurant is not a means to end, but a natural step in the way of a lifelong career.

I can still joke around with some. Megan for instance, does an excellent impression of Henry the VIII at table six—her freckled wrist and pinkie tilt in just the right angle of royal demand. She understands. The universal three dollar tip, no matter the bill total, the inevitable request for more chips and salsa than anyone at the table is prepared to eat, and the confused disdain for a full belly after consuming food that is never truly satisfying—all contribute to our disgruntled status.

the difference now is in the perception of my peers. When I am confronted with the impossible-to-please customer snapping at me across the table tops and pointing at his empty bowl of chips accompanied by a full plate of enchiladas, I cannot help but think what this means to the person behind the glass in the back office. Or the “college” girl beside me in the wait station, who I have now decided is in her thirties, scooping up salsa and muttering to herself about how she does not respond like a dog. Her bright eyes are beginning to wrinkle around the edges, and when she runs out the station, her agitated features smooth into a pretty, petite complacency.

These people dawn on me like lights of comprehension in the dimness of our ranks. They may just take their jobs home with them. I cannot help but think it. What a shame to waste them on the subtleties of serving salsa.

## Poppy Field



## **Too Much Restriction on Immigration Laws**

Imagine one is a loyal citizen of the United States of America and is married, but the spouse lives overseas in another country. The citizen badly wants his or her family reunited with him or her, but if the Department of Homeland Security was prolong-

automatically that individual lost his or her chance of becoming a citizen of the United States. Therefore, one must comply with the laws of this country, and this is true for all emigrants. I got my green card in 2005 after three-and-a-half years of waiting time.

In 2005, I applied for citizenship and paid application fees of \$400. Finally, I got my citizenship on March 17, 2006, hoping this would free me from all restrictions of immigration laws, and also I was hoping that the procedure for my family reunion would become easier. However, immigration restrictions still deprive emigrants and deny them many benefits regardless of the fact that we work and ocedez5(e)5(d)TJ T\* [ez5( (ez5,)70( ynmew)6ax(fo)s like na



without taking a closer look at the negative impacts and financial difficulties those emigrant communities living in the U.S. will suffer. Both legal and illegal immigrants from Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, are paying a heavy price. Many people have been denied services, and their cases were put on hold because of their names, religions, and countries of origin.

It is not fair for people who do not have criminal background records. I know that our government has a duty to protect us from any dangers, including terrorists; the government needs to envisage a policy where there are checks and balances between state security and emigrant grievances.

I have conducted surveys in different emigrant communities around Lincoln and Omaha areas, and I have found that all emigrants are sailing the same boat. "Lee Guor," a former refugee from Sudan, mentioned that in 1994, permanent refugee cards used to be issued after one year of residency prior to the arrival date in the U.S. from the country of origin. Application fees were



religion. One of my coworkers, Mr. Hussam Mohammed, a loyal member of Iraq community here in Lincoln, told me that he



gime of Saddam Hussien and his baath party from power in Iraq, and now he is deployed in Baghdad. My own nephew John Deng is serving in the U.S. arms in the horn of Africa working as an interpreter for his units helping government agents gather information.

e government and Immigration needs to recognize emigrants who volunteered to serve the U.S. government in the time of their services while one is alive. It does not make any sense for the government to recognize someone after he or she is deceased, as it happened two years ago. I remember when President George Bush rewarded a deceased emigrant soldier killed with his citizenship at his funeral because of service and commitment defending the freedom and the U.S. interests overseas. is ridiculous policy needs to be changed for the better of all citizens.

To me it seemed that this immigration reform was wise tactics formulated by U.S. lawmakers in order to target the emigrant community because they know that it is our Achilles' heel. My fellow comrade Chan Nyakor that I had known for years has been in jail since 2000 for unknown reasons that Immigration alleged as a serious violation of immigration laws. Chan tells me, "Life back home was much better than this current situation; one couldn't have emigrated to US and felt good with Homeland Security where my movement is restricted and confined in the states" (Nyakor).

Punishing people in such a way will limit the fluctuation of people to seek life changes, and this will have a severe impact on

different, contrary to what I have heard before I came here; that really surprised me a lot” (Nyakor). Suleman Skojavics, a 32-year-old refugee from the Bosnian community in Lincoln, said that the majority of emigrants will simply return back to their countries of origins as soon as peace is prevailed there because Immigration is doing countless injustice to emigrant communities here. He told me, “I’m planning to build a house in Bosnia and take all my family with me. I know this situation does not apply to me alone; there are many emigrants who are frustrated with situations, and the way Immigration treated people here is not acceptable, and this will lead the United States losing some of its future generations” (Skojavics).

Regardless of the fact that my liberty is being protected and I am working 40 hours a week, a man cannot live with bread alone. I’m paying rents, utility bills, car insurance, and payments. I’m not saving any money because the little money I’m making is not enough when split between my bills and my family living overseas. In addition, I pay attorney fees for the lawyer that will represent my family case and make it expedited. I’m tired of being lonesome, and for sure, I need the support of my wife behind me; also, I like to see my children around me all the time. As Hussem Mohammed says, “How long will I continue living separated from my family since the Immigration deprived me from getting citizenship?” (Mohammed).

We all rely on our government lawmakers who decide the fate of the nation and its security. But the problem is that emigrants don’t have lawyers who can file their cases to appeal Supreme Court. Maybe the government can find a suitable ground that will promote the tranquility for the welfare of our country. The government is denying thousands of Latinos work permits that will allow them to work and pay taxes to the US government. In some big states such as California, Texas, New York, and Florida, Spanish people are pursuing jobs in a very cunning, technical way. Three different people working with different companies at different times a day use one social security numbers and never file tax returns. Yollanda Francisco from Mexico has told me that



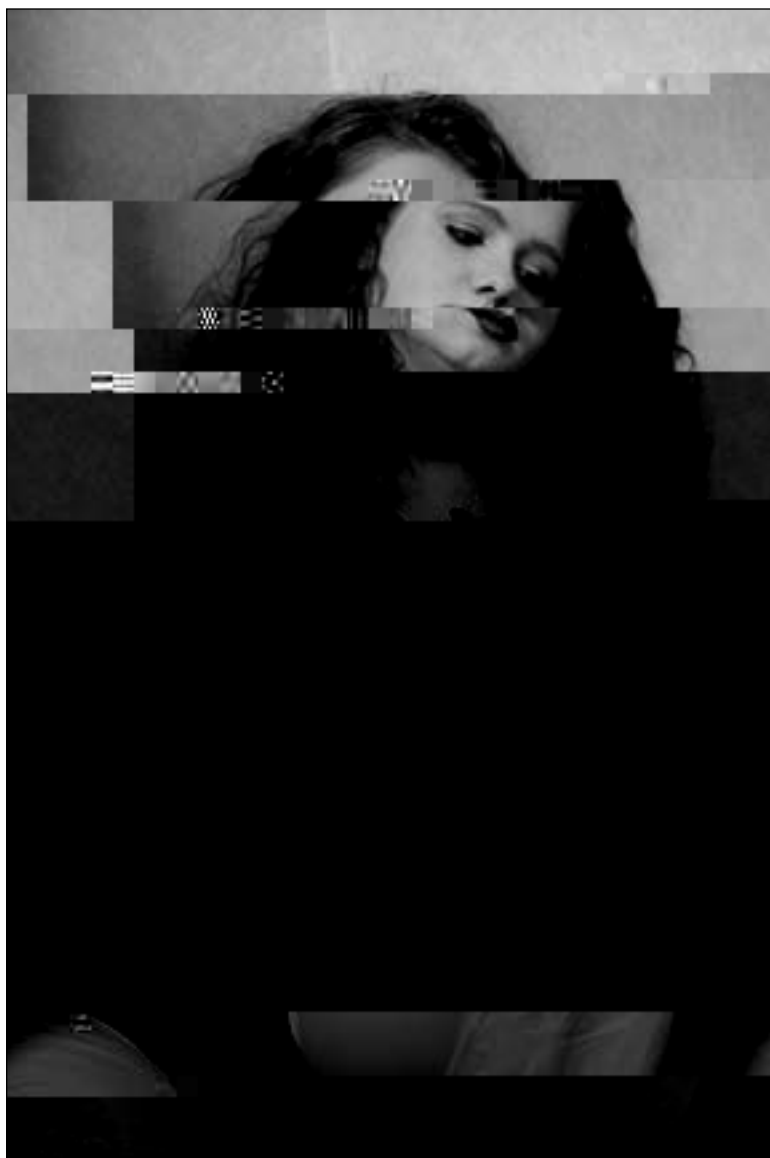
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## Sound Off

On the silent screen, I see  
a bronze casket;  
people huddle near an open wound in the grass.  
Like flowers seeking rain, their faces turn toward  
a tall man with eyes dark as his beard.  
He lifts a hand to calm the air;  
but I hear no sound,  
only the emptiness between words  
as he stops to breathe.  
Maybe he speaks of life and love lost,  
a heart's cadence stilled.  
No sound. No answer—  
only a gasp between gunshots  
while the solemn honor guard reloads.  
Smoke unfurls like a flag across the sky,  
saluting the space between words  
and breaths  
and thoughts.  
In the silence, only the echo of loss remains.

# Torn



## The Intersection of 66<sup>th</sup> and Vine Streets

On a typical day, the intersection of 66<sup>th</sup> and Vine Streets is continually hustling and bustling with traffic. However, there is so much more to an intersection than the cars, trucks, SUVs, and commercial vehicles that pass through it. Every day, whether there is or isn't traffic, the intersection of 66<sup>th</sup> and Vine Streets contains permanent objects and features. The most recognizable and obvious object is the traffic signal which emits green, yellow, and red lights to safely guide the flow of traffic and pedestrians. Perhaps less noticeable, there are cables running parallel with the ground to support and position the traffic signals. Another item is the green, rectangular street signs with reflective white lettering naming the street. The street sign going east and west is named "VINE ST 800 N," while the street sign running north to south is called "N 66<sup>TH</sup> ST." One more item in the mix is the pedestrian crosswalk signal and activating buttons. Each pedestrian crosswalk guide has two signals. One signal, a white, walking stick figure, denotes it is safe to cross the street, while another signal, a flashing orange hand, denotes it is unsafe to cross the street. Upon the cement surface lay nine rectangular white boxes painted across each street to designate the pedestrian crosswalk. Finally, four light poles, one for each corner, bring the intersection together by connecting all of the objects.

The intersection of 66<sup>th</sup> and Vine Streets has many core elements which cannot be altered due to weather, traffic, people, or emergencies. Every day, hundreds of people yield, stop, and pass through this intersection. Although some drivers believe they have the ability to make the light change faster, they don't. No matter what weather comes its way, the intersection remains reliable. Snow may cover its lines, and rain may make the visibility of its lights difficult, but the traffic signals change on a regularly recurring time frame. Afternoon, evening, and morning have no effect on its efficiency, nor does light or absence thereof.

Today has reached its brightest point, although it seems no brighter than the average day at dusk. Today, the skies are a dark, heavy gray color. It appears as if it is ready to snow. Unlike a normal afternoon, there are no shadows to be mentioned. The dark afternoon sky leaves somewhat of a lonely, empty feeling to be felt about the day. The roads appear less busy, and the passersby seem much less hurried. Suddenly, the wind begins to blow the branches of the tree below the nearest light post. As the branches waver in the wind, a distinct scent of cigarette begins to fill the air.

No more than twenty feet away, a young man driving an old, beat-up Ford pickup reaches his hand out the partially rolled-down window to dispose of the ashes accumulated at the end of his cigarette. As the ashes fall to the cement, the young man pulls his hand back into the vehicle to inhale another cancerous portion of his cigarette. As he exhales, a large cloud of smoke fills the cab of his truck and begins to make its way out the driver's side window. Then, the light changes to green, and the man in the pickup, along with all of the other drivers, stomp on their accelerators to move about their day. As they take off, each one discharges a different accelerating sound. Some engines emit a mere hum, while others shower the air with loud reverberations of diesel engines.

As the previous drivers take off, a vast array of new motorists driving cars, SUVs, trucks, and commercial vehicles comes to a stop on Vine Street. Thirty-five seconds pass, and these drivers also accelerate toward their destination. Now, north and south bound traffic waits for sixty seconds while east and west bound traffic passes through. All throughout the day, these repetitious light changes continue as a rainbow of different colored vehicles come and go. Red, green, blue, white, silver, purple, black, brown, yellow, and many other paint colors can be seen on the vehicles as they stop and pass through the intersection.

As the five o'clock rush hour approaches, the streets get busier and busier. The flow of traffic stays steady, but drivers begin to lose patience with the lights and inch closer and closer to the cars in front of them as if to speed up the process of the changing lights. Finally, as the light goes from red to green, an upset driver

lays on his horn to alert the “leader of the pack” that the light has changed and it’s time to get a move on. As they accelerate, the ground begins to vibrate harder and harder with the boom of the souped-up speakers in a teenager’s car.

Eventually, the rush hour ends, and the gloomy, gray sky discards all its light. Day finally becomes night. The street lights turn on and replace the day’s missing light. The illumination of the street lamps draws attention to a light falling snow. The temperature has dropped to a grueling 6°F. The road appears desolate. Hardly anyone dares the cold, snowy evening. Then, from a distance shine the bright headlights of an old Chevy Blazer. From the irradiate headlights, the snow is visibly blowing south, but the Blazer treks on through the cold as if weather has no effect.

Several minutes pass by before any more vehicles pass. Then, a large quad cab truck pulling a tarp-covered trailer turns around the corner with a thunderous sound of horses undern BT 0( Hihn T\* (BT 0( Hi0

the burning sun. The nearby street lamp casts light only on the north branches of the tree below it, causing the north half to look white while the south half appears black. As the light shines its way down to the snow-white covered ground, the shadows of the branches stand out clearly, like expertly woven webs of a spider.

As the snow begins to fall faster and heavier, it is apparent that it is here to stay, for today at least. The once visible dividing lines and white crosswalk markings are now hidden below the near half-inch of frozen white snow. Drivers now approach with a more cautious attitude. No one seems to be in as much of a hurry as on an average day. The majority of the vehicles that pass are SUVs and trucks. Many of the trucks are loaded down with one, and sometimes two snow blowers in the back.

Finally, it happens. A young, obviously less experienced driver, barrels towards the intersection just as the light turns red. Without hesitation, he slams on his brakes. The brakes lock up, and he skids straight ahead into the middle of the intersection. Luckily for him, there are no other vehicles in sight. He quickly drives away as if nothing had happened at all.

At seven o'clock, three of the four street lights shut off. The day has finally presented enough light to do without the aid of the street lamps. Moving west across Vine Street, a fifty-some-year-old woman marches along the snow-covered sidewalk. Upon her head she has a pure white fur hat which blends in with her glistening white fur coat. Dangling from her right arm is an oversized black purse. Once she reaches the corner, she presses the pedestrian walking signal. While she waits for the white stick



# Grandpa's Shop



Rummaging through the dust  
I find pieces of Grandpa  
I find his hands with their long wooden handles and metal heads  
Smashing away at the work to be done

His feet are busy rolling about  
Finishing the jobs of many machines  
I hear the shrill zing of his voice  
As he warns me not to touch  
    the razor sharp circular saw blades

And his steady gaze and concentration  
Show me how to stick with difficult projects

Even now when I catch a whiff  
Of grease, dirt and sweat  
I'm transported back in time  
To my adventures in Grandpa's shop

## Sloth: The Fourth Deadly Sin



## Tragic Apathy

I rehearsed what I was going to say for over an hour in the mirror prior to coming to work at the restaurant that night, and another random thirty minutes in the backroom before my (hormone-raged) adolescent pecker got the balls to ask her. I do not believe that it was that long, but in moments like that, it seems like you have prepared for a lifetime. Thoughts just randomly come in and out of one's mind. I could taste my stomach. Butterflies? Consuming fears reveal everything about one's insecurities when standing vulnerable in the face of rejection.

I asked.

You know that moment when the adrenaline settles after an accident and you find out that you are still alive, or maybe when you merely avoid a collision? That little place in time where everything is kind of free-floating for a while? Where your heart tries to find its place again? That is where I was. I didn't care about anything else at that moment. She said yes.

That summer we both worked at a little diner by the name of Mrs. Mom's. It was located less than a block away from two different packing house plants. The buzzing from the plants, screeching pigs being slaughtered, and semis were what you usually heard. When I stepped outside, a sweaty wave of smoldering, unshaded sun coupled with the dust kicked up from passing trucks would generally chase me back inside where a window AC would, at minimum, warm the place. Mrs. Mom's made its money by making itself the gathering place of passer-on truckers and union workers. The building was built like a trailer: a long, narrowed, single-storied grease pit. Dirty white siding clothed the shell that Jill and I called home that summer.

We had become pretty close friends over the course of that summer. I admired her. She was two years older than I was and much wiser in the world of independence and punk. She listened to bands I had never heard of. She dyed her shoulder-length blonde strands with pink strips in the front. She had a mushroom

sticker in the back window of her car. She had a nose ring. She was cool.

I had up to this time spent much of my time conforming to a local preppy community. I played in numerous sports trying to

We got into her car and proceeded to drive out to the Saint Mary's cemetery. We were listening to a bootleg of the Flaming Lips that Jill had acquired from one of her friends. The evening was warm. Looking around at the elongated shades that mimicked the trees and buildings reminded me that we had less than a couple of hours before nightfall. This would be a good place to coin the term "shady copycat." The air was fresh like evening. A cool and crisp wind would occasionally make its way through the car. This breeze reminded me of swimming in a lake where you get occasional spots of warm water, only opposite. I always thought that someone had peed in that spot of the lake to make it so warm.

I reached down and pulled out my sack of weed and one of my father's tobacco pipes. She asked to smell the weed, and I gave it to her. The pipe reminded me of something that Sigmund Freud would have smoked, except he smoked cigars. I read somewhere that it was for phallic symbolism, but that is neither here nor there. The night before this, I was at "Teen Night" where I had bought the weed from some skaters that hung out by the bathroom. It sounds kind of clichéd, but it is true. I knew that Jill smoked from the stories she told at work, so I thought that it would be a good first date. I had never bought grass before, so I had no idea how to do it. As cool as I thought I was, I'm sure I was as awkward as a 15-year-old doing anything for the first time.

She handed me back the weed and looked at my pipe somewhat confused and asked, "Where did you get that?" I told her that it was my father's. I later learned that they have special smoking utensils for grass.

We pulled into the cemetery and parked. I got out of the car and could feel the butterflies starting to return. I had never even smoked weed before. We walked down the hill a little ways before sitting down to lean our backs against the stone that was the eternal resting place of somebody's mother. I cannot remember her name, but even if I had, you would not remember by the end of this story. The point is that she was once us and now was cold and hard without anything she obtained in her life, except maybe her Sunday best. I wonder

if she found what she was looking for. I pulled my father's tobacco pipe out of my pocket and loaded it with the grass before handing it to Jill. She looked at me with a tranquil and much anticipated smile, as if she was looking forward to this moment. I flattered myself with the idea that her pleasant body language was because of me. It was the weed. My free floating anxiety was interrupted by the sound of crackling, the way dead leaves burn in the fall. I looked over to her face in the midst of a cloud of pungent smelling smoke. I took the pipe and could feel myself shaking as I took my turn.

We exchanged glances and grass a couple of more times before she got up and started to dance. She had left her stereo on, and I could faintly hear the sounds of Plastic Jesus playing in the distance. I had no idea how to do this pot smoking thing, so I just kept on taking more hits. When I was at about my twelfth, Jill told me to stop. She didn't have to because at that moment everything stopped. I was paralyzed, melted into what was left of a woman posed eternally in her Sunday best. I think I want to be buried naked. Donate my clothes, I won't need them. I just need to be entertained and comfortable while I am alive. Solomon calls it "Vanity of Vanities." I believe that I would be very comfortable lying naked less than three feet from my neighbor. I'm sure he wouldn't complain. I find it kind of ironic that comfort with nudity, as the genuine comfort of anything else, comes only after death. Even Adam wasn't content before death; he wanted more. He ate an apple; I smoked grass.

I could see Jill still dancing with her arms out: spinning, swaying, rhythmically floating from one tombstone to another humming to the music. She was beautiful.

"You all right, man?" she asked. I just kind of let out a contented moan that led into an, "Uh-huh." Other than passing intrigue of why I had no mobility over my body, the moment was beautiful. Fear and insecurity did not exist in that place. Concern was completely absent. To hell with your validation; the wind was chasing me. Lost somewhere in a state of apathy, I was free.

"Don't you have to be home soon?" she asked.

Suddenly I began to notice that there was no longer a sun, only a faint glow that acted as a nightlight until the night would completely steal what was left of the day. How long had I been out? I could see the black outline of a maple tree taking the shape of a cactus. What is a cactus doing in the middle of the Midwest?

“Jon!”

“What time is it?” I replied.

“9:15”

“Shit. We gotta go! My dad will have my ass!” I said.

I no more than made an attempt to get up when I fell forward, puking on a tombstone. I couldn't read who this one belonged to. I kneeled there nauseated for a moment before making a second attempt to the car. Freedom soon becomes regret when forced reality, like everything else when it turns out with a different outcome than what was expected. Jill was mumbling something about having told me not to smoke so much as she helped me into the car. I rested my head out the window as we drove back to

attempt to unload my moped. Jill had already done it for me. She must have wanted me gone. I said goodbye and drove o .

ere were no warm pee spots in the air that night. Everything seemed cold. I had an ancient moped from the early 80's that had a carburetor problem when the weather was cold. I could not get it past 10 miles per hour. It is hard to balance a 300-pound moped at 10 miles an hour. Imagine riding a bicycle for the first time, stoned. Somehow I managed to make it home, but not without wishing that my moped had training wheels.

My father was sitting at the kitchen table when I walked into the house. e anxiety had returned by this time. I was nervous that he was going to find me out. My father was a strict and generally intolerant man—never physically abusive, but generally verbally antagonizing. Wait, verbally annoying. My father's career was as a social worker and drug abuse counselor. He had also spent quite some time under the influence himself, so I was anticipating the worst.

“Where have you been?” he asked.

“Got out of work late. It's been a long night; I'm heading to bed,” I told him as sober as I could. I turned and left the room before he could say anything. I felt as though his piercing stare followed me as I walked toward the hall.

e next morning I woke up and put on my jeans. I felt around my pockets and noticed that the pipe, the weed, my cigarettes wJ -0.005 Tcicu1mme gone. s thou 5Td nhat tktimealked into mm6(ker (







But not for fun, rather to torment me,” would be his answer.  
ese arguments lead us nowhere;  
efore, I reminded him of past times with her  
Outside of his dreams.

“Ah, but remember how she felt when you first kissed?  
Her lips were softer than cotton,” I would say.

“ e sense of loneliness you had without her  
Would vanish, replaced by warmth coming  
From the fires of your hearts.

Her skin creamy like vanilla, sensual and tender to the touch,  
Made you envious of her blankets

at shielded and kept her warm throughout the night.

Her eyes, more magnificent than any of God’s creation 5(h.) Home,

ed the list (2 times) 10% 100 (n) 6 (y) t kept (only he 2 14 4 migh) 6 2 10 5 (h.) 21 0 5 23 7 3 7 6

# Radiant Raine

Jessica Applegarth, Academic Transfer



## **Fantasy Waves**

e road continued to wind along the beach; million dollar mansions lay behind stone walls on either side. I had only been driving for ten minutes, and I could tell my foot was getting heavy on the

yet to be made and the new job I still needed to find to afford it. All sounds were drowned away, demonstrating the overwhelming power of Poseidon.

It was fun, though, knowing there was a potential danger. I was outside of my own security circle where I called the shots. It scared me to be such a little person as a guest in a large abyss. I half expected something gross and slimy to swim up and bite me. I imagined diving under the water and surfacing with a starfish stuck over my nose. I tried to not let my nerves get the best of me. Those things didn't happen in real life. I felt something brush against my leg, so I jumped and paddled away. It followed me as if it had a mind of its own. "Okay, Li, be brave!" I told myself. I mustered up the courage, sunk my hand below the water, grabbed, pulled and threw. Damn seaweed! Yuck!

I hoped Mike or Amy didn't see my charade. They would make fun of me for sure. I laughed at myself when I was sure they didn't notice. Mike hadn't been in the ocean for years, and he was having too much fun to recognize my fears. The smile on his face reflected nostalgic memories. He wasn't a young man that night.

The waves turned him into a four-year-old boy back in Hawaii, and he had no fears. He was invincible, reunited with his childhood playmate and protected from Poseidon by his innocence. It was uplifting to see him have so much fun after a stressful week of work. I cared about him so much and saw the ocean brought him a happiness that I could never provide.

Amy, the pro, went scuba diving once a year. She felt at home in the water and disappeared beneath it for a long time. I almost started to worry until her head resurfaced, and there she was again. She didn't let the ocean push her around. It was as if she and Poseidon were good pals, and she read his mind. He was agitated that night, but I think Amy had dealt with his temper before. Another wave came. She disappeared, and moments later her blonde head popped up even further from the shore. I wanted to have her courage. I wanted to have her strengths. On I went.

I knew I had never spent too much time in the ocean. I knew I was inexperienced, but I wanted more. I wanted to be brave. I wanted to throw myself deeper into the ocean and fight the waves, to show Poseidon he wasn't the only tough guy around there. The next wave came quickly. "Uh, oh," I said to myself. My eyes widened, and I remembered to close my mouth this time; the ocean had more salt than my taste buds could handle. My feet left solid ground, the wave came up over my head, water went up my nose, and I flailed my arms trying desperately to get a fresh breath. I might not make it; this could be it. Seconds later, the wave passed, and I was still standing. I hung in just long enough to catch my breath, but still I kept going further out. I had to make up for that last wave that bullied me around. I felt like those kids in high school who got thrown into lockers for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I kept telling myself, "One more wave. One more crest. Keep swimming out. Don't look back. If Amy can do it, then so can I. I want those bigger waves over there, the ones right beyond *that* crest." It could have been stupid. It wasn't exactly smart. I was inexperienced, but I went nevertheless. What didn't kill me would only make me stronger. I waited and saw a new, white, crest break, the water rolling toward me, growing bigger and taller. I gritted my teeth, "Wait for it, wait for it. Ok, jump now!"

"Just go with it, let it take you in," I heard Amy say until the wave overpowered me, and I couldn't stay above the water anymore. This was my way of releasing control and letting a power greater than I take its course. A rush of achievement and satisfaction overcame me because I knew I was one up on Poseidon. I saw how far out I was from the shore, but I didn't care. I swam further out than I ever had before.

When I stopped, I looked back to the beach that seemed so far away. I realized I was really helpless with no ground below my feet and no safety net to catch me if I gave up; I was inspired. I saw the condos behind me and the mansions just down the beach and thought, "How cool would it be, to wake up with the sun shining through my window and the ocean as far as my eyes could see?"





up my worries vanished, and my dreams of living on the beach blew away.

“Where are we going?” I asked Amy as we got back in the car.

“You’re the driver,” she replied. As she spoke those words, my power returned. In the once magical moments of being in the ocean, I became a different person. I released all fears, responsibilities and doubts about life. At night the ocean became my muse. Yet as easily as my imagination and desires were set free to wander when those first waves hit me, they vaporized all the same when I put my feet back on solid ground.

## **Do you really want to know me?**

See me; this is just an act, a ruse, a plot, a ploy, a pretense. I stand here as a different man.

Not holding back, just spray the mic with what burns within, hoping I strike someone who can relate with no question.

Do you really want to know me?

Or do you want to know the mask that hides my true identity, for the truth is too ugly to see.

You say you want someone amazing-5(y)12 supenan.

See me; this is just an act, a ruse, a plot, a ploy, a pretense. I stand here as a different man.

Not holding back, just spray the mic with what burns within, hoping I strike someone who can relate with no question.

So at the end of this rant, applaud if you can relate.

Hoot and holler if you have ever been wronged by that supposed loved one.

If she has ever taken all that you had and said, “ that’s not enough. I want more.”

Stomp the floor if you have ever felt that burn, that never-ending burn before.

So much so that you could have slammed the door in her face, but out of love, you took her shit with grace.

Like a man.

You didn’t strike her down; you just stood there, not making a sound.

Waiting with never-ending love to paint that sweet smile back on her face.

But in the end, who did she replace?

## Graduating to a Ceremonial Sunset

ere comes a time in high school students' lives when they robe in a gown of silk, wear a tasseled hat, and walk in formation to a song that describes the many tribulations and joys experienced...and the ones destined to face.

Graduation means a transition from the nonchalant days of high school to an expanded world full of adult responsibilities and decisions, a time when adolescents mature and prosper enough to hopefully face the world on their own and succeed...or possibly fail. While there are many moments of joy and happiness as a graduate ricochets through life's journeys, there will be hardship. Every high hurdle, solid obstacle, and hard-hitting brick wall is hurled at full force with devastating effects. The difficult choices that graduates make will be the deciding factors in what lay beyond their horizons.

My graduation was one of the most important memorable events of my life; it meant that I had achieved academic status at a high school level and was ready to transcend to an advanced educational facility.

I'm not keen on every minor detail of that day. Most of my recollection consists of fuzzy video clips locked in my cerebral cavity and about two dozen photographs that my close friends and family took that now collectively lace my photo album. I even frantically dug through dusty boxes of my adolescent belongings to obtain my senior yearbook that held pages of comments and pictures of curriculum, hoping to mold more thoughts from the past, but I found my trip down memory lane met with suppression.

As I looked over the withered photographs of myself, clothed in a blue silk commencement gown and hooded in a blue and gray tasseled biretta, I think back over my progressive academic career that was surrounded with a series of successes and failures. On the day of May 15, though, there was no presence of failure; I was ready to commence with the rest of my peers and classmates into

a new transition of life. But to verify my scholastic achievements, I needed to obtain the one item that symbolized recognition for the accomplishments that brought me to that place in time... my blue and gray ribbon-wrapped diploma.

And who could forget the few male graduates that portrayed a Texas-sized smile while they sported black shades and acted quite cool throughout the whole event?

The girls seemed mature and more serious about the ceremony. Many of them I saw in a different light; their beauty really caught my eye. Maybe it was just due to the right angle from the luminance of the sun. They looked as though they spent the entire day at the beauty salon with their hair frizzed out and curly, along with their face, dusted to perfection with the use of make-up. It was almost as if I'd entered a beauty pageant, and my female classmates were the contestants; it was truly a blissful sight. Some of them I never really gave a second look while I walked through the halls between classes. But it was at that moment that I thought to smack my forehead in regret and wonder why I never asked them out on a date.

The ceremony felt like it lasted forever, but time did not stand more still for me than when the observance drew to an end. Each classmate moved his or her tassel to the other side, and the announcer said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome the graduating class of 1988!" As the crowd cheered, we all threw our birettas into the air with an explosion of spinning blue squares and gray tassels. It was as if we were all trapped in a bubble of time where every moment was played in super slow motion. I recall receiving embraces from many classmates. I didn't know whom I exactly threw my arms around because of the enormous shock and numbness I experienced. Surrounded laughter and smiles reflected the idea that we had progressed beyond our academic ball and chain, at least from a high school point of view. Emotional tears streamed down the cheeks of many, signs of joy and newfound relief from all the scholastic struggles we had to endure. And yet those same tears also meant that all of us had acknowledged this would probably be the last day we would be together as a whole group. It was customary for the senior class to schedule a graduation party, late at night, at an old abandoned farmhouse somewhere in a secluded location, undisclosed to local authorities. But

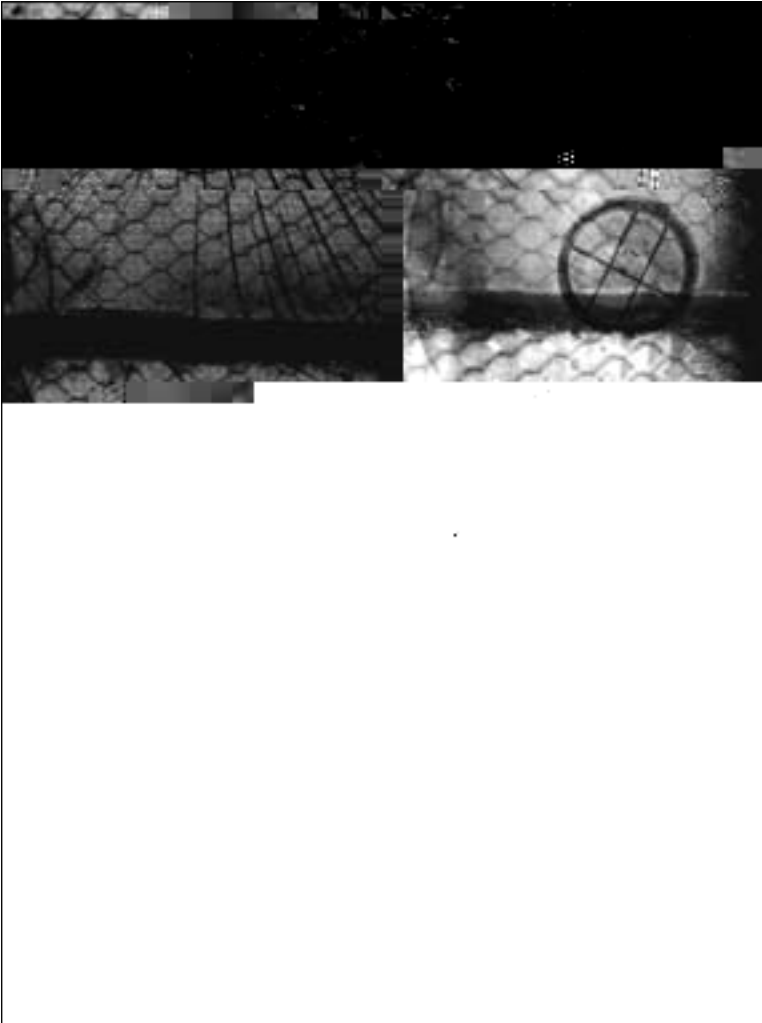
after all the alcohol was consumed and the bon-fire died, each classmate would walk away with hazed brain cells and the realization that a few would keep in touch, but most would go their separate ways never to meet again.

After a closer look through all the photographs of my commencement, I noticed that in every close-up of me there were displayed signs of confusion as the camera caught me with a gazed look towards the sun. I could see the gears turn in my head as I appeared to have the thought, "With the accumulated knowledge

and family who had shared my joys and sorrows and would be there to watch my back and pick me up when I faltered. Before



# Destroyed



## **Lost at the Cabin**

I can smell the metallic lake outside my cabin window,  
still as stone marble,  
only whispering faintly against the shore.

the sun rises higher into the sky  
away from the sunbaking ground.  
Good for the sun, bad for everyone else.  
The temperature climbs with it, pushes me from bed.  
The house is still quiet; no one is up but Dad.  
The crackling of the AM radio drones on  
about presidents and sports,  
things I neither understand nor care about.  
The bitter smell of coffee clogs the room.  
I want to go outside and play, but I know  
I'm not allowed to go alone, so I only sit on the porch  
to mingle with the now sleeping water.  
The birds are waking, and the rich thickness  
of the lake air instills in my memory.  
I am happy.



## Waiting to Cross the Berm

Eventually I grew bored of watching the planes blow up chunks of the city. I tried to eat but really had no appetite, not that MRE's (Meals Ready to Eat) were appetizing. I just sat there and made small talk with my fire team. I didn't worry about what was to come; lots of things had to happen before we entered the city. First we had to get back in the tracks and move up behind the berm (a large pile of sand that separated us from the city). Then we had to wait for the engineers to breach and clear the berm. That was when I could worry about the next step. There was too much waiting left to dwell on the "what ifs."

I awoke earlier that morning at Marine Corps reveille, 0530, and was not the least bit tired. I was on an adrenaline rush; it was the big day when we would finally assault the city of Fallujah. The months of training and preparation were behind us. The weeks of endless waiting and orders being changed as soon as they were issued were over. It was game time.

The first thing I did that morning was to make sure I had packed everything that I would need and put away everything I wouldn't. We were told to put everything away so our area would look neat and squared away. The reality was our command expected high casualties and wanted to know who owned what. I took my time with this task. I focused all my attention on it, so I couldn't dwell on what was to come later that day.

Once I had finished packing, I began to put on my gear. My gear

We boarded the Amphibious Tracks (we called them “am tracks” for short) around 0700, which took us to the first staging site. ere we waited while artillery and aircraft bombed the city, destroying the enemy’s fortified positions.

Our mission was simple: retake the city of Fallujah from the insurgents. I am not sure how long we waited at the first staging site. Time had seemed to speed up and slow down randomly. I was uncertain if I wanted to hurry things up and just get this battle started or enjoy what could possibly be my last moments on earth.

Typically, when my squad was together, we were anything but quiet. We knew everything about each other and would always be talking or making fun of each other. at day, however, was anything but typical. For a while we all sat with the same blank look on our faces, the same posture: leaning forward, elbows on thighs, chin resting on hands, and eyes fixated on a spot but never seeing it. It was like the whole track was under a spell, and every one of us had the same thoughts. “How would I react under fire? Am I going to die? Will I come home with ten fingers and ten toes?”

at mental pondering only lasted a few minutes. It ended as abruptly as it had started. My platoon Sergeant, Sgt. Chambers, helped break the spell by passing around beef jerky, Tang drink mix, and bottles of water. I was surprised that the old guy cared enough about us to bring us something to eat and drink while we waited. I would come to find out later that he found the jerky and the drink mix under his seat. While the am trackers were chattering us around, we were eating and drinking food from their care packages! e food brought out our old selves. Soon things were back to normal, and we were talking and joking around.

We moved into our blocking position around midday. We were told to dig in and watch for any insurgents coming out of the city.

at order was unnecessary because beside us were our am tracks and Humvees, in front of us were LAVs (Light Armored Vehicles), and in front of them were the best tanks on the planet, the M1A1 Abrams main battle tank. ere was no way anyone was getting through all that.

Nonetheless, our digging in soon became ludicrous. We were able

skyline; the illumination rounds added green, and the white phosphorus rounds added white to the mix. It was a spectacular sight, beautiful even, if not for the purpose of it all.

Eventually, the planes stopped dropping their bombs, and the artillery ceased firing. They stopped so those of us in the ground forces could finally enter the city. But when this happened, the insurgents started shooting RPG's (Rocket Propelled Grenades) at our positions. They hit one of the tracks that was down the line from us. Through the radio in the back of our track, we were able to listen to the drama unfold. The radioman in that am track was screaming for a medivac, saying that they had mass casualties. While listening to this, we talked amongst ourselves trying to figure out what platoon was in that track. Earlier that week, we had all been issued quick kill numbers; mine was Charlie 13. Everyone gave me crap for being number 13. I took it as a good omen because it was the same number as our unit, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 3<sup>rd</sup>





# **I Am All**

beneath your bare feet. I am the scent of magnolia that runs through your home. I am never going to leave you, no matter how hard you try to push.

I am a blank sheet of paper. I am a notebook full of thoughts. I am what you need, yet you don't know it. I am the want of forever and the promise of it shall be. I fulfill. This is why you need to open your heart to me, and you will not suffer as I watch as your world is falling apart. I can make you whole again.

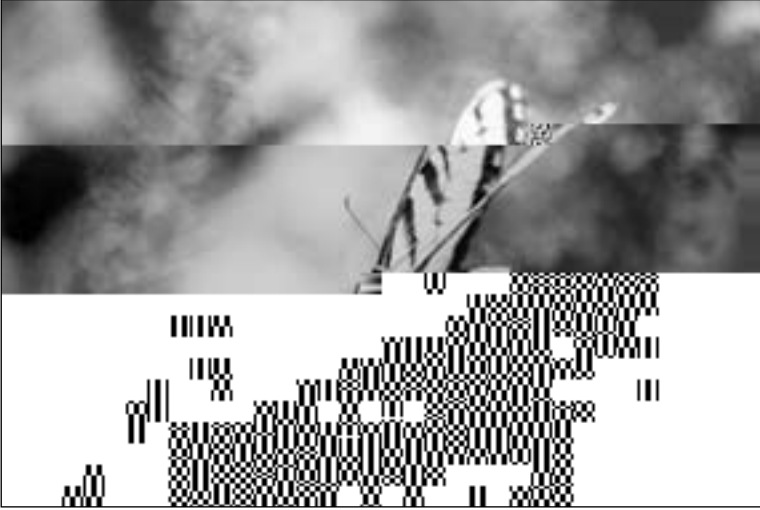
I watch the ending as it begins. You will no longer feel trapped; you are free. Finally it is over, yet it begins. I am God.

# Splash!

Radiology Technologies



# Waiting to Fly



## Writer's Block

I just sit here merely thinking.  
Writing a poem is clearly impossible.  
I don't know how long the poem should be.  
A grand strand of creativity falls out of my head,  
But I am unable to catch it.  
My poetry is inferior to others.  
My procrastination is superior to many.  
I can feel myself turning green,  
Like the Incredible Hulk.  
With every misspelled word, creative mind blanks,  
My shade becomes darker and greener.  
I wish, just once,  
An idea would swim up to me like a fish.  
I keep tossing up ideas  
    at I keep shooting down due to my negativity.  
I don't know.  
I probably won't write a poem, I guess.

## Silence



## Our Contributors

**Jessica Anderson** (“Grandpa’s Shop,” “Radiant Raine”): Jessica wrote her poem, “Grandpa’s Shop” to honor her grandfather and all the wonderful memories she has with him. A multi-talented artist, when Jessica saw “Radiant Raine,” she couldn’t resist capturing her beautiful and elegant image on film. Jessica is in the Academic Transfer program at SCC.

**Angie Anderson** (“One Block”): Angie says she had always been a fun-loving and outgoing person until her addiction rendered her incapable of having social interactions beyond getting and using drugs. Angie has been clean and sober since August 6, 2005, and is currently the addictions counselor at Summit Life Recovery short-term residential treatment facility in Hickman, NE. A 2007 graduate of SCC, she is now a follower of the Buddha and is continuing her education at Doane College.

**Connie Anderson** (“Torn”): Connie says she enjoys wearing ugly shoes that no one else will wear, and she loves her life and her kids. This is her third consecutive year of having either a poem or a photo published in *Illuminations*.

**Chris Anderson** (“Waiting to Cross the Berm”): Chris is 23 and in his first year at SCC. He joined the Marine Corps right after high school, and his essay, “Waiting to Cross the Berm,” describes one of his experiences while serving. Chris thanks Mrs. Humphrey for motivating him to submit this essay to *Illuminations*.

**Robert Anderson** (“Land of My Fathers”): Robert was motivated to write “Land of My Fathers” by various western trips he’s taken during his life and by the passing of his father. A dedicated outdoorsman, Robert is also a student of science and history.



... (“Bird on a Window Sill”): A broken heart motivated Merrion to write her poem, “Bird on a Window Sill.” She has been a student at SCC for many years. She says you may have seen her putting around with her backpack and gray hair.

... (“I Am All”): Shannan was motivated to write her tribute to God, “I Am All,” for a class assignment. She says she’s not good at offering biographies of herself and, “I am what I am.”

... (“Sandman,” “Writer’s Block”): Sam enjoys writing, listening to music, making people laugh, spending time with loved ones, and more. Sam says of “Sandman” and “Writer’s Block,” “These poems are very personal to me, and I enjoyed writing them.”

... (“Floundering”): Erin is recently married and a 7–12 English teacher at Prague Public School. Although her essay, “Floundering,” began as an assignment for her SCC Fiction Writing class, Erin found that as she wrote, it became extremely personal, and her passion for it grew.

... (“Black Christmas”): Brent is 27 and married. He’s been in the York area writer’s guild for over seven years and loves to write poetry. This is the first time he’s submitted his work for publication.

... (“Too Much Restriction on Immigration Laws”): Through his essay, “Too Much Restriction on Immigration Laws,” Pal wanted to make known the immigration situation to people who may not have a clue about immigration laws. Pal’s wife and

**LAURA HARRIS** (“Destroyed,” “The Quiet Place,” “Spiraling Down,” “Stepping into the Unknown,” cover images): Laura says photography is by far her favorite thing to do. She also loves music and going to concerts. “Destroyed” is of a broken window she encountered while walking through the Haymarket. “The Quiet Place” is a photo taken at a lake. She hadn’t seen a tornado slide in years when she created the image “Spiraling Down,” and she wasn’t even going to photograph the scene in “Stepping into the Unknown” until her friend Scott insisted she did. Now it’s one of her favorite photos. Her stunning photos “Vent” and “Dreamscape,” grace the cover of *Illuminations*.

**TERESA A. HARRIS** (“Destination”): Teresa works at a limestone mine and was doing homework when she came up with the idea to write about something she saw every day. The result was her poem, “Destination.” Teresa is an “untraditional” student—a widow with three sons who moved back to Nebraska four years ago. She loves learning, expanding her knowledge, and interacting with new people.

**KIMBERLY HARRIS** (“Cara’s Swing,” “Leroy’s Truck,” “Sloth: The Fourth Deadly Sin”): Kimberly is the editor of *Illuminations* and an English instructor at the Lincoln campus. Photography has always been her passion, as well as reading and music. Her most recent proud hour was serving simultaneously as official photographer and official pianist for a wedding—not easily accomplished! In regard to her photos, “Cara’s Swing” features her daughter, “Sloth” is one of a series of photos on the Seven Deadly Sins, and “Leroy’s Truck” is a nod to her Modern Fiction students who felt Leroy got the raw end of the deal.



**A.** . . . . (“The Intersection of 66th and Vine Streets”): Rachel wrote her observation essay, “The Intersection of 66th and Vine Streets,” for Judith Ottmann’s Composition I class. She is pursuing a degree in Business Administration and Marketing.

**B.** . . . . (“Little James Dean”): Brenda is 36 and a certified Reiki Master and holistic therapist. She enjoys nature, singing, and taking photos of her son. “Little James Dean” was taken after her son did his own hair and was playing the part of a reluctant model.

**C.** . . . . (“Memory of Civil War in Sudan and the Death of My Brother”): Chuol wrote his memoir as an assignment in his creative writing class. He left Sudan in 1986 to flee civil war and came to the United States in 1995. He and his wife have four children.

**D.** . . . . (“Chesney Christine”): Nicole loves children and was just shooting a few random shots when she captured “Chesney Christine.” She loves how it turned out! Nicole plans to

**A. Sara** (“Cabin Revisited,” “Lost at the Cabin”): Sara says she’s written so much poetry since taking Julie MacDonald’s class that she considers herself a poet now. She’s also written three novels, which are linked and are traveling/drama/adventure/romance novels all at once. Sara says denying her the freedom to write would be like denying her air.

**N. Kathie** (“Kathie Has Left the Building!”): Kathie says she’s like most mothers her age: she plays video and computer games with her 13-year-old son and reads horror stories with him when he sits still long enough. Halloween is the favorite holiday around her home, as it’s the one day of the year when it’s completely acceptable for adults to act childish.

**R. Renee** (“Headdress”): Enrolled in an art class each year from kindergarten through 12th grade, Renee loves to draw and paint when she has the time. She’s currently working in a hospital and plans to earn her nursing degree. She also loves the outdoors, enjoys trap-shooting, and is learning how to shoot a bow.

**L. Lydya** (“All a Day”): Lydya is married and the mother of three girls and one boy. She arrived in the United States in June of 2008 but almost returned to Kenya after learning she was pregnant. Instead, the Sudanis helped her establish roots in Lincoln. Lydya is now in school for her surgical technology degree. Her husband is in Kenya with the rest of her family, and she misses him very much, but she says school has been a blessing. Once an elementary teacher in Kenya, Lydya hopes to return as a more learned teacher.

**N. Nicholas** (“Do You Really Want to Know Me?”): Nicholas was motivated to write his slam poetry by a poem called “How I Feel.” Nicholas hopes to pursue a degree in psychology and believes that poets become lovers, lovers become fighters, and fighters become poets.

... (“Discovering the Subtleties of Salsa”): Caitlin loves the smell of the library and sifting her fingers through the gold-lined pages of an old book. When she wins the lottery, she’ll have an entire room dedicated to book shelves and a rolling ladder along the wall. Her idea of the perfect evening is summer stars, a southern-style front porch, laughter, and food. Caitlin says her coworkers are intelligent people, and she thinks many of them deserve better than the service industry. Her essay, “Discovering the Subtleties of Salsa,” is a tribute to them.

... (“Kenny”): Marsha’s essay, “Kenny,” was written for a Composition project. She says she had so much fun recalling all the stories she shared with her dad while playing gin rummy that she found it hard to narrow the stories down to the final version.

... (“An Abrupt Awakening”): Sarah says she’s a soul-searching person who believes that “not all those who wander are lost.” She wrote her essay, “An Abrupt Awakening,” for a class assignment.

... (“Sound O ”): After a career in business communication and promotional writing, Claudia is now a freelance writer/editor and a writing tutor at SCC. She has always been fascinated by the power of words and silence. At the end of the PBS television program *Washington Week in Review*, the photos of soldiers killed in action are shown in silence. The impact of the images is magnified with the sound o —in contrast to the military command “sound o ,” prompting each soldier to shout out his/her presence. In her poem aptly titled “Sound O ,” these concepts are woven together, while leaving unanswered the who, when, where, and why.

... (“Old People”): Max works as a custodian at SCC and was motivated to write his poem, “Old People,” by the diversity of ages he sees on campus—not only among the students, but among the staff and faculty, as well. Raised in Nebraska, Max has been married for more than forty years, has lived on both coasts, has raised three sons, and has been an artist and a teacher. He says he’s ready to retire!

... (“By the Dog of Egypt!”): Carolee got her first dog six years ago, and life has never been the same. She now understands what unconditional love really means. Carolee was motivated to create her photograph while on vacation at the New Jersey shore. Everywhere she went, there were signs that disallowed dogs. She found it hilarious that her dog seemed to get bored as a result of being banned from even the parks they encountered.

... (“Rubber Hammer”): Phip is an SCC English instructor who enjoys writing, teaching, and making short video essays called “digital stories.” He also enjoys playing the guitar. You can find a story of his and other amazing stories at [storiesforchange.com](http://storiesforchange.com).





**Liwayway** (“Fantasy Waves”): Instead of going to college right out of high school, Liwayway went to Basic Combat Training. Less than a year after graduation from AIT, her boots were on Iraqi soil. Although she’s been home only a short time, she feels like it’s been 100 years since she drove past road-side bombs and trucks going up in flames. Liwayway wrote “Fantasy Waves” to not only create the physical sense of being in the ocean but also to illustrate her accomplishment in facing her fears. For her, it’s a story of bravery and inspiration.

**Heather** (“Silence”): Heather wanted to study the techniques of combining color with a graphite image when she created “Silence,” the portrait of a large, docile beast at rest in the silence of the forest. Heather is 19, generally confused, and likes pretty colors. Paint and marker stains are her fashion statement.

**Je** (“Macro,” “Splash”): Je loves photography and capturing beauty in all things. “Macro” was created after encountering leaves after a light shower, while “Splash” is an image of a coconut found on a beach on Kawaii Island. Je is currently in SCC’s Radiology program.

**Lana** (“My Daughter”): Lana is in the Human Services program at SCC and writes poetry and bakes when she’s feeling sad. She loves to read, and she feels that writing poetry is a way for her to deal with life. She wrote her poem, “My Daughter,” for her infant daughter.

