

## **Secret of the American Spirit by Mark Anderson**

### **DO YOU WANT TO KNOW THE SECRET OF THE AMERICAN SPIRIT?**

It's simple, the creator of the human spirit gave us freedom, and a strong sense of individuality. In all western culture where there is a Bible heritage, we have instilled in our heart that our allegiance is first to God and second to society or other people. Reflecting this belief, we bow only to God (if we bow at all) and we show respect to other people as equals. Our sense of individuality and personal value, comes from the one who created us individually and desires relationship with each person. Thus we have a great emphasis on personal responsibility, personal choice, and personal accountability.

So what happened? From this description it sounds like we would all be happy, respectful and nonviolent. Instead we're more like one big dysfunctional family. Personally I believe that mankind will always try to distort this freedom. We try to have individuality without being in harmony with the creator of individuality. We neglect allegiance to God and just have allegiance to self, and maybe to others. We have distorted that which is meant for good. We don't know which way to evolve; forward or backward. The source of life calls out to us to guide us.

## **I Believe in the Power of Self by Phyllis Baker**

I believe in the power of Self. To become self-empowered and self-reliant can change your life. If you aren't there yet, get there as soon as you can. Being totally responsible for one's self means not blaming others but it also means you call all your own shots. Wow. That is true empowerment.

I was raised in the era when a woman could only achieve stature and distinction through her husband. When I married, my husband expected me to be secondary to him; he was always first, even after we had we children and I were just accessories in his life, mere satellites orbiting around his self-centered world.

There were times when I felt like I must be invisible and wondered if I truly existed. I see pictures of women in traditional Islamic dress, their faces completely hidden beneath their burqas. They look at the world through a small opening for their eyes. It seems to me they must feel invisible as I once did when I had no sense of my value as a human being.

Years ago I was whining to a therapist and what she said stopped me cold mid-whine. "Stop being a victim." It shocked me, as if she had thrown ice water in my face. It was then that I began to take control of my life and shape my destiny.

I began to work outside my home and my sense of identity and self-worth began to grow. All of the bosses and supervisors I have ever had have praised my work ethic, intelligence and dependability. I have been told many times, "Thanks for being you." I finally knew that I was OK, and began reclaiming my Self.

Near the end of my marriage, I knew I could no longer live with someone who didn't value me and had no respect for my need to have a sense of identity. I asked for a divorce and told my husband that I was eager to live alone, not having to please others, unless I chose to do so. He called me selfish. Yes, I was being selfish and rational. I had decided to take care of me first. Then, and only then could I begin to take care of others.

It is no longer a man's world; it is our world. Everyone, no matter what gender, what race, what religion, has the power to make a difference and change the world.

Now that I believe in Self, I am empowered and know what I want and don't want. I no longer compromise myself. I say what I think and don't hide behind my shyness. I step forward and face the word: proud and responsible for my belief in Self.

**Frying Pan, I Believe**  
**by Bill Binger**

A Gentile in Zion taking pre-med courses at the University of Utah back in the 70s, I was having lunch with one of my classmates, a returned Mormon Missionary. He had just finished laying his proselytizing rap on me, when a Hare Krishna adherent approached us and held forth on Krishna Consciousness. A lively discussion ensued. Finally, I interjected; "Can we agree on anything? The two Great Commandments: Love God, Love your neighbor. It seems all you religious types view humanity as an egg in the frying pan. The heat is on. Each of you think you have the only handle on the frying pan and will be the one to flip the egg over easy. I have to go take a physics exam you two work it out." As I walked away, they were shaking their fingers at each other, making points, no doubt confident they each had the one true and only handle.

Gifts from God or creations of man

Talmud, Bible, and Koran

Adherents proclaim "We're Number ONE!

Some convert at the point of a gun

Used to be the point of a sword

Time marches on People got bored

Pope declaring primacy as chief primate

While fringe groups express their own brand of hate

Love God. Love your neighbor. But what do we see?

By Jesus (Allah) (Abraham) you can't live next to me.

We are a Christian nation, just ask Colorado Springs

Air Force Academy Here is what their faith brings

Precision bombs from on high

In the name of you and I

We have to kill and maim, you see.

So you can be, for Christ's sake, FREE!

Hindus, Buddhists, Mormons, and many more,

So many versions of God It won't be long before

We are here for but a short time then we're out of here

Everyone has to believe something

I believe I'll have another beer.

### **Miles to Go by Tommy Bird**

I believe love conquers all, not with a flash and a crash, but through slow, firm, unyielding pressure. I believe no person ever approaches perfection but must seek it as an ideal. There is a passage in the Koran that states, "A baby is born into this world, angry hands clenched, crying and wanting everything. An old man leaves this world with his hands open, wanting nothing."

I believe the search that beings when we are born until the time we die, prepares us for the next world, or level of existence, call it what you may. No man or woman knows what happens after we die or where we go. However, we should look forward to that time, preparing ourselves by whatever means we have, no matter who our beliefs, "just in case."

I believe the true miracles of this life are not flashy, showy events splashed out over an azure sky for all mere mortals to watch with wonder and awe. What purpose do they serve? Instead, I believe in the miracle of true friendship, trusting, giving, ever ready to help, no matter what the task. I believe in that kind of love, by its very uniqueness, rewards the giver with much more than he or she gave in the first place. I believe the love of a parent for a child is much more a miracle than a Being who writes on stone that only one man ever witnessed.

I believe in the miracle of forgiveness. For what greater miracle can you imagine than the man or woman who has the ability to look a persecutor in the eye and say, "I forgive you?"

I believe in giggles and belly laughs and rip snorting guffaws and har hars so intense they make a person giggle all over, rather than merely smile politely. I believe in the ridiculous and the sublime beauty of a person when he dives through a barbed wire fence to escape a raging and snorting bull as he leaves the seat of his pants hanging on the fence, snagged by a bard. Such small and mundane occurrences have the power to create grins, cause laughter and bring the tyrants of this nation to their knees.

I believe in the power of the eloquent message the soft smiles and gentle kisses lovers bestow on one another as they say, "I love you," without uttering a word. I believe love conquers all things and softens the hardest heart.

I believe I have miles to go before I sleep.

## **The "Butterfly Effect"** **by Barrie Brewer**

I believe it is presumptuous to think that one must first see in order to believe. We may not see the butterfly flapping its wings on the far side of the planet, yet its effect on our atmosphere will be no less profound. A seemingly small event outside our immediate awareness can cause large scale phenomena.

The connectedness of all mankind is accelerating due to technological advances in communication and travel. Despite the great expanse between individuals and cultures, the flourishing social networks are shrinking human disparities.

The population of earth is more connected now than ever before. We have the opportunity to *carpe diem* (seize the day), moving beyond connectedness to unanimity.

It's time to cast off the shackles of divisiveness and engage in a dialogue of community.

I believe in the combination of contrasted elements to bring about what the Greeks referred to as

harmonia, meaning "joint, agreement, one accord".

If we just try harder (individually and collectively) to exercise faith, hope, and charity; the butterfly effect will resonate PEACE and unanimity beyond our immediate awareness.

This I believe.

## **"This...I Accept" or "And the Enemy is Me"** **by Jim Catano**

I believe I cause most of the world's problems. Well...not all by myself, but I and about four billion others do. Let me explain.

We humans possess an astonishing capacity for self-delusion. We're at the confluence of several emerging crises like peaking oil production, diminishing fresh water supplies, topsoil depletion, fishery collapse, and increasing demand by developing countries for non-renewable resources. What's fascinating to me is that most of us can't even contemplate that we are creating these shortages by our very existence.

The number of humans wanting a slice of the resource pie has skyrocketed from 2.6 billion when I was born in 1950 to 6.6 billion today. Credible scientific estimates indicate that that's 4 billion more than this planet is capable of permanently sustaining even with projected advanced technology.

The Green Revolution...or petroleum-driven agriculture born in the mid 20th Century... coupled with modern sanitation and medical developments allowed us to live longer while we simultaneously bred like lemmings. Now we're using vanishing resources at unprecedented rates, many nations are imitating our consumption, and world population is estimated to climb to 10 billion. We're the victims of our own success.

Typically, overshoots like ours get "corrected" quite harshly. When a stronger enemy isn't around to bring an over-inflated society into check...and most wars really are fought over resources, not ideology...catastrophic natural events like famine and disease do the job. Jared Diamond's book, "Collapse," is a sobering study of several such episodes.

The survivors often move elsewhere, and we call that immigration. My own primordial ancestors were driven from sunnier climes and even had to develop lighter skin adapted to the less intense sunlight at northern latitudes. But humans also invented technologies... starting with the basics like making clothes and catching fish...to survive in places we are not biologically suited to inhabit. We've become so good at technology, however, that it's allowed us to extend ourselves well past nature's limits.

But acknowledgement of the impact of looming environmental calamities is far from universal. Many cling to worn out clichés like, "Be fruitful and multiply," or "Future high-tech solutions will save us," or "Don't worry, the rapture is coming." And the human tendency to shun responsibility and procrastinate until after disaster strikes further blinds us to the fact that too many people claiming too few resources is the primary issue and addressing it holds the only solution. We even get distracted and expend more effort hacking away at the symptoms...like global warming...than correcting the real root problem.

So is this little rant just an echo of that of computer-generated Agent Smith in the film, "The Matrix," who described humans as an out-of-control virus? In a way...yes.

But can we solve the over-population dilemma without suffering the inevitable die-offs that happen whenever a species becomes so numerous its environment simply can't sustain it? Perhaps. The jury's still out. However, if we don't start yesterday with corrective measures that may seem Draconian, wars or nature will prune us back. This...reluctantly and sadly...I accept.

### **A Soldier's Story by Larry Chaston**

This I believe. When people find their commonalities they can get along and become friends.

In 2002 while stationed on a firebase in Afghanistan, I knew we had to win the hearts and minds of the local Pashtoon people. The Al Qaeda had invaded Afghanistan a decade before and imposed their fundamentalist ideas on these people. We were there to gain back their freedom. They knew we were Christians (Catholic, Mormon, and Protestant), whom they considered infidels. In January of 2002 the Al Qaeda destroyed the mosque used by locals to worship. In talking with Abdul Hajji, the senior interpreter, he did not want to give us encouragement or help because he did not want infidels building the new Mosque.

Abdul and I discussed possibilities, including keeping infidels, us, away from the Mosque, especially after it was built. We could desecrate it with thoughtless acts. I told Abdul we were the same: we both believed in strong family, the laws of Moses, and prayed to the same God. Abdul asked "Do you pray to Allah?" I responded, "I pray to the God of Abraham." Abdul nodded his head and we found commonality.

We began building the Mosque. A local architect was picked. All the materials, including bricks and logs, were purchased from local suppliers. Locals were employed for construction labor. Together we built the Mosque, replacing the damage done to the community by the Al Qaeda.

Several times a week the firebase was rocketed by Al Qaeda. Because they lacked rocket launchers, they piled rocks, leaned the rocket against the rocks, and aimed it at us. Timed-pencil fuses were set to ignite several minutes to hours later, giving the Al Qaeda time to exit the area before detonation of the rockets. In order for rockets to arm, they must twist in the air after launch, therefore only about half of them armed and exploded upon impact. The rockets landed in the farmers' fields around us and even crash through roofs, landing in their homes.

The executive officer, the Captain, who in real life is a farmer from Idaho, employed another concept. He wanted to destroy all of the unexploded rockets in the surrounding fields. The Captain went from house to house, asking if the family had unexploded bombs or rockets in their homes or fields and offering to destroy the ordnance to keep the children safe. The Pashtoon people were so pleased they began coming to the firebase gate, asking for the Captain and showing him where rockets were located, allowing us to destroy the explosives and work together to protect their children. In only a few weeks, all the loose ordnance was destroyed.

I found commonality with Abdul. The Captain found it with the fathers of the children around our base, allowing us to accomplish our goal of helping the people of Afghanistan.

When people find their commonalities they can get along and become friends even under most stressful conditions. This I believe.

### **These Days by Andy Child**

Anything useful that had the meaning of coming out of something so small and seemingly insignificant bears pure and true fascination as to what is really happening to us. We are always meant for greater gifts.

But it is as if each man is taught to bear himself with neglect and persecution because someone strange and so unfamiliar is grabbing his tongue before a voice is even left to utter words towards the ways of life and liberty. Because of such harsh methodical tones we are left thinking ourselves to be wrong. Indeed the day comes and goes with so much being swept under the rug of mediocrity. Songs we sing become whispers and cries of anguish to us.

So much is meant to be seen as peace and comfort. It is absolute necessity to say how we see things. Whether we are founded upon righteous or hateful longevities with our patterns of action or speech, we still have them and we hope that they will be braver than us even though they come from the place that we most frequently seek. Embrace true love. Wandering eyes do not bend when they feel a tender soul.

We must dare and we must be. It's that simple. I have seen much in my days, though I do not commit to the idea that I am a scholar or a man filled with more wisdom and guidance than I have the power to speak. But with all that I have seen, joy remains to those that grab hold. It is in the cracks of the walls of humanity and in those that teach us more than we teach ourselves.

These days, we fight hard. We embark with scars and deep wounds cut from the world that seem to remain open and infected.

Never give up. Three words that ring in our ears when we least expect it. We have been cheated in life and from what we think we deserve. So, there we stop and whine. The precious moments of heartfelt gratitude must never be pushed aside again. There is so much to understand.

Grab life for all that it is and ever will be. It is life that finds us and takes us. We take and give so little in return. Weakness is our greatest asset in finding out how to be more like what this world needs and wishes to become.

**Truth, relationship, strength, and balance**  
**by Julie Conroy**

I believe in being true to oneself and to others; to identify one's core values and to live by them. I believe that there is a basic conflict internally and in our communities in that when people simply do not know what they really believe, and are lost in this world.

I believe in relationships; Relationship to self, to God, and to others. The relationship with myself had led me down a path of much self-exploration. What drives me in my work and personal life is to do the best job that I can, and to honor my commitments.

I must meet my responsibilities but first, I must define MY responsibilities.

So, I have identified (for today, for this year, or for a lifetime) the goals and responsibilities that I have. The problem I incur is when, in my personal life (friends, family, work), others do not share that value. There are many values I wish were my core values--ones I lived by unconditionally--but it comes down to it, I live by growing and being the best person I can be. I then must respect others' values, even if I do not share them.

I believe in my relationship with God, and when pushed to the edge, it comes down to loving God, and to love others (even if I don't like them).

My relationships with others drive me. How I give to others, how I make a difference, what relationships transcend the difficulties in life. I value my friendships old and new, my relationships with family, and the moments with people I am likely to never see again. Passing conversations in a market, an intense conversation with a stranger, even with only eye contact and a smile.

I believe in strength, and struggle with that balance of letting go. For some, it is the strength to fight for one's country. For others, it is for justice (in the community, large or small). For all, it is the strength from within, the ability to move forward.

Many times in my life, I felt that I had to be strong (BE STRONG) to get through the adversity. Even recently, I felt that being strong meant preserving, to stay in a relationship, to make a difference. I had lost much of who I was as a person, my identity, my laugh, and my dreams. I believe in strength, but also in balance. It is a delicate balance. How are we strong, yet vulnerable as individuals? My delicate balance is to be strong, but not too determined to be right.

I know I must make a difference in my community, and in the world. I know I have the energy, the love, and the commitment to make that happen. This I believe.

**Learning Hope**  
**by Mary Craig**

Hope is the sure conviction that all will be well no matter how things turn out.

I heard these words at a time of great challenge. My son, Simon, a delightful four-year-old, had recently been diagnosed with cancer. Not leukemia or something else with an impressive cure rate. But neuroblastoma, "one of the deadliest childhood cancers," according to a New York Times article I had tried not to read.

Life with cancer offered plenty to hope for: new blood cells after chemo; safe surgery; a peaceful night's sleep; a slot on a clinical trial. Sometimes our hopes were met, but patience and adaptability often covered for success. Along the way I enjoyed precious moments with Simon. Once he glanced at the monitor during an echocardiogram and exclaimed: "I can see the point at the bottom of my heart!" Delight is a fine fuel for hope.

I swapped stories on a listserv with other parents facing this disease. Hope, I once shared, is as much a part of living well as it is of dying well, if dying is the project at hand.

And I believed it, even as Simon's cancer outpaced treatment and our vigilance shifted to helping him die. We did a fine job, keeping his needs and wishes foremost in our caregiving. At the age of seven, Simon died quietly in the sacred middle of his parents' bed. All had indeed been well--as well as could possibly be--when dying became the project at hand.

I can't say exactly when the hopeful spirit that had infused my life with Simon disappeared. Gradually I entered a stumbling, cobwebbed fog of grief where nothing seems right, nothing feels real, and hope is an abstraction with nowhere to land. Forty-one moons have grown full since Simon died. I wonder if life will ever feel real again. If I'll truly find hope again.

I believe there are times when hope is impossible. When a dull watchfulness scans the universe and finds no trace.

One of Simon's nurses sent a note just after he died. She called Simon "feisty and witty, with an extra special intelligence and charm." Her description makes me smile. She emboldened the rest of us--me, my husband, and Simon's sister Miriam--saying: "I expect that your family will re-create something as lovely as you had when Simon was with you." I still draw courage from her words.

The other day Miriam, now eight, observed our morning behaviors. Mom is slow; Dad is fast. "Since half my genes are from you and half from Dad," she said, "that means I'm medium."

"You are the cutest thing there is!" I gushed and encircled her in my arms. This feels good, I thought, this delight, this almost unself-conscious blurt of mommy hyperbole.

She looked up, still weighing her world, and caught my eyes. "And Simon . . . too," she said.

Yes, and Simon, too.

Simon Craig Vodosek died on August 6, 2004 in Salt Lake City, Utah. He was going into second grade.

### **A Sister's Love by Karen Dick**

I believe in the power of a sister's love. A sister's ability to share your joys and griefs, provide guidance on the rough waters of womanhood, and love unconditionally, set her apart from all other classes of friends. A sister who loves you is truly one of God's greatest gifts.

My sister Georgia has always been my best friend and confidante. She is emotionally unafraid, because she's already seen me at my best and my worst. She dives right into my worries, hurts, and deepest fears, knowing that she can help in a way that no one else can.



When I was in high school, a boy broke my heart completely. I cried, moped, dreaded going to school, and in general made my own life miserable. This was one of the low points of my life not only because of the heartbreak but because of how poorly I handled it. I don't remember what my sister said to me, but I do remember what she did. Every day in the lunch Mom packed me, I found a note from Georgia. Sometimes they were elaborately crafted on beautiful paper, and sometimes they were hurriedly scratched out on notebook paper. But each one was a treasure to me. They were messages of validation, support, and unconditional love. She didn't tell me that I was pathetic or to show a little pride. Georgia told me for weeks on end, every day at lunch, that she loved me. And, like lifelines thrown into the shark-infested waters of the high school social pool, these notes saved me. They were physical proof of a bond that would continue through my hardest times.

My sister's love continues to be a powerful source of comfort and support in my life. She is not only there for my big crises, but listens when I need a sounding board for life's little perplexities. She depends on me in the same way, and together we share all the thoughts and feelings that try the patience and listening power of even our own great husbands. Georgia's love for me is manifest in her willingness to spend time on all the little stuff.

The perspective Georgia provides on my life is refreshingly familiar, and echoes all of my deepest set idiosyncrasies and motivations. It makes sense, since we came from roughly the same place and time. We both harbor grudges, love to sing, feel guilty every time we spend money, want to be athletic in a hopeless way, are passionate about good books and movies, and want to be good, but usually end up settling for good enough.

Intimacy is said to grow from shared experiences and beliefs. What a great gift is this lifelong friend of mine, who has witnessed my greatest disappointments and my finest achievements. With Georgia I don't explain my history or why I am the way I am. With my sister I just am. With my sister I know I'm loved no matter what.

### **The Meaning of Life by Adam Eslahpazir**

You want to know what I believe. I believe in something. Some people believe in nothing. They say we're here for no reason, floating willy-nilly on the ocean of life, with no compass, no astrolabe, nothing to guide us across the vastest body of figurative water known to mankind. Do you have the tools to guide you? We live in a time that is afraid of the spiritual, afraid of the religious, afraid of God. Perhaps that is the way God wants us to live, in fear of Him. Perhaps. . .but I believe differently.

Today a battle rages between those who believe in nothing vs. those who believe in something. God is just a name for a concept, an abstract concept that performs many functions such as hope, empowerment, and justice. You may call God karma, tao, or allah however all these labels are used to describe a concept that even atheists proscribe to. That concept is meaning. Life without meaning is hell, reincarnation as a cockroach, or imprisonment. Let's just say you are put into a chamber against your will. By definition you are imprisoned. Let's now say you are in the exact same chamber voluntarily. By definition you are free. However both individuals are objectively in the same chamber and your subjective perspective determines your imprisonment or freedom.

Creationists believe that we were created. Evolutionists also believe that we were created. The former have us created by the hand of God and the latter by a natural mechanism. Both have meaning but a different vocabulary for the same concept, creation. In evolution, there was a day that Genus Australopithecus gave birth to the first Genus Homo, thus man was created. Perhaps Genus Australopithecus was the God that created Adam and Eve.

What does it all mean? It all amounts to something. Meaning is the most valuable asset humanity has. A diamond is worthless without the meaning attached to it. Are we hurtling aimlessly through a vast emptiness on a ball of mud that randomly developed an interesting mechanism called life, or do we find ourselves spinning through a universe teeming with unique creations, on a valuable sapphire, that glitters with the glory of life, heading toward a destiny? I know which scenario I'm going with. Do you?

**I believe that Acting, and the Theatre can make the world a better place  
by Grace Fojtik**

This I believe... I believe that acting and the theatre can make the world a better place.

I believe that young people should study the theatre and acting. The theatre teaches history, life lessons, and helps us feel how others experience life.

From theatre students at the University of Utah, I learned about courage, and ancient Greece by watching them perform Helen of Troy. I learned that Helen was a strong brave woman, who stood up to men and Greek traditional beliefs to do what was right for herself and her country.

I learned an important life lessons from Wicked, the musical. Elphaba, the ugly witch, truly had the heart of gold, and Glinda the beautiful witch, was only pretty on the outside. From this show I learned that judging a book by its cover is almost always a mistake. Looking good does not always equal being good.

I played a pick pocket in the musical Oliver, and learned that when you are hungry, what is right and wrong changes significantly. From the character Cosette in Les Mis, I also learned that simple acts of kindness can change someone's life.

By playing the part of a Who in Suessical, I learned that if a community joins their voices together, they can be heard, even by an elephant.

And, by watching Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, I learned there is no place like home.

Having been in several different casts, I learned a basic life skill from my experiences--how to get along with others who are different than you. Actors come from every religion, race, and sexual orientation, I have learned that talent comes in every shape and every size, and I can learn from every actor I have ever worked with. I also have learned that everyone has days when they can hit all those high notes, and days when they just need a friend in the cast, to give them a hug and remind them that there is another show tomorrow.

This past summer, I was lucky enough to travel to a small town in Kenya and attend school there for a day. I had little in common with the students in the school, but when my family asked the children to sing a song, I heard some of the most wonderful music I've heard in my life. This moment, and the many shows I have seen and participated in, have made me believe that joining voices in song, or sharing our stories through the theatre is one of the easiest ways to bring people together in a way that is peaceful and joyful.

The world will be a better place if we all continue to share our stories and songs with each other.

**This I Believe**  
**by Stephan Fowler**

I was 31 years old when my daughter was born. During my wife's pregnancy I was belligerent. I took a photo of her when she was about 8 months along and purposely cropped off her head as a joke. A baby was the last thing I wanted. I wanted stuff: a BMW, an Alta ski pass, not a child. With a child all I could see was compromise. Why did I agree to her getting pregnant? I suppose I feared my wife would leave me, so I caved. During her pregnancy she openly questioned if I would hold the child once it was born. To be honest I had the same question.

The morning of the delivery I wondered if I was going to faint and crack my head open like a ripe melon hitting pavement. I remember asking one of the nurses, not quite jokingly, if there was a football helmet I could wear to prevent my brains from spilling out when my head smacked the tile floor. The nurse that fielded the comment looked at me as though she wanted to pull my balls off so that I would never place my wife in this situation again, or maybe she just had a gut full of me and my whine. Either way she was not pleased with me.

The miracle of birth happened in all its bloody, screaming, afterbirth, vagina splitting glory. And my melon stayed intact. The bug-eyed pediatrician pronounced the jelly coated slug a GIRL!, ceremoniously clipped the umbilical cord and everyone rejoiced. He then stitched my wife's femininity back together while a doting nurse (the one that wanted to pull my balls off) commented to my wife that this doctor is a real craftsman when it comes to stitching up birth-split womanliness parts. Meanwhile, the staff kick-started the newborn's breathing, sucked the jelly out of her ears and nose, gave her a passing grade and tucked her in with my wife, who began cooing a mother's coo. I stood and stared.

Later in the day, when the backslapping and crying by the grandparents subsided, I stood alone staring through the glass that separated the newborn holding pen from adoring adults. There in the crowd of infants lay a newborn with my last name. She looked like a dehydrated, miniaturized version of Ozzy Osbourne swaddled into a cocoon. I turned, walked over, sat on some nearby stairs and stared at my feet. A feeling of belonging leaked into my thoughts. It occurred to me that I belonged to that Ozzy Osbourne slug of a baby and she to me and we both belonged to the exhausted elegant woman down the hall. For a moment my eyes pooled with tears. I answered my question: I will hold this child, hold her close for as long as I breathe. The child has grown into an elegant adult, simple at heart and strong of intellect, like her mother.

I believe that people belong to each other.

**I Believe in Stories**  
**by Christine Frazier**

The question was the typical icebreaker. Who from the past would I ask over for dinner and conversation?

My answer came quickly.

I would invite Utah women who could tell me about everyday life in extraordinary times. I believe their stories would be more fascinating than those told by women carrying more famous names. I want to hear them.

I would go far back to the time of the Anasazi, barring language barriers. I would invite an African American pioneer and a cowgirl from Brown's Hole during the days of Butch Cassidy.

Women like Susanna Bransford, Martha Hughes Cannon, and Juanita Brooks led lives history records. But I want to hear from women who lived an earnest life despite the odds and never got much attention for doing so. They would add a dimension, a depth, the stories written on pages can't begin to tell.

Most of the time, their stories aren't told at all.

The Anasazi comes from my love of the central Utah desert.

Not too long ago my husband and I visited the Buckhorn Wash, which cuts into the center of the San Rafael Swell. While on our way to the River we stopped to hike up a sandstone ridge that led to several granaries. A cave, blackened inside from I imagine centuries of smoke and fire, was tucked in close by. I want to sit in that cave alongside a woman who was there 2,000 years ago.

Oh, the questions I could ask.

How many hours a day do you spend grinding corn for meals?

The pottery, it's beautiful. Is that a family design?

Can you tell me about the images, we call petroglyphs, pecked into the rock wall?

I believe her stories would tell me about a past so little recorded.

I also want to talk to an African American pioneer because not many of these stories are found in the Western books I've read. I want to know how Martha Crosby raised livestock, garden vegetables, and fruit on land in south Salt Lake Valley, just like it says on a web site about Utah's early African American farmers.

What is it like to be an African American living among the early Mormons?

Who are your friends?

Where do your children play?

I believe her stories would tell me about a past not talked about.

I'd ask the cowgirl about her wild days among the outlaws.

Did she ever visit Robbers' Roost?

Was Butch Cassidy the gentleman Paul Newman portrayed?

Do you think Butch made it back from Bolivia?

Homesteading is equally fascinating.

How do you survive?

I believe her stories would lend some truth about a past Hollywood made celluloid.

These are the stories I want to hear. These are the type of people I want at my dinner table, or to join them at theirs. I believe that in hearing their stories I will learn more about my own.

### **Occupational Parenting by Gail Graves**

I believe that one of the most important, rewarding, things that can be done to help the world we live in, is to bring new life into it and care for that life properly. There are many noble professions that labor to improve the lives of others. The medical profession works to save and improve the quality of life. Teachers dedicate many hours preparing young people to take their place in the world as productive citizens. Environmentalists work to protect our world and keep it livable. Massive amounts of new technology fill the markets with timesaving, convenience creating, life improving devices.

Sometimes it seems that the career most overlooked is that of creating the life that so many seek to improve the quality of. Maybe because of the lack of monetary reward, or the length of time it takes to see the result of one's work. Not many people plant acorns; they may not be around to enjoy the mature oak tree. In our fast paced world of have it now mentalities, waiting for twenty five or thirty years to hear "Thanks, Dad and Mom. You are great parents." isn't perceived to be worth the wait.

In parenting, paydays don't come at regular intervals, but they do come. Holding a sleeping infant in your arms, knowing that you helped give them life, contemplating their immense potential, watching them grow, developing their talents and decision making skills along the way, learning to sacrifice and serve others; are supreme paydays. When your offspring grow up and make the world a better place as they spread across the earth, you know it was all worth it.

I make many mistakes. I still have so much to learn about parenting. But I have a good solid background of example to draw from. My parents, grandparents, neighbors and my own children are all good examples to me with good advice to offer. We are not alone in the struggle to be good parents. Help is all around us. We don't have to be perfect. We don't have to give our children everything. But they do need our most valued commodity, our time. They need to know that they are more important to us than any of the myriad of other things demanding our time.

Sometimes parenting is viewed as a side job, rather than the chief occupation. Earning the money needed to provide for a family should be the means to an end. That end being: producing well adjusted, fully functioning, happy, productive citizens in the various communities wherever they go. Parenting isn't for everyone, but those who undertake this vital responsibility should take it seriously. If we devote ourselves to the fundamental responsibility of parenting, the rewards far outweigh the costs. There will still be problems in the world and challenges to overcome, but your influence will be felt for generations to come and the world will be a better place because you were in it.

### **Sensitivity is Not a Virtue by Rebecca Guevara**

As a young child I was affected when Mother lashed out in angry words at Grandma. The words are forgotten. They didn't change me. What changed me was the sorrow on my grandmother's face and the beseeching words to her daughter.

Dear, I'm very sensitive.

As a child, who had also been the brunt of Mother's anger (as children routinely are), I latched onto this justification of wounds large and small. I was sensitive.

The idea became a small hidden personality brick. Without awareness I used it to keep people, ideas, and experiences away. Whoever or whatever I saw as hurtful, or potentially hurtful, I reasoned I was a sensitive soul too aware of the world's angers and mistreatments. I was a finely tuned human instrument easily bruised if crudely treated. A human Stradivarius.

Another solid brick was the pervasive support of society that sensitivity is a female virtue. Female emotions were considered deeper, somehow more meaningful and nuanced than men's.

But time and the forces of nature eventually wear at even the most hidden bricks and now I look at being a sensitive person very differently. My senior year of high school I joined the debate team. A social issue was posed and everyone on the team was expected to research the topic and be able to defend and criticize pro and con views. Rules of debate stressed being prepared and ability to understand all sides.

The world of ideas and tools of critical thinking slowly opened. I became more familiar with an attitude of listening to various sides and realizing ideas were only ideas and not weapons directed at me. Often they appeared to imprison the uncritical or unobservant believer.

A later realization was while listening to my husband's anger. He was very upset over something I had done or said. Marriage gives reasons. I'd seen his anger before and nursed my tender sensitive wounds afterwards. This time I spontaneously observed, Oh, that's what he means.

I think the new thought occurred because I was finally bored with his anger and my wounds and our emotional routines. So I listened. I heard. I still didn't entirely agree, but I could see his point of argument and expression of honest emotion. Emotion not only aimed at me, but also emotion that was a façade of his fears and hurts. Man deep feelings. Human deep feelings.

Oh, I thought.

I'm careful using the word sensitive. I believe it is easily self limiting, destructive and a judgmental excuse to not consider intentions and real meaning. Instead, I aim for awareness then understanding. Ideas and emotions can make me confused and defensive. But once the initial swell of reaction clears, I consider and re-think. Sensitivity is no longer a pointed arrow to my heart. It is radar gathering information to act sincerely from my heart.

### **Thoughts on Thanks by Anne Hansen**

I believe in writing thank-you notes.

After we were married, my husband and I set out to write thank you's for our wedding gifts, a significant task as we'd had nine showers and sent more than 300 invitations. Writing the notes took a long time, some seemed perfunctory (what do you say, "Of all the crock pots we received, yours was our favorite"?), and yes, we thanked Aunt DeEtte for green camp chairs when it turns out she actually sent crystal goblets.

But something more than completing the notes happened when I sat down to write. Scanning our modest student apartment, I realized everything in it from the desk where I sat to the lamp lighting my work had been a gift. I felt grateful to my parents' cousins and my husband's neighbors, and not just for items

dutifully purchased from our Target registry. I appreciated the support rallied around my marriage and realized each gift represented a small investment in its success.

My father-in-law teased that about the time we finished wedding thank-you's we'd be moving on to baby gifts. Although two-and-a-half years passed before baby Scotty came along, Grandpa's prediction felt true. I confess, in those hazy home-from-the-hospital days between lactation consultations and poopy diaper tallies it seemed an added strain to record who brought which Onesie.

But when the fog cleared enough that I could write some thank-you notes, I was glad I remembered. It seemed important to tell Grandma Jean her blue romper matched Scotty's eyes, to tell the neighbors their dinner of roast beef and potatoes made me feel as though I were eating love. And for the first time in weeks, I could process what had happened. I'd had a baby. There was so much I wanted to teach him, to be for him. The gifts I acknowledged reminded me that the responsibility of meeting his needs was not mine alone, nor was the joy at his coming.

Thank-you notes also teach me when I receive them. It's no good to be a thank-you note accountant, keeping mental ledgers of which kindnesses have been acknowledged, but I do anticipate one note each year. In early January, when snowflakes settle on the holiday runaround, I receive a note from my dad, thanking my family for whatever \$25 Christmas present we gave him and the time we spent together. A paper shredder actually becomes a thoughtful gift when I picture my dad cross-cutting away at those noxious credit-card offers. I hope when he does this he'll think of me and remember I love him. Because my dad says he is thankful, my giving feels more generous.

These thank-you note convictions seem murkier when I try to persuade Scotty, now four, to color notes for his recent birthday gifts. He refuses anything but a red crayon and complains, "Coloring is not one of my talents." But we will keep trying, because I want him to experience the realizations of gratitude and generosity thank-you notes have given me.

### **If You Can Read This by Daniel Harnsberger**

With a tube of white oil paint and my black graduation gown, I went to work. I couldn't mess it up. I got on the computer and printed out letters in a few different sizes so it would fit. To do things right I had to work twice as hard. I began to paint across the shoulders of my graduation gown. I swigged my beer. With the last sip, the last letter was finished. I stepped back and looked at my final product. In crooked letters that according to spell-check were spelled right the black gown had been adorned with the word DISLEXIC.

I stopped telling people I was dyslexic at some point because they usually told me about how they might be dyslexic too. They saw b's as d's. They misspelled words. They even read slowly. I listened. Told them nothing. I didn't explain that I had never seen letters forward so how could they be backward? I didn't tell them I couldn't spell my middle name, Thomas, until I was 14 and that sometimes I spell "of" as "o-v-e" and that I hate the words tomorrow and february. And reading slowly? Try being scared to finish the last page of the first "real" book you ever read because to spend another year, a few pages at a time, is so insurmountable that you want to cry so you leave that last page for months just because. Because it might not ever happen again.

My college graduation was the first time in years that I talked about dyslexia with strangers. Mostly they took photographs of my gown to show their loved ones with dyslexia. Two days later I started graduate school for my Masters in Education. I decided to do what a teacher had once done for me on the first day of third grade at my new school for "different kids." I was left in a room with a giant man who leaned back in a metal chair. I studied him closely through the green glasses that they gave me because green glasses cured dyslexia. I saw his slightly greenish Paul Bunyan shirt, jeans and long hair. He said, "I'm

Chad." I didn't say anything. I waved. Chad grinned and pointed at the chair next to him. As I approached I saw him pick up a book. Immediately I tried to escape. I slid under the table and spun into a roly-poly bug shape. Then Chad went down on one knee and I thought he was going to squash me. Instead he crawled under with the book still in hand. Chad's shoulders didn't fit and he shrugged, lifting the table up a few inches. Chad's huge hand pushed the book in front of my face. "Cat, Bat, Mat," he said while his finger followed the letters. I felt comfortable under the table with Chad snug next to me. We read.

### **R-E-S-P-E-C-T** **by Trish Hopkinson**

I believe in R-E-S-P-E-C-T and not just a little bit. All the world relies on humankind, how we treat each other, how we eat, how we live, how we love, how we react, how we worship. Or should I say war-ship. The battleship of G-O-D. Because there is nothing like religion to bring out the worst in humankind. Religion is a one way flight to nowhere but conflict, angst, and suffering.

I believe in respecting everyone! Oh yeah, no matter what the race, gender, age, ethnicity, or religion. There's not a person alive today that doesn't seek respect, doesn't yearn for it, doesn't D-E-S-E-R-V-E it and to me, it's the children that suffer most. Children, treated for less than who they are, forced into slavery, made into soldiers, and often, even in the land of the free, left alone.

Children, treated with no R-E-S-P-E-C-T not even a little bit.

With true respect, there would be no bigotry, no child abuse, no violence, no intolerance. An existence such as this is hard to imagine. There are times I peer out at the world and think of its hatred. I contemplate--if my son or daughter were to live a lifestyle not accepted by society, if they were to change skin color, love someone of the same gender, or change their gender, if they lived in poverty, if they chose Atheism over god, or simply chose the wrong god. Some people that I know would H-A-T-E them. Even though they are my children, born of my blood, raised by my heart, and part of my soul. Other humans might hurt their feelings, punch them in the face; other humans might even kill them.

What a tragedy when parents must witness the disrespect of their children.

I believe in respect for everyone.

I believe in R-E-S-P-E-C-T! and NOT just a little bit.

### **I Believe in Living Usefully** **by James House**

I believe that the personal behavior that makes one most happy is that which reinforces the welfare of society. In my view, this behavior was best summed up by Benjamin Franklin's phrase "live usefully."

What is a useful life? I believe that there are many forms a useful life can take, all of which have the commonality of bettering society. We are useful to our fellow citizens when we do things that improve their condition. Most religions teach their people to treat others kindly and do good deeds. This is useful. But I believe usefulness also includes creating improvements to the world around us.

Why does being useful make one happy? Consider this question: who wants to be called "good for nothing"? If seriously meant, there are few terms that bestow less love and value upon a person's life



than "good for nothing." To be loved by others is a primal, deep desire. To be useful to others gives one the knowledge that the love and respect you receive is genuinely deserved and long lasting. What can make a person happier than knowing that the love they receive is deserved? When I was a teen, I was once with my father when he introduced himself to an older gentleman. Upon hearing our uncommon last name, the man asked, are you the son of Adolphus House? When my father replied yes, the man then said, "Oh, he did so many great things for so many people, I'm sure he taught you to do the same, so I just have to give you a hug." My grandfather had been dead for about 15 years, but still had that much love felt toward him! Surely he must have felt happiness.

How do we achieve usefulness? All of us are engaged in activities with varying degrees of usefulness throughout our lives. However, those who daily seek to identify and meet another's need are bound to be useful. I believe that every human is born with the ability to distinguish which of their actions are beneficial to their fellow beings. Unfortunately, we are also born with the inclination to seek superficial pleasure. To truly be happy, we must spend more time acting usefully. Everyone will find different ways of doing so. Ben Franklin found usefulness through his ideas for societal improvement (such as introducing public libraries) and the inventions which he offered to the world patent-free (such as the bifocal and lightning rod). Not everyone's usefulness will achieve such public renown, but all of us can find ways to make real improvements to the lives in our communities and nation.

I believe that for me, the struggle for the discipline to live more usefully will be lifelong. But I have a responsibility to do so, because I wish to live in a world full of people anxiously engaged in improving the conditions of their fellow men. I believe that the more effort I put into being useful, the happier everyone, particularly myself, will be.

### **In the Forest by Michael Huerta-Enochian**

I believe in the wonderful life of the trees. I believe that trees supply life for much, much more than just the animals present with them. I believe in the vast sanctity that trees have constantly given to me. I believe in the awe-inspiring life of the trees.

I grew up in Oregon on the edge of an 11,250 acre forest, my backyard was this forest. I learned to love with every part of me the creeks, the flowers, the animals, the bugs, and most of all, the amazing scent of my backyard forest during the rain. The sound of the drops hitting every leaf as it comes down to wet my face and the crackle of fallen branches and crushing leaves under my feet. I couldn't help but realize what a miniscule person I was every time I would climb some of my more adored trees! Being all the way in the top of the highest tree just above the canopy of the rest is such an astonishing feeling. I can feel every change in the direction of the wind because the WHOLE tree sways a very noticeable amount. It can get pretty scary up there. In the forest I've always had a very strong notion of being free. The way I could run out in to the forest and no one, not even my mother, not even myself at times, would know where I was. If I wanted to hide, I could and no one could find me, except for my dog, but that's another story.

I don't think I could begin to comprehend how I would feel if ALL the trees in the world disappeared. When I was young growing up in Oregon, one of my favorite places to go was The Tree on the Hill. I always climbed up this tree and went about twenty feet out on one of the limbs, this particular branch split in a y shape forming two more branches. I used to nestle up and sleep in its small cove for periods of time. One day, some developers bought a small portion of land just near MY TREE and started bulldozing the land. I was so panicked that I thought it was the end of the world! They were going to cut my friend, my companion down, and having a very vivid imagination back then, I thought I was going to have to chain myself to the tree and get in a bloody fight with the loggers (like in *The Hitch-Hikers Guide to The Galaxy*). It never happened, and the tree still stands on top of that hill today. However, that feeling I had long ago comes back every time I drive up a beautiful canyon just to come around a bend in the road to see where

a massive forest used to be, and should be, but instead see a whole mountainside of tree stumps that have been 100% logged out.

When I was young, my mother used to read to me *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein. I used to love it just for the crude drawings and the idea of the tree being this child's, boy's, and man's best friend. It is now much later in life and I'm beginning to understand that the story is about unconditional love between a boy and a tree. The tree is very selfless and gives all it can to the boy: apples, shade, and vines. The tree then gives itself to the young man so that he can build with, and finally, a seat for the old man as a stump while they grow old together. Trees have shaped my life today in many ways. They have even taught me how I would like to treat others. Although I can't prove that trees make decisions and act on self-will, I do know that those trees in my backyard forest always supplied me with the things I needed when I was with them. There is life in the trees, and I believe in the wonderful life of them.

\* I guess I really am a tree-hugger

### **I Believe in Beer by Kyle Jeffreys**

What do we think about when we think about beer? Major brewing companies spend hundreds of millions of dollars on billboard and television advertisements to ensure that images of beautiful women and good times come to mind in the consciousness of every male when thinking about drinking. Other advertisements aim their sights on the ladies, telling them they can work on their buzz at a rate of only one calorie per can.

I choose a different perspective. As I hold a pint of amber ale against the light, it brings to life a beautiful tradition as old as history itself. The Gilgamesh Epic is regarded as one of the first great works of literature and tells a story of evolution from the primitive to cultured man. It also tells of brewing beer. Chinese records dating back 5,000 years carry accounts of brewing. Pharaoh Rameses II was a beer drinker. The Egyptian Book of the Dead makes reference to brewing, and the Romans were known to knock back a few as well. St. Nicholas of Myra was a well regarded brewer, better known as the fat man who slides down your chimney once a year. If you've ever wondered what monks did day in and day out all those centuries, this is a hint.

When I look at a beer I see a work of art. I see creativity at its finest; every recipe as distinctive as the thumbprint of its brewer. Nothing has ever mirrored it and we will never see an exact copy. Different recipes are born from all over the world, each and every one as unique as its coordinates on a map. Yet, all beer shares one characteristic that will never fade; they are all 90% water. As different as they may seem, be it through color or taste, they are all overwhelmingly the same. It is a mere 10% that makes them different, and it is within that 10% that a countless number of truly unique creations will come to be.

As the tap eases forward and opens the spout, each glass is filled with this rich history and beauty to be enjoyed with each taste. While I participate in one of the oldest cultural norms known to humankind, I like to think about how we are all born 90% water. As different as we may seem--as different as some would like us to be--we are all overwhelmingly the same. It is a mere 10% that makes us different, and beer reminds me that these differences should bring us together, like friends sitting down to a few drinks, appreciating life and warm conversation. It is these differences that make life worth the experience.

I see a world where so many people fail to recognize that we should embrace our differences. I try to live each day showing people the value in diversity, and the strength in realizing that we are all so much the same. Beer reminds me of this, and for that I believe in beer.

## **Parenting is My Teacher** **by Shelly Jenson**

I believe the most profound lessons in life arise from parenting. Despite the massive amounts of information I send my children's way, more lessons seem to come back my way. The recurring, subtle lesson I encounter is learning to separate my self from each child's self. I feel my children's pain as my own pain and their joy as my own. But, parenting is difficult for me, knowing I have only limited control over the outcome.

I believe I have made a commitment to my children to provide them with a safe place to crawl, walk, stumble, fall, and always find footing. Included in this commitment is a set of boundaries. Boundaries firm enough to teach consequences and flexible enough to allow discovery. If I let them investigate life, without judging them, they will discover their own truths.

I believe in teaching my children the delicate notion that bad choices do not make bad people. One day my son noticed a man smoking and exclaimed, "Oh my gosh, Mom, that man is soooooo bad. He is going to die!" I explained that the man had chosen differently, but that didn't make him a bad person. He was silent as he pondered this difficult concept. A few days later my son thoughtfully made an obtuse attempt to empathize with a stranger, it wasn't great, but it was a beginning.

I believe humor is a powerful teacher. I happened upon it one day when my daughter was doing a math assignment. When she had completed it, she flew downstairs to play. As I began to correct it, her answers looked too familiar. I glanced around and discovered the crumpled paper from yesterday's attempt. I realized her endeavor to cheat and was aghast! How could she? Why would she? My initial reaction was to lecture her. However, after thinking for a few minutes, I cheerily called her upstairs, handed her the two papers and said, "If you're going to cheat, you need to be more clever about it!" I watched her face register fear. Then slowly a shy smile played around the edges of her mouth. She looked up at me with her eyes twinkling, put her arms around me and said, "Sorry, Mom, I just wanted to play. Do you want me to do it again, for real?" Humor had been the perfect teacher.

I believe I must continually forgive myself when I am not the parent I expected to be. I can't recall how many times I have given up parenting. Yes, given up! Yet, each time I do, my parent-child relationship suddenly becomes less complicated and I realize that I was wounding myself, and my children, with the blade of my expectations.

I believe that, if I allow my children the freedom to shatter my expectations, they will choose their own singular paths and become self-determining adults. I am learning to separate my self from each child's self. I feel their pain and I feel their joy. But, their lives are their own.

## **A Call for Greatness** **by Mary E. Johnson**

In the play, *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio recites one of Shakespeare's most famous lines, "but be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em." I marvel at these words and often wonder if Shakespeare had any inclination that centuries after his death, he would continue to be distinguished as one of the greatest writers of all time. This quote has personal significance and invokes a powerful sense of purpose in my life. While perhaps not all of us are born to be the Shakespeares or Einsteins of our day, the quote speaks for every human being, those born with extraordinary talent, and those who have yet to find it. It is my belief that our greatness is not measured by origin, but rather how we choose to cultivate and engage it. We as human beings are extraordinary

creatures, and it is our purpose and responsibility to use our existence to do great things for the betterment of humanity. I believe this value is quickly diminishing in our society; and that we as individuals must restructure our lives to enable the extraordinary.

I often find myself troubled by the lack of purpose that seems so ubiquitous in our society. I feel as though the general population manages itself through the greatness of the few. While we are blessed to live in an age of astounding technological advances, I believe that we too often let these innovations replace our own abilities to conceive new ideas and formulate thoughtful opinions about the world around us. These adaptations have given society more opportunities and resources to not only become connected to the world, but to instigate new ideas and constitute change. Unfortunately, my observations conclude that the general public is more distracted by the personal gains of such advances; whereas the population would be served better by capitalizing on technology as an instrument for achieving greatness. The world is inundated with noise, from video games to i-pods, commercializing a commodious lifestyle, and enabling a lack of personal motivation. We need to take off the headphones if we are to ever hear our call for greatness.

I believe there is no substitution for the extraordinary; and that our society has accepted mediocrity to take its place. The deficiencies in education, the staggering absence of voting constituents and an overall sense of complacency is threatening to destroy the very fabric of what constitutes who we are and our capacity for greatness. It is difficult to imagine where our world would be today if Thomas Edison was satisfied with conventional candle light. What will the world have to say about us two hundred years from now? What discoveries will be left untouched because our creativity was exchanged for convenience? Our progress as human beings is contingent on not only our ability, but also our willingness to engage in greatness. If we are to succeed, we must reevaluate the patterns that are prohibiting us from reaching this potential, and strive to make our lives extraordinary.

### **One Person Truly Can Make a Difference by C. R. Lee**

Do you ever feel like an ant on the back of an elephant when thinking about your scope of influence? I have, but in my heart, I believe that one person truly can make a difference. I'm not talking about becoming a caped crusader or leaping over tall buildings in a single bound. I'm referring to the person who let me into traffic, receptionists who have greeted me promptly, and the person who took the time to cancel their reservation creating an opening for me.

My definition of making a difference doesn't involve fame, world domination, or never making a mistake. If it did I'd easily become discouraged. Instead, I take the shorter view, identifying those who've made a difference in my life. I can still remember a teacher who knowing my parents both worked and couldn't attend after school volleyball games, supported me by making her presence known. Each time the referee called side out, and it came my turn to serve, butterflies had a jamboree in my stomach. I'd hear a cheer coming from the stands, and break out in a blushing grin. Hearing her enthusiasm one might think the team's power server had just stepped up to the line. On the contrary, none of my serves made it over the net; my own teammates crouched in fear as the ball ricocheted off the ceiling. Now every time my serve makes it to the other side of the net I silently give thanks for a teacher who refused to give up on me, even in the face of defeat.

I won't be posing for a statue anytime soon, but by following Mrs. Beach's example I believe I have made a difference in the lives of others. I share my smile, mentor new employees without being asked and thank the clerk who bags my groceries. You may not think yourself a hero when giving up your seat on the train, but you are to the person who sits there.

I know I'll never look like Angelina Jolie or become a world class figure skater, but whenever I start to doubt my belief that one person truly can make a difference, I recall feeling like a loser and the one person who continued cheering me on.

### **Never Forget Where You Came From by Nancy McGee**

It was an amazing farm. There was an old smokehouse to the east of the main house and a barn where hollyhocks grew in the summer; the shades of pink and white and magenta so strong against the reddish brown of the barn wall. Not far away were three old apple trees that bore the most luxurious white blooms in the spring. And when the leaves and apples were long gone you could look through the living room window and see through the branches out into the plowed fields where the black hard earth had been turned over to form perfect rows ready for the heavy Iowa snow.

Driving up the gravel lane past the old windmill where Black Angus cows milled about in the pasture, you knew you were in for a very special treat of a home cooked meal, time in the garden and a game of cards. It sounds simple to those who hurry and scurry about today, most terribly disconnected from the ones they truly love and treasure, and in ways it now seems like fiction to me. So perfect. People who didn't work in their fields on Sunday because it was the Lord's day and they truly honored that for what it was--a day that was bigger than them, a day that they showed gratitude and were humbled by the power that nature had over everything they had and everything they did.

Now that my mother and father are gone and I reflect on my life and what I believe, I know that when my grandmother decided to sell this farm after my grandfather died and move to town, she was creating a new and different life. Remembering that this was her husband's family farm where she created a family of her own--built on the values of hard work, faith, laughter and humility--she never forgot where she came from. Today, I have the good fortune of enjoying the picture of this farm in my home and I believe that those values--hard work, faith, laughter and humility--will lead me as I continue to create my life.

This I believe: never forget where you came from.

### **Gay Marriage by Carol McLean**

I believe in love: I believe the lucky ones of us will find that one person who makes our life and sojourn on this planet worthwhile.

I believe in marriage: I believe we have the right to spend this brief moment in eternity with the love of our life, to spend our youth, our middle age, and our golden years together.

What I don't understand is all the hoopla about gay marriage being a threat to our family values or a menace to our community.

Because I've gotta tell you that when I walk down a dark alley at night frankly it's not being attacked by roving bands of homosexuals that scares me.

When I'm at the ATM and looking over my shoulder nervously, the guy with the delicate air is not the one I'm worried about brandishing a gun.

The drive-by shootings in my neighborhood, I just know are not gangs of gay couples.

When I hold my sobbing teenage student who has just been raped, or visit the battered women's shelter, I'm pretty certain it's not the homosexuals who brutalized those women.

When statistics show me one-third of all births in the US are to single mothers and that the divorce rate now tops 50% and families are torn asunder it's not the homosexual who I'm thinking caused that tragedy.

And finally when I compare notes with other 60+ year old women, whose husbands of 40 years have divorced them for a 29 year old trophy wife, and these elderly women now find themselves destitute with no marketable skills besides raising his children ya gotta wonder.

But it's the homosexual couples we regard as a threat to our family values, and a menace to our community?

Okay, in all fairness I must admit that when I come home and find someone has broken into my house, cleaned up the kitchen, made the beds, and tastefully redecorated my living room AGAIN I'm going to be eyeing with suspicion that homosexual couple at the end of my block.

Otherwise, I think we need to leave these people alone. I think they have the right to spend their life with the one they love. To pledge their lives to each other, to financially provide for each other, to purchase a home together, to tackle crabgrass and termites together, to save for cruises and cars together, to stand by each other in sickness and in health, and when their life come to an end, I think they have the right to die in each other's loving arms--just like the rest of us.

### **I Believe in Christmas by Cory Milligan**

Everything I truly believe in can be found in the ideals of what I call The Christmas Spirit. Christmas is not just a holiday for gift giving, but I believe it is a feeling of peace created by an awareness of a true desire to become a better person. Giving gifts is fun and a very enjoyable activity. However, it seems that it is the one activity that often detracts from what I see as the ideals of Christmas. To me, Christmas is a desire to serve others; it is a set of ideals, an inner peace to strive for throughout the year.

As a child, Christmas meant waiting for Santa Claus, getting presents, and complaining about Dad's tradition of waiting until after breakfast to open our presents. Christmas meant sneaking through the living room and trying to identify whose presents were whose. Yes, as a child, Christmas meant something very different than it does to me now. However, the same values of service are displayed and the same feelings of warmth and excitement well up in me today as they did when I was a child. Even Santa plays a big role in reminding me of the ideals of the Holiday season, for sewn up in his suit he is the symbol of forgiveness. As the scriptures tell me, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool." In other words my sins, my imperfections, my impurity can be forgiven and I can be made whole. The peace of forgiving imperfections is the greatest gift I can give or receive.

When I think of Christmas I think of big fluffy snowflakes falling to the earth while I am inside next to a cozy warm fire. I can close my eyes and imagine the smells of turkey, ham, mashed potatoes, gravy, fresh rolls, apple pie, wassail, and peppermint candies. I imagine the smell of fresh Christmas trees. I can see boughs of holly, blinking lights, red ribbons and displays of devotion. I can hear the ringing of jingle bells and Christmas Carols being sung by neighbors and friends. I imagine families gathering together and sharing memories of years gone by. I can even hear my father's voice as he reads his wide variety of

Christmas stories. I imagine children climbing up on Santa's lap to share their hopes and dreams of what they want to wake up to on Christmas morning. All I have to do is close my eyes and I am there at peace with myself and the world around me.

These feelings of peace have not always flourished inside my mind. I remember lean years when I could not afford a gift for my wife or child. Our Christmas tree one year was a poor feeble houseplant that we couldn't put any more than tinsel on. I remember a Christmas when we wrapped up a picture of what we wished we could have given had we the money to get something. Reflecting back, these experiences have shaped my belief that Christmas is not just a holiday for gift giving but a peace created by an awareness of a true desire to become a better person.

I believe that I can make a difference in this world by sharing what I call the Christmas spirit: displaying a joyful countenance, saying hello, being kind, courteous, respectful, and sharing a piece of myself with others through the Christmas Holiday and throughout the year. It is my responsibility to weave those ideals of Christmas into my life and make the world a better place one person and one season at a time. No matter what the calendar says, when I am at peace with myself and with others, it is Christmas

### **This I Believe by F. John Neuhauser**

The process of explaining what one believes is an interesting and in some ways an inherently flawed one. Although rarely specified by one individual in a query about one's beliefs, it is generally understood that the inquirer is not curious about the other person's beliefs on the current barometric pressure or if the bus they are waiting for will arrive on time. Such questions usually pertain to more deeply pondered things. Matters of the spirit are usually what are triggered within my own psyche when questioned about my beliefs. For some this may elicit thoughts on political matters or perhaps social structure. Webster's defines belief as conviction or faith, trust or opinion. To me, beliefs are thoughts or amalgamations of thoughts that for any number of reasons become internally cemented as truths or foundations.

The concept of putting my beliefs or "what I believe" in written form is new to me and has been fascinating! I've realized that to explain my beliefs to someone has almost always been a blood pressure event for me. Why is that? Is it that verbally expressing my beliefs to someone causes me to oversimplify or paraphrase my beliefs? Is it that I am manifesting the common human tendency, or dare I call it a need to tell other people what to do or think. Perhaps these dynamics and others are at work in such situations. Putting my beliefs in writing is having the opposite effect on me. I find myself taking a closer and perhaps more fresh look at what I believe. Time and experience it seems cause one's beliefs to evolve and mature, if not waiver in priority. My beliefs about God and the soul of a human being are loosely, but at the same time decisively rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. My spiritual orientation is no doubt largely tied to my upbringing in the Roman Catholic Church. Although, I haven't been a practicing member of that faith for decades. I think that some of my beliefs had their genesis internally; through prayer, meditation and perhaps directly through my connection to God and the Universe.

At this stage in my life, I often find myself contemplating external, or shall I say the here and now issues. There are so many systems on the planet that seem at or near the breaking point. Many of nature's systems already appear to be biting back or at least bearing their fangs in defense. Is the natural world capable of such malice towards an entity that seemingly means it harm? I believe it is!! Similarly, it seems that so many of the systems that are part of the human equation are in disarray. Geo-political systems, monetary systems, trade and commerce systems, just to name just a few. Social systems that have evolved over thousands of years of human interaction also seem to be under assault. A brave new world of personal computing and communication devices, has in the blink of an eye, forever changed the way we relate to each other in our daily lives. The threat of grave trouble and chaos is as any follower of history knows, nothing new. I believe that the stakes are just so much higher in the present time. I

suppose in a sense, that many of my most recently formed beliefs actually are about a barometric pressure of sorts. I believe, if there were a barometer that measured the general wellbeing of our world, it would be calling for stormy weather.

I believe that the human family is at a crossroads. We are also directing traffic at that crossroads and how we choose to do so undeniably effects virtually every other family that makes up the web of life on this, our fragile and precious planet Earth! If we are to rise to the occasion, we must utilize powers that I believe have been divinely gifted to us. Powers of compassion, of co-operation, of forgiveness, of resolve, of fortitude and of course a most divine power, that, of Love.

### **"Doctor, I Am at Peace"** **by Bretton Newman**

As a female physician many months into the thick of infertility I have come to see myself in a different way than I did just a few months ago. Before, I thought I was invincible. I thought I'd pulled off the impossible task of being "perfect." Then my husband and I started trying to get pregnant, earlier than many of our other professional friends, yet at thirty-five, we knew we were running late. Still, life had been swimming along for us, and we assumed it would continue to do so.

It hasn't gone the way we'd hoped. We're two years into our marriage and twenty tries into pregnancy. Infertility is humbling and has required that I face imperfection and life's frailty. I'm broken, flawed, and so far helplessly unable to conceive a child.

Rather than liberating me, the choices available that might lead to a child have temporarily immobilized me. Thoughts of clomid, intrauterine insemination, in vitro fertilization, adoption, and remaining childless swirl regularly through my mind, leaving me exhausted and unclear about our next step. I'm in a holding pattern, a waiting corral with my incredible husband at my side.

Last week I met a new patient, Marjorie, an elderly woman with newly diagnosed pancreatic cancer at her home. Facing innumerable choices about the direction of her care, she chose hospice. During the visit she gripped my hand and, with twinkling, youthful eyes despite her aged body, said to me in a scratchy voice, "Doctor, I am at peace." Her words got to me, in the pit of my stomach, and they changed me.

She had not lived a "perfect" life. She was alcoholic, widowed for many years, and lived alone. One son was now moving in to care for her. She was real rather than perfect. I fell for her instantly because she absolutely knew that life was messy and she didn't care. She liked life anyway. The wrinkles around her smiling eyes told it all.

I was drawn to Marjorie, transfixed by her calm, her laughter, and her insistence that this pancreatic cancer diagnosis would be ok. As I struggle on the path toward motherhood I wonder if I can learn to trust, like Marjorie, that life has a way of working itself out if you can make peace with its imperfection.

### **Nature** **By Katie Northrup**

I believe in nature--to live in it, with it, among it as much as possible. I believe happiness comes from appreciation and wonder at just being alive on this beautiful planet.

That the sun rises every morning and sets every night--without fail--is wondrous to me.



Craggy mountains, wind-carved deserts, blue-green seas are endlessly lovely, to me.

I've seen wild deer a thousand times and enjoyed every glimpse. I've seen a wild grizzly bear only once, and that encounter is blazed in my memory.

I find joy in twisting Aspen leaves, darting blue dragonflies and spring-scented breezes.

It is, to me, amazing that water droplets recycle and renew themselves endlessly--from rain, to river, to sea, to cloud.

To me, it is miraculous that a cell can live as worm or human--it makes no difference to the living.

I found nature as a child, traipsing for miles behind my Dad as he fished. He delicately flipped flies into streams; I searched for frogs, picked flowers, and climbed rocks. We got muddy, wet feet and bit by mosquitoes. While I never took to the fishing part, I loved everything else. I remember once, I was probably about 10 years old, I got bored watching my Dad fish and wandered off. I spotted a scrap of snow leftover from winter. It was at the base of a treeless rocky slope, not too far away. I headed that way. It took longer than I expected to reach the snow, but I did. I took a cold bite of snow, plopped down to admire the view, then headed back. The lake my Dad was fishing at was no longer in view. I thought, well it's just over this next rise. It wasn't. But I felt confident of my direction and sure enough I eventually found myself back to where I'd started off in the first place. I felt proud--never afraid. Out in nature is a good place to be.

I believe nature is essential to human life, not just because we need water, food and air to live, but because we need wholeness. To me, nature fills an unexplainable human need.

For this reason, I believe in living as gently upon the planet as possible--to protect, preserve or let it alone, as the case may be. I believe human survival depends upon it.

### **To Throw Food Away is Wrong by Fredy Ntambwe-Kalala**

The United States of America is the wealthiest country in this world. In it are found the best athletes, the smartest, and the most advanced resources to help human kind have the greatest journey while habiting it. In addition to being a well-developed country, the unhealthiest people are found in it.

Back home in Africa, I had never seen obese people in my life. Never have I known that in the long run someone can get cancer by consuming too much canned food. Food is overloaded here in the Americas. That explains why Americans have no fear in so what wasting food. Throwing food away is wrong and Americans should think about recycling it, instead of throwing it away.

My family values have taught me that throwing food away is wrong because millions in Africa die of hunger everyday. I was born in Liberia Africa and my family always had enough food. In as much we had food we were in an entourage of the hungriest people on the planet. As you all know, Africa is the home of the deadliest wars that tears apart families, leaving a lot of homeless and fatherless children without food or any means to survive. At home during dinner, my parents thought us that we should always serve us what we could eat. When we didn't finish what was on our plates, the leftover was stored in a little bowl and kept in the fridge. The following day we were to take it out and warm it up in the microwave to eat it again whether the food was soggy or not.

I grew up with that mind set that throwing food away is wrong. When I moved to the Americas it was hard for me to be an accomplice in what I believed was wrong. Why is food wasted so much in the U.S? In all my years working in restaurants and grocery stores I have been so offended and hurt to see food being wasted and thrown away straight to the garbage. Why isn't that given to animals, or kept for other purposes? Millions are dying in Africa, and I am sure home less people can use a loaf of bread that will expired the next day.

Living with Americans was the hardest for me. There was an instance where my roommate and I were cleaning the fridge when we found a dozen eggs with the expiration date of a month before. My roommate commanded me that I should throw them away but my conscience pressed so hard on my beliefs that I didn't throw the eggs away. Because I had grown up with that belief for me throwing food away was as bad as hitting a girl or telling a lie.

I believe it is wrong to throw food away. The only time I think it is right is if the food is used for something else after. There are millions of people dying of hunger all around why isn't that food given to them. Why can't we take that extra money we buy for extra food and give it to those that will not throw it away? To throw food away is wrong and that is what I believe.

### **Weighing in Our Ourselves by Annabelle Numaguchi**

I believe that we need to be kinder to ourselves. We need to treat ourselves with the compassion we share with friends and the gentleness we show to children. This spring I became particularly aware of how hard I can sometimes be on myself and how so many people I know share this trait.

A close friend and I used to take walks together, often bemoaning the five pounds we eternally wanted to lose, but never did. This Spring, we finally lost that weight.

My two-year-old son was diagnosed with an aggressive non-metastatic tumor; her husband with stomach cancer. In essence, we lost our appetites.

Neither of us was overweight. On the contrary, we are healthy women who never really exceeded the recommended weight limit for our 5'3" frames. Yet, like so many women, we were constantly critical of ourselves, most notably, our physical selves. This eternal drive to lose the last five pounds was simply a manifestation of that endless quest for perfection, and with that, an underlying dissatisfaction with our naturally flawed selves.

Our bodies got lighter as our hearts became heavier. I attained that desirable number on the scale, but what I really wanted was to roll back time.

I wish I had worried less about those five pounds. Here are some of the numbers that were more worth focusing on: the pound of butter on her husband's homemade perogies in the winter; the liters of champagne we drank for each New Year; the traditional 4-pound Prime Rib we used to celebrate every birthday; the 25 pounds of pregnancy weight I gained that yielded 7 lbs of perfect joy--not once, but twice.

I want to give thanks for all the pleasure I took during those moments that nurtured me into the extra five pounds I used to own. They represented happiness and peace.

By the end of the summer, our stories were resolved. We all avoided the dreaded chemotherapy that loomed in the possible future for us. For my son, his tumor went into spontaneous remission. For our friend, his tumor killed him.

I believe we should be kinder to ourselves, less critical of our flaws and more thankful for the ability we have to create and enjoy pleasure in our uncertain lives. Every scar tells a story, every pound bears witness to a meal well savored and shared, every wrinkle reminds us that we are living a long life.

### **Modern Renaissance by Sarah Parker**

It really is a wild wonderland out there, complete with colored trees and thieves, and mystical messages from the mouths of animals. True scientists and worshippers agree there is infinite order and infinite chaos.

Science is miraculous. It can't be blindly wielded, or smothered. Blocking progress is akin to witch hunt; it's just modern superstition. Huge leaps of understanding came from practices shrouded in misunderstanding. From the first anatomists, to planetary positioning, to the modern day, the effects of miracles are defended against as manipulations of God's work.

The tide of spirituality must, too, be accepted. What more can be required than high ideals? They are the shelter from the constant storm. And what a violent storm! If the world were seen as its own system, we could see that this turbulence is an attempt at equilibrium, driven by the uneven state we're in.

The only relief is that surrounding the reconciliation of our world, our future, and our beliefs is the promise of an era of renaissance, of enlightenment. Whether this is achieved gracefully, by the will of the people, or with brutality, by the nature of the people, it is assuredly a time of great art, music, science, written word, and spirituality. These are the shock absorbers and amplifiers of violence, change, and evolution. Let the sciences grow and spirituality roam! In a global civilization we have everything we need if we can only be civilized.

Within the comforting statement, "Everything will be okay" is the profound lie that somehow the world will stop, war could end, and all people would be comfortable in this life. But the statement should be everything is inevitable. Ultimately, the only way to dispel the panic is to contribute. I hope to usher in whatever world comes, by paint, by pen, by philosophy. Since at least, for me, it may absorb the shock.

### **Voices by Delores Peterson**

I believe people can hear voices without being crazy or having to accept that it's their own inner voice they hear.

I heard a voice. It asked, Do you want to meet him? I was standing in front of a bathroom mirror washing a pair of stockings. No one else was home so the house was quiet except for the sloshing of water in the sink. I don't know that I heard it so much as heard the question almost type itself into my head.

Later, my mother told me that paranormal sensitivity is heightened near water.

At the time I thought and answered no. I thought by him, the voice meant death. And I didn't want to die. I thought that was the end of things, but I heard the voice and the question about five times in all.

The second time I started thinking that maybe I was being asked if I wanted to meet a man, someone real. Or the happier thought that I was going to meet five men, one for each question I heard.

I was in a troubled marriage. I started thinking after the voices that maybe the voice was trying to tell me that there was someone else waiting to come into my life. I did get divorced, and it's been 10 years since the voice, but I can't say I've met him yet.

My mother heard voices on a few occasions in her life.

Her older sister died at age 10 when my mother was 8. Shortly thereafter my mother was outside and heard her sister's voice ask, Did you bring me flowers? My mother was scared and never heard her sister's voice again.

When my mother was in her early thirties, she heard a different voice. She'd recently given birth to twin girls after giving birth to five daughters previously. She'd always wanted twins and had to wait until her sixth pregnancy to get them. The morning she found out that she was carrying twins, she made us scrambled eggs for breakfast and all the eggs came out double-yolked. But I digress. My mother heard the voice while nursing one of the twins with the other in a crib nearby. It said, There. Are you happy now?

Over human history and through various cultures hearing voices has either been accepted or denounced. People were thought to run the gamut from being crazy or being a witch to being visited by heavenly beings. The tendency in our culture is to explain it rationally away.

I'm not crazy and I'm not a church-goer, but I do believe there's something beyond this earth, this physical universe. As Shakespeare said, All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players. I believe that there will be a time after the curtain goes down when we will be reunited with a higher spiritual realm. And that in the meantime, their voices speak to us on occasion from the life to come.

### **Dog is Love by Aaron Phillips**

I believe in my dog, the canine embodiment of purity and the bringer of love. His name is Riley, after the 1940s radio sitcom that popularized the phrase "living the life of Riley," which is to say living the good life on someone else's money. The name is uniquely apropos of dog life.

Right now, Riley's looking at me. I don't know what he's thinking. I don't know whether he's thinking. To be honest, I suspect he's not. But that look carries meaning nonetheless. That look represents a bond between animals, a bond that has been with us hominids for fifteen thousand years.

Early humans are said to have welcomed Riley's ancient predecessor, Canis Lupus, into their camps as food-scrungers. In return for spare chunks of wooly mammoth meat, the wolf-dog would perform certain vital functions, like protection from predators and help with the next hunt for new chunks of mammoth meat. People now had their first nonhuman boon companion; wolf-dogs now had something approaching the life of Riley, which catalyzed the gradual sloughing-off of their wolfishness.

Today, as then, the dog is simple. The dog is pure. But that purity and simplicity belies the intensity of our bond and the extent to which our existence is not just mutual but symbiotic, the product of shared experience and emotion. This should go without saying, but I love Riley. And I think he loves me, a fact science alternately proves and disproves, depending on which text one consults. Science aside, the feeling is intense on this end, a fact I need no experiment to verify. When I feed, walk, play with or pet Riley, we co-operate, we co-exist, and we co-love. This affectionate interplay between ancient hunter and ancient sidekick is not just something craved by those of us who share our lives with canines. It's coded for in our DNA, written into the spiral of genetics across millennia.

In the 2004 comedy *Anchorman*, bumbling newsman Ron Burgundy's temporary and predictable slide into oblivion is triggered by the loss of his beloved dog, Baxter, who is dropkicked off the Coronado Bridge by an enraged motorcyclist. Upon witnessing this devastating act of vengeance, Will Ferrell's character falls apart, unable to say anything intelligible beyond "I'm in a glass case of emotion" (a.k.a. a phone booth).

I hesitate to wrest deep meaning from a quagmire of slapstick, but I believe I will anyway: Ron Burgundy's comic attachment to his dog, which speaks Spanish, wears pajamas and orthodontic headgear, and saves lives ala Lassie, is an attachment to love itself. Baxter is an anthropomorphized caricature, yes, but

he is nevertheless a symbol of a bone-deep and biologically real connection. Baxter, Riley, wolf-dogs, all prove one thing: dog is love. Believe it.

**This I Believe**  
**by Christie Marie Rainey**

Howdy, Everybody. One of the books that got me through my teenage years was a book called The Secret Garden. And one day when I was walking through a desert in Palmdale, California—I found a five inch long gnarled rusted key that I placed on a leather string and wore around my neck—to meeting house on Sundays—to high school—everywhere. Then one day, I threw it back into the desert—to show that no physical thing would hold too much value for me.

So—what if—and just suppose—there is really is a Secret Garden?

This I Believe. Currently, we're trained to call ourselves "humans." To me, this sounds too much like humus which is a high grade of dirt but dirt, nevertheless. I think we are "Cosms"—acronym C S M—I think we are creators, scientists and monkeys. It's a heady mix.

If we're going to have a spirit world, do let's have a logical consistency. It takes a team to get things done—on earth as it is in heaven. If we're going to have a spirit world—and why not—it teaches unlimited thinking and allows for the possibility of phenomenon—not only in times of danger but also helpfull and fun phenomenon. And credit where credit is due—thy good is thine and my good is mine. In this manner, I do pray "Dear Team, Thankyou for this day. I'll be a hero and now a coward, in the main (no all the time but for the most part). I'll kick butt if I need to (in the most loving way possible) and I'll slap a blessing on the rest of it and figure that I've done my flippin' job. In Your Names and In My Name Universe of all Universe Eternity—See y'all in a minute—time being relative.

I believe that all "religions" are belief systems. Using the term "religion" gives automatic sanction. The term "belief system" will suffice. So AllTogetherMighty—AllTogetherAh!

P.S. I believe the saying is "Don't be followers of "satin"—in other words, material things—have some toys—enjoy them—but don't be followers of satin."

Also, the word "dead" does not teach the idea of eternal life. That word is also the most common denominator. All those in all the meeting houses in all the world and all those in prison all agree it's fine to use that word. I believe that word teaches limited thinking and is not a "good" for our species. First, we were this big and then we were this big and now we are This Big. We discard the physical body—we've been doing that since we were teeny tiny—let's speak what we know. We discard the physical body—it's rather an important event.

This I Believe. . .  
by Sudha Ramajani

What do I believe? What I believe in is not going to change the world one bit. So why do I care? But then, I do care extremely about life. I care about brain and consciousness. Why else four in the morning do I get up and sit in meditation while I could have used those few extra hours of sleep? Why else have I been practicing awareness all these years when I could have easily daydreamed.

Human beings have suffered through history. We have gone through many external revolutions since the beginning of mankind. All these revolutions, economic, technological, social, political, religious and cultural have not found any solutions to this problem of suffering. Human psyche has not advanced in

conjunction with these revolutions. The scientific and technological advancements have resulted in a world more dangerous than ever before. A small bomb can wipe out entire cities. All major nations in the world have phenomenal capacity to wipe out the entire earth several times over. Terrorism and terrorists have become household terms which even elementary school kids are familiar with. Interaction between nations has become easier and yet the divisions between nations and their economic, political and religious ideologies separate them more than ever before.

In this precarious situation it is my belief that what we need is an inner revolution. Inner revolution begins when we are face to face with our worries, anxieties, fears and all other emotions without dissipating them through escaping into numerous entertainments and analysis. Earth is so beautiful. Earth displays its magnificence all the time through its various colors, various shades of blues, yellows, oranges, reds, greens, whites, and browns. Along with the beauty of earth, life flows harmoniously displaying its magic. Humankind, not being aware of this magic suffers eternally. This is the first major snowstorm this winter. It looks unreal outside. The storm has brought mounds and mounds of white fluffy miracles all over the valley. The tall dogwood tree in the front yard is bearing the snow with all its red leaves still intact. Life is so inordinately alive and vibrant.

I believe life opens up before us every moment displaying its magic. But we live in the past. One does not need stacks of books and hierarchies of gurus to teach us about life. The enormity of life becomes apparent every moment if only we are awake. I believe every one of us is capable of being present to this magic.

### **Simple Beliefs by Art Reeves**

I believe that religions are part of a tree. Each one is true. That they start from the trunk and make up God's way. Each one is part of the branches and goes to the top of the tree. Each one is as important as the other. People should start believing in each other's way of religion and not think that there is only one that is true. I think that God can only do good things. He cannot do bad things. The bad things are the work of the Devil.

I believe that you do unto others the way you want to be treated. I believe that at first you should treat people the way you would want to be treated. Then treat them the way they treat you.

I believe there are a million reasons why you don't want to do something but there is only one reason why you should do it and that's because it's the right thing to do.

I think that people should stick together through good times and also bad times. That they should stand up for each other and stay together even if they're wrong.

I believe that you should not put off doing something when it needs to be done. You should do it right now.

I also believe that you have to pay for losing your temper. When you get mad and lose your temper bad things happen. It takes a while to happen but you have to pay sooner or later. So I believe you should not lose your temper. Things will get better, it just takes time. I believe that if you are kind and show love it will be like a cold when it spreads through people. That is seems like it is impossible for peace on earth, but if you are kind it can overcome hate.

You should never give up. Somebody said, "Never, never give up." I believe you should try to understand the old sayings like, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions" and "A penny saved is a penny earned" and "Sleep on it before you do anything." At first I didn't understand what these meant, but I as I think about them they seem to make sense.

I believe that if you are looking for the answers they will come along.

I believe that if I inspire somebody to get an idea then I am satisfied.

### **Star Prophecy Important For Us by Brigham Sabrig**

The accounts of a new star which coincided with the birth of Christ are important for us today. The event caused the side of Earth facing away from the sun to be lit brightly as day.

The Supernova SN1987a occurred about 140,000 years ago. The duration of its ultra bright phase appears similar to the Book of Mormon account. SN1987a's light reached Earth only 30 years ago. Cassiopeia A, occurred 10,000 years ago and was observed over 300 years ago. Events like these help us perceive the time skew and understand that a supernova only 200 light years away could have been observed over 2000 years ago. They indicate that a considerable amount of debris traveling at millions of miles an hour will be passing through the Solar System in the very near future.

Because the light from SN1987a shows us that debris from such explosions continues outward into space, we can know initial velocities must have exceeded the escape velocity for the original stars. 140,000 light years of empty space carries images of the debris still hot from continuing fission 30 years after the event. There is nothing between it and us to divert it or stop it.

Correlating the scientific and scriptural data, I conclude that Jesus synchronized the birth of his mortal body with the arrival of the light from a nearby supernova. A close enough to light the night as brightly as day.

Because Christ's Birth is incorrectly celebrated on December 25th astronomers are looking in the wrong direction for the nativity star. Emperor Constantine desiring to establish peace between Pagans and Christians, separated the nativity from the resurrection by moving the Nativity celebration to coincide with the Annual rebirth of the Sun. This can be seen from the scriptural account of the shepherds abiding in the fields with their flocks by night. In Winter the sheep are safely secured in a sheepfold.

Modern day scriptures tell us to look in the direction of midnight in America on April 6. This also makes the reason for the journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem more likely Passover than a Tax/Census. The Census/Tax story has been impossible to validate. Passover was also the reason Jesus was in that vicinity for his Crucifixion.

The Bottom line is that I believe Jesus synchronized His birth with the arrival of light from a supernova to draw our attention to the stars and make us aware of this high velocity debris. I believe science has correctly shown planets are formed from star debris. It is foolish to try to blow up such debris. I believe it should be intelligently diverted into collision trajectories with other pieces of debris rather than the sun or planets. Choosing carefully which pieces collide when and where would allow the very force which accelerated the pieces from the supernova to: ONE shape the mass into spheres. TWO decelerate the spheres into long term parking orbits around stable stars. THREE vent fission byproducts into space as much less threatening gas and dust to refuel stars. FOUR leave an empty space inside the spheres which could be much more safely inhabited by God's posterity (Us). I believe Geothermal Energy is a byproduct of naturally occurring Fission not thousands of miles, but more like a hundred miles below us, sandwiched between inner and outer surfaces of the Hollow Earth. We are doing as we must continue to do. We must progress in Technology to the point where we might participate in the process of building and parking planets made from exploded stars around stable stars.

### **Childish Imagination by Luke Seegmiller**

Childhood experiences have shaped what I believe. I grew up quickly. At a young age I learned about evil in this world no one wants to know about. My 14-year-old-adolescent mind was broadened when I watched my sister cope with terrible abuse at our neighbor's hand. It turns out that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is not reserved only for old war heroes. Could something like this happen in a small religious Idaho farming community? The answer: yes, it did happen and it changed the way I look at life.

Reading *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett recently reminded me of this difficult time in my life and how I coped. The story is about little Sara Crewe who's father dies leaving her penniless and at the mercy of a ruthless boarding school master, Miss Minchin. In addition to the loss of her beloved father, she goes from riches to rags in the matter of a few short moments. The star pupil became the lowest servant. Sara coped by using her imagination. She was a princess. To her, life was a fascinating story where her actions were as noble as any she ever read.

At the terrible time in my life when I mourned with my sister, I often felt as if I were in a great story. I could hear the sound track in the background as I went about in my daily teenage life. I was the noble hero of the story and did my best to act the part. I felt comfort knowing that every good hero or heroine must face the most difficult challenges and only when they face them well is a good story written. My sister now stands as a pillar of strength having lived through a dark, difficult, and yet triumphant time. A vivid imagination and a sense of the story like nature of life saw me through this challenge: the conflict, climax, and resolution of one of my life's stories.

I believe that our lives are great, long, and intricate stories. I don't know how much choice we have in making the story a tragedy, romance, or adventure, but I believe that we can make our lives good stories where actions and desires are as noble as any protagonist ever brought to life through pen and ink.

### **You Can Make a Difference by Nia Sherar**

"Nothing I can do about it...guess I'll go fishing," my boyfriend used to say when I would rant on about politics and world poverty. I would shake my index finger in his face and say, "Yes you can!"

This I believe, you can make a difference. We live in the wealthiest nation in the world and we should make a difference.

Consider these statistics:

- 1 out of 3 people in our world lack basic sanitation.
- 1 out of 6 people in our world have inadequate access to clean water.
- 1 out of 6 people in our world cannot read a book or write their name.
- 1 out of 6 people in our world live on less \$1 a day.

My childhood dream was to plant corn to feed the starving children in Africa. As I grew older, I knew that simply planting corn would not end hunger. I wanted to do something but what could I do?

In 1976, Mohammad Yunus, a Bangladeshi economist, met a group of 42 impoverished women who made and sold baskets. Each morning they borrowed money for their supplies from money sharks. Each evening profits from their day's work was eaten up when they repaid their usurious loans. Yunus wanted to make a difference. He loaned the group of 42 women the equivalent of \$27, never expecting to be repaid. When these illiterate women repaid him, microcredit and the Grameen Bank were born.

To date, microcredit has helped over 10 million poor women and their families overcome poverty. Yunus won the Noble Peace Prize in 2006. He is making a difference.



When I learned about Mohammad Yunus and microcredit, I knew this was the way I could make a difference. In 1999 I completed over 30 pages of IRS forms to establish the Opportunity Fund for Developing Countries (OFDC). Eight years later, with a lot of hard work and commitment our grassroots, volunteer-powered organization has raised over half a million dollars to offer a bridge to poor Kenyan women and children to improve their lives. Our volunteer Kenyan administrators work with villagers who live with no electricity or running water.

With donations:

- women are starting small businesses and with their profits they are able to feed their families
- girls are in school, avoiding forced child marriages
- children are sleeping under treated nets, protected from malaria carrying mosquitoes
- villagers are building water wells and latrines, improving community sanitation and decreasing illness

Poli, poli, (slowly, slowly) each OFDC volunteer is making a difference. We are little ripples making big waves.

My Danish sister-in-law says they are raised with "what makes you think you're so special?" Here in the States it's "you're special. You can do anything." I think it should be "you're special. You can make a difference."

This I believe.

My former boyfriend, now husband no longer says, "Nothing I can do about it." But he still goes fishing.

Beauty Never Sleeps  
by Michael Siguenza

The memories that I have of being very young come in flashes of my senses; holding my grandmother's hand as we boarded a downtown bus, the wool coat she wore with a fox fur collar. The narrow windows of the bus all steamed up as we lurched through the busy streets of downtown Seattle. I remember the smell of low tide and the squeal of seagulls wheeling above. I remember the graceful swirling motions of my three aunts practicing their Hawaiian Kahiko dances in unison on the living room floor at my grandparent's house.

All of the memories of my early childhood are sensory, and I believe that this sense of underlying beauty in the world around us is the true intention of what is meant for us. This is what sets us apart from all the other creatures on this world, not our violence and destructiveness.

Many artists, poets, and musicians know this and are fortunate enough that this sense is never diminished with age and never leaves them. I believe that the continuation of the childhood ability to stand and stare at the sky or close our eyes and breathe in the dreamlike smell of the ocean is the state of grace that we are meant to have.

When I was very small there were so many people living in my grandparent's house that I had to sleep on the floor at the end of a hallway sometimes. That was where the little bookshelf stood holding the miraculous *Encyclopedia Britannica*. While I lived there, I read the whole collection and I was transported all over the world and it fueled the thousand questions that I had for my grandmother. I remember my grandfather telling my grandmother, "That boy is a dreamer," like that was something bad.

I wanted to be like my grandfather, so as an adult I took up his chosen occupation and became a sailor and fisherman, sometimes a harsh and brutal occupation. But the beauty never left the world I chose to inhabit, and I saw glimpses of it every day at sea.

When we are children, before we have the burdens of the responsibilities of reality, we can look at the world around us and imagine almost anything. I can just barely remember when I was about six years old, having a toy car and playing in the dirt, building a whole world around just that one toy. Before I knew it, I was being called away to do a chore or eat a meal. Hours had gone by without me tuning back into the real world.

The real world around us requires that we tune in and work and do the tasks at hand to ensure our survival and that of our dependants, but I believe that we should remember that the dream world, the world of beauty, never sleeps and that we should tune back into it whenever we can.

### **It is Wise to Be Humble** **by Linda Staker**

There is always someone bigger or better so I believe it is wise to be humble. I have often sat by my picture window in the mornings, sipping tea and watching the children line up for the bus stop. I watched the biggest boy push his way to the front. He'd knock backpacks from the other children, tease the little ones and generally be a bully. I clearly recall the spring morning, however, that a new and bigger boy came to the bus stop. He eyed the others, and then took his position at the front of the line. Being the biggest is so fleeting.

As a young mother with little money and less time to shop, I hesitated going to a football game with a fashionable friend. I scrambled to find things to wear. Sitting on the bleachers at the game, I glanced at her painted perfect clothes. I uncomfortably felt her eyes, under feathery false lashes and several layers of shadow, travel from my head to my shoes. She seemed to be searching for some complimentary item. Finally, she set her glare at my feet. "Nice socks." Humility is often forced upon us.

Don't get me wrong. I love to be the best. When after three failures and a trashed kitchen, I won a blue ribbon on my German chocolate cake, I felt grand. Sadly my pride was lessened with minutes when my cake turned to crumbs and it was revealed that several others entering the contest received blue ribbons, too. It is impossible to always remain the best.

Life gets complicated when climbing to the top and is filled with constant pressure. It's like my husband's golf. He is hopelessly getting the best driver, crafted out of the latest marvel metal and molded to drive that tiny, white ball twenty yards longer and straighter. He is a happy golfer for several weeks--until someone shows him the newest, bigger driver that will give him that "hole-in-one" off every tee. Then he comes to me with his same, old plea, "If I only had...then I could..."

The bigger and better you are, the more paranoid you become about just who it is that is going to force you to nose-dive to the bottom. I had a neighbor who wanted my driveway. I naturally declined. Staring me eye to eye, he demanded, "Don't mess with me, I'm rich and powerful!" He was correct. I shouldn't have confronted him and, yes, he did get my road, but I'm okay with that because I heard some time ago that he is in another state and has a new neighbor, Ted Turner.

I still sit by my window and watch the children, but I know that the child who gets on the bus first today may likely not be the same tomorrow. It is wise to accept that fact and to be, at least, a little bit humble.

### **Serve it Up** **by Linda Staker**

Kitchen tables are immeasurable underrated. I believe some of my most important lessons in life were

learned around my mother's kitchen table. People would drop in and if mother had nothing else to serve, she'd open a bottle of peaches, peaches she grew in her own orchard, slice some homemade bread and place them on her starched yellow and white gingham tablecloth, then she'd put on the coffee. But, what we ate didn't matter. What did matter were the people. Facing one another, we were all equal participants in the chatter and sharing of life and its many lessons.

I learned that we don't always deserve what we get. My brother and I were late for school and gobbling down our breakfast. Mother had recently had some serious dental work. Suddenly, without provocation, my mother's hand flew up in the air landing on my brother's shoulder. He was stunned and his shoulder hurt. Turning to look at mother with bewildered eyes the size of her coffee cup he pleaded, "What was that for?"

Mother turned her red, pain-distorted face to him, "I'm sorry son. I accidentally bit down on my sore tooth, and well, you just happened to be there."

I chuckle when I remember this but it does help me every time I am cut off in traffic. Because of this, lesson I am a more tolerant person.

Comforting others can be a natural part of life. Being only in grade school and hardly understanding the term, divorce, I recall a Home Ec. teacher sitting at my mother's kitchen table crying about her wayward husband. I'd never seen a teacher cry. Within a month, a neighbor was sitting in the same chair and likewise crying. I'd never seen a man cry so hard. His wife had left him. I witnessed both of these people pour out their pain. Yet, I saw them leave partly smiling, having been comforted and buoyed up by my mother while sitting at that table.

Now, I sit at my own kitchen table and although I don't serve homemade bread, I do serve up my own stories. My young son sits beside me. He just lost his bride and his heart is broken. I cannot heal it, but I pat his hand comforting him with some of the many lessons I learned while I sat at my mother's kitchen table.

### **I Believe in Love by Christopher Stone**

By Love I mean not just the deep joy of affection, the dizzying ecstasy of new romance, or the security of home and the comfort of habit. Love is not less than these things, but it is greater also. It is the determination to work for the true welfare of others and oneself, to build up in goodness and to encourage in virtue: a matter of the intellect and the will as much as of the feelings. It is not licence to do as one pleases in the name of love, but is subject always to objective morality.

Love is not moody or fragile. It endures hardship, tragedy, and (perhaps most often) apathy, all without giving up or feeling sorry for itself. Although it may be spurned--sometimes even abused and brutalized--I believe that such Love is never ultimately in vain. It does not easily take offence, does not assume the worst, and does not demonize or bear grudges. It is patient, kind, long-suffering, gentle, quick to forgive and to ask forgiveness, taking no pleasure in anyone's misfortunes. Love may know much sorrow, but never despair, for I believe--unlikely as it may seem at times--that this Love is the very foundation of all reality.

Because I cannot believe that the Good arose from the random flux of the atoms, or Mind from mindless matter, I am convinced that Love is more fundamental than the Cosmos itself, and is in fact its source. When time has run its course, when the galaxies have vanished and the last black hole has evaporated, Love will remain unchanged. Moreover, I believe that all rational creatures who have cast their lot with Love will live on in organic unity, sharing the eternal fulfilment and bliss that only such Love can provide.

There is no withdrawn haziness or sentimental indulgence in Love. It is intensely personal, and of such searing purity as to evoke holy dread as well as desire in those who know it. Love can never be parted from the Good. In the end, when every tear has been wiped away, justice will indeed roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. This, our fondest hope, is also a sobering prospect for any self-aware person.

I believe in a Love so great that it found a way to subsume Justice in Mercy: the reed, though bent, will not be broken off. Stricken and rebellious as we are, Love reaches down to us, stronger than any potential foe. When in seeming weakness Love hung naked on a Roman gallows, marrying Justice and Mercy in one shattering moment, then Love was in fact at its strongest, and even death was powerless to hold it. In all the eternity thus bought for us, we shall never be able to fathom the depths of that Love--only praise it and enjoy it for ever.

### **I Believe in Teaching Young Men Values by Jeff Summerhays**

I believe the rising generation has many problems ahead of them. The biggest problems I see revolve around their core values, character, and poor self image. They are bombarded with a society that gives them a list full of things that are more important than their own self worth. Money, they are told, is the most important thing in life. Integrity takes a back seat to what ever it took to get them the money. They are taught the more beautiful you look, the more attention you get; it is better go with the flow than to stand for what you believe in.

Some of the biggest things in my life that has helped me overcome these obstacles are sports. Over the last ten years I have played many sports for fun and in leagues, and they have all helped me. Nothing can compare to the foundation that was laid when I played little league football. I learned how individual efforts come together and make a difference for a team. I learned it is better to try and give it your all, and to lose than to not try at all. I learned that by overcoming obstacles and stretching yourself, you will become a better person.

Twelve years later, I find myself on the other end of the coin the coach. I now have the responsibility to try to teach twelve year old boys these same principles. They find themselves at a very unfamiliar stage in their lives. They are experiencing changes in their bodies, most are starting Jr. High School, and all of them are trying to find out who they really are. It is funny to look at the kids and see how society has affected each one. There are some who come thinking practice is a fashion show; whether it is new cleats, a visor for their helmet, or an Under-Armor shirt, they have to show something off. Others come to practice and find it easier to criticize other players and pull them down, rather than to evaluate their own game to find things to improve on. There are always one or two kids who have their head in the clouds spending the full two hours wondering what their mom is going to have on the table for dinner.

As a coach, I can see myself twelve years younger in each one of these boys. I accept the fact out of our 21 players, less than 8 will continue to play through High School, and I wouldn't guess any of them will play in college. This being said, I believe it is my responsibility to teach these boys life skills disguised as the game of football. As I do this they will learn that success comes by working as a team, but at the same time, if the individual doesn't perform his responsibility, than the team will not be successful. By giving each of them personal responsibilities, it helps them understand accountability and helps build self esteem. During practices I also try to get the boys to build each other up which helps them respect others. This is also important because we have kids from all back grounds and they normally would not have tried to get to know each other.

To most people football is something they watch on TV or a game to play with friends. But I see it as much more than that. I see it as a life building experience for many young men. I believe if I could help other coaches to see pass the wins and losses, watch the boys learn those much needed life skills, and develop into men, this game would change.

## **Ending Poverty and Inequality in Perpetuity by Julie L. Taggart**

This I believe that there is a plan that will "feed the hungry, clothe the naked and liberate the captive" in perpetuity---which is the only true Charity there is.

We demand, through an executive order, that our government change the laws to provide basic necessities for its citizens using Section 8 housing, food stamps, Medicaid, etc. The oversight of which would create many, many jobs.

One qualifies if you are a human being thus eliminating the red tape that protracts relief, and eliminates theft and corruption associated with the system when available to all at no cost. (Of course, not all will want to participate.)

It could be funded the way the "war on terror" has been funded. Then every seven years debt relief is sought the same way as it is for third world countries. Through capitalism creditors would quickly recover without a "burp" or "bubble" to their lifestyles.

It would greatly diminish crime, which is the consequence of ignoring the plight of the desperate and destitute.

Although many will insist, "This program will create more lazy bums!" Au contraire! Under the definition of "basic necessities," it will not include vacations, cars, TVs, Twinkies, cigarettes and Starbucks.

Those desiring amenities must get a job, if only part time. However, if one chooses not to work, which many do (or can't), they will not be forced to live and die, or be dumped from hospital beds, onto the streets.

The greatest motivator to hold a job is the joy one feels when their hard earned cash may be spent on what they want to bring them happiness, instead of what one needs to make ends meet!

Think of the boost to the economy as one's purchasing power and security is increased!

No one will be stuck at jobs they aren't receiving humane treatment---no more sweatshops, sexual harassment, child brothels, abuse, etc.,

Of course, these government programs will need to be tweaked and refined, but there would be a dramatic increase in production of basic goods and services, wholesome foods, adequate housing, and satisfactory medical care, which will increase competition for the best and finest instead of the cheapest and substandard.

There would be no need for Social Security.

No need for fences, walls or borders! Who would wish to leave the comfort of their family and friends to move to America (other than to visit), when their basic necessities are provided by their own governments?

The greatest reward will be to know that not one more child will go to bed hungry; not one more person, caught in a cycle of abuse, will be left without an option; and not one more person will be forced to sleep on the street, or eat out of a dumpster.

Imagine how it will feel when ALL our brothers and sisters Worldwide are considered equal and deserving of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness!

Only then can we ALL truly be---FREE AT LAST!!

**Worth**  
**by Jeffrey Taylor**

This evening as I drove home from a holy temple, I thought about my childhood friends from Richmond, California. I remembered their kindness toward me and their disappointment that I was moving away. I also remembered their excitement at the thought of being pen pals with a bunch of foreign Utah kids. The memory of me not following through with this plan touched my heart. Thoughts of what the future held for many of them then brought tears to my eyes.

I believe in the great worth of every human soul. Karl, my Chinese American friend who taught me to make miniature cranes from thin origami paper and who played baseball with me on the street in front of his house. Alex, my Mexican American friend who first introduced me to the board game Risk and then told me to hide under his bed as a local gang walked down the street in front of his house. Miguel, our Portuguese American friend who collected condoms from the bushes at our elementary school, and, although I forget her name, the thin Indian American girl who led us to her father's liquor store where we could buy sweets with our nickels and dimes. And then there was Jennifer Horstman, my first crush, my one Mormon friend in my school class, my spelling bee competitor, and the girl my mom babysat from time to time. I remember a buddy of mine asking me questions in the back of our van as my mom drove Jennifer and my friend and I to some after school function. How priceless the moment when Jen asked me what we had talked about and I told her that he asked whether I liked her. She asked what my response was and I said that I kind of liked her and then, scooting closer to me, she said she kind of liked me too. How precious. How priceless. How my little heart raced!

I believe in the great worth of every human soul. I believe in the love I felt both from and toward each of these elementary school friends. My worry is that someone out there hasn't felt such love, such worth in a long time. I believe that is something worth praying for, something worth going to a holy temple for.

**Human Perspectives**  
**by Sara Vandermolen**

I believe that only one race exists in this world. As part of the human race, we all share a common underlying humanity that makes us more alike than any other set of creatures. If I look closely enough at any person in the world, I believe that I will find something to which I can relate and understand. If I fail to understand, it usually means that I was unwilling to try. So when I see the seemingly irreconcilable separation of the world—by race, religion, status, and even personal beliefs—I see a world that has learned to clutch personal beliefs as I might clutch a flashlight in the dark. We have been taught to fear the unknown, but perhaps even more to fear becoming part of it. So when I hesitate to step beyond my comfortable belief system, I know it is fear which holds me back: fear of what I will find, and in some ways, a greater fear that I will embrace it. For when I dare to change my beliefs, the inevitable result is to lose reality as I know it.

However frightening it may be to explore these waters, I also believe it is necessary. Although people are capable of living their entire lives without venturing outside their ideological boxes, this attitude comes with a price. Focusing on the differences which separate people can lead to becoming intolerant of those differences. This tendency emerges in schoolyard teasing, shunning, hate crimes, and even war. It can be seen throughout history that when "irreconcilable" beliefs collide, lives and dreams are destroyed. In a tragic twist of irony, the responses of those wronged by hate are often full of hate themselves, creating grudges which deepen the divisions between mankind.

In spite of these dark conclusions, there is (and always has been) hope for a different ending. In one famous case, WWI soldiers from Allied and German armies became friends during a Christmas truce. In the spirit of the season, each side found themselves making connections with the enemy they had been

taught to hate. Suddenly, the faceless other side they had sworn to kill was replaced with the faces of husbands, brothers, and sons. In the end, both armies were sent elsewhere by their distant commanders, for neither was willing to fight the other.

Those soldiers found something in common, and in that moment they found peace. If opposing soldiers can become friends in the middle of a war, my excuses for categorical dislikes seem pretty pathetic. Those men, and others throughout history who have created peace, encourage me to say that we can always find some common humanity in people; all we need is a chance. I figure that we owe the world that chance—clinging to our convictions so that we can be right may be satisfying in the short term, but it's not worth the price we pay in the end.

Note: The story referred to in the essay can be found by the name of "Christmas Truce at the World War I Front", among others.

### **The Impossible Only Takes a Little Longer by Rufino Villalva**

Have you imagined what people in the 19th century would think if someone said that in the 20th century there would be a person on the moon? What about the dream of a mother with two kids trying to finish her high school studies. These sound like impossible enterprises. There are many examples where to reach a goal creates a very common opinion of that is impossible. However, there are also many where those impossible goals surrendered under the hard work, passion, and firm guidance of leaders. Therefore, based on my beliefs and experiences, I believe that there is almost anything is possible if we have the passion and desire to accomplish that which really matters to us.

Start with the experiences of the men who arrived on the moon in July 20 of 1969. This was one of the greatest achievements of mankind. When John Fitzgerald Kennedy put most of his efforts to reach the goal of putting a man in the moon, his dream was the center of criticism by the press and by other political leaders for many of whom the president's idea didn't have any logical foundation. Despite this opposition the space program of NASA kept going with the only point and desire to finally have an astronaut in the sky and specifically in the moon. The critical point had closure when Neil Armstrong in the Apollo XI landed on the moon. The words on how Armstrong exemplified are so clear and tangible; this is a small step for a person, but a huge jump for mankind. This spews all the excitement of the believer of this idea and put down all the opposition in a position where they only have to admit that all of their doubtful thinking was wrong.

Next, in my personal experience, the example of my mom who had to raise two kids (my brother and me) and also achieve her personal goal of completing her studies in high school. As a non-traditional student when back in that time where it was unusual for a woman with kids to finish her studies, she had to try really hard to accomplish that personal goal. Most of the woman students in her similar situation ended up stopping their studies and losing the opportunity to improve their quality of life. However, even with all the difficulties of raising a family she still kept going and preparing and passing one by one, course at a time, until she received her most prized reward which was her diploma. The time on which she had to finish her studies takes three times more than a regular student, but with effort, sacrifice and hard work the goal was tangible and concrete. Like any other person who wants to achieve an important step in their life, she had people who were opposed to her sacrifice using argument such as stay in your house or with that diploma you would never find a job. Luckily, she never surrendered to those comments and with her diploma she found a better job in her town.

To sum up, in these two examples it is possible to see a tangible expression of overcoming adversities. In the first one, through calculus, statistics, and facts it is possible to go on and search for almost everything

which mankind wants to strive. In the second one, faith and confidence in yourself is a powerful tool which can help anyone to reach what really matters to them.