CATS IN ZANZIBAR

2014/2015 ISSUE
Is it not worth the while to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar?

- The Promethean Editors, 2014/2015
EDITORIAL STAFF:
Managing Editor
Raeann Bauer

Student Editors
Katie Wartell
Ashley Aczon
Kayla Suvak
Peggy Wood
Blue Braun
Amber Reeves
William Pynn
Renee Saucier
Jalyn Gilmore
Haley Bucher
Tyler Lamott

Faculty Advisor
Dr. Kimberly Knutsen

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Cats in Zanzibar

With every new generation it is important to look back and learn from those that have come before us, but it is also essential to redefine the new era on a personal level. Henry David Thoreau, venerated author and philosopher, concluded his novel Walden with the line, “It is not worth the while to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar.” Thoreau’s sentiment was that a change of soul or purpose is more important than a change of scenery.

I speak for myself as well as a lot of other late-teen and twenty-somethings when I say that the change in scenery is more than a want, it is a call to our souls to see and experience distant places. That is why, “Is it not worth the while to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar?” took on a lot of meaning this year as it evolved to become something that was uniquely our own.

For us, it is really a question of the worth of a dream. In the context of curing diseases, traveling to Indonesia or Guam seems like a petty pursuit but, if we can gather those experiences and knowledge and use those to inspire us to put good and light into the world, is that not just as worthy of a pursuit?

What follows are the pieces and experiences of my life and the other authors’ lives that we hope to inspire others with. We hope to not only be relatable but also to share some of our understanding with people that we might not ever meet.

Through the tireless efforts of Dr. Kim Knutsen and the other student editors of The Promethean, I am proud to present to you Cats in Zanzibar.

- Raeann Bauer, Managing Editor
One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things.

-Henry Miller
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Drowning

Hana Whisman

There was no abrupt shift. I didn’t suddenly wake up one morning and realize that I was in a world I did not belong to; nor did I get out that way. It was a long, slow process. I was wading out to sea when a swift undertow caught me when I wasn’t looking and carried me out to open waters. I didn’t realize I was drowning until every single person who loved me tossed life vest after life vest. But I didn’t want to be pulled out. I wanted to swim out myself—kicking, screaming, choking, and bobbing with my head just under the surface before I finally landed on the sand—soaked, shivering, and gasping for air.

I had thought I was happy. (Ignorant and stupid might be more accurate statements.) He didn’t “treat me like a princess” in the way I imagined when I was little, but he was new, mysterious, and gave me a peculiar kind of attention I had never experienced before. When he got jealous, it was cute; when he cried, he was sensitive; when he fell silent, he was sultry and mysterious. But things started to change. When he was jealous, it was frightening; when he cried to me, it was pathetic; and when he was silent, I knew it was only because screaming rage was welling up inside him.

When my feelings were hurt, I was “being overly-sensitive and a bitch.” When his feelings were hurt, I was “being rude and also a bitch.”

His fist fell heavy on doors, walls, lockers—anything but me. As long as he didn’t hit me, it wasn’t abuse, right? But his words fell like tarnished chains around my throat.

Of course it didn’t start out that way. I can’t think of any situation like mine that does. Somewhere I read this comparison: “If you drop a frog in a pot of boiling water, he will immediately jump out. If you put him in a pot of lukewarm water and slowly turn up the heat, he will stay there until he boils. And that’s how abusive relationships work.”
At first it was exciting—I had never had a real boyfriend all to myself before! Suddenly, this boy popped up on my Facebook messages to ask about an assignment, and we instantly found ourselves lost in conversation. I think I fell for him because he was the first sixteen year-old boy I had talked to who knew how to use proper grammar.

So we did the traditional “high school relationship” thing. He asked me to the winter formal, and I told him I would think about it. His “hurt feelings” face alarmed me slightly, so I agreed that yes, I would go with him. We had a nice time. He bought me dinner at the Olive Garden and pulled out my chair and toted around my crutches that I had been using since I sprained my ankle the night before.

We sat in the back of each class we had together, whispering and giggling and wreaking general havoc for our teachers. He held my hand on the school bus and let me rest my head against his shoulder. He walked me to my classes, and even though I found it ridiculously embarrassing, always gave me a kiss in the doorway before hustling off to his own classroom.

He said he wanted to be my boyfriend. I told him to ask my father (per the agreement my father made with me when I was young that he would only help me pay for my wedding if all my boyfriends asked his permission to court me). I remember he came over to my house the day before my sixteenth birthday to meet my family. After most of them left, we were sitting on the couch watching Finding Nemo. He was rubbing his hands back and forth, back and forth over his thighs. He'd rock forward, holding his breath, then lay back and let out a deep sigh. I rolled my eyes. I thought he was being a giant baby, but it was still cute.

Finally my dad walked in the room, and in a feeble voice, the trembling boy at my side said, “Mike, I'd like to talk to you about something.” And then they went in the backyard for a while and when he came back he was grinning and trembling slightly less. Then he went home and I guess that's when he became my first boyfriend.

“Did you threaten him?” I asked my father accusingly.

“Only a little,” he said.

I rolled my eyes. “Great, just what I need. A new boyfriend
who’s full of fear.

“Exactly,” he responded.

He was pretty popular, and I certainly was not. He was the varsity pitcher for the baseball team. At the time I was working, an honors student, and a track athlete, but I still made it to every one of his home games. I was usually freezing cold in my skimpy track practice attire, and the team was usually losing. But most of the time he would come out of the dugout after the game to thank me for coming before running off with his friends.

I think he came to one track meet of mine and watched my whole first event (a whopping 13 seconds).

He was also a musician. He taught himself to play the guitar by watching John Mayer performances and he had a decent enough voice. Whenever I was at his house, he’d usually play a song or two for me after I watched him play video games for a couple hours. He told me that he wrote his own songs in his spare time, but I never heard any of them. He said they would be too depressing and too loud for me. What I really wanted was for him to write me a song. I mean, what’s the point of even dating a musician if you don’t get original songs written for or about you? The money?

My uncle told me a great joke: “What do you call a musician without a girlfriend? Homeless.”

Later I remembered this joke and made up my own rendition: “What do you call a musician without a girlfriend? Starving and hitchhiking, apparently.”

Since I was employed and had a car, and he was “focusing on his music and baseball,” I usually was in charge of paying for meals and giving rides.

“Where are you going?” my mother would ask.

“On a date.”

“Well, after you’ve picked up your date and the dinner check, make sure you get her home before dark so her parents don’t worry.” My mother thinks she’s so clever.

“Please don’t say that in front of him. You’ll hurt his feelings.”

My mother just rolled her eyes into the top of her head and
sighed loudly. She got really good at doing that.

After about a year or so, things seemed to be going the way they were supposed to. Although we were bickering more, it was never about anything big. He had also succeeded in coercing me into doing, “what all the other couples are doing,” in the stairway behind the locker room. I felt pretty invested at that point. He had certainly ventured where no one else had attempted without a sharp smack in the face. If I could trust him with that part of me, that obviously meant I was in love, right?

Then she came along. I wasn’t terribly threatened at first. “She’s small, I could take her easily enough if I need to.” I was only joking.

He didn’t think it was funny. “She’s a good friend of mine. So I’d appreciate it if you weren’t a bitch to her, okay?”

We hung out with her and his cousin on the Fourth of July that year. Per his instructions, I did not converse with her.

He began spending more time with her, but I still wasn’t bothered. What could he possibly get from her that he couldn’t get from me? I knew everything about him. No matter how he was struggling, I could read him like yesterday’s newspaper and then make everything better.

She started coming to baseball games. I cheered extra loud at those games. He said, “Stop being a jealous bitch.”

I hadn’t thought I was jealous up to that point. Until I started thinking there might be a reason I should be jealous.

One baseball game, I had just arrived at the field after battling traffic all the way back from my track meet in the city across the river. I was cold, wet, and tired, but I was there in time for the last several innings.

After the game, he exited the dugout. I raised my hand to wave and smile, but he continued walking. My smile froze plastered on my face like clown’s paint while he walked up to her and gave her a hug.

My jaw dropped. I’m not sure if I picked it up by the time he
turned back to me. "I can’t hang out today because I told Emily she could get a ride home with me." (By this time, he had inherited his dad’s minivan with the tinted windows for part-time use.)

The words spilled out of my mouth before I could catch them. "That’s nice. Hey, I just got back from Wilsonville and I’m cold and wet and it’s raining and I parked my car all the way on the other side of the school and it’s like five blocks away and since it’s raining do you think you could drive me over to it? Babe?" I accentuated this last word with a dramatic swat to his behind.

He stuttered for a moment and glanced back at Emily. She looked furious. I grinned sweetly. "Please?"

"Yeah, hang on a second," he muttered and turned to walk back to her.

Flames burned in her eyes as he explained the new situation to her. The same flames burned in my stomach, but all that could be found on my face was sweet, expectant eyes for him and a gloating, smirking grin for her.

We all turned to walk to his car. I still had not said a word to her. They walked painfully slow behind me. I strutted determinedly to the car and stood waiting by the passenger door.

"Listen," she said, "I think I’m just gonna wait for my mom to get me."

He looked at her in distress. "Are you sure?" he asked blankly.

"Yeah, uh, she’s already on her way."

I ignored this encounter and hopped in once he unlocked the door. Neither of us said anything until he had stopped next to my car.

"You played great today. I’m sure glad I got to see you play, since I left my track meet early to come watch!"

He muttered a "thanks" without looking at me. I rolled my eyes and hopped out.

"She’s going through a lot, and so am I, and we’re really the only ones who understand each other."

"Um, then how about you go date her?" I asked.

"Hana, you know I love you."

Bullshit.
He started to cry. I sighed. I used to cry too when he cried, but it got me nowhere. He told me it was selfish to cry since I “don’t even understand what he’s going through.”

For the next six months or so, I continued to put up with his silly nonsense. After I teased him for buying a peacoat and a pair of Toms, I put up with him calling me a foul, vulgar name that made the hair on the back of my neck rise during class. I put up with him when he bought Diablo 3 the week before prom so he didn’t have any money to buy our dinner. I put up with him telling me, “The only reason I bought you a corsage was so I wouldn’t have to hear you bitch about it all night.”

I put up with him regularly making me late for class because he had something to cry about in the parking lot after one of our fights. I put up with him screaming that I “betrayed him,” because I dared to seek counsel from one of my guy friends about a life issue.

I put up with finding out that he and Emily had kissed during one of our short “breaks,” several months after it happened. I put up with months of being grounded by my parents for my lying and sneaky behavior to cover up most of the shitstorm that was our relationship.

I put up with it all because he said he needed me. He said that he would kill himself if I left him. And he would cling to me, wipe his salty tears across my chest, shake me, throw me, and sob himself hoarse if I so much as suggest we try “moving on.”

So I stayed. For a year and a half, I stayed.

I’m not sure what finally caused me to decide to leave. I think I had seen just one too many tears. Every time he cried, I would pat him on the back and mutter, “There, there.” As soon as he looked away or wiped his eyes, I would sigh deeply and roll my eyes into the back of my head. I was nearly as proficient at the eye roll as my mother.

I knew I had to do it. I called up a friend and cried for the first time in several months. I knew I had to do it, but I didn’t know how.

“Just call him so he can’t hurt you,” he said. “Hana, it only takes thirty seconds of bravery. Tell him you’re done and hang up.
Don’t stay on the phone and let him play your emotions.”

So I did that. When I hung up, he was sobbing. “Hana, please no. We can work this out.”

Within ten minutes there was a knock on my front door. Apparently, he had run to my house. My parents were already in bed but, like an idiot, I opened the door.

He cried. He sobbed. He flung himself onto the ground, face first. I stood there, numb and disbelieving. I was shocked that I wasn’t sobbing too. But I felt so calm and steady knowing that it would eventually all be over.

Apparently I didn’t look sympathetic enough, so he crawled across the ground and reached up and grabbed my sweatpants. His hands wrapped around my legs like a shark’s jaw, tearing and gnawing and ripping me. I kicked him off.

It was not the first time I used physical force to remove him from me, but it was the first time it worked. He lay back on the ground sobbing and screaming. My dad appeared on the porch as if he suddenly sprouted from the rotting wooden boards.

“This is the most pathetic thing I’ve ever seen.”

To my surprise, he sounded more bewildered than angry.

“You get off my property and away from my daughter before I have to come down there and escort you away. Do you understand?”

I stood with my mouth gaping open. I wasn’t quite absorbing what was going on. He glanced at me and I knowingly went back in the house. I somehow found my way to my bed and sat there for what felt like several hours or maybe several days. It was probably only a minute or two.

“I took care of him,” he said. “I’m going to bed.”

That was my father’s shining moment of glory. He had always told me what he’d do to a boy who’d mistreated his daughter. I had always dreaded the moment my father would return from dealing with a boy saying, “I took care of it.” But at that moment, I had never been more grateful to have him as my father.

For the next several weeks, I woke up every morning fearing that I would walk outside and find a dead boy in my driveway. Thank God that was not the case.
However, I would come home to find presents, flowers, and notes sitting on my porch or around the back of the house taped to my window.

He even left a pair of Nike Free Run shoes he had promised me for two birthdays and a Christmas (not that I had received anything for any of those occasions). Although they were gorgeous and fit perfectly, my mother made me return them.

One night when my dad was gone, my mom knocked on my bedroom door to inform me that someone had arrived with a photograph, his guitar, and an original song. “There’s my damned song,” I thought. She sent him away. I never got to hear my song.

I had to block his number from my phone, as I was receiving over ten calls and twenty texts daily.

Now I look back on that time and laugh, at least a little. Not that it was funny by any means. In fact, quite the contrary. I mostly laugh at the ridiculous backwards logic I used to justify staying with him. Sometimes, I blame it on the fact I was young and stupid. I don’t really have any other excuse—my parents were always the perfect portrait of a healthy relationship. They taught me my whole life about respecting myself and finding someone who respects me even more.

Concerned family and friends had confronted me over the months to question just why I was still with him. They said that he didn’t treat me right. I told them that I was doing just fine, thank you, and that it wasn’t nearly as bad as it apparently seemed. My parents, though, never directly told me what they thought of him.

Later, I asked my mom why she never confronted me. She said she didn’t want me to push her away even further, because she knew that would only have made me run to him more.

I asked myself the same question. I couldn’t think of a good answer. Ultimately, it doesn’t matter why I stayed. It only matters that I stayed.

When I was seventeen years old, I found myself drowning in the ocean. He sucked me in like an undertow tide and I was out in the open ocean without a lifeline before I realized that I couldn’t feel the sand under my toes any more. He was out there too. He was drowning too. He splashed and gurgled, and pulled me down into the
waters with him. I thought I could save him but the whole time he was killing me.

When I finally emerged, I found myself face first in the sand, coughing and sputtering with my lungs full of water. I was exhausted after fighting the breaker waves for so long.

Now I am not afraid of the ocean, but I am much more careful when wading in. I've coughed up all the water.

Occasionally, I'll find some sand still stuck behind my ear or between my toes. I just brush it off and continue with my day.
Nowhere to Turn

Blue Braun

My name’s Timothy and I like to go by Timothy. I hate when people call me Tim — because it’s somehow impersonal to me. If you can’t understand that now, I guess you never will.

I’m in love with my best friend. We have always been best friends and nothing more, even though I have tried incessantly to get Margaret to see me as “boyfriend material.” I mean, her name is Margaret, but she goes by Kwon ever since her dad passed away when we were both freshman in high school. Kwon’s mom refused to have me at the funeral, despite the fact that Kwon invited me. Then the mom also disinvited Kwon since Kwon’s sinister cherry-red lipstick was too dark, her hair was still dyed a radiantly rebellious red, her black dress was too short, and black Doc Martens were not appropriate shoe attire, or something along those lines. Kwon looked more conservative than I’d ever seen her, but her mom said her dad, Davis Kwon, would not want his only daughter to honor him in something like that. Honestly, I think it’s about something else. Kwon does too, but we have no proof for why Kimberly Kwon disinvited her own daughter to a funeral.

Two years later, Kwon stopped attending parties with me, and I hadn’t seen her lips brush against a bottle in a while. Junior year, she was always in Mr. Moskowitz’s office. To improve her grade in English, I think.

Mr. Moskowitz had a nose that seemed almost aggressive. It was long, pointy and disoriented like an avalanche. I called Kwon every Friday afternoon to see if she would want to watch my band, Mosh Pit, perform at school—she was the one friend that always came to our concerts. Not to brag, but even my bandmates’ girlfriends didn’t attend all of the shows. Their girlfriends came to half, if luck was on their side. Junior year, my one true friend was never there for our auditions, our concerts. She wasn’t there to witness me putting my heart on stage with my voice that could slice through a rock because it’s so ugly, and my rough guitar playing giving the audience migraines. Mosh Pit sometimes performed for our school dances, and
we have had legit gigs, too.

Our most famous song is “Nowhere to Turn,” which was written by me.

Nowhere to turn
Now that I’m alone now
Will you still be watching me?

After our first performance of “Nowhere to Turn,” Kwon’s mascara-filled tears ran down her cheeks as I sang those lines, and my lungs filled with bitter feelings. The fact that she’d finally showed up made me happier than anything, but deeply sad too. Why now? Why did she wait so long to come back into my life? Kwon hugged and congratulated me after the show.

The following Monday, Mr. Moskowitz was fired. The school didn’t really have time to host our shows anymore, or have slam poetry events, or art galleries. The one teacher who managed all these events happened to be Mr. Moskowitz, the twenty-seven-year-old professor who always had the door closed during a private meeting. Not for the boys, though. Usually, he had his door closed any time a girl wanted to ask him a question about their paper, their final grade, or whatever. The last two months he had been teaching, I’m not really sure what he did.

After he was fired, Kwon spent time with me again. We got insanely wasted together, rode our bikes to the park, watched bands perform that were usually almost terrible. We tried to forget about all the bad things that had recently happened to her.
“Zurückgreifen! Umgruppieren!”

A command from the Germans echoed through the clearing. The Volksgrenadiers stopped their attack and hastily retreated back into the snowy forest. They had taken heavy casualties in this engagement and didn’t want to risk being wiped out. Carson fired a few more times before lowering his rifle and let out a relieved sigh. He had somehow avoided death yet again. Soon the gunfire and explosions quieted down, leaving only the cries and whimpers of wounded from both sides. They drifted through the frosted pine trees and were carried around by the cold winter winds. Carson sat down in his foxhole and tried to ignore the desperate yells of the wounded Germans.

He had taken the time to learn some of the language back in basic training. However as he listened to them call out for their mothers and friends to save them from certain death, he was beginning to think he had made a mistake. As some of the voices faded away, only one remained powerful enough to understand.

“Bitte... ich wollte schriftsteller warden,” one of them cried softly.

“He... wanted to be a writer...” Carson whispered to himself.

“Amerikaner!” the voice yelled.

Carson slowly peeked out of his foxhole and saw a German shakily holding out a notebook, his other hand covering his profusely bleeding wound.

“Bitte...” he cried, his voice echoing through the clearing.

Carson climbed out of his foxhole and cautiously walked over to the wounded German. Upon reaching him, Carson slowly kneeled down beside him. His face was pale and his eyes were just barely able to hang open. He weakly motioned for Carson to take his notebook.

“Take...” the German said.
With a wavering hand, Carson took the notebook as a small smile crept across the German’s face. The notebook looked as if it had gone through every hardship known to man. Pages were falling out and the cover was dirty and shredded.

“Tell story...” The German pleaded, beginning to shake from the cold.

Carson nodded slowly. Using his remaining strength, the German smiled and placed his hand on Carson’s knee. Moments later, the hand lifelessly fell into the snow, the German’s eyes closing for the final time. Carson stood up with a heavy heart and walked back to his foxhole, the notebook he had been given lazily hanging down by his side.

Upon sitting back down in his foxhole, he quietly read the cover of the notebook.

“My life as a Soldier in the Wehrmacht... by Hansel Shultz... of the 212th Infanterie Division,”

Carson opened the notebook to the first page and continued reading.

“Whoever finds this, be them German, Russian, British or American, I want you to tell my story alongside yours.”

Carson flipped through the notebook, only able to comprehend a few of Hansel’s masterfully written stories and journal entries. For being seventeen, he had been quite skilled. As he browsed the pages enveloped in writing, two pictures fell into his lap. One picture was of Hansel and his squad. Each of them had confident yet humble grins on their faces. The names of each soldier were written above their heads, his closest friends circled and the ones who had been killed crossed out. There were also several soldiers who were both circled and crossed out. As he examined the second picture, a wave of guilt drowned him.

It was Hansel standing with his mother and baby sister. His mother, Greta, looked immensely proud of her son, hugging him with a gleeful smile. Meanwhile his baby sister, Erika, tugged at
his uniform, intrigued at the design and colors. A tear rolled down Carson's face as emotions swelled up inside of him. They would never see Hansel again.
The house is empty. Silence encompasses the room. The water is stagnant in his bowl. The food is stale. I pour my bowl of cereal. There is no one begging for scraps. I look out the window. The sky is tranquil, although I can’t see any shapes in the clouds. The ice-cream truck passes. I hear no familiar recorded tune. The wind refuses to whisper its secrets to me. The stuffed rabbit has ceased to squeak. Something is different about his gaze. Lately it has been vacant. Staring into nothingness. His nose is pale. The color of a newly formed snowflake. His fur the color of melting snow. He can barely lift his head. I am wondering if I should help him. I wait until the seventh day. Hoping, waiting, wishing, thinking. I lift him up into the passenger seat, dreading every nano-second that slips through my loose grip. I lay before him his favorite stuffed rabbit and a chew bone, out of respect. We drive, our breaths are in unison. Then slowly fading, only one breath is audible. The grass seems less green; the sky has lost its blueness.
Bully
Peggy Wood

Loser is carved into my desk. It isn’t written in large letters, as that would likely be to hard to do in the short amount of time whoever wrote it had. Instead, it is inscribed in uneven, straight and crossed scratches in the bottom left corner.

At first, I thought nothing of it. It was just a note left on a desk by some other student long ago. I never even thought it was meant for me nor did the idea to tell a teacher cross my mind. It wasn’t until we changed seats and the day after the new desk I had was replaced with the labeled one that I realized it was a message for me.

Well, I have to give them props; after all, an engraving is a lot more permanent than writing in pencil. I guess they decided to skip over the pen stage this year and go straight from pencil to carving such a nice word on my desk. I can even appreciate the thought that went into planning where to place such a word. The bottom left corner, just a smidgen from the edge so that it would always be visible between my paper and my arm as I wrote down notes or doodled. Still, it’s not as bad as they could have done. There were so many other words to choose from… Retarded? I guess that’s too long to carve out… Stupid? Nah. What’s another five letter word that they call me? Oh well, it doesn’t really matter to me. I’ve long since accepted this level. It’s the other stuff, the more extreme stuff, that gets to me anyway.

It’s the shoving on the steps that are always wet due to the moist air that surrounds our school. I’m told its because we live near the ocean, but I still find it hard to believe that the steps can remain wet even on sunny days. It’s the stealing of my assignments when I’m not in the room. This leads the teachers to believe I’m lying about doing it and lying about the abuse. That gets to me.

It’s the way they do stuff that hurts me both mentally and physically that I have to hide at home because my mom will cry all night if I tell her the truth. Although, now I don’t suppose I’ve hidden it too well, because she’s been going to all these school meetings lately. I tried to warn her that they, the school, wouldn’t do anything, but
I guess she'll have to figure it out on her own. I get to re-learn that lesson every year with a new teacher. That's the worst part, and that gets to me too.

This year has been the hardest yet. This year it's become truly physical. This year they actually grabbed me and hurt me. It's not like before. It's not just words, or threatening looks and dangerously timed shoves. This time, three girls trapped me in the bathroom and threw me against a sink so hard I had a bruise for a week.

This time I went to the teacher begging her to help and she brought them up. They denied it, of course, and she just looked at me. Her eyes said she believed me, but her face told me that there was nothing she could do.

"You three can sit down. Lilly, why don't you go to the nurse's office and let Maggie look at you." I don't feel betrayed when the teacher doesn't help me. At least she isn't punishing me. Last year, my teacher made me fill out a pink slip every time someone told her I was lying. The slips, the only sin of lying that I actually committed. It will take years for me to discover that punishing the victim is actually wrong and not just said to be wrong.

I mean, they tell us to be loving, they tell us to turn the other cheek, and they tell us to forgive. They tell us to tell them if something you think is wrong is happening. They say it will all be better if you tell a teacher or adult that someone is hurting you, but those are just words. I still do it, but I know that those are just words. Here, at school, the victim gets punished because the victim is outnumbered.

As I'm walking, I see Ms. Maggie standing outside with a person I vaguely recognize as our principal. When I am about twenty feet from them, Ms. Maggie calls out to me.

"What happened this time, Lilly? Cold, stomach, or did you fall?" I'm not a saint. I do lie sometimes. I say I've caught a cold, or that I've thrown up on days when I just can't take the bullying anymore.

Sometimes it's not a complete lie. I have tripped a number of time on those forsaken steps, and right now, I wish I had because my ability to gloss the bullying over for the day, or pretend it's something...
else is too low.
I've been here so many times before but right now it's different. I just don't have the strength this time. I run up and hug her around the waist, burying my face in her stomach. I begin crying my eyes out.

"Please call my Mom. Please? I just want to go home," I beg. My voice is cracking and my back hurts so much that lifting my arms to hug her makes my breathing come in short, difficult inhalations, but I don't care. I just need to feel safe for a little while. I just need my Mom.

"Lilly?" She tries her best to be gentle as she dislodges me, and this time she bends down a little to be at my level. I just shake my head and cry, covering my eyes with my hands. I'm a little ashamed to have lost my composure. I'm a sixth grader crying like a first year. She excuses herself and me and brings me into the office. She asks what's wrong, but I'll never tell. I'll never say it to anyone working at that school again. I just won't.

She calls my mom, who I hug from her arrival to the car. In the car, I can't hug her, but as soon as we're home I go right back to doing it. I hugged her for hours, long after my crying stopped, and only when I let go of her did she get up to make dinner.

That was the last year I went to that school. That was the last year I ever had to deal with those bullies, but I don't doubt that they're out there somewhere.

Some of them might even attend my college. If they read this, I hope they know that what they did scarred me. It was years before I was able to move past it. Even now, I still suffer some of the effects. I, at twenty years old, still have nightmares of falling to my death on the stairs of that elementary school. I hope that someday they read this. Not because I want to invoke guilt or shame them by spilling this information, but so they know about it. So they think about it. So they learn from it. I want them to never do it again, but I doubt that will ever happen because something dark has a hold of them.
Dog Jaw

Julia Vitells

“Do you want to feel my dog jaw?”
I moved my gaze slowly, slowly from the page in front of me and regarded my brother.
“I know all your jokes already. I know that one.”
“Do you want to feel my dog jaw?” my brother repeated, hopefully. He swung himself off his bed and came over to me.
“Here,” he pointed at his chin. “Feel it.”
“Will you promise not to talk to me for fifteen minutes if I do?”
He thought about it. “Yeah. Just feel it. Come on!”
I brushed his chin with my fingers and then jumped back with a squeak as he growled and snapped at my hand.
“You’re terrifying. That was a good joke. Now shut up for fifteen minutes and let me read.”
My brother was smiling. I guessed it had been worth it. He hopped back over to his side and stretched out on his bed, staring at the ceiling. The late-afternoon sun coming through the window made his hair look dusty. I brought my book back up to my face, but my mind wandered. It was hard to pay attention to a story in this kind of sunlight.
I let my mind roam at peace back into its honeycomb of memories. It was a specifically pleasurable feeling, letting it skip where it wanted and stop where it pleased. My mind’s eye hung for a moment on a recess memory, from elementary school, swinging up on the swing set and letting my eyes unfocus on the blue sky until I saw tiny clear creatures, like snakes or worms in a tide pool, swimming across my vision. It was astonishing. When I told my teacher about it he said it was tiny specks of dust on my eyeball.
“If you could have any kind of birthday party in the world, what would it be?” My brother asked out of nowhere. He was wearing his catcher’s mitt and batting idly at the string that hung from the lamp over his bed.
“Davis...”
“No, I’m serious. Like a party with a theme. Like would it be Star Wars, or wild west, or pirate ship...”
“I truly have no idea,” I told him. “I would rather just have a party where I could dress up.”
“I would probably have it be a space theme. It wouldn’t matter what movie or TV show, or it could be sort of all of them..”
I snorted. “Not very likely. Can you picture dad letting you have a space party?”
“You never know. He used to let us do more fun stuff. Maybe he’ll get in a good mood again.”
I looked at him. He was still staring up at the light fixture. His eyes looked untroubled.
“Maybe,” I told him. We were silent for a few minutes.
“You know,” I said, after a while. “Summer vacation is not going to last for that much longer.”
Davis grinned and jumped his eyebrows at me. “I know. I can’t wait to see...everybody.”
“Are you going to talk to the teachers?”
Davis was thoughtful and silent for another minute.
“I don’t know.” He flipped over onto his stomach and dangled his arm off the edge of the bed. His cheek squished against the mattress. “Are you?” he said in a squished-sounding voice.
“I don’t know.”
There were footsteps suddenly outside the door. It rattled. I heard the key in the lock.
The door opened and Dad was in the doorway with a tray. He fixed us with a cold eye and put the tray down. He gathered up the dirty dishes from yesterday, shifted the stack to one arm, grabbed the little porta-potty with the other hand.
“I’ll be back with this and some more TP in a minute,” he said. It was all he ever said.
Trapped Breath

Blue Braun

It all changed when Mr. Freeman was smiling wide, a smile big enough to hold a watermelon. Mrs. Confrey, inches away from his oven-warm face, had ideas in her head. *He wants to understand me? Did he have an accident as a kid that caused his neediness to be extreme?*

“Always be cautious with someone extreme,” her mother once told Mrs. Confrey when she was little. Little Mrs. Confrey’s lace soft fingers tried to pry open a jar filled with jam as her mother continued ranting. Gross jam—Mrs. Confrey thought it looked like the insides of the body, the inside of the liver, the inside of the heart.

“I like you and I think you like me…” Mr. Freeman began, still keeping intimate eye contact with her. Mrs. Confrey released her breath because, for a split second, it was as if her breath was trapped in a jar filled with nothing.
Making Magic
Kylie Johnson

It was a normal day on the seas of the Caribbean. The all-too-familiar scent of bleach and must filled my nostrils. It was right around dinner time when I walked into the attraction through its exit, passing the Blue Bayou restaurant and its never-ending line of viciously hungry patrons. I walked through what I call the “brain scanner,” a camouflaged contraption that counts heads of guests as they leave the attraction, threw my arms into an X on my chest, and yelled “CROSSING,” letting the dispatchers know I needed to cross the flume via a boat to get to the other side of the dock.

After clocking in and getting my assignment, I took over at Front Unload, letting Lisa go to break. That position had become second nature to me. Open the gates. Spiel to the guests, “Welcome aboard, Mateys! Stow all yer loose treasure, and there be no flash pictures. Enjoy yer voyage!” Wait for the green light. Push the button. Never, under any circumstances, take your hand off the emergency stop.

The dock is set up in a manner that is most efficient. Two boats pull into the station. Each boat contains six rows that can accommodate three passengers in the front, two in the back, and four in each of the middle rows. As the two boatloads pull into the station and the guests disembark to their starboard side, the gates open to allow twenty-one new passengers on board via the port side. Sixteen seconds after the last boats are dispatched, a green light affixed to a post on the dock signals that the ride is ready for a new load of passengers. When the gates to the back boat are closed and all the sailors are seated, the pirate or wench at Rear Unload may depress the dispatch button, signaling its preparedness to the cast member at Front Unload. When the same safety precautions are met at the front boat, the pirate or wench at Front Unload presses their dispatch button and the boats take off.

After a few minutes of sending sailors into the abyss of the Caribbean, Cindy, the wench at Rear Unload, began loading guests with disabilities onto the rear boat via the starboard side. This delay
causes a bit of a lag in the dispatching of boats, and I chose to take those few extra seconds to enhance the guests’ experiences; a practice Walt Disney called “plussing.” My favorite activity during these bonus seconds with guests was to tell corny pirate jokes. “Why did Captain Hook cross the road? To get to the second hand store!”

The console phone began ringing and, unfortunately, this particular impromptu stand-up act was cut short. “FrontUnload, Kylie.”

“Hi, Kylie, this is Ashley at the Blue Bayou. I have two guests here on their honeymoon. Any chance we can make some magic?”

Making magic was another way to “plus” a guest’s experience in the parks. At Pirates of the Caribbean, we did this by allowing sailors to enter through the exit, bypassing the line, and for special occasions we loaded them onto an empty boat, letting them sail through the attraction on a private cruise.

“Sure thing, Ashley,” I replied. “Bring them in whenever they’re ready.”

A few minutes later Ashley appeared with a young couple. It was quite obvious that they were flying high on fresh love. The pair sported cliché Disney t-shirts which read, “I’ll be your Mickey” and “I’ll be your Minnie,” along with bride and groom Mickey Mouse ears, and the park’s complimentary “Just Married” buttons. They walked through the secret door connecting Pirates of the Caribbean with the Blue Bayou in an embrace, never letting go of each other. Ashley introduced them to me as Justin and Michelle.

“Thank you so much for doing this for us!” Michelle said to me. She had a Valley Girl voice that matched her perfectly manicured hands and the blond curls flowing from beneath her mousey veil.

Justin reached his hand out to shake mine. “Yes. Thank you so much.” I reciprocated the gesture and shook his hand. It was clammy but strong. He had dark eyes that begged not to be trusted and slick, black hair like a Greaser. The pair reminded me of a modernized teenage John Travolta and Olivia Newton John.

“It’s my pleasure,” I responded, as I had been trained to do.

The first day of training, in a class called Traditions, my colleagues and I were taught two of the most important universal
Disney lessons. Firstly, whenever a guest says ‘thank you’, it is only appropriate to respond with ‘my pleasure’.

“Responding with ‘you’re welcome’ or ‘no problem’ sounds as if you were put out by doing what they asked,” our trainer Erika explained. “Saying ‘my pleasure’ tells the guest that you truly enjoyed serving them.”

The second most important universal lesson was related to pointing. At Disney, everyone uses the two-finger point. Most people think the Disney two-finger point was adopted because in some cultures pointing with one finger is considered rude, but in reality it is utilized simply because Walt pointed with two fingers. The reason for this? He always had a cigarette between his index and middle finger. This practice has now been implemented at most theme parks around the world.

Performing the Disney two-finger point with flawless form, I pointed to a yellow line on the dock and asked Justin and Michelle to wait behind it. As their boat pulled into the station I warned them to watch out for those disembarking and, when the coast was clear, to load into row two. I spied on them. I waited for the green light. I pushed the dispatch button. And I sent the couple on the ride of their lives. As I watched them drift off into the darkness of the bayou, I saw the ears on their heads lean together. Justin put his arm around Michelle and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. A smile played across my face, and I felt pleased with myself for being able to give the couple this rare, precious gift.

Shortly thereafter I was sent to break. I spent fifteen minutes watching Food Network in the closet that served as a break room backstage. To access this room, you walk through the stage door and immediately down half a flight of stairs. At the bottom, there is a small shelf containing a computer where work assignments are given. To the right of the computer is a water fountain and to the left are two doors. One of these doors leads to the Indiana Jones queue and the other, directly above another very short flight of stairs, leads to the break room. The break room door is similar to that of a church nursery, a Dutch door that is missing the top half, but this detail is often missed because the door is always propped open in case of emergencies. Through the doorway, on the immediate right, is the so-
called break room.

It consists of a mini-fridge with a small microwave perched atop, a very large breaker box serving as a TV stand, and a smaller electrical box protruding from the wall that serves as the table. This particular “table” is about a foot long, but only six inches wide, and I can say from experience that it is quite difficult to balance a TV dinner on it while answering texts and eating. There is only enough room for two people in the break room, and most of the time pirates waiting for their shift to start sit on the stairs instead of packing into the break room like sardines. Walking straight through the door and past the makeshift rest area, one would find oneself traveling behind the shrubbery of the Bayou and into the banjo player’s cabin. Upon exiting the cabin, there are cast member bathrooms and kitchens for New Orleans Square’s many restaurants.

I was just getting up and heading to the computer to clock back in when I heard the stage door open.

“Kylie, you down there?” Natalie wailed down the stairs. Natalie was the Lead for the evening. Not quite a manager, but not quite a lowly grunt worker, a lead is the head of an attraction, shop, restaurant, or area. Natalie knew more about our quaint attraction than anyone else onsite. She could fix faulty water levels and blown hydraulic lines in seconds, and she was always quick on her feet to solve guest complaints.

“Yeah, I’m here,” I shouted back. “Just about to get a new assignment.”

“Don’t bother,” Natalie retorted. “We have a situation in Tower. Meet me up there.”

I quickly shuffled into my becoming pirate vest and wide belt and half-leaped, half-ran up the two short flights of stairs, one backstage and one onstage. When I got to Tower, Natalie and Bruce were scanning the nine TV screens that showed live video feed from the 33 cameras dispersed throughout the attraction. I saw boats sailing past the Blue Bayou, through the Transition Tunnel (the well camouflaged transition point between Pirates of the Caribbean’s two show buildings), and in the Auction Scene, but nothing really grabbed me as a “situation.”
“Look at camera 30,” Natalie said as Bruce enlarged the image on the extra screen. “Did you load those guests onto that boat?”

I looked at the picture of what was taking place in the attraction. Having engaged the lift break, Natalie stopped boat 14 at the base of the lift near the Jail Scene. The boat was where it should be. It wasn’t taking on water. No one was using the flash on their camera or standing up. But there were my two new friends, Justin and Michelle, one on top of the other, fornicating.

“Kylie. Did you load those guests onto that boat?” Natalie repeated.

“Ye.. Ye.. Yes. I did. Bu.. But I didn’t know they were going to do THAT!” I stammered. I quickly relayed the story to Natalie and Bruce of Justin and Michelle’s honeymoon, and Ashley calling, asking to make magic. “Someone sure is making some magic, alright,” Bruce interrupted. “But it wasn’t you or Ashley!”

Disneyland Security was waiting on the dock when I descended the stairs from Tower. They asked to take a statement and I again explained the situation that had taken place only twenty minutes earlier. Having composed themselves after their festivities in the Caribbean, Justin and Michelle, her Mickey Mouse ears a little askew, were surprised to see Security waiting for them at the station. The couple was escorted out of the park and their tickets for the day were voided.

Almost a year later, after completing my Disney College Program and moving back to Concordia, I grabbed a Cosmopolitan magazine off the rack at Safeway and took it home to read. As I gazed through the pages filled with gossip and advertisements, I saw an article suggesting some of the most fun places to “get it on” in public.

Thinking back to the incident at Disneyland, and intrigued to see what Cosmo had to say on the issue, I read. “We’ve all seen Fear. But it’s probably not a great idea to do anything raunchy on a ride that involves speed or unpredictable motion, because people are going to lose actual teeth. The ideal place to get discreetly happy is probably more like a Pirates of the Caribbean ride...”

Right you are, Cosmo. Because it would be totally cool to get caught on the cameras, an incident termed ‘pirate porn’ in Tower,
only to be shamefully kicked out of Disneyland. Maybe you should try *It's a Small World*. I hear there aren’t any cameras over there.
When I was little, my name was Bug. At least, that is what my mom told me. Like other children, my parents gave me nicknames. Childhood nicknames seem to make most teens cringe but, at the age of nineteen, I cried.

My family is the crayon drawing on a fridge. It is a mommy and daddy with two kids, an older sister and a younger brother. They are all smiling. They are holding hands. They are happy.

"Raeann Elan, stop it," my mother whispers through her teeth at me.

There are too many memories to single out which time my mom said this to me. It was probably that time I bit my baby brother’s toe when I was three at the state fair. At one and a half years, toes wiggle far too much not to be bitten, especially when they are hogging all of the attention. Or, it might have been that time when I started crying at Disney World because all of the other girls had a Mickey Mouse ice cream with the round, delicate ears and grape bubblegum eyes.

It was probably the time we were out to eat and the right side of my dad’s upper lip not so quietly sneered, “They probably stole the menus too. Gyps.” And I cried for the uncomfortable ignorance of the laugh that escaped my mom’s frown and my dad’s fake laugh that made a racist remark “just a saying, Raeann” or “just a joke, Raeann.”

Growing up, it was the cardinal sin to let others see anything but our shiny lacquered surfaces, bright with the polish of secret tears and vibrant like a newly printed photo, not given the chance to see the light. It was all to keep what was on the outside separate from the stuff on the inside. You can’t draw sadness with crayons.

I am the oldest by almost two years and my brother is the youngest. Cameron was always “Cam Cam” or “Scoot Scoot” named so for the red-rider colored, old-fashioned scooter he used to ride all the time. It was my dad’s when he was little and Cam would wheel it around our wooden deck, chasing his latest scraped knee. When my dad would walk past him, he would abandon the scooter and run after. He would pull on his green pants leg begging to go with him.
And so they rode off on weekends to have guy time. Somehow, I was always a little too slow to catch up. Even the time that I climbed into the hot car before they left and buckled myself in, I sat breathing in the smell of heat and the warm leather of the dashboard just waiting. Even the time it was my birthday and I insisted that it be my pass into guy time. But I would have never liked guy time. It wouldn't have been fun for me. It wasn't for me. At least, those were the excuses. There was one time that I was allowed to go with them.

The gates to guy time were rusted and metal. This was my father's passion and church. He was here every weekend without fail and it showed. We drove up to the booth and purchased a ticket to go into the flea market. It was a junkyard of treasure. We parked in the field in front of the buildings and tents. We worked our way around to all of the booths.

I knew by now not to ask for silly things that a ten-year-old girl might want, so I did not look too closely. We went from vendor to vendor; there were tools and collectables. There were cassette tapes and CDs, jewelry, and other small, dusty things. The people all knew my dad. They knew my brother too. Many of them had candy or toys for him. They greeted them with a smile and a present, but I was the unknown. "Who is this?" and "I didn't know you had a daughter." I felt like I was an outsider and I was. They all knew about Cameron's soccer game, but they didn't even know I existed. I was Raeann. I was the oldest. I was Bug.

The first time I found out I was a girl called Bug, I was nineteen. I had gone home on a weekend during college to pick up some things I had forgotten. It was the first time I had seen any of my family in three months. I drove up and parked near the side of the house. As I was walking into the garage, my dad walked out of the house. He strode past me, talking on his work cell phone, clad in his trademark green Carhartt jeans. I didn't try to run after him or even try to get his attention. I let him go. My mom greeted me and helped me collect some of my things. We talked about how school was going. We talked about how I liked my classes. We talked about how my mom was filing for divorce.

My family's happiness is like a puzzle. If I assigned a face on a
pain chart to our family unit, it would be the “Hurts Even More” face. It is the wobbly one with the number six out of ten. In the moments of my childhood, I would say that we were content. Upon reflection, I realize that it was because those moments were filled with distractions. My mother tried everything to give the impression to my brother and me that we were happy. Every school break was filled with camping trips to the beach with just my mom, brother and me and the anticipation for the next whole family trip. Stripped away, those breaks were moments when we created our own new happiness. We created our own small puzzle piece that was made of laughs, but the picture the puzzle created did not make a happy scene. The fear of our flight caused the beginning of my father’s gifts.

When I was little, my dad was Santa Claus. He became Santa out of guilt and tradition. He began leaving gifts for me to find when we got home after trips. When I was a child, they were just presents. Through an adult’s perspective, they were apologies. The Tweety Bird stuffed animal, I am sorry for not making it to any of your soccer games. The cassettes of murder mysteries, I missed you when you were at the beach. The air conditioning unit for my dorm, I wish we were closer. Each gift was expected and yet never actually given. I was always expected to thank him. I would always find the gifts on the top of my bed. There was never a note or an explanation. There was just a new possession on a cold blanket. It was just something to fill the father shaped crack in my memories. They were a trade on the dirty flea market mistress that my father had enslaved himself to.

My father is a “collector.” He has rooms of things that he really doesn’t need. He has stacks and stacks of toilet paper. He has boxes of Disney collectables and records he never listens to. He devotes his life to these things and they welcome him. They make him feel in control. There is no excuse given for why he feels the need to collect things. Just like money, the more he has, the better he can fill his own father shaped crack. It isn’t the quality of the goods or the things that he can buy with his money. It is the amount of things that he can have.

My grandfather is the same way. He “collects” things. When I was little, I would go over to my grandparent’s house. They had a ranch
style house with a basement. My father and my uncle grew up down there and when they moved out, the stuff moved in. I never saw the basement or what was in it.

When I was about to go into middle school, they moved. Now, they have a two story house on a farm. It is a farm with sheds full of things and the second story is filled with boxes. There is no going up there. My dad and my grandfather are a lot a like. The difference is that my grandfather uses sharp words and harsh judgments that cut deep. For my dad, the only way to staunch the bleeding is to press his things to him. If he has things, he will never truly be alone. They will always have the security that they will not be abandoned or forgotten. Like a dragon atop his hoard, he covets the next sparkly thing to catch his eye, and it is enough for him to just sit above all that he owns and feel at peace.

The first time I found out I was a girl called Bug I was nineteen. My mom asked me if I thought it was a good idea for her to leave my dad. *If I thought it was a good idea to leave my dad.*

Even though I have seen the hurt that he has caused my brother and my mom and even now, myself, he is still Santa and I am still waiting for my next cold present. But how can I explain this to a person who feels so insecure about leaving a man that criticizes her and has long since left the emotional part of the marriage? So I said, I guess. I guess that you have tried hard enough to make it work. I guess that crayon lifestyle has long since faded away. I guess that you will be happier by yourself because he left us a long time ago.

Relieved, she hugs me and voices her concern that I might have been upset about the split. 

“You know, when you were born you were so small that they almost had to keep you in the hospital and wouldn’t send you home with us. Your dad used to hold your head in his palm and lay your body on his forearm. He called you his ‘little bug’.”

As I drove away back to the much safer dorm, I had to fight the tears. Like bile or a laugh that you try to stifle, it fought with my esophagus. *Raeann Elan, stop it.* So, I did. I pushed down all of the hurt and all of the pain. I pushed the idea of abandonment and the feeling of being wronged down.

After all, I am Bug.
"Hana, stop! That's not where I want it!"

I roll my eyes. Fourth-grade-me cannot comprehend why on earth these imbecilic classmates of mine are incapable of placing their felt ornaments on the tree in a straight and balanced fashion.

"I'm just fixing it," I retort. "You put it on wrong."

"There is no wrong, Hana," soothes my Sunday school teacher, Mrs. Johnson.

"It looks BAD. I'm just FIXING it." I continue to delicately replace the ornaments on the tree. The girls are in an uproar. Mrs. Johnson drags me away and makes me sit in the corner.

She lectures me very gently. "You put your ornament where you wanted it. Now your classmates get to put theirs where they want them."

I'm infuriated. I glare at the shameful, vile felt tree where the sloppy, smeared ornaments are strewn about carelessly.

"There's too many on the bottom!" I insist. "JUDY just move yours over there!" I jump up and gesture wildly to where the ornament belongs. She gives me a sneer and OVERLAPS HER ORNAMENT with another one.

I start crying. "They're doing it on PURPOSE!" I sob. "They WANT it to look bad!"

Mrs. Johnson ushers the other girls out of the room to join the rest of the class. I hear their whispers and feel their glances as they scurry through the door.

I bury my face so I don't have to look at the nasty tree and I grind my teeth in frustration.

Mrs. Johnson speaks very gently, feeding me a load of BS about how "there is no right or wrong way to celebrate Christmas," and how I must "love my neighbors despite their flaws." She eventually gives up on this malarkey and tells me, "Just don't look at it, Hana."

I spend the next month NOT LOOKING at the tree. I do notice that somebody has moved Judy's ornament so it no longer overlaps.
My momma has always accepted my peculiarities, and my Mema finds them downright endearing. When I showed Mema my innovative way of organizing my sock and undie drawer with an arrangement of empty tampon boxes, she gushed, “Great-grandma Mary would be so proud!”

I have a certain fondness for laundry. The clothing in my dresser shelves is stacked up by width. Sometimes when I’m feeling wild, I like to mix things up and arrange them by color instead. In order for stacks to fit nicely, I cut out a piece of cardboard from a cereal box to fold my clothing around. Occasionally, friends who come over and see these clothing stacks drop their jaws in shock and ask me if I use a ruler to get them so perfect. “Of course not,” I respond. “That would be ridiculous.”

For my last birthday, I asked for only one thing: a t-shirt folder. My mom bought me the plastic folding tray and my grandma bought me more t-shirts, “So I could show her just how it works.”

Last year, my roommate’s boyfriend, Chris, spent enough time in our dorm to learn that I have a very specific system of hanging up my laundry. Shirts are separated by tank tops, short sleeves, three-quarter sleeves, long sleeves, and flannels. They are sub-categorized by color and pattern. And all hangers MUST be placed curved-side out and evenly spaced.

As soon as I walk in the room, I notice my dresser door slightly ajar. “Did Kelly borrow something of mine?” I ask my other roommate.

She hesitantly glances up from her computer. “Nope.”

I pry open the door and see the catastrophe.

“Christopher?” I fume.

“Yes.”

Sure I had put up with him turning my picture frames upside down and my comforter inside out, but touching my laundry? This would not be tolerated.

I call up Kelly and ask with forced control if she is with her Christopher.

“Yeah, we’re in the parking lot!” she says. I hear mumbling in the background through the receiver.
“Um, I’ll be up in a minute. I need to say bye to Chris.”

“Oh, no,” I say. “You bring him up.”

More mumbling, now sounding more urgent.

I hang up, and sit very delicately on the edge of my desk chair.

Waiting. Unblinking.

The door swings open very slowly. Kelly pulls Christopher in by the hand. He looks wobbly and weak.

I stare. I will wait him out. He knows what he has done. “Um,” he says, not meeting my eye.

I stare.

“Look,” he says, glancing nervously at me. He looks away again.

“I’ve been thinking, and I feel really bad for touching your stuff.”

I stare.

“And,” he cleared his throat. “I... I’m really sorry.”

I slowly get up and start fixing my clothes.

“No,” he says. “Let me.”

I wheel around, tears of fury burning in my eyes.

“My question for you, Christopher, is WHY DO YOU THINK IT IS FUNNY?!” I struggle to convey to him the weight of my world and the lack of control I have in any aspect of my life as it constantly churns, and I helplessly bobble along, suffocating and drowning in obligations and responsibilities. “I find peace in having control of one MINISCULE thing in my life and you feel that you have the right to wreck it JUST BECAUSE YOU THINK IT’S FUNNY.”

He cowers in the corner, still not meeting my eye.

As obnoxious as it is when people find it funny to mess with me, it is infinitely worse when they try to understand me. Once people start noticing my little quirks, all they want to do is “crack my system.”

When my strides aren’t quite long enough to get me to the next slab of pavement and I need to take a little leap to make it over the crack, they giggle and say, “Oh, so you don’t wanna break your momma’s back?”

But then when my foot makes a small detouring side-step, they stare in wonder at why on earth I won’t step on a dirt clump.”
You can't even step in dirt? Do you know what the ground is made of?

When I shake my sugar packet for an unnecessary amount of time, they hypothesize, "You shake it twenty-five times right? Is that twenty-five each direction or both directions?" And when I frown slightly they say, "Oh yeah! You don't do odd numbers... So how many times is it?"

My parents do a marvelous job of not questioning my motives.

A few months ago, I ordered a three-pack of screen protectors for my new iPhone. I sat on my bed and very carefully applied each one. The first I accidently applied upside-down, the second had a tiny bubble in the bottom left corner that I couldn't smooth out, and the third had a fingerprint on the sticky side.

After this traumatic failure, I flopped over on my bed and bawled. My mom came in and played with my hair to calm me and my dad offered to take my phone to the Verizon store to have an employee apply the screen protector for me.

I admire my parents deeply for having the patience to put up with my insanity. However, there have been times that they've failed to adequately solve my stressors.

When I was five years old, I was in ballet. According to my mother, I spent every evening before practice crying my eyes out because my bun had "sticky-outy hairs" that she couldn't fix.

I was only in ballet for three weeks.

Occasionally my compulsions have led to minor physical bodily harm.

As a sophomore in high school, I played basketball. Like all players, I invested in a few over-priced pairs of Nike Elite socks. One feature of the socks is that they are specifically labeled for your left and right feet. I found this innovation marvelous.

One day, I carelessly threw two left-foot socks into my gym bag. When I discovered this error in the locker room before practice, I had a minor hyperventilation episode, but still I pulled both socks
over my feet and tightly laced my shoes over them. I completed the first five minutes of practice, but could hardly function as an athlete. My right foot was ON FIRE. It weighed AS MUCH AS LEAD. It was COMPLETELY NUMB.

I ran back to my gym bag, pulled off the demon socks, and slipped on my no-show footie socks. All through practice, I could feel blisters forming all around the perimeter of my feet. My new shoes rubbed the back of my heel and blood ran down my ankle and into my expensive insoles. It didn’t matter, as long as the fire was gone.

Oftentimes, these compulsions manifest themselves as nervous tics. In uncomfortable social situations or stressful circumstances, they seem to magnify by a thousand.

If I’m not sure what to say in a conversation, my hand flies to my face as I examine my nails. Any snags, corners, or skin tags are imperfections that MUST BE REMOVED—bitten, usually. It seems that I spend half of all conversations with my hand stuck in my mouth.

I can’t take a test without finding every skin imperfection on my face, neck, head, and shoulders. If there’s one thing I can’t stand, it’s BUMPS ON MY SKIN. These imperfections must be removed as well—scratched, usually.

“IT’S all in your head.” That’s what people say to me. “IT’S all in your head.”

I know it’s in my head. I can’t get it OUT of my head. That constant voice tells me every single day that I NEED to do this or I HAVE to do that—offering no further explanation as to why.

It’s my head that tells me I HAVE to tap the top of my soda can four times before I open it so that it doesn’t explode.

It’s my head that tells me to GO BACK outside to check that I locked my car door. Again. And again. And AGAIN.

It’s my head that tells me that if I can’t do it absolutely perfectly the first time, it’s not worth attempting at all.

And they just don’t understand. They say things like, “That picture is so crooked! My OCD is killing me!” But they do not
They don’t understand that I can’t even do something as simple as WALK without internally counting each step and grinding my teeth to the rhythm of my feet.

One, two, three. One, two, three. One, two, three, four. One, two, three. One, two.

They don’t understand.
And guess what?
Neither do I.
And that’s okay.
My sister and I had a fight that morning. She was the one who got me ready for school, and my mother had already gone to work. My dad was supposed to come home that afternoon from a big road trip in Ohio with his friend. We hadn’t seen him since Memorial Day weekend and I was missing him a lot.

I didn’t get a good night’s sleep, and that morning I felt off. We were almost late for the bus because I didn’t want to go to school at all. It was almost summer and the air was starting to get hot and muggy. Once we got there, we apologized to each other, her for pushing me out of the door, and me for almost making us late.

We sat on the wooden bench outside of the cafeteria and talked as we waited for the bell to ring. She laughed at me for sneezing too loudly when the principal came over. We straightened up immediately and noticed he looked especially nice. He was never nice.

Behind him were two men in suits, one of whom my sister recognized as a friend of our dad’s. They were cops just like my dad, but I couldn’t quite remembered them. They told us to come with them, but my sister kept asking why. She was older, so I let her speak for the both of us. They explained that something happened at the house and they were sent to the school to take us home.

“Pete, can you please just tell me why we have to leave?” she kept pressing like she already knew the answer.

Pete looked down and shifted his feet, while the other man with the salt and pepper hair simply said, “Please, we can’t say. Just come with us.”

We reluctantly got into their car. It was a black town car with leather seats. It was too professional looking and it made me uncomfortable. Every time I shifted, the seats made a squeaking noise.

“Is our house on fire? What is it? Just tell me!”

I drowned out the sound of my sister’s sarcastic and irritated voice. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see her arms go up every
time she spoke. I sat quietly and gazed out of the window, watching the scenery pass us by.

I kept thinking to myself, this is definitely about Dad. He had just had an accident only a year ago on his motorcycle, and he was in the hospital for a week with a major concussion. Still, I thought he was just driving in a car with his friend. It can’t be any worse than that. When we were about half way home, I lowered my head and closed my eyes. Dear God, please let him be okay, and if he dies, which isn’t the case, send him to heaven anyway. Amen. Being only ten, my prayers were not that sophisticated, and it felt like I should at least say something.

We finally pulled up to our house, which had become a circus. Police cars were lined up in our tiny driveway, and men in uniforms were standing their tallest as I walked past them. Officers with their hands on their hips shook their heads as they saw a small girl and her sister weave in and out of strangers in their living room. It no longer felt like my home, and it no longer felt like I was myself. This is when I started to fit the pieces together. I told myself it wasn’t true, so I did my best to believe it.

Finally, they led us to my parents’ bedroom. Still forcing myself to be blissfully unaware, we entered the small room. It had dark wood furniture and the bed took up most of the space. At its foot, my eldest sister sat on the ground. She was silent, just sitting there in a white sweater jacket with a silver metal zipper. She was gripping the jacket with her hand zipping it up and down. Just up and down, not saying a word.

I looked at my mother, who was sitting on her side of their bed with her head hanging low. I glanced over towards his side of the bed. That was where I usually climbed in on the weekends. He would be in the shower and I would sneak into his spot and hide. My giggles always gave me away as he took a pair of his white and grey socks out of his dresser and threw them at me while calling me Stinky Feet.

My mom was crying, her face flushed and her shirt was damp from her tears. Her glasses were slightly fogged as she looked up and ushered us to sit on either side of her. As we sat down, my face began to scrunch up the way it did right before you’d get a flu shot.
I whimpered timidly and asked, "Mom, what's going on? What's wrong?"

She grabbed our hands, still crying as she mumbled something that came out like a gargle. My sister must have caught it because she started to sob heavily.

"Oh, God," she sharply exhaled.

Then my mother said something else.

"Dad's in heaven now."

That I understood. I choked and a moment later, I began to cry like the rest of them. I kept wanting to ask my dad if he was okay, but I couldn't. The thought of never being able to see or speak with him again took the breath straight out of me.

That night, after everyone had come and gone, I went back into my parents' room. The house was nearly empty, except for a few people. Exhausted from the day's pandemonium, I quietly curled up under the covers, and fell asleep in my dad's spot, next to my lonely mother, holding on tightly to a pair of my dad's white and grey socks.
Contests
It’s a Sacred Institution As They Say
Jalyn Gilmore
1st Place, Writing Contest

Notes from our judge:
This piece is short but powerful. It is impressive how much the author accomplishes in so few words. The imagery is wonderful and the suspense is used effectively, giving the reader just enough to keep them on the edge of their seats.

She certainly didn’t mean to do it and she’s not entirely sure how it happened. Her lip is still bleeding heavily making her spit and gag. She’s always hated the metallic taste of blood ever since she was a little girl. Her eye is already starting to swell shut, turning blue and purple.

She stands on hesitant, untrustworthy legs. What now? Should she straighten up? No, they say to leave everything exactly as it is. Don’t they call that obstruction? Should she at least change her clothes? It wouldn’t make that big of a difference would it? And they are so terribly tattered.

It is her favorite blouse not just because it is canary yellow but because he gave it to her, telling her she looked like a flower. His little flower. She spits out a little more blood from a cut in the back of her cheek. She means to turn down the hallway toward their bedroom, but one foot stumbles over the other and she falls.

She cuts her forehead on the edge of the kitchen table. The blood is warm and sticky in her eyes, dying everything red, the warm burnt auburn of their living room, the soft, delicate browns of their kitchen, the cherry black of their hardwood floors. No, it has always been red. All of it. The living room where he’d first laid vicious hands on her. The kitchen table where he first bent her over against her will. The hardwood floors where she would lay as he stood over her. It’s always been red, every single bit of it. Again she stands. Her feet do not fail this time as she staggers to the phone sitting there waiting, the only other witness with a voice. She dials.

“911. What’s your emergency?”

She turns at last and catches sight of him, catches the silver glint of the blade protruding from his neck. She heaves but only
manages to offer up saliva.

"Hello? What's your emergency?

She swallows it down at last. "I...I would like to report a murder."
Notes from our judge:

The sincerity in this piece is astounding. “Home” provides the reader with an honest narrator with whom they can trust, empathize with, and learn from. The characters are also very believable, unique, and the dialogue is realistic and well executed.

I was dragged back to that familiar place; a place that had sheltered me ever since I came into this world. My mother turned the rusty door knob, holding tightly onto my tiny wrist, so tight that my blue veins stretched out against my pale skin she pulled me into the bedroom that I had not seen for the last twelve hours. The breezy wind flew through the window trying to blow out the hot and humid air in the room. The faint pale moon, surrounded by the blackness of the sky, looked lonely. Like the moon, my loneliness and sadness grew when my mother’s dark and heartbroken eyes locked onto mine. My head was full of the pounding of my own blood as I crouched down to hold onto my body, frozen from fear as my mother raised a wooden stick.

I had woken up that morning when the sunlight hit my eyes. The ripped sheet of handmade woven bamboo no longer felt cool against my skin. My whole body was uncomfortably hot and irritated due to the early morning heat. I stood up and walked toward the window to see the back view of the house. Far away, the clear blue sky spread over the green rice field and white ducks flapped on the water. Tiny straw hats were scattered across the rice field, swaying back and forth. My eyes began to move toward the right side of the view, where rows of tall buildings emerged from the trees. My elementary school was somewhere among those buildings.

Every morning when I looked out the window, I always wanted to live on that side of the city someday. Kids in my class always told me about all the excitement they had at the amusement parks or community swimming pools. Every time I pleaded with my dad to take me there, he crushed my heart by saying no or break his
promises of going with me. After a while, I stopped bothering him because I knew I would get the same answer. Sometimes, I tried to remain angry or to act stubborn around him to make him feel guilty, but it never worked out too well. His kind smile always turned the corners of my mouth upwards.

After dressing myself in my mom’s simple hand-sewn uniform, I sat down quietly on the edge of the bed. My dad pulled a chair behind me, running his tough hands loosely through my long sleek black hair. A man in his early fifties, he had a sturdy body with a few strands of gray hair hidden behind his leather black hair. I was amused as my dad struggled with his strong hands, trying to braid my hair. My mom usually left for work early, so my dad was the only one who took care of me in the morning until I went to class.

After he finished my hair, my dad took me outside to his motorcycle. He lifted me up on his motorcycle and positioned me in front of him. His rough beard brushed against my pale, pink cheek as I smelled the gasoline fumes coming from the motorcycle engine. As we headed off to my school, I felt really proud of my dad. Like a mother duck looking over her children as they swam in the lake, my dad was protecting both fifty chicken eggs in the boxes we had at home and me behind his seat. Standing at the corner of the street, my parents sold these eggs every day in humid weather to customers. Each cent that they earned was used to support my family, especially for me to attend one of the private elementary schools in the city.

After I waved my dad goodbye, I joined my classmates at the front door and we all headed up to our classroom. Most of the kids around my neighborhood attended school in the rural area. I was one of the few children from the rural side that was able to afford to go to the school in the city. Although all my classmates treated me well and with respect, I could not help but feel full of sadness and jealousy towards the girls in my class with their fancy, floral embroidered-uniforms, compared to my plain uniform, made out of cloth that my mom bought for the cheapest price.

The girl who sat next to me was my new best friend, Lan, whose name meant orchid. Just like her name, she was one of the prettiest girls that I had encountered. She had a tall, slender figure with long,
silky hair neatly tied into a ponytail. Her delicate fingers gracefully moved the pen to write out beautiful lines of sentences in cursive handwriting. While studious students like Lan spent their nights under piles of homework to maintain their high standing in the class, I spent my days letting my imagination and creativity go wild on paper. My art teacher was proud of me for receiving first place every year in the school art competition, but my home room teacher detested me, knowing I was unable to remember anything she had said even a few minutes ago. Lan and I became close friends quickly after finding out we shared a similar interest in art. Whenever both of us were not studying, Lan and I would spend minutes folding cranes and stars, and hours coloring our drawings.

Lan told me that her parents had recently bought a new house and she wanted me to come over to hang out with her. I replied “yes” without hesitation. I felt the excitement as my pulse rushed throughout my body, like an eager child ready to go on an adventure for the first time.

On a daily basis, I would walk home from school alone and play with kids in my neighborhood. It was normal for the young children in the small town where I lived to hang out on the street until the sky turned dark blue because everyone knew each other well. My mom was fine with me playing with my neighborhood friends or staying at their houses, but she never allowed me to play at my school friends’ houses. No matter how much I asked her for a good reason, the only statement she gave me was that she didn’t want to burden their family or to cause them trouble since our family was poor. As a child, I never fully understood why she felt that way.

Knowing that my mom would refuse to let me hang out with Lan, I decided to disobey her because I wanted to experience the excitement and freedom of being away from home. My jaw dropped open when I walked in to Lan’s six-story house. The marble-white tiles felt cool against my tiny feet as I gently stepped on the spiral staircase. The expensive, wooden doors for each room were carved in beautiful, Victorian designs. My home was nothing compared to this.

The flashback of the rusty doors and the bed covered in torn handmade bamboo sheets appeared in front of me. No, no, no, I
screamed inside as I struggled to tear that scene apart. Lan’s house was the home I wanted to live in, fancy and comfortable. Sitting on the bed, I could see through the window puppies chasing one another, like kids playing hide and seek.

The smell of the savory scent of beef noodle soup from the kitchen increased my appetite. Mrs. Tran, Lan’s mother, walked into the room wearing a floral-print, satin, pleated dress that fit perfectly on her petite-sized body. I had never seen my mom wear a dress or even a skirt before. All she wore was a simple blouse with dark-colored linen pants. Since my mom had a tall, lean body, she would look stunning in a fancy dress like the one Mrs. Tran was wearing, but her humility and generosity were what made her the most beautiful woman in my eyes.

“Phuong, would you like to stay for dinner with us, and perhaps stay a night with Lan?” Mrs. Tran politely asked me. “You girls seem to have lots of fun. You can make a call and ask if your parents are ok with that. Just let them know that I can always drive you back home tomorrow, so they don’t have to worry.”

“Yes, Mrs. Tran. I’m going to call and ask my mom now.” Without a doubt, I knew exactly what my mom would say.

Holding the phone, I nervously pretended to press the numbers.

“Hi mom, I’m at Lan’s house, my new friend in my class. I had lots of fun with her family and I was wondering if I could stay overnight today. Mrs. Tran will drive me back home tomorrow.”

Silence.

Forcing myself to smile, I squealed in happiness when my imaginary mom replied yes. I hung up, feeling my heart beat uncontrollably. I was shocked and confused at what I had just done and why I had done it. I knew that this was not a good idea, but my thoughts were unable to pull away from all the excitement that I felt today for the first time. I closed my eyes and shook my head to disperse the heavy cloud that surrounded my head, and quietly joined dinner with Lan’s family.

As I slurped in the last drop of the beef soup, Mr. Tran, Lan’s father, walked over to the refrigerator and pulled out a white cardboard box. He still had on his business attire since he had come
home late from work on that night.

Mr. Tran was in his late thirties, much younger than my dad, but most of the strands of his hair had already fallen off, like a bare tree in winter time. He carefully opened the box and inside was a cake that looked like one of those cakes I had always seen in the window of the bakery near my parents’ vendor booth. I had never thought that I would finally taste this pretty cake, full of colors like the rainbow.

While Mr. Tran cut the cake, I secretly caught Lan rolling her eyes as if she was thinking, *not this cake again.* A mixed feeling swirled inside me as I tried to hold back my tears, not because I was too eager to taste this delicious cake for the first time. It was the fact that I was eating this cake on an ordinary day that made my heart ache. Lan might not know how lucky she was to have everything she wanted, from living in this gigantic house to eating this piece of cake that my taste buds had always desired. Every year on my birthday, I waited anxiously at the door for my mom to be home from work with a present that I always dreamt of, a birthday cake. But she always reached out and gave me the same plain, baked wheat bun that, she said, tasted better than a cake. I would always hide my disappointment with a faint smile.

Before we went to sleep, Lan’s mother read us several fairy tales. By the time the stories ended, I found myself sleeping soundly like a puppy with Lan in her room. I had a long, relaxed sleep until a sobbing noise from downstairs woke me up. As I walked down to find out what was going on, I recognized a very familiar face. It was none other than my mom’s, with a dreadful and tired expression on her face. The glare of her black eyes was so dark and deep that it locked my soul in a cage. She was frantic with distress as she grabbed my tiny wrist and dragged me back home without saying anything.

I found myself back in my room, confronted by my mom and her stick. The room was so still and silent that I heard my mom’s droplets of sweat dripping on the floor. When I saw a shoulder-length wooden stick in her hand, I knew exactly what she was going to do to me, but this time, I did not fight back or defend my mistake as I usually would. This time, an infinite number of reasons could never justify my actions.

*This is it; she is going to hit me.* I curled into a ball, like a pill
bug, as my whole body trembled with sweat. As I crouched down expecting a painful whip, all I felt was a slight, cool air brushing against my face, as the stick dropped before me. I peeked up at her, and at that moment, my heart shattered. The woman in front of me, who I had always seen as a strong, capable woman, now tumbled before me, like a strong wind had knocked her over.

Her protective arms quivered as she wrapped them around my fragile body. Her eyes were weary as if she had just lost something important in her life. I suddenly felt very scared and everything became blurry as my eyes watered. My head cleared for an instant and I realized how deeply I had wounded her heart. It was the very first time I ever saw my mom cry. She embraced me in her arms and I could hear her trembling voice as she spoke to me.

“I thought I would never see you again. I was scared that I would lose you forever. Now that you’re in my arms, this is all I need.”

I began to cry and unconsciously, the words “I love you, Mommy” slipped out from my lips.

My mom tucked me in bed while still holding me tightly in her arms. Her hair smelled like fresh cool coconuts on a summer beach. I felt the tenderness that I missed as her soft bosom pressed against my cheek. Her breathing was soothing in my ear like a calm river running at night.

As I closed my eyes, my heart clenched as thoughts rushed into my head. I was crazy. I was foolish. I hurt my mom. I did not understand how important my family was to me. I was too young and naïve to understand my parents’ suffering and the sacrifices they made for me. The moment she dropped her stick, I finally understood my mom’s boundless love for me.

Running away to Lan’s house was my way to assure my parents that I would be fine on my own. But now, like a baby polar bear, I was back home, back in my mom’s arms for comfort and protection. In the blackness, I saw a girl running further away from her best friend’s home, running away from the excitement, the adventure. She was running back toward a familiar place, a place that had sheltered her ever since she came into this world. She returned to where her
heart belonged: *home*. 
The Plane Ride From Hell
Autumn Ingrassia
3rd Place, Writing Contest

Notes from our judge:
"The Plane Ride From Hell" is an entertaining piece. The tone is consistent with what is going on in the story, keeping up with the suspense, the comedy, and the heartfelt moments. It is all around an enjoyable read.

It was a cool winters eve, back in 2006. My father and I sat in the back of a musty yellow cab on our way to the San Diego Airport. The fifteen-minute drive from my father's quaint 1950's yellow beach house seemed longer than usual, as I was jittery with excitement and soon to be reunited with my grandparents. Little did I know, this flight would be like nothing I had ever experienced in past years. At a mere eleven years old, I was already accustomed to flying, having gone to New Jersey twice a year since I was five and also having flown eighteen hours to Australia the previous year. We arrived at the airport, bags in tow, and hurried to the outdoor bag check line. Everything seemed normal.

We received our tickets; I was one row behind my father in the middle seat. Then we continued on through the airport security. I lugged around my purple Jansport backpack that was full of books and Nintendo DS games to entertain myself during the flight. I complained to my father as we stood in the security line. "I hate the middle seat. Now I'm gonna be squished between some weird old people. Why aren't we in the same row?"

"Grandma had trouble finding tickets this late, so you'll have to deal with it," he responded. "Let's just hope this plane has televisions and plays a good movie." That turned out to be the least of our worries.

After waiting what felt like an eternity to board, we finally found our seats. There was a middle aged Chinese woman on my right (the window seat) and a quiet, older gentleman on my left (the aisle seat). The plane sat idly on the runway for longer than usual. The nice, young flight attendant woman explained that there were strong winds
up ahead that had caused a delay. So I waited and played on my DS. At the time, my favorite game was Nintendogs. I had a Yorkie named Maya and a Dalmatian named Daisy. I finally heard the pilot say over the speakers, “Everyone please buckle your seatbelts for takeoff and turn off all approved electronic devices until otherwise instructed.”

Just like that, we were in the air. The takeoff was smooth and I patiently waited until I could play with my “dogs” again. The flight from San Diego to Newark International Airport, New Jersey is about six long hours. The first four hours went by without any trouble. I played my games, watched part of a movie on the overhead screen, and drank a coke, my favorite soda, which I had ordered when the drink cart went by.

Flying was not my favorite activity but I was used to it. I knew the routine and, at the time, the only part I somewhat disliked was the occasional minor turbulence. This flight was different. Overhead, the speakers came back on. “Alright folks, please remain in your seats with your seatbelts fastened. We are going to be hitting some turbulence.”

It soon became the flight from hell. We hit the turbulence hard. I grabbed the armrests of my seat and braced myself. Everyone was jostled in their seats and the female flight attendant, who had been up to ensure everyone was buckled in, nearly landed on the man she stood next to.

I peeked over the woman sitting next to me to get a better look outside her window. It was black and I could see nothing but the rain as it hammered the glass. I suddenly felt tiny, like I was lost deep in an abyss. The turbulence continued like this for some time; it seemed never-ending. I sat in terrified silence, not wanting to move or think about the fact that the only thing protecting me from the elements was a hollow, flying, metal machine. I wanted to land and be safely in the warmth of my grandma’s home, surrounded by the delicious home-cooked feast she has always prepared for my arrival.

We are Italian and every year, no matter the time I arrived, my grandma prepared a magnificent meal. It included: a huge batch of meatballs with homemade sauce, tuna macaroni salad, chocolate cake, cookies, and by far my favorite, Speciality. Speciality is basically spaghetti which has been made into this sort of dome that is filled
with cheese, ground beef, sausage, sauce, and amazingness, or cheese, tomato, broccoli, onion, garlic, and other delicious vegetable ingredients. My favorite was the vegetable Speciality. I imagined the soft crunch of the hot, delicious, cheesy noodles and broccoli, the smooth and luscious sauce as it dribbled into my mouth. I began to salivate from the thought. I was brought back to reality when suddenly everything inside the plane went black.

The lights flickered back on unsteadily. I heard the murmurs of those around me nervously ask what was wrong and what had happened. The televisions, which had been playing a movie, went to static and were immediately closed so people would not panic even more.

I was scared and sensed that I was not the only one. I sat in silence once more until I felt something drip onto my cheek. It was cold and carried a light metallic scent. The woman I sat with must have felt something too because we both looked up at the same time. Water had leaked through the cracks in the plane. Her entire sleeve was wet. She quickly pressed the call button and a dazed flight attendant slowly appeared.

She walked carefully gripping the backs of seats so as to not be tossed onto the ground by the turbulence. Her voice shook as she said, “What can I do for you?” The woman to my right explained the water seeping down and the flight attendant, with wide eyes, simply said, “We have hit a bad storm and the pilot is doing everything he can to ensure we arrive safely.” It seemed like she said it to convince herself more than us.

As she walked away we hit another big wave of turbulence and one of the overhead compartments abruptly opened. Bags spilled out into the aisle. This caused an uproar. Some people cried, while others stared blankly. There was a crack of thunder and then lightning, just outside the window. I now knew that everyone was in danger.

I reached through the seat ahead of me and for the first time since the flight began, I made contact with my father. He and I have never gotten along but, in my time of distress, I felt the need for some sort of condolence, even if it was from him. I grabbed at his sleeve. He turned to look at me. His big brown eyes glistened with terror. I had never before seen my strong 6'4”, 270 lb. UFC fighting dad look...
so afraid. I cried and asked him if we were almost there. He looked at his watch and said we should be there soon, that hopefully this would all be over with. He was wrong.

Another flight attendant, an older woman with salt and pepper hair that stood nobly atop her head in a bun, went to the front of the plane and explained the situation. We were above our destination but there was a very long line of planes that waited to land because of the storm. Needless to say, we were at the back of that line.

I thought the six-hour flight of doom would be over but it had hardly just begun. We flew in circles above the airport for two more hours! The plane was tossed around in the air like a toy. I had my seatbelt on but my head and upper body were continuously thrashed back and forth within the seat. I felt sick. My stomach turned and my mind raced through all the possible events that could take place.

The overhead speaker beeped to life and a panicky voice spoke, “Excuse me please, as you are all aware we have been circling above Newark International Airport for about two hours which has used up our excess fuel reserves. The pilot is attempting to make contact with any nearby landing bases. Please for the safety of those around you, remain calm.”

Now, I don’t know if the flight attendant had expected this type of reaction, but chaos broke out. Those few who had not already broken down did so now. I looked around and saw the young flight attendant as she cried in the back of the plane. A man in the row across from me stood up and began to pace the length of the plane with a zombie-like stare. The flight attendants tried to restrain the man and force him back into his seat. The plane swayed back and forth and the man fell onto the older gentleman next to me. He was wearily lifted by the flight attendants and placed back in his seat.

Once the man was buckled back into his seat the speaker came back on, “The pilot has made contact with a military base in upstate New York. We have been granted permission to land.”

The plane flew for an undetermined amount of time to this military base. All the while, lights flickered and water dripped down through the plane. My leggings had a huge wet spot on the thigh and the woman’s shoulder next to me was soaked. When it finally came time to land, things were just not right.

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It took two dives before we landed safely. The first, you could feel. We came down way too fast and way too quickly. I had butterflies in my stomach, my heart raced, and sweat beaded up on my forehead. We were not angled horizontally or at the slight diagonal slope most landings should be. We came in almost vertically. My upper body could not touch the back of my seat. We fell straight down. Gravity pulled at us uncomfortably. My mind raced. My life flashed before my eyes. I clutched my armrest so hard my knuckles turned white. I braced myself for impact. Just when I thought we were going to crash into the earth and die we were swiftly thrown against the backs of our seats as the plane soared back up into the sky for attempt number two.

After that first attempt the anxiety rose. The air felt stagnant as if everyone was holding his or her breath. I tensed, ready for this second attempt to be the end of us. However, as the descent began I felt positive. I think we must have come down from further away. I was not unnaturally thrown back and forth in my seat like the last attempt. This one seemed better and it was. I slowly released my iron like grip from the armrest, watching as my finger indents slowly dissipated from the leather.

Although bumpy, we landed safely at the military base. I do not know where exactly it was located but, from what I heard around me, it was in the middle of nowhere. We sat on the plane for what seemed like forever. The plane was most likely being worked on while the pilot debriefed the people here why we had landed. Those too shaken up over the whole event were permitted to leave the plane and find a different way to their final destination. While my dad and I, well mostly he, decided we must stay because we had no other way to get to my grandparents, almost everyone else exited the plane and left. I sat alone and waited anxiously.

The plane sat on that runway for a lifetime. Eventually, we were told the plane was refueled and fixed well enough that it could fly safely to our destination. This next short flight was a blur. There was still turbulence but I cannot remember much else. I thanked God that I was still alive and tried to calm myself down. I did not want to think about the fact that I had stayed on a plane that nearly went down.
Once we finally landed, it was extremely late. My dad and I were shocked to see that my grandparents had waited for us this whole time just past the security line. They were in a panic. They had only been told minute details over the course of multiple phone calls about what had happened. When I saw them, I ran up to them. I had tears in my eyes as they engulfed me in the warm, loving embrace I always remembered and had dreamt about during that flight. They held me until I was composed and could breath without sniffles.

The drive from the airport to their huge beautiful house in Watchung, New Jersey went by in a flash after everything that had just happened. As my grandfather’s black Escalade pulled into the garage, I could hardly contain my anticipation of what was to come. I walked inside and was greeted by their little dog Henry. He was very spoiled so normally he acted like a brat because he hated when my grandma gave me attention instead of him. This time, I did not even seem to notice. There was so much food. SO MUCH. I thought I was in heaven. I was hungry because I had not eaten since breakfast, which at this point was ages ago. Finally reunited with my beautiful Speciality, I was at peace.
It Won't Be Long
Katie Wartell

It was August, a summery month for working on evening out your tan and endless family get-togethers. The sunrays crept into her bedroom from behind the shades to kiss her naked shoulders. Avery turned over in her bed and stretched her final stretch for she knew today would be her last. Avery was a vivacious, wild spirit with a milk chocolate, thinning mane and an olive complexion. She swallowed the fear that surrounded her body as she cradled her knees to her chest. A single bead of collected tears danced down her colorless cheek. It was August 13th. The day that Avery knew would be her last here on earth.

One-year prior, she had gone to the doctor’s for a yearly checkup, where they stumbled across a lump. It was pressed for time she knew she couldn’t produce.

“Avery, I am sorry to inform you, but there is nothing we can do,” her doctor said in the calmest voice possible.

“It was just a regular check-up. How could you not have caught this sooner!”

She could feel the blood leaving her lifeless when she heard the words depart from her doctor’s mouth.

“It’s a rare form of cancer, Avery. It had only became apparent to us during your recent checkup. “

Her doctor continued to talk about possible treatments, like chemotherapy and radiotherapy, and all Avery could understand was that she was labeled as a patient of cancer. The world slowly drained from vibrant colors to a bloodless black.

“Why do bad things happen to good people? What is your plan for me if you are going to kill me off anyways?”

A screaming match formed between a voice that never answered back and an ill-tempered Avery. She smashed the whiskey bottle she had been taking long swallows from. She
destroyed her room and smashed her collection of shot glasses her dad had given her. The cancer had spread to almost every inch of her body. She had lost all hope. The tears poured out over her soul and dampened the shattered glass beneath her.

*I just want answers.*

Spoken in the softest, yet strongest voice she could manage through the gasps of agony she held onto. She planned to donate her eyes to someone who needed them much more than she did. It was one place cancer had not touched. Her eyes were to be donated to someone who was never allowed to experience the beauty around them. She knew that this was her prayer being answered.

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It was August. The summer had been its hottest. It had record-breaking highs that could fry a cracked egg on the sidewalk or melt cherry red popsicles in an instant. For her last day, she could have spent it saying her goodbyes to her beloved ones, but instead she occupied the beach. The ocean was her safe haven. She stood at the water’s edge while she cried tears of joy and tears of stress.

She opened her eyes to find herself hooked up to a long threaded cord that attached itself to a translucent bag that limply hung from a branch of a dying, metal tree. The toxins emptied into her precious veins as she sat and waited for her life to be over. She was too preoccupied with her donation and death to notice the eager smile of an on-looking stranger. Her weakened smile suppressed the wave of nausea destined for the sadly cradled pink kidney shaped basin constant companion all throughout her chemo session.

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Avery sat on her beach blanket remembering why she had chosen to donate. It was six months after finding out about the cancer and she had met with the donating team.

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"Good afternoon, Avery. I’m Doctor Olivia. I will be handling your case. Tell me why you want to be an organ donor."
Avery breathed out a choked reply as if an elephant were stomping on her chest.

“I have cancer. I know you probably don’t get many cases like me, but I want to give someone a chance. A chance to live a life that God didn’t intend for me.”

Tears glistened down her rosy cheeks.

Doctor Olivia was a kind soul with chestnut hair and a glowing smile. She placed her hand on top of Avery’s and Avery knew at that moment she wasn’t alone in her decision.

She wished her mother and father would have given her the hope that she needed, instead of bashing the decision.

“Avery, no. We can get through this. Your father and I will take out loans to cover the expenses of your treatments. I cannot lose you.”

Her mother dropped to her knees as if she were praying. Avery wanted to suggest waterproof mascara to her mother, but she knew it wasn’t the time or place to give out beauty advice. She watched her old man crawl across the wooden floors to her mother and cradle her convulsing body close to his heart.

“Kiddo, your mother is right. I… I mean we cannot lose our beautiful daughter. Please reconsider your decisions. Don’t give up your fight!”

“Okay, daddy…”

It was August with a scorching, record-breaking heat wave. Beads of cold sweat rushed down the base of her neck as she wished for a salty sea breeze to wash over her sadness. She knew that today was the day she was going to die, as the cancer had engulfed every organ, but her eyes. Today, she was going to donate and give someone a chance to see the world with her beautiful blue eyes, as she planned to terminate her life on August 13th.
Why We're Here

Peggy Wood

There are six mourners, seven people total if you count the counselor, in this room. Each is of a different age with different backgrounds. There are three males and three females.

"Shall we get started?" the singular counselor of the group asks. No one says a word; each is somewhat solemn as they look into the faces of those around them.

One of the men has a faded look. His eyes are cloudy and he stares into the ceiling as though his mind has wandered to the past leaving only a vacant shell. He was by far the youngest man in the room, and likely in his late twenties. He has some stubble, as if he’s forgotten to shave, while the rest of him is clean cut and ready for the day.

One is a teenage girl who fidgets and glances at people before looking back towards the ground. She is uncomfortable and feels as though she doesn't belong. Her arms are covered with fishnet sleeves and wrists surrounded by many studded bracelets. Her face is coated in thick make-up and her clothes look as though someone has taken scissors to them. Everything about her, from the dyed tips of her hair to the thick platform of her boot’s screams stay away from me.

One is a foreign looking woman who wears an equally thick make-up, but her look is to make her appear dressed up rather than punkish. She has a pink skirt suit and a pink purse, and pink shoes to match. She is curvy and her plump lip sticks out just a tad. Her nose looks permanently pulled upward, even as her head aims downward so that she can stare into her purse.

One is a man with crossed arms and crossed legs. He glares into the group uncaring of their discomfort and huffs whenever someone looks him dead in the eye before turning from them. He gives off the feeling that he should be in an anger management class rather than
here. He is tanned and muscular and likely works in construction if the dust on his shoes says anything. He isn’t too old, but he isn’t young either. Maybe he is in his early forties or late thirties. His hair is already beginning to gain a little salt in his pepper.

One man, dressed in a black suit and looking as though he hasn’t changed out of it since a funeral, holds his head in his hands as his elbows imprint into his knees. He looks pale and thin, his hair is unmanaged and he almost appears to not be breathing; if not for the gentle sob escaping his mouth every so often one might assume he had died in that very chair. His hair is roughly half grey and half black with only a small mixed barrier in between. He is easily the eldest person in the room.

The last woman is likely in her mid twenties. She is dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. One leg bounces up and down while the other stays firmly planted. Her hands are held in front of her and she is carefully looking at each person with a desperate look of hope that someone will speak first so her awkward hatred of silence doesn’t make her do it. Her long hair is pulled into a tight ponytail that hangs low rather than high.

“Welcome, first comers, to group therapy. How about we all introduce ourselves, and then tell why we’re—” The counselor doesn’t get to finish as the cloudy eyed man speaks up.

“I lost my wife,” he says as he turns away from the ceiling to look at the ground. His voice goes a little lower towards the end of the sentence causing the other mourners to lean forward so that they can hear what he has to say. He smiles as he starts telling them the story.

“We always knew we would be together,” he says looking around at the others as though he is talking to new neighbors with a big sloppy smile on his face and twinkling eyes. Subconsciously, his hand grasps at air just above his leg that he gives a little squeeze to as though something were there. His eyes lose a small twinkle, as it is apparent he knows what he’s doing and can’t seem to stop. “We were
born just minutes apart you see. Our mothers were neighbors who became best friends... They got pregnant right around the same time, and around the time they were due they got into a little argument that somehow made them both go into labor. We were raised like cousins, or maybe even brother and sister—but by the time we were eight we knew we would get married. We’d play house all the time, and at first I hated it, but that was because she would kick me out of the playhouse so that I could ‘go to work.’ Eventually we started to switch every now and then until I was almost always the ‘house-wife’ and she was the ‘bread winner.’ When we went to middle school we started dating and even though we had break-ups, we always made up…” He took a deep breath, and paused. His smiled faded and the cloudiness returned. “I proposed in high school—senior year. She didn’t answer then... she said after college she’d say yes. We dated all through college, even states apart, and when I graduated after four years we moved in together while she attended graduate school. She said yes, and we got married. Everything was perfect. We were together, working stable jobs, planning to have our first kid and then…” He started to frown and rock back and forth. “She caught a cold at work. At least... we thought it was a cold but it went on for weeks, and I couldn’t get her to go to a doctor...” He froze completely before he started to shake, and the tears began to fall. “Pneumonia... Severe pneumonia...” He suddenly couldn’t take sitting there any longer. He stood up and walked to the nearest window to get some fresh air. He stayed there at the windowsill for several moments. He stood frozen, as if time had stopped for him before returning to his seat at the insistence of the counselor. He didn’t say another word. The counselor handed him a fresh box of tissues.

Inspired by the man, or maybe just hoping to relieve herself of talking later on, the youngest of the room spoke next. “My name is Lily and I’m nineteen.” Everyone turned his or her attention towards her. Some were slightly slow to do so, but while she took a few silent moments to prepare herself it gave them the time to focus on her tale.

She mumbled for a second, before taking a deep breath and
trying again. Her voice cracked as she spoke, but the words came out anyway. “I had a brother,” she stated. She glanced around before training her eyes on her painted nails. She began to scratch the paint off as she spoke, something that appeared like habit.

“He was older than me by seven years and he was always mean. I can’t really remember anything he did that was too nice to me that didn’t come at the insistence of our parents. He tugged my hair, destroyed my toys, and sometimes he would open markers and drop them in my drawers so that all my clothes looked like I had slept on the damn things... but even so he wasn’t cruel. I mean, he was nice sometimes but like, secretly... Like, every now and then I saw him sneak an extra rice crispy into my lunch box, and he wouldn’t let his friends say anything mean to me... and a couple of times he even cleaned my room when I forgot to. He thought... or at least pretended to always find me annoying... and I was, because... because that’s what you’re supposed to do, right? Little sisters are supposed to annoy their brothers... anyway. We were kind of spiteful toward each other, and when I turned ten I thought I was all grown up and he thought I was being too snotty. For a while we started fighting... I can’t really remember why I thought this way... or why we started to act that way, but I do know that I was convinced he hated me and I hated him.” She paused.

She bit her bottom lip and scrunched her brows together as her nails scratched at a particularly hardened piece of polish. “He was in his senior year of high school and weeks away from graduation. He walked home from school everyday, and picked me up—even though I told him I could go by myself! I think he did it because he would have been grounded otherwise, but even so he always did it. He told me that he would drag me by my hair to school the next morning if I didn’t wait for him and one time I didn’t and he followed through so I never did it again. That day—the day he... that day I decided to play kick ball with some of my friends while waiting for him. We had been let out early, and not many parents were there yet. I kicked the ball too hard and it went into the street—I didn’t even think to look both ways, I mean... no one ever drove fast around our school. It was in

http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol23/iss2015/1
a residential area, ya' know? " She ran out of polish and went to start scratching her arms thru the fishnets. "I ran into the street and right as I was grabbing the ball I heard this screeching noise before I felt two big hands shove me super hard. I mean hard. I flew backwards and hit the curb so hard I had the wind knocked out of me. By the time I was breathing again, teachers surrounded me and someone was screaming and another was giving out orders but for the life of me I can't remember what they said. All I remember was that through the gap of their legs was my brother's face lying on the hot cement. His face was bloody and didn't look right. He was positioned weird, with his hands out in front of him, laying on his back, but his head sort of side ways..." She started to breath shallow breaths as tears formed in her eyes. The tissues were pushed towards her but she didn't want them "He was looking at me. He was still alive for just a few minutes and he was looking at me, and when I looked at him he smiled, and tried to say something... but all that came out was blood and, and, and he just closed his eyes as if he was going to take a nap. He didn't move after that." Her voice broke near the end, and everything became sort of raspy. "They never caught the car that hit him. I don't even know what it looked like. If it was blue or red, or black, or gold... I don't know. I just know it hit him and that they never caught it." That was the end of her speech. Her voice disappeared completely as she curled herself up into her seat.

As if a trend was started the next woman spoke. She nodded her head to each, even to those that weren't paying attention and introduced herself in a light accent as a Mrs. Anonymous. "I too lost my spouse," she said giving an especially low nod to the first speaker as if to show how much she understood his hardship. She swallowed hard before continuing. "I never loved him like a husband, but I did love him. It was an arranged marriage, by our parents, and even though he was an odd man, I grew to love him like a close friend. He was never really in love with me either, something we found a mutual bond over. Each of us loved someone unobtainable. His was a lover who married another and mine was a man too cruel to ever consider a serious monogamous relationship with. We found, over this bond, that we had mutual tastes and interests and eventually found it in..."
ourselves to at least try having a sexual relationship. It was... weird enough to only occur every now and then except for when we planned to have a child and really tried *ehem* ‘going at it.’ Together we... we had two girls and a boy.”

She stops to rifle through her purse as tears start to drip out. She has so much control over her speech that it is hard to believe she felt anything for the man she speaks of, but the tears tell otherwise. A handkerchief is rescued from the purse and she dabs at the salt water ruining her make-up with a hurried motion. “They, our children, don’t even like to talk about him. It’s like they want to forget that he was even there and I can’t tell if it was because they were so young when it happened or because they think poorly of him. My in-laws call him a shame, and whenever my children see them they spout these horrid lines... it drove me to strike my eldest across the cheek when she spoke last time. That’s why I’m here.

“I feel so terrible about it now, but at the moment I was just so outraged that she could ever say anything so cruel about the man that tenderly rocked her to sleep and wiped her tears and pushed her on the swing and adored them all so much... I just, I couldn’t believe how they could say something like that. I told her to stop and she wouldn’t listen and I hit her, he would have been so angry, I know it... He never even raised his voice to them... He would be patient and when they calmed down from a fit he would tell them what was wrong with what they did. I had to lock myself in our room for nearly an hour to cry before I confronted the three of them and apologized and told them why they should never say or think such ill will of him. You see, he was quirky and loving but he was also ill. He would have terrible moments of depression. Sometimes he would leave for a few days so that no one would have to see him in such a way, especially not his children. On one of his ‘outings’ as I called it... he suffered a deeper spill than usual. He had gotten into some trouble at work and he called me from a motel and I didn’t bother to pick up. I should have picked up, but I was busy with some menial chore that I thought was important at the time. He was drunk and his words slurred but he told me he loved our children and me and that he was
The angry looking man spoke next, his accent thick and odd to the people in the room. “My name is Butch, and I repair houses. I lost my best friend and business partner to prostate cancer almost a year ago. It really hit our business hard but my wife says it hit me harder.” As he uncrosses his arms, the ring on his left hand stands out. He begins to play with it as he speaks. “My wife said that if I didn’t come here she was going to do something drastic like go to her parents’ until I did—or worse, invite her parents here to ‘help.’” He moves the foot resting on his other leg to the floor so that he can lean in more towards the group. “Jake was my best friend since were in high school. We were on the same football team and at first we got off on da wrong foot, but after a few games we got over it and were like brothers ever since. Heck—he came out to me before his parents and looked scared as hell that I’d abandon him. That id-i-ot. Maybe I was narrower minded before we met, so I guess I get it, ‘cause when he came out to his parents and they kicked him out... I think I got it figured why he was so scared now. I mean, they made him drop out the team and I was pissed because I swore I wasn’t gonna let him go alone. Don’t get me wrong, I didn’t pretend to be homosexual or nothin’, but I did resign my position so that he didn’t have to hang out by himself. That really irked me at the time, I mean we was, sorry were, good players but it’s a small town that we were from and it was, maybe is, pretty norm in those type “A” places. After his parents kicked him out we got a place together; my parents weren’t too happy...
but they raised a good man and a man doesn't turn his back to a friend in need so they got over it. I mean, he was still the same Jake we all knew and loved, he just wasn't all that into the cheerleaders. Besides, he hooked me up with Molly, my wife! He may not have been into women but he sure knew how to set you up with one-though I swear he got me and Molly together 'cause he had a huge crush on her brother. It was real hard when he told me the doctor told him he had cancer. I thought that meant I was gonna be takin' my best friend to chemo and watchin' his hair fall out and watching as my wife tells his lover that someday the hair might grow back and to have faith that he'd get through it—something I was sure he would, but he said nah to all that. It was some rare form of prostate cancer and too late for him, he told me. I just could not believe it.” A pause as he stopped fiddling with his ring for a moment.

“Jake was a fighter, but I feel like he gave that up. He said he wanted da live life for as normal as he could, the longest he could and for a little while it all seemed fine. I mean little. Like months little... maybe weeks. He started leaving me notes on how to take care a his side of the business and teachin' me stuff I already knew but I let him anyway 'cause he was being so strict about it. They gave him medicine that he couldn't drink with, but he ditched those to have a couple of beers with me in my garage during Super Bowl... and then he had to be confined to a bed. His lover fell apart and my wife kinda had her hands full with the kids so it was really me trying to take care of the business and help his lover with the bills and stuff. It whipped me real good... I was there in that final moment and it didn't register at first. He just fell asleep and stayed that way for awhile before the heart monitor went flat. He signed a do not resuscitate, but even if he hadn't I don't think anythin' coulda been done.” He stopped playing with his ring all together and clasped his hands together instead, as if to pray.

“After that I buried myself in work. It was actually harder than I thought to do the jobs by myself, so I had ta hire someone who still ain't as good at it as he was. His lover is starten' to move on and recently left all Jake's things that weren't linked to their relationship in...
private way in front of the house for me. He said that he thought Jake would have wanted me to have it since I was like his family. I didn’t know that he had recorded our last Super Bowl together. I found it in the box. Spent a three-day weekend re-watching that video over and over and over in the garage. I don’t blame him for given-up but everyone accuses me of doin’ so. I was pissed that he did, and it hurt to all hell but I don’t blame him. I’m angry a lot, but mostly ‘cause I’m scared. Everyone wants to move on, but I just want to go back to watching Sunday night football in the garage and cursin’ on Mondays about hangovers when we go to work ‘cause we know we’re too damn old to be drinkin like teenagers. I even miss those stupid calls he’d make at the worst time possible to ask me to put my wife on the phone ‘cause it’s his turn to make dinner and after five years of asking her how to make the same damn dessert he still has to call her to ask how much sugar, or flour, or whatever ‘cause the ‘sorta-in-law’s’ are comin’ and they love his remake of her recipe.

Hell, I can repeat the thing by heart but he still made me put her on every time. It so different without my best bud here and its even harder cause no one wants to talk about it. No one says, ‘I miss him’ unless they add a ‘too’ at the end as though they are only saying it to sympathize with me. I want to move on, but I want everyone to stop telling me that I have to and I especially want them to stop tellin me to forget about him. As if they aren’t giving me a choice. I know he ain’t comin’ back. I accept that. But it doesn’t mean that I have to forget about him to move on and I don’t need anyone giving me false sympathy. That’s why I’m angry and it got nothin’ to do with his actions. He was the best friend that went through thick and thin with me. He introduced me to the love of my life and made sure I didn’t go f***in’ it up. We took care of each other. Everyone around me accuses me of being angry at him for not trying harder to live. Truth is I’m angry ‘cause I can’t stand how after he died everyone wants to abandon his memory. I want my kids to know that I had a true friend and that I hope they someday have one as great and that sometimes it takes work. I don’t want my wife or my parents telling them to ‘ignore daddy’s crying’ just ‘cause I have a hard time tellin them about him.” The man huffed and clasped his hands tighter together.
I know what you mean lady... about wish he was here. I get it. I wish Jake was here too, but I know he's in a better place. I wish everyone else would stop trying to forget him all together and instead only forget the bad stuff. I want to be able to talk about him with my wife, and laugh about him every now and then.

"To be honest, I'm scared that if we don't try to remember the good stuff we'll be teaching our kids that when someone dies the best way to deal with it is to forget them. Like shoving them in the attic only to be glanced at with a 'oh yeah' smile when moving stuff around every now and then. We're not getting any younger — that's for sure, and heaven forbid that it happen anytime soon, gonna lose another friend or family member eventually. Are we gonna force ourselves to forget them too? Are we gonna tell our kids that even though they miss grandpa or grandma they should forget about them so it doesn't hurt as much? It frightens me and it makes me angry that no one, until today, listens." Somewhere along the way, he too had begun to cry, wiped the fallen tears on his sleeves until the counselor handed him the tissues. He accepted with a nod of thanks.

The man in the black suit was looked at expectantly, after all—the group had formed an unspoken order of speaking clockwise from the last person that spoke. He never moved and never looked up from his hands but he somehow knew they were all looking at him. He could feel their eyes watch him and this somehow gave his washed out nerves the stability to talk. From the thinness of his hair and the fact that there was a lot of greying, it could be assumed that he was older than everyone else. Since no one saw his face since arrival they simply had to assume so, but it was proven by his voice that he was at least in his sixties.

"I saw a sign in the funeral home's front office and on a whim decided to come here. This morning I buried my 20-year-old daughter, and instead of attending the after get-together being hosted in my house, I'm here. She was young, and pretty, and was excited to be a junior in college. Loved by all, straight A's and a potty-mouth that put my sailor father to shame. My wife told her often it was her
only bad quality. I tried to get angry about it but all I could do was laugh whenever she’d say ‘Oh shut your yap, Gramps’ to my father for scolding her. The funny part was, she only cussed behind closed doors, never in front of friends or the boys she liked, but as soon as they were out of the house she’d say something like ‘God, I love those f**kers.’ It gave my wife shivers.” He still didn’t move his head from his hands, but the sobs were no longer being held quietly. “I’m told that she was being asked out by this boy at school and that she kept turning him down because she wasn’t interested. I was told he loudly asked her out again in the middle of the college gymnasium in front of a professor and forty or more students, to which she, again, turned him down as politely as possible. Then he shot her. He shot her, yelled to the room that it was her fault for turning him down and shot himself before anyone could stop him. Another boy tried to tackle him and get the gun away but it was too late. The police were called and an ambulance, but it was already too late. The bullet went right into her heart. She died in minutes...

“Minutes.

“In minutes, the life that I held in my hands as a baby, and raised, loved and worried over was dead. In minutes the vile boy that took her from me was also dead. If he were alive, I’d be on my way to kill him, but since he’s dead I can’t do anything about it. I can’t even accept it all yet. I keep thinking that after all this crying, I’ll fall asleep and everything will be back the way it was. Jenny will be at school, calling home to tell us how her day went and I’ll be telling her about work and how excited I am to be retiring in a few years, but no. Instead I’m walking about in a daze, unable to stop crying and unable to do anything but hold my wife in my arms and cry with her for hours on end before we have to get up and do something or other for all the people who showed up to her funeral. I’m broken inside and I don’t think I’ll ever be able to fix it.” One hand left his face to reach out for the some sort of wipe, which was handed to him in great quantity. From the right angle one could see bloodshot eyes, a red raw and wet face with bags beneath his eyes dark enough to look like a double shot of black eyes. Wrinkles could be seen on his face, as 80
well as a solid handprint from resting his head for so long. He cleared away some tears, blew his nose and trashed the used and soaked material into the can the counselor brought forward.

The final member of mourners was the woman who now sat awkwardly spread out. She no longer looked uncomfortable, but she did look sad. “My name is Lauren. I’m here because I lost my sister, Sara, a few months ago... she overdosed on prescription drugs.” Lauren looked across the room before settling on the window across from her.

“Sara and I were fraternal twins... she liked being girly, and I never really had that sort of taste. When our parents divorced, they asked who we wanted to live with. I said my dad, and she said Mom and for a while we hardly spoke or heard from each other. Eventually, my dad felt torn about us living so far apart and moved to the area where Mom had taken off to, so by high school we were in the same town again, and had some of the same classes but for the most part we ignored each other. She had her friends and I had mine... My mom got remarried in our sophomore year and she started acting weird with her friends. She came to my and dad’s place asking if she could come stay with us and wouldn’t say why. I think my mom’s new husband was abusing her because she had some weird marks, but I didn’t confront her about it and she never brought it up. She just did a one-eighty though. She started wanting to hang out with me, and I didn’t really care. She was, well, a little princess with an attitude and I was a tomboy.”

“Well, she went from being the perfect princess to coming home late and hanging out with a bad crowd. She was still a good person, she just did some bad stuff. Right after high school, when she moved out to live with her boyfriend, she got addicted to some hard-core drugs. I didn’t see her too often since I left for college and I didn’t know about the problem for a while, but when I graduated and she showed up we all knew something was different... that something was... wrong.
“I took her to rehab a couple of times, but you can't really help those that don't want to be helped... she kept getting kicked out, or leaving. I had her move in with me, got her a job at a local retail in our area... I helped her get off the illegal drugs, and was helping her wean off the prescription ones... but I guess some itches are too hard not to scratch.

“I left for a business trip. I was gone for a week, and when I got home there was this terrible smell coming from her bedroom. The coroner said it had been five days. It was accidental, he said... and I think it was, but... its really messed me up. I keep thinking that if I just hadn't gone on that damn trip I could have stopped her before it happened, or I could have called 9-1-1 or something. I wish I would have been there.”

That was the last person who spoke and the last words spoken between the six for the remainder of the night.
I arose to my sister bouncing on my bed one cold autumn morning.

“C’mon Eric! Wake up! It’s Grandma’s birthday!” she whispered loudly.

I just pulled the cover over my head and hissed, “Quit yer bouncing Tracey, I’m tryin’ to sleep.”

“I’ll be jumpin’ on the bed if I could, but Mom doesn’t like it when I do,” she said in a hushed tone as she bounced a little harder. “C’mon! We hafta get dressed and get going before Mom and Dad wake up!”

“If you keep bouncing like that any longer, they’ll be up any sec now because of the racket you are making!”

Suddenly she stopped bouncing, but only to make a deal. Tracey was good at making deals.

“Okay, I’ll stop bouncing only if you get up ‘cause we got to get to Arnold’s at first light, to make sure we get some good apples.”

I opened one eye to look at the alarm clock and saw it was 5:32 AM. “Ah, c’mon Trace! The sun won’t rise ‘til two and a half hours from now!”

“I know, but we gotta get goin’ ‘fore Mom and Dad get up. If Dad gets up before we go, then he’s gonna make us rake the yard first thing. So get up!” she said, as she yanked the covers off of me and unto the floor beside the bed. Just then, the cold air of the morning swooshed across my body, and I immediately tensed my body onto the fetal position to keep warm. My teeth started chattering instantaneously. “Sheesh Trace! It’s cold!”

“I know! But you gotta get up now!” Tracey said while going through my dresser pulling out clothes for me to wear that morning, throwing a shirt, socks, underwear, a flannel shirt, and my favorite pair of Toughskins’ jeans on the bed. “Dad’s stopped snoring, so that means he’s gonna get up soon. Hurry up and get dressed! I’ll go get breakfast ready when you do that.”

As I rubbed my eyes to rid myself of the Sand Man’s nightly
gifts, I rotated and sat up in bed with my feet dangling from the side. Seeing that I was now sitting up, Tracey stared at me with one of those threatening looks, daring me to lay back down again. Getting the hint, I placed my feet on the cold wood floor. Suddenly a cold shiver went up my spine, and I shook myself awake. Satisfied with her efforts, Tracey smiled, turned around, and quietly opened the door while both listening and looking for our parents. Snake-like, she tiptoed outside the door and quietly closed it behind her.

I stared at myself in the mirror atop my dresser, and realized my mother would probably be wanting my father to take me down to the barbershop this weekend. It was getting long, even for the early 1970s, and it was over my ears, and a disheveled mess after a hard night's sleep. I turned around towards the bed to see that Tracey pulled out my drawers for me to wear. I shook my head realizing that this was not enough for hiking across the woods on a cold autumn morning. So, I went back to the dresser and pulled out my long-johns and a long sleeved turtleneck sweater, and threw them on my bed.

After stripping off my pajamas and the underwear I was wearing, I quickly put on the clean underwear, socks, and long johns – in that order for I did not like it when my socks started riding low on cold days like that day. Then went on the T-shirt, pants, and Cub Scout belt, followed by the turtleneck and flannel shirt. Not wanting the wrath of Mom later on, I then threw my dirty P.J.'s and underwear in the direction of the hamper, hoping most of them would fly into it (no such luck). I picked up the sheets and blankets Tracey threw onto the floor, and piled them upon the bed.

Just as I was admiring my quick handiwork, I realized I had forgotten something. After putting on the layers of clothes, I realized I had yet to go to the bathroom for my morning visit, and quietly rushed to the bathroom. Careful not to urinate in my pants, I quickly pulled down my pants, long johns, and underwear and sat down on the pot. The seat was bitterly cold, and realized I needed to put on an additional sweater after I was done for I didn't think I had enough to wear for the morning.

After flushing, I quickly pulled up my undergarments and pants, washed my hands in cold water (the hot water had not risen to the
second floor yet), dried them and quietly retreated to my room for a sweater. I found one that would fit under my coat downstairs, turned off the light in my room, and navigated by shadows towards downstairs trying not to make a noise. However, just as I stepped on the first step, I heard my father stopped snoring, cough to clear his throat, grind his teeth, and after a few nervous seconds I heard him start snoring again. At that moment I started down the stairs.

When I walked into the lit kitchen downstairs, Tracey asked, “What took you so long?”

“I had to put on my long johns and went to the bathroom.”

“Oh,” said Tracey blankly staring at the wall behind me, as if she was calculating something out. I did not have to ask her at all, for I already knew what it was. I knew she had also forgotten to put on her long johns because she would have pulled them out of the drawer if she thought she would have to wear them. Now, she was figuring out how she could go upstairs without waking up my parents to retrieve them.

I looked down at the table and saw my sister get out my box of Wheaties, a bowl, some sugar, and a carton of milk and put them on the table. Recognizing she had forgotten a spoon, I shuffled to the silverware drawer and pulled one out and went to my seat at the table. “Thanks, Trace,” I said as I sat down. “Yer welcome,” she replied as she shoveled the last spoonful of her Kix into her mouth, placed the spoon in the bowl, walked over to the sink and placed the bowl into it. She looked back at me and said, “I will be right back down, and we should get goin’ afterwards.”

“Okay,” I smiled as I took my first mouthful of Wheaties, knowing I was correct earlier. As she ventured upstairs, I stared at the front of the Wheaties box and frowned at the picture of Jerry West on the front of it. “Jerry West sucks,” I said to myself as I spooned the next mouthful of cereal into my mouth, knowing John Haviliceck was a much better player. All West could do was shoot the ball, while Hondo was a better all-around player. Hondo could not only shoot, but he could also play defense, rebound, and, most of all, he was not a ball hog like West was. Well, that was just one opinion from a young kid who lived just outside of Boston.
As I ruminated downstairs, I heard Tracey close her door upstairs, and winced because of the amount of noise she had made. I upended the bowl to swallow the sweet milk left over, and placed it and the spoon at the side of the sink. Since I was too short to see into the sink, I did not want to make any additional noise by mistakenly placing my bowl on top of Tracey’s in the sink.

I turned to the table, closed the cereal boxes, and put them in the pantry. As I retrieved the milk, Tracey whispered as she came into the kitchen, “I think Dad’s up.” While I put the milk into the fridge, Tracey put away the sugar. Just then, we heard a toilet flush. Dad was up.

We turned off the kitchen lights and scurried out the back door. Sitting on the back stoop in the mud room, we put on our shoes, and our coats. “Did ya forget the money?” I asked Tracey.

“Nope. That’s what I got when I went back upstairs,” lied Tracey, for I knew she would never admit that she forgot her long-johns, or ever being wrong. A trait she still carries to this day.

Reaching into my coat pockets, I found both my stocking cap and mittens, and put them on quickly as we entered the cold darkness of morning. I looked back at Tracey, whose breath looked like steam, and her nose was already turning red. As we started our journey to Arnold’s, our feet crunched the frozen grass and leaves in the backyard. I looked down and saw she had put on her boots, and realized I should have done the same because I was wearing my Buster Browns Mom bought me at the beginning of the school year. Mom would kill me if she saw me wearing them now to hike across the woods, but my boots from last year did not fit any longer.

The woods started just outside of our backyard. There used to be a creek marking the boundary from Mr. McDonald’s property and ours. However, Mr. McDonald put a series of large steel culverts to direct the flow of the stream, and placed both rock and dirt on top of it. Granted, my parents enjoyed that tremendously for it increased the size of the backyard and reduced the amount of mosquitos during the summer. On the other hand, both Tracey and I hated it because we loved playing in the stream during the summer. Sometimes parents do not listen to their children.

The path we took to Arnold’s was not actually a path at all. It was
a forgotten country road that ran through the woods and onto a more
used dirt road that went to Arnold's. Tracey and I called it a path, for
cars no longer drove on it. It was simply two ruts in the ground which
the tires or wagon wheels created over years of use. In between the
ruts was high growing grass, and at one side there were berry bushes,
wild brush and birch trees in their fall bloom. On the other side,
there were pine trees and a blanket of needles covering the forest floor.

Tracey and I had discovered many species of berries in the
woods, and during the summers we always brought home buckets
full of different varieties. In other words, the woods held a bounty
of blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, boysenberries, huckleberries,
loganberries, and even wild strawberries. For example, during the
last summer we brought home two large buckets of berries from
the woods one day. My mother did not know what to do with all of
them. Luckily, my Great Grandma was visiting in the kitchen, and
she told to my mother she knew exactly what to do, and took both
buckets back with her to their apartment in downtown Westborough.
We, my parents and my three siblings, came by for dinner the
following night, and sat down with Great Grandpa. After a great
meal of ham, potatoes, red gravy, and string beans, Great Grandma
presented to us three pies she had made from scratch from the berries,
plus one rhubarb pie, as well as jam made from the berries. Of course,
my sister, younger brothers and I were ecstatic, for Great Grandma
was an outstanding cook, and really knew her way around a pressure
cooker.

It was still dark, and Tracey and I stumbled into the woods.
Luckily Tracey brought one of Dad's flashlights as we navigated down
the old road up the wooded hill. Atop the hill was what we called
the "Black Barn." It was not really a barn, but a wood shed with dirt
as the floor, one doorway and two window frames, but no door or
windows. Instead of paint, it was covered with black tar paper on
both the outside and inside of the shed. Because of the color, we
called it the Black Barn.

It was our own unofficial clubhouse. The "barn" was simply a
place where we gathered with friends of the neighborhood during the
times we were outside playing in the woods. When it was winter, we
would gather there to sled down the old road of the hill. At times we would start a small fire in front of it to keep ourselves warm. Other times we would need some type of shelter when a big nor’easter came in from the New England coast during our time sledding in the fresh snow.

Just beyond the Black Barn, the old road opened up to the farm access road leading to Arnold’s Orchard. It was a six mile walk, but for our little legs it seemed a lot longer than that. However, we had all of the energy we needed that morning, for it was Great Grandma’s birthday and we were going to buy her a bag of apples.

The past few days, my sister and I gathered all the change we could find from our new piggy banks, in the folds of the couches and chairs, and the drawer where our parents threw their keys and everything from their pockets. We also scoured the entire house for any change we could muster. We gathered what we thought was a large sum of money in the eyes of two young kids.

Once we reached the black barn, I stopped, bowed my head, and closed my eyes. Tracey stopped too, and asked me what I was doing. I said that I was praying for Great Grandpa, who died earlier in the week, and for Katherine, whose grave we found that past summer in an old forgotten stone-fenced farm field adjacent to the black barn. When we found it, we went to the nearby farm and mentioned what we discovered. The farmer’s wife mentioned it had belonged to a little girl who died of smallpox in the early 1800s, and her family was destitute and buried her on the plot instead of in the town’s cemetery.

Tracey prayed with me.

After we had passed the barn, we came to the access road, and saw that the sun was starting to come up. From there we walked towards Arnold’s Orchard. After forty-five minutes we arrived at Arnold’s. The sun was up and Mr. Arnold in his flannel field jacket was just opening up the building where he sells his apple-based products. Tracey and I walked through the door, and all we could smell was the apples and the cedar of the building. We stood just inside the doorway, as Mr. Arnold was busy arranging everything for the day’s business. As he turned with a bushel basket full of apples in his arms, he was a little startled by our presence.
“Hi kids! Both of you are up really early this morning this morning, aren’t you?”
“Yes, sir.” Tracey replied for both of us.
He put the basket atop one of the tables, smiled and asked us,
“What can I help you with?”
I piped up. “We want to buy some apples for our great grandma for her birthday.”
Just then Mrs. Arnold entered the building. “Good morning children.”
“Good morning ma’am,” Tracey and I said in unison.
“What are you two doing here so early?”
“They are here to buy some apples for their grandmother for her birthday,” Mr. Arnold explained.
“Oh that’s very nice of you. What kind of apples does your grandmother like? And how many do you want?”
Tracey and I looked at each other, for we did not know there were different kinds of apples, nor did we know how much to get. I took the initiative. “We would like some red ones please.”
Mr. and Mrs. Arnold smiled and laughed softly, amused at our innocence. “Okay. As you can see, we have a lot of those. So how many do you want?”
Tracey then took control of the conversation. “We would like a bag of them please.”
Mr. Arnold then grabbed one of the bags from the nearby table, and was handing it to Tracey as she gave him the $2.32 in change that we had gathered the past two days.
Mr. Arnold’s eyebrows went up. “I’m sorry miss, but this bag costs a little more than what you have there.”
Tracey’s and my eyes went to the floor. I looked up toward Mr. Arnold. “We’re sorry to trouble you Mr. Arnold,” I said, turned and followed Tracey to the doorway.
I heard Mrs. Arnold scold her husband. “James, you could make an arrangement with them. After all, they obviously got up real early to walk all this way here to get some apples for their grandmother.”
Apparently, that hit the mark with Mr. Arnold. “Kids. Wait up.” Tracey and I stopped at the doorway, and turned towards him. “I’ll
make a deal with you. If I give you an empty bag, you can go out to the orchard and pick enough apples to fill the bag, and I will take what you have in money. Okay?"

Tracey and I beamed, and she ran up to Mr. Arnold to get an empty bag from him and said, "Thank you Mr. Arnold!" and the both of us ran out the door towards the orchard.

We ran to the first tree, and I looked at all of the apples on the ground and started to pick them up. Tracey told me to stop and she explained to me that the apples on the ground may have worms and bugs in them. The good ones were in the tree, and I should climb up and pick them from the branches.

I balked at her suggestion, for I had never climbed a tree before. Also, looking upwards at the tree, the apples that had not been picked yet were on the upper branches. "Tracey, you should climb up instead of me. You know I haven't done that before."

"It's nothing to it. You just climb up the branches like a ladder one by one."

"Still. You should climb up, not me." I was afraid, and I did not mind Tracey calling me a sissy for not wanting to climb. Then I realized she was afraid also, and wanted me to climb instead of her. "Besides, you know how to do it, and it'll be quicker if you did it."

She responded with a "Hmmph!" and started climbing up the tree to the branches where the apples were. One by one she tossed the apples down to me, and quickly we filled the bag up. After Tracey climbed down to safety, we marched proudly with each of us holding the bag's handles towards Mr. Arnold in the store. We placed the bag outside the door, where I stood guard as Tracey went inside to pay for the apples. Both of the Arnolds came outside with Tracey to inspect the bag of apples. Astonished, Mr. Arnold asked us, "Where did you get those apples?"

"From the first tree over there," answered Tracey.

Then Mrs. Arnold started laughing with her hand over her mouth at the situation. It was obvious that Mr. Arnold had meant for us to pick the apples from the ground, and not from the tree. He was not expecting two small kids to climb up the tree to pick the apples. Then Mrs. Arnold interceded. "James, you did say pick a bag of
apples from the orchard. You did not say where in the orchard.” She turned laughing as she went inside, as Mr. Arnold grunted from his folly.

Sensing the situation, Tracey quickly handed the $2.32 in change to him, said thank you, grabbed her respective bag handle, and we left. As I said before, Tracey was good at making deals.

The walk home was a little quicker than when we went the other way. It was because we were not fumbling about in the dark as we were earlier. The trees were wearing their fall colors very well that morning. As we walked home we would kick at the leaves on the ground as the morning sun shone through the trees in beams of spectacular light. When I kicked one leaf Tracey noticed I was wearing my Buster Browns and remarked that if I scuffed my shoes, Mom would kill me, so I should stop my kicking. I realized she was correct, but kicked one more pile of leaves just for fun.

As we arrived at the house, we looked in the back windows to make sure our parents – or more importantly, Grandma – would not see us as we crossed the backyard. Thus, we took a more circuitous route to the back door of the mud room. Quietly, we took off our shoes and coats and entered the kitchen. We observed that nobody was there but we heard voices emanating from the family room. So Tracey snuck upstairs by way of the dining room with the apples as I walked to the fridge for the carton of milk. I got a clean glass from the sink and filled it up with milk to have with some Mr. Chip’s chocolate chip cookies. I looked up at the clock to see it was almost ten o’clock in the morning, and settled down to start dunking cookies in the milk. My mother, hearing the noise in the kitchen, came out to see who was there. Seeing myself occupied with my cookies, she asked me, “Where did you two go this morning?”

“We went to the Black Barn.” It was not entirely the truth, but it was not a lie either.

“You were gone early.”

“We watched the sunrise this morning.” Again, it was not entirely the truth, but it was not a lie either.

“Okay.” She then brushed her hands through my hair, examining me. I kept munching on my cookies, as she did this. “You need a
haircut. Your dad should take you to the barber shop this morning.”

“Okay,” I said as she left the kitchen. As she went upstairs my
great grandmother came from the family room. “Hi Grandma!”

She smiled at me, and said, “Good morning Eric. How are you
this morning?”

“Warming up from outside. How about you?”

“I’m fine thank you very much. I’m going upstairs to my room
now.”

“Okay.” I smiled knowing Tracey would be done placing the bag
of apples in her room.

I put both the milk and cookies away, and the glass on the side of
the sink. I then proceeded to the family room to watch the Saturday
morning cartoons, and lucked out to watch the beginning of a Jonny
Quest show. Tracey then came in and sat down beside me. “Did you
get it done?” I asked her.

“Yeah, I did.”

“Good.”

Many years later, thirty-six to be exact, I mentioned what Tracey
and I did that morning to my mother. Upon hearing it she laughed,
and said when we came into the house she knew Tracey and I were
up to something, for I never got up that early when I was that age.
She went on to explain that she and our great grandmother were in
the family room, and they were discussing Great Grandma’s plans for
the future. Great Grandpa just died earlier in the week, and Great
Grandma felt that she was an extra wheel in a household full of
children. My mother was trying to assure her that she was very much
needed in the house, and the children loved her very much. After
Great Grandma left for upstairs that morning, she entered her room
to find a large bag full of apples with a homemade card reading:

“Happy Birthday Great Grandma! Here are some apples for your
great apple pie! Love, Tracey and Eric.”

My mother said Grandma had cried in joy and love for a little
while. Plus Mom said it was the perfect gift for that moment in time,
because it demonstrated that indeed she was much needed and loved
by us children.

Nevertheless, my father and great grandmother left for Iowa
with my great grandfather's remains, and he was buried in the town of Spencer. After the funeral, my great grandmother stayed with her sister's family in Sioux City. The next summer all of us went to Iowa for a family reunion on my mother's side. We initially gathered in Sioux City at my Uncle Chuck's home, and visited my grandmother for lunch.

Two years later my family moved to Syracuse, NY and my great grandmother stayed with us for a while, until one afternoon all of us returned from visiting the N.Y. State Fair and found her in Tracey's room. Dad then went to Spencer again with my great grandmother.

Long ago in Spencer, my great grandparents purchased four plots at the cemetery when they buried their youngest son, Caleb, who died at the age of six years of age from influenza in the 1920s. My great uncle and great grandparents are now buried there, while my grandfather, Lester, opted to be buried with his wife, my grandmother, in Burien, WA. So, three summers ago before I had my heart surgery, I mentioned to my father that if he or my mother were not going to use the plot, and if something went wrong, then I would not mind waking up in the afterlife with my great grandparents at my side.

Later, I was told it was an honor to be invited to dinner by either my great grandmother or Mrs. Meutzel (Great Grandma's sister-in-law) who lived down the road in the town of Spencer in the day. Both of the women could really cook, and both of them kept winning the cooking competitions at Spencer's Town Fair. For instance, Great Grandma won the pie contest eight years straight before moving to Sioux City. So, when I discovered her recipe book in the attic this past summer, I was surprised to find this family treasure. When I opened the page to where her apple pie recipe was, there was a note to the side of it; "Tracey's and Eric's favorite."
T-minus 26 hours till destination:

Head over the toilet, I fight the urge to let go. There are better places I’d rather be than here. My stomach flips as if it is performing a gymnastics routine. The push came again and I shake as my body rids itself of burning stomach acid. I’m surrounded by bright red bathroom stalls that seem too eager to greet me and I am not feeling too enthusiastic to greet back. Here I am kneeling in the Barcelona Airport Spain, about 5,533 miles away from home. Far from my mother, my father, and most importantly my own bed. My brand new queen-sized bed is always willing to comfort me and I yearn for its presence at the moment. I decide that my incentive for the day will be to reunite with my soft, sleek, fluffy bed.

“Carly? You sick, yes? Need you anything?” The voice breaks my daydreaming as my sweet Spanish mother asks in broken English from outside the stall door. She is always concerned and the wrinkles on her face show it. This lady is my best friend’s mother, and in my eyes, my own fill-in mother while here in Barcelona for a few more hours.

“No, gracias,” I say as another wave of shakes take over my body. I flew here to Barcelona alone to spend Christmas break with my best friend and her family. Both being sixteen years of age, this trip seemed like a wonderful idea to my young adventurous heart. It allowed for the possibilities of meeting new people, experiencing different lifestyles, and living out any opportunity that came my way.

The travel time for the way there took fifteen hours. Not too bad. Here I am anticipating what will be twenty-four hours’ worth of travel time with layovers and me alone journeying home. My body shakes again.

Thirty thousand feet in the air is not my ideal place to be vomiting and I am extremely determined not to have that happen. I sit on the cold ground of the brightly illuminated bathroom, taking deep breaths and composing myself. Do I have food poisoning? No, I barely ate last night. Do I have the flu? No...I have been feeling pretty
great. I took a moment to breathe and compose myself enough to grab the bright red stall, climb to standing position, and make it out of the bathroom.

On my way out, I glance at the mirror. Bad idea. There I catch sight of a pale, clammy face with tangled crazy hair, and even worse I see a girl who is not ready to fly. The shakes attack me. My body tremors with each step I take. Outside the bathroom my best friend and her family wait to embrace me in their arms. I’m wrapped in warmth from the family but my body feels so cold. I smile to convince my Spanish mother not to worry. I am going to be all right.

**T-minus 25 ½ hours till destination:**

After the hug, it is time to leave them and pass through security. As if on cue, my stomach cartwheels and I cannot move, only breathe. The nausea sends acid to the lower part of my throat but I decide to ignore it and push onward. I lug my heavy carry on over my shoulder shakily and slowly trudge to the line entrance. *Inhale, exhale. I will be fine.* Turning around, I give my Spanish family one last forceful smile of reassurance before I walk into the security line.

Standing in line, I begin to panic. The image of my face in the bathroom mirror flashes in my memory and I realize I could be mistaken for an unsteady, shaky, cold-sweating drug addict. *Oh God, get me through this line without anything happening. There are no drugs in this system, just sickness.* While barely lifting my bag enough to place it in a grey container, I take off my shoes and stride up to the agents waiting. One lady looks me in the eye and waves me through the metal detector. No alarms go off. *I’m good. I’m not a danger to anyone.* Leaning over to get my stuff, I get a tap on the shoulder. I turn to find the suspicious eyes of the agent lady and her mouth that states something about a search. My stomach drops and does little flips again. Sweat begins to form on my pale white brow line but I accept what is to happen.

Apparently, I am what they call a “random search”. They are required to do them every certain number of people. Today is my day. There I am, a sick sweating teenage girl who just wants her bed, getting a pat down. I hold a sob back, not from fright or fear, but
from this barrier that is restraining me from comfort. *Yes that is my arm. Yes that is my other arm. You have checked the two legs. Can I please go?!* There is still a look of concern on the Agent’s face, but she allows me to have my dignity back and gives me the nod. Once free I grab my things and bathroom hop, puking once or twice all the way to my terminal.

**T-minus 25 hours till destination**

A chair. A simple, blue chair. This terminal has many chairs, but I am fixated on the closest one I can collapse into. *Not as comfortable as my bed, but it will suffice.* Exhaustion hits and the nausea seems to stop. I curl up in the chair and gaze blankly into the distant terminals. *I feel okay. I can make it home.* It is then that a young man, with a perfectly chiseled face and adorable brown curls atop his head, asks if he may sit next to me. *Why yes you can. You can sit next to me any day!*

“Uh…yeah, sure,” I quickly respond, feeling embarrassed for my unheard thoughts. We exchange names and discuss where we are from. This young man, of eighteen years, is from the Netherlands, and at the time is unlike any man I have ever met before. All of a sudden I begin to shake and my body kicks back into the nausea routine. *Why now?! Why did this wonderful specimen of a man have to sit directly next to me? Carly, you have to hold on till we can find a bathroom. JUST HOLD ON.* My inner thoughts attack me almost as much as my stomach does.

I turn towards my new friend and smile, asking if he could watch my things while I find a bathroom. He smiles back and says “Yes.” If I was not so clammy and pale-faced from dehydration my cheeks would be pure red from blushing.

The bathroom is near enough but disappointment begins when I see a little sign blocking the way that says it is being cleaned. My stomach and heart drop at the same time. Tears form in my eyes but I fight back against the disappointment and walk back to the seat. There is a look of confusion on the young man’s face when I come back only after being gone a minute. “It was closed for cleaning,” I say. He just nods, smiles a charming smile, and begins to talk about his life. I engage politely and stare deeply into those beautiful brown eyes. The only thing that could be better is if I could actually enjoy 96
the moment. Instead, my brain is having an inner monologue going a little something like this:

You need to puke. Hello, Carly? Bathroom, not boy! Yes, his eyes are great and he is so exotic compared to you, but seriously your stomach is out of control. Okay maybe just be honest with him about how sick you are.

“I’m not feeling too well,” I blurt out in the midst of his talking. Embarrassment hits and I gave another one of my unconvincing smiles, which he laughs at.

“Well that is just cute!” he says. “Hey, what is your seat number? Maybe I can switch with someone. That way we can sit together and the flight won’t be so bad for you.”

My brain is in awe that a young man can look at this half dead, stricken with sickness, American zombie-girl and think she is cute enough to sit by. My stomach rumbles again. It is then that I realize if vomit were to eject from my mouth, the last thing I want is for a gorgeous man to witness such a horrid thing; or worse, be caught in the crossfire. Managing my gag impulse I am able to respond, “No maybe we shouldn’t. You know how they are particular about seating. Thanks though, it was a good idea.” Good job for escaping that one Carly.

T-minus 24 hours to destination

The plane begins to board and my dreamy Dutch friend lugs my carry-on bag for me. I could get used to something like this. My seat destination arrives before his and my heart saddens when he gives me my bag, smiles, and continues his trek farther down to wherever his seat is located. Goodbye for now my Dutch man. I shall see you soon!

It is a small plane with two blue set of seats on either side of a middle aisle. The plane is departing from Barcelona and headed to Paris. It is from Paris that I will take a flight to Atlanta, Georgia and from there fly home to Portland. I take a seat in a fluffy chair and my body relaxes. Not as good as my bed, but not too bad for a plane seat. With each breath I can taste the stuffy salty air of the cabin and it sets me off into shaking. Just then a little old Spanish lady sits next to me. She looks about sixty years of age with grey streaks in her hair. She is wearing an adorable floral dress with a cardigan and radiates such
warmth it puts my heart at ease before liftoff. I begin to imagine that this woman is a mother of three, traveling the world to see her now grown and successful children. It feels wonderful to think that there is a well-practiced mother on the plane and that she is seated next to me. Mothers deal with throw up all the time, right? Carly, you might have just scored.

The plane hits the runway and begins moving as my stomach decides to join in. To stop from shaking I grip the arm rests, close my eyes, and promise myself to not to throw up during the liftoff. My eyes stay shut till I hear the *DING* of the seat belt sign going off. I am now free to roam the cabin. I made it through liftoff without any ejection of fluids. Success! As if to poke fun at me, my stomach clenches and my body receives the dreaded feeling once again. Looking in the pocket of the seat in front for barf bags, my reward is none. Panic sets in to join the trembling of my body.

In a shaky quiet voice I turn towards the sweet looking motherly figure beside me and say “Perdoname.” Which I later find out stands for forgive me as opposed to pardon me in Spanish. I continue with “Estoy mal,” I am sick. I am more than sick. Throw up will be exploding from my mouth very soon. I want my bed. Please motherly Spanish figure, help me.

From those brief words, the comforting eyes give me the once over as if understanding what is going on with my body and she responds with, “Un momento!” Just like that she grabs her purse, digs around, and whips out what seems to be a perfect cylindrical plastic barf bag that beckons to be filled with fluid. I beam with joy as the burning sensation in my throat commences. Somehow I manage a “Gracias” before I eject what little there is in my stomach. A soft, sweet hand rubs my back and I know I am in the care of a kind-hearted woman.

After the ejection of fluids, a flight attendant escorts my body to the bathroom to allow myself to be put back together. I look even worse than I did earlier going through security. With no such pride or satisfaction I hold my see through barf bag for the world to see as I walk amidst the aisle way. People begin to turn away, and I hold tightly to the bag hoping no odors escape. The farther back I trek
into the plane, the more embarrassment becomes of me. Please don’t let cute hot Dutch boy see me. Please no. My mind pleads with the inevitable. Dark brown eyes lock with mine and he sees me. All of me. I smile at him as if not noticing the bag of tan warm fluid in my hands. My life is done. I want to not be on this plane! I want to curl up and hibernate in my bed.

Cold water feels good on the face as I clean myself up in the tiny bathroom. I find safety here, but I know the comfort of the bathroom is not an escape from the unavoidable walk back to my seat. How can I go back? I have just imitated a Price Is Right show girl, but instead of showing off a car or a new set of golf clubs, I have showed off my stomach fluids for the whole plane to see. Carly focus on the destination ahead: cozy bed. I cling to the thought, slide open the door, and book it to my seat without making any eye contact. Once there I am given a Sprite in order to replenish the missing fluid in my body and I drift off to sleep on the shoulder of the sweet Spanish woman.

T-Minus 19 hours to destination:
Everything turns into a cloudy haze as one hour meshes with another. I can barely recall hiking the Paris airport to catch my transfer flight. I sleep the whole flight across the Atlantic. Whether it is embarrassment from the day’s events or just pure exhaustion, my eyes do not want to open and face the world. One thought sticks with me. Need bed.

T-minus 6 Hours to destination:
I reach the Atlanta airport and am met with the smell of fried food, deep fried food. Hunger hits, but oily food is the last thing my stomach needs. After hiking one terminal, going through customs, and taking a subway of some sort to my last terminal, I make it to the last leg of the journey. It feels as if the weight of a thousand dumbbells lifts from my heart. One last flight till my destination. Go Carly Go! I decide it is now time to call my mother. My arm aches holding up the phone and I relay the day’s events while hearing very little of her frantic worry spouting from the earpiece. One memory
that sticks with me is my last words to her before I hang up. "Hey mom, can you make sure my bed is ready for me? Thanks." After hanging up I grab my carry-on bag, take a shaky breath and almost laugh out loud thinking back to the events of the day as I walk onto the last flight.

T-Minus 0 hours. Destination reached:

I have made it. The trauma of the travel time traverses in my memory. No more embarrassing moment with cute Dutch man, no more sickness, only the warmth of my sheets and the bounce of my bed to take away the past day's events. I doze for the half hour car ride home, unable to answer my parents' questions filled with worry and concerns. My brain only has one thought. I am jostled awake as home appears. Without remembering the walk I show up in front of my white bedroom door, trembling as if the weight of the world is on my shoulders. Stepping inside the dim lit room I feel a wash of relief. My bed beckons me with one corner pulled down in anticipation of my arrival. I slide my body in the sheets and feel the warm soft touch of the blankets taking away the aches from my body and the emotional pains from the day. My bed at that moment is better for me than any boyfriend or exotic man could be. Destination reached, bed acquired.
Poems
Soliloquy

Amber Reeves

depression is not cute
depression is not a john green novel read on your porch under a rainy sky,
it does turn you into ethereal stardust
do not buy the stories they try to sell you—
you will not find a boy who sees your scars and feels a faint tug on his heartstrings that leads
his lips to kiss your pale, tattered flesh
you will not find a boy to sit idly by as you rip apart your body limb from rotten limb
depression is ugly, and it will tear canyons between you and your lover
between you and your family
between you and your entire world

it will turn you into a monster in the eyes of the very people who swore you would always be their summer, always be their spring blossom at the end of a long, harsh winter
but they ripped their rosebud out of the soil the day you confessed that their love wasn’t enough to keep you in this world the day that you became the winter, the cold unfeeling wind, the brittle branches crumbling under the weight of your dying world

he will see your scarred skin and lose the courage to look you in the eye
as he wonders where he was when you lost yourself again
he will cringe despite himself, despite all his love for you, despite his every intention to board up the windows and hold you through the hurricanes that are ravaging your being

he will tell you that his phone is always on—— and it will be
but at 3 am when he picks up to your trembling voice,
he will answer less enthused than you think he should be

Because, after all, he is only human.

his body does not run on your broken circadian rhythm
and his brain does not pick up on the wavelengths
    that send shivers down your spine as you curl into yourself at night

He is not built to understand and that is a godsend within itself.

his hands will be strong as yours tremble
his heart will be steady as yours fails to remember
    how the hell it’s supposed to keep a steady rhythm

your spine may shrink and crumble as his grows taller
but remember— your spine carries the weight of a thousand lives
    your spine carries the burden of a thousand thoughts he will never
    be able to fathom

the birdcage in your sternum does not make you weak
the fears that flutter frantically, always threatening to escape
through your shaking lips
    do not define your character

You are not his conquest.

you are not the broken toy in the corner
    waiting for the right hands to piece you back together
you are not the ruins of something once beautiful,
    waiting for an artist’s vision to shape you into
something the world can stomach once more
and you are not his manic dream
So do not buy the stories they try to sell you.
Do not let them write you off.
Do not let them push you to the sidelines.
Do not let them brand you as a phase, as the product of a bullshit generational statistic.

You are the mountains.
You are the sunset.
You are the winter—and the summer.

You are a lifetime worth of wonder just waiting to burst through.
One Day

Katie Wartell

Pretty, sweet bile escapes from the throat of an average-looking girl.

The extreme heckling from the voices in her head congratulates her for the commitment.

"We couldn't be more pleased that you've decided to fully dedicate yourself. Now do it again and act like you want this lifestyle more than ever!"

A sleek smile on her swollen translucent lips develops as she sends the contents and remains of her lunch down to its watery grave.

A wobbly, yet graceful stride to the sink, she unwinds the tool belt of her complicated misery.

Her secret is harbored behind the routine that is beginning to define her.

The tepid water refuses to drain the sickly taste that has embedded itself along her gum-line.

Sapphire colored toothpaste that dances with diamond specks exhausts itself to rid the stench in her mouth.

"A stick of minted gum will do the trick," she mumbles to herself as she fumbles for her prearranged emergency kit, as if she knew that something would hit a snag.

Smug, but an unsatisfied look washes across her eyes knowing that her routine will come again, in due time.

For the practice that threatens her life will define her and it will eventually become her.

"One day," she whispers into the unreflective mirror that reveals no soul, but a thinning body.

"One day..."
Sonnet #2
Carly Shick

Of knowledge known, one cannot be more true!
Now sit on white pot round and cold below.
To feel the liberation from one's poo,
Excreting things can be a great big show.

Can be how prairie dogs are often like
Slide in and out of holes in grassy field.
A musty scent arises from their strife
But here we've learned they never like to yield.

How tiresome little brown clods make the time.
To sit and push as sweat begins to form
be-rid this ugly dirty piece of grime.
Once done the body aches of new reform!

The flush is conq'ring as the battle ceased,
Until the time when next one more's unleashed
The Voice
Samatha Pottinger

Rushing, roaring, howling smites
The mighty wind on the mountainsides,
Its force splits rocks and uproots trees
And tosses them on airy seas.
This surging storm, what can it mean?
What power is here, unheard, unseen?
Is the Creator come, all things to end?
........but the Lord is not in the wind.

Rumbling, grumbling, tremoring shake
The roots of the earth in a wrenching quake,
Rending the earth and laying it bare
Showing a world's bones and sowing despair.
This destruction and havoc, what can it mean?
Is there glory herein, to be heard and seen?
Has the Creator come, creation to break?
 ........but the Lord is not in the earthquake.

Snapping, cracking, scorching leap
The flames of a blazing gale of heat,
It rushes and swirls in angry rage
Bearing death in its wings, and mad rampage.
This ravenous fire, what can it mean?
What power is here, unknown yet seen?
Is the Creator come to wreak His ire?
...........but the Lord is not in the fire.

Falling, crashing, hushing falls
A tranquil quiet o'er creation's all,
The quiet envelops, shoos clamor away
Stills all before it, forging a way,
So that into its bosom, ah! soft and light
Like a rumor of air, a sigh so slight
One barely perceives it, but for the void
.............there comes in the silence a still, small voice.
Whispering, murmuring, soothing it speaks
So mighty and awesome it dares to be weak;
It brushes the ear—nay, the heart—with its tones
Assuring the creature she is not alone.
It breathes of a Truth so vast it contains
A Heaven of Love, and a world of pain,
And the creature cries out her surrender, her choice
...........for the Lord is in the still, small voice.
Am the collection of pieces that define me
A unique individual in every way
A carbon copy of everyone else

I am the manifestation of good and evil
Walking the tightrope between Heaven and Hell
Betwixt the narrow space known as Humanity

I am the pool of tears in which I drown
The valley of cocksure grins and cheeky eyebrows
The indiscriminate breath of listlessness
And the flooding rush of fresh sunrise

I am that which has no wings yet soars into sunsets
Hairless beast of no name, always aware
Always hungry, always roaming
The upright monster of dreams and nightmares, biding time
The hunched creature of fear and anxiety biting its ankles
The ruler of all and the master of none

I am the soft peach of summer waiting to be plucked
The blooming rose encased in a shroud of thorns
The swan with its clipped wing and broken leg
The luxurious pelt hanging by the fire
The stolen tusks carved into fine jewelry

I am the tomorrow waiting in today
The harvest Moon illuminating the night on borrowed light
The beads of dew on each blade of grass
The glittering stars that sparkle in their graves
The muddled words caught in throat
I am that which I am
That which has no name
That which has been named
That which is as it is now
That which will not always be
I am [...]
My name is mythological and refreshing. Lately my name is Lucky Charms.

But sometimes it’s Cocoa Puffs, Cheerios, Trix, or Cinnamon Toast Crunch. I hope my name will always be bright. I’d like it to be shiny, tricky, and beautiful. My name can be bang, crack, swish, crash.

My name means cool, glass, foam, strong. It’s full. My name yesterday was a story.

Today it is the sun. Tomorrow it will be colorful: honey, cider, flower. The next day it’ll be a crater. My name will always be alarm, and real.

It holds Poseidon, Sebastian, Ariel, flipper, and tail. My name is snap, shuffle, and slide.
Oh childhood, ‘member lovely days from past,
From Tolkien comes, adventures and of bonds.
Like dreams un-entered, now it comes at last!
The yearn to ‘scape from earth and all it spawned.

Drowned in two worlds both true and also fake.
The wa’try words are greatly pure and fine.
But ox’gen in my lungs tells me to ‘wake,
To be pulled out of water in its line.

Letters are yours to wrap and realign,
Create a marveled land in which to dwell,
A word weaver, both wonder and divine.
Construct the sounds. Produce a mystic spell,

Oh author! Person, sculptor big and small,
What’s only verses never lived at all.
Every morning, I pretend I'm a junkie or a rebel.  
Got to start the day right, got to stay out of trouble.  
I take the several pills I so desperately need, I need.  
For my mind cannot be what it wants to be. Freed  

From all of the horrors and pain, I crave to release  
Victimhood, a statistic of violence, self-hate, to appease  
My mother, my father, my humanity as they inspect  
Myself. To be normal without fear, regret, to reject,  

My awkward body, my trembling words that get caught,  
In my mouth, a desert of have's and have not's.  
But those pills don't get me high; all they do is rot  
Away my brain, chemical by chemical, and they will plot,  

To turn me into a citizen in a country of liars,  
Who say how I'm feeling cannot be right, I must decipher,  
As they jeer at the blasphemous sight of the frozen,  
Hear me!  
The sanctuary of the unknown. That is what I have chosen.
"Why do you do that to your hair?"

Good Question. I’m not really sure.
Why do I take up a metal comb, my artist’s wand,
And conjure up grand castles made of sand, my straight hair,
Only to watch it wash into oblivion by the threat of water?
Water, the giver of life melts my castles and now it is mud and slop.
The stuff for pigs.

Burning scalp fills my kitchen, the acrid stench of perfection.
Gone is the fleecy mane, gone is the nappy, tangled forest black as midnight.
Now I am beautiful. Now my hair is nice—whatever that means.
Now I will blend.
Into the translucent mosaic of respectable women.

I am neat and sleek and glossy and they will not dare call me—they will not call this girl
Ghetto. Because I will blend.
Away the soft auburn streak in my hair, the tainted legacy of a poor Irish immigrant
The soft fuzz on my neck. I will stamp out that Blackfoot and cut off the Choctaw.

"How do you get your hair like that?"
"How long does it take to do that?"
"Is your hair like that naturally?"
"Is that a weave?"

"Why do you do that to your hair?"
I’m not sure. I guess
I do it to look like you
Song Poem

Renee Saucier

I can feel the fear and loneliness it possesses. Sharp and frantic harps pluck to the beat of my heart.

Cold ethereal voices breathe along with my lungs. The tympani strikes in my ears like thunder and lightning.

Flutes flutter like poisonous butterflies in my stomach. Basses crack my bones and violins trill like stinging bees.

Somehow the song’s tragedy transposes itself into my life.
Skyline
Katie Wartell

Sea Turtle
Ashley Aczon
Reading on the Beach

Ashley Aczon

As the sun set, I sat on the sand with my book open to the page where I had left off. The waves crashed against the shore, and the scent of the sea filled my nostrils. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, allowing the sound of the waves to lull me into a state of relaxation.

I opened my book and began to read. The pages turned quickly, and before I knew it, I had reached the end of the chapter. I sighed and closed my eyes again, feeling content and at peace.

As I lay there, I thought about all the books I had read in my lifetime. Each one had brought me to a new world, introduced me to new characters, and taught me new things. I realized that reading had changed me in ways I never thought possible.


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Snowy Scenes

William Pynn
St. John's Bridge
Kayla Suvak
Amber Reeves is a freshman who hails from a lonely Michigan suburb. She spends the vast majority of her free time reading satire news articles and watching B movies. She dreams of one day taming a team moose and living in the Alaskan wilderness. Short of that, she is happily majoring in English and pursuing a deep interest in journalism.

Hana Whisman is an undergrad student majoring in English and minoring in Spanish and History. She is currently in her second year at Concordia but will be graduating in spring of 2016. She is a journalist for the Oregon Optimist online news website, and plans to continue writing after graduation—though hopefully focusing more on creative fiction and nonfiction. Hana’s biggest dream is to one day voice a Disney princess.

Blue Braun is currently a freshman at Concordia University, with a major in English and considering a minor in Psychology. Blue enjoys writing fiction or poetry, reading and listening to loud music in the car. She was born in Portland, Oregon and wants to visit Japan, Norway and London after she graduates. She also is considering being a marriage counselor in the near future because she has an affinity for romantic relationships and how they either fail or become successful.

William Pynn is an enthusiast of the Second World War who can identify almost any weapon or vehicle utilized in the conflict. Majoring in Business Administration, with a minor in Communications, he hopes to pursue his passion in fiction writing and become an author. When William is asked why he isn’t majoring in English or History, he shrugs and usually replies promptly with, “Honestly I have no idea, but I’m sure it’ll work out... somehow.”
Missie Yamamura is currently a freshman nursing major here at Concordia University. Her hobbies consist of free reading in her spare time, partaking in outdoor activities (i.e., hiking; swimming), writing haiku, and handcrafting jewelry. Missie's inspiration for her poem came from her long time family dog, Maxx, who passed away. Fun fact: Although her name (Missie) is regarded as a common nickname, she was given that name as her actual birthname!

Peggy Wood is currently a junior. Her love of storytelling began as a small child when her parents read fairy tales. Peggy has been an avid reader/writer since youth. She loves participating as a writer and staff member in The Promethean. Her favorite activities are reading, writing, and drawing. After graduating she hopes to become an author of fiction and an editor.

Julia Vitells is a lifelong bookworm, the kind of kid who used to walk home from the library with her nose stuck in her Ramona Quimby book. She is also a sophomore at Concordia University, planning to major in nursing. In the future, she hopes to continue writing stories, songs, and perhaps even a novel, in between nursing shifts. As well as reading and writing, Julia enjoys nature walks, coffee dates, and trying to stay up on a wakeboard.

Kylie Johnson is a senior, graduating with a degree in both piano performance and finance. When she's not tickling the ivories or crunching numbers, Kylie enjoys cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, washing dishes, and other womanly chores. She can often be found in Disneyland, sailing the seas of the Caribbean, or in her hometown of Wenatchee, gallivanting around the apple orchards. Her loves include (in this order) dogs, the color “sea-foam green”, Meeko (the pesky raccoon from Pocahontas), coffee, Sour Punch Straws, and Maroon 5.
Raeann Bauer is a twenty-something that enjoys foreign films, foreign movies and foreign accents. Her greatest loves are Tapatio, Siracha, Matt Bauer (her husband) and Eleanor (her cat). While wanderlust has taken hold of her heart, she is rooted at the moment in the pursuit of finishing her junior year at Concordia University as an English major with a minor in History. After college, the only thing leading her is the idea that “adventure is out there” and the hope that she will embrace that with open arms.

Renee Sauder is currently an English major at Concordia whose works are often influenced by music. She one day hopes to become either a teacher or writer. A Seattle native, Renee enjoys writing, traveling, film and all things science fiction. She would like to thank her mother for giving her the gift of books.

Jalyn Gilmore is an English major and an aspiring novelist. Writing on rainy days and eating snacks is one of the best ways to spend the day. She hopes she can leave and study abroad and find her calling and maybe travel around with a pack of weirdos just like her. It would be nice if she could go to South America at least once and Jalyn wants to see something unimaginably inspiring.

Phuong Mai is a sophomore majoring in Nursing at Concordia University. When not at her desk studying, she enjoys spending minutes on folding cranes, hours on making cards, days on knitting baby hats, and weeks on painting the misty forests. She hopes to enter the nursing program at Concordia and achieve her dream of becoming a Registered Nurse.

Autumn Ingrassia is a freshman at Concordia University. She is majoring in Elementary Education and when she graduates she hopes to become a teacher and then maybe one day, a principal. Autumn grew up along the hot and sunny coast of San Diego, California. In her free time she enjoys relaxing at the beach and hanging out with friends and family. Autumn is also going to be transferring to Point Loma Nazarene University this next fall because she misses the beautiful weather and soaking up the hot rays at the beach.
Katie Wartell graduated Concordia University in Fall 2014 and majored in Interdisciplinary Studies with an emphasis in English Literature, and minored in History. She dreams of becoming a photojournalist for the National Geographic Magazine and in the meantime, she will settle for whatever open door comes her way.

Eric van Devender is a licensed deacon within the Northwest District of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, and serves Pilgrim Lutheran Church and Preschool in Bellevue, WA. He is a senior within Concordia's Theology program where he is preparing for seminary to become an ordained minister. When writing “Apples,” Eric thought it would be a fun escape from the rigors of studying classical Greek and Biblical Hebrew.

Carly Shick is a sophomore at Concordia University and is studying Molecular Biology. She has a passion for life, people, and hopes to gain better confidence in writing. Carly has only recently discovered her enjoyment for creative writing. A humorous-honest voice is what she aims for and hopes others will find delight in her writing.

Samatha Pottinger is an Education major and junior at Concordia University.

Haley Bucher has no idea what she's doing, but she knows she's doing it really, really well.

Kayla Suvak is a senior at Concordia University and is graduating this spring.

Ashley Aczon is always attempting to channel her inner nineties-kid-spirit in honor of her namesake on The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air. Although she was born and raised on the island of O’ahu, she is finishing up her junior year at Concordia while majoring in English and minoring in History. Her ultimate lifetime goal is to one day become an in-house editor at a major fashion or beauty magazine.
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