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The HACC Lebanon Literary Journal is made possible by the creative energy of students, faculty and staff who generously submit their poetry, essays, memoirs, paintings, sketches and photographs for publication. The journal is published each spring of every academic year and welcomes spring 2008 submissions. Submit your work to the Pushnik Library or The Learning Center in care of HACC Lebanon Literary Journal. The submission deadline will be announced next fall. All submissions must have artists’ names, titles, and phone numbers included. Once accepted, poetry and essays must be emailed to the journal’s advisor prior to publication. You will be contacted when your work has been selected for the journal.

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Ocean is roaring
Waves crashing on the shoreline
Dawn calms the restless sea.

by Dan Hess, Sara Shaak, and Amanda Smith
Breeze of ancestor
It is the answer, dear friend,
Blowing in the wind.

by Renee Bowers, Christa Nolt, and Sunny Sorn
Evening is winter,
Meadows whisper and glisten
Snow-covered trees standing still.

by Greg Cooley, Philip Mahaffey,
Ashley Schaeffer, and Rachel Weise
The autumn leaves fall
As colors are created,
Children frolicking.

by Tamara Bowser, Eric Clemens, and Megan Devine.
Autumn is among us;
Trees are bare and stand alone;
Nighttime is longer.

by Dana Aldridge, Brigette Berger, and Lori Britto.
Everywhere you look
There is yellow, orange, and red
Falling from the trees.

by Jen Barbaria, Amber Moyer, and Kenny Spitler
A friend once asked me why I fight for you.  
I told him, “They’re the air I breathe.”  
He asked me why I work so hard.  
I told him, “Because I believe.”

I could have lived a thousand lives  
Without knowing what life means.  
In this life I’ve found my purpose  
Now you’ve become my dreams.

For every day I went through hell  
Every night I slept unsure  
Vindicated by each morning’s sun,  
For you I will always endure.

Forever in debt to tomorrow  
For keeping my hope strong,  
My serenity beside you  
This family is where we belong.

Never without you,  
Your future above all  
Burning inside my mind.  
My life to heed your call.
What you see
by Robbin Key

When you look at me,
Tell me what you see…
You see a person…
Or a color…
A color black as dirt
You walk, not given a second glance.

When you look at me,
Tell me what you see…
You see a soul…
Or just an empty vessel.

When you look at me,
Tell me what you see…
You see a life…
Or a dying heart.
Prelude to “Whose Shoe is it Anyway?”
by Bill Romberger

There you are driving to work, running errands, taking a walk, or going on a trip and suddenly you notice a shoe lying along side of the road, hanging from a wire or tree and you wonder how it got there. Was there an accident, was there some sort of drama playing out, or possibly a mischievous deed was performed against some unsuspecting person. This question spawned a whimsical conversation culminating in a silly poem that queries the possibilities of “Whose Shoe is it Anyway?”
Whose Shoe Is It Anyway?
Bill and Monica Romberger

How is it possible to lose a shoe?
Oh, me, oh my! What would you do?
Whose shoe is it anyway?
Did they fall out of a bus, or a car?
I don’t know whose they are.
Did they fall out of the air? I don’t really care!
But you know someone somewhere is missing a pair!
So...whose shoe is it anyway?
Did they fall off of a train, or a plane?
I don’t know, it must be a pain,
To walk with only one shoe.
What would you do?
Whose shoe is it anyway?
I’ve seen them lying on the road, hanging on a wire
and sometimes in a tree.
Do they belong to you? ‘Cause they don’t belong to me.
Whose shoe is it anyway?
I’ve seen a sneaker, a loafer, and even a sock.
Oh my goodness! There’s a flip flop!
Whose shoe is it anyway?
Along the road, or in a ditch,
I’ve seen quite a few that were given a pitch.
Whose shoe is it anyway?
On a hill without a reason,
anytime, no matter the season.
Whose shoe is it anyway?
How is it possible to lose a shoe?
Oh me, oh my! What would you do?
I Miss You, My Little Friend
by Eleanor Batdorf

In honor of Colby, my little long haired daschund.
Ten years of his joyful little soul, giving me laughter.

I miss you, my little friend.
You have always been there for me, without question, reason, or doubt.

I miss you, my little friend.
Your heart and soul, given to me without a flinch of doubt.
Always the honest truth, I can see through your eyes.

I miss you, my little friend.
Your endless trust and devotion you have given me.
I appreciate you not judging me,
No matter what, always looking at me lovingly.

I miss you, my little friend.
I knew the time had come, that I had to relieve you of your pain.
You told with your big soulful eyes, that you wanted your pain to end.
I honored your wish, as my heart broke into two.

I miss you, my little friend.
High-tech machines like this computer I sit before
Make myself believe it’s bigger and better than me.
My learning of all its combined plastic, glass, metal
And wired pieces continues to go so slow; I wonder,

Should I religiously commit to it? Or walk away?

However, I do believe that these connected parts
Were made to be used by all who wish or must
Progress, communicate and repeat – repeat or
In an effortless attempt, press key to delete, DELETE.

Should I walk away? Or religiously commit to it?

In a man-made world, many will watch the kill.
As all of the ‘motherboards’ (main circuit) work
Against the other ‘mother nature’ (earth circuit).
Mother against mother must affect all others.

Can my divided time and solar-cyber space improve?
The Storm Within
By Maribel Gonzalez

I’m falling – hard and fast.
Didn’t think it could happen again.
A raging storm waiting to erupt inside,
You’re the cause of this torment I’m in.

Your image burns an imprint in my soul
Like a falling star in the sky,
Leaving a trail of beauty for all to see.
All I can ask myself is...why?

Why are you so cruel?
Don’t you realize what you do to me?
I know it’s not intentional on your part;
I just wish that you could see.

See how I tremble inside when you’re around.
And the way I secretly catch a glimpse of you
When you innocently walk by and smile.
This is but a fraction of what you do.

You make me feel new, alive, and inspired--
Something I haven’t felt in years.
Could be just a phase I’m going through
Or could be the worst of my fears.

No one to blame but myself
I’m in no place to make demands.
You have better things to do with your time,
And I happen to belong to another man.
God with a Gun
by Justin Peiffer

Point blank, you whisper in my ear,
A demon of flank, you’re my conscience, one with fear.
There is no safety to debate your scope on humankind,
Just is a hammer, on a gun, in the back of our mind!
We are one as are you, the apartheid of your favoritism.
Words are bullets in your silencing mouth of mercenary fascism.
Kill the weak, kill the wrong,
Kill the fearful, kill the strong.
Eradicate the defects and the flaws;
Segregate the rejects from their falls.
Kill the man of imperfection,
And feed your chamber of absolution,
For your mind is suppressed,
And your gun is free.
Hope
by Jamont F. Simmons

Hope is not pretending that troubles do not exist. It is the trust that they will not last forever, That hurts are healed and difficulties overcome. It is faith that a source of strength and renewal Lies within to lead us through the dark To the sunshine.


Healing
by John Simmons

She whispered to him in the darkness as they lay together, “Tell me where to touch you so that I can drive you insane. Tell me where to touch you to give you the ultimate pleasure. Tell me where to touch you so that we will truly own each other.” And he kissed her softly and whispered back, “Touch My Mind.”
Untitled
by Ariel Taylor
Another poem gone to waste
Deleted from once was a word-coated page.
It seems right at the beginning
And fades towards the end
Because I can’t find the words
That I’m trying to send.

It’s hard being perfect for anyone nowadays,
And I’m trying to fulfill you in all of the ways.
But I’m sinking in myself
Digging a hole from a lonely shelf
That’s rusting on broken nails,
The tears wearing down the pails.

I’m hoping for a miracle
To bring out what I’m trying to say
‘Cause strike three and I’m losing hope.

I just want you here to stay.
Just don’t tell me we’re through
Without me saying goodbye to you
Because I’m not the kind of girl to just leave
And tell you things weren’t meant to be.
I’m not the girl that gives up on mistakes.

I am the girl saying, “Do whatever it takes.”
‘Cuz I’m in the ER and
They can’t find the scar,
Or why this young girl stopped breathing
Eyes glued shut, lost all feeling.

The diagnosis was clear,
But only two people knew
Her heart drowned in her tears
Died how she felt…blue.
Safe
by Emalee Baldwin

I feel alive when I’m reading,
I can travel all around the world.
   It’s a chance to get away
   From all that binds me here.

   To feel free, to be myself,
Without restraints from everyone else.
   Relax, chill out, and let the fun begin--
   We’re off on our journey yet again.

You choose your adventures, no one else,
   Whether to Egypt or New Mexico,
   Present day or Victorian times,
   To see the Pharaoh or a UFO convention.

   Lost in my world of books,
   Far away in my own creation,
   No one can interrupt my exploring,
   Time is nonexistent, so I’m never late.

   The time does come,
   When I need to return,
   Back to reality once again,
   While the promise of returning lingers in my head.
“Tell Them It’s Real, Mom”  
by R.G. Kreider

Mom, I’m writing you this letter, so that you may understand why I’ve done what I did. See I feel this way is better; I could no longer stand the pressure of being a kid.

Everyone thinks it’s so easy, mom, but I found it harder than you could believe. This life just wasn’t for me, mom, so I decided it was best if I leave.

Don’t question that I love you, mom; I really did and always will. There was just too much pain here for me, mom; bury me with grandma on the hill.

Is this really a surprise, mom? I mean I’d be showing almost every sign. Didn’t you see it, mom? I walked around with a frown all the time.

Tell everyone not to worry, mom; see it’s better off this way. Don’t worry about my friends, mom; all the time they called me gay.

They acted like they cared, mom, but they didn’t see the signs either. I used to love baseball and football, mom, but lately I took a breather.

All my grades dropped, mom, and my teachers didn’t seem to worry about my progress. I usually got A’s, mom; they just assumed I was simply slacking off, I guess.

Say sorry to whoever found me, mom; I know it’s not an easy thing to lay eyes on, But see I was so unhappy, mom, and I hope it will be better now that I’m gone.
See no one looks for it, mom; everyone is so taboo about depression. Spread the word that it’s real, mom; let my suicide make an impression.

Don’t let everyone be blind, mom; tell them to look for it everyday. It’s too late for me, mom, but you change the world if you share what I say.

Goodbye and I am sorry, mom; I know this wasn’t easy for you to read. I hope it’s pretty clean, mom; I thought some blood might get on it as I bleed.

This is the end for me, mom, no more pain in my heart anymore. This life ended for me a while ago, mom; now I’m just closing the door.

Remember the happy times, mom; you know the few and far between. Tell dad I love him, mom; I just wonder what it would have been like to be eighteen.

But I won’t get that chance, mom, for sixteen is all I will live to see. Spread the word. mom, that the silent epidemic killed me.
Free Verse for the Portuguese
by Carolyn L. Williams, Adjunct Instructor

Some visitors are drawn like magnets to Provincetown’s tower,
Seeking heritage clues from cornerstones inscribed on granite walls
Commemorating first ship landings and settlements along the Eastern coast.

Village vacationers bicycle or walk the narrow streets.
Rows of weathered clapboard shingled houses
And shops entice tourists’ business in the artists’ colony.

Goldenrod, beach plums, and poison ivy signal fall.
Storm fences lay twisted – whipped by errant waves of salt water at high tide.
Sand has shifted the landscape into curiously shaped dunes.

Later settlers after the staunch Pilgrims of 1620 – the Portuguese --
Their grit stolidly matched the challenges – as firmly anchored they were
As the grey Maine granite 252’ tall monument overlooking the harbor.

At 4 AM two generation of fishermen check their traps,
Nets made a few months before when icy winter storms prevailed.
Lead weights were melted down in spring – renewal from rust.
Canes of one hundred hardwood hickory poles
Had to be measured, cut, loaded onto trucks
Then hauled from New Hampshire’s woods.

In the past, this patient, tedious process enabled inner floor harvesting;
But today persistence might not yield profits – an industry and lifestyle changed forever.
Offshore foreign trawlers drag international waters ignoring laws of natural regeneration.
Wise management abandoned, respect for policies are wantonly defied.
Photography
Nature

Beverly Wood
Nature

Beverly Wood
Live Oak Study captured with Olympus C1z, 150d. This “Live Oak” Stands in remembrance of the fallen Heroes of the Alamo in the east courtyard. Its intertwined branches seemingly stretch into eternity, embodying the tentacles of teeming life echoed in the shadows and reflections of sunlight in the depths of its boughs. Photo by Bill Romberger
San José Mission by Bill Romberger
This is another picture of the ruins of San José Mission notice how the geometry of the walls seem to fold into the next. Captured by Olympus C1z, D150Z photo by Bill Romberger
CAMPUS LIFE IN PICTURES
The Learning Center
Rewards for Studying

Math Finals Review
Allied Health Practice
Academic Success Fair
Faculty Christmas Party
Pennsylvania German Festival
The Vagina Monolog
Sketches
Snow Fall

Pen/Brush and Ink by: Alex Meidunas
Literature
By Jacqueline Eisenhauer
In loving memory of Nick Barnham-Hall
To the unfamiliar observer, Nick appeared to be nothing more than a rather heavy, jolly young man. He always had a brilliant smile and a laugh for everyone he met. Because of this, he was very good at making someone see into his soul a happiness that he wanted them to believe was there. Those of us he felt comfortable enough with to allow insight into his true self, however, saw quite a different man.

Nick was an emotional train wreck of a person who was completely incapable of finding happiness, no matter how hard the people in his life tried to force it upon him. There were several factors that contributed to his lack of happiness, the biggest one being his homosexuality. He came from a very religious background; his parents were members of the Salvation Army, and they had a difficult time accepting that their son was gay. He was also fairly overweight, which made finding a partner more difficult. These two factors made being a homosexual very hard for him. He also made quite a few bad financial decisions and dug himself into a lot of debt. To top it all off, he had to take a job where he made quite a bit less money, and was forced to live in a way that he was completely unaccustomed to. Nick was a landfill that just got more and more garbage piled into him until he was full to capacity, and he saw no possible way of cleaning up the mess.

By the time my husband, Bob, and I had gotten together, he had known Nick for several years. Nick lived in England. He and Bob met on an online game and became instant friends. Nick soon started coming to visit here at least once a year, and he would stay at our house for weeks at a time every time he came.

One summer night in 2003, after I had known Nick for about five years, Bob and I were in bed watching “The Sopranos,” when the phone rudely interrupted the imminent death of another unfortunate man who placed himself on the wrong side of Tony Soprano. Sighing, I grabbed the remote control, paused the television, and answered the phone.

“Is Bob there?” came the familiar sound of a British accent from the other side of the phone.

I rolled my eyes and handed the phone to Bob. Accepting the terrible fate that I wasn’t about to continue watching my show anytime soon, I lay back down and covered myself with the comforter to shield myself from the cold air of the air conditioner. I turned toward Bob then, and began listening to his side of the conversation.
“Hey Nick, what’s up?” he began in his cheerful, nonchalant tone of voice. He was quiet for a moment as he listened to Nick’s response; then his dark eyebrows furrowed in a look that I immediately interpreted as one of worry. “You did what?... How much did you take?... Oh my God... I’m gonna call somebody... You have to let me call somebody...”

Panic flooded through my body. I sat up quickly and turned on the light. “What’s going on?” I demanded. I didn’t need Bob to answer me, though; I knew.

Bob put a hand over the phone. He quietly replied, “Nick just took enough heroin and sleeping pills to kill himself. He doesn’t want us to call anyone. He says that he just wants someone to talk to in the last minutes of his life.”

It felt as if someone had just punched me in the stomach. I put a protective arm over my stomach, as if to protect my unborn child from the blow that I had just received, and leaned over as my head swam. Bob began talking to Nick again. A minute later he got up and grabbed the Bible. “What are you doing?” I asked.

“He wants me to read the Bible to him,” He replied.

“What are we gonna do?”

“I don’t know. What do you think we should do?”

What to do seems obvious to me now, but when you have something like this thrown suddenly in your face, it is hard to think clearly. I honestly felt as if I’d be betraying Nick if I didn’t respect his wishes. In the end, though, I knew I could never live with the guilt I’d feel if Nick succeeded in killing himself and I could have possibly saved him.

Bob wanted to stay on the line with Nick, so I went into the den, sat on one of the cold leather chairs, and started fumbling around in the dark for my cell phone. When I finally found it, I used the light of the computer monitor as my guide as I dialed 911.

“911; what’s your emergency?” said the male voice on the phone.

I explained the whole situation to him as quickly as I could. When I was finished, he informed me that I needed to reach emergency services in England, which he didn’t have the authority to call from there. He said that I needed to call the phone company and have them patch me through over there.

Next I dialed 0 for the operator. When she answered, I desperately explained the whole situation to her.
“I’m sorry,” was her response. “You don’t have the ability to make international calls from that phone.”

“Not even if someone is dying?” I demanded.

“No,” she replied in her cold, matter-of-fact tone of voice. I hung up the phone.

I walked into the bedroom to explain the situation to Bob. At that point, Nick was still on the phone, but he was no longer talking.

“He’s not answering me anymore, but I can still hear him breathing,” Bob said somberly. “I want to stay on the phone to confirm he continues breathing.”

I nodded and sat back down on the bed, cell phone in hand. I dialed 911 again and fortunately got the same guy I’d already explained the situation to. When I explained to him what had happened with the phone company, he was appalled. He immediately put me on hold, so he could call his supervisor and get the authorization to patch me to England, despite the fact that it was well after midnight and his supervisor was most likely asleep.

Moments later he returned, excited, and informed me that his supervisor had given him the green light to call England. I breathed a sigh of relief. Even now, I still feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude toward this man, not simply for going through the motions of connecting me to England, but for the care and concern that it was so obvious he felt for my situation.

As I explained the situation to the emergency services operator in England, I was quite surprised with the cheerfulness in her voice. When I gave her Nick’s address, she just responded, “All right, we’ll send someone over straight away,” as if I had just informed her that our cable wasn’t working properly.

At that point, the first rays of daylight were beginning to stream through the windows. I walked back into the bedroom to find that Bob had hung up the phone. He had been disconnected from the call. Now all that was left to do was sit around and wait. Although our minds were racing, we finally lay down and partook in what little sleep we were able to get.

The next day Bob called the hospital where Nick had been taken and found out that Nick was still unconscious, but the paramedics were able to get there in time to save him. We hugged each other and shared our relief and joy at being able to succeed in the mission, that the night before seemed to be becoming a fast failure.
Several days later, Nick called to talk to Bob. He appeared to be in quite a cheerful mood. He reiterated that calling somebody was not what he wanted us to do, but that he understood why we did it. I felt relieved to know that he wasn’t angry with us, and to hear him sound so upbeat. He ended the conversation, however, by jokingly promising Bob that the next time he decided to kill himself he wouldn’t call us.

Nick remained true to his word. One night in early April of 2005, nearly two years later, we returned home to a message on our machine. “Hi, Bub, this is Bub Barham-Hall, Nick’s dad,” the message began. My heart sank to the floor at that point. “I’m at Nick’s apartment if you could please give me a call back.”

After putting our son to bed, we went into the den and sat at our computers. I mindlessly stared at the Everquest screen while I listened to Bob’s conversation.

“Hi, Bob, this is Bob calling back,” he began. A long silence followed, until he responded again, “Oh, no…I’m so sorry..If there’s anything I can do, just let me know…”

The screen blurred to nothingness as my eyes filled with tears. I turned to Bob when he hung up the phone. Bob explained to me that Nick had killed himself sometime in the past couple of days. He cleaned his apartment, took some pills, lay down in his bed, and died.

I had always assumed Nick didn’t really want to die, which is why he called us that night. Then I remembered how just a few nights earlier I had been talking to him on the phone while he reorganized his phone book. I realize now that he did that so his parents would be able to contact people. I was so angry with myself for not realizing that sooner. I couldn’t help but feel that if I hadn’t made so many assumptions, or that I would’ve caught onto some of the cues sooner, that Nick would have finally gotten the help he needed and would be alive today.

I’ve since gone through a lot of emotions about this. I’ve come to the conclusion that I did nothing wrong; that at that point in my life there was nothing left in my power I could’ve done to save Nick. I hope that if a situation like this were to come up again, I would have more power to change things, however, having been through the experience that I’ve been through.

Even though Nick caused me a lot of stress, I came to care about him very deeply. I realize that any pain that’s been caused to me over this ordeal doesn’t come close to the pain he felt every day of his life. I will always be grateful to Nick for forcing me to learn how to better empathize with people.

Most of all, I will always love Nick.

In loving memory of Nick Barnham-Hall
The Leaving

By: Jesse Patrick
The Leaving
by Jesse Patrick

I knew this would be one of the most difficult weekends my family and I had ever experienced. My brother, Shane, was being deployed to Iraq, and my mom, dad, sister, and I made the excruciating long drive to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to see him off. While staring blankly out the car window, all I could see were the memories my brother and I had made across the years. The bleak southern landscape acted as a movie screen, and scenes from my life with Shane slowly panned across it like a slideshow. Tears began to well up, so I quickly blasted the volume on my MP3 player and put on some heavy metal.

After eight hours of driving, we finally arrived at our hotel in the dirty, dreary town of Fayetteville. As if the situation of the weekend hadn't brought everyone's mood down enough, this place made it worse. My brother met us there and greeted us with a huge smile and a hug for everyone. After unloading all the luggage from the car, we went for dinner at Joe's Crab Shack. The outside of the restaurant was made to look like a shack, with fishing equipment and crab traps strewn here and there. On the inside, neon lights scattered on the walls sent fluorescent light beaming through the smoky haze that filled the restaurant. It wasn't the nicest place, but we've never been a family to rule out a restaurant just by its looks. It felt like old times, the whole family sitting down for dinner together and telling stories and laughing. Behind the smiles and laughs, though, was sadness and tears because in the back of our minds we knew what was going to happen in a few days. Shane was going to be thrown into a life of danger and uncertainty, and there was nothing anyone could do about it. Every time my parents looked at my brother, I could see the faraway look in their eyes; they were reliving all the times they shared with Shane as he grew up, all the while, forcing back tears from their worried eyes.

The next day, we went to the Airborne and Special Operations Museum. The lobby was flooded by the hot summer sun's rays, which were allowed in by the tall glass ceiling. Hanging from the ceiling was a mannequin soldier floating down from the sky underneath his huge, green parachute. After passing through the lobby, we entered rooms with artifacts and video footage from different wars America has participated in. Even in the face of all the doom and gloom surrounding us, Shane was his classic self. He never stopped joking around and doing stupid stuff. I didn't get how none of it bothered him. He was facing one of the most dangerous situations a person could ever be in, and he hadn't seemed to be affected in the least.

The third day was a lazy day. Everyone was tired because of how horrible they had been sleeping the last couple nights. The beds at the hotel were hard, and the blankets they provided were rough and not exactly inviting, not to mention two people had to sleep in each bed and one unlucky
person was left to sleep on the floor. If somehow you were comfortable, there was still another problem. The obnoxious rumbling of my dad’s ceaseless snoring scared sleep away. After not doing much of anything all day, we all retired to our beds and crawled underneath our covers and tried to go to sleep. I was the one stuck with the floor that night. This was the last night we had with Shane before he left. I couldn’t sleep at all, mostly because my brother who had always been there for me was leaving the next day, but the extremely hard floor probably had something to do with it, too.

There were some things on my mind that I knew I wouldn’t be able to tell him face to face without crying, so I took a little tablet and pencil into the bathroom in the middle of the night and sat on the edge of the tub. Surrounded by strange yellowish lighting, I started putting my feelings down. As I did so, I couldn’t hold back the tears anymore. One after another they kept falling, some landing on my paper and smudging my words. The relationship between my brother and me wasn’t at all perfect. A couple years ago, we had had somewhat of a falling out. Something he did upset me, and we ended up not talking for almost a year. After a while, I started to forget about the past and moved on. We started hanging out when he came home on leave, and our relationship was getting better. Then, all of that was interrupted by the news of his deployment. After finishing my letter, I wiped my eyes and went back to bed, bracing myself for the next day.

It felt like we were standing in the middle of a desert. The sun and heat showed no mercy on the families who were about to say goodbye to their sons, brothers, and husbands. Sweat and tears rolled down the faces of everyone there. We stood and watched as about fifty soldiers packed up all their equipment and lined up for roll call. The sergeant started yelling out names, “Kovach!”

“Hooah!” The obedient soldier yelled back.

“Dinello!”

“Hooah!”

Then, “Patrick!” and it all became real at that moment. My mom broke down and turned away, head lowered, afraid to let her oldest son see her crying.

The time had come to say goodbye, and we started walking to our car. I pulled my brother aside on the way and handed him the letter.

“Here, don’t read this yet; wait ‘til I’m not around.”
“Ok. I love you, bud,” he said as he took the note from my trembling hand. We hugged and cried on each other’s shoulder. One by one, each member of the family took his or her turn hugging him, leaving their own tears on the broad shoulder of his camouflage uniform. Minutes passed, each one seeming like hours, and finally the time for us to leave had come. We slowly walked through the parking lot to the car as if we were in a funeral procession. After getting in, not a word was said. My mom started the car and began driving away. All eyes were fixed on Shane up until the moment we lost him in the distance.

Shane has now been in Iraq for six months, and there’s not a day that goes by that I don’t miss him.
The Blessing of Peace

by Judy Mitchell
Divorce hurts. There are days I don’t know what to do with the pain. Sadness, anger, fear, and guilt overtake my mind like a tidal wave. Try as I might, I just can’t turn it off sometimes.

At times, I’m so overwhelmed and utterly exhausted by handling my responsibilities single-handedly. It feels as if a tsunami has washed over me and I am being swept away in the tide. There’s a house to clean, two somewhat sassy teenagers to discipline, a dog and a cat to feed, errands to run, phone calls to make and bills to pay and not enough money to pay them. Add school, homework, and late-night studying into the mix, and you’ve got a recipe for disaster.

Yet, as crazy as it sounds, I wouldn’t trade ANY of this for the peace that settles into my house at night now when the television is off, the computer is shut down, the kids are finally asleep—and I can be alone to think and to pray. There is no fear.

I wouldn’t give any of this up for the peace of mind that comes from knowing that I won’t get screamed at for forgetting my purse in the mall food court. I won’t be called a bitch or any other foul and degrading name. I won’t be ridiculed for keeping the Seventh-day Sabbath, the kosher food laws, or my faith in general. I won’t be told every single day that I am a selfish person who insists on having everything her own way while I am giving all that I have. Fits of rage will not belittle me anymore. Best of all, I don’t have to watch my 17 year-old son be ridiculed, mocked, beaten down emotionally or beaten up physically, or my daughter shrink back in terror and tears while I stand by in fear.

I will not be disparaged any longer.

You may ask why I stayed for fourteen years. The answer is lack of self-worth. Because I am the oldest of four children that were raised in a spiritually, emotionally, and at times physically abusive environment, I knew no differently. Aside from the physical abuse, I thought that some of this behavior was normal. Yet I was extremely sensitive to someone calling me names, yelling, or raising his voice. I shrunk back in fear when I heard these words. Then, I became angry, full of rage, actually.

I was 18 when I was thrown out of my parents’ house. Then I began to yell back. The HELL WITH THE WORLD AND ANYONE IN IT WHO WOULD HURT ME!! It stuck with me through the age of 22 or 23 when it softened a bit. But it did not go away entirely. I was still angry. But more than that, I was hurting. Even more, I realized I just wanted someone to take away the pain, someone to love me. I thought that if someone loved me, that I could learn to love myself, eventually.
That’s when I met S. He was nice to me. He talked to me. He seemed like he cared. I thought that I met Mr. Right at last. We met in September and moved in together in February. His abusive behavior began to manifest itself at this time. But I took it because I did not want to be out there on my own again. I thought that if we got married, the situation would get better. But I had a sickening feeling in my stomach as I walked down the aisle. Again, I second-guessed my intuition. I was disillusioned. The curse of believing I was some type of Cinderella (and he might be my Prince Charming) was upon me. But the dizzying cycle of abuse and apologies went into full spin—out of control—like the Tilt-a-Whirl at Hershey Park.

Fast forward 10 years. September 11, 2001 is a day we will all remember well. A day when our nation was attacked, enraged, and terrified. But it was a day that our nation united, and a day I made a decision. It wasn’t a conscious decision; in retrospect, it was a decision that had been deep inside of me all along. I decided I had had enough. Enough anger. Enough pain. Enough fear. Enough confusion. Enough of feeling like I was half alive. Enough of living a lie.

The answer was found in returning to my core spiritual beliefs. These were the beliefs of my childhood, minus the abuse of being told how to practice them. I began to keep the seventh-day Sabbath and kosher food laws again. I began to practice what I truly believed was right. Finally, I felt like there was hope. I began to heal.

But my marriage did not. In fact, the revival of my childhood faith caused a deeper division. He did not want to walk with me on this journey. I even went so far as to keep my observance a secret for the first year—out of fear for my emotional well-being. I was living a double life. I was living a lie.

One day during one of many, many heated arguments, I chose to live the lie no longer. I chose to tell the truth. He could take it or leave it. If he left it, he could leave me along with it. I didn’t care. I began to hate him at this point. He chose to leave it, but not me. Not yet. In some ways, I was grateful. Even though my resentment for him deepened, I thought perhaps there was some hope for him, for me, for our family, and for our marriage. I began to pray daily for our situation. The more I prayed, the stronger I got and the more hardened he became. Prince Charming turned into Prince Alarming. I was fighting a losing battle.

Ironically enough, everything came to a final head on our fourteenth wedding anniversary. I was done. I had had it. I was finished.
By admitting this to myself, the gaping wound began its final healing. I had turned 38 just seven days before. I’ve grown because of this experience. In these last months, I’ve learned that I am independent, creative, caring, intelligent, funny, and beautiful both inside and out. I have learned that I am loveable. I have learned to forgive myself and others.

I am strong. I am a survivor.

U2’s song “Mysterious Ways” says it best for me: “To touch is to heal; to hurt is to steal, if you want to kiss the sky, better learn how to kneel, on your knees…” I’ve learned that I’m tallest when I kneel in prayer. My faith has become my shield and my rock. No one can take that from me.

It’s now February, and my divorce is not yet finalized. Hopefully it will be soon enough. But the house is quiet, the kids are calm, and we do not fear. Even though money is still a worry, our safety and sanity are not. The curse of Cinderella has ended. I have self worth. The blessing of peace has begun.
The Bellagonna’s Lesson
by Yolanda Lauria

There was quiet. Quiet like being in the attic of an old farmhouse all alone. The stillness was comforting. It reminded me of the times when as a toddler, I played next to my grandmother who sewed on her treadle sewing machine, and all I heard was the motion of her feet on the treadle and the whirring of the machine as she sewed. The quiet made the small movements pronounced, yet it was soothing.

We moved methodically as we pulled the yarn through the looms. The quiet surrounding me helped me hear the swoosh as the yarn traveled the width. Now and then someone let out a deep contented sigh. Betty sat in front of me on the other side of the loom. Our heads were bent into the weaving so much that they nearly touched through the warp. She watched every line I wove as if it was fascinating work. Sometimes, after I had woven an inch or so, Betty tapped the back of her hand against the tapestry and as she poked through the strands, she chastised me with her “Dee, dee, dee, dee!” (There, there, there, there!) I had learned that that meant I had made mistakes and must pull out the hour’s work and begin again.

My back was aching. Even though our vertical looms were sitting on tables about knee high, the bending over to finger the in and out threading of the yarn put me in an unnatural pose. We had made the looms a few weeks earlier. They were about 30 inches wide by 48 inches tall. We had lain the wood frames on the floor of the hogan and then Betty had showed us how to put on the warp. Next, we picked up our looms and put them on old tables and school desks so that we could spare our backs and sit before the looms at eye level. Navajo weavers actually place their looms on the floor, and they sit on their knees to weave. Betty and the others recognized that this bellagonna (white) woman would never be able to weave in the Navajo way, so they created a more comfortable sitting.

While I worked the yarn, I often marveled at being given this wonderful experience. People pay thousands of dollars for Navajo rugs; few bellagonnas get the chance to learn from a Navajo weaver, and fewer still are invited to spend time with families.

Just a few months before, Vera had been in my English composition class at New Mexico State University. She took to stopping by my office every now and then. She’d come in, say hello, and then sit there quietly. At first, I didn’t know how to respond to this behavior, but it wasn’t long until I accepted that this was our habit, so I let her sit there while I finished grading papers. Always, she’d begin talking when she was ready. She had a soft and pleasant voice. I listened to her talk about her family, the Navajo traditions like the Squaw Dance, and her home on the reservation. The
visits never lasted long. Soon she was standing up and telling me she would see me again, and then she was gone. From this experience, I learned that one sits and waits for the Indian to begin. There is no hurried conversation, and if you don’t wait, you lose a chance to see another world.

When summer was near and the semester was coming to a close, Vera surprised me by inviting me to come out to the Res to learn to weave. She said her mother, Betty, would teach us. Vera was part of the new generation of Navajo Indians, who had not learned to weave. Many Navajo children are turning to the “white way” of living and are not learning their traditions or even their language. Vera got the idea that she would like to learn to weave before it was too late, but she didn’t want to do it alone. Because we had a kind of friendship after her visits to my office, Vera asked her mother to teach us the Navajo way of weaving during the summer months. Vera gave me directions to the reservation at Haystack mountain and to her home that sat like a little toy house among the sweeping desert hills and deep arroyos.

On my first visit, I took along a 25 lb. bag of flour and 10 pounds of pinto beans. This was my gift to show appreciation for being invited to their home and also to thank Betty for agreeing to teach me how to weave. I also took along a case of soda for Vera’s 5 children. Many of the families have little money, so food and treats are appreciated, but it is also a tradition to take food to a Navajo home as a sign of respect.

After driving over the washboard dirt road to their place, I pulled up in front of the house. Their home was like any other tract housing in eastern developments, but it seemed out of place on the Res. There we were in the middle of nowhere with nothing but desert and sage brush, buttes and big horned sheep, and blue skies around us. I could see for a hundred miles. I could hear the thunder in the distance and feel the desert wind blowing through my hair. My eyes took in the beautiful, otherworldly feast.

Friends had told me that I should beep the horn to let the Chee family know I was there and then wait for someone to come to the door and invite me in. Soon Vera was at the door. With a big smile, she waved me in. “Ya’at’ eeh Abini!” (Good morning). The inside was like anyone else’s house. There were couches and chairs, kitchen table and chairs, a stove, a sink, and curtains on the windows. What did I expect? A teepee?

I greeted Vera’s children, sister, and mother with a nod and a smile. There was a plate of fry bread on the table next to a bottle of pancake syrup. The family invited me to eat lunch with them. We squirted the syrup on the fry bread and ate it with some strong coffee.
Grandma Betty, Vera, and the children talked quietly together in Navajo in a comfortable, soothing way. They occasionally turned and smiled at me and nodded as if to include me. After lunch, Vera moved toward the door indicating we should walk across the desert dusty “yard” to the hooghan (hogan).

The hogan was an eight sided single story house no bigger than a great room in today’s homes. The doorway faced east so that the family could greet the rising sun each morning and offer a prayer of thanks. This is where the Navajo family lived before the government tract house. Many of the elders still lived in their ancient hogans, but few of the younger generation wanted them. Now, the hogans were used for religious ceremonies with medicine men and peyote, or in our case, as a place to weave. Through the summer, twice a week, Betty taught us how to weave. We used the yarn shorn from their own sheep and dyed with natural weeds and seeds from the desert.

Betty didn’t speak English, so we used a kind of sign language and grunts to communicate. Betty took turns scolding and correcting both of us. As we worked, she coached each of us with little nods of her head and throaty sounds for direction. Vera spoke her native language as well as English. Sometimes, Vera and Betty got to talking about something, and I heard the musical cadence of interesting sounding words.

Here we were, we three women, sitting at our looms on quiet summer days while the children played “school” near us. Out of the window I watched the great white clouds float overhead and heard thunder roll across the great desert. I watched the Indian paintbrush and the sage wobble back and forth in the wind. In the early morning, the pot belly stove in the center of the hogan made crackling noises as it warmed the open room. It was time on hold. It was a pause in life. We could hear our breathing as we worked. When we “talked” about our work, we often ended with great bursts of joyous laughter. It struck me that this was just like back east when women quilted together on dining table size frames with the small children playing underneath the stretched fabric. Navajo and white, we are not so different after all.

Soon summer was ending, and so was my time in the hogan. Betty and the family wore their best jewelry and fancy dress for our picture together. It was their parting gift to me. In the following spring, I left New Mexico to return home to Pennsylvania.

However, New Mexico’s siren song called to my heart, and I was unable to stay away; a year later, I returned to the Res to visit my Navajo family. When I pulled up to the house and beeped the horn, Vera came out; she told me Betty had died a few months earlier. In the desert sun, we hugged each other and cried.
Vera’s words rose and fell in the Navajo poetry as she told me about her mother’s death. We leaned against my rental car and stood together shoulder to shoulder and spoke very softly, remembering our summer of weaving, remembering Betty.

As a goodbye to Betty, I walked into the hogan. I wanted to return to the memory and feel her presence, but the big room was filled with leftover furniture, kids’ toys, and old sheepskins. The pot bellied stove was cold. The hogan felt empty like a bed when a spouse has gone away or died. There was no “Dee, dee, dee, dee!” There was no quiet murmuring of a different language and no laughter.

After returning to Pennsylvania, I hung the rug I had woven with Betty and Vera a year before. It isn’t finished, but every time I look at it, I remember something small that was something greater. I remember a peaceful, harmonious time, and a woman who couldn’t speak English, but who taught me how to weave; I remember friendship and family, and incredible beauty. This is the Navajo Way.
Walking tall through the terminal, the light at the end of the tunnel is actually the end of the terminal for me. The seventh month ordeal finally ends tonight. I’ve waited for this for too long, but I have to use the bathroom. This just added minutes onto those seven months. Some people stare at me, a cold empty stare that I try to ignore. Then there are other smiles, ones that thank me for all I have done. Those strangers don’t matter to me anyway; I haven’t seen my family, my girlfriend, or my grandparents all this time. I just forgot about it and kept moving. I’m afraid of what my emotions might make me do in the next few minutes.

I left my family and had to create a new one while I was away. It consisted of just brothers. I’ve put my life in their hands and vice versa. Lying underneath an aircraft that weighs 155,000 pounds while they jack it up to do maintenance takes a lot of trust. Trust is something we have in each other. Only a month prior to this day did we enter the real flight line, not one that contains ancient aircraft that no man would dare fly. Now on the new flight-line, we experience real problems and real dangers with aircraft. In-flight-emergencies such as a bird strike, that put a volleyball size hole in the wing, would include such dangers. The drone of the engines was beautiful, reduced to a loud humming with the aid of ear protection. Engine start-up was like the shiver when you wake up in the morning. The aircraft would shutter like a chill up your spine as you ignite the fuel. We would individually launch and recover aircraft.

We would make fun of each other, but also complimented the one who did the best job. We are all very critical of one another, but it made our class the best to go through this program. We all loved being together, but in between the moments of laughter and fun were moments of silence, awkward silence, where you knew that every other guy was missing home and loved ones. “Guys, I love the hell out of ya’ll, but I want to go the hell home.”

Andy replied, “Yeah, I do too, Greg! You’ve got a hot girlfriend waiting at home, so we all know the real reason for you going home!” We all laughed and continued to torque a few bolts. Silence fell upon us, and smiles went to blank looks. The point is I had to leave this family we had created and return to the old one, making a homecoming to my biological family disheartening even though it was a joyous moment.

Staggering through the terminal with three oversized pieces of luggage is uncomfortable. The uniform I’m wearing is itchy and tight around my body. I had it tailored the week before to make it form more to myself.
It looked good, but it was cumbersome. My clean shave is now a five o’clock shadow, so I didn’t look as sharp as I could have. I hustle to the latrine; it is now midnight and nobody is in there. The cold air and grey tile in the bathroom make it seem like a sanitarium. I guess the other passengers must have just skipped a bathroom break so they could be home sooner. I finished my business and shuffled to the counter to wash my hands. Staring at myself in the mirror, I wonder and hope they’ll like what I have become.

I begin to fast-forward ahead in time. I try to imagine how it will feel to put my arms around someone and feel a warm hug. “Screw this; go see it in real time. Pick up your bags; they are waiting for you.”

Everyone is off the plane by now, and it is very quiet, like the eerie quiet you get when walking in a dream. It reminds me of the kind of dream where you wander endless hallways never finding the exit. I turn the corner to see them all; I notice my father first, but where I work everyone notices a Chief Master Sergeant first. They all turn to face me. “There he is,” someone sprouts as smiles turn towards me. I focus on my mother; she has always been so supportive and optimistic when I was in distress. My pace quickens towards them. The gear just falls out of my grasp. It didn’t seem as though my brain actually gave the signal to drop the bags; it just happened as though they disappeared from my hands. My eyes are locked in. I go to mother first. Relief is released in my veins, and warmth spreads through my chest like a shot of whiskey. In that very moment, tears begin to flow. I put my arms around my mother; my head rests on hers because I tower over her 5 foot 3 frame. I cry, “I love you so much, mama!” I hold her the longest out of everyone.

She let me go as a mother does when she must release her child to be on his own. I see my brother, Adam, with his shaggy hair that looks like a mop. I criticize him, so that he realizes I’m still the same person. “Get a haircut, Adam!” While I wipe tears off my cheeks, I give him a hug. My little sister, who always had the prettiest smile to brighten your day, comes to me next. Jacque’s long hair was warm as I kissed the top of her head. I look at my girlfriend, the one who has stuck by and put up with what most girls would not. I hardly give her a look before my arms fly around her. It was very quiet in the terminal as I hugged her. I closed my eyes tightly, sort of like when you are a child and want pain from somewhere to stop. She looked pale, probably from a day of crying.

Grams stands there patiently but anxiously. “I love you.” I kiss her cheek, noticing dried tears as I pull away. My grandpa quickly steps in. He is a Navy man, but is elated that his eldest grandson joined the Air Force.
Never have I seen him so happy as he looks right now. Clutching my girlfriend, I stagger to the door. Behind me is an armada of family and luggage. These months have been long, and the night dark. However, the mood has drastically changed tonight.

These moments are embedded in my heart. My family makes me feel as though nothing is wrong in the world. Though the night is dark, the color is vivid to me. I walked away alone from that same spot, seven months ago. Now I return to this very spot. Only to walk away from it once more, but this time it is with the people that matter most.
Going Buggy

by Pat Daly
Going Buggy
By Pat Daly

This past Saturday, February 25, I took two of my granddaughters Kayla, age 7, and Shae, age 4, up to Harrisburg to see the Whitaker Center’s Science and Arts presentation of “Backyard Monsters: The World of Insects Exhibit.” Keeping it simple, we just called it the “bug show.” Fortunately, for me (and I think for all concerned), my daughter Erin came along as co-chaperon.

As anyone who has ever taken children on a field trip can attest, a person can spend more time running back and forth to the bathroom and negotiating settlements between bickering kids, than they actually do absorbing and enjoying whatever experience they’re trying to experience. That said, the kids behaved themselves pretty well, and, all in all, our malfunctions were mostly minor in nature.

This was a day for us to have fun as a family, and hopefully, while having fun, learn some new and interesting facts about the world we live in. After getting our bearings in the huge and unfamiliar Science Center’s surroundings, we milled about and interacted with the various exhibit displays for a little over two hours, then took in the half-hour, 3-D IMAX movie called, “A Rainforest Adventure: Bugs!” Following the movie, we went back to the exhibit area and browsed around for what seemed like an eternity, but in reality was more like another 60 minutes. Or to be more precise, we browsed around until we were up to our gills in grasshoppers, to our ears in earwigs, to our eyes with tset-se flies, and literally sick to our stomachs from stinkbugs. And so, consequently, after a day of carousing with caterpillars, cockroaches, corn borers, and a cadre of other critters, we hit the road and headed home.

Like myself, my granddaughter Kayla’s first grade class is currently reading and learning about Tropical Rainforests, their ecosystems and inhabitants. Shae, on the other hand, is not yet attending school but is, just the same, very interested in bugs of all kinds, particularly ladybugs and fireflies.

Although the initial motivation for going to the show was to put together something for my own class project, the real heart of the trip was to expose the girls to the diversity of earth’s living creatures and to further fan an already blustering curiosity. I wanted them to see beyond the dreadfully icky images that insects often conjure up and to begin to understand that every member of the bug community has a purpose, performs certain tasks, plays important roles, and provides vital functions beneficial to the earth’s environment. However, I knew fully well that my best laid plans could come back to me in either tears, tantrums, or the tortured wails of “Get us out of here, we wanna go home.” I ratcheted down my expectations to a more reasonable: Aim high, take what you can get, and try to enjoy the journey along the way.
Interestingly enough, many of the displays represented were of themes that we’ve already covered in our Environmental Science course this semester. There were depictions and descriptions of a food web, a watershed, water pollution sources (point source and non-point source), wetlands (with an emphasis on the flood protection that wetlands provide, and the continuing need for their stewardship, restoration, and preservation), soil erosion (including a large model to demonstrate how erosion is caused by water and wind), and other bits of information regarding the ecological well-being of our planet.

Did I mention that they had an enormous amount of data about bugs? Everywhere one looked, there was this about bugs and that about bugs, until finally, the info about bugs was blistering old Grandpa at such a fast and furious pace that he felt like he was running naked through a plague of swarming locusts. In short, I was going buggy.

Not allowing myself to be deterred from the mission we were on, I bore down, pressed forward, and prayed for the strength to lead this glorified vermin-quest to a safe and at least semi-happy conclusion.

When we finished the exhaustive examination of all the exhibits displayed, we limped like one-legged leafhoppers up to the IMAX Theater for round two of our environmental education. At last, we could sit down and relax, and, perhaps, learn at the same time. I liked that idea. I think we all liked that idea. And wouldn’t you know it, right before the movie even started, I could see the sprouts of knowledge bursting forth from the seeds just recently sown when Shae turned to Kayla and said, “Praying Mantises are good for people. They eat all the bad bugs.” Yet, in as little time as it took for the lights to go down and the picture to begin, my proud jubilation turned to stark mortification when suddenly Kayla squealed out into the calm and crowded darkness for all the world to hear, “Hey Grandpa, why is that ant’s butt soo biiigggg?”

Actually, for me, the Tropical Rainforest movie was the best part of the whole educational excursion. The film was beautiful, informative, soothing, and, might I say, more than a little steamy at parts. And I’m not talking Rainforest humidity steamy either. You know what I’m talking about. Yeah, you got it. Bug sex – one hundred percent pure and unadulterated – bug sex – grisly and grotesque – bug sex. Not your grandparents’ bug sex either. This is high stakes, clash of the Titans, life or death bug sex we’re talking about here. When the narrator declared near the end of the movie that the female praying mantis seduces her mate by wiggling her behind while emitting a seductive scent, I saw parents and grandparents in unison sinking in their seats and clutching their hearts. Some clasped hands onto young ears, and more than a few were shielding kids by flinging coats over their poor, befuddled noggins.
Annoyed, I bristled under my breath, “Oh brother! Not only am I beaten-up, broken down, and bugging out, but to boot I might be left holding the bag to tell the birds and the bees of beetles and butterflies to a couple of kids barely knee high to a boll weevil.” Leaping Lizards! I was flabbergasted. Meanwhile, back at the Rainforest, the film’s spokesman further expounded on the mating process by revealing how when the male praying mantis approaches the female from behind, he’d better be able to tickle her back with just the right touch or else he’s a goner; she’ll viciously turn on him and savagely bite his head off. Oooouch!!

In an instant, two things became crystal clear to me. One, the narrator was having way too much fun dispatching the disgusting details, and two, the “hell hath no fury’ adage held as much sway in the insect realm as it does in our own.

Well, needless to say, after that disturbing little item, I almost puked on my own lap. Some folks looked ready to leap face first from the balcony. Instantly, young and old alike were swinging to and fro wildly, mouths were shocked wide open, and tongues were either blathering incoherently or frozen with paralysis. I saw one elderly gent raise his walking stick in protest and shout to a stunned ticket taker that he was “gonna call his lawyer and sue the perverted bastards!” Personally, I was getting the creeps. Somewhere along the line our Saturday-afternoon matinee jumped the tracks and crash landed in a Marquis de Sade documentary (sort of like this essay has). I thought, “My God, they could’ve at least had the decency to put an R rating on this flick. There are kids in the theater, for crying out loud!” It’s a shame, too, because what had once started out with the feel of a first rate, cinematic marvel of a movie house had somehow, for the moment, degenerated into a two-bit, tawdry, back room peep show version of “Bugs Gone Wild.”

It was long about this point that I shot a glare to my daughter and silently mouthed the words we both were thinking, “Toto, I don’t think we’re in Lebanon anymore.” And in a flash, just like that, Kayla and Shae were shooting their own crazy looks of desperation at me that seemed to be saying, “C’mon Grandpa, let’s blow this sleazy flea circus.”

In a way, I kind of felt sorry for the male praying mantis. Could you imagine the hardships he faces everyday? It’s no wonder he walks around with his arms folded in perpetual appeal. He’s begging the almighty to give him a break. It’s a bug eat bug life out there, man! You could crawl out of your hole in the morning only to be greeted by a hungry neighbor intent on assaulting and consuming you for breakfast, or gingerly snuggle up to the little lady come nighttime where a scowling hairy eyeball is merely a prelude to certain death. Talk about risky business; it’s either risky business, or it’s score or die tryin’.
Nevertheless, after all was said and done, aside from the excessive sex and violence, our small family group really enjoyed the movie. Naturally, we gave it four thumbs up. Eventually, we made our way back to the exhibit floor for a final goin’ over, touching every last knob on every last gadget that we might’ve missed the first time round, reading every blessed word on every single plaque and display that was within eyesight.

At the close of our very long day, we discovered there was much that we did in fact learn at the bug show. We may not have come away prepared to argue the profound complexities of global climate change with the Harvard debate team, or suddenly developed new insights and strategies on how best to solve any of the world’s ecoglogical problems, for that matter, but we did come away alternately impressed and fascinated with both the beauty and brutality of nature. When one happens to be only 4 or 7 years old, maybe it doesn’t get any better than that. Heck, when one happens to be going on 30 or just turned 50, maybe it doesn’t get any better than that. Anyhow, in the end, I think I can honestly say, despite the ridiculous misgivings projected throughout most of this story that, indeed, a good time was had by all.

Finally, having come, seen, and conquered as much as was humanly possible and tolerable at Cootiestock 2006, we slithered on home to good ol’ Lebanon. To tell you the truth, after the day we just had, Lebanon never looked so good, nor felt so much like home.

As we drove home into the looming twilight, stillness, then silence was quickly followed by innocent slumber. From a gleam in my rearview, I caught a glimpse of the girls resting peacefully in the back with their eyes closed tight and fast asleep – serene, angelic, and absolutely precious – sitting side by side, buckled up and battened down, secured in their seats, and dare I say, snug as two bugs in a rug. Zzzzzz…Mission Accomplished.
On September 18, 1991, I was sleeping about 4:30 in the morning when my phone rang. I knew something was definitely wrong when my phone rang at that time of the morning. I reached over for my phone, which was on my nightstand beside my bed.

When I picked up the phone, it was my brother Kwabena in Delaware on the other end. He went right to the point to tell me the reason why he was calling me that early in the morning. He said, “Adwoah, something terrible has happened. I just got a phone call from Sister Elizabeth from Ghana, West Africa; she gave me the bad news that our father has just died.” Ghana is my original home country, where most of my family members still live.

I went into silence for a while because, for a moment, I did not know what to do or say. I just held the phone like I was dead myself. My brother thought the phone was disconnected, so he said, “Hello! Hello! Are you there?”

I responded to my brother, “I am here. I do not know what to say. That is why I am quiet.” I was speechless, and I was shocked. I could not move my tongue; it felt like it was glued to my teeth. My mouth was suddenly dry as a bone. My heart beat like a drum, boom! Boom! My legs were giving up on me; I guess I would have fallen if I was standing at the time. My legs were cold, numb, and stiff. After I responded to my brother that I was still on the phone and we had not gotten disconnected, I was hit by my dad’s death. I suddenly felt a pain in my stomach and chest. I started screaming and crying.

I was five months pregnant at the time. Therefore, brother Kwabena became worried about me. I remember him telling me to take it easy because dad was already gone; and I needed to be strong for myself and the baby in me, whose life depended on me. Although I heard what my brother said, and understood what he said, he did not make sense to me at the time. I said to myself, the worst has already happened; Papa is dead. What possibly could go wrong now? My brother said he had to go, and he would call me later in the day.

After I hung up the phone, I cried for a while. But while I cried, I thought about my three-year-old son Kwame who was sleeping in the next room. Something in me started telling me, “You need to calm down; you should not wake up your little son, who is so attached to you, to see you in this shape.” I calmed myself down and just sat down on my bed. I was still crying, but this time, I cried quietly. Tears were dripping on my pillow that I was holding tightly across my chest while I sat on my bed. I squeezed down on the pillow for comfort. I needed someone to hold me and console me.
Even though my husband was sleeping in the next room while I was broken down and all out of shape with his baby in my stomach, he was not compassionate enough to comfort me in my time of need. It was at that moment that I realized that the man, who was my husband then, had not been supportive to me. So I had to let him go.

It was about 6:30 A.M. by this time. I decided to shower and get ready to go to work. I went in the bathroom and got in the bathtub and showered. Tears continued to drip down my chest as I showered.

It was about 7:00 A.M. when I saw Kwame standing at my door. I said to myself, “Perfect timing”; it was time to get him ready for the daycare anyway. I was all dressed up in my boots and my camouflage uniform. I was ready to go to work at Stewart Air Force Base, Newburgh, New York. I took Kwame to the bathroom and washed him. I gave him his toothbrush to brush his teeth. And as he brushed, I got his breakfast ready on the kitchen table. I sat and looked through the kitchen window as Kwame ate.

He asked me, “Why aren’t you eating breakfast today? You don’t want to eat?”

I told him, “You just enjoy your food; mammy is not hungry today.”

He said “Okay! You are going to be hungry at work!” I smiled, although I did not want to smile. I had to stay strong for my son.

I told him, “Don’t worry about me, baby; I will be fine.” He smiled back and continued to eat his food.

By this time, it was about 7:30 in the morning. It was time to head out the door. I helped Kwame put on his coat, and we left the house. I dropped him off at the child care center, and I went to my office.

When I got to the office, my friend Warrant Officer Francis was on the phone. I waited until she got off the phone, and I walked to her cubicle and told her that I got a phone call earlier that morning that my dad had passed. Tears rolled down my face as I was telling her. Ms. Francis said, “I am so sorry to hear this. Is your mom all right?” I said I did not know because I couldn’t call her at the time I heard the news. I thought that it was too early in the morning or that maybe the news had not been broken to her. I told Francis that I would go home at lunch time and call my mom to find out how she was doing. As I spoke with Ms. Francis, I was crying and getting out of control.
I was swearing, rubbing my face, and holding my stomach as the baby was kicking. Ms. Francis said, “Lydia, you think you are going to be all right to work today?” I said yes, I would be fine. I went back to my cubicle and attempted to work. That is when I realized that I was not fine, and I could not provide any productive work that day.

My supervisor came in and he asked me, “Lydia, are you all right? What is wrong?” Before I could say anything, I found myself crying harder and louder. My supervisor, who was my team chief, went to the unit commander’s office. When he came back from Major Fisher’s office, he told me that I could go home and take it easy.

I wiggled my fat belly out of my chair, and I slowly walked to my car and drove home. When I got home, I took off my uniform and boots and got in my bed.

I tried to fall asleep as a way of running away from the pain I was going through, but I did not fall asleep. I kept thinking of how Papa used to cook for us when we were children.

I was my daddy’s model child. Papa told me he wished that all his children could be like me. When I was young, I was very quiet and very shy. I did not hang out with friends. I kept to myself most of the time. I always made sure that I did not do anything which would make Papa get angry at me. He was very pleased with my behavior as a child, so he never laid a hand on me. Something he did many times with my siblings. I stayed out of trouble everywhere I went. In fact, I never got into any physical fights or any kind of fight with anyone at home or in school.

When my father died, I thought it was the worst thing I would ever feel, but I was wrong. On January 8, 2007, when I learned that my brother Henry had died, the pains I felt when my father died were nothing compared to the pains I felt then when my brother had passed. I could not eat for days without tears dripping down my face.

Brother Henry was a very special person to me, and I was also very special to him. He confided in me about a lot of things because he trusted me; I would not reveal his secrets to anyone. Although he lived in Ghana, which is thousands of miles away from the United States where I live, distance did not prevent me from letting my brother know what was going on in my life. I turned to brother for advice and support; he was just a phone call away whenever I needed him. Oh yes! Brother was always there for me and was always on my side, no matter what the situation was. He told me, “Adowoah, I believe in you, that you are kind and wise, and you would not offend anyone if he or she does not do anything to you to cause you to be angry or say anything offensive to him or her.”
One thing that my brother told me that I will never forget is, “Adwoah, it is very unfortunate that you had to go through all the hardship in life, especially for being taken to America to be a maid. As a baby of the family, you should have been the one to enjoy life, but you did not have the privilege; all the hardships that you had to go through were because of the poorness of our parents, Eno and Papa. Adowoah, I tell you, being poor is a curse. That is why you had to suffer so much. I am proud of you for that, for all the hardships that you went through, you are smart and wise; that is why you have succeeded. Not only did you make it, you have reached out to every single one of Eno Nyarko’s children.”

Brother Henry was a big part of my success. His encouragement helped me to work harder to make him prouder of me. Losing brother Henry really opened my eyes to see and understand the world and people better than ever. I thought I knew how people felt, but I was wrong. The deaths of my father and brother have made me realize that it is not possible to truly know how anyone feels until you find yourself in the situation they are in.
I Want You to Put Make-Up On

by Maribel Gonzalez
I Want You To Put Make-Up On
by Maribel González

That is what my mother would always say to me. “I want you to put make-up on. I don’t want you crying when I die, or dressing all in black. I want you to look good, put your make-up on.” Wow, how those words have motivated me to this day.

My mother was the strongest person I have ever met, and I don’t just mean that in the physical sense of the word. Sure, I had witnessed firsthand how she could pick up a load of lumber so that we could have firewood to cook with. I had seen how she would go out early in the morning and fill sacks upon sacks with coffee beans under the hot Puerto Rican sun. And who could forget how she’d chase, conquer, and butcher a pig all by herself? Then there is being strong in the emotional sense, especially when she was faced with cancer.

My mother was diagnosed at the age of 68. A routine exam of a sharp pain in her abdomen turned out to be a tumor near her pancreas. Up until this point, I never thought of her as being vulnerable. At sixty-eight years old she was still extremely strong and wise. One example of how wise she was took place upon her being admitted to the hospital. Before even knowing the outcome of the tests, her prophetic words to us were, “This is the beginning of the end for me.” We dismissed those words as nonsense. We could not have been more wrong. Her end arrived just 18 months later.

I like to think of my mother’s illness as her final journey. Most people might refer to it as “my battle with cancer” but then again, most people did not know my mother. The rest of her days were without a doubt a journey. She continued to care for, teach, advise, and comfort those around her. How unselfish can somebody be? How can you comfort those dear to your heart when you are the one faced with a killer that takes its sweet old time to carry out its final duty?

Not once did my mother waste time on figuring out how to stop this disease, or how she could take back some things she had done in life. Instead, her precious time was utilized in preparing US (yes, us)— and not herself— for the inevitable outcome. I was angry, sad, and perplexed. Why wasn’t she? As I said before, she was the strongest and wisest person I will ever get to know.

Without any regrets I granted her wish. I used my best make-up and my prettiest skirt. Staring at her casket, my tears gave way to laughter knowing how she would have been the first to tell me how beautiful I looked. I now realize just what a profound impact those few words have had in my life. The way I see it, I have two choices: I can look hopeless when faced with adversity, or I can just put my make-up on.
Talkin' Bout My Generation

By Joan Weaver
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By Joan Weaver

I’ve never read The Greatest Generation. I know what I know about it from references on talk shows and book reviews. It refers to my parents’ generation, the one that saved the world. They overcame the Great Depression, fought the Second World War overseas and at home, and built the Great Society.

But I think it’s time for my generation to get a little respect. We were called the Conformist Generation, the Quiet Generation, the Button-Down Minds in the Grey Flannel Suits, and the Ugly Americans. Our dissidents were called bohemians and then beatniks.

None of those designations have ever appealed to me; I don’t think they ever fit most of us. Instead, I’d like to suggest a title that more fully captures our essence: the Crash Test Generation.

We are the survivors of childhoods fraught with perils no longer imaginable to parents of young children. We grew up on the side-stream smoke that billowed through our homes and then took up our own cigarettes at sixteen or twenty or twelve. We walked to our neighborhood schools inhaling lead-filled exhaust with every breath. We stood—in the back of our parents’ cars, watching the road between their heads. Our baby sisters slept in our mothers’ laps up front in the shotgun seat. No one wore seat belts.

We wore those pajamas that flashed into flame at the touch of a cigarette in test labs, and we went to sleep hugging sawdust-stuffed animals, sometimes sucking on their glass eyes attached to their heads by inch-long saw-toothed metal shanks. Sometimes we ate the sawdust if a seam split open.

We tasted library paste and crayons and the paint off our yellow pencils in school and ate crumbling plaster and peeled-off paint from buildings around home. We never saw a “Non-Toxic” label on a paint set or a “Not Safe for Human Consumption” warning on an ink bottle. We wouldn’t have cared if we did. If the scoop of ice cream fell off our cone onto the sidewalk, we grabbed it up, flicked off some of the dirt, and ate it.

We experimented with small parts of our toys and games. Many of our toys were metal and harder to pick apart than the plastic ones that followed, so if we didn’t manage to pry a wheel off a truck, we made do with a jack or a tinker toy. We carried out studies on which of them fit into our noses or other body orifices.

So I think the current generation—the Bubble-Wrapped Generation—owes us a great big thank you. Not that we’ve ever asked for it. We’ve been busy seeing the Greatest Generation—wheezing, cancer-ridden,
arthritic, and Alzheimer’s-plagued to their final rest. But because we swallowed gallons of Red Dye #2 and breathed in tankfuls of airborne particulates, you never had to. We taught researchers all they know about what you needed to be protected from. Because of us, you have antibacterial hand gel.

You can leave the two-pound box of chocolates on the coffee table. Just be sure they’re the full-fat, high-carb kind. Don’t worry whether they’re bad for me. I survived my childhood, and I can survive them.
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