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Identity Lost

Laura A. Summy

It was finally here, my senior year on swim team. For three years I had done what the seniors wanted and more. It was my turn to give the orders, then sit back and talk while the underclassmen did all the work. I wasn’t going to be mean about it, I would just be assertive. On November 17, 2006, that vision was shattered. At the time I thought I had lost my identity. To really understand the significance of this day and the months to follow you need to know what had happened in the years before. Let’s start at the beginning of my freshman year.

Going into my freshman year I knew I should get a job to start saving money for college. This would be a challenge because most employers would like to have people that can drive to work. I knew the school hired lifeguards and student swim instructors, so I went and talked to the aquatic director about working for her. She said she did not have any openings for weekday guards but she could put me on the list to do parties on Saturdays. As far as becoming a swim instructor, she had no idea how many instructors she would need because registration for the classes was later that week. So I gave her my information and she said she would call me if they needed any more people. Later that week, I remember coming home and my mom said that there was a message from the Aquatic Director on the answering machine. I ran into the house listened to the message and jumped around the house. I had a job and not just any job, it was a teaching job. This would be a great experience and chance for me to see if teaching was what I really wanted to do.

I loved this job and continued doing it the rest of my high school career. During the second semester of my freshman year I became one of the lifeguards for the evening events. This then lead to me becoming the supervising lifeguard. The only real differences between being a regular guard and a supervisor was I could lock-up the pool and I got paid a dollar more. After my sophomore year the Aquatic Director and the swim coach was given the job. When school started again I helped my new boss get everything organized ready for the fall activities. Throughout the next year I really began to recreate the swim lesson program; later I became the supervisor. The registration numbers rose and more kids wanted to return to my lessons. My passion for the aquatic program became deeper as I then started to join the water fitness classes. I would guard the pool and chatted with the ladies while they did their workout. People were calling the Aquatic Director to tell her how much they really enjoyed what I had been doing. I loved going different places and having kids call out “teacher, teacher” or having ladies come up and ask me when I would be at aerobics. I had a sense of belonging and a reassurance that no matter what happened in my life I would always be able to go back to the pool and feel proud of what I had done.

Not only had I built up pride through the program I had created but also in the team I was a member. I had joined a community swim team the summer after third grade. I loved the water and my parents wanted me to be involved in sports. I continued to swim competitively throughout school and joined the high school swim team my freshmen year. There was
something different about being in the high school team. I still cannot figure out what it was. I worked hard and did my best for the team. I encouraged everyone to do the same. I was proud to wear the team warm-up suits around school and tell people that I was a member of this great team. Every year I worked to make “senior night” the best possible for that group. I let myself dream about what mine would be like and could not wait for that season to begin. Just as every other season had begun this one would be no different, a letter from the coaches informed me that the season would be starting soon.

Early in October everyone on the team received a letter that told us to go to the athletic office and pick up the packet of information for the season. I went to office to pick up my packet and started reading through the pages of information. The first page was a letter from all of the coaches. This letter always gave a report as to how practices would operate different team activities, the team motto for the year, and any other information we would need to know before the season started. As I neared the end of this letter my excitement turned to worry. The coaches wrote that they had made the decision to consider making cuts from the team. The final decision for this act would not be made until the first official week of practice, when they could see the size of the team. This worried me; I wasn’t the fastest person in the water, but I loved this sport. I worked hard at practices and in the end it showed. I had dedicated three years to this team. I read through the rest of the information and decided not to think about it too much because it was just a possibility.

The season started the first week of November. Just as every other year I tried to help the freshmen adjust to the routines for the beginning of practice and help them in whatever way I could. When the coaches announced that they would be making the cuts at the end of the second week my heart sank. I knew at that point the chances of being in the team for the season were slim. I continued to work hard, but the thought of being cut lingered in my mind all through practice each day. Finally that Friday came. Many of the girls said not to worry because they thought the coaches would not cut a senior. I tried to believe it but had a sinking feeling within my heart. About half way through practice the coach (and Aquatic Director) told me that she wanted to talk to me out in the hallway. I got out of the pool and saw another senior get out as well. We looked at each other and we both knew what was coming. The next part is a little blurry. We went to the hall she told us in a “beat around the bush” kind of way that we were cut from the team. However, since we were seniors they wanted to offer us positions as team assistants. After a weekend of crying I decided to take the offer. I thought about what would happen if I left the team and that just brought more pain.

In the months to follow I began to hate myself. Every time I walked on the pool deck some of the girls would glare at me. There were many different kinds of glares but they all seemed to say the about same thing “How dare you show your face here.” This message kept eating away at my heart. Many parents and peers said that they thought the coaches’ decision was wrong, but no one told the coaches. From November to January I wanted to hide. Senior night came around and the team did not recognize me as being a senior. A week or so before this event we had a picture taken of all the seniors and after the picture was taken I overheard one of the girls ask if it was possible to take a person out of the picture. What once was my safe place became a place of hurt.
After the season I prepared for the next session of swim lessons. The session went well, but looking back I think it could have been better. I have not gotten in a pool to swim laps since that Friday night. Every time I try I am reminded of all the events that took place that winter. I was not planning on going to the senior sports banquet but, somehow I was talked into going. I was enjoying the evening but still somewhat uncertain as to why I was there. The Athletic Director came up to the microphone and started saying something about all the awards being important and one of the most important awards was the service award. He went on to describe this person and I realized it was me. That evening I found my identity again. It was not the identity of a swimmer. My identity can be described as a caring, supportive person who also takes pride in her accomplishments.

Overcoming the Odds

Adele M. Dorsey

Somehow I woke this morning with peace in my heart and a voice which stirred my soul. I realized that I didn’t want to do this anymore. I didn’t want to fight against life. I wanted to open the window and shout out loud – here I am and I am coming for you, life.

I have spent years in a losing battle against life. I ran away from me and closer to my destruction. I gave myself over to the negative forces and gave up on me. A life spend in the grips of hell. What I thought I was chasing eluded me even more.

This day is different. This morning as I rose a solitary tear rolled down my cheek, dropping every so gently on my hand. Now I understand - life is a challenge, and if I don’t put my gloves on and come out swinging, then I will just exist!
Easter Candy

Melissa Furman

One of my most cherished memories of my childhood was the time I spent in the kitchen with Grandma. She loved to cook and it showed. It was April 7, 1977. I was just weeks away from my eleventh birthday. I had missed school all week due to a terrible case of the chicken pox. I lived with my godparents, a.k.a. Grandma and Gramps. True to form they were doing a great job taking care of me. Grandma decided we should make some Easter candy.

I remember how excited I was! I loved helping in the kitchen. Grandma always made me feel special. She made everything she did seem special. I believe she was able to make everything seem so special, because she herself was such a special woman.

Before we started to make our candy, we had a big meal. We had roasted chicken, mashed potatoes, and peas. These were all Gramps’ favorite foods. I didn’t realize it at the time but it had been a while since she cooked a meal like that. All too soon I would come to realize why.

After dinner Grandma and I cleared the table and Gramps started doing the dishes. Once he finished washing the dishes, he went outside to his vegetable garden. He was an avid vegetable gardener.

Finally the moment I had been waiting for; Grandma starting melting the chocolate. I wasn’t allowed to help with that part. My job was to form the peanut butter concoction into eggs. It was very messy. I think that might be why I enjoyed doing it so much. This process went on for about one hour, me rolling the eggs and Grandma dipping them in the hot chocolate.

Then the unthinkable happened. Grandma clutched her chest. She yelled, “Oh my God.” She fell off her chair and onto me. She must have bumped the pot with the hot chocolate mixture on her way down because it was now all over her. I was so frightened. What had just happened? What should I do?

I moved her so I could get up. I ran outside to the other end of the yard to find Gramps. He would be able to help. He could fix anything. He could tell by the expression on my face that something was terribly wrong. I don’t remember saying anything to him. He took off running toward the house.

He arrived before I did. He was already on the phone calling for help when I arrived. After he got off the phone he tried to help her. He had some first aid training when he worked in the ore mines. He started punching her in the chest. I now know it was a cardiac thump but back then I thought he was hurting her. The thumping
made a horrible sound that scared me even more. I ran to the other room and held onto my dog for dear life. I needed someone to comfort me and make this right.

The next thing I remember was seeing the emergency medical technicians through the dining room window. They had a litter with a bag on it. In the bag was my Grandma. All I could hear was Gramps sobbing in the kitchen. I had never heard this strong man cry much less sob before. I knew I never wanted to hear it again. I remember him calling my mom at work. I can’t recall the conversation. The next call was to Grandma’s mother, Gertie. He either called the neighbor or she saw the ambulance because she came over. She stayed with us until my mother was able to get there. Once my mother arrived, she decided my Gramps needed some time alone. She took me to home with her; I was familiar with this house, but it was not my home.

The next day, my mother and Gramps went to the funeral home to make arrangements for the burial while I stayed with my Pappy. Pappy was my mother’s father. They lived together in a row house on the north side of town. This was to be my new home.

The funeral was April 11, 1977. My Grandma wore a beautiful mint green gown that my mother and Gramps had picked out for her. I wore a mint green dress that only days before my Grandma had bought for me for Easter Sunday. Oh how I wished we were dressed up for church instead of where we were going. I don’t remember much about the funeral. The one thing that sticks in my mind was how full it was. Extra chairs were needed and people were sitting in the hallways. I must not have been the only person that thought she was a special woman. The procession to the cemetery seemed to take hours. I was never so sad, or felt so alone as I did that day.

I often wonder how differently my life would have turned out if that terrible day in April had never happened. I guess I will never know.
Believe Me When I Say

Stronger and deeper
My love has grown
Brighter and purer
My heart has shown
Hour after hour
And day after day
I find it easier and easier
And now I can say
Long past time
And the world we know
My love for you
Will continue to grow
We’ve seen so much
And almost did it all
We’ve come so close
But always stopped the fall
I know in my heart
That you’re the one
You can see it in my heart
And the actions I’ve done
Always and forever
What I feel is true
Believe me when I say
I love you

Casey Via
Doubting Faith

There is this girl,
I know her so well.
She yearns for serenity,
And to escape from her hell.

Looking for love
In all the wrong places,
Only brought her to her knees,
In front of men’s devilish faces.

“If only,” She thought,
“My heart would stop this fight...
And find that one thing...
To conquer these feelings every night.”

But then she told herself,
To put it in His Hands.
Her suffering and tears that she shed
Might just have been part of His Plan.

How does she hope,
From the heartache she’s been given?
Faith and trust in God,
Is what’s been keeping her driven.

Lisa Clements
Not Just Another Day on the Farm

Andrew Rissler

For me, a typical day on the farm is very monotonous, but on this day, my perspective was changed forever. It was the September of the year 2000 and I had just turned eleven years old. The morning routine was: get up at 6:00 to milk the family cow, feed the hogs and steers, and then come back inside at 7:00 for breakfast. As we sat around the large wooden kitchen table finishing our food, Ethan, my cousin, asked me and my two brothers, “You boys ready for work?” We nodded a groggy “uh huh,” and Ethan added, “Then let’s go, we have a lot of orders to fill today” as he put on his straw hat and headed outside.

Ethan was a tall athletic-looking man with huge hands. He had a loud voice with a slight twang that came from his Pennsylvania Dutch background. Anita, Ethan’s wife, was a short woman, who looked even shorter when she stood next to her husband. They had a seven year old son named Cletus, who was enrolled in a local Mennonite school. Every day, Ethan had to help him across the busy highway to get to school. Once Anita finished the daily task of getting Cletus off to school, she could concentrate on getting us ready to work in the fields. She handed my brothers and me a water jug to take with us into the fields. She made sure we had plenty of sunscreen so we wouldn’t get sunburned.

The farm was situated on a 100 acre parcel of land in Fleetwood, PA. It took about five minutes to bike past the cornfields and melon patches to get to the first of several quarter-mile long tomato patches. There were rows of black plastic with full grown tomato plants that were planted about three feet apart. Each plant only grew to be about a foot high. Beyond that height, they would fall over and grow along the ground like vines. There were about ten rows to a patch of tomatoes. As the plants grew, the rows blended together to form a single patch of tangled green vines.

There was little talking as my brothers and I gathered our baskets. None of us looked forward to another monotonous day of tomato picking. The sun was bearing down on our bare necks as we bent down on our knees in the dark brown, rocky soil. None of us liked the look of our black, grimy hands that would not come clean no matter how hard we tried to clean them. The only reason we were willing to come to our cousins’ farm every September was the one dollar per bushel we earned from picking the tomatoes. Besides, our parents thought that the hard work and discipline on an Old Order Mennonite farm would do us some good.

We slowly picked tomatoes into our green plastic baskets. When they were filled, we dumped them into wooden crates that were lined up beside the patch. It was about 85 degrees, and the field we were picking in had been picked through many times during the past month. The high heat and scarcity of tomatoes made the picking very slow.

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Finally, twelve o’clock arrived. We got back on our bikes and headed back to the house for lunch. As we biked, we questioned each other as to how many bushels of tomatoes we had picked. I’d picked eleven bushels, Phil, my older brother, had picked thirteen bushels, and my younger brother Matthew had picked nine. These were not very high numbers, and as we sat around the table, Ethan said as much. We told him the “picking was bad,” in the patch we were picking. He said he wouldn’t make us pick in that patch again that day because we were going to a patch with “better picking,” after lunch. We were happy to hear this, and our spirits rose slightly as we concluded our lunch with pieces of watermelon so big, they had to be eaten with a spoon.

At 12:45, just as we finished eating, Ethan suddenly announced, “How many of you boys would like a pocket knife like this?” He held up a rugged-looking black pocket knife with a silver plate in the middle that had the words Camp King engraved on it. “I’ve had this knife for years and I just found out that the store right down the road still sells them.” He then showed us all the neat features the knife had. He told us about the time he accidentally ran over his with a two-ton skid loader and it still worked fine. We all fell in love with the knife right away and waited for him to tell us what the price would be. “Phil and Andrew,“ he said, “if you each pick twenty-five bushels of tomatoes before supper, I’ll get you one. Matthew, you’ll need to pick twenty.” We each gulped down an extra glass of water and ran outside to start picking.

Five minutes later we stood beside our bikes, surveying the tomato patch we would be picking in for the next five hours. This patch had only been picked once during the season. The second picking of a tomato patch is always the most profitable, so we were eager to get started. Each of us took a few minutes to pick out what looked like the best row. We grabbed our baskets and started to pick. For the first minute or two, all that was heard was the satisfying “plunk, plunk,” of the tomatoes as they were dropped into the empty plastic baskets. The day was still very hot, but this time we didn’t care about the heat. We focused our minds on the goal that had been set for us and the reward we would receive if we were able to meet it. We were normally careful not to brush our hands against the rough plant stalks as we picked because, after a while, we would develop a rash. But today, we didn’t care how sore our hands would be afterwards, as long as we made our goals.

The time raced by for the first couple of hours, and then everything seemed to go slower. Our goals started to seem like faraway mountains. No matter how much we tried, they seemed to be just out of reach. However, we knew that the goals that had been set were attainable, so we plunged on with all the energy we could muster. A cool breeze started to blow and with it there seemed to be a new energy. A couple of hours later, clouds blew past the sun, shading us somewhat from its painful rays. By 5:30, with thirty minutes to go, Phil had picked twenty-two bushels, Matthew had picked eighteen and I had picked twenty-one. The wind was starting to blow and dark clouds were creeping across the sky – there was going to be a storm. By 5:55, Phil and Matthew had finished their allotted amount, but I still had one more bushel to pick. As they got on their bikes to leave, they asked if I wanted them to help me fill my last bushel. I said, “No, I’ll be okay” and continued picking without looking up. After they started to peddle away, they shouted back, “You’d better hurry, it looks like it’s about to start raining.”
I wondered if I should go back to the house. I didn’t want to be caught in a thunder storm. I only thought about it for a few seconds, and then I decided I was going to finish. This was not about a pocket knife any more. It was about the goal I had to meet. Not Ethan’s goal, but my goal. I picked that last bushel in less than ten minutes. I don’t think I had ever before picked one that fast. As I poured the last basket of tomatoes into the crate to fill the bushel, the rain was already starting to fall and the rolling of the thunder got louder. I got on my bike, but I’d only gone a few yards when I saw a bolt of lightning strike the ground in the distance. A few seconds later, a deafening peal of thunder sounded in my ears. It felt as if buckets of water were being dumped onto my head.

The rolls of thunder became louder and more frequent. I abandoned my bike and ran to the nearby cornfield for shelter. I plunged in among the tangle of green stalks poking out from the reddish-brown soil, their long, itchy leaves reaching out to scratch my arms as I passed by. As I ran further into the cornfield, I wandered if I had made the right choice by staying to finish my goal.

I stood in the field for about ten minutes, sheltered somewhat by the nine-foot high corn stalks. The soil under my feet began to turn into a heavy, sticky mud. I wondered if I should stay where I was or run across the open fields to get back to the house. I was terrified to be outside in the middle of a thunderstorm. I’d always heard to never go into an open area during a thunderstorm, so I decided to stay where I was until the storm abated somewhat. I decided to crouch down on my knees because I’d heard that it reduced the chances of being hit. As I knelt down, scared and shivering in the mud, all thoughts of tomato picking and pocket knives were forgotten. I fought with myself the whole time, “Should I go or stay?” I knew that if I stayed where I was, I would be considered foolish by Ethan and Anita. As Mennonites they didn’t seem to understand the dangers of lightening. How would they understand if I told them that I had stayed in the cornfield because I was afraid of lightening? The time went by slowly, and I didn’t move.

In another five minutes, the water droplets that fell became smaller and further apart and the rolls of thunder grew fainter. I walked slowly back to the house. Ethan had met me half way– he had come out to see what had become of me. He silently turned back towards the house as he came up to me, and I followed closely behind. As I walked into the house, I observed everyone sitting at the table eating. I suddenly felt very self conscious of my appearance. I was soaking wet, my legs were muddy from being in the cornfield. My hair was matted down and my arms were red from brushing against the corn. As I started to move towards the stairs, I mumbled, “I need to go upstairs to change and clean up.” No one said anything, but I imagined that everyone was thinking the same thing; Why did he wait outside until the storm ended to come inside? I felt stupid for the choice I’d made to stay in the field until the storm subsided.

As I went upstairs, my unpleasant thoughts were pushed aside by the realization of my success. I had finished picking the twenty-five bushels in one afternoon that were required to earn that coveted Camp King pocket knife. The pride that I felt as I walked up those stairs was very great. It was even greater than the joy I felt when I received the knife two weeks later. I don’t mean to say that the knife was no longer special. It was, and to this day I still have the knife to remind me of that day. This experience helped me to realize something
about goals. I was given a goal, but if I hadn’t made it *my* goal, I would have never completed it. I was going to finish it, no matter what the cost and no matter what anyone else thought. And I did.
Love Is…

Natasha Fessler

Love is…
When I look into your eyes
And I see love and compassion,
Care and concern,
And the beauty within.

Love is…
When your eyes sparkle
As I enter the room.
And when you tell me I’m beautiful
Even when I look terrible.

Love is…
When you hold my hand in public,
And tell me you love me
In front of your friends.
And when you tell your friends
You can’t hang with them
Cuz you’re with me.

Love is…
When you get down on one knee,
Looking into my eyes
And tell me you love me
And want to spend the rest of your life
With me in your arms.

Love is…
Our 50th anniversary
Sitting in each others arms,
You whispering the words
“I LOVE YOU” into my ears,
While placing butterfly kisses
On my forehead.

Love is…
Me And You!
The Last Of The Good Old Days

Joseph D. Stephens

I sit here in the classrooms of HACC, at times I find myself drifting off to the days of my childhood, a simpler time, one not too long ago. I like to refer to it as the “last of the good old days.” The city of Lebanon was a more prosperous town, after all we had Bethlehem Steel which provided many residents with well-paying jobs, no malls and Downtown Lebanon was the place to go.

On the current site of the HACC campus stood two well known stores... Haak’s Department Store and Harpel’s. Haak’s actually had an escalator, and as children we found this so fascinating. My friends and I on occasion would run into Haak’s as though we were attacking the place. Three, four or even five children running across the hardwood floors making the deafening ruckus of a hundred people. Our mad dash to ride the escalator to the second floor, run across the second floor to the staircase, down the stairs, across the first floor to the escalator, up again, repeating this several times until one of the hoity toity sales ladies would angrily redirect us to the street. How could she be so nasty? We were only having fun.

We made our own fun back then. There were no video games or computers, cable television only meant a clear view of three networks for those fortunate to have it. We played in places no kid would dream of playing today much less have access to. We played king of the hill on the sand piles of Lebanon Building Supply, moving out of the way of the backhoe operator when he needed a scoop of sand. We collected scrap wood from Miller’s Lumber Yard at Seventh and Willow to build forts. Like something out of Tom Sawyer, I remember walking barefoot into the lumber yard pulling a wagon for a load of wood, climbing into the scrap wood bin pulling out the best pieces. This day and age, no kid would ever dream of going onto business sites unsupervised the way we did back then. If we got hurt on their site someone from the office would provide a band-aid and send us on our way. Today they’d be calling their lawyer for fear of a pending lawsuit.

I grew up on Green Street, a well known neighborhood respected for its tough nature, one referred to by some as the “Ghetto of Lebanon.” Any old-timer would remember this area and its reputation. Green Street was a narrow one way street, only two blocks long, with row homes on either side, running between Fifth and Seventh Streets, just south of the railroad and along the Quittapahilla Creek. Predominantly Catholic, most of the kids attended Saint Mary’s Elementary School. Our parents were not wealthy by any means, working class just making it. We were a tough bunch that stuck together and guarded our turf, we made our fun by playing army in the coal piles, railroad yard and “bum’s jungle” where the current YMCA is today. We built dams in the Quittapahilla Creek. This self-made fun exercised our imaginations; toys and bicycles were few. We played baseball in the corner lot at Seventh and Green, a small lot that by nature of its size required the retrieval of the baseball from the creek on many occasions.

Our rough and tumble reputation proceeded us, but if the truth be known we were quite a respectful bunch destined for better things, the Sisters of St. Mary’s making sure of that.
Never too tough for them, they’d “lock our heels” in a minute. Parents of the neighborhood commanded respect as well; to disobey or mouth off to an elder in the neighborhood would be like doing the same to your own parents, setting off a chain of events that would leave a person with mouth full of soap, knuckles or an ass as red as the sunset. There was no such thing as “not my Joey” back then...it was six of one and a half a dozen of the other. If another parent scolded or reprimanded you, then you must have deserved it, and you received no mercy. In fact, if the person that scolded you didn’t tell your parents, and you were dumb enough to tell them yourself, you probably got a another scolding or worse.

We also knew how to work. Many of us had Sunday paper routes, pulling the old wooden wagon with metal wheels that you could hear coming from a block away, we pulled them in the heat of the summer and cold of winter, through rain and snow. There were times we would venture out on Saturday mornings with Radio Flyer wagon in tow collecting newspapers and bottles, newspapers made some money, but bottles were the thing; they brought a nickel each and were much easier to handle than bundles of paper. Door to door asking for papers and bottles, most people were happy to give up their newspapers, some neatly bundled which made our job easier, others a total mess which created a wrestling match keeping the papers on the wagon.

Once overflowing, and more work than it was worth keeping the papers on the wagon, we headed to the scrap yard. As we entered the yard, all of us together, two, three maybe even four would walk onto the truck scale with the wagon, then over to the drop off, unload and back to the scale. Once back to the scale, only one person pulled the wagon onto the scale... the scale master was too dumb to figure out our deceptive actions... so we thought. We would collect our cash and it never failed... an amount that could not be equally divided. Looking back now, this must have been part of the game played by the weigh master by leading us to believe we actually made that truck scale budge. Again here is another situation where a kid could never pull a wagon into a scrap yard with all kinds of machinery moving about for fear of something going wrong and a pending lawsuit.

A snow storm also provided opportunity to make money, shoveling snow from sidewalks for the merchants on Cumberland Street, most of whom we knew by name and actually owned the business, not managers of some chain or franchise. We were constantly coming up with ideas to earn spending money, there were no allowances. We were a modern day Ralph Cramden and Ed Norton when it came to ideas for getting rich. Of course, some of our earnings had to go into our miniature church envelopes for the offering at Sunday Mass; not only was it our moral obligation, our parents knew we had made some cash from our bragging and expected us to do the proper thing.

After a hard day’s work, and having some money to spend, we would head up town. I have fond memories of going into H & L Green for lunch, at their store front deli, the inviting smell of the food on the menu filled the air a block before entering the store. I always ordered my favorite, the Reuben dog, chips and a fountain drink all for under one dollar. We sat at the counter like a bunch of rich hot shots enjoying our fine dining. Other favorite eateries in the area were the William Penn at Seventh and Cumberland, and Shepp’s at Seventh and Willow. The William Penn offered their famous hot dogs with everything. We would order this specialty, the aroma of the secret recipe filling the air as we would
wait patiently with watering mouths as Effie, the waitress who spoke no English, would prepare our hot dogs, so many that she lined them up her arm. Shepp’s was the place to go for a cherry cola…cherry syrup in a glass with cola added from the fountain, there was nothing like it. In the back of Shepp’s were the pinball machines, so many it sounded like a carnival when you passed through the doorway and cigarette smoke filled the room. A dime would get you a play…and this was our equivalent to a video game, playing the pin balls was fun and took some skill, but the nuns didn’t think so. In their eyes this was no place for young children of impressionable youth, although we were street wise beyond their wildest dreams. Occasionally there would be a “raid” - the sisters would come in and kindly but firmly escort us from this place of ill repute, usually when they needed something done at the school or convent. These odd jobs were often paid for with cookies, lemonade, soda or some other treat, but never cash. A good deed for the sisters now was remembered during the school year and might earn a person some leniency for a bad grade or pending punishment.

If there was any money left over, the day would not be complete without a visit to Mike DeLeo’s store for penny candy or some other snack, a 7 oz. bottle of soda was a dime if you drank it there, fifteen cents if you took it with you…a nickel deposit. This store also served as a place to get a pack of cigarettes for Dad, a loaf of bread, a gallon of milk, lunch meat or some other staple for home. Many families including my own ran a tab there. My mother always said “Green Street kept Mike in business.”

These were much simpler times, and one might think this all took place in the nineteen twenties, thirties or forties, but this was only the early seventies, and I was less than ten years old. Though the times were tough, we had fun and appreciated what little we had. We were mischievous, but not to the point of hurting anyone or their property. Even though we didn’t have much, we really wanted for nothing. I guess that’s just the way it was. I often think of the real lessons I learned growing up on Green Street; true friendship, love, moderation, humility and appreciation. I don’t often hear too many stories like this from people my age, and that’s why I call it the last of the “good old days.”

But all good things must come to an end. June of 1972 brought heavy rains to the Lebanon Valley, and when heavy rains hit, it would usually cause the lowest point of Green Street to flood. Most of the kids would play in these flood waters much to their parents dismay. Something a little different happened this time and ultimately changed the future of Green Street.

I was eight years old in 1972, the spring had above average rainfall leaving the ground saturated, and for about two weeks in June the rain became quite heavy and constant. A hurricane…Hurricane Agnes moving up the east coast stalled over the northeast and brought Eastern Pennsylvania what is known today as the flood of ’72. On the eve of June 21, there was flooding throughout the Lebanon Valley, and power was off in many areas including Green Street. It rained all night and Mother Nature’s fury brought the Quittapahilla Creek, which ran right behind our house well over its banks. As day broke on the morning of June 22nd, it was evident there was no relief in site, Green Street now became part of the Quittapahilla and was rising by the minute.

My mother, a nurse at the Cornwall Manor, was stranded at work, there was no phone service and the turn of events that took place kept me and my brothers from seeing or even
talking to our mother and father for the next two or three weeks. As the water was rising my father and older brothers were moving anything of value from the first floor to the second floor as quickly as possible. People on Green Street were accustomed to the street flooding from time to time and there was no initial concern or panic, but not this time. Never did the water rise this high and at the rate it was rising. This was a flashflood and the water was literally rising by the second. I watched it rising and rising, seeping between the cracks in the hardwood floor and flowing through the front door. My father, only forty three at the time, had to get himself and his five sons out of the house and to safety. With the help of other neighbors and friends of neighbors coming to the rescue (and it truly was a rescue now), they took a rope from our porch rail to a telephone pole across the street. My younger brother on my Dad’s back, I on my oldest brother’s back and the other two brothers used this life line to wade safely across the now swiftly flowing chest high water, and to higher ground.

Once safely on higher ground, my father had the not-so-easy task of finding us food and shelter, and though the confusion, fear and uncertainty of the whole situation was quite memorable and traumatic, yet my father assured us everything would be fine. We were on our own; the Red Cross was either spread too thin, affected by the flood itself or just hadn’t responded yet. Phone service was out through most of, if not all of Lebanon County. Any friends or contacts my father had were either affected by the flood themselves or had no phone service to contact them. We had no family in the area.

I remember it was a raw, cold day, pouring down rain, my father walking us in our wet clothes like refugees driven from their homeland. By evening, after a day of walking we reached the home of a family friend that was able to shelter us for the night. They were already sheltering another family affected by the flood. We spent the night there, and then my younger brother and I were moved onto another family friend for the next two or three weeks. Woody and Dorothy...an elderly couple that spent every Thanksgiving Day with our family. I loved Woody and Dorothy, but they never had children, and there was nothing to do. They didn't really know how to interact with us on a full time basis. I hated the whole ordeal; I missed my parents, I missed my friends and I missed my home. I was never away from my parents and this alone taught me just how tough I wasn’t and how much I loved my parents.

After about a week, my younger brother and I were allowed to visit the house and witness the damage. The water mark on the first floor was at two and a half feet, mud on the floor at least five inches deep, the stench of dampness and an oily smell, presumably from the good washing the flood waters gave the floors of the Bethlehem Steel which was only four blocks upstream from our house. It was a mess and took several weeks to clean up and return the house to a livable state. There was a great deal of assistance to get things put back together from family, friends, churches, the Red Cross, and the area was declared a disaster area making state and federal funding available.

The house was put back together, remodeled, better than before. The following year when the Redevelopment Authority turned its eyes toward the “Ghetto of Lebanon”, they started making offers for property that people just couldn’t refuse. Since the only thing most people liked about Green Street were their neighbors, they all jumped at the offers which afforded them the opportunity to make better lives for themselves in better neighborhoods. I hated losing my friends, but certainly welcomed the new home we moved into.
These buyouts transpired through 1973 and 1974, and by summer of 1974 Green Street as we knew it was no more. The homes were leveled and the portion of Green Street between Fifth and Seventh Streets was removed from the map. We moved into our new home on January 7, 1974. When all was said and done, what was know as the “Ghetto of Lebanon” was now just a flat lot awaiting its new purpose.

I inherited the home we moved into as my parents have since passed on, and I reside there still today. I often think back of that day in June and what a strain it must have put on my father. I think of the effect the Flood of 1972 had on that area of town and the chain of events that forever changed the appearance and demographics of the entire area.
A Tender Kiss

Emalee Baldwin

Your lips are full and soft,
His slightly coarse and rough.
They are total opposites to each other,
But when combined, they fit perfectly together.

You start off slow and careful,
But gradually the need builds.
Then you find yourself in a spiral of desire,
Wanting more than just each other’s lips.

Your bodies heat and grow with need,
Your mind shuffles all of the possibilities.
Eyes connect and voice their wanting,
All that’s left is each other’s answer!
Kid Versus Farm Machinery

Stanley Martin

In 1959, seven of my siblings, along with my parents, resided on one hundred acres of Lebanon County dirt. I recall not feeling crowded inside the old farm house. I had freedom to roam anywhere from which I could find my way home. My rank as youngest of thirteen children afforded few privileges, particularly privacy. I was seven and in second grade. Two brothers were six and eight years older than me. Filling in the gap were two sisters four and five years my senior.

My father, who was fifty, had a very large, commanding presence. It seemed to me that Dad’s girth almost matched his five-foot, eleven-inch height. Simply put, at 260 pounds, he was a very large man. His only language until entering primary school was Pennsylvania German, even though our ancestors had left Europe prior to 1740. Meaning, as he spoke to me in English, he was constantly translating. This form of communication would at times keep me guessing what really he meant. From my perspective, he was fearsome and deeply respected by all who knew him.

Dad wanted inexpensive labor. No member of our household was exempt from contributing communal effort, whether working inside our home, or some other field related chore. Starting us at a young age served secondarily to occupy our hands and minimize mischief time.

To make matters more difficult, crop yield leaned towards average or less. One field had twenty acres of tomatoes. Thirty to forty acres of corn were planted to feed cattle through winter when pasturing was impossible. There were fields of grain and grass planted also to provide bedding and additional feed for the ever-hungry steer. Two-plus acres of garden space were reserved for human consumption.

History doesn’t tell us how successful the former tenants were. Sporadic cherry, apple, and pear trees held testimony to one of its former uses as an orchard. We knew from deed descriptions that its origin sprang from a need to provide housing and food for a lock master’s family circa 1828. The family farm lay adjacent to a waterworks specifically built to provide water for Union Canal locks.

Known as Lions Lake in 1959, it had become a swimming hole providing relief for SRO crowds of overheated sun bathers each summer for many years. I could easily see car loads of people coming and going. By mutual agreement, 500 feet of our lane doubled as entrance and exit for lake parking. When crop growing coincided with low rain fall, we pumped irrigation water from the lake.

This one thing I had in common with Bill Cosby; both of us walked to and from elementary school. However, in my case, “uphill both ways” was entirely mental. Temperature/precipitation extremes did not alter attendance requirements at Ebenezer Elementary School.
Ordinarily, I trudged home using our lane, in full view of Dad. I learned at an early age that occasionally I could delay tiresome activities by stealth. This involved sneaking around a marshy area, behind an old implement shed, between two parallel corn cribs, and several run-down garages. This roundabout route provided visual shields while attempting to avoid detection by Dad, whose main task, it seemed, was conscripting child laborers. When all other school age children were playing, reading, watching TV, or whatever non-farm kids did when they were not in school, I could usually be found taking care of some arduous duty.

In spite of all my efforts at avoiding him, one late summer day Dad spotted me on my way home. “Change out of your school clothing and meet me at the barn,” he ordered. This would include not wearing shoes, even though our lanes were gravel and fields full of sharp grass stubble. The barefoot rule was understood, after all, shoes had to be purchased and he always shunned unnecessary expenditures. Reluctantly, I did as I was told. What a waste of perfectly good daylight.

I procrastinated as long as possible before heading off to my fate. Delay had previously proven a faithful ally. When I finally caught up to him in the field, his impatience with me was clearly evident.

Bear in mind, I had recently turned seven and was about forty-eight inches tall. Dad gave me brief, incomplete instructions regarding my duties. “Stand on the platform. Keep checking to make sure that the timothy bin actually has seed in it and tell me when the fertilizer box is near empty,” he said. This sure sounded simple enough.

The equipment he placed me on was a grain drill. The drill had two very large, spoked wheels similar to those found on pioneer wagons and was hitched to a rigid draw bar on a forty horsepower Cock Shut tractor. Any rational grownup, whose duties included riding on this beastly machine when pulled through a freshly ploughed field, would undoubtedly feel uncertain about their own safety. Timothy is used for feeding cattle and has an extremely small seed. This seed was held in a small, obscure bin located up front and down low, well out of ordinary kid reach.

The platform referred to by my father was located low and at the rear of the drill. Its design accommodated full-sized adults with 20/20 vision. I could not see well due to undiagnosed nearsightedness. Individual seed hoppers could be inspected without difficulty by an adult standing on the rear platform.

So, in order to perform my newly assumed adult duties, I had to find something to stand on. I was a farm kid with plenty of climbing experience but not much commonsense. After a short visual search, I found a horizontal rod located about halfway between where I stood and the drill’s highest point. This improvised perch would allow me to gain enough height advantage and actually monitor the seed bin. I successfully performed this acrobatic procedure once or twice. What was my father thinking at this time? Did safety for his son even enter his thoughts? Strange how the obvious can be so easily overlooked.

However, on my very next try, I learned the reality of excruciating pain. Close in elevation and slightly forward of my perch was another shaft with meshing gears. My adversary’s forward motion drove these gears which in turn activated the sowing mechanism. Unfortunately, my right foot was just long enough to reach the monster’s gnashing teeth. In a split second, my vocal chords released an agonizing shriek. Even the noisy tractor could not divert Dad’s attention from me.
My memory of the next few moments has always been somewhat blurry. I do recall being carried home. I sensed fear and urgency in Dad’s conduct. It was obvious that parts of me were in need of serious repair.

It was at this point that my mother became involved. She was a soft-spoken woman who easily commanded my dad’s attention. Following some discussion between my mother and dad, a brief phone call was placed to our family doctor. Responsibility for making decisions temporarily fell to my mother. My older siblings were nearby, but not close enough to be drawn into this crisis. I felt detached from my surroundings. Pain had a cruel way of re-connecting me to reality. Could this really have happened to me?

Dad placed me in our family car for the ten minute ride to Dr. Shultz’s office. Other than an occasional backward glance, and “Are your ok?” from my mother, all was muted. Doc Shultz recommended surgical removal of what had been my second toe, to which Dad roared, “Absolutely not!” He was thinking clearly now. We promptly left his office and found our way to Lebanon Sanatorium on Fourth Street (now part of Good Samaritan), whereupon much needle sticking and sewing was accomplished. Remarkably, the surgery caused more suffering than the offending machine. It was necessary for my dad and some orderlies to hold me down while the procedure went on in spite of my constant protests and screaming. In some small way, I have compassion for injured soldiers who are worked on without use of nerve-deadening agents.

The surgeons did their part extremely well, leaving little physical reminder of that dreadful day. Ultimately, the outcome could have been much worse. If I had been wearing shoes, my knee-jerk reaction to pull back would have met with too much resistance for me to extract my foot.

The rest of the summer and early fall was lost to recuperation. I was completely useless to help on the farm and for many weeks I could not go to school. In a way, I had received what I wanted, but certainly not in a manner in which I would have planned.

This incident was neither my first nor last injurious run-in with farm machinery. Two years before I had suffered a broken arm and narrowly escaped mutilation from a windrow maker (a hay rake). Three years later, I was caught between the same grain drill and a truck driven by – yes, my dad. I did not hold a grudge against my father. As the adult present in two of these scenarios, safety was clearly his responsibility. Dad’s carelessness cast certain doubt on his judgment regarding kids and farm machinery.
The Dark Road of Dementia

Jacqueline Eisenhauer

She sits in her wheelchair, staring blankly at a television program she isn’t even watching. As we enter the room, she turns to look at us and raises her hand in a feeble gesture of hello. Her beautiful white hair is unkempt, and she holds a tissue in her hand to stop the running of her eye. To her left is seated another elderly woman with white hair who is just staring down, not looking at anybody, and to her right is yet another white-haired woman who is sitting on the sofa playing with a Philly Fanatic doll.

“Hi, Grandma!” my husband, Bob, says cheerfully as we enter the living area. Braden, my three-year-old, just throws his coat on the sofa and immediately starts playing with the two action figures he brought with him, the idea of a polite greeting completely lost to his egocentric mind. I say my hello, then retire quietly to a seat on the sofa where I can observe my surroundings.

The living area of the Mount Hope cottage of Linden Village is a cozy little place. A real fire burns warmly in the corner fireplace. There is a television in another corner, and two sofas and three armchairs line the walls. Animal Planet is playing on the television, though none of the residents who were supposedly watching it would’ve been able to tell you that.

Betty Kimmel, or Grandma, as I call her, since she is my husband’s grandmother, is the woman we are there to see. Braden, however, is more interested in the Philly Fanatic the other woman is holding. That woman quite obviously takes great joy in sharing her toy with Braden. Grandma tries to say something to her in her usual barely audible tone of voice, and the woman just smiles at her blankly. Grandma then looks at me, rolling her eyes, and tells me that the other woman never hears anything.

As soon as Grandma settles in with visiting Bob and Braden, I sneak off into the dining area to speak to Rose Mary, one of the caregivers on duty. There are several small tables scattered throughout the room. At one table, a woman is sitting by herself looking at a book, and at another table a man and a woman are sitting together; the woman is playing with a baby doll and the man is just watching her. I take a seat at an empty table near the windows, and Rose Mary sits down across from me. She then tells me, with a smile on her face and thick New York accent, that she had been there the day Grandma first came there about two months ago, and that Grandma had been sitting in the same seat where I was now sitting.

Rose Mary works full time at Linden Village, and she works all shifts. She has been working there for a year and three months now. The cottage in which she works, and Grandma lives, is specifically for dementia and Alzheimer’s residents. Grandma suffers from dementia, which is why she is in that cottage.

Dementia is a progressive brain dysfunction, which often leads to Alzheimer’s. It usually only begins after age sixty-five, and about half of those affected with dementia are also affected by Alzheimer’s. When people suffer from dementia they become very forgetful. They forget how to do common everyday tasks, they forget the words for things, they lose their sense of time, and they have difficulty with abstract thinking. Because of this, they can often
become depressed, which causes drastic behavioral and personality changes.

Rose Mary has spent quite a bit of time with Grandma. She explains that when Grandma first arrived there, two months ago, she was very quiet and kept to herself quite a bit. Now, however, she is much more social. She enjoys participating in the many activities that the activity person organizes daily, such as Uno, cards, bean bag toss, basketball, and crafts. In the evenings, she likes to watch game shows with the other residents.

"The cutest thing she does," she explains, laughing, "is she’s always recruiting people to break out with her."

As we are sitting there talking, the woman who had been playing with the baby doll comes over and sits next to me. The acrid smell of urine fills my nostrils, but I just smile at her and pretend not to notice. Rose Mary’s face lights up. “This is my favorite resident,” she explains proudly. “A lot of the other people here, mainly the residents, would love to get rid of her, but I just love her.” The woman just smiles obliviously, obviously not comprehending that she is being talked about.

As I return to the living area, Braden is still busy entertaining everybody with his action figures. Grandma asks me if we’d like to visit with her in her room, which we agree to. As Bob is pushing her in her wheelchair, she complains about her eye hurting. She is suffering from a virus called Bell’s Palsy, which affects the right side of her face and causes her to lose control of her muscles, including her eye, making her incapable of closing it completely. She doesn’t remember that, however, so Bob explains it to her again.

When we get into Grandma’s room, I take a seat in the corner. It is a small room. She has a bed, two chairs, a dresser, and an end table. On her dresser is a picture of her late husband with her son-in-law and grandson, and on her end table is a picture of four of her great-grandchildren, Braden included. I go because someday that may very well be me, sitting in my wheelchair, staring blankly at a television program I’m not even watching, hoping that somebody will walk in so I can raise my hand in a feeble gesture of hello.

She also has her own private bathroom, which is quite large for just having a toilet and a sink.

Not long after we are settled in, Grandma wants to get up out of her wheelchair. Bob helps her up, and she opens the bathroom door and looks in, explaining that she’s looking for another chair. Bob chuckles, tells her there’s no chair in the bathroom, then guides her over to the other chair in her room.

Now that we’re all comfortable, we finally get a chance to talk to Grandma. She is very worried about when she’s going to be going home. She had been living with Bob’s mother before, and doesn’t look at Linden Village as home. Bob’s mother had made the decision to bring Grandma back to her house, but first Grandma has to finish out her physical therapy at Linden Village. One of the effects of dementia, however, is a loss of time sense, so Grandma thinks she’s been living at Linden Village forever and was supposed to go home weeks ago. She holds up her fingers and starts counting for us how many weeks she’s been there.

As we’re talking, Grandma’s door opens, and one of the men pokes his head in briefly then closes the door again. This happens quite a bit – he is just looking for his room. Fortunately, Grandma forgets about it shortly after it happens.
Grandma gets tired very suddenly and asks to lie down in her bed. Bob helps her into bed, then we get ready to go. As we are saying our good-byes, she beckons Bob over.

“Even if I’m here for weeks yet, please don’t stop coming. It’s those times in between that seem really long in here,” she says, pointing to her head. Bob promises we’ll be back, Braden gives her a hug, and we leave her to her nap.

As we leave, I am feeling very sad. Up until a year ago, Grandma lived on her own. She even drove. We would often go over to her house and she’d make us dinner. She was happy and even a bit witty. It amazes me how quickly this disease can change someone.

I realize that in Grandma’s mind, our visit may not have even occurred. She will more than likely wake up forgetting we were ever there, and assume that we weren’t. That isn’t why we go, though. We go because it makes her happy while we are there. For someone in her condition, that is all that we can do. We go because if we were in the same position, we would want our grandchildren to come see us.
Accessibility – A Personal Viewpoint

Emily Zeller

What happens when life gives you an unexpected challenge? That is the situation that my family and I faced when I was born with a disability called spina bifida twenty-three years ago. My family could choose to solely rely on the doctors’ statements that I would grow up to be retarded and unable to walk. They could also rely on medical interventions such as surgeries and choose to treat me as normally as possible in all aspects of my development.

My family followed the doctors’ advice to medically repair all the neurological, orthopedic, and other complications that I had. I had eight surgeries, including the insertion of a shunt, through the time I was in third grade. At the same time my family, teachers, and friends were helping me to learn how to be a part of the world academically and socially. Obviously, I could not do everything that other children could do, but I did many things that other children did because of accessible opportunities and places.

The Americans with Disabilities Act, which took effect on July 26, 1992, is the most important law, one which allows me to pursue a normal life. This law protects disabled people from discrimination from private employers. It also requires public buildings and mass transportation to be accessible to disabled people. Education, a job, public transportation, public accommodation, and fair housing are all accessible to me as I become an independent young adult. I can continue my education here at H.A.C.C. because it is accessible for my wheelchair. I can work at Northwest Elementary School because it is also accessible for me. I can socialize with my friends and family because many places, such as movies, restaurants, and malls are accessible. I can worship in my church because it is also accessible for my wheelchair. In the future I will seek an affordable and accessible apartment or home.

Overall, I have had few experiences with places that were not accessible for me. The places where I have had trouble were usually historical sites and other older places that had not been brought up to code with the ADA’s standards. Sometimes this was disappointing, because I really enjoy learning about America’s past.

Without the Americans with Disabilities Acts (ADA), I would not have had the chance to become and independent and productive citizen. Millions of people like me who were born with physical or mental impairments would have also lost their chance to do the same. We are present in society, and we are trying each day to be the best that we can be.

There is another kind of accessibility that disabled people need. This type of accessibility is not just about getting into a building, or getting from point A to point B. I am referring to the need that we all have to feel that others allow us equal access for friendships and other social relationships. We need love, support, and encouragement just like all people do. We need acceptance. We do not need pity or stares from strangers. We do not need to be demeaned by another person’s words or actions toward us.

Being accepted for who I am is the most important aspect of my life. The law gives me and other disabled people the right to live an independent and more accessible life;
however, if other people are not open to our presence in society and our ability to be productive citizens, then I cannot lead a fully accessible life. So the next time you see someone who is disabled like me, be genuinely friendly and treat me as your equal. I may not be able to walk as well as you do, but I am a citizen, a taxpayer, and more importantly, a person who is more like you than you might realize.
Don’t Be Afraid

Latasha R. Allie

Don’t be afraid
Even though it seems dark now
There will be brighter days.

Just because it’s pouring rain outside,
The storm will not last forever.
There will be brighter days
With sunnier weather.

No one can say
They have never been down in the dumps.
Even though you are down right now,
There will always come brighter days
With a breeze that will pick you right up.

Don’t give up.
Continue to push on through.
Because what tests you today,
Tomorrow becomes a reward to you
Sometimes I Wonder

Natasha Fessler

Sometimes I wonder
What I would do
If I had to live
My life without you.

You have known me
For as long as I can remember
And I always thought we
Would be together.

But then you decided to
Break my heart in two pieces
Leaving me with
Nothing to do.

I often thought of
What when wrong
Between you and me
Then I realize it was SHE!

You fell for another woman
And left me crying in my room
Thinking of what could have been
If we were bride and groom.
How Fast Can You Run?

Donald Beaulieu

I sit here in this lonely place I call home.
I wonder where all this pain will flow to when I
have to let it go.
I sit here, sopping up the beers I do not drink,
it really helps, you know.
It helps me not to think,
It helps me not to feel the agony that tears at my being.
No, not at my soul; that went MIA long ago.
From 20,000 feet I help to drop the steel eggs whose
carefully crafted shell housed 5000 pounds or so
of gas we called napalm.
Wow, what a fiery hell we could create.
Wow, what awesome power we could unleash.

Ever see a desert? Ever see the craters of the Moon?
Ever wish you could find God, wherever
He’s supposed to be?
Did you ever know about killing, about death?
Did you know that one can be a prisoner within their mind, as they mark the slow beating of
death’s drum?
It announces the execution of his last few
moments in time.
You know – PTSDs or something like that.
Maybe it’s paranoia, schizophrenia, hallucinations –
the pain, OH, what a hellish pain!
Can you see it? Can you feel it burning?
If I keep the pain locked inside me I die,
but what will happen to the world if I let it go?

I have to make this choice you know!

There are battle zones and the war zones they
are fought in, then there are the wars
and the earth they are fought on.
And,
I still have to make that choice you know!
Guess What? I Let It Go! Did You Know?

Donald Beaulieu

I sit here in this lonely place I call home.
Do you remember when I asked you,
“I wonder where all this pain will flow to
when I have to let go?”
Well now I know.

The beers I do not drink still help,
but now it's an image to an idea.
It's an idea from my imaging, my mind –
which finds a thought where none used to be.
Perhaps it’s a nightmare or a dream.
It’s like trying to create something from the invisible.
I had to find all of it in order to let it go, you know!

I just did not know how. Did you?
Was it a secret or just the usual stupidity for me?
Like dramatic irony, did you see it coming on cue?
   But, as usual, not me!
Could you feel my pain?
Could you understand?
Did you know of death and pain?
   As usual, not bird in my hand, not me!
Do you know where God was all the time?

My soul is still MIA, but not so my mind,
   so I do really care. Do you?
   Was I the only one running?
I seemed all alone with my fear.
Did you see it too and not care?
I never noticed your hand reach out,
see a tear, or feel a hug. Only fear!
Did you reach out to me and I not see –
was I blinded in a spell’s binding?
I remember being spit on.  
Do you?  
I remember having cigarette butts flicked at me.  
Do you?  
I remember being called, “fuck’n baby killer,”  
Do you?  
But, I didn’t do it! Do you care?  
Was it you, If not, then who?  
Am I just a scapegoat to be ridiculed?  

Are you wondering what happened when I let “it” go?  
When I let the pain, the agony, the anger,  
and the forever stream of tears  
that trickled down my cheeks - - go?  
How come you never noticed?  
How come it had to be me?  
How is it God had forsaken me?  
How come I lived and so many did not?  
How come I had to create collateral damage and not you?  

You, that drove drunk and killed my baby boy.  
You, who misdiagnosed and my aunt died?  
You, who could not be bothered to do your job and my mother passed into God’s light.  
Guess what – my dad cried when he had to live alone.  
It’s called a broken heart.  

And you, Miss Driver who just “flipped me off” –  
what gives you the right?  
I did my job as best I knew how.  
I did not “flip anyone off”; I kept my wits about me;  
made no mistakes, mine were built in,  
they call it war.
AND HERE IN lays the rub, the real irony, the paradox.
I was defending you and your rights.
Yeah, I’m the one who helped you stay free
so you could drive drunk, so you could kill a child,
so you could “flip me off;”
so you could spit on me"
so you could use me to flick your butts at;
so you can be lazy at one of the most important
professions on this earth and be a lousy doctor.
What about you dear teacher who said,
“I could never be more than marginally functioning?”
She was nun.

BUT, through it all: ——— Thanks,
dear people, for giving me the chance to serve you.
Thank you, God, for allowing me to live
so I could teach your children and theirs
with all I had, day after day,
Thank you for allowing me to stay in
the country that I fought for.
I gave you back an architect,
A director of operations,
A world class designer,
A genetic engineer,
An FBI agent,
Anastasia – who plays in heaven
And oh, yeah –
God gave you back me.

YES, you are correct, I’m an angry
man filled with pain and agony.
BUT,
that was a second ago, now –
I let “it” go!

I’m free now, I let “it” go, but you did not
make it easy for me.
How come you know and wouldn’t tell me?
Here is the best of it my friends, my readers,
my sons, my daughters,
my students, my associates, and all the universes –
When I let it go, my dear earthly friends, it
became a Blue Morphos butterfly.
Is there anything as beautifully or as intricately designed as the sparkling powder of a butterfly’s wings, or the powerful, metamorphoses and the spirit of gossamer wings?
No, there is not!
Lady Autumn

Alex Meidunas
Cape May Morning  Deb Morrissey

Winter Storm  Beverly Wood
Sunbeams  Vanessa Simmons

Harbingers of Spring  Deb Lovett
Study of Cloth Draped Over Chair

Garlic

Abby Cessna
Benjamin Ludwig
Edified

Benjamin Ludwig

I had plans for that coming Friday night. I heard the news as I was coming up on mile seven on the treadmill at the base gym Wednesday evening. I never was the kind of person who enjoyed any sort of cold weather; the temperature outside that night was unbearable. It was here that I saw the bad news scroll across the bottom of the CNN screen. It had been a particularly bloody week for the boys and girls fighting terrorism overseas. It was going on two years since the war had started that fateful March in 2003, and as I looked up at the screen in front of my treadmill, I saw the ticker at the bottom announce additional casualties. For most, this is tragic news to read about, but some moments later it fades out of mind. For me, it meant my weekend would be spent on the flight line performing the distinguished transfers of all the human remains coming home for their last time, via the Dover Port Mortuary. It was the first week of my bimonthly honor guard rotation and one that I would never forget.

I had found myself on the Honor Guard team in somewhat odd circumstances. In my early twenties, I spent a lot of my free time being very unconstructive. I have a tendency to pour everything I have into whatever it is I find occupying my time, good or bad. After a while, I found myself in the unfavorable gaze of my First Sergeant. The man knew exactly how to ‘rehabilitate’ a ‘well enough liked’ airman who still had potential. My ‘rehabilitation’ involved numerous avenues of motivation accentuated by a 30-day stint in a military correctional custody program that closely resembled Hell. After the 30 days, I returned to Dover, where I was strongly encouraged to participate in the base honor guard. The honor guard usually attracted the kind of person I found irritating, brown-nosers and the like, so I was not too thrilled with having to be in their company during my rotations once every six weeks. I had no inclination as to what I would experience; I was very naive.

I drove on base around midnight, showed my I.D. at the gate and parked my car in front of the Honor Guard building. By no means was I tired. I was a night person by nature and, no matter what, found myself more alert and awake at night than in the morning. On this particular night, I was somewhat upset. The unofficial count on the inbound 747’s manifest was 47 human remains. This alone was upsetting on a couple of levels. It was tremendously gut wrenching to read the individual I.D. tags on the side of the transfer cases and see birth dates of 1982, 1983, 84, 85, and so on; kids younger than I. In addition, the more flag-draped transfer cases you see on an aircraft, the more the reality of what is taking place hits your stomach like a wrecking ball, 47 is a lot to take in. Lastly, after having seen so many of the fallen return home, the whole process becomes a routine and you lose grasp of the cold reality of the situation and what is taking place. At the same time, it’s this very state of mind that enables us to do what we do on a routine basis.

Until that night, the most transfer cases I had ever handled in a single ceremony were 27 on a summer evening, and it took two and a half hours of standing on the flight line to finish. This may not sound like an arduous task, but standing still at the position of attention for even 15 minutes is not easy. The reason for my indignant mood was that, on top of all the
tragic realities of the job at hand and my selfish want to spend a Friday night full of debauchery and foolishness with my friends, the temperature outside was in the low, bitter single digits. The cold wind, sweeping off the northern Atlantic a few hundred meters from where we stood, was relentlessly forcing its way across the flight line like death coming to collect on any individual fool enough to be out in it at the moment.

As I walked into the small room crammed with wall lockers that took up most of the space, I looked at the uniform I was going to wear that night. Pulling out my pants and blouse, I started ironing each garment again for the millionth time, all the while thinking of the menacing cold that awaited us outside. Now, it is standard policy to never ever wash your honor guard BDU uniform because you would rid it of the five bottles of concentrated starch that had long since turned every fiber into a material similar to paper. Instead, you just ironed out all the wrinkles and sweat and made it flat again. The overall effect, however, was impressive; the creases in the sleeves and pants were sharp, crisp, and, when put together, looked very imposing. My head was devoid of any hair, which meant my body warmth would escape much easier. Finally, due to budget cuts, I had not received the black Lycra thermal tops and bottoms that were worn under our uniforms. So, I wore a T-shirt with my paper-thin blouse on top, along with my paper-thin pants, boots with a nylon mesh body, my Gore-Tex jacket and a pair of white cotton gloves that would provide no warmth. I did a quick search around the locker room, seeing if I could borrow somebody else’s gear, but to no avail.

When we were all dressed, we fell-in in the drill room to go over the various commands and movements we would be using for the ceremony. This was basically an exercise in ‘too many chiefs, not enough Indians’; it entailed a lot of repetition, carrying a casket around in circles while people complained someone else wasn’t doing it right, wasn’t in step or had forgotten to wear deodorant, again. I was savoring the sweaty warmth I was working up, not thinking of how that would feel in a couple of minutes when we fell-out outside to march to the pax (passenger) terminal. Upon stepping out into the night air, I was abruptly and cruelly slapped in the face by the coldest blast of wind I had ever felt in my short life. As we started marching at ease, I turned to the guy next to me and said “This is going to hurt man,” ”No shit,” he grumbled. I guess he didn’t have thermal underwear on either.

We came up to the door of terminal ‘A’, halted, did an about-face and fell out into the room with a sense of urgency. The Marine Honor Guard was punctual as usual and off in its own little group. The Navy Honor Guard came in a few moments after us and piled into the seats on the opposite end of the room from where we sat. Finally, the Army guard came shuffling in, followed by the General. Having all four guard teams present, with the addition of all the VIP’s, officers, and various enlisted ranks, made the big room feel congested and loud. When the Major called the room to attention for the General, the effect of sudden and absolute silence was a stark contrast and quite impressive. At the front and center of the room, the Major gave a more detailed and thorough briefing than she usually gave. I listened attentively for a few moments, but my attention was quickly lost. A shiver ran down the back of my spine as I stared out of a nearby window at the night.
There was going to be a family witnessing its son come off the plane. This was a rare occasion. Having family there was hard to take in. I was glad that I wouldn’t have to see them off to the side as we moved case after case forward, but you couldn’t escape the sounds of their heart aching anguish. The sound of a mother’s or widow’s sorrow made me feel like the wind had been knocked out of me. We all got up again for the General and followed him out for the ceremony, each of us savoring the last bit of warmth we were going to feel for quite some time.

The 747 normally parked facing north on the ramp, and this night was no exception. The orange glow of the ramp lights washed over everything and contributed an additional level of melancholy. The aircraft’s auxiliary power unit was running. The roar of the small engine drowned out the noise of the maintenance activities that never ceased. The whole ceremony required the use of five very different kinds of vehicles. First and foremost was the 747 herself. On the left side of the fuselage, just behind the wing, was a cargo door that opened out and up, leaving an opening 15’ by 15’. The second vehicle used was nicknamed a ‘K-loader’, which is basically a big rectangular platform mounted on a very powerful hydraulic scissor lift that can drive to and from the freight docks and airplanes and can be raised to any level. On the ground, 100’ from the aircraft’s cargo door, were two big utility trucks parked perpendicular to the plane and backwards. In the gap created between the backs of the trucks and the end of the K-loader mated to the aircraft, the ground teams stood in position facing inward, making a corridor of servicemen for the movement of the transfer cases. The enclosed back compartments of the modified ‘hearses’ were able to carry six transfer cases from the flight line to the port mortuary led by the fifth vehicle, a security forces escort car.

The guards fell-in in their respective spots right outside the terminal. We were reluctant to leave, and as before, I was met by the savage assault of the brutal and unforgiving cold. The Army always marched out first followed closely by the Navy, Marines, and the Air Force always brought up the rear. This always resulted in an odd performance of our march out because the Army guard marched off at a good clip, while the Marines in front of us, not compromising their tradition, marched slowly and methodically, a march that was indeed stately but slow. So inevitably, the four groups separated and a gap grew in between our formation. As the first three teams veered off to their respective places in between the K-loader and the hearse trucks, the Air Force team proceeded to the stair truck leading up to the forward door of the massive 747.

In single file, we went up the stairs to fall in on the first transfer case of the night. I cannot begin to explain what it was like to come through the door of the plane and see 50 bodies, 50 flags covering the boys and girls you see every day on the news. The distinct smell of death was in the cabin air, making the entire cargo hold feel like a coffin itself. I marched down the side of the cargo compartment, glancing at the numerous cases with human remains, and fell in on the first transfer case at the opening on the side of the plane with the K-loader in place. It was an eight man/woman team, four on each side. Every fiber of my being shouted out at once in a tumultuous voice in my head, “God, I do not want to be here!” By the time we started to move the first case, I had lost feeling in my fingers, toes and face.
After the chaplain had finished his prayer, we carried the first case all the way out to the end of the K-loader. We then placed it down and slid it forward so the teams on the ground could pull it off and carry it from the K-loader to the trucks, once the platform was lowered with the first ten cases. At any point in time, when any transfer case is being moved during the ceremony, everyone salutes. The General, flanked by the Admiral, Air Force Colonel and Marine Colonel, called ‘present arms’ for everybody. It took my team half an hour to move the first 10 cases into two tight and uncomfortable rows straight down the center of the K-loader platform. We subsequently rode the platform down to ground level at ease, with our hands crossed in front of ourselves. Once it had come to a stop we snapped back to attention and waited for the first two teams to come up and move the first two cases. One by one, the teams carried the bodies over the flight line tarmac to the trucks, passing through a cordon of uniforms and salutes from fellow servicemen and women, welcoming them home for the last time.

The wind felt like sandpaper as it whipped by my face and my vision started to blur again as soon as I blinked away the water running out of my eyes from just a moment ago. The back doors of the hearse trucks were shut with 10 cases in each. As the remains were driven off, the ground teams marched behind and then veered off toward the warm inviting glow of the terminal. My team remained on the airplane, awaiting the return of the trucks and other teams. It had been over an hour since we had started, and only ten transfer cases had been moved.

We did this four more times. I could do nothing but stand erect and motionless with my gaze fixed straight ahead, ignoring my own thoughts of angry protest to the weather. It takes a lot of discipline to bear something so painful for so long, but I’d had a lot of training in pushing my threshold for pain for the sake of the mission at hand. We all had. I was glad it was dark; I was shaking uncontrollably underneath my ‘non-insulated’ jacket, but somehow, I was able to keep my composure. I tried to hunch my shoulders up so I could cover my mouth, ears and nose with the top of my jacket, but this made no difference, and after an hour, I gave up and let the snot and tears go. Gradually the numbness spread over me, making me feel the harsh cold less and less.

Each time I picked up a transfer case, I was filled with an immense sense of gratitude that I was able to move again, not that I could feel the handles of the cases, or the 500 lbs. of ice, human remains and whatever else was on the individual when he died. It was exceptionally heartbreaking to bend down and pick up a transfer case that weighed less than 200 lbs. It was a grim reminder of the fact that sometimes only a small part of you comes home, and the rest is lost in some Godforsaken war.

As I watched the last transfer case slide into the back of the truck, I couldn’t feel anything except the burning sensation that being too cold for too long will give you. The commands that were being shouted out over the noise of other airplanes, engines and power units up and down the flight line had become inaudible and distant. As the ceremony went along, I forgot about what I had wanted to do that night. As though through trial by fire, I had been
contemplated what it must be like inside the flag-draped cases. It was a cold and dark place death inhabited, much like the ramp was that night.

All the teams including the official party of VIP’s and bystanders followed the final truck until passed by the terminal. As we marched up to what looked like the ethereal glow of some paradise, I took another look at the flight line and the stoic stance of the 747 on which we had just been. The orange glow of the night floodlights made the whole ramp seem surreal. It was in that moment I came to realize how beautiful life is and how fragile it can be. It was a realization of exactly how each and every one of us out there that night was truly blessed to be there, in that place and time, to honor the tremendous self-sacrifice others had made for the multitudes who would never fully realize what was given them and the cost of it. As I stepped over the threshold into the terminal, the water streaming across my face was no longer a result of the icy winds.

My honor guard team marched back to our little building a few blocks away in silence. We were all too tired and frozen to do much else but shuffle along the street in step. I changed back into my civilian clothes slowly as my fingers were still adjusting to the warm. The chatter that had been so prevalent earlier that night was no longer there. After our briefing about the human remains coming in the very next night, we all went home. I got in my car and lit a cigarette while I let the engine warm up. My apartment would no doubt have my roommate and our four close friends still up, drinking and carrying on, but that was the last thing I cared about. There wasn’t anything particular on my mind as I drove home; I was in one of those states where you stare off into space with that blankness in your mind that brings a kind of peace which lets you feel, not know, that it’s good to be alive. In turn, this makes you completely content with yourself, your life, the world around you, and the position you’ve been given in it.

Much of a person’s life is dictated by the circumstances one is given and how he/she reacts to them. We either learn and prevail, or spurn and fail. From January of 2004 until April of 2006, when I left Dover AFB for Lajes Field in the Azores to finish out my 6-year enlistment, I performed hundreds of flight line ceremonies and carried more than a thousand of our men and women who had made the ultimate sacrifice. I have buried hundreds of retired vets from WWII and beyond. I’ve had the honor of presenting the colors in five different states and meeting a number of high ranking individuals. Admitably, I wasn’t very happy when my plans were so consistently ruined by short-notice details. I missed being able to drive to see my girlfriend in another state, going to all the parties my roommate attended, missing dates with beautiful girls, snowboarding trips, beach vacations and so on. Nevertheless, the memories of all the ceremonies in which I participated and all the honors bestowed therein infinitely outweigh the trivial things I thought were so important. Words cannot begin to describe how thankful I am for the opportunity I had to be part of a hero’s last journey home, the honor of presenting a folded flag to weeping family members who had just lost their reason for living, or being able to stand at attention in my full ceremonial service dress and salute the colors of a nation worthy of the sacrifice given as the national anthem plays.

I still have my honor guard uniforms, and to this day, I will from time to time pull them out of the closet. And I remember.
We lay there, my friend and I on the hill above the playground, relaxing. We can still hear the squeals and laughter of the other children playing as we lay on the soft cushion of grass. It envelopes us like a warm cotton blanket, massaging our souls.

We often come here to look up at the sky and tell each other the story of the clouds. They carry us away on magic carpets and dance like bears in a circus. The clouds give us peace and engage our minds in thoughts of fantasy. It takes us from school and home and all the bad things we’ve known.

Nothing can reach us here at the top of this hill, except clouds dancing and changing and comforting us.
Old Smokey and the Foal

Beverly Wood

Living on the Taylor family farm, we always had relatives dropping in to visit and see the animals, even in the dead cold of winter. Being an animal lover, I was always excited to show the animals off, especially the babies. The year I was turning 10 was no exception. As sure as the sun rose and set, Christmas came, the relatives came, and there was a young foal in the big pasture to show off.

Uncle Herbert and Cousin Debbie dropped by to visit and she wanted to see the young foal. Being city folks, they never showed up with the right clothing. Debbie and I were about the same size and we were the same age. We had become close over the years and I was happy to share my clothes so we could play and have fun. So on this day, as we were getting ready to go out into the frigid cold of a prairie day, she was putting on my boots, coat, scarf, and mittens. I slipped into a pair of my brother’s boots which were a little big, but they would be warm. We were bundled up, ready to go when Mom said, “Be sure to take the dog with you in case Old Smokey gets protective.”

Old Smokey was a beautiful black mare. In the winter, her shiny black summer coat was replaced by a thick dull brown winter coat. She looked scruffy, which fit her personality quite well. When she had a baby, she became an extremely protective mother. When her ears went back, you knew you had best have some sort of escape plan ready. That is why Mom’s instruction of “take the dog with you” was taken seriously.

Debbie, myself, and Snuff my dog set out on our trek. That day, the horses were at the far end of the pasture. This meant about a half-mile walk. We were fine with that, being bundled up and warm. The day was a beautiful sunny day, just damn cold. It had snowed a few days earlier and with the sunshine, there was a hard crust on the snow. As we walked, we crunched through the hard crust into the fine powdery snow, about a foot of it in places. Being young, not having seen one another for a while and with the anticipation of seeing the foal, we didn’t care. We were laughing and talking as we walked across the wide open field. Snuff followed along behind us in our tracks.

Finally, we could see the horses, and there was the foal standing very close to Old Smokey. Their heads were down eating. They would break through the snow and eat the stubble left from the oat crop that had been harvested. We knew they had seen us as their heads popped up one by one. They were curious about us, you see. For them, seeing a human being in the pasture at anytime of year generally meant they would get fed or put to work.

It was at about this time I told Debbie that we needed to stop to see what the horses would do and to watch Old Smokey’s ears. If they thought work was involved they would be gone and if Old Smokey thought we were a danger, well that wasn’t even pleasant to think about. I think I was in that thought process when all of a sudden I saw Old Smokey turn and her ears went back. She started to stomp our way, her front feet striking high and her breath blowing in the winter air. I remember turning to Debbie and telling her to start to walk away. We needed to get going and fast because I knew the further the distance between Old Smokey
and us, the less threat we were. For some reason, this day that was not the case. Old Smokey was in a mood of moods. She came at us in a full gallop, ears back, front legs striking and nostrils flared. “Run Debbie, run!” I screamed. “Run for the fence.” She took off like a sprinter and I was right behind her. It was hard running in the boots I had on as they were a little big.

As my foot crunched through the snow and I went for the next step, my foot came out of my boot without the sock on it. It hit the freezing, hard snow and I knew at that moment I was in trouble. Then the other foot came out of the boot, but with the sock still on. I was literally so frightened I ran out of my boots! Even Snuff new the best thing to do was run. Old Smokey was closing in on us. I was cutting a new path through the hard crusty snow with no boots for protection. I knew this was not good and Old Smokey was not giving us any breaks. The fences seemed to be miles away. I finally just stopped. I was out of breath, my feet were being cut, they were cold, and I knew I needed those boots to get home. Old Smokey stopped too! She stood there stomping her feet and snorting, letting me know I had crossed the line with her.

I hollered to Debbie, who had also stopped running. I told her to run home and get Mom, that I had no boots on and that I was going to see if I could get them. I knew once Debbie made it home it wouldn’t be long before Mom would come for me. Old Smokey stood between me and my boots. She was not about to let me go back for them. I took off my mitten and put it on my foot to try keeping some warmth there and wrapped my scarf around my feet for more warmth. It wasn’t helping too much, everything was damp and cold. Snuff the dog cuddled up on my feet, she had stayed with me. It wouldn’t be long and Mom would be here, I thought.

I really don’t know how long I sat there, but I knew from the position of the sun it had been a while. My feet were numb and the rest of me was getting very cold. I couldn’t figure out why Mom hadn’t come for me.

I knew I needed to get home. I started to crawl. I tried to walk a few times, but that didn’t work so well. My feet had gone beyond numb, they felt like they weren’t there. I could see the house in the distance, the smoke curling up from the chimney. I knew how warm the house would be. Mom would have the stove stoked up and ready to cook supper. Then I saw this dark spot which appeared to move and it was moving quite fast. It was coming towards me; it was Mom at a full run. I was safe!

I never saw Debbie after that, not that I wanted too. But I never got the chance to ask her why she didn’t say anything and just left me out there. That one afternoon changed our relationship forever. As for Old Smokey, I came home from school one spring day and she was gone. I had come close to losing a few toes, but that thought didn’t last as long as the question of why Debbie hadn’t told anyone where I was and the memory of the look on my mother’s face.
The Rose and the Revolver

Justin Peiffer

Author’s note: In this poem, Love (the rose) converses with War (the revolver) sequenced in a call and response format, beginning with the rose.

All is fair in love and war!

Then I shall pillage thy heart, De Amor!

Down lay thy palisade of thirty knives!

Thy tongue hath intruded upon the honey of the hive!

Of what lies sweet within thy bitterness of war?

Bittersweet are thy spoils – thy spoils of whore!

Sheath thy serrated tongue lest wounding thy child!

Botanical queen have you not conceived thy wretch defiled?

Holster such volatility within the sores of my womb.

Amidst the arsenal in the amnion shall I build you your tomb?

Postpone thy burial so that death may dine with loneliness tonight!

Ah, a cold shoulder to the reaper, my fellow horseman of the night!

Best hath be thy man, a corpse marauder to bereave us of our first breath!

Whilst the matron of dishonor spread her sincere lie like ivy within the ear of death.
Object to the Ragnarok, our reception in hell!

I *do*, *doth speak the mutiny of the maggots so well.*

Here cometh thy Wedding Hearse, ushered by terminus and matrimony!

My bride, hath you not spoken with a Pistil in your throat of our monochromatic ceremony?

One of such graceful production rather than genocide and destruction!

Thy harlot’s radical appendage be thy warmth’s eviscerated abduction!

‘tis the day to divorce thee with a dagger, with blood of black and tears as white as cake!

Thus upon thy brimstone pillow should you lay the martyr of the incompetent man’s futile sake.
True Love

Emalee Baldwin

Waking up in your arms,
Makes me feel so loved and secure.
Even though these days are numbered,
When we’re together, it shows no bonds.

We laugh, we smile,
We kiss, we hug.
We wrestle, we tickle,
We hang, we talk.

We live in the moment,
For we know it will come to an end.
But even when it does,
We look forward to our future moments.
Fifteen Seconds of Fame

Teirany Hutter

In a time when Hello Kitty lunchboxes were the tickets to popularity, your teachers were qualified to teach every subject, you played hop-scotch during recess, and girls finally figured out that boys really don’t have cooties, I made history.

At nine years old, I sat on the bench in Lancaster Catholic School’s gym and was overwhelmed by the intimidation I felt. Not only by the arena that seemed double the size of the gym to which I was accustomed, but the players that it housed, who towered over me in a manner that made me feel like a duck in a forest. I sat in my cheap mesh blue and white uniform, taking in everything around me as I anticipated the coach’s call.

The fading scent of cleaning supplies lurked beneath the bold flavor of the hot dogs being served at the concession stand that was diffusing through the air around me. Beside me sat girls my own age, who were struggling with puberty and newly discovered sweat glands. I could taste the aroma surrounding the bench; layers of the Caribbean Cool Teen Spirit deodorant layered underneath each young woman’s armpits, the musty smell of each player’s uniform and sweat being absorbed into the socks of us young ones.

The hum of the time-out buzzer startled me and brought my attention back to the game as my coach called my name. He loomed over me with anxious eyes, hair so speckled with gray that it looked as if he were wearing a chinchilla as a toupee and a wave so belligerent that I thought he was going to knock someone over. Escaping the rancid aftertaste of sauerkraut that lingered in his breath, I took my place on the court and waited to be given the ball.

My tired teammate stood next to the referee on the sideline, earnestly waiting for him to hand her the ball, granting her permission to throw it in-bounds to me and continue the game. Exhaustion was etched into her expression as she received the worn-out ball and aggressively passed it to me. Upon my hand touching the ball, I suddenly gained a burst of energy and began my journey down the glossy court and toward my goal. Adrenaline soaked the atmosphere as I found rhythm with the pushing and retraction of the ball to and from my open and eager palm. Allowing the echo of the ball to embrace my spirit and lift me to a place where I could look my opponents in the eye, my speed increased as I reached my first obstacle.

Standing, in reality, about four feet and ten inches off the floor, I came face-to-jersey number with my enemy at half court. Trying to look out around her broad body and exaggerated height, I sought out a familiar voice – a rehearsed call for the ball. Without finding a single player with outstretched arms, I paced myself as I dribbled across the top of the key, my foe never leaving my side. With a quick step to the right, I saw a sign.

The industrial overhead lights beat down on the court and set a piercing glare toward every spectator and player’s eyes. The friction of my continuously and rapidly pushing the ball down and letting it rise to meet my hand made my palm sweat, triggering a nervous reaction. Eyes darting from cantankerous and pushy coaches to players who were desperately trying to break free from the bond that their defenders held them in, I saw my spot. The middle lane was wide open, due to the motion of the participants trying so hard to be open on the
wings of the court. Determined and anchored in this choice, I pushed headstrong past my cap-
tor and drove the rubber ball, covered in soft leather, down the clearing.

Just as Moses had walked through the towering ocean walls, I tore down the path laid
out before me and lunged at the bold and inviting red metal hoop. With pressure building in-
side of me, so great that it was like a soda shaken to the point of explosion, I nearly lost my
nerve. Pushing with all my might and hurling myself in the direction of the net, I seemed to
levitate as the crowd suddenly tensed. I thrust the worn, leather covered ball towards the
small box, centered and marked, on the glass backboard. My feet slammed on to the hard-
wood floor just as I looked up to see the ball take a single bounce off the back of the rim and
fall through the clean woven net.

Overcome with shock, I staggered backwards and frantically searched the premises for
the referee. “I just made a lay-up down the middle of the lane! How could I do that? Lay-ups
are from the side, you moron!” I screamed inside my pounding head. But as the girls clad gal-
lantly in purple and gold began to take the ball up from outside of the court, I realized that no
slick-with-saliva whistle was going to blow for my basket; it was good. I glanced up just in
time to see the numerical value on the fulsome scoreboard change in favor of my team as the
quarter ended.

Gathering at the sideline in front of the bench, my team gave me high-fives and the
coach gave his pep talk for the next round. I expected the MVP award right then and there for
my valiant effort, but was disappointed as coach asked me to be seated. I gave him the dirtiest
look a fourth grade student could without sinning and took my place. “Now if our smallest
player isn’t afraid to drive to the basket like that, then you girls have no excuse not to,” urged
the coach, embellished gestures and all. Scooting down in my barely cushioned metal seat, I
stretched out my legs like a professional know-it-all and sipped from the cheap plastic bottle
that allowed more water to collect on its exterior than interior.

Most people talk about having their fifteen minutes of fame. I hardly came close to that
amount of time, but I didn’t care what anyone thought or how much recognition I received
beyond that point. In my mind, I won that game.
Nature’s Own Beauty

Sophea Sam

Beauty in nature is often difficult to find. Without looking past the exterior, man is most blind. The buildings, the cars and all in between. They call and consume, blocking the scene. Not even the light can penetrate the mass and watch as the trees are becoming more scarce. But wait and just watch and look for the hidden, or close just for a moment your eyes and just listen; feel the quiet whisper of the wind in your hair, smell the morning dew in the moist salty air, sing with the birds as they once more take flight, capture the sun and steal away the light. Let the skies wrap around you and take it all in. Race with the butterflies and wait as they go, watch the buds grow into evergreen trees, gracefully catch the light drifting leaves. And as your eyelashes catch the soft falling rain, remember that hidden in nature the beauty remains.
An Adventure in the Military

Vickie L. Soule

On this cold winter’s morning of November 22, 1976, a young man of 19 years headed to the Harrisburg bus station to start his military adventure. He then had to board another bus to Philadelphia. This stop led him to board his first plane ride to Missouri, also known as the “Show me” state. Howard had joined the Army with a buddy of his, Bob, a tall man with blond hair from Harrisburg.

The young men arrived at the St. Louis airport in what they called a comfortable, up-to-date airplane. Howard looked outside the window at the airport, and saw a DC3 prop plan that looked like a WWII era left-over soon destined to be scrap metal. He innocently said to Bob, “Wouldn’t that be funny if we had to fly in that to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri!” “Fort lost in the woods, state of Misery.” As it turned out, they did have to fly in that plane, not a Jet Blue Boeing or an Airbus 320.

When the young men arrived at Fort Leonard Wood in a drab brown bus, a big, burly, black drill sergeant started to scream at the young men, “Get off my bus! You’re not moving fast enough. You better get off my bus when I tell you the first time.” Shittin’ and gittin’. He continued to yell until the last of the young men hustled off the bus.

An eight day orientation took place for the young soldiers. As Harold recalled, “you are only called a soldier when in the Army.” Orientation consisted of paperwork, several immunizations with an air gun, a hair cut, and the uniform.

After the pleasantries were over, the soldiers lined up to receive their sleeping arrangements and notice of which building they would be staying in. Howard went on to describe the buildings and bunks as well as the red brick building that were new and up-to-date. Each room bunked four soldiers on single steel beds with a spring mattress. This model of comfort was home for the soldiers during the next eight weeks.

Many stories circulate about the dreaded weeks in boot camp. For example: the early morning of getting out of bed and having to do drills, and missing a home-cooked meal along with family and friends. Seemingly disgusted by his boot camp experience, Howard describes the fire guard that woke them at 5:00 A.M by slamming or banging trash can lids in their ears. “By 6:00 A.M., we were outside in the cold with no shirts on doing a two mile run. We came back to the chow hall and had our breakfast. This was every morning. We continued our day with climbing into a cattle car just like a cow and headed out to the firing range, where we finally got our rifles, M16’s. We had a twelve mile ride in this cattle car to the firing range. When we arrived at the range, we fired our M16’s, 30-caliber machine guns, 50-caliber machine guns, M203’s (a combination of the M16 and a grenade launcher), a law rocket (a light anti-tank system), hand grenades, and then claymore mines.” After the day was done at the range, they had to march twelve miles back in the cold, deep snow with their rifles. Twelve miles at 3 mph is a 4 hour march, not fun at all.

Howard remembers that one of the soldiers fell out of line due to fatigue. As his punishment for his weakness, he had to do push-ups in the cold, wet snow and was ordered to get
back in line to finish the march back to the barracks. He also describes another experience when “there was a time in our schedule that we had to do a gas mask drill. CWT (chemical warfare training): what we had to do was go into a cinder block building where tear gas was thrown into the room. You had your mask on for a short period of time and then you were told to take the mask off, with the tear gas still in the room. This lasted for about 20 seconds which felt like minutes. With the mask off, you couldn’t breathe. Your eyes watered and burned, you had a runny nose and you felt like your lungs were on fire. It was a very unpleasant feeling.”

The training was designed to show the soldiers that the mask does work when it is on. “When the door opened to get out, we ran to get the smell off our clothing, coughing, and trying to catch our breath.” Howard describes this situation as if it were yesterday, not one that he experienced years ago. He spoke of the smell of menthol and eucalyptus. He ends by saying, “Our day was done at 6:00 P.M. Then it was time to study, shine our boots for the next day, write or call home, and do our laundry.”

“In the military we ate but three meals a day, breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Two of the meals were held in the chow hall where it was pleasant, and all military personnel ate. But our lunches were outside in the cold field, where we would stand and eat the meal immediately, because the lunch chilled quickly.” Howard never got enough to eat, so he would venture down to the PX, a small convenience store. He would grab some burgers, snacks, and a magazine. “We were not allowed to do this or have these extras while in boot camp. The stipulation was that if you got caught with any of these items, everyone had to suffer. Howard recalls a time when he was stopped by a sergeant who asked him, “Where have you been soldier?”

“The chow hall, Sir.”

“If I check your pockets, will I find any snacks or magazines?”

“No, Sir.”

The truth was that he did have snacks and a magazine. A few of them took their chances with living on the edge.

On weekends they earned some free time. But whatever they did, they were restricted to the base at all times. “Like a prisoner? If we went off base and got caught, we were in some immense trouble depending on what we did. The consequences varied—you could get prison time, lose your rank, or be fined an article 15 (a fine which was taken out of your pay.) When you got paid in the military at that time, it was in cash, not like today where it is deposited directly into your bank account.”

At the end of eight weeks the recruits graduated from boot camp. They had a ceremony, and a good number of families traveled to take part in the celebration of the accomplishments of these young men and women. Howard graduated with an expert ribbon in rifle and grenade, which was a solid accomplishment for him!

Howard then proceeded to electrical school in Fort Leonard Wood for a thirteen week training course which he paid for himself and finished in seven weeks. He then returned home to Harrisburg. After completing his basic and individual training, he started serving in the Army Reserve. He acquired a job at the Hershey Creamery for one year before starting a job in his field of electrical work.

He served in the Army Reserves for nine years. Things started to change for him, and
not for the better. Five years into his service, he was changed from civil engineer to combat engineer—and in his words “became a ditch digger.” They eliminated the electrical skills part of the job because they were no longer needed in the missions worldwide. Annual training was changed from three days in the fields to fourteen days at Fort Indiantown Gap. These were only a few of the decisions which had been made that caused him to join the Air National Guard.

In the Air National Guard Howard served with the 193rd Special Operations Wing. Their mission is conducting psychological warfare. In the 193rd, he was a supervisor for the electrical shop. He also received his Associates Degree in applied science, mechanical, and electrical technology.

In 2004 Howard was all but one day from being deployed to Iraq. Orders came telling him that he did not have to go because of a situation with a military family. A young couple with young children were both serving in the military and had no relatives who could take care of the children. The government offered to allow the wife to leave the military while the husband went to Iraq in Howard’s place. You would think that this would have been a relief to the airman, but in truth he was upset because all his buddies were going and he had to stay behind. To this day Howard still feels that his fellow airmen look at him differently. When they came home, Howard went to the airport to welcome them home and heard their stories from Iraq. The squadron brought back an American flag that they flew over camp and gave it to Howard to let him know that they thought of him even though he wasn’t able to be with them. To this day, he keeps in touch with his buddies who went to Iraq.

Howard served in the 193rd for twenty-one years, enjoying this time with the airmen and traveling extensively—to Germany, England, Bolivia, Puerto Rico, Canada, Florida, California, and Louisiana—for the ATs (Annual Training) that he was required to do for two weeks each year.

He left the 193rd unit to take a full-time position with the 201st Red Horse unit at Fort Indiantown Gap, teaching EALS—electrical airfield lighting and electrical distribution equipment, specifically generators, high voltage switch gear, and step-down transformers.

Howard is pursuing a bachelors’ degree to attain a better job in the military and to progress in his career.
Free Ride

Theresa M. Hagens

From a mother’s perspective, I believe children should be presented with the ultimatum of flunking, in order for them to succeed with their education. Life is full of decisions we must make, and each choice has a consequence. Outcomes may differ, but the decisions we make determine how one’s life will evolve. I concur with Mary Sherry in her article, “In Praise of the F Word,” which was published in Newsweek.

A philosophy I have always enforced with my children is “You don’t truly win when you cheat.” Whether it is a game or a test, when you cheat you don’t win. Likewise, in the Olympics there was a big hoopla when numerous athletes were found to have been using steroids to enhance their performance. They were cheating. The International Olympic Committee developed the World Anti-Doping Agency in 1999 to stop drug use worldwide in international sports. Dishonesty does not help you win!

I graduated from Palmyra High School in 1984. For many years I did not take my education seriously. As a teenage student my view was all about having fun and not taking academics seriously until my science teacher confronted me. She said, “If you don’t get this project in, I am flunking you.” It woke me up.

Mary Sherry is quoted as saying, “Young people generally don’t have the maturity to value education in the same way many adult students value it.” In my personal experiences, I have come to value a high-quality education. This is because, at this stage of my life, I realize the some of my past choices have not been the best, but through the decisions I made I have gained wisdom. My choices not only affect me, but also my children and society as a whole. The knowledge of possibly flunking gave me the perseverance to succeed. Because school-aged children have not yet experienced many life events, they have not yet obtained the maturity and wisdom necessary to succeed.

On the website <teachers.mindsay.com> an unidentified author describes a principal in a California school who urged teachers to pass failing students in order to meet the federal requirements under “the No Child Left Behind” law. The principal’s reasoning was based on attempting to follow the law. I suppose he was concerned about the implications and possibility of losing his school and job.

Similarly, an anonymous blog posting that appeared on the same website was written about a Philadelphia school. These teachers were also urged to pass failing students. The students were failing because they neglected to do any work and were fighting with other students and teachers, often leading to police intervention. Based upon these circumstances and out of desperation, the school felt the need to pass them in order to get rid of them. Would anyone what to be a teacher confronted with situations like this? It gives us all something to think about.

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In conclusion, I believe when you give children a “get out of jail free” card, they will run with it! Children are geared this way and it is society’s responsibility to say “no” when needed. This needs to be done so they can understand that their choices and level of perseverance have either a negative or positive effect. Finally, I believe that advising children that they will fail can give them the determination necessary to succeed.
The Path

Latasha R. Allie

Follow your own path
So that you pave the way
Steady, for the night comes quick
And the day is far away
Do not follow your heart
For it could lead you astray
Doing what is right
Does not involve the heart anyway
Dry those tears
Do not let them distract you
Be determined to finish
If anyone can do it, it is you
You are on your way
The path may get rough
Life has plenty of dismay
Though everyday is not a holiday
Every step is not so tough
What test we have today
Tomorrow brings us a better us
The hard times come and go
Steady just remain on the path
Fastnacht Frenzy

Deb Morrisey

Seven tons of flour, nearly three tons of sugar, 720 pounds of butter-flavored Crisco, 1000 gallons of milk, 1100 eggs, two commercial-sized mixers, seven fryers, and 100 volunteers. Whatever can they be up to?

What started over 75 years ago with a few German immigrant women has evolved into the largest fundraiser for St. Cecilia’s Catholic Church on Lehman Street in Lebanon, PA. During the course of three days, more than 100 volunteers will sift, pour, crack, scoop, cut, and fry their way through the mountains of ingredients to create the famous Fastnachts that people all over the mid-state will come to buy. Yes, this is a long-standing tradition, one in which many people still refer to the product as “St. Gertie’s donuts,” the previous name of St. Cecilia’s Parish. The sale has been described by David Mekeel of the Lebanon Daily News as “all-out fastnacht frenzy.” That is an accurate description, for when it is all said and done, over 80,000 donuts will be mixed, raised, fried, sugared, boxed, sold, and eaten.

Preparations for this fundraiser (that supplies the church with over $20,000 each year) starts with folding the 8000 boxes needed to pack donuts for sale. Three days are set aside just for this and the many volunteers make quick work of it. The first two days are spent putting together the white cardboard boxes that will hold a dozen. Each box must be folded, the tabs secured, and waxed paper placed in the bottom. The third day is devoted to doing the same with boxes that will hold a half-dozen. These boxes are stacked, floor to ceiling, several deep along all available walls of the social hall, creating the illusion of lay-layers of white brick walls. Many of the volunteers for this job are senior citizens, some as old as 90. For these faithful parishioners, this is the only job they can still help with. Next, volunteers must secure cardboard to the floor under the tables that will be used for cooling and sugaring the donuts. This area will be needed for stacking the completed orders until they can be picked up. The tops of the tables are lined with heavy brown paper and large screens made of chicken wire and wood. Plastic covers all the surfaces that need protection from flying flour, sugar, and grease.

The Thursday before, all available hands unload the trucks; it is delivery day and those tons of flour, sugar, eggs, oil, milk, and Crisco will need to be neatly stacked. Even though this job must be done during the workday, many volunteers come to lend their help. It is important to note that many of the people are retirees and some of this work is heavy lifting. About this time, there is another crew, again our faithful retired, preparing the food that will be available around the clock for the workers. A group of shoppers already secured from Foodland, our local grocery store, 50 pounds of ground beef, 21 pounds of hot dogs, 50 dozen buns, 52 two-liter bottles of soda, lemonade, coffee, and fixings for homemade beef vegetable and chicken noodle soup. Everyone will be working hard but they will also be well fed.

The public only gets a glimpse of all this action when they come by to pick their fastnachts. The process is carefully orchestrated to ensure the least amount of wait time. It is announced, in the church bulletin and other local media, that a specific date is designated for
anyone that wishes to order more than six dozen donuts. This year it was January 21st between
the hours of 9:00 am and 2:00 pm. Several women manned the phones and feverishly marked
the name, phone number, date, time, and number of dozen, half-dozen, sugared, and plain
that each caller requested. Anyone who is unable to get through or forgets to call will have a
chance to purchase their donuts at the door with a five dozen per person maximum.

As I have done for the past 13 years, I prepare to do my part in the fastnacht making.
There are three shifts that cover around the clock and the first starts at 11:00 pm Saturday
night. I go to bed at 10:00 and set my alarm for midnight. Surprisingly, I jump up feeling
ready to go. Like a doctor pulling an 18-hour shift, I leap into action after a two-hour cat-nap.
I pull on old sweatpants, an old t-shirt, sweatshirt, and fasten a bandana over my hair. All
heads must be covered so the men wear hats and most of the women wear hairnets. After the
first year, I wised up and decided a bandana was more comfortable, if not more fashionable.

As I drove the short distance from my house to the church, I noticed the frost forming
on the cars and buildings and it occurred to me that I would have to scrape my windows be-
fore returning home in the wee hours of the morning. I am spoiled by parking in my garage at
home. A full parking lot is a welcome sight, plenty of workers. I park and enter the west side
door, and as I walk down the short flight of stairs I can hear the soft hum of voices. I round
the corner and am greeted by the bright lights, the sound of the radio playing, and the many
familiar faces of the other volunteers that man the stations on the first night of donut making.
I spot my father-in-law standing in his usual place beside one of the fryers and stop to talk
with him awhile before making my way to the back room to hang up my coat. More hellos
and small talk as I make my way back. After hanging my coat, I proceed to the cashier and
place my order as is the “rule” for workers. If you place your order for up to five dozen when
you arrive, you must work a minimum of five hours to get five dozen. We do not receive the
donuts for free for working; we are able to buy up to five dozen during our shift. I guess you
could say “We can bake our cake and eat it too,” as long as we are also willing to pay. If we
had wanted more than five dozen, we must pre-order just like the public. I usually work two
nights so am able to take home donuts for several family members.

Things are just getting started so it is still a little quiet throughout the hall. The first
batches of raised dough have been plopped on to the floured tables where the 12 cutters will
use round cookie cutters to cut the dough and place it on plastic cutting boards. These boards
are then slid on to the dozen or so shelves of the carts that will be wheeled over to the fryers. I
walk back out as the fryers are going into action for the first time this evening. The designated
“fryers” each take a tray of dough; and as they grab each soft blob they push a hole in the mid-
dle with their thumbs and place it on the screen that will be put into the perfectly heated oil.
They line the screens with 24 uncooked donuts. When the bottoms are golden brown, they use
what look like two drumsticks to flip the donuts over. After they get in their groove, many of
them have a perfect rhythm to flipping the donuts.

When the donuts are browned to perfection, they are lifted from the oil and set along-
side to drain. Then they are carried to the nearby prepared tables where they will cool slightly
before being submerged in tubs of sugar. Groups of “sugarers” wear gloves and aprons and
they also will develop a rhythm for their job. Veterans will demonstrate that it is best to grab
two or four donuts, rub one side and then the other in the sugar, gently tap two together,
and then place them on the table or directly in the boxes. The gloves serve two purposes; they are more sanitary than naked hands and the donuts are hot.

Now the boxed donuts move to the next step and that is the job I have come to enjoy. That is also why I did not rush down at 11:00; years of standing around has taught me to mosey on down after midnight when they would be ready for me. We stack two or three boxes together on the tying machine and with a quick click of a foot, string flies and perfectly wraps and ties itself around the boxes. You then turn the boxes a quarter turn and do it again. This machine is pretty slick, but if you don’t do it right, it will jam up on you. I have gotten rather proficient in unjamming it and derive some satisfaction out of keeping it running smoothly. The orders taken on January 21 have now been broken down hour by hour for pickup times. I begin filling orders, placing names on the boxes, placing them under the tables, and notating where I am placing each order. Once the boxes start coming, we continue to tie, label, and fill the orders.

Upon my arrival, I am surprised to see Janet. I have worked with her in the past and each year she is not sure if she will be working the next year. Well, she said she was here tonight but would not be back Sunday night. I know she has some health issues and she proceeded to explain that she had both knees and one of her hips replaced. Joan, another woman from our parish, about 60 years old with white hair and a pleasant face, sat rubbing her own knee as Janet tried to talk her into having hers done. “I know I have to, but I am scared,” she explains.

“Of course you are,” responded Janet, “but once you do it you will wonder why you waited so long.” Oh, it gets better – Lena is coming in soon and she recently had her left knee replaced. Janet tells Joan that she may not want to talk to Lena right now about knee replacement. She hasn’t completely healed yet and might not encourage Joan to have the surgery. While I am the youngest of the group, this weekend I happen to be limping because of a recent knee injury acquired while skiing two weeks ago. We sound like a sports team with half its members on the injured list. We will tough it out; it is the off-season and this charity is counting on us. Over the years, I have come to know that each of these women has endured many hardships, including losing children, husbands, and grandchildren to illnesses, accidents, and even war. It is an inspiration for me to watch them put aside their own physical pains and heartaches and do their part for our church community. Their faith gets them through the rough times. So I humbly ignore my small ailment and do most of the lifting and bending that the others can’t do. Lena soon arrives and insists on taking over the stringing machine. Contrary to what Joan thought, Lena is doing well since her surgery and states, “I have to walk on this knee. I am just afraid of slipping.” This is a valid fear; the floors become slick from sugar falling. I try to keep up by sweeping often. We do not need any new injuries.

Before long, there are boxes and boxes of donuts stacked and waiting for pickup. With our orders filled for most of the morning, we put the extras up front for the walk-in sales. As time permits, people take breaks, going to the back room for a drink, something to eat, and to sit awhile. Then it is back to work. Around 6:00 am customers arrive to pick up their orders at the west door. At 7:00 am the next shift of volunteers start to drift in and that means the weary can think about heading home for some needed sleep. Each of us “passes the baton” to someone that will take over where we left off. I make my way to the back room to retrieve my coat.
grab a last sip of lemonade, say my goodbyes, and pick up my donuts. Not even realizing how smoky it had become down in the basement of our social hall, my eyes sting when the cold, clear air hits them. Surprised and thankful that my car windows are not frosted over, I put my five dozen donuts in the back of my Durango, climb into the front seat, and drive the short distance home. My clothes, hair, and skin reek of fried dough. I am tired and achy, but satisfied. A shower, then some sleep. I’ll go back and do it again on Sunday night. Perhaps when I retire, I will be there all three nights.
Joe Droober

Alex Meidunas

As far as the eye could see in either direction, both sides of the road were lined with row-houses. All were of a modest appearance – in size and shape uniform – all of a red brick color.

Each house had three windows in front, framed in white, and rising up to the front door, four white steps. Some older models went back to a bygone era, appearing worn and less desirable than the more modern ones containing better appliances. Yet, with the exception of one building, they were all still habitable.

Somewhere about the middle of these parallel rows of houses, in front of the oddly dilapidated one, huddled a single solitary figure – just as dilapidated looking and abandoned, one could say.

This figure had a face. This face, unwashed, was predominantly covered in hair besmirched, tangled, and filthy.

In those wee hours of the morning, its eyes were shut, and a guttural sound rose rhythmically from its throat, ultimately escaping through its mouth and knobby nose. The figure’s chest heaved beneath the cloth which kept it warm.

Quite abruptly the sound stopped. The eyes, after hard rubbing with two grimy hands, were unsealed. They blinked a couple of times while they came into focus. Through the gaping mouth issued a loud protracted yawn. A passing mangy mutt answered back with an equally loud bark.

The figure rose triumphantly, stretching his arms way up, letting the covers drop, revealing a man, standing six feet tall, draped in tattered, dirty clothes, no longer in his prime.

“Weell, good morning there, Peacock. What you make me for breakfast today, eh, old girl?”

Another bark in reply, and Peacock moved selfishly on her way.

“Nothing? Shame on you, old gal. And they call you man’s best friend…”

“Well, looks like I gotta go diggin’ again.” And so Joe Droober proceeded to the nearest trashcan, not but a few paces from his bed.

“Hmmm… let’s see – slim pickings this morning’ - a morsel of McDonald’s cheeseburger (still in its carton); hey, some clam chowder at the bottom of a can! How about this? A blueberry muffin with bird droppings?”

Going for the cheeseburger, he plunged his hand in.

“Now, what to drink? I think I spy some cola left in that plastic bottle. Bit of unfinished beer? Or is it piss? Better not risk it. Cola will do.”

So, having found breakfast, Joe Droober retreated back to his home, at the corner of the Dilapidated Building and its Steps.

As he squeezed out the last bits of cola, he could hear some of the neighbors getting up.

At the apartment over to his side, the kids could be heard running, screaming, and fighting. Mom was yelling to hurry up and eat breakfast before it got cold.
On the other side of him, a husband was complaining because he couldn’t find the tie
his daughter had given him last Christmas. Michael was yelling at his little sister to hurry it
up in the bathroom ‘cause he really had to go!
The paper boy was on his bike, tossing his papers. As he passed, Joe smiled at him, but
the boy just passed him without notice and flung a paper at his face.
Across the street, he heard the alarm go off – 7:00 am!!! Joe pretended to look at his
own watch. Then he waited to hear the ensuing sound.
There, in apartment 109, lived the family he loved the most. They held a special place
in his heart.
Yup – and there was the sound that he loved the most. It was the sound of Nelson get-
ing up. Nelson was hungry, and he was letting the whole world know about it!
Joe chuckled to himself. What a cry! Certainly Nelson was no name for such a lively
boy! He deserved something much better, Joe thought. Joe thought that Tiger was more befit-
ing. Thus, the boy became known to Joe as Tiger – a more virile name.
Tiger was but a year old, and his parents’ first child. The young couple had moved in
across the street right after their wedding. Joe had been there to witness their grand arrival.
[He was glad to have new neighbors. Certainly, they had to be better than the last one – a
dopehead who threw wild parties day and night! (Even tried to push some junk on Joe one
time.)
Huck, the husband, had trouble carrying his new bride up the stairs and over the
threshold. Both had had a little too much to drink, were a bit wobbly, and couldn’t stop laugh-
ing. As Huck made it through the door, and seemed on his way to success, he stumbled, and
out of his arms tumbled poor Marianne.
Luckily, the floor wasn’t too far down, and Marianne escaped with only minor scrapes
and bruises. Huck instantly corrected his clumsy act by placing a profusion of kisses on his
new bride, thus rapidly accelerating the healing process.
Precisely nine months later, Tiger was born. Joe was there again when the Hutchinses
brought back the squirt from the hospital, an occasion he was very proud of and fortunate not
to have missed. Joe managed with trepidation to sneak a peak at the child as he brushed by
the Hutchinses that muggy July afternoon, venturing far closer to people than he’s had in a
very long time. Tiger had been peacefully asleep. Joe envied him. Already, Joe felt a special
bond growing between him and the little guy.
Huck’s instinctive response to the bum’s approach had been to immediately shield his
family from the bum, and move them quickly inside their home. Joe remained unmoving,
staring as if through the door; then he returned to his own home.
Of course, the Hutchinses had noticed Joe before. However, that was after they had
already moved in. Marianne thought that Huck should have noticed him before signing the
lease, which probably would have made them reconsider. But, for some reason, that day Joe
had not been there (just so happened to be the day Joe decided to go on his once a year trip
Downtown – “to the stone” – as he called it.)
In the beginning, they didn’t even know his name was Joe. In fact, Joe wasn’t even his
real name. They’d heard someone in the neighborhood call him that one day, and so that was
the name they referred to him by. Most of the time, everyone in the neighborhood simply
referred to him as “The Bum.” And normally, everyone steered clear of him. He was merely a
town fixture – like the lamppost, the trashcan, or the mailbox.

There were several stories circulating about Joe. Some said he was an old Vietnam vet,
others said he was a bit retarded, some said he looked like someone who had once lived in the
neighborhood a long time ago, others said he was an outcast from the loony bin. Maybe he
was all of these things… the fact is, no one knew the truth – except, of course, Joe Droober
himself. But, as you already know, Joe didn’t talk to any people – nor did he care to.

A few folks had tried to help, but he didn’t seem to want any. He wouldn’t even accept
any food from them – not even the coins they tossed at him on occasion. (Later, some of the
street urchins would salvage these.) It seemed he wanted nothing to do with the human race
altogether, the only exception being Tiger.

But, an even bigger mystery could be said to have been, why he chose to camp out here –
and what drew him to that particular ugly building.

The general consensus was that he was harmless, but as a precaution, the children were
warned to steer clear of him.

Day in and day out, Joe was seen across the street, huddled in his corner. The
Hutchinses were still wary of him. They thought of getting another apartment, but Huck was
on a new, uncertain job, and this apartment seemed to suit their income and there weren’t
other apartments available in the area, anyhow. Moving in with either of their parents was out
of the question!

So, the Hutchinses reluctantly remained where they were. Huck would go to work at
his job selling appliances downtown, while Marianne stayed at home with the little one.

Sometimes Joe would sneak by and peek through the window.

He could see that Marianne was taking wonderful care of Tiger and that Tiger was very
happy. One of the things Tiger really enjoyed was a yellow bird puppet his mother made talk
and chirp. Joe would see Tiger trying to imitate the chirping sounds. Tiger would clap his
hands, and then he would give a great big smile. When Joe saw this, tears came to his eyes.
He’d turn away and walk down the block trying to erase some old memory that had become
dislodged. After awhile, everything became alright once more.

Sometimes, Mom and Tiger would go for a stroll. Everyone they passed would remark
what a beautiful kid Marianne had.

One time, as Marianne had stopped to talk to a couple of ladies, Joe came strolling to-
towards them, unseen. As he came alongside, he involuntarily reached down towards Tiger,
who in turn, fearlessly offered up his own tiny hand to the lowly bum, whereupon Mom im-
mediately screamed and yelled out, “Don’t touch him, you freak!”

Joe panicked and ran away.

Marianne had to sit down on her friend’s steps and let her heart settle down. It was
racing like a locomotive. How could she have let that almost happen?

She explained to her husband what had happened that day, and how she’d had the
queer feeling that that bum was sometimes watching them in their own home.

Huck told her it was just her imagination. He’d even talked to the neighbors, who re-
assured him that the bum was absolutely harmless. That “bum” couldn’t hurt a fly – and for
goodness’ sake, no one was watching them! Marianne was consoled, at least temporarily.
One day, Joe decided to make a special gift for Tiger. He knew that all little boys loved to play with cars. Having found a discarded knife in the trash and then pieces of discarded furniture wood, he began his new enterprise. He was on a mission.

It was slow going at first, but then his fingers found their old agility. It was like he had done woodwork once before. He took great pride and care in his work. Nope, no slapdash work here – this had to be extra special! He was making a car for Tiger!

The car was finally constructed. Joe found a little leftover paint in some discarded cans and painted the car orange with black stripes on the sides and a number one on the hood. As a finishing touch, he added the word “TIGER” in bold letters on top of it.

There – it was finished, and Joe was pleased.

The next morning, as Huck exited the front door, he found a surprise – a small package wrapped in newspaper on his doorstep. “What could this be?” It only said TIGER on it. Who, or what was Tiger? Somebody’s pet? He wondered, “Should I pick this up?”

He picked it up.
He shook it a little. Something definitely inside. Was it drugs?
He took it inside.
“Hey, Mar, someone’s left us a package.”
She came out of the kitchen.
“I didn’t order anything.”
“Neither did I. Maybe it’s a joke. It doesn’t even have any address on it – just says TIGER. Do you think it’s drugs?”
“Well, don’t open it here, do it in the bathroom, in case it spills, or breaks or some- thin’.”
They took it to the bathroom.
“Alright, here goes nothiiin’…”
He undid the newspaper, revealing a brown cardboard box. He opened the lid. Inside was something wrapped in a plastic supermarket bag.
“Hey, Mar, get me a pair of plastic gloves, will ya, Hon?”
She brought the gloves and he popped them on. He reached in. It felt like a hard object. He looked inside.
“Why, it’s only a car. A wooden car. Rather nicely made. Says Tiger on it.”
“Who’s Tiger?” Mar asked. “Is he one of those NASCAR guys, do you think?”
“Dunno…”
“Looks like a toy. Too early for Christmas…hmmmm. Maybe some kid left it.”
“ Weird. Anyway, I have to get to work, Hon. You take care of it. Maybe someone will come by to claim it.”

And so Marianne ended up with the mysterious car. No one came to claim it. It seemed harmless enough, and since it just happened to be Nelson’s second birthday, she let Nelson push it around. Nelson push it around. He seemed to like it. Well, if no one showed up to claim it, she thought she might let Nelson keep it. She couldn’t see just throwing it away. When Joe saw Tiger playing with the new toy he made him, it made Joe very happy. He was beside himself all day. Everything seemed bright and lovely. He kept whistling an old song he’d once heard.
One day, Tiger and his mommy sat outside. Marianne sat in her lawn chair reading a paperback, while Nelson sat on a bed cover surrounded by a child barrier. He had many toys to choose from to play with. But the orange car with the black stripes was the most interesting. He liked making a trilling sound when he pushed it through the makeshift hills he created with the covers. Then he would sometimes push it with all his might to see just how far it would go. One such time, the car went through a small gap in the barrier, and kept moving on its willful way down the sidewalk. Tiger watched futilely – on no, his orange car was doomed!

Then fate stepped in. That is, someone’s foot stopped it before it could turn off into the street. Tiger jumped! A smile came across his face. His car was saved!

That someone’s foot was Joe’s.

Joe reached down and retrieved the toy. He walked slowly over to the child, and as he was about to return the toy, Marianne panicked and jumped out of her seat, simultaneously throwing her book at Joe’s face, waving hysterically, and yelling at him to get away. She made such a ruckus that the neighbors came rushing out.

Joe dropped the toy in the playpen and ran away.

“That bum’s a menace and a threat to my child! Someone should do SOMETHING!”

That was it. As soon as Huck returned from work, Marianne told him what had happened. He still didn’t think it was a matter for concern, but to ease Mar’s pretty little head and heart, he said that they could consider moving out after Christmas and his much anticipated bonus.

Christmas, the season in which we remember our brothers in need, finally arrived. The Hutchinses had their first real tree. Nelson kept crawling under the tree and playing with the bows. Marianne had a hard time keeping him out of there.

Daddy, with some difficulty, put up the lights. For some reason, he’d kept getting them tangled up. Nelson particularly liked the ones that flashed on and off. He would point to them and mutter his baby talk. “Yes, Hon, those are lights,” Mom answered.

Christmas Eve night they all watched “White Christmas” together on the television. Nelson couldn’t make much out of it, but he kind of liked the goofy guy with red hair who made strange faces. That song they sang wasn’t too bad, either.

Then it was beddy-bye. His mother told him some guy named Santa Claus would come by later tonight, bringing him all kinds of gifts “just for little Nelson.”

Joe Droober could care less what day it was. All days were the same to him. He sat huddled in a cardboard box on his corner, with Peacock cuddled by his side and a half-full bottle of beer he’d found. Luckily, it hadn’t snowed yet this winter. Through a small hole he had cut in the box, he could see the lights twinkling on the Hutchinses’ Christmas tree.

In the apartments of his immediate neighbors, he could hear the kids enthusiastically talking about the presents they would get. Joe was haunted by a strange fleeting memory of a tie he had once received from two little hands. He fell asleep only to be roused a couple of hours later by a scream!

The Hutchinses apartment was ablaze! Sparks were flying. Black smoke was rising. Peacock began barking madly. Someone forgot to unplug the lights on the tree. The tree had caught on fire, and before anybody knew, the fire had run upstairs, surrounding little Tiger’s room. The cheap smoke alarm had failed to go off. No one had ever bothered to test it, and
now it was too late. Huck ordered his resisting wife, covered with blankets, downstairs while he went after Nelson. She called the fire department. The steps were almost consumed.

Upon entering Tiger’s room, something came crashing down on Huck’s head, knocking him unconscious.

This was just as Joe Droober came crashing through the front door. He pushed Mar outside, and sprang up the steps like a deer. He picked up Huck and ran him to Mar downstairs, and quickly ran up again, as the stairs came crashing down behind him.

The firemen had just arrived. All the neighbors were outside. Fire was leaping through the windows. Hoses went off. Marianne was outside on her knees praying. Huck was put in an ambulance and sped to the Memorial Hospital.

Joe had gotten into the room, not without a good many severe burns. Tiger was coughing. He wrapped Tiger up and shoveled him up into his arms. “You’re gonna be alright, Tiger, yes you are, this time you’re gonna be all right, nothing’s gonna harm you, no, nothing’s gonna harm you – Daddy’s gotchya son!

The steps were gone, nothing but ashes. A couple firemen were downstairs.

“Can you catch?” yelled out Joe. “I’ve got the kid in my arms!”

“We’ll get him, drop him!” was their assuring response.

Joe knelt down, squeezed the kid out through the hall railings, and dropped him safely into the hands of a fireman. “Now, get out!” They wasted not a second.

Joe was about to jump down himself when the floor beneath him gave way, and came crashing down. Then the ceiling followed on top of him.

Christmas morning, the Hutchineses were lucky to receive each other.

As for Joe Droober, he received Paradise.
Thoughts

Vanessa Simmons

The lonely path
Lonely and derelict
Lonely and quiet
Am I lonely?

This question so suspicious
So unpredictably cold
Still, am I lonely?

The wind touches my skin
Suddenly and impartial
Words are crossing my mind
Is this the answer?

Life is complex
Rich of words
Unsuspecting with meanings
And so simple is the reply?

I am wandering around
No specific direction
No destination
Is this what makes me therefore lonely?

I guessed
I thought
The wind already told me!
But why am I still disaffected?

I am just human
Just a marionette of the society
Ignorance and ineffectualness
That’s what’s ruling my life
Is this just an excuse?
I am hiding
I am fleeing
Scared to come to rest
There is no path

Everything is an illusion
-I am lonely!
Everything is senseless
-I don’t know what to do!

Who said this?
Was it the wind or my mind?
Endnotes

We hope you have enjoyed reading this year’s Literary Journal. Thanks to all the students who submitted their works.

The journal is published each spring and welcomes 2009 submissions.

If you are interested in submitting an essay, memoir, story, photograph, or sketch, please contact Deb Lovett in the Pushnik Library. Art work should not be larger than 8½ x 11 inches. Photographs should be submitted electronically. All other entries should be submitted in paper and must include your name, address, phone number, email address, and the title of the work submitted. We will accept no more than three entries from any one person. You can enter any time prior to March 1, 2009.

Once accepted, poetry and essays must be emailed to the editor prior to publication. You will be contacted when your work has been selected for the journal.