

sine cera

A DiverseCity Writing Series Anthology

For Everything, A Season

Volume XVII

April 2014

sine cera is published by the SLCC Community Writing Center
All inquiries should be directed to:
DiverseCity Writing Series Coordinator
210 East 400 South, Suite 8, Salt Lake City, UT 84111

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DiverseCity Writing Series Coordinator Shauna Edson
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Introduction

Everyone Can Write!

In August of 2000, the SLCC Community Writing Center began working with writers from local organizations in two-month writing workshops. Each workshop culminated in a publication and a public reading. At first, this DiverseCity Writing Series worked one-on-one with a variety of organizations: Justice, Economic Independence and Dignity for Women; the Road Home shelter; Liberty Senior Center; and Cancer Wellness House.

In the summer of 2003, the DiverseCity Writing Series expanded to offer multiple, on-going writing groups. Volunteers were trained in collaborative writing strategies and became mentors for a variety of open-interest and specialized writing groups.

In the fall of 2003, the pieces written in these groups were assembled to create *sine cera: People Are Strange*, the first DiverseCity Writing Series anthology. The anthology celebrated the work of participants, who were then invited to present their writing at a public reading.

Over the past several years, the DiverseCity Writing Series has grown to include fourteen groups, with an average of 200 community members participating; however, the mission remains the same: The DiverseCity Writing Series bridges the Salt Lake community's diverse social, economic and educational backgrounds through writing, collaboration and dialogue.

The SLCC Community Writing Center would like to thank the mentors and participants who have made this program an ongoing success.

DiverseCity Writing Series Groups

Millcreek Group

Graffiti Writers

Gay Writes

Asian Association

King's English Group

The Literacy Action Center

Silver Pen

Copper Quill

Veterans Affairs Salt Lake City

Avenues Courtyard

St. Mark's Tower

Homeless Youth Resource Center

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We look forward to the future growth of the DiverseCity Writing Series and are happy to present our seventeenth publication:

sine cera:
For Everything, A Season

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For Everything, A Season

Volume XVII

April 2014

Preface

The DiverseCity Writing Series bridges the Salt Lake community's diverse social, economic and educational backgrounds through writing, collaboration and dialogue.

—DiverseCity Writing Series Mission Statement

I felt dizzy as I passed out five copies of the short story I had written to the writers attending the Gay Writes DiverseCity Writing Group. My pulse quickened and a lump the size of a piece of charcoal formed in my throat. I had only shared the story with one other person in the three years since I had written it. I felt like I had progressed as a writer and was a little embarrassed by the mistakes found in the piece, but I was more concerned with the content of the piece than the style. I worried about how the writers would interpret my personal story, would they think less of me for having written it? The story was about part of my childhood, when I was fifteen years-old; my father came out of the closet as a gay man.

My hands shook and I felt like no words would come out as I read the first line aloud. My voice was so soft the writers had to lean in to hear what I was saying. As I read my voice got louder, my pulse slowed to a somewhat normal pace, and the story came alive. When I finished reading, I sheepishly looked into the faces of my audience. I was greeted with smiles and constructive yet encouraging feedback. Nobody thought less of me for what I had written. I felt a sigh of relief as I moved on to the next step in the writing process.

As I have worked this past year as the coordinator for the DiverseCity Writing Series, I have witnessed other writers bravely reading their stories out loud for the first time: stories of childhood pleasures, stories of made up adventures, stories of relationships gone awry, stories of discrimination, stories of illness, stories of love, and stories of overcoming the numerous obstacles that can block individuals from achieving his or her goals and achieving happiness. Beginning and seasoned writers alike share in the community of writers found in the DiverseCity Writing Series. Much like the changing of the seasons in nature, experiences, imagination, and adventures in life can help us create beautiful stories as we learn and grow and change: For Everything, a Season.



For Everything, A Season

Ked Kirkham

Gather hope in springtime
as buds from the trees.
Hold it until the time is right to open;
purposeful, glad, colorful,
designed for fruition, to nourish.

Gather inspiration in summer.
The bright, windy open days. The sun like a kite,
and clouds racing; sailing ships plying the sky,
high above cliff and dune,
making for the horizon shores.

Gather reflections in autumn
as though buckeyes from the lawn.
Look into the shapes and the whorls
that set them apart; deep, rich, nuanced,
shimmering as the husk is discarded.

Gather memories in winter,
keep them near the fire;
take them up to smooth and fold the tattered edges,
stitch the promised patterns and renew the paling colors;
warm and calming, fragrant with life.

Day I Lost My Cool

Diane Lockard

One spark of conversation heard on Trax - light rail, creates memories from 42 years ago. I park my car at the closest station; grab my purple umbrella, balance my keys, red purse, tote bag, and climb out to fluffy white flakes.

I put my dollar in the vending machine after selecting reduced fare, one of the rewards of aging. Trax is not very full today, probably because of the weather. A bearded man in a heavy, olive drab coat enters the car at the next stop. He sits down in a seat facing another man across the aisle from me.

I am not paying attention until one man says something about a grocery store in Ogden, built in the fifties; my "antenna turned on." The other one comments, "I remember eating potato logs with sour cream there."

People who have not tried them wonder what is so wonderful about them. If anybody says potato logs, our family thinks of a slice of a large potato dipped in - like a competitor special breading and deep fat-fried making a golden, crispy piece of potato with soft insides, lathered with sour cream. They are addictive.

My son turns three, it is time to start working at a branch store, close to where I live, as a meat-wrapper/deli prep, and advance to cashier. Following 11 years, I assemble and/or sell an abundance of sandwiches, fried chicken, pickled eggs, hand-made pizza, creamy coleslaw, and the well-known potato logs.

During this time, I am divorced, become a single mom of three, and after my marriage to my second husband, move to Salt Lake City with my son and youngest daughter. I return to the store after a new branch with drive-up service and gas pumps is available.

In addition to being a cashier and resuming deli prep, I am responsible for reconciling the day's receipts and bank deposits on weekends. During wind, rain, or snow, I remove the lids off the underground gas tanks to measure the amount of gas remaining.

Towards the end of twenty years, paid about \$7 an hour, including, working holidays and weekends, I arrive at the store. It starts out as a normal day, opening the store at 6 AM and prepping the areas for business. My manager and two other co-workers arrive, and are talking nearby.

Chicken and logs are put in the fryer, set the timer, wait on drive-up customers, and sling the mayo on bread when my boss who is standing by his desk, asks me to do one more thing. ONE more too many!

I pick up a sandwich and throw it across the room at him. Retrieve my purse and say, "I quit." Walk out the door, after working at the company for 18 years! My boss follows me out the door...

I attend our family reunion in Colorado, soon afterwards; the topic of conversation is "What happened to mild-mannered me?" in joint disbelief. My family members laugh, as they have a mental picture of me hurling a sandwich through the air, and this day is marked in family history as "the day I lost my cool."

I return to work until accepting a position at a day planner company, not too far from the scene. An opportunity to transfer to the copy room occurs, and it is a turning point in my life. I gain computer skills "hands on," plus, enroll in adult education classes, and start on a new adventure.

All these memories from hearing two little words - potato logs...

PS: At age fifty-six, I start my first clerical position, nervous to say the least. The Supervisor asks me, "Do you know how to make a spreadsheet?"

I said, "I am learning," although, eventually downsized, learned data entry, how to download reports, make spreadsheets, and filled in for her. A week later, it is gratifying to be hired by a life insurance/investments company and assist the Investment Specialist, a dream come true!

Looking for Church

John Guo

Last November 20th, I arrived in Salt Lake City. I wanted to look for a Church quickly, because I believed that good news from God is very good for me. So I asked my caseworker of IRC. She searched the information for internet, and she told me a Church named The First Presbyterian Church. When I arrived in Salt Lake City the first Sunday, I went to the Church. The Church is a beautiful gray color building, has long history. When I got in the Church, a brother asked me: "Are you visitor?" "No, I'm refugee. Maybe I will live the city all my life." I answered. Later, a choir of song of God was singing, the music was very good. When the song finished, the pastor preached the good news from God. But I did not felt happy, because only thirty people set in the big classroom. Later, the serving finished, I went to hall, and ate food and fruit, drink a cup of coffee, but I had no conversation everyone, because I can't speak English very well.

When I became a Christian, I was a political prisoner in China. In an amazing story, I read Bible in prison. When I was prisoner first day, every other prisoner did not understood why I was prisoner, because I had a very good job—I worked in country's bank. I told them, I like reading book and I like wrote article to newspaper and magazine of Taiwan and Hong Kong. So the Government don't like me. Then, a prisoner asked me what book I like, I told him I like history bookculture book, and I told him, I want read the Bible, but I can't get for the book. Out of my thinking, a prisoner told me: "I can give you the book, but you mustn't be tell other person I give you."

Three months later, I got a Bible from the prisoner. In my first Bible, only had New Testament. When I read the book, I was surprised the truth is very good. That's difference truth, difference culture. I felt exciting, my blood rose up to my head, my body was very hot, so I believed God. When I was free, I want look for a Church in my hometown, but I lost my hope, because the religion is illegal in China. December 30, 2009, I escaped from China and exiled in Bangkok. I baptized in Christian Church, and I hope serve God.

Why?

Nellie Darling

“What’s your best feature now?” her long-lost boyfriend asks over the phone.

“Oh my green eyes,” my Momma would say, “but don’t let them fool you. Please start with my heart.”

“What kind of man do you prefer?” he asked, changing the subject. She replied, “Again I say, let’s start with the heart. I prefer a man that when we dance, I can hear his heart. I want a man to be as you used to whisper, ‘Heart High.’”

(He doesn’t know who I’m describing.)

She continued, “Please don’t make me go through all this all over again. Let’s start, you and I, with our hearts again. What were you thinking back then, when you said ‘Hearts High?’ Tell me, tell me, why isn’t it happening now? If our souls were meant to be mates, what does it take? Tell me, tell me. Each full moon I yearn for your sweet presence. What does it take? My heart seems to be landlocked while yours sails away. If our souls are meant to be mates, what does it take? why?”

All Aboard

Judy Johnson

On the first Saturday night in December 1955, my dad, sister, and I wait at the kitchen table to eat. Tonight isn't our traditional dinner of meat, potatoes, gravy, and vegetables. Tonight, Mom fixes hamburgers, potato chips, and canned Franco-American Spaghetti.

I ask Mom, "Can I help decorate the tree this year?"

"No, you are not old enough!" she answers.

"When will I be old enough?"

"When you are 12 years old."

The answer is always the same. At the time I was nine years old, and thought I was old enough because I knew how to be careful with breakable items.

After eating and clearing the table, I try again. "I will be careful with the ornaments," I promise.

She says, "The answer was still 'no.'"

Looking back, I can understand how she would have felt if I had accidentally broken one of the ornaments because I'm sure some of them had sentimental value to her.

Dad pushes his chair away from the kitchen table and asks, "Who wants to go with me to pick out a Christmas tree?"

At least I can help pick out the tree. Marilyn, my younger sister, and I reply, "We do."

There is nothing better than the smell of fresh pine in the living room. I remember one year when artificial trees came on the market. The shiny silver trees were the big rage that year, and my parents bought one with pompoms at the end of the branches. A color wheel came with the tree that lit the tree with rotating colors of red, blue, green and yellow. At first, it was fun having a different tree, but I wanted the smell of a real pine tree.

I'm excited to go because we're going to find the perfect tree that the little village and train will sit under. Marilyn and I hurry to the back landing to get our red rubber boots (without linings), leggings, coats, mittens, and hats on because it's very cold outside. Mom stays home with our two-year-old sister, Deanna to harbor her from the cold.

We step out the front door to ten inches of glistening snow in the dark. The crisp night air makes my nose cold, and the icy air burns my lungs. Marilyn and I hurry to the car, being careful not to slide on the icy sidewalk. We bicker about whose turn it is to sit up front with Dad. He says, "Sit in the back seat tonight and stop bickering." Dad turns the motor on. It takes a long time for the heater to warm up. I can't

feel my nose and cheeks. Dad backs out of the driveway and heads for Allied Stores on the corner of State Street and 6400 South. Allied had a tree lot every year and they were known for the nicest trees in town. According to Dad and Mom, Allied has the biggest selection of trees to choose from. We spend an hour walking up and down every row of trees before finding the right tree. I'm so cold; I wish it wouldn't have taken so long to find a tree.

As snow starts to fall, Dad ties the tree to the top of our Buick, and we drive home. At home, Mom says, "Get your pajamas on and wash your face and brush your teeth. It's time for bed."

I don't want to go to bed! It's only nine o'clock, I think to myself. Why can't we start getting the tree up tonight and hang the decorations on Monday night? Well, it's only two more days. I just have to wait. I walk to my bedroom to do what Mom tells me.

Monday night is finally here. I can hardly wait to help Dad with the train, the train he brought with him from New York City in 1944. When Dad gets home from work, I ask, "Dad, can we get the tree up so I can help you put up the train?"

He says, "First, I need to shorten the base on the tree trunk and then bring it in to see if it will fit in our living room."

He saws off the base three times before it would fit in the living room. By the time the tree is up, it's time for bed. Dad tries to help me understand why we can't put the tree up tonight. I turn away from him and won't talk to him because I'm disappointed. Dad sees the look on my face and says, "Don't be upset, Judy. We can't do everything in one night. These things take time. Be patient." I need to wait again. I pout all the way to bed.

Tuesday night is finally here. I stand at the living room window waiting to see the headlights of Dad's car.

I ask mom, "Where is Dad? When will he be here?"

Dad worked at Hill Air Force base in Syracuse, Utah. I remember when the weather was good he got home by 5:30 p.m. But that Tuesday night was different. The snow had come down hard and covered the streets and sidewalks, making the road look icy. Around 6:30 p.m. Dad pulls into the driveway.

The second he comes in the door, I ask, "Dad can we start getting the tree decorated so we can get the train up?"

"I just got home, and I need to change my clothes, then we need to eat dinner. We'll set it up after dinner," Dad says.

After dinner, Dad goes down to the basement to bring up the train set. While he's downstairs, Mom lets me put a few decorations, non-breakable, on the tree. I can't believe she is letting me do this. She must not be worried about these ornaments. Then she allows me to put one glass ornament on the tree. Mom hands me a round glass ornament. She says, "Now be very careful. I'll let you do just one." I

“We can’t do everything in one night. These things take time. Be patient.”

hold the ornament in both hands, and then I gently hang it on one of the tree’s branches. I remember handling the glass ornament with great care because I was fearful of the consequences if I had broken it. Mom would have spanked me with one of Dad’s leather belts, like the time she did when I was washing the dishes and a glass slipped out of my hands and broke on the kitchen floor. I did whatever I could to avoid the sting of the belt across my legs.

Dad returns with the train set, joining Mom in the living room. First, Dad and Mom lay brown paper, from the big sacks that Mom has saved from Keith O’Brien and Kress’ all year, on the floor. The paper is used so the cotton won’t stick to the carpet. She cuts one side and the bottom of the sack and smooths the paper flat before placing it under the tree. Next Mom and Dad hang the lights, and then Mom hangs the glass ornaments and the garland. Then Marilyn and I put the icicles on the tree. Finally, Dad and Mom gently lay the cotton on the floor so it looks fluffy, giving the appearance of snow for our village.

Next comes Dad’s least favorite part every Christmas. He is six feet two inches tall which makes it hard for him to get down on his hands and knees, but he does and crawls around to the back of the tree and helps Mom put the bears, deer, and miniature pine trees in the forest and ice skaters on the skating pond. It’s hard to make them stand up on the cotton because if there is a slight movement or someone touches the cotton, it’s like a Domino effect, the forest animals fall down. Dad gets frustrated while lying on his side. It’s hard for him to move into a comfortable position because the 10 feet by 15 feet room has too much furniture. To the north of the tree is Dad’s tall radio and to the south of the tree is the couch, making it hard for him to squeeze between the radio and the tree. Mother is on the other side of the tree putting up the forest animals.

Dad says to Mom, “Ruth, get the deer to stand up. I’m getting tired of lying like this. I’m getting a cramp in my leg.”

Marilyn and I silently laugh to ourselves because it’s funny to see him crammed in between the radio and the tree, but it isn’t funny to him.

Mom replies, “I’m doing the best I can, but they won’t stand up.”
“Hurry up!” he says.

Perspiration runs down the side of his face as he gets all the animals and trees to stand up. Without daring to breathe, he slowly crawls from behind the tree without disturbing the scene. He takes out his handkerchief to wipe the sweat from his face, head, and neck. I feel sorry for him because he suffers from Addison’s Disease, an autoimmune disease in which his body can’t keep salt and water levels balanced in his kidneys.

Now we're ready for the track to be assembled and then put the train on the track. The engine has a working headlight and whistle, with a coal car, a passenger car, an oil tank car, a cattle car, and the caboose. The cattle car has two side doors that open. Marilyn and I put our dollhouse dolls inside the cattle car for a ride around the tree. Dad makes the train go backwards and forwards using a remote control. He drops a small pellet in the chimney stack on the engine and puffs of white smoke come out, just like a real train. The train circles around the village and forest.

"Dad, can I blow the whistle?" I ask.

He says, "Yes, but you need to let Marilyn have a turn."

"Okay." Sometimes I don't want her to have a turn. I don't want to share. I realize now that my parents were trying to teach us to share.

As the train goes around and around the tree, Marilyn and I take turns blowing the whistle. I ask Dad, the conductor, if he'll take our dolls for a ride. When the dolls are in the car he calls out, "All aboard."

Dad does a test run to make sure everything is working but the track must not have been flat enough on the paper and the engine jumps the track. Poor Dad gets down on his hands and knees to crawl behind the forest to put the engine back on the track. He makes sure all the wheels are set on the rail before he comes out. The train is up and running again.

The last step is to place the cardboard houses around the front of the tree, creating the tiny village. Once they're in place, my parents take a strand of Christmas lights and put the bulbs in the holes on the back of the houses, making the village come alive with lights in the tiny windows. The village always reminds me of Victorian times in winter like the Currier and Ives paintings. I sit on the floor looking at the beautiful tree. I pretend I live in the village and ride the train.

The week before Christmas Dad takes Marilyn and me to see the trains on display at the Paris Company while Mom finishes her shopping. We hurry to get a good place to view the trains because it's a popular attraction for parents to take their children. The display is in the basement of the store. It gets very crowded at times, and I can't see the trains until someone leaves. The three of us stand for an hour watching many trains go around the villages, forests, up and down hills, underneath trestles, over bridges, and stopping to let passengers off and on at the train stations located in various places. The display is grander than our little village at home. I wish we could have a display like this. I pretend that I'm riding one of the trains going on a trip to a different town or up in the mountains.

Fondly, I look back on those Christmas mornings when Mom fixed hot oatmeal and toast for the family. After breakfast, my sisters and I would change into our dresses and wait for Mom to fix our hair. Dad would be busy setting the camera and the flood lights up to take pictures

of us opening our gifts. We would sit on the floor in front of the tree. Dad would turn the tree lights and the train on when we would come into the living room. Christmas music would play in the background. My sisters and I would take turns opening one present at a time. Sadly, the anticipation was over too soon. We would play with our toys until it was time to visit our grandparents. Each New Year's Day, the tree and decorations would come down.

I sit on the couch, with my elbows on my legs and my hands on my cheeks, watching Dad carefully place the train and cars in the boxes to be stored away for another year. He tells me, "I'm thinking of putting up a train display downstairs in the basement and then you can watch the trains any time. I'll set up the ping pong table and make the display similar to the one at the Paris Company. Would you like that?"

"Dad I'd like that and I'll help you with anything you need," I say.

Dad keeps his word and the next year he puts up a town with three trains picking up passengers or dropping wood off at the lumber yard or picking up coal. Marilyn and I help with the easy parts of the display. There is only one stipulation and that is Marilyn and I wait for Dad to get home so he can start the trains for us. "All Aboard," the conductor cries. We watch our dolls go all around the town, and I wish I could be riding on one of those trains. Ten years later, I'll ride on a train and hear a real conductor say, "All aboard."

My Home Town

Sokla Hay

My home town-Khampungspet

I talk about my small house in my home town. When I was young, I lived in an old brown color house. I lived in city, my house have four bedrooms, 1 kitchen, but no bathroom.

My house is raised by the wooden post. It is made from the tree, and anything in the house is made from the tree. My family always lived in the house, but we lived under the house in summer.

Because every year has the big water when winter time I hear the water comes.

Sometimes in the day sometimes at night I hear the wind come first before the water come my house 25 years old but not look nice have 1 floor we lived 6 people but they sleep two room 1 room for mom and dad 1 room me my sister and two brothers. A round my house have to many trees banana tree, coconut tree and mango tree so many trees I don't know English name. In winter time I hear wind and see the water come every year. My house bright in the day and dark at night.

Sometimes I hear the sound of the Bird. Sometimes my parents took me my sister and my brother to go to farm. We play with the water in the lake my family go to farm every day in winter time because my mom and dad were farmers.

Every year they used a raft made from the tree. In the winter time my dad keep a raft under the house. When water come they use a raft when they want to go anywhere. Sometimes the water is fun, but the first day we are so scared because sometimes we see something coming with the water like a big snake or enormous. Sometimes see the people drowned with the water they can not swim when the water coming too fast time water yell "Ho" that time so scared around my house. My city is scary to live in but I like my hometown.

The Golden Years

Shirley Fifer

Whwn painting a picture
Be sue you are young
Abd don't have Parkinsons.

When I was seventy
—almost twenty years ago,
I painted several

acceptable oil color
paintings. At 88 years
and with wonderful

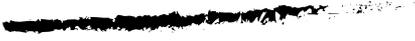
(haha) new Acrylic
paints I thought I could
still paint (ha ha ha)

If you can't sympa
thize, make your best hand shake
And try to pain. It

might be all right for
an impressionist painting
with a lot of blobs

and streaks of color
but forget detail. You can't
get it now. Too late.

Some of My Friends



Andrew Vogen

Four-footed furry friends I have known over the years. When very young I had made friends with my mother's cat "Blackie" who was of course a totally black long hair and my father's German Shepard, named "Texi". I would quite often go into our yard which was rather large, and pick "Blackie" up and carrying the cat, get "Texi," and the cat and I would ride "Texi" around the yard. Lots of fun.

Through the years of growing up, many times if I came upon a stray cat, I would pick it up and take it home with me. Sometimes I believe a few of them were not stray. However, I did treat them well. "Scotty" a scotch terrier was quite a playmate. Very gentle dog. Another; a friend of mine and I, his name was Ben Aguirre, we were coming out of a Saturday movie, walking down an alley and heard a whimpering coming from a garbage can. Ben lifted the lid and here was a shivering appearing half starved Mexican Hairless puppy. Ben picked it up and carried it home. Ben's family was very happy to welcome him into their home. Named him "Peppie." Kept him until he expired of old age.

Many others I found or found me. Quite a few cats and some dogs. Living in apartment buildings, cats or smaller dogs are far more favorable as companions. Cats or dogs. Great roommates or friends. Thank you for your time.

Making Your Dreams a Reality

Appio Hunter

Have you ever had one of those lifelong dreams that just won't go away? I'm talking about an aspirational dream that you want to turn into something real, like becoming a doctor or traveling around the world. The aspiration sits there, sometimes for years, nagging you and demanding attention like an overexcited Yorkie. When you finally do pay attention to it, it plays coy and hard-to-get. If, after several attempts to catch that dream, you don't succeed, you find it easy to get frustrated and give up. The dream doesn't go away however. It may slink into a corner of your mind and stay there, whimpering and dejected, just outside of your awareness. If you work up the courage to remember the dream, it will jump out of that corner and run around, happy to see you and forgiving you for ignoring it for so long.

I certainly had one of those lifelong dreams. Mine wasn't a little lapdog, however. My dream was more like a Great Dane – big, looming, and always getting in the way. I tried to ignore it, thinking that it required too much effort to feed, nurture, and exercise. I thought that I had to be an expert to handle it, and that welcoming it into my life required education I didn't have. But like a Great Dane, my dream was patient, long-suffering, and it loved me unconditionally. It didn't care that I ignored it periodically. It merely followed me around, reminding me that it was there. Meanwhile, other little dreams came and went, distracting me with their antics and taking up my time.

Several major life events forced me to recognize that I needed my dream, just as it needed me. I was hesitant to welcome that dream into my life however, so I reluctantly examined it, and I was surprised to discover that my dream was the perfect companion. When I didn't feel like facing the day, it gently nudged me until I got out of bed. When I felt discouraged, it was there, licking up my tears and quietly sending the message, "That's okay. I'm here and I love you." When I was happy, my dream bounded around and shared my excitement. I'm so grateful that the dream insisted on following me around even when I thought it was an inconvenience.

My dream was to live a life of complete freedom by bringing joy to others. I realize that on the surface that sounds abstract, but to me it wasn't. Ever since I was five years old I knew that my life's purpose was to bring happiness to those who had lost it. I just didn't know how I would do it. All I knew was that if I stayed true to myself, listened to my instincts, and did the best I could with what I had, it would be enough to get me where I wanted to go.

I wasn't helped by the fact that I was one of those awkward kids who wasn't quite a geek, but not quite popular either. I was stuck in a no-man's land that had no definition. Strangely, existing in that place turned out to be a blessing. What I discovered was that I could make friends with just about anyone. I felt as comfortable with the outcasts and neglected as I did with the "in" crowd. Sure, I was teased – cruelly, sometimes – but overall, I knew that I had a wonderful gift that allowed me to relate to anyone. Empathy came to me naturally, but it wasn't until I entered my fourth decade of life did I realize that my gift was there so that I could fulfill my life's purpose and see my lifelong dream come true.

The funny thing about dreams is that if you feed them and give them a little attention by taking simple actions, they quickly go from being excited dogs to stray cats. They move in, take over, and leave reminders everywhere that they're there – even if you don't see them for weeks. The moment you neglect them, they surprise you by showing up and smothering you with attention. They rub up against you incessantly, climb into your lap, purr, and even curl up on your face while you're trying to sleep. It's their way of saying, "You started this. Now you have to finish it."

My problem was that living a life of complete freedom by bringing joy to others wasn't compatible with my job. Well, it was partly compatible. I had a job that was a perfect match for my gift; I was working as a coach, developing and training people in the department where I worked. So yes, I was bringing joy to others because every day I helped them discover new ways to do their jobs better. But that wasn't what I really wanted. I wanted to help others find the type of joy that inspired them to get out of bed every day, feeling fully energized. Additionally, I wasn't living a life of complete freedom because I worked in a call center for a large corporation. Vacation or discretionary time was difficult for me to plan because that time was scheduled based on seniority, and I was the least senior person in my department.

My definition of complete freedom was to be my own boss, make money doing the things I was most passionate about, and to have the ability to take any time I needed, when I needed it, to do the things I wanted to do. Unfortunately, I didn't know how to gain that freedom. I had adopted the belief that "responsible" people held down "steady" jobs, and that people who insisted on following their dreams usually ended up poor, or working in restaurants as waiters. My dream and my instincts told me a different story however. In my heart, I knew that as long as I clung to the belief that I had to work for someone else, my dream would remain unfulfilled.

**“So, you follow
your heart
regardless of what
anyone else says.”**

Partial fulfillment wasn't enough, and like the stray cat that moves in and takes over your house, a partially fulfilled dream isn't satisfied with distracted petting. It will insist on your full, undivided attention, and it will find ways of getting it. My dream got my attention by creating a personal crisis that required a solution that was completely outside of my comfort zone. I had no idea what to do, but I was inspired some words from Mike Dooley, *New York Times* bestselling author and motivational speaker. His message was striking in its simplicity, which was to focus on my end result (my dream), and to take any baby steps I could think of to get there. It wasn't necessary for me to focus on the "hows." If I focused on the "hows" of making my dream a reality, I would get distracted, and then my dream would find new ways of grabbing my attention. What inspired me the most however, were three simple words. "Be divinely selfish." I didn't understand that message for a while, but when I finally did, my life changed. Dreams – once fed – won't settle down until they're completely satisfied. Here's what it means to be divinely selfish: You follow your dream no matter what. You keep that stray cat even when everyone else tells you to get rid of it. You ignore the "advice" of those who insist that you abandon your dream for something more realistic. That's because in your heart, you know that this thing, in spite of its annoying habits and periodic disappointments, brings you immeasurable joy. So, you follow your heart regardless of what anyone else says. And when you do, your dream morphs once more. It becomes part of you, and the mask that hid your true self is ripped away. Suddenly, your passions are freed, your dream explodes, and the world benefits because you're sharing your gifts with the people whose lives you touch.

When I became divinely selfish, the Universe threw a party. It wasn't just one of those low-key family celebrations. Oh, no. It was one of those Brazilian block parties where you invite 50 people, 5,000 show up, and then you wake up with a massive hangover, yet feeling deliriously happy. New people entered my life, new opportunities presented themselves, and a series of events conspired to liberate me from the hindering beliefs that held me back.

I'm now living the life of my dreams, and I'm still amazed at the reality of my life. I really am living a life of complete freedom by bringing joy to others. I'm free in every sense of the word, just as I had defined it. Even better, every day I get to witness the transformation that happens when I help someone reconnect with his or her true self. That is my message. Nurture your dreams and never let them go. Be divinely selfish, and the world – and you – will be happier for it. In the end, after your true self is revealed, the dream that has become a reality returns to its original form. You will have the satisfaction of knowing that your loving, trusted companion has matured. The excited little puppy has grown into a wizened old adult who silently keeps you company, and it will stay by your side the rest of your life, pouring out love for the person you have become.

Are Your Unexplained Emotions Destroying Your Life? Three Words to Stop Them Now.

Leesa Myers

When I was in elementary school, we were taught if your clothes catch on fire you must stop, drop and roll. We would do exercises and games to drum those words in our heads: Stop! Drop! And Roll! Stop! Drop! And Roll!

At a salon I owned, we had a lit candle on the counter. One of the co-workers leaned up against the counter and caught her sweater on fire. Another co-worker started hitting her back with her hand trying to put the fire out. Which burned her hand. In a panic, I yelled, “Stop! Drop! And Roll!” She dropped to the ground, and the fire went out. She only had a small burn on her back, and both girls were fine.

Why do I bring this up? Those three simple words have saved many lives. It is also a great exercise when you are caught on fire with anxiety, unexplained fear-based emotions that can ruin your life. I have clients that are housebound because anxiety is so overwhelming. It completely stops them from functioning. They go to the doctors and the doctors put them on medication. Now they are medicated, but that does not stop the anxiety from continuing to happen.

When we grow up, we have a lot of experiences. Some are physical and/or sexual abuse, some are learning to ride a bike with dad, some are words that break down self-esteem and self-worth, some are words of encouragement and love. What happens to those emotions when we are experiencing those fun and hard times? They go to a part of the brain that keeps them secure. I like to imagine the emotions are in bubbles, like the kind we used to blow as children. These bubbles stay in our bodies, and at certain times these bubbles pop and we feel those emotions again as they escape from the bubbles. Usually they pop when we experience a smell, or see, or hear something that reminds us of our past.

AnxietyCentre.com says, “Anxiety ISN’T something we genetically inherit or an illness or disease we contract. Anxiety is something we produce. We produce anxiety by the way we’ve learned to live and interact in the world. Learning what anxiety is, what it does to the mind and body, how you produce it, and more importantly, what you can do to eliminate it as a condition, IS the cure. Once you learn how to stop producing anxiety, anxiety as a condition goes away, and consequently, so do the symptoms.”

“I like to imagine the emotions are in bubbles, like the kind we used to blow as children.”

Susie was at a department store, a store clerk approached her in an aggressive manner. This clerk had the same stature as her mother, who was physically abusive to her. When the clerk approached, Susie began feeling her palms sweat, her heart race, anxiety was setting in and all she wanted to do was bolt fast. Susie shared her experience with her therapist. The therapist explained it as “post traumatic syndrome.”

The therapist told Susie, a client of his, a veteran from the Vietnam War, was walking down a street and all of a sudden hit the ground and would not move. People came to his aid but he was frozen and would not move. In Vietnam, the veteran was eating at a restaurant that was bombed, the front part of the restaurant was completely destroyed. When the veteran was walking down the street, he smelled those same aromas from the restaurant and immediately was back in Vietnam at the bombed restaurant.

I am claustrophobic; I do not like being in elevators or in small spaces that I cannot get out of. My mother told me that when I was around three years old, my brothers built a tent out of quilts in the front yard. They left me playing in the tent and the quilts collapsed on me. My mother could hear me crying and came to my rescue.

When the bubbles of emotions pop, we go into reactive mode, which makes us want to run or hide. I feel panic when an elevator door does not open quickly. I am fine, but I can feel the panic begin to rise, and I just want to get out fast. Just as with clothes being on fire, our first instinct is to run, but with fire, running kills people. Stop! Drop! And Roll! Saves lives!

I want to introduce to you, three words and just like school, drum these three words into your mind. The three words are, Stop! Drop! And Think! When those bubbles of emotions pop, and you are ready to run:

- A. Stop! Look at where you are and what is going on right now.
- B. Drop! The thought to run and reacting to the emotions you are feeling.
- C. Think! Asking the questions: When in the past was I feeling these same emotions? What was going on in the past when I was feeling these emotions? Where was I?

By answering the questions in C, you can start to see the past experiences and what was happening. A and B, you can stop the emotions and wanting to run, it gives you time to change the feelings. Letting you deal with the situation that is going on currently. Taking deep breaths, gives you a chance to start the process of changing, the words going through your mind. When I am in an elevator that is taking too long to open, I

begin the self-talk. I take deep breaths. I close my eyes and tell myself that I am fine. The elevator door opens and I calmly walk out.

Here are some example of what you can say to yourself:

- These feelings are from the past. This is not now!
- I am stronger. I can take care of myself, and I am fine.
- I am confident in my abilities to overcome any obstacle from the past.
- I take deep breaths. When I am ready, I will face the current situation with power and confidence.

I promise you, each time you do this exercise—stop, drop and think—the bubbles will become fewer and fewer. You will grow stronger than any obstacle in your path.

Stop! Drop! And Think! Stop! Drop! And Think! Stop! Drop! And Think!

BAH-HM

Sarah Rose

December 25
8:00 am

Silence blankets the world. Leaves from recently happy flowers curl down and inward. Walks are icy. Purposely holding in the flood of memories which are old, not even real any longer, you step forward, trembling. Storefronts yawn in darkness. Trying to get a pulse. Is it tranquility or a gaping emptiness? Maybe it's all about the world that's inside your head.

As a voyeur, you wonder what goes on behind closed curtains along the way. The blinking lights of outdoor decorations hint of an event. Are they celebrating this day? Or are they out and about? Are they lounging about, drunk with the giddiness of children's joy? Or intoxicated with spirits? Are they really happily-ever-aftering as they circle the piano, lights glittering, singing praises? It's an insular thing. Maybe tomorrow the magic will morph into the depths of insight that it's just stuff, a frivolous exercise. After the flurry of exchanges nearly supersedes the flurry of purchases, the real memories are branded, searing the consciousness of this year's story.

There's never a do-over. Maybe a do-better, though. You are charting new territory today.

When at last you arrive at his apartment, you announce by text message, "HO, HO, HO, Santa's come to town." He opens the door to you, puzzled. Coffee with decadent holiday creamer, time out for a smoke--balancing priorities--then the opening of gifts, trinkets mostly, filling Santa's bag, your offering of the fatted calf.

Is that a twinkle in his eyes? He, too, has a host of memories concealed. In the aftermath of it all is a strained silence, struggling for expression.

You rise to go, and he asks, a plea that clings to the moment, elusive as it is, "Do you have anything going? We could play games for awhile." Here is an opening of a door long rusted shut.

The Funky Alien

Betsy Maxwell

Once upon a time while my horse Squeakers® was eating her delicious hay in the barn, I said, “I need a new friend because all my human friends are busy. Why don’t I check out the fair?”

My horse asked, “Can I come along?”

“Let’s go to the fair,” I said. I knew both of us wanted to leave the farm for a while. Riding always made both of us smile.

A few minutes later on the trail on the outskirts of the farm, a colorful light flashed in the sky. A pink flying saucer hovered nearby and then landed a few feet from the trail. A small, furry, blue alien jumped out of the sliding door at the front of the ship. The alien floated slowly in our direction with a smile on its face.

I wondered if this alien was looking for someone to play with, so I asked the alien, “Do you want to be our friend?”

To my surprise, the alien said, “Yes!”

Squeakers® suggested that I take the alien to the fair. The alien hitched a ride, and we cantered to the fair.

At the fair, we did many things. We took the alien on some rides, like the rollercoaster. We went through the fun house.

When we got hungry, we went to the concession stands. I bought us some pink cotton candy because the alien said it looked good.

After a couple of chews, the alien’s furry blue body changed colors. At first, the alien’s body turned pink, and then back to blue. Then the alien ate some more, turned green and fled the scene.

My horse and I could not follow the alien because it was too fast. We took the trail back to the farm.

The spaceship was still sitting on the side of the trail. We wanted to see if the alien was there. We knocked on the door gently. The alien did not respond. Five minutes later, we headed home.

A few minutes later down the trail, the blue alien appeared beside us. We stopped and talked.

“Hey there,” I said, “are you okay?”

“I think I’m okay.”

“What’s your name?” Squeakers® asked.

“My name is Moody,” Moody said.

“Why is your name Moody?” I said.

“I am called Moody because I have different moods. When I turn pink, I want to give a hug. When I change to—”

“I saved some cotton candy for you,” I said.

“I don’t want any more cotton candy!” Moody said. “I got sick and

**“The alien
hitched a ride, and
we cantered to the
fair.”**

turned green when I ate that stuff.”

“So green means sick?” Squeakers® asked.

“Yes!” Moody replied.

“Tell us more.” Squeakers® said.

“I am blue when I’m happy, like right now. I’m purple when I’m shy,” Moody replied.

“That’s awesome!” I said.

I wanted to know how long Moody would be around. Moody said he had to go home now to be with his family. He also said that he might come this way again someday. He turned pink just before he left, so my horse and I both got a hug from him.

“See you again someday,” we both said.

We watched Moody float quickly back to his ship. Minutes later the ship spun off into space. Squeakers® and I hoped he would return someday.

We Were Winners

Chan Wook

I grew up in Seoul, South Korea.

When I was a third year high school student in summer, I played a soccer game with my friends one hot, sunny afternoon.

I was the goalkeeper I have to defend the Goal.

I wore the blue & black uniforms and my team name was Eleven.

My friend name was Sang-gi in my class.

We really wanted to win the game. It was the semifinal game of Semin School's tournament. When we started the game, we were playing hard for win, and we felt very hot.

"Pass, pass" "shoot, do it" somebody yelled. (shout)

Sometimes we score a goal.

Sometimes enemies score a goal.

But my team plays well more than rival.

We played in field and at 2:00pm the game ended.

Now, I forgot the score, how many goals we had.

But I'll always remember, we were winner.

After game, we were sweaty but felt cool.

And the losers bought fresh and cold apple juice for us at the school cafeteria.

Then when we came back to our class, we smelled of sweat from men. We hurried to open the window, that was good idea. And I felt tired, sleepy and I wanted take shower.

That was one of my best high school memories.

The Day My Dog Ate Good

Christine Ireland

While my family was staying with my older sister's family in Texas during summer vacation, her dog Cuddles had a litter of chow pups. My younger brother and I fell in love with one of them. We begged to keep her, and when my sister gave her to us, we named her Star, after the Lone Star State. She traveled with us in the car and got lots of compliments at rest stops on our way to Salt Lake City. We also had a cat at this time, named Snowball, and after a few sparring matches, our chow dog and white cat got along just fine. They even posed in a family photo together.

We trusted Star so much that she was allowed to roam the front yard without a leash. She would bark at other dogs, but would not leave the yard. One day, she wasn't in the front yard. My mom and sister went searching for our dog. They found her fairly quickly. Unfortunately, she had not been idle during the time she was lost to us.

Mom was crying when she came home. I asked her what was wrong, and she told me. She and my sister had seen Star take the neighbor's poodle in her mouth, shake it a few times like a rag doll, and drop it on the ground, dead. My mom had said she was so sorry, and asked the neighbor what she could do. The neighbor said simply, and coldly, "Just get your dog out of here."

When I heard this story, I thought to myself, "She's never acted that way around other dogs!" Being a teenager, my first reaction was to say, "What's the big deal, don't they have another dog?" My mother was appalled at me! To this day, when I see someone walking a dog I could kick over a fence, I still think, "That's not a dog!"

No Need

Richard Clegg

It's been so long since you left.
So long, there are those who would
See little need, perhaps no need,

No need at all for miniscule sparklings
On the shiny black granite kitchen counter,
Nor for tiny white feathers to appear here and there.
No need for owls on a Christmas card, nor
For Winston the dog to stare frozen into space,
Seeing what others can't—you.

But I know he sees and encouraged by his seeing,
I see not you, but priceless nuggets
Of your presence we mine together.
Me with a pickaxe and shovel
As I dig through life's earthly rubble,
And you with a light from elsewhere
Radiating from your otherworldly hard hat
Meant to guide me through my dark.

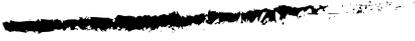
Love and warm gratitude spread like a broad smile
Across my face, in me and surround me.
All the while I'm comforted by knowing
There will be yet another unneeded nugget.

What Happened to Those

Gordy Ewell

When they look up at the big night sky
Do they feel like the world has passed them right by
Like there is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide
And nowhere to fit into the civilian world outside
No one left to provide cover on their left or the right
Do they too shake with tremors that come from inside
Knowing there is now one left on their left or their right
What happened to them
I wish I knew
Yet I am afraid that I know, and it makes me blue
Do they fight with their demons even during the day
Is there any place to feel safe and out of the way
No place to unwind or to feel secure
No place for their soul on this world anymore
Is this why the suicide rates are so high
They can't find a place from their demons to hide
What happened to soldiers with valor and courage
Those never afraid who pressed forward to fight
Those men who were fighters on my left and my right
What happened to those so brave on my sides
What happened to me on their left or their right
Why did we return to a world that has passed us by
Being stuck in a place where we watched good men die
Both on our left and on our right
What happened to those I wish I knew
But then I guess my torment is, that I already do

Woodcarver's Wife Draws the Line



Jim Kelley

It's nice to watch you relax in the shade
while the wooden chips dance from your blade.

You can carve in my kitchen or in front of the tv
as long as you don't leave the clean-up to me.

You can whittle as you bathe or sit and make a stink
as long as your wood chips don't clog-up the sink.

But I am telling you now; this is how it is going to be:
You are not going to whittle in this bed with me!

Kae Kae Kai's Life With Old People

Kae Kae Kai

Throughout my life, I have always taken care of old people.

During my childhood, I stayed with my grandpa, my mother's father, in a small city in Myanmar, while my ma and dad lived and worked in their clothing and food store in a different small city. My grandpa took care of my three sisters and me. He did not cook. Instead, he paid a woman to cook our meals and wash our clothes.

After the woman died, we had to take care of my grandpa while we were going to school. My older sister and I had to cook. I had to go shopping and wash the clothes. My grandpa paid for my sister and I to go to school. My grandpa died when I was in fifth grade.

When my grandpa died, my parents didn't want to pay for our school. They sent us to work for a farmer. Farming was a hard job with heavy lifting. During the rainy season, we planted and harvested rice. In the springtime, we raised black, white, and green beans. I did not like working as a farmer.

Finally, when I was fifteen, my parents sent me to stay with my dad's parents. I stayed with them for a couple of months, cooking and cleaning. When my dad's brother, a monk, came to visit us from Thailand, I told him I was looking for a job. He told me that he had a friend in Thailand who owned a store who might hire me. So, I left with my uncle to go to Thailand.

When my uncle went back to Myanmar awhile later, my mom told him that she wanted me to come back. I did not want to go back, because the only job I would be able to do was work as a farmer. The people on both my mother's and father's sides were farmers.

I met my husband in Thailand and married him in 1990. My mom did not want me to get married. She did not like my husband because he drank and he was six years older, and she thought I was too young to get married. She did not want us live with her because I got married without her consent. So, we stayed with my husband's family.

Months after I got married, I got very sick. I couldn't walk or stand, but my husband and his family took care of me until I got better. In 1992, my husband's great uncle got very sick. I made him food, I washed his clothes, and I took care of him. He was too sick to walk.

Now, in 2014, my mother-in-law and my parents live with us. I take care of them. I don't do the cooking because I work full-time and go to school. I do take them to doctor's appointments, case worker meetings, and help them fill out paperwork.

As you can see, I have taken care of old people for my entire life.

A Letter of Gratitude

Awes Muhina

September 12, 2013

Dear case managers and other members of the Housing Authority of the County of Salt Lake,

Thank you! Whenever I ask to see my case worker, the person at the front desk always helps me. Every case worker I have ever had has always been very, very nice and kind to me and said nice things. I appreciate all housing people for helping all of us.

I, my wife, and three children came from Kenya as refugees in 2003. We moved into public housing in 2004 and then moved to Section 8 housing in 2006. Between 2005 and 2010, my beautiful wife and I had three more wonderful children. In 2008, our family became U.S. citizens. I learned English first in Kenya through a private school. When I arrived in Utah, I learned more English at Horizonte for about one year. Later, I went to Guadalupe for about two years. Because of Krysta, my case worker, I am now going to Literacy Action Center to get help with my reading, writing, and math.

As a father of six great kids, I work full-time and go to Literacy Action Center two evenings a week. My goal is to earn my high school diploma. I want my diploma so I can get a better paying job. Like all fathers, I want to give my family the best life ever, especially the opportunity to go to college.

My kids are happy that I am going to school. I am learning many different things. I am learning spelling, pronunciation of words, and math. I can read a lot more words. Right now I am reading a story about Thomas Edison, the man who invented the electric light bulb. I am learning how to write letters. Now I can help my older daughter check my kids' homework. I understand when my kids read to me, and they understand when I read to them.

My whole family thanks Krysta and Housing Authority for letting us be in the Section 8 housing program!

Sincerely,
Awes Muhina

A Grain

Grace Ann Mercie

With each grain of knowledge of my illness raises a sprout of hope.
With each grain of effort raises a sprout of new ability. With each grain
of ability raises a sprout of some self confidence. And with that grain
raises a sprout of accomplishment. With that comes a new life.

You Are Perfect. Why Don't You Believe It?

Leesa Myers

You are perfect. Why don't you believe it? What is keeping you from a life you wish you had—a life of happiness, fun, wealth, love? What obstacles keep showing up that are not what you want? If you had the secret to the blocks in your life, would you use the secret? Are you ready?

The secret is simple. Neale Donald Walsh said, “Most people live their life from their Past. Most people find it impossible not to. They make their decisions about what is going on in this moment in their relationship based on their prior thought. Masters, on the other hand, make their decisions based on their future intention. Memory or intention? That is the choice. Always!”

When coming from past memories, you create one type of experience. When coming from intention, you create a completely different kind of experience.

What is stopping you from taking a risk or making a mistake or even trying? As Neale said, your thoughts are directing your actions. Your beliefs or learned habits are beliefs in action, they are creating your results and experiences. Are you happy with the results?

When you were born, you were born into someone else's environment. This could have been a hospital, at home with family, adoption, a loving couple or a single parent. In this environment, you absorb the feelings and energy that surrounds you. You are like a new computer, inputting fresh data, without a virus program. A virus program, blocks harmful programs entering a computer. Your virus program is not installed yet. You are taking in all the information, good and bad, information that has not been verified. Information that is giving you wrong information. Information that tells you, you are not perfect.

I was an Adjunct Chaplain at Primary Children's Medical Center. At the hospital, brand new tiny babies are hooked up to lots of monitors and life saving devices. When the mother's are able to hold the babies, the mother's hold the baby against her warm skin not blocked by clothing. This is a bonding experience for both mother and baby. The nurses also handle the babies with loving care. The rooms are darkened and made quite as much as can be in order to give the babies as much help as possible to survive and thrive. No matter what their medical problems, these tiny babies are perfect. You can feel their beautiful spirits; everyone falls in love with them.

When my grandchildren were born, the family came in and we loved these tiny new babies. You could feel the loving energy in the room. But what if that was not the case when you were born?

When I was born, my mother and father were having marriage problems. My dad was a drinker and had affairs. My mother told me the story of my birth over and over as I grew up. When I was born I was past due; I was scheduled the last part of December and was born first of February. I had lots of dark hair and olive skin, I could hold up my head, and my mom said I was absolutely beautiful. When my dad came to see mom and me, he'd been drinking with his buddies. Mom said dad walked in and took one look at me and said, "This is not my child" and left. When mom told me the story she added: "Of course you were, and your dad loved you."

Let's go back to the hospital room. It is said that when a baby is born, the baby is fully conscious, aware of everything going on, but has no protection (virus program). In the hospital room, I am pretty sure Mom was happy, sad, confused, angry and fearful, dad was probably frustrated, angry, confused, not loving himself. There was a lot of energy in that room and baby Leesaa was absorbing it all without a defense.

It took me until I understood that core belief, "I am not loved." I created a situation that proved that belief. No matter what I accomplished, no matter the good compliments people would give me, my thoughts would be, "If you truly knew me, you would not like me."

"...my mom said I was absolutely beautiful..."

a few years ago to this day I created my unlovable." From that situation after sitting in that room and thinking to myself that I was not loved, what I accomplished, no matter the good compliments people would give me, my thoughts would be, "If you truly knew me, you would not like me."

I believe that at one time in everyone's life, there are beliefs and feelings of being less than perfect, not enough, wearing a mask to the world, friends, family and work.

I have faced many self-defeating beliefs about myself—unlovable, not good enough, scared of rejection, living from lack and limitation. When I was able to visualize myself in that room as a baby and talk with people that could help me to understand what had happened, I was able to see I was living my life based on untruths about myself.

I made a decision that it was time to release the past and to step in the truth of who I was - a vibrant, loving, beautiful, powerful woman that was loved.

Ernest Holmes said, "When you separate the belief from the believer, healing begins." To begin healing, first is to identify what is holding you back. Trace the belief to where you took that belief. This is what I did when I went back to see me as a baby in the hospital. Second is to

see how you have created your life from that belief. After all that work (whew), you are ready to replace the self-defeating behavior with the TRUTH! You are perfect, whole, and complete. You are a creation of the most Divine and you can only be loved.

If this is not sitting well with you, or you are squirming in your seat, good! There is a reason why you are reading this article. I invite you to explore where your beliefs that have not served you to your highest good came from? Do not keep staying stuck. You are worth living from the Truth of LOVE, Creation and Joy. As Walsh said the masters make their decisions based on future intentions always! You have a choice. You can live from memory or intention? This is the choice Always!

Now you have the secret, are you going to use the secret?

A Pocketful

Peggy Kadir

Daddy was to meet us
In the theater lobby.
It was winter and
He was wearing
His well-tailored overcoat
When he got close
I noticed that
He was not alone.
Our Pekinese dog
Was riding in his coat pocket.

Awesome Wheels in Action!

Julie Liljenquist

On the way to Daytona Raceway in Florida, my sister, Pam, her daughter, Courtney, and I got stuck in a traffic jam on the freeway. I was upset and frustrated because we were late. The GPS, that was guiding us there, was making annoying sounds. I yelled at the GPS, “Shut up!”

When we finally got to the racetrack, the parking attendant had given our handicapped parking spot away even though we had prepaid 50 dollars to rent that spot. The racetrack had no other parking spots available. Pam pounded on the steering wheel of the rental car in despair. We were directed to park in the overflow handicap parking, which was in an old cow pasture two miles away from the track. The field was packed with hundreds of cars and layered with flattened weeds.

When Pam got the wheelchair out of the trunk of the car, she said to me, “This is too hard to push, and you’re not even in it yet.”

Pam and Courtney got me out of the car and into the wheelchair. When they pushed me in my chair together, the thick dead yellow weeds made it difficult for the wheels on my chair to move.

Next, they tried to carry my chair with me in it, but I was too heavy. We still didn’t get anywhere.

Finally, we decided to abandon my chair, leaving it in the middle of the driving path. Pam and Courtney struggled to get me out of the chair. Courtney, facing me, scooped me up under my arms and pulled me to her shoulders. When I was out of my chair far enough, Pam reached under my arms, from behind me, to pull me close to her chest. She took on my upper body weight with my head lying on her shoulder.

Pam told me, “Stiffen your arms so I can carry you.”

Courtney picked up my legs and said, “Stiffen your legs, too.”

I stayed stiff, but Pam and Courtney still struggled to cart me across the cow pasture. Within a minute, Courtney dropped my legs forcing Pam to drop my body, too.

They tried again. By now, Pam was not only angry about the traffic jam, the parking situation, and carrying me, but she got even angrier when a sharp stick poked its way through her thong into her tender foot.

This time, Pam dropped me first. She tried to drop me gently – hanging on to me as I fell shoulder first into the dry, poky weeds. (By the way, Pam dropped me two more times before we reached the edge of the pasture.)

While we only five cars farther down the path, a pair of paraplegic guys saw us from a distance. They yelled out, “Can we help?” We yelled, “Yes!”

“I had to tell myself that there would be other races and let my disappointment go.”

They came wheeling back through the cow pasture again. They offered to help by bringing my chair along.

At first, they tried to move my folded chair by pushing it between their two sports wheelchairs. My chair fell because they weren't going at the same speeds. These two guys's sports wheelchairs were lower to the ground than my wheelchair, so they could move easier through the weeds.

Next, the two guys duct taped two of their legs together to make sure that they would not separate again. This time they carried my wheelchair by laying it across their laps. These guys were funny to watch. They even did a wheelie in unison with my wheelchair on their laps.

Once everyone got me and my wheelchair past the cow pasture, we boarded a schoolbus to take us the two miles to the racetrack. On the bus, the two paraplegics told us that they too had lost their handicapped parking spot.

By the time we got to the racetrack, I had missed the meet-and-greet with the drivers, which was part of my ticket package, and the shoutout for the drivers to start their engines. In fact, the drivers had already gone twelve laps by the time we got to our seats. I was upset because I really wanted to meet Dale Earnhardt, Jr., but I had to tell myself that there would be other races and let my disappointment go.

The racetrack was two-and-a-half miles long. The racetrack people told us that the winning drivers only needed three hours to complete the two hundred laps. All the television commercials made the live broadcast longer to watch at home than at the track.

Seeing all the cars race was fun. Pam rented a mini-television so I could watch all the cars racing at once. Watching the race on the mini-television was cool! I got to hear things that other people didn't get to hear, even though they were at the race. For example, I heard Dale's conversations with his spotter. From one conversation, I learned that the drivers could take over spots from other drivers who were no longer able to race because their cars were wrecked and could not be fixed. Although I've been watching NASCAR on television for over four years, I didn't know this information until I eavesdropped on Dale's conversation.

In between Dale's conversations, I yelled, "Go, Dale! Go!" I saw my driver, Dale, take second place. That made me want to get out of my wheelchair, run down to the NASCAR hauler, and ask them, "Can I meet my favorite driver?"

After the race was over, we stopped at the bathroom, before heading back to the cow pasture. We waited in a long line outside the women's

powder room which was really close to the line for the men's bathroom. We watched a drunken paraplegic hit an old guy who wouldn't let the paraplegic cut ahead in the line. In return, the old guy knocked the paraplegic out of his wheelchair.

None of the men in line helped the drunken paraplegic. Pam and Courtney, who felt sorry for the drunk, helped him back into his wheelchair. The drunken paraplegic then kissed my sixteen-year-old niece, Courtney, on her cheek.

The drunk, however, continued to taunt all the men in line. He wanted to be knocked out of his wheelchair again so he could go to the hospital. We waited for security to get there before we went to the bathroom.

As we walked to the schoolbus to get back to the cow pasture, Pam, Courtney, and I laughed about the drunk and his kiss. Courtney told Pam, "I need a shower."

I still want to meet my favorite driver, Dale Earnhardt, Jr., but I will have to wait for the next race I attend. I am going to make somebody in my family take me to Daytona 500 every five years until I get to meet my driver. Seeing him take second place was wonderful, but it was no substitute for actually meeting him. Meanwhile, I am still so excited about the race that I tell everyone I meet about the things I experienced that day.

Sea Birds in St. Andrews

K. E. Concannon

We sneak away from our hotel without
the notice of the sleeping chaperones.
In North Sea air, we navigate as free
as turnstones rising on a gust of wind
at dawn. We gather souvenir sand and kiss,
as though the indigo light might herald our
adulthood. At water's verge, we are a pair
of fledglings standing on a precipice.
The flight of a lifetime cannot be foreseen,
and thirteen years would pass before I'd see
the tracks of greenshanks in the sand again.
With another love I never could imagine
in youth beside me on that shore, we gaze
at long-tailed ducks returning home at dusk.

The Pennsylvania

Jackie Skinner

Stephen Messeter exited the building and carefully smoothed his eyebrow with a forefinger. He adjusted his suit, donned his new hat, and walked down the street with an air of utter confidence. Those near him subconsciously moved out of his way, and so he arrived at his next appointment in quick time. Stephen knocked on the heavy wooden door with the solid brass knocker and waited politely. A woman in her forties answered the door, considered him briefly, then immediately ushered him inside and into an office. He sat rigidly on the edge of a leather chair and waited, taking in every detail of the office.

Within minutes, a middle-aged man with glorious gray muttonchops walked into the room and sat in a beautiful mahogany chair behind the desk, studying Stephen the entire time. “Mr. Messeter, it’s a pleasure to finally meet you,” the man said, shuffling some papers into a stack on his desk. “I’d like to be the first to welcome you to the company. I’ve heard a great many things about you. I’m Mr. Duff, and you can think of me as your boss. As I’m sure you know, Lancaster Bank carries a proud tradition of taking our members’ discretion very seriously. I expect you to uphold that tradition. I’ll be giving you your official assignments, although as you know you will have a certain amount of free reign, especially as you familiarize yourself with the company. You’ve been through training so you know how the bank works and how to conduct all of its forms of business. We are a high-society institution, and you will have access to delicate information. You may use your status in the bank for any privileges or needs you can think of. I take care of my own.”

Stephen nodded his head, which was the only part of him that moved, and waited for the man to continue. Mr. Duff flipped through the papers, skimming each page. “It says here you’ve been in training for six months, and that you graduated the program early, in fact, just under an hour ago. I’m pleased you accepted the invitation to meet with me.”

“I’ve enjoyed the training, but I’m excited to begin working. I’m pleased you contacted me; it allows me to begin sooner than I could have hoped.”

“I wonder, though, if you’re surprised you and I are meeting so quickly after you graduated.”

Stephen inclined his head slightly and answered. “With respect, Mr. Duff, I don’t get surprised very easily, especially working for such prominent businessmen. I understand time is money. I had assumed you kept close tabs on all of your future employees, for safety and security.”

“Yes, well...” Mr. Duff replied, looking a little ruffled. “Considering

you graduated less than an hour ago, you should feel quite honored. May I see your certificate, please?” Stephen gave a curt nod and extracted a perfectly folded letter from his inner coat pocket. Mr. Duff accepted it without a word and unfolded it, reading every word carefully. “Excellent,” he murmured, more to himself than to Stephen. “This is excellent, exactly what we wanted. Yes,” he continued, speaking directly to Stephen now. “It seems Mr. Coates from your training program took special notice of you and has highly recommended you, and that is a rare circumstance.” Stephen carefully inclined his head again, just enough to be considered respectful, but said nothing.

Mr. Duff tore the letter to bits. “You will begin work immediately. As you know, we keep a close watch on our competition, and you’ll be assigned to keep tabs on certain competitors. Again, use your status to acquire any information you need. We tend to work closely with the railroads. Please trust my judgment until you get a handle on the business, and remember to remain polite and courteous as you carry out your work. We provide a valuable service to this country and we must always remain aware and respectful of that responsibility.” He took a letter from a locked drawer in his desk and handed it carefully to Stephen. “This is a personal message from Mr. Edgar Thompson, the chief engineer of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. He would like to consult with you on a business expenditure. I expect great things from you, Mr. Messeter, and on that note, I’d like to officially welcome you to the ranks of the Bankers.”

Stephen looked out across the newly created park as he sat on a bench waiting for his meeting with Thompson. He absently fiddled with a new hat he had bought himself after a successful meeting with a client in Worcester.

He caught himself fidgeting and placed the hat on his head. Stephen felt a certain disdain as he looked around at the new public park. Such parks had sprouted all over the place, becoming incredibly popular for locals and tourists alike. He supposed they provided a sense of peace, but he found that movement soothed him more than any tree or pond. But he could sit absolutely still when the need arose, and it did quite often as a Banker.

The portly man arrived almost a thirty minutes late; he displayed the blunt arrogance of a man of power who possessed his own sense of time and to whom others adjusted theirs. He sat heavily on the bench and it groaned slightly, protesting against the weight. “You’re Messeter, then?” the man asked gruffly. Messeter nodded once. “Not a big talker, eh? Duff warned me of that. I hear you’re better with clients, but I’m bugged if I can tell. I’m Thompson, as I’m sure they told you. I’ll cut to the point. The Baltimore and Ohio railroad line is causing trouble. The bastards are routing business from Pittsburgh, away from our own

Philadelphia and into Baltimore. The bosses don't like that and so they hired me to build a new line directly between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. I need someone to talk with and calm down a Matthew Porter from the B&O who is... displeased with the competition I'm about to provide his company, even though his company started this rubbish."

Stephen considered briefly, weighing options. "How important is this man?"

Thompson snorted. "I think he's a know-nothing pile of trash. He has no concept of creating and engineering railroad tracks. However, the B&O finds him important enough to negotiate certain business deals. He's just starting out, and while a few people have taken notice of him, he's slowly working his way through the company. Getting to him early would certainly simplify my life. Enough chitchat. Yes or no?"

Stephen stood and nodded once. "Of course."

Three days later Messeter sat in Porter's rather cluttered office. "I'm a very busy man, Mr. Messeter. I'm afraid I can only give you a few minutes of my time. I'm sure you understand."

"I understand, Mr. Porter, my bank sent me on rather short notice. None of my colleagues even know I left. D'you know, I had a rather long journey into town and I'm feeling a bit pent up. I realize time is short, but could I trouble you into walking along the river?"

Porter sighed. "Yes. I'll just tell my secretary I'll be out for a bit."

"Oh there's really no need for that, Mr. Porter. It'll be a quick trip."

"Very well, Mr. Messeter, if you insist, I shall concede." They engaged in small talk as they made their way to a loud section of river. Although beautiful, few people visited the area due to its isolation and overgrown vegetation. There were more accessible areas to reach the shore but Messeter insisted they stop.

"And now to business, Mr. Messeter. I'm afraid I have very little time."

"Yes of course," Messeter agreed. "I'm here on behalf of a...shall we say concerned party."

"Concern for what? Or whom?"

"For a businessman who does not relish the competition of your B&O railroad. He fears a certain diversion of business and is not fond of the intrusion."

"Ah, regarding the Pennsylvania railroad. Those sanctimonious fools." Porter guessed. "As if they own commerce. I'm sure you're here to enlighten me, Mr. Messeter, on why I should not compete with the Pennsylvania line, but I'm afraid I cannot acquiesce. My employers

**"...he found
that movement
soothed him more
than any tree or
pond..."**

would frown upon losing such business; in fact, I haven't even told them I'm meeting with you. I haven't told anyone. Even that could sow discord in my company, and I'm afraid I want to move up in the company, not out. Please believe me when I tell you I have nothing else to say on the matter."

Messenger said nothing, only nodded. "I see. Well then here is where we must part, Mr. Porter. I'm sorry you chose this path. It is not one I would have wished for you, but I must abide by your decision." He held out his hand.

As Porter clasped his hand in Messenger's, he felt the man's rather strong grip yank him in close, closely followed by a sharp pain near his heart. He looked down to see a dot of red coloring his shirt. Not understanding, he looked into Messenger's eyes and saw no emotion. Only calculation. "Railroads are big business, Mr. Porter. My employer was unwilling to share the profits, and you had too many clever ideas. You should be flattered. It is a compliment he even took notice of you. He doesn't notice much besides his own reflection. It's a shame: you didn't know the game well enough to really be a player. I'm sorry Mr. Porter."

Messenger wrestled Porter into the brush, and then cleaned the blood from the road. He pushed Porter down the bank, watching dispassionately as he tumbled and hurtled through the brush next to the shore of the river. The Ohio was a nice wide river, flowing directly into the Mississippi. A good, strong river. A river where a body wouldn't be found. Messenger weighed the body down and released him into the steady current. Then he dried off, boarded a train, and headed home.

There was a knock at the door. Messenger's secretary, Celeste, walked briskly into the room. "Mr. Messenger, there's a Mr. Allan Pinkerton waiting for you."

"That name doesn't sound familiar. Do I know a Mr. Allan Pinkerton?"

"I'm sure you don't sir, but he said that Mr. Duff recommended he speak to you personally." She noticed the subtle shift in his bearing, but said nothing. She didn't want to know why his posture and expression changed every time Mr. Duff's name entered into a conversation.

"Very well, send him in. Thank you, Celeste," he added as he turned towards the door.

"Of course, sir." He heard her speak softly to someone in the outer room, and then a man entered, holding out his hand and introducing himself as he walked. "I'm Allan Pinkerton, Mr. Messenger. Mr. Duff recommended I speak with you. He said you might be interested in my proposal."

"By all means, please sit down, Mr. Pinkerton." They both sat, Messenger waiting patiently, watching the man organize his thoughts.

"I'm a fairly simple man, Mr. Messenger. I like order, and I like when

people behave themselves. I believe in the basic goodness of people, but I'm realistic enough to know that that order comes at a price. I am that price, Mr. Messeter. I believe the country is a bit too wide and current law enforcement is spread a bit too thin. To that end, I'm setting up a detective agency. Mr. Duff said, with an enormous smile I might add, that you are essentially incorruptible, and I need honest men like you to help me create this agency. I've never seen a man recommend an employee so thoroughly and with such gusto." He paused. "I hope you're interested and flattered enough to allow me to continue."

Stephen thought for a moment, then nodded. Pinkerton continued. "Excellent. Now, as I said, I'm just beginning to form this agency, but I've already heard of a group of people that immediately need to be hauled in." He paused before continuing. "Have you heard of a group of men called the Bankers? Quite different from the work you do, although I realize the humor as I say it."

Stephen laughed. "The Bankers? I enjoy the name, but I'm afraid I don't know whom you mean."

"Yes, well, I wouldn't expect you to. These men are highly secretive and very good at what they do."

"And what is it that they do?"

"They seem to be independent contractors, with most of their business coming from the railroad industry. Please excuse the pomp and circumstance, but they appear to be assassins, of a sort. They eliminate important competition to a particular interest by luring their victims to a river and murdering them. They then throw the bodies down the bank and into the water. This specific style of disposal has led to their perverse little name, the Bankers."

"A rather gruesome nickname. Gives people like me a bad name." Mr. Messeter replied. "But I'm still a little fuzzy on how I come into play."

"I understand you're very good at research, which helps you manage your clients' investments. I'm hoping you can apply that research to locating these bastards, please excuse my language. This agency will be the birth of a new method of business, one forged through honor and integrity, not by shady deals and dirty money. You're excellent at what you do and I'd like you to set the agency on the right path."

Allan Pinkerton stood up. "I don't want to take up more of your time, but I would like an answer as soon as possible. I have many people to visit and convince to quit their job and join me. I'm very excited about the positive change we can make."

Messeter stood with him, weighing his options, realizing the benefits he could have with Pinkerton's access to information. An opportunity for eliminating competition was always welcome. He smiled broadly. "No need to wait, Mr. Pinkerton. I'd be thrilled to help you create this agency, and I would thoroughly enjoy taking a whack at these Bankers. They seem interesting creatures, if not cruel ones."

Pinkerton looked relieved. “That’s excellent news. When can you start? I’m based in Chicago for now. I’d like to have you within the next two weeks.”

“I’m afraid I have business in Philadelphia this week – another troublesome client – but as soon as that’s concluded, I’d be happy to join you. It was very nice to meet you, Mr. Pinkerton, and I look forward to working with you.” They shook hands and Pinkerton walked away looking giddy, while Messeter looked thoughtful. He left his office, traveled down the street and bought himself a new hat. He had many business opportunities in the near future, and he deserved a treat.

I Wait and Smoke

Gordy Ewell

I am alone
I light my smoke
My room is dark
So feels my heart
By myself, so all alone
Except for the demons
All sharing my home

I take a drag
Soft my cigar glows
I find comfort as the smoke
Trails by my nose
Another drag, another glow
I quietly wait for them to show
The demons here
All sharing my home

It is almost time for them to come
I will wait I will not run
I will battle them until the break of day
I will survive until I see the light of dawn
Then it will be them that run away
I will still be here, but they will be gone

Soft light as my cigar glows
Again smoke rolls gently by my nose
The smoke is sweet that I inhale
As I sit and wait for my visitors from hell

Save Me From My Roommate

Kelly Albrecht

During one of the most ordinary mundane routines, it occurred to me that my roommate must be a vampire. I was vacuuming the house when I went from his bedroom to mine across the hall. The difference was literally from night to day. Mine was warm and bright with the sun shining through the open blinds and the walls painted a bright and cheerful light blue.

The very first thing you notice upon entering his room, besides the drastic drop in temperature, is death. Hanging on the wall opposite the entryway is the skull of an animal, perhaps that of a mountain goat or a bull, I'm not quite sure. The room is always dark since the curtains are always pulled shut, and the bed is always neat and tidy, appearing as though it has never been slept in.

Oddly enough, it was the difference in our bedrooms that first caused me to notice that he might have a thirst for blood. He is tall, handsome, and strong, as most vampires usually are. He is also very talented in many different skills and genres. Most people spend a lifetime developing one or two talents, but my roommate is gifted in so many that it would take centuries for any normal person to learn them all. I have often wondered how he did it. Now I know.

This may all seem like small circumstantial evidence to most of you, so I did some research. For starters, I investigated his broken nose.

My roommate claims that he once had his nose broken during a scuffle with some bullies in high school. And yet, I can find no evidence in school records or from local hospitals of a broken nose during that time. However, I found a story from the year 1736 of a man by the name of Antoine De Vershburne who moved into the village near the hills of Dashburgen. Shortly thereafter, young handsome men from the area began to mysteriously die off. The villagers became suspicious and accused Antoine of being Dracula. On one night, a mob gathered in the village and went after him. The mob managed to corner the unsuspecting Antoine in the hills where a vicious fight broke out, but Antoine had managed to escape from the ordeal. His only injury was a broken nose caused by the handle of a pitchfork.

In all the time I have known my roommate he has never once become ill, not even so much as a sniffle. His only reoccurring complaint is that of an occasional toothache. Strangely enough, I found another story of an actual vampire from the year 1799. His name was Antony Juan Lushboner.

Antony belonged to a coven of vampires that had plans to transform

an entire village into vampire slaves. It was to take place at the turn of the century during the evening celebration of 1800. But for unknown reasons, Antony set a fire in the early morning near the village. The fire was large enough that it eventually destroyed the small village, but it was set far enough away that it gave time for the villagers to escape its wrath. As punishment for scaring everyone away, the other vampires used an old pair of blacksmith grips to pull out Antony's fangs, making it difficult for him to feed until he could grow new ones. Could that be the cause of my roomies toothaches, even to this day?

Another curious story is that of a passenger aboard the Titanic by the name of Tony Wishbone. There is no record of Tony being saved in any of the lifeboats after the steamer went down, and it was assumed that poor Tony went down with the ship. But shortly after the tragedy, other survivors began to notice Tony walking around the dark streets of New York City. When confronted about how he had survived the ordeal, he simply denied his identity, claiming they must be mistaking him for somebody else. Recently I had the opportunity to go on a sailing trip with my roommate; he was absolutely terrified of the dark and murky water, fearing that dead bodies were floating just below its surface.

"I have often wondered how he did it. Now I know."

Another part of the puzzle came together only a few short years ago when my roommate, who now goes by the name of Anthony more modern Washburn, suffered a broken leg. The fracture healed remarkably fast, faster than any human, and it amazed even the doctors of his recovery.

Still not convinced? How about this? Skilled vampires learn how to feed off of their victims without actually killing them. They learn how to take small bites and take only small amounts of blood at a time, leaving their victim's completely unaware. An easy way to do this is during sex. In the heat of passion a small bite on the neck only adds to the arousal of love making. Anthony once admitted to me that he has a biting fetish when engaged in sexual encounters. Interestingly enough, Anthony has a string of boys at his disposal. His charm simply lures them in as if they are in a trance under his spell, and they always know when Anthony is hungry for they always appear at just the right time.

The most troubling of all this, whether you believe me or not, is that I am beginning to fear for my own safety. Knowing that I have a certain weakness for young Latino men, Anthony has been enticing me with one of his snack boys Luciano. It is only obvious to me that Luciano has been turned to a vampire himself and Anthony is using him to transform me into one as well.

It is not that the prospect of eternal life does not intrigue me; it is just that I am more of a wolf man. Have you ever seen what the wolves look like before a full moon appears? Woof. The thought of belonging to a pack, running wild through the forest in the dark of night, and sticking our noses under one another's tails is somewhat enticing to me.

The mystery in all of this is what will become of me? Will I eventually become caught in the snare of lustful vampires that lurk around my home? Will I be rescued by a pack of wolves in heat on the night of a full moon? Or will I perhaps become the first werewolf?

When I Was Young with My Family

Jacques Angualo

My name is Jacques Angualo. I am from Congo D.R.C., in Bukavu City. Bukavu is a big city, it has three villages, Bagira, Kadutu, and Ibanda. Bagira is my native village, it is a very beautiful village. There are a lot of green avocado trees and a big blue lake called Kivu Lake. Bagira is around Kivu Lake. When I was young every weekend I like to go to lake and my Father teach me to swim. I have a very happy family. I have two little sisters Jacqueline and Solange, my father and my mom. I am first child in my family. I like to go to school because every morning my teacher has a new good story to tell. I like to have a picnic at Lake Kivu with my father because after swimming I take a break and drink juice, sometimes I eat some bitter oranges and sweet yellow papaya.

In July to August it is so hot most people go to the lake for swimming between 12:00pm and 4:00pm. The temperature is 45.5 degrees Celsius. Lake Kivu has many fish, sometimes my daddy teach me to catch fish. When I was with my mom and daddy I was very happy when I came back from the lake. My mom prepares potatoes, tomatoes, carrots, cabbage and fish soup for my family. I help daddy to clean the fresh fish with a knife. My younger sisters were too small to go to the lake. My father did not want to go to the lake. End of the day my family eat dinner together.

Mountains and Molehills

Jonathan Dale Ricks

It's as if I see, in my mind's eye, a view that is truly strange.
For what appears at first to be a mountain, as I get closer still appears
the same.
The illusion gives way only when my foot touches its foot.
It is then that I see the molehill.
A small and unassuming hill with an easy incline,
a gentle slope that a child of nine could walk.
This I know, because I remember doing such things so easily when I was
nine.
What has changed since then?
I thought that I had become smarter, bigger, and stronger.
Why is it that I have become more fearful, anxious, and uneasy?
It is so easy to picture the counterfeit nightmare coming true,
and so hard to believe in the genuine dream.
I feel it is such a mystery, this mountain and its molehill.
I am no closer to answering the conundrum now than I was when I
started.
Despite this, I do have my feet on the ground.
Whatever ground it is.

Because of English

Busaya Dimitrov

I would like to write some stories to share with you, but English is difficult. I need time to improve my English.

I studied English in my country, Thailand. I came to the USA in July 2012. Oh my god! I was only able to understand 20% of what American people said. In that time, I was thinking that I needed to learn more English.

I studied ESL and graduated with my high school diploma after ten months at Horizonte Instruction and Training Center. I understood more English than before, but it was not enough for me. I needed more practice listening and speaking, so I enrolled to learn at Literacy Action Center.

“Because of English” is my first essay for the writing group. The members of the group have given me their opinions and ideas. These suggestions are helping me improve my grammar. I appreciate the help and want to say to everyone, “Thank you very much.”

I hope my English is getting better and better. I am excited to write more stories to share with you.

Brown Butter

Sarah Rose

Our Goddess group has been meeting for twenty years. We pray and sing and celebrate the seasons. It's a highlight of my week. Last night my goddess sisters prepared a birthday dinner for me. The table setting was utopian, round green straw placemats, green plates with colorful soup bowls, and napkins folded in red and green rings. Just regarding it was gratifying. But my heart skipped a beat when I saw the brown butter in the middle of the table. There it was, two little balls of brown butter in a small white dish. Instantly everything else was secondary. I remembered the brown butter from last year. It came from an upscale restaurant.

The squash soup with a hint of peanuts was sublime, the salad, baby greens with granny apple slices and caramelized pecans, refreshing. Little molecules of health ran around, saturating my cells. But the brown butter... "Please pass the bread," I said, but what I really meant was "Lemme at that butter!" The bread was just an excuse. I was the first to probe into the soft virgin ball of brown butter. I spread it on the bread, then secured a second swipe into the ball of brown butter, almost missing the bread as I spread it, because I wanted to lick it off my fingers. Glancing furtively to see if anyone was looking, I reached for another slice of bread, dipping into the second ball of brown butter. The brown butter yielded readily to my knife. With deft swiftness, I reached for yet another slice of bread. So as to appear to have a modicum of self respect, I broke the bread in half and placed one half back in the basket. Slathering as much brown butter on that half slice as possible, I heard all my taste buds singing as the brown butter bestowed a high note of triumph and I heard the heavenly choirs singing, celebrating that divine experience.

Then, that other half slice of bread seemed lonely, so I rescued it and furtively dove into the brown butter yet again, this time striking the bottom of the dish. The impact sent shockwaves through the knife, up my hand and arm and shoulder and neck and up to my brain, then directly down to my sinking heart. This is going to end!

I placed a dab of brown butter on my knife, and explored it with my eyes, then my tongue. I inquired of the Goddess girls the secrets it held, the ingredients which elevated the butter so. The consensus was balsamic vinegar, pimento, and something green, maybe a touch of basil. I'll surely experiment with it at home, but already I know it won't be the same.

My next birthday is only 364 days away.

Grief

Mary Garrity

I am hollow.
I am a rock's dry center,
So my dust chokes on itself.
I am the inside wall of storm,
Where I am silence
Stepping one down from quiet
to slow motion.
Rage is collapsing in on itself.
I watch, while it
Reforms, boils up,
And then explodes.
My energy is just another useless destruction.
My mind's eye sees
 "Bleak"
Raining down, wetting into a vacuum of despair with shopworn tears.
This fury is without direction,
a colorless futility with razor
 sharp edges.
I am despair's whimpering whine
 that "Hell"
might be just an extension of today/
So death promises no relief.
Whether my life is above it
Or under it—
Grief seems to be an eternal affair.
I cannot pray
 I cannot pray
 Oh do it for me,
Let your prayers fill me—
 For I am hollow.

Song for a Sunday

J. Phillip Wilkes

Saturday, came slow:
An old town Saturday.
Come, Saturday morning:
Saturday in the park.
Saturday sun, bring
S-S-S-Saturday night.
Saturday night's alright,
But not for fightin'.
Saturday night. Live!
For love. Right?
Saturday night fevah...
You should be dancin', yeah.
S-A-T-U-R-D-A-Y
Night!

Hair Don't Matter

Jim Kelley

I've had a passion for long hair on pretty girls since I was a boy pulling pigtails and 'boinging' yellow ringlets. My passion soared to its highest on our wedding day when I saw Karlene's cascades of vibrant wavy hair under her bridal veil.

When our daughter was born and people would say she didn't have any hair, as if to dispute those who'd say, "What a perfect baby." I'd tell a little white lie and say, "Hair don't matter."

I was in awe of the motherly power of Karlene's hair as she would take our fussy baby in her arms and quickly quiet the child by pulling a lock of hair over her shoulder.

My mind went numb. Karlene has cancer—breast cancer. No. That can't be. No. Treatment would require surgery, radiation and Chemotherapy which, as a final insult, would take her hair. All of it. Karlene decided she would donate her hair, up to her chin, to Locks of Love. Our two daughters supported her by doing the same. It would be the first time she'd had her hair so short since junior high.

I would have my last chance to enjoy her long lovely hair. I savored washing it. Then we went out in the warm June morning to brush it dry. I admit: the sunlight, the breeze and I played with her hair long after it was dry.

When she came home from getting it cut, I told her it looked cute. And it did.

Fourteen days after beginning chemotherapy, she had been crying when I came home from work. Her hair was gone. She asked me to shave the last scraggly strands. All I could see was her eyes: pure, concentrated, liquid love. Her face: goodness, serenity, love. I had to touch it to make sure it was real. The hair had only been a gilded frame for her beautiful face.

One night, as I teetered between being asleep and awake, I tried to draw her hair to me. Instead I ran my hand over her smooth hairless head. My face flooded. She'd been through so much and yet remains so poised and serene. I'm so helpless. So scared.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing," I replied as I tried to wipe my face on the pillow case. I thought I'd see sympathy in her eyes. She would help dry my face with those angel soft hands and I'd hear her soothing "ssshhh."

Instead there was a mischief in her eyes as she caressed my hairless chest and teased, "Hair don't matter."

"Yeah," I almost giggled as I rubbed her bald head, "Hair don't matter."

**“All I could see
was her eyes: pure,
concentrated, liquid
love.”**

We laughed; a healing, soothing laugh.

I saw my true passion as I looked into her eyes
and she looked at me with the look she reserves
for me and the kids.

I whispered, “We’re gonna make it.”

“Together,” she added.

The Contest

Marti Grace Ashby

Remember Tammy Faye Bakker? If that name doesn't ring a bell, Google her and check out her eyes. Seriously, they were something to behold. I often imagined her looking in the mirror every morning and deciding when she had applied just enough mascara. How did she keep her eyes open with the heaviness of those lashes? She was a pretty woman who didn't need all that goop around her eyes. Tammy Faye was a victim of the human condition of self-delusion.

I've had more than one moment of self-delusion. For example, during the summer before junior high, this was 1958, my friend Laura wanted me to enter a beauty contest with her that was being held at our local swimming pool. The membership of this particular club was made up of local merchants: attorneys, CPAs, and other businessmen. My father, a CPA, had done business with many of these people and knew most of them. (Back then they were all businessmen. I have no memory of even one woman in business unless she was in it with her husband.)

Herb, my straight-arrow dad, was well respected in our west side community. He would do taxes for all kinds of folks. If they couldn't afford to pay him in cash, he would accept eggs or chickens, whatever the people had as their currency. He was also quite a stickler on modest dress. Once my sister and I were watching a movie, can't remember what, but the girls had on two-piece bathing suits. You couldn't call them bikinis because, well, they weren't. Still my dad wasn't happy about all that exposed skin being on TV.

Anyway, when Laura suggested we enter the contest, I thought this would be great fun. It never occurred to me that my father would be less than thrilled with his daughter parading around in front of people in a swimsuit. Of course, I didn't own anything scandalous; in fact, I didn't own anything remotely appropriate for my debut. Fortunately I had a friend who let me borrow her swimsuit. It was black with cinched waist and perky cups. Dynamite. I fished out my mom's black and white open-toe heels. You can picture this, right? So cute. Such a winning combination.

Laura and I practiced every day at my house. We sauntered up the sidewalk, mounted the steps to my porch, the stage, and proceeded to show off our beautiful bodies. We had watched many "Miss America" pageants and knew to lift our arms in such a way as to show the curves of our breasts. We got pretty good at walking in heels, too. My ankles hardly ever caved.

The day before the big event, my mother asked me what I was going to wear. I showed her my friend's suit.

"Absolutely not!" she said. "There's no telling what you can catch from wearing another girl's bathing suit."

All my pleading and begging did no good. She would not budge. It didn't matter that I had already worn the suit several times for our dress rehearsals. The answer was no, and that was the end of it. I was to wear my older sister's suit . . . a shapeless, blue and green swirly cotton thing that had NO cups whatsoever. None. And, of course, no cinched waist either. I was doomed.

OK, fine, I thought, full of resentment. All was not lost. A brilliant idea brewed in my adolescent mind: my sister's padded bra, three inches of beautiful foam rubber formed into the breasts of a goddess. Yes, this would do nicely. Very nicely. And, of course, my mother knew nothing about this secret weapon.

On the day of the contest, I put the shapeless thing, mom's black and white heels, and the amazing bra in a Piggly Wiggly grocery bag and went to the pool. Picture this combination for a moment. Not exactly the stuff of a fashion. I know that now.

I entered the dressing room full of giggling girls, all hopefuls of being the chosen beauty that day. Poor things, I smirked to myself. Little did they know who had just entered their midst.

I saw Laura. She was already dressed and had put in her own secret weapon: rolled up toilet paper stuffed into the bra of her suit. Nice. But not as nice as what I was about to debut, I thought smugly. I was jealous that her suit also had a cinched waist but only a tiny bit because I knew she would soon be jealous of what I was about to put in my suit. They would all be jealous.

Mothers were helping their daughters dress, fussing with their hair, putting a bit of lipstick on their lips and a touch on their cheeks. Not too much though. I was glad my mom wasn't there. She was going to be so surprised when I walked out.

I went into one of the dressing stalls and changed for my entry into the world of *The Chosen*. When I walked out, the envy was obvious on everyone's faces. They parted for me as I went to the mirror to fix my hair. It was already in a ponytail. I ignored the little poof on the top of my head because my curlicue bangs would divert attention from the less than perfectly combed do. I separated my bangs into three sections and tortured them into perfect curls on my forehead, plastering them with hairspray. They would not lose their oomph that day.

I sensed the awe around me. They knew the winner was there among them, that I was to be the crowned beauty that day. I could see it in their wide eyes, in the way their mouths hung slightly open in surprise. I felt proud.

Finally my name was called as well as naming my soon-to-be-proud parents.

“Martha Dickey, daughter of Herb and Ann Dickey,” said the announcer.

My cue.

I straightened my shoulders and walked out to face a crowd of around 300 people. It was quite a long walk to the stage, but poised and graceful I made my way to certain victory. I saw out of the corner of my eye my brother and his friends. I heard one of the boys say, “Hey! She didn’t have those yesterday!”

Silly boys.

I finally reached the stage, walked up the steps, turned this way and that with practiced precision. I lifted my arms to give everyone a gander at the heavenly boobs, then stood back to let the lesser-thans do their inferior show. I tried hard not to smirk.

Guess what: I. Didn’t. Win. I was shocked ... a bit. The same girl won who had won the last two years straight. I knew it was fixed; that was obvious.

I quickly got bored and just wanted to go swimming. No tears from this girl. No ma’am. After the crowning, I kicked off my mom’s shoes (never to be seen again), jumped off the stage, and dove into the deep water. I was on a couple of swim teams so I was a good swimmer. I, however, hadn’t considered the fact that my sister’s padded bra did not float. It could be said that I didn’t consider a lot of things that day. Anyway, the bra turned against me and became a huge sponge soaking up water. A lot of water. If it hadn’t been for my swimming skills, it might have been a different story altogether. I shudder to think of a handsome lifeguard pulling my body and huge boobs out of the pool. What would the protocol have been in dealing with what was causing me to drown? I somehow made it to the side of the pool, pulled myself out, crossed my arms under the water-laden breasts, and ran to the dressing room. I removed the offending garment, flung it in a dressing stall, and got back into the pool to play Marco Polo with some kids.

Not one member of my family ever mentioned the contest. I forgot about it until right before I was to start junior high. It finally dawned on me that I probably hadn’t been as beautiful and seductive as I had thought. I failed to mention that I had my full height of 5’9” and was quite skinny. Imagine Dolly Partonesque breasts accentuated by a flat and bony chest from which they sprang. And I began to wonder why that instead of sneaking in the amazing bra I hadn’t sneaked in the cute black swimsuit.

I also wondered WHERE THE HELL WAS MY MOTHER!
Turns out she along with my father were in the audience studying the

“It was quite a long walk to the stage, but poised and graceful I made my way to certain victory.”

grass the whole time I was presenting myself to the public comprised of many of my father's business associates. My younger sister, three years my junior, was laughing her ass off.

Perhaps this is the reason my brother wanted to change the spelling of his last name so people wouldn't know we were related.

The Precipice

Richard Clegg

Moist lemon flavored swabs—meant to comfort his dry and dying mouth—when withdrawn this time, mopped blood instead. It was time. The end of this joyous journey together was nearing. Somewhere along the way from there to here at the precipice, I had promised to make him as comfortable as I could for as long as I could. I no longer could keep my promise. So, I drew nearer, gazed into what were once his impish brown eyes, still open, still brown, but now uninhabited. Sure in the knowledge he could hear me, was listening and WOULD hear me, I whispered, as softly as a beach breeze we shared in Penang all the while hoping for the same stunning effect as when we both inhaled the fragrance of the night blooming jasmine on that starlit walk in Taфраout. And I tenderly suggested, “It’s time, Stevie. I’ll be OK. Why not embrace your Mom with both arms; touch lightly your Granny’s silky wrinkled cheeks with the finger-tips of both hands? I can’t make you comfortable any longer. It’s time.” He heard. He listened. He left. Our journey together was over. He soared from the precipice.

This same journey had long ago moved from strolls along the white-hot midday beaches of southern Spain or upon the moonlit glistening cobblestones of a crisp midwinter night at Red Square, to a more modest post-diagnosis variety along the Neckar, where he promised he’d come to me in a breeze in the curls at my forehead. That was when he could walk. The ever creeping mass of malignant brain cells took his steps from him. For a time it was a world on wheels. And what was once a shared life of cities, friends, operas, concerts, continents was reduced to a modest few rooms filled with our intense love and to us unspeakable horrors – excrement and urine in unwanted places: on floors, on walls, the sofa, the very bed we shared.

A hospital bed was delivered and installed in our living room along with my ever present vases of fresh cut flowers and the soothing notes of Leonskaya’s Chopin Nocturnes. Like Rilke’s panther, he was a prisoner behind not iron, but wooden bars. There were several witnesses there to help that day as the tumor and I sentenced him “to do time” lying there unable to move on his own. “Til death do us part.” Both the horrors and the love were residents in our rooms. The love had lived there for over twenty years. The horrors were new and unwelcome, uninvited guests.

Death’s slow tedious process resulted at times in his losing all sense of time, of day and night, of appropriate and inappropriate. With a soft call In the dead of night he stirred me from my futon on the floor

“We simply waited for the process to complete itself..”

next to his railed prison. I recall a certain degree of irritation at being awakened from what little sleep was afforded me by his request for bacon and eggs at 2 am. The phrase “a last request for a special food” jumped to my mind from the pamphlet “Death and Dying” a wise and knowing friend had surreptitiously sent me in an envelope with nothing else. It was in this early-hour loneliness of our kitchen, once a scene of banter and baking, that I allowed in the realization this was his last meal, the last I would have the pleasure of preparing for him. Irritation was replaced by a profound sadness. I wept as I scrambled the eggs. He ate very little, but smiled as I fed it to him.

Eventually for us the collective madness and death’s panic morphed into a comfortable, peaceful and loving quiet. We simply waited for the process to complete itself, all the while talking of Dickinson being read at the funeral, no cremation, nor recorded music. I went about my caregiving. He spoke little until one day he could speak no more. A profound silence fell about our rooms.

Until that silence was shattered—just as stunningly as the 3rd movement of Tchaikovsky’s 6th symphony shatters the pain of the 4th—when I noticed his usually still and almost lifeless manner was suddenly, unexpectedly animated. It was as if he were about to speak, a gift this beloved raconteur had lost weeks earlier. I leaned closer to hear what I thought he was about to say when he struggled with the one arm he could still move. He was clawing at me as a loving kitten might, desperately trying to touch my face, kiss my hands. I kissed him in return and in spite of his physical limitations, like falling spring cherry blossom petals - stunning even in their final stages – he blanketed me with his love, his gratitude and what I sensed at that moment would be his eternal concern for me.

We both knew that like so much that had been stolen from him by the wretched tumor, his ability to convey anything at all to me would soon be impossible. It was his final message of love and without a spoken word, he had gifted me the likes of a Shakespearean sonnet, a Shubert Lied, a Psalmist’s prayer. I smelled again the fragrance of the night blooming jasmine.

Hometown

Shalah Soltanianzadeh

I am an Iranian. I was born in Yazd. I grew up in Yazd and I finished high school in Yazd. I lived with my parents, a sister, and two brothers. My sister's name is Parvin and my brother's names are Reza and Jalal. Our house was very large and beautiful. It had four rooms, furniture, washrooms, living spaces, dining room and a big yard for playing and a pool for swimming. Always my sister and I played in the yard. My grandma and grandpa lived in our neighborhood. Usually I went to their home with my family. Usually I woke up at 7a.m. and went to bed at 9p.m. (night). I ate dinner at 7p.m.

In holiday eve narooze my family and I went to Shiraz city. Shiraz is near Yazd. Shiraz is historical city. There are in Shiraz historical building and beautiful garden and Hafez tomb. Hafez is famous poet. I would visit in the hot weather with my family Hafez tomb. Sometimes the sunny warm my face. My family buys sweets and candy. The sweet famous Shiraz is Masghati. It is make with sugar and flour and walnut and pistachio and safari. It is sticky sweet and yellow color. In this city make candy with nuts and sugar and rice flour, it is soft cookie and very delicious. I heard sound birds in the garden. I smell orange trees blossoms in the hotel garden.

I love my hometown. My parents live in my hometown. Usually on holiday my family and I go to Yazd. In Yazd I can visualize my childhood. My garden had a few trees and very beautiful flowers and some basil, parsley, red radishes and green onion. They were very delicious and smelled good. The famous sweet in my hometown is baklava. It is made with walnut and pistachio and sugar, butter, and flour and cooked in the oven. It is soft and very delicious. I love my family and I never forget my hometown.

Essay on Take One Magnifying Glass

Awes Muhina

Take One Magnifying Glass is a book that takes place in modern times at the reader's home or school. In fact, it could be happening right here, right now.

The book discusses many different things you can learn about with the help of a magnifying glass also called a magnifier. The book shows how to use a magnifier to look at many different tiny things.

When I read the book, I learned many things that can be explored using a magnifier. I learned about looking at snowflakes. I found out that each snowflake has six sides or six branches. I read about looking close up at fingerprints. Every fingerprint is different. Fingerprints are of three types: whorl, rise, and loop. I read about looking at pictures and seeing that their images are made up of a lot of tiny lines. I read about looking at single color stamps and finding that their images are also made of tiny lines. I read about looking at leaves and insect wings. I learned that both leaves and insect wings have many tiny veins.

As you can see, I learned a lot from the book. I think the author wants the reader to learn to use a magnifying glass to look at small things and be curious.

I liked the book. It was fun and interesting to read. I learned many new things while reading it. I would recommend this book to other learners in my class and my children.

Arc of a Rainbow

J. Phillip Wilkes

Each arc of each rainbow
 Portends an end to each storm
 That blocks the sun.

Each arc of each rainbow
 Is a brilliant bridge
 To light and warmth.

Each arc of each rainbow
 Is a promise of an end
 To destruction and death.

Each arc of each rainbow
 Is the product of rain
 As well as sunshine.

Each arc of each rainbow
 Displays all the colors
 Of the whole light.

The Nightmare Before Christmas

Christine Ireland

It's two weeks until Christmas, and already Mom is anxious. She and Dad caught a bat that came down the chimney last night. They had a devil of a time capturing it. I watched in fascinated glee, as my uncoordinated mother tried to bring the bat down using a broom. Dad stood several feet away shouting commands, while Mom swatted, then screamed at every near miss. Suddenly, the shouting, swatting and screaming stopped. My heart sank. "You didn't have to kill it!" I said.

"We had to get it out of the house Ralphy, bats carry all kinds of infectious diseases."

I had no argument for her statement, nor explanation for the sense of loss I felt as the bat fell into the dustpan my father held, never to rise again. Finally, the words formed in my mouth. "I don't like it when the peacocks keep me up by exchanging cat calls all night, but you don't see me going after them with bow and arrow or slingshot." Mom shook her head at me.

I went outside to throw a few balls with my dog Bert. I started out by throwing short passes, then made him work for it. The ball went around to the front of the house and Bert took off running. When he didn't come back, I went toward him, he'd abandoned the ball and stood staring at the garbage bag Dad had put out by the road for pickup. Then I saw something, maybe just the wind making ripples on the surface of the bag. Bert began barking and Mom called out for me to bring him and myself in for the night. "Sure Mom," I said, so she'd go back to whatever she was doing and I could investigate further. Upon tearing open the plastic, I could hardly believe my eyes. The bat I thought Mom and Dad had killed was still alive. I scooped him up in the closest thing I could find, an empty shoebox, and secured the lid. "This is our secret." I told Bert as we headed into the house.

"What's in the box?" Dad asked.

"Just my rock collection." I lied.

"I thought you gave that up?" He asked.

"We're in a new place now Dad, who knows what unusual specimens I might find."

"Good luck, son." He called after me, as I climbed the stairs to my room.

I set the box down on my bed and started rummaging through my closet for a temporary home. A birdcage, perfect.

The next morning I arrived at school early and learned everything I could about bats from books and magazines in our school's library. I

read that bats in North America eat insects. While walking home that afternoon, I stopped at the pet store to buy some grasshoppers and other insects for Batty. I got nervous when the clerk asked me what I needed the bugs for; my eyes surveyed the shop. Upon spying an iguana for sale, I quickly answered, "An Iguana."

"Hi Ralphy," someone said. I turned to see Sally McKendrick standing there.

I gave her a nod.

"What's in the bag?" She asked, peering into the brown paper bag I held loosely in my hand.

"It's nothing, just some bugs for my iguana."

"I've never seen an iguana up close," she said.

"You're in luck," I retorted, "there's one right here in the store."

"No silly, I want to see yours."

I'll let her come see my iguana, I thought, it'll be the strangest looking iguana she's ever seen. Maybe even convince her to stop following me around. We walked the few blocks to my house. Sally followed close behind me, as I showed her to my room. "Groovy wallpaper, it looks like you've got the whole universe on your walls.

"It was here when we moved in."

"You sure are cute, Ralphy."

I can't stand being called Ralphy. It's bad enough when your mother gives you a pet name like that, but where does someone you've only known a couple weeks get off calling you that? A high pitched giggle escapes from her lips each time she says my name. It's more of a squeak really. She took a seat on the bed and pulled me toward her with surprising force. "Sit with me." She said.

"I thought you came over to see my iguana."

Her eyes lit up. "Sure, why don't you get him out for me?" I cross the room and pull off the fabric covering Batty's cage. He'd been sleeping upside down, his claws digging into the swing. His bright eyes stared at Sally, as if attempting to hypnotize her. It appeared to be working. Sally just sat there with a blank look on her face, as if she'd been entranced. She wasn't moving, wasn't talking and definitely wasn't giggling. In an effort to prevent her from going into a catatonic state, I replaced the cover. "You really don't like me, do you Ralph?"

"Thank you for calling me Ralph." Batty's subliminal messages must have started taking effect. "I don't dislike you Sally." It was too late, she ran from the room crying. I turned to the birdcage. "You didn't have to be that hard on her."

Mom went into my room to gather up the dirty bed linen. She looked towards the window and noticed something different. The birdcage hadn't been out in ages, not since Perry died. She placed her hands against the fabric around Perry's cage, and tried to remember what he looked like. Then it happened, she removed the towel. Initially she had

“I could hear my mother sobbing as I climbed the stairs.”

the reaction Sally had only hours before; the spell didn't last long. Within seconds she fled the room shrieking. “Herbert! Herbert! Ralph's got a bat in his room, a bat in his room, I tell you.”

“What is the meaning of this?” Dad bellowed.

“I'm sorry Dad.”

“Sorry, your mother is in hysterics and all you can come up with is ‘sorry?’”

“It's not my fault you and Mom didn't finish the job after you attacked a defenseless animal.”

“Ralph, that's enough, I won't hear any more about it. The bat has to go, do you want to give your mother a heart attack?”

“With her weight, it's only a matter of time before her arteries clog up, one way or another.”

Dad gave me a look that said I'd gone too far. “I am not prepared to respond to you right now, go to your room, until I come up with a rational response.”

“You mean before you bludgeon me to death too?”

“Go to your room, young man.” He thundered.

I could hear my mother sobbing as I climbed the stairs. I felt bad; all I could do was wait for the other shoe to fall. When my parents decided to relieve me of my anxiety, I'd cooled down considerably.

“Are you ready to talk civilly?” Dad asked.

“Yes, first I'd like to apologize for what I said earlier Mom.”

“Go ahead Ralph.”

I hadn't thought this far ahead. I assumed expressing my desire to apologize and apologizing were the same thing. “Well,” I stammered, “you were trying to do me a favor by changing my sheets and instead of thanking you, I lashed out. I should have told you and Dad I brought a wild animal into the house.” Dad nodded in agreement, Mom smiled.

“Obviously, this creature means a lot to you.” Dad said.

“Yes, Batty does.” I paused. “I've been thinking only of myself, keeping him in a cage. I came across a website today while using my Swag Bucks account: batworld.org which included information about a local rescue. I didn't want to tell you because other than worrying about Bert letting my secret out, it's been fun to have such an exotic pet.”

“Good recognition son. I hope you'll come to us sooner next time there's a problem.”

“I will Dad.”

Sally didn't seem her normal bubbly self, at school the next day. I felt bad about what had happened with her too. “Listen Sally,” I said leaning across the aisle. “I am sorry about what happened yesterday. I really do want to be friends.”

“It's my fault too. I move too fast and never give anybody a chance to just be my friend.” She said.

“You remember my friend Batty, don’t you?”

“You mean the mummified rat in a birdcage?”

“Yeah, that’s him.” I said.

Sally grinned. I have her on the ropes, I thought. “I’d like some moral support when I drop him off at Utah Bat Rescue and Rehab.”

“Okay.” She said.

During the car ride Sally looked nervous. “Are you sure he can’t get out?” She asked.

“The bars are less than a quarter of an inch apart. I keep the cage covered because bats like to hide.

Wildlife and conservation expert Heidi Harris was as bubbly in person as she had been over the phone. She took us on a tour and explained that even though rabies is rare in bats it’s important not to handle them with bare hands, because if it bites you, the bat will need to be euthanized and tested.

“Do bats try to become tangled in your hair?” Sally asked.

“If a bat swoops toward you, it’s probably after the mosquito that is hovering just over your head. Insect eating bats have built in sonar; their unique echolocation ability allows them to navigate at breakneck speed through total darkness.” Heidi said.

“Do vampire bats exist?” Mom asked.

“Vampire bats are found throughout Central and South America. They have a wingspan of about eight inches and a body about the size of an adult’s thumb. But it’s their saliva that has medical researchers so excited. Once a vampire bat bites its sleeping prey it uses this remarkable saliva to keep the victim’s blood flowing freely so that it can continue feeding. Scientists have now turned this clot-busting protein into a drug to dissolve the blood clots that cause a stroke.” Heidi said.

We thanked her and said our goodbyes.

Although that one Christmas things got out of hand, I’ll always have fond memories of my winged mammal friend.

Hidden Falls

Steve Proskauer

Cool waft's
The gift
Of falling water.

Mist's moist touch
Seeks me out
Singing

Ballads of
Waterfalls
Within.

Hate

Shirley Fifer

She says derogatory things about others, a lot.
he cheated me
she told lies about me
she has funny clothes
her hair is weird
I'm ashamed of being seen with her
he goes to that funny church
he can't talk English
all the time he stutters
he's dumb, I can't understand him
I think they're Jewish, they've got a lot of money
that political party causes all our problems
love of money, it may be the root of all evil, but I
need a lot of it.
the poor should go back where they came from
if he weren't lazy he'd have a job.
I told a lie. I wish I didn't. It just sipped out.
he's a negro and too black.

Something Important That Happened to Me

Gerry Vigoda

Several years ago I entered a contest in the American Heritage magazine wanting to know if anyone had been involved in anything important. And this is like the little story I wrote them.

It was during the war. I was living on the fifth floor of an apartment building in the Bronx in New York City. I heard a noise and looked out the window. There was a big zeppelin sliding by. It wasn't flying, just moving.

It looked so close I thought I could reach out and touch it. I ran to the kitchen and said, "Momma come quick, there's something you've got to see!" She ran into the living room with me, and we looked out the window and there it was, the back end of it was still near us. She said... "Look, there's a swastika on the tail of it, it's German." It was gliding by so slowly I could see the person gliding it. My mother was aware of what had been going on in Germany. She said in Yiddish, "du zolst unt Zindendinh vee ah licht" (translation; May you burst into flame like a candle)... I remembered stories from her childhood in Russia where the many unschooled peasants believed in werewolves and in casting an evil eye against an enemy.

Later that night we heard on the radio that the Von Hindenberg Zeppelin had exploded as it came in for its mooring at the Lyndhurst, New Jersey, Naval Air Training Station. I turned to my mother and said, "Oh Momma, what did you DO?" I believed what she had said had put a curse on the zeppelin. My mother was aware of things going on in Germany since Hitler came in control.

When American Heritage called me to tell me my story would be printed in their next issue my daughter asked me how much I'd get paid for my story and I said, "Oh, maybe \$25," but when the check came it was for \$200!

Segment from Sweet Grace

Melissa Rasmussen

One September morning, Mari and Grandma Hana were sitting on the front porch watching for the threshers to arrive. Everything was ready in the kitchen for the soon to be hungry workers. They had labored yesterday and long into the night to prepare all that could be done ahead of time.

Grace was at the edge of the yard that touched the meadow. She was cheerfully skipping about in a dace with a black and scarlet butterfly. Elly was bounding around her feet, tail swishing, clearly interested in catching it.

I will need you to keep Grace out front here, not in the house and away from the men working in the field. They won't welcome you two under foot.

Yes Grandma.

Now I mean it. Keep her in sight at all times and out of trouble you hear?

I hear you Grandma. I promise.

That promise was easier to make than keep. Elly, afraid of all the strange people and noisy equipment, had fled to safer regions beneath their bed. Without her for distraction, Grace was in rare form. Naturally curious, she wanted to be right where the action was. The unusual flurry around the farm was too much for her. She snuck off every chance she got, which kept Mari busy all morning.

Around noon, they were out front petting Charlie. They fed him a few of the ripening apples off the tree while waiting for the men to finish dinner so they could eat. Mari turned for just a second to reach up and pick one more apple for their old, brown horse when poof! She looked over just in time to see the blue tip of Grace's untied sash whip around the corner of the house.

Why do you have to clean it with oil? Why not water? Oil is NOT clean you know. It's very messy. So is that rag! You should wash it. Grace was talking to a red-faced man who was setting up the thresher. He was hurrying to finish before the barley started coming in from the field. He looked a bit harried.

Grace, come away from there. The nice man is busy and you mustn't bother him now.

But Mari! He's cleaning it with OIL! He should use soap and water. That would work much more better. We need to tell Meema. He's gonna ruin it!

Without even a glance at the man, Mari grabbed her sister's hand

**“She
stopped and
turned and looked
over the white-
golden fields which
were alive with
activity.”**

and pulled her away, dragging her back towards the front yard. She heard the man behind them start to chuckle and couldn't stop a wry smile of her own. Sweet Grace, no one could resist her charms.

Just then, she wrenched her hand out of Mari's hold and sprinted off into the meadow. She stopped and turned and looked over the white-golden fields which were alive with activity. Hefty bundle haulers were tossing shocks of grain into big horse-drawn wagons. A somewhat grim overseer shouted commands at the men, keeping them moving at all times.

There were newer machines, newer ways than this. But her community, thrifty and not even a little afraid of hard work, had determined to use the old machines as long as they could keep them running.

We could go help them! I can drive the horses!

No you can't.

Grace began to run through the meadow to the back fields and Mari had to hurry to catch her before she reached the first wagon.

GRACE! STOP!

Without another word, Mari heaved her sister awkwardly up onto her hip and began to stomp through the meadow and back to the front porch once more. She was tired and hot and hungry and thirsty...not to mention frustrated by how difficult it was to watch Grace under these conditions.

Neither sister spoke. Mari reached the front porch and plopped Grace unceremoniously into Grandma Hana's chair. Then she dropped down in the chair beside her.

Now sit there and DON'T MOVE while I catch my breath. Then I'll get us some water and something to eat ok?

Mari rested her head in her hands while she took deep breaths.

Grace was growing too big for her to carry like that. She listened to the buzz of the insects in the grass, the hot, dry straw scent of the harvest filling her lungs. Her head was pounding and her cheeks were radiating heat.

In her chair, little Grace began to sniffle, then to wail.

No no no!

Mari dropped to her knees in front of Grace and began rubbing her legs and patting her shoulders to comfort her. She cupped Grace's chin and looked up into her luminous green eyes. They appeared double their original size at the moment. Copious, wet tears were tumbling out of them and streaming down her dusty cheeks, making little dark, muddy tracks on her creamy skin which were splotched with red from the heat and crying.

Oh baby...Gracie...I'm sorry. I love you. I didn't mean to make you sad. Come here sweetheart.

She held her little sister close and began to rub her back and pet her russet curls while she continued to murmur words of comfort. Grace was just excited by all that was going on today. -And in her exasperation, Mari had forgotten her tender little heart.

When Grace calmed down, Mari ducked into the house and quickly returned with a cool, moist rag and glasses of water for both of them. She gave Grace a sip and then wiped her face clean with the rag. Grace smiled at her, which melted Mari's heart. She really must be more patient.

Hey! I knew you were in there somewhere. -Just had to get past all this grime. Look at that!

Mari turned the rag to show Grace all the dirt on it.

EEEEWWW!

Eww is right.

Grace Giggled. They both sipped their water. After a few minutes of calm, Mari stood.

Now, I'm going in to find us some food before one of us faints from hunger. -Any requests?

Can we take a picnic?

That's a fine idea Grace. Maybe we can sit under those trees at the edge of the forest and cool our feet in the creek. We could even pick some of those white Anemone you love. I'll ask Grandma Hana. Now be sure you wait here, I'll be right back.

I want to come with you.

Mari sighed.

Ok, but you have to stay right behind me and hold onto my sash you hear?

Yes. -Right behind you. I promise.

We Live

K. E. Concannon

We live beneath the seven-colored sky,
citron on the southern horizon,
green of a backlit cloud,
vermillion arc
giving way to amber,
rose reflecting higher,
heliotrope behind the highest birds,
and indigo beyond.
We collect armfuls of wood
in the chill of morning,
as the children unfold,
gather dried peppers
from beneath the shrubs,
tasting the earth.

When the colors return,
we feast on a stew
of migrating game,
the fires burning golden and violet.
In the clear of the desert,
we no longer count the stars
but nightly rename the constellations.

For Want of Words

Ked Kirkham

I want words.

I want words for every
thing and feeling
and time.

With words
I am sure I can know,
can express,
can change and enlarge
or bring to size

what seems lacking
without words.
And sometimes

seems lacking altogether,

so that
I want even more

for words.

Quiply Can Fly

Kelly Albrecht

There once was a family of Quail that lived in the shrubs near the Old Farm Town Homes of Wannabe Square. The youngest was Quiply, a most curious bird, and he liked to ask all kinds of questions about this and about that.

More often than not he liked to stand and look up into the sky; watching other birds fly over head, land in the trees, laughing and talking with one another. Quiply would look at his feet...then at his wings, and then ask his mother;

“Mama, why do we walk everywhere?”

“Oh Quiply,” she’d say, nearly laughing, “Because we are Quail honey and that is just what Quail birds do. They walk.”

“But I have wings too Mama, I want to fly where they fly and play the games they play, just like they do.”

So sure enough, that is just what Quiply decided to do. Every day he would flap his wings, getting them stronger and stronger. Pretty soon his little legs would begin to leave the ground, faster and faster he would flap and he would go higher and higher, then higher still. And soon enough he was looking down at the top of the trees instead of up into them, soaring over the tops with the wind in his feathers. “I’m flying,” he sung with delight. Then swooped down, gave his Mama and Papa a little peck, saying he would be back soon, then off he went, into the sky.

“Well who are you my little friend?” he heard from above.

“I’m Quiply, but you can call me Quip,” he said, looking up at the big brown bird above him. “I’m a Quail, and I am flying.”

“I can see that you are. My name is Hubert; I am a Vulture and one of the highest flying birds around. Would you like to come with me?”

“YES.”

Quiply bit the tip of the Vultures tail feathers and hung on tight. “SWOOSH” went the big bird’s wings and up they went, high into the sky. The trees began to look like sticks, then dots. “SWOOSH, SWOOSH” higher and higher.

“Now hold your wings out strong little Quip and feel the wind beneath you.”

Quiply stretched out his wings and took a moment to get his balance, then soon as he felt he was ready he let go of Hubert’s tail feathers and felt himself soar.

“Look at me,” he squealed with delight. “I’m as high as the sky and I can fly.”

But this was Quiply’s first time out and he was beginning to get tired,

so he told his new friend Hubert goodbye; then dropped down, down, down, until he found a branch to perch on for a moment.

“Well who are you my friend?” Chirped the pretty bird next to him.

“My name is Quiply, but you can call me Quip. I’m a Quail and I just flew as high as the sky. Now I’m resting in this tree because my wings are tired.”

“My name is Lori Lou Lou, I’m a yellow bibbed lorikeet and I like to play. Would you like to play with me?”

“YES.”

For hours they chased each other around from tree to tree from branch to branch. Quiply had so much fun playing with Lori Lou Lou that he completely lost track of time and did not notice that it was starting to get dark.

“Oh my, it is getting late. I better go home now.”

So Quiply said goodbye to his new friend Lori Lou Lou and started to fly home. But it was dark now and he could not see where he was going. Quiply was scared.

“Well who are you my flying friend?” said the bird next to him in the dark with big round eyes.

“My name is Quiply, but you can call me Quip. I’m a Quail and today I flew as high as the sky and then played with my friend Lori Lou Lou. Now I am trying to go home but it is dark and I can’t see where I am going. Can you help me?”

“My name is Nightey and I am an Owl. I will help you because I can see in the dark; climb on and I will take you home little fella.”

Quiply nestled between Nightey’s wings and they flew into the night.

Little Quip got home a little late that night, past the time of cookies and milk, but Mama let him stay up anyway and have some before tucking him into bed.

That night, instead of Mama telling him a bedtime story, Quip told her an adventure; because today he learned how to step...nope, FLY, outside the nest.

The End

Invisible Wall

Winnie Mae Walker

Sometimes it hits as I awake;
Sometimes it socks me later.
My friends can never seem to understand
why I'm a walking zombie, such that
no one wants to date her.

In fact, they seem to want to use a brand

like hypochondriac or bum,
dysfunctional or lazy.

If they could only see things through my eyes,
when all I want to do is roam
and enjoy the warmer weather,
but I walk into this wall each time I try.

I get all kinds of good advice—
“eat fruits and veggies, exercise,
think positive and things will soon improve!”
Yet even doctors don't quite see
that pills do not move walls.
There's nothing that will put me “in the groove!”

Love

Shirley Fifer

understanding
forgiving
repenting
Christian way

.....

.....

he has a problem
but he needs a friend

.....

I know where she could get
inexpensive clothes, maybe she'd
like to go shopping with me.

.....

all of these people need a friend
Could it be you?

.....

If Mom was a Flower, She'd Be a Peace Rose

Judith Johnson

My mom, Ruth Isabella Lehman Johnson, was born on a farm on February 21, 1917, in Granger, Utah to German immigrants, August and Martha Lehman. She was born at home with a midwife and was the middle child of 14 children.

Mom was 12 years old in 1929 when the stock market crashed, sending the United States into the Great Depression. There wasn't any work, banks closed, and thousands of people lost all their money. My uncle Howard Lehman, Mom's brother, told me, "It was a terrible time when men were taking their own lives by jumping out of windows and hanging or shooting themselves."

During this time, Mom knew what it was like to go without personal wants, but she never complained and did what had to be done. Money was hard to come by. Mom didn't go to the movies and wasn't able to buy clothes. In Mom's senior year of high school, her mother approached her and said, "I have been saving up money to buy you a yearbook." Because of the sacrifice her mom made to buy her daughter a yearbook, Mom bought yearbooks for my sisters and me every year. Mom learned from her mother how to be thrifty during hard times. As a mother myself, I also made sure that each of my children got yearbooks. When World War II broke out in 1939, Mom was 22 years old and lived with her parents. To support the war effort, Mom didn't buy nylons as they were hard to come by. During the war years, Mom's family worked hard to keep a roof over their heads by growing their own food and raising and feeding the farm animals. Her older brothers looked for work to help pay the bills. Some of them found work at Kennecott Copper Mine. The younger ones got jobs in the fields, from farmers in the area, thinning and topping beets, getting in the harvest, and picking up potatoes after they were furrowed. Mom and her sisters helped the brothers in the fields to get extra money too. The girls also helped their mother in tending to the big vegetable garden. Some of Mom's and her sisters' main duties were: helping make lunches for their brothers that had jobs, canning the harvest from the garden, washing clothes using a wringer washer with two galvanized rinse tubs and then hanging the clothes outside on the clothesline or hanging them by the coal stove in the dining room. They also helped with the cooking and baking, cleaning the house, gathering eggs, feeding the baby chicks, and cutting the heads off chickens and plucking their feathers. Everyone, including my

grandparents, worked hard to keep their family fed, clothed, and warm. To help keep the budget low, my grandmother sewed dresses for Mom and her sisters for the first day of school. That was the only dress they had for a whole year. Of course, Mom also wore hand-me-downs from her older sisters.

Mom met Dad and they married on February 21, 1944 just before WWII ended, and they moved to Everett, Massachusetts because Dad got drafted for the navy and went to boot camp in Florida. In talking to Mom about moving so far away from her family, she said, "I was nervous because I only knew his parents, and I didn't know how long I would be gone from my family." When Dad was honorably discharged from the navy later that year, Mom said, "I was excited to have my own house and to start a family. I was going back home."

Being descended from Germans who are known for their determination and stubbornness, Mom was a woman of strength, courage, and support, and she was a hard worker and very determined. After she got my sisters and me off to school, she'd hurry outside to start working in her flower gardens. I remember coming home from school on many occasions and finding Mom working in the yard, wearing Dad's overalls with one of his long sleeve shirts rolled up to her elbows and a big straw hat on top of her head. Every day after school, very hot outside, even when it was hoeing or pulling weeds. Standing Mom would bend from the waist when she weeded the gardens. Sometimes she sat or kneeled on the ground to pull the pesky weeds out. As far as I know, the only break she took was for lunch and then out she went to finish up before four o'clock, and then she would go in the house to start dinner and have it ready before Dad got home at 5:30.

"Every day after school, even when it was very hot outside, there she was hoeing or pulling weeds."

Mom loved roses and had about twenty or more bushes. If she could be a flower, she would be a peace rose—a hybrid tea rose with large, creamy lemon yellow colored flowers with petal edges flushed in crimson-pink. Like my mother, the peace rose is hardy and full of physical strength. She also grew beautiful azaleas which grow best in a moist environment, not a dry, hot climate, but Mom tenderly helped them by planting them in a special soil and fertilizing and watering them during hot summer days. They were her pride and joy. What a green thumb she had! At one point, Dad had bought some extra property to the south of our home, and Mom planted a big bed of iris in the southwest corner of the lot. Marilyn and I weeded this bed every summer. Boy, did I dread going out on hot days to weed!

When Mom was in her late 70s, the hot sun started taking a toll on

her body. I noticed she walked a little more slowly to the garage to put the garden tools away. At age 88, her back was slightly stooped because of the many hours she spent bending over weeding her gardens. Her hard work made our yard very beautiful though. Neighbors passing by on their walks would comment to her how beautiful her yard looked. The flower gardens were ablaze with colors from a variety of flowers such as tulips, crocus, petunias, narcissus, basket of gold, hyacinths, alyssum, and geraniums. How she loved flowers!

A song I used to sing for Mother's Day when I was in Primary, always reminded me of Mom. It was called, "In My Mother's Garden the Flowers are Nodding." The song went like this: "In my mother's garden the flowers are nodding. How do you do they say? How do you do today? In my mother's garden the flowers are nodding." When I sang this song and whenever I've heard primary children sing this song, I always think of Mom because of how she cared for her flowers. One could almost hear them talking to her.

I mentioned Mom was a courageous woman. For forty-one years she took great care of my Dad who had Addison's disease, which is an autoimmune disease where Dad's body couldn't keep the salt and water levels balanced in his kidneys. Dad got sick many times throughout his life, and Mom took him to doctor appointments and to the hospital when a crisis struck. I look back on those days and remember Mom never complained about helping Dad. She also never complained about my sister, Karen, who has Down syndrome.

One time I asked Mom, "Did you feel that Karen was a burden?"

She replied, "She never was. It was something I had to do because there was nobody else who would take care of her."

Mom took great care of my sister, Karen, by fixing healthy meals and making sure her clothes were clean. She also took Karen to school every day until the 1990s when the Flex Trans bus started picking her up. This service helps people with disabilities get from one point to another. How glad Mom was when this service began! Mom also took Karen to doctor and dentist appointments, taught her how to dress, washed and fixed her hair, brushed her teeth because her front teeth were not attached to the upper facial bone, and had her kneel in prayer with her every night. On school nights, Mom made sure Karen was in bed by nine o'clock because she had to get up at 5:45 in the morning to get dressed, eat, and have her hair brushed before the bus came to pick her up.

Mom was also a great seamstress. She made all of her girls' dresses and skirts. When it came to sewing clothes for me, it was a challenge for her. I was slightly overweight as a teenager so the problem was finding a pattern and then getting it to fit my body. This made her very anxious. Mom and I would drive over to Lucille Hansen's, a neighbor, whenever she had a problem fitting a pattern to me. Once Lucille showed her how to make the pattern fit my body, Mom could fit any pattern to me.

During the winter months, I'd find Mom in the middle bedroom, bent over her Singer sewing machine, sewing clothes for me and my sisters. Mom never taught me how to sew because she was nervousness—she needed quiet and couldn't be bothered as she was worried she'd make a mistake. However, she would help me with sewing problems I brought home from school.

One time, in 1964, my last year in high school, Mom and I drove to Fashion Fabrics in Sugarhouse to buy material for my graduation dress. We chose white brocade that would be made into a dress with an empire waist. I couldn't wait for her to start sewing it. The week before graduation, she asked me, "Has anyone asked you to the dance?"

I replied, "No, not yet."

I started getting panicky because every day that week she'd been sewing my dress. How would I explain to Mom if I didn't have a date to the dance? With only three days left before the big night, I got a call from a boy who asked me if I would like to go to the dance. I told him, yes. I went to the dance and felt like the most beautiful girl in the gymnasium that night. The dress Mom made for me meant a lot because I knew how much work and love she put into making it, even though I didn't have a date at the time. I have kept the dress because of the sentimental value of that special night. I was happy that the fabric she'd purchased and her skills in sewing the dress weren't wasted.

A favorite memory I have of Mom was when we got a job working as caterers for Distinctive Catering. I was sixteen years old and a head-strong teenager. I didn't mind working with Mom, but sometimes I wouldn't know what to say to her. There was a big communication gap between us. The longer we worked together the gap became smaller.

At many of the catering jobs, we reminisced about where we'd worked and how many people we had served in one night. Sometimes, we'd serve 200 to 800 people and the highest number we served was 1,200. Mom really enjoyed her job and was a very good worker. She was better than the other employees.

Most of the catering jobs were at The Terrace, a dance hall from the 40s, in downtown Salt Lake City. One night, Mom and I were in the kitchen fixing our dinner. There was some cocktail shrimp left over. I had never tasted shrimp before and was anxious to try it. Mom told me, "Get a plate and take as much shrimp as you want. Then we can go to the ladies lounge to eat."

I went back for seconds on the shrimp because it was so good. It was then that I noticed Mom didn't have any shrimp on her plate.

"Mom, do you want some shrimp? It's very good," I said.

"No," she replied, "I don't like any fish except salmon because it doesn't have many bones."

She told me a story of her brothers bringing home some fish they had caught. The fish was full of bones, and Mom didn't like taking the

time to pull them out because the fish would be cold by the time she could eat. We had a good laugh! Mom had a dry sense of humor, and I remember many hearty laughs we had as we both got older.

Thank you, Mom, for always supporting me by driving me to practices, dress rehearsals, taking photos at these events, and attending plays and roadshows, coming to my orchestra performances, and helping me write talks for church, sewing clothes for me and attending my violin recitals.

Thank you for being such a strong woman and for teaching me to work hard, to always do good work, and take responsibility and be a woman of integrity. I am grateful for the hard work and courage you showed me as I was growing up.

Cleansing Summer Rain

Ked Kirkham

We were drenched, soaked through,
so that you must
peel my clothing
off of
me,

then
I yours
off you. What
possessed us, as surely
we were under some influence,

some notion, movement of heart
or dancing of spirit.
Would we not
have thought:
it's

raining;
summer rain
all the same,
but we walked, finding
ourselves here, after an hour

standing closely enough, that our
heat rose between us.
Fragrant. Our clothing
coming off
slowly.

Until
our only
memory of rain
was in the words
we spoke as we walked.

The very same words which
we have just spoken
in our nakedness,
hiding nothing
now

that
would separate
us from tomorrow,
and the vows we
have given to each other.

Maisie and the Magic Pear

Steve Proskauer

Maisie sat slumped against the trunk of a tree in one corner of her grandpa's orchard, gazing down into the grass. A late summer sunset flooded the orchard with soft orange light. Birds were singing their evening songs. Bees were buzzing as they made their last trips out of the hive to harvest nectar from the flowers before evening faded into night. But Maisie didn't care about the bustling life and beauty all around her. Tears were trickling down her freckled face. Her grandpa was sick in the hospital and she was afraid he might die.

Maisie loved her grandpa very much. He was the one who raised her, all by himself. Her grandpa got her up each morning, cooked her a tasty breakfast of baked apples and scrambled eggs, and got her off to school. He was waiting at the bus stop to meet her each afternoon. He would take her hand and lead her up the long driveway to their farmhouse where they would share a snack of milk and fresh baked bread with peanut butter and peach jam. After supper Maisie finished her homework and brushed her teeth, then her grandpa would tuck her into bed and read her a story. She fell asleep every night to the sound of his gentle voice.

One night when he was reading a tale about a family's adventures, Maisie asked why she didn't have any parents or a grandma. Her grandpa paused and looked down for a minute to hide his tears. He took a deep breath and replied, "Maisie, it's time I told you about the terrible auto accident that killed your father and mother and grandmother when you were only six months old. You were safe and snug in your infant carrier and you survived the crash. Your parents loved you deeply, Maisie. When I'm not sure how best to take care of you, I just ask myself what your mother and father would do and the answers come to me."

Maisie knew what her grandpa meant. She had been too young to remember her parents or grandma so Maisie's grandpa felt like father and mother to her, but then there were times when Maisie got the feeling of being watched over lovingly when no one was around. Could the spirits of her mother and father and grandma be protecting her?

On weekends, Maisie liked to help her grandpa on the farm. She tagged along as he fed the horses and milked the cows. He would let Maisie collect the fresh eggs from the hens' nests in the hutch while he fed the chickens outside the door. When she was old enough, he even let her ride up high on the tractor seat with him as he plowed the fields.

While grandpa was in the hospital, Molly Pritchett, a kind neighbor lady, walked down the hill every day after school to meet Maisie's bus

and bring her a snack. She looked after Maisie all evening and put her to bed. Molly stayed overnight and cooked breakfast for her in the morning too. Molly made sure she caught the school bus, but it just wasn't the same as having her grandpa walk her down to the bus stop.

Maisie felt very lonely. Just the thought of living without her grandpa gave her a hollow empty feeling inside, like the last little girl on Earth with no special person to love her and keep her company. Maisie began crying again, even harder this time.

All at once Maisie heard a swishing sound. She looked up and saw one of the trees in the orchard waving its branches gently up and down and all around. "That's strange," thought Maisie. "There's not even a breath of a breeze. None of the other trees are moving. Could that tree be waving to me?"

Maisie got up and started walking into the orchard past rows and rows of still branches loaded with ripening fruit. As she came closer, the tree swished its leaves a little faster, as if it were urging her to hurry. She ran as fast as she could. When Maisie reached the tree, it stopped waving and extended a single branch toward Maisie.

Dangling at the very tip was a golden pear. It was the largest, most perfect pear Maisie had ever seen. It shone with a beautiful pink blush on one side. The pear seemed to glow in the sunset light. Maisie so much wanted to pick it but she was a little bit scared because she was a smart girl and she knew this was no ordinary tree and no ordinary pear. At last she could resist no longer. Maisie reached for the pear.

"Go ahead, Maisie, pick it," a kind voice spoke into the evening stillness. "This is a very special and most wonderful pear, and I made it just for you." It seemed to Maisie the voice came from inside the tree, but trees don't talk so she looked high and low and all around for the source of the voice.

Maisie could only see her little brown dachshund puppy, Hot Dog. He followed her everywhere. Hot Dog looked up at her from way down close to the ground with his bright little beady black eyes, wagging his tale and wiggling his whole body.

"Hi, Hot Dog. You didn't just say something to me about that pear, did you?"

"No, silly, it couldn't have been me. Everybody knows dogs don't talk. Especially about dumb things like pears. Weren't you listening? The voice came from inside that tree. Now come play with me!"

"Sorry, Hot Dog, I want to find out more about this talking tree and this special pear. We can play later."

Hot Dog stopped his wagging and wiggling. He turned his head and trotted off toward the tree without another word. He lifted his leg and peed right on the trunk.

"Hey, that tickles!" said the tree. Hot Dog raised his nose in the air and marched off without bothering to reply. But Maisie thought she

heard him muttering under his breath, “Humph. A talking tree. What next?”

Maisie giggled. “Hot Dog, you are the funniest puppy ever! You were a naughty dog to pee on that nice tree but I forgive you. You made me laugh when I thought I might never laugh again.”

“Don’t worry about what Hot Dog did, Maisie,” the tree said. “Creatures use me for all sorts of things. Birds make their nests in my branches. Squirrels make homes inside me. Caterpillars chew on my leaves and build cocoons on my twigs. Beetles crawl all over me looking for food. Yes, and dogs pee on my trunk. At least that only tickles, not like woodpeckers pecking at my bark to get at the tiny bugs crawling underneath. That stings. Besides, the pee washes away the next time it rains and fertilizes my roots. So you see, Hot Dog is helping me grow taller and stronger whenever he pees on me.”

“I’m glad you are not angry at Hot Dog. He’s just jealous because I’m playing with you instead of him. He’d like me all to himself. Now, where were we? Oh yes, did you say I could pick that golden pear?”

“Yes, of course, Maisie. It is your very own magic pear that I made just for you. Go ahead. It’s waiting for you.”

Maisie reached out her hand and the pear gently dropped off the branch right into her palm. The pear felt warm and alive.

“See?” said the tree, “Your pear was so ripe it let go of the branch as soon as you were ready to catch it.”

Maisie held the golden pear up to her nose. It smelled so delicious. She was about to take a bite when she remembered it wasn’t any ordinary pear. It was a magic pear. She didn’t want to spoil the magic. She decided to ask the tree some questions.

“How does the magic work? What do I have to do? And when can I eat my pear?”

“The magic? It is a mystery. I don’t think anyone knows just how it works, not even wise old trees like me, but I do know this. When magic happens, it usually happens when people need it the most. Do you understand, Maisie?”

“I think so. I really, really need my grandpa to get well. I love him, and I miss him so much.”

Maisie was about to start crying again when the tree spoke once more. “Yes, you do understand. Now, are you ready for me to answer your other questions, Maisie?”

“Oh, yes! Tell me, tell me, what should I do? And when can I eat my magic pear? It smells scrumptious and I think it would taste even better.”
“Listen carefully, Maisie. Hold the pear up close to your chest so it can listen to the song your heart is singing—the song of your love, of your

“She didn’t want to spoil the magic.”

wish, of your dream. And remember, the magic pear works best if you share it with someone you love.”

Maisie held the magic pear over her heart. She shut her eyes and pictured her grandpa standing tall and healthy in the waving wheat on a sunny midsummer’s day. He ran to meet her with his arms spread wide to sweep her up. Maisie’s smile spread as wide as his arms. She felt herself reaching out to him and running to meet him.

When she opened her eyes, Maisie was in her grandpa’s hospital room by his bedside, still holding the magic pear to her heart. Maisie gasped. “How did I get here so fast? It must be the magic.”

Her grandpa was sleeping. She looked down at his matted hair and pale brow, glistening with sweat from the fever. He looked so sick. Maisie touched her grandpa’s face ever so softly and felt all the love in her heart pour out to him. He opened his eyes and smiled at Maisie. “Look, Grandpa! I have brought you a beautiful pear. A special tree in the orchard gave it to me to share. It’s magic. You take the first bite, OK?” Her grandpa’s eyes opened a little wider. He took a long look at the pear.

“How kind of you, Maisie,” her grandpa whispered. “When I was your age, if I found such a perfect pear I would want to eat it up right away. You cared enough to save it and share your pear with me. I haven’t felt much like eating lately, but that pear smells so good.”

Maisie held the pear close so her grandpa could reach it. He lifted his head from the pillow and bit off a small piece. He chewed it slowly, and sighed. “That must be the juiciest, most heavenly pear on God’s green earth, I do declare.”

Maisie noticed her grandpa’s voice was getting stronger already. She smiled and bit into the rosy spot, her favorite place on the golden pear. As the heavenly taste of the sweet pear juice filled her mouth, she shut her eyes and prayed with all her heart for her grandpa to get well.

When Maisie opened her eyes, she saw the color returning to his cheeks and the sparkle back in his eyes. “Wow! That’s fast magic!” she thought to herself. And it was.

The doctor walked in a few minutes later and couldn’t believe his eyes. “My goodness, you look so much better than you did this morning,” he said. “And your fever is way down.” The doctor listened to her grandpa’s chest with his stethoscope. “Your lungs are clearing up fast. You are recovering in record time. Many a man your age with such a serious case of pneumonia doesn’t make it, but you surely will. You should be able to go home in a day or two.”

The nurse let Maisie spend the night on a cot in her grandpa’s room. Before they went to sleep, she and her grandpa finished eating the golden pear together. By morning it was all gone. Her grandpa felt strong enough to get out of bed and take a walk in the hall with Maisie by his side. The next day he was ready to go home.

The orderly let Maisie help push the wheelchair to the front door of the hospital where Molly was waiting for them. Everywhere she looked in the corridors people were smiling. Nobody acted upset or grumpy. On the way home through heavy traffic in town, the drivers were waving instead of yelling and honking. They passed a city park where she saw people bending over to smell the flowers and touch the leaves on the bushes. Wow, thought Maisie, it looks like everybody is happy today.

“What’s going on, Grandpa? Why is everyone smiling at each other and paying so much attention to the plants in the park? I’m super happy now because you are well, but the whole world is acting super happy too. Why, Grandpa?”

“Maisie, when your heart shines bright with love, the light spreads far and wide. When we get home you go on out to the orchard and ask your special tree to tell you more about it.”

“Grandpa, how did you know my tree could talk?”

Her grandpa answered softly with a faraway look in his eyes. “I’ve lived on this farm all my life, Maisie. You’d be surprised how many talks I’ve had with the trees in that orchard. I’m glad you found your special one.”

“It took your being sick to make it happen, Grandpa. I was so afraid I would lose you. I love you so much.” Maisie started to cry again, this time with tears of happiness.

“I love you too, Maisie, and I’ll tell you a little secret. That pear tasted real good, but it was your love that made it magic for me and for the whole wide world.”

They were almost home now. Maisie spotted Hot Dog waiting for them in the shade under the porch. When he saw the familiar car winding up the driveway, Hot Dog came running, wagging his tail and wiggling his long body.

“Hi, Hot Dog,” Maisie shouted through the car window. “Look, Grandpa’s home!”

Then Maisie glanced toward the orchard, bathed in the bright morning sunlight. Her special tree was waving to her. Maisie smiled and waved back.

My Pets

Paul Rosser

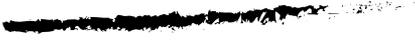
I lived in a house on Reed Avenue from the time I was a little kid until I was in my late forties. As a little kid, my family had pets. We had a dog, cat, and parrot. My sister and I went to the dog pound by Wasatch Park to get our first dog. We had him for four years. I don't remember his name, but he was little. We played with him in the yard and took him to the park to play and run around. We also had a brown and white cat that my mother got at the pet store. My mother got us a parrot too that was kept in a cage. We let it fly around the house. All of us took care of these pets, but my mother bought their food and everything else.

At age twenty-one, I went to the pet store to buy my own dog, a black lab. I played catch with her and took her to the park to let her run around. One day, my dad let her out, and she didn't come back. Later, someone told me she had been hit by a car near the capitol, and she died.

In my early forties, I got a little brown dog at the dog pound. When our home burned down, this dog survived the fire. I took him back to the dog pound because I didn't have a place to keep my dog.

In November 2013, my next-door neighbor's friend got me a dog. She is a Chihuahua, and her name is Misty. She is a fun, loveable dog, who likes to lick my hands, jump on me, and bark.

Pets are fun to have and be with!


J. Phillip Wilkes

Three hundred sixty-five days without you.
Zero days not thinking about you.
Three hundred sixty-five nights without your call.
Dozens of nights not sleeping at all.
I don't know where it is you have gone.
All I know is sometimes I am so alone,
And want to hear your voice
Over the phone, so I reach
And almost call, then realize
I don't need the phone to hear you.

Hearing the Drumbeat of my Tribe

Doug Woodall

Three nights ago I dreamed two gay lovers were lost in a dense jungle. Far in the distance, they could hear the drumbeat of their tribe. Yet, no matter what they did, they couldn't find the drummer or their village. When they followed the river, the drummer was on the ridge. When they traversed the ridge, the drummer was by the river. On and on they went from one misstep to the next.

I know why I had the dream. Mother's Day is coming up. "What?" you might ask. "How can your dream and Mother's Day be connected?" They're connected only in my mind, and it's there because I heard the drumbeat of my tribe for the first time on a Mother's Day. Then somehow I forgot about it. Then, many months later, I was reminded of it. This was when I learned Rory, the leading man in my dream, had found a partner and had come out to his wife and family.

Years ago, when I used to go to church, I entered a Sunday School classroom where I found Libby telling Emma a story. Libby, who is about 10 years older than I, was one of my favorite people. One reason is she was a convert to my faith. Then she came from Long Island, spoke in a resonant NYC voice, befriended practically every soul she met, and stubbornly held onto many of her pre-conversion ideas that quite often rubbed against the starched shirts and blouses of the church. Emma, who is my age almost to the day, is my closest friend in all the world.

My entrance made Libby stop short. She glanced at Emma and then regrouped to tell her story to me. This because she knew I'd hear it from Emma on our way home.

"I was just saying," Libby said, "Rory and Kylie are going to get a divorce. Rory says he's gay."

Rory and Kylie used to go to our church. About 18 months prior, they moved away, but Libby and a handful of other members of our congregation stayed in contact with them. One couple, the Starksons, still went on date nights with them.

I could have received the news "he says he's gay" with a nod of my head. Instead, I blurted out, "I knew Rory was gay the day he gave his Mother's Day talk in church maybe two years ago."

"What?" Libby asked. "How's that?"

"Right," Emma said. "How is that?"

As a deeply closeted gay man, the best I could do was stammer out an answer. My proof seemed weak, even erroneous. What was my problem? Now I know I was trying to explain the drumbeat of my tribe

to two people who didn't know it and couldn't hear it. On that Mother's Day, they heard Rory the same as I. My first feeling was fear for him; my second was try to protect him. Everyone else in the room was oblivious to the fact every word Rory spoke was a beat made on a special set of drums. Only certain people could play them and hear them.

"They heard Rory's words, yet, they were stone deaf to his drumming."

All Rory did that day was talk about the most important women in his life. They included his mother, his piano teachers, his organ teacher, and his wife. He flat out said all his close friends were women and he felt uncomfortable around most men. Even though I didn't have Rory's exact feelings or experiences, I knew the sound of them.

All the while Rory spoke, he beat out a rhythm on his snare drum, hi-hat and crash cymbals, and bass drum. His repeating boom boom, bang bang; boom bang boom bang, smash were really words. "I'm gay, gay, gay," he said. "Do you hear what I'm saying? I'm attracted to men, men, men. I'll say it all, again. I'm gay, gay, gay, and I'm attracted to men, men, men."

As I listened to Rory's drumming, he might as well of been hitting me on my head with his drumsticks. My anxiety for him grew with every thud against my skull. When my panic for him reached a pitch, I brought my head up, locked my eyes on him, and sat in disbelief. I shouted at him in my mind, "You can't say those things. Not here and not to these people."

All Rory did was drum on. I turned to look at the faces of the congregants. I truly expected to see astonished looks if not hate-filled stares. Instead, I saw polite listening. They heard Rory's words, yet, they were stone deaf to his drumming. I wondered, "Why can't you hear what he's saying? Right now he's using his tom-toms to say, 'I'm gay, gay, gay.' Now he's using his snare and hi-hat to taunt you with, 'I'm attracted to men, men, men.'"

Before that Mother's Day, I never thought Rory might be gay. Then we really didn't have much contact in or out of church. Thus I only knew a handful of facts about him. He was a talented musician. No, he didn't play the drums—just the piano and organ. He worked for one of the largest banks in the state, and he had three maybe four children. At the time Libby told me he'd come out, she reminded me his oldest was 19. This made me think Rory was in his mid-40s.

After I stumbled at trying to explain the drumbeat of my tribe, Libby lost patience with me. She had a story to tell, and she wasn't going to be slowed down or deterred. "Rory's found someone of our faith at his work," she said.

This and all the other tidbits of information she shared with me

became the basis of my dream.

“They’re sharing an apartment,” Libby continued, “but they’re sticking to church standards.”

What she meant was they were staying celibate.

“I can tell you,” Libby said, “they’re meeting almost weekly with church leaders so they don’t jeopardize their standing.”

A smart translator could get to her real meaning by changing her last six words to “so they won’t be excommunicated.”

“I’m so glad,” Libby added, “to know they won’t be condemned for having the feelings they have for each other as long as they don’t act on them.”

She was talking about how a small number of higher-ups in our church were tamping down their usual hate-language for homosexuals.

“Kylie,” Libby went on, “went back to school to get her Master’s degree in social work. You know that’s why they moved, right? She knew something was wrong between her and Rory all the time they were married. She asked Rory several times if he was gay. He always denied it. Now she finally knows the truth.”

Indeed she did.

“Rory’s parents,” Libby said, “are taking everything rather hard and they’ve done a very interesting thing: They’ve taken all Rory’s pictures in their house down. Kylie says they act as if he’s dead.”

I wondered why they didn’t have unconditional love for their children.

“The last thing I can tell you,” Libby added, “is the Starksons will do things with Kylie, but not Rory. They both have season tickets to the university’s main-stage theater. If Rory uses the tickets, they won’t go. If Kylie uses the tickets, they will.”

Instantly, I hated the Starksons.

At the time Libby told me Rory’s story, I probably thought, “What a mess,” and went on with my life. Now I find I’ve had a dream where Rory and his partner are lost in a jungle. They could hear the drum-beat of their tribe, but they couldn’t find the drummer or their village. Perhaps they had too many false ideas. Maybe society put up too many obstacles against them. If I could find an interpreter for my dream, I wonder what he or she would say. My own Joseph-of-the-Old-Testament voice says, “They need to go over the ridge and into the next valley. The drummer and their village are ten miles due north. When they get there, they’ll live a happy and full life.”

My sort of dream needs to have a happy ending.

Stashing My Stuff

Winnie Mae Walker

I got the 15 boxes that were sent by UPS.
I even have a table and two chairs,
a bed, a sofa, coffee table, rocker and two lamps,
but what I need is still up in the air.

A chest of drawers, perhaps a desk, would go a long, long way,
and yet it wouldn't really be enough,
because I still have boxes all lined up around the room.
I simply need a place to stash my "stuff"!

Old photographs and yearbooks, plus my genealogy,
some Christmas cards, and poems by the score
are just a sample of things I have not place to put.
I've scads of things I don't know where to store!

Perhaps a bureau or a chest—no, no, they'd be too deep.
I'd never find the items buried there!
Those plastic boxes that they sell for organizing junk?
Think fast before I start to tear my hair!

Or shall I just resign myself, as I have done before
to letting things accumulate some dust
within the closet on a shelf in some old cardboard box?
It certainly would save a lot of fuss!

Dear Dark

J. Phillip Wilkes

I love your brilliant darkness
Shining dark hair
Bright black eyes
Deep dark skin
How you wear only black
Day or night
Summer and winter.

Most of all
I am drawn by
Your dark thoughts
Forcing me to perform
Dark deeds; black acts
At dark hours
Undercover of darkness.

Broken people

Melissa Rasmussen

Broken People
Wander in
Searching
Hurt
Loving the best they can
The way they were taught
Damage is done
Love is lost
And found.

The Walk

Mary Garrity

When I thought of you this morning
my heart raced, and the sun seemed to light up the very
corners of my mind.

Later on today when I thought of our meeting tonight,
everything stopped and I could feel my back stiffen with anxiety.
Now you are here, and you are tired and cross and want to be
alone with your thoughts.

I can feel the anger that follows disappointment start to make a lump
in my throat.

What happened to the days when everything that touched us, touched
us together?

You are walking a few steps ahead of me, and I know if I stopped, you
wouldn't notice and just keep going till you arrived at some
predestined place alone.

I need a beer, and someone to tell me how wonderful I am; but I'll
keep walking behind you, hoping you may turn around and smile
after all.

Pledge for the 21st Century

J. Phillip Wilkes

I PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE

To the planet

Of the United Earth

Of the Universe

And to all humanity

With whom I stand

One people

Underdogs

Irrepressible

With equality and compassion for all.

Propaganda & Recruitment

Christine Ireland

I've been watching General Conference off and on this weekend (April 2013). Last night my mom watched *Prayers for Bobby* with me. At one point she thought about turning it off/changing the channel but she didn't and said it turned out to be a very good movie. I bring this up because I feel neither outside or inside either the LDS (Latter-day Saints) or the Gay community. Many aspects of both Mormon and Queer culture disgust me. Still I find myself orbiting these two cultures, unable to resist the gravitational pull they have over me.

I listen to people talk about Gay rights in the military and think, what suckers. Individuals who desire to serve their country remind me of Mormon missionaries. All Americans have heard and understand the phrase "Be all you can be" as referring to being in the army/reserve. While still in grammar school LDS attendees learn the primary song, "I Hope They Call Me On A Mission." I hear young people say, I've been reserved to come to earth at this particular time when the prophet has revealed sister missionaries can serve at the age of 19 instead of waiting until they are 21 and men can serve at 18 instead of waiting until they are 19. While this change in policy has produced a mass amount of missionaries in training, the skeptic in me does not see this as divine providence but merely the Church ramping up. Likewise I do not see the appeal of "Don't Ask Don't Tell" as a victory for Queer servicemen and women, although it is an improvement. Again it smacks of the military ramping up, for what precisely, I don't know but like any other recruit-Queer men and women are property of the United States government. Getting a tattoo is considered destruction of government property. Like any other military personnel Queer individuals are a tool/weapon used to do the government's bidding.

Personally I don't want to join God's or Uncle Sam's Army in any capacity. If I were to serve an LDS mission I would feel like a hypocrite and if I were in Uncle Sam's Army, rather than feeling privileged to serve, I'd feel like a sign had been hung around my neck with the word "expendable" in capital letters on it.

A Verb

Audrey Weigel

Living is not a noun
It is a verb

It belongs to no one
Yet issues forth and belongs to itself

I witness a whale
Emerging from the ocean

Majestic it spills erupt
Sustained in mid air
Splashes a story high
Then massively slips silent

Away, percolating
Ballet style
Carooning, swooning
Underwater

Life is a verb, carooning, swooning
Displaying the privilege, to be, enraptured

The Straw That Broke the Camel's Back

Bruce Hager

Even in my fourteen years of life, I had heard the saying about the straw that had broke the camel's back. I quickly visualized a desert scene of an Arab man stacking straw one by one on the camel's back. Whoops! One straw too many and the camel falls to the ground with the broken back. The camel was then of no use to anyone again.

I was facing the final straw that was going to break me. My dad was diagnosed with lung cancer in December and was in his grave by the Fourth of July. We had gone from being a well-functioning family to one that was destitute. The loss of my father's income, hospital and doctor bills, funeral expenses and all that goes with a tragedy had hit our family pretty hard.

My pride, my self-respect and my immaturity could not see how dire our circumstances were. It did not make sense to me that we were not the family we use to be. We had all the things that made life well with the necessities and an occasional luxury now and then. We no longer went on weekly trips to the store where we filled our car with groceries. The bare necessities were all we could get.

What it came down to was Mom had no choice but to go to the welfare office. What could a widow with three teenage sons and no resources do? After meeting with the welfare intake worker we soon had to go through a battery of forms, documentations, home inspection and interviews to see if we qualified for public assistance. This process was taking its toll on my mom. She had to be strong and was reaching for inner strength. I did not help matters at all. I had this "piss poor" attitude about everything. I spewed out my digs about being poor and on welfare. I hated the whole idea and blasted my mom every chance I could. I was angry, embarrassed, frustrated and was no help in this situation. I was mad at my dad for getting cancer and for dying. I was angry at God and all of those who still had their families intact. I was worried what others were thinking. It was clearly all about me.

Finally, and with much relief to my Mom, we qualified for public assistance. There was money that would be coming in to help us somewhat survive. Doctor bills would be paid and some other pressing matters would be taken care of until the Social Security could be straightened out. Another benefit was that we could get commodities. Commodities was food provided by the state. We were appropriated and allowed to go to the welfare office to get food. To me the idea of going and standing in line to get our rations was beyond my concept of understanding. This was my final straw to say the least. I could not bear this. I was ashamed.

This was the most devastating in the entire line of horrible events that had happened to me and my family.

The day came that we were scheduled to go and get our food. I wanted no part of this and protested the idea of even going to get the food. We had to drive forty miles away to the county seat to the welfare distributing location. We even had to take our own boxes. We found the address and went into a warehouse that was as stark and plain as any room I had ever seen. We stood in line with others to get the commodities. I did not like the fact that there were other people there to get food along with us. I shuddered thinking that someone I might know may be there. I wanted to scream at these people that we were not like them. We had a dad, a nice home, nice cars but our dad died. We did not belong there in that line with other people on welfare. Never did I once have an ounce of compassion for others. I never once wondered what my brothers were going through. What was my Mom truly feeling? What about those others in line? What were their circumstances that brought them to this same building? Mostly I just wanted to disappear. This was just too great for me to endure. Finally I blocked out the ugliness of the situation and did what was asked of us void of any feelings.

“This was the most devastating in the entire line of horrible events that had happened to me and my family.”

We walked along in between the pallets of food and got what was on our list. We got flour, sugar, raisins, peanut butter, canned meat, canned beef, dried egg powder and many other items. My Mom was startled that we got real butter. We only had real butter for Christmas because my Dad loved real butter on his homemade rolls. How ironic that something we considered a luxury was something we could get on welfare. The welfare worker checked the groceries we had. I looked at him as he was checking our rations. He was matter of fact and straight to the point. I held my breath waiting for him to tell us we had picked one item too much.

We loaded up the boxes of commodities. All labeled with the “Department of Welfare.” The label shouted food for poor people to me. The trip home was silent. Nobody spoke. I relished the peace to be in my own thoughts. The awful part was over, but I knew it would not be our last trip. I still worried how I could hide the fact that we had welfare food. We just drove on. We didn’t talk anymore; there was no joy in this family. We were silent at all times. Who could remember the last time there was laughter in our family? We were as exciting as the label on the packages we had just received.

When we got home, the food boxes were put on the kitchen counter and the overflow was put on the floor. Mom went to her room. She had never ever been one to take naps, but she was sleeping a lot. I think it

was her escape. She may have just gone to her room to cry and suffer in her own silence. My younger brother vanished to the living room to watch TV. We had just got the new color TV before Dad discovered his cancer. Ironically, I thought we were rich when we got the color TV. Now it seemed out of place because we were poor and should not have the TV, but it was the last luxury item purchased before these awful chain of events occurred.

My older brother got on his bike and went to his friend's house. He was so lucky to have a place to escape. I did not want to talk to anyone outside our family for fear they would know what was going on at our house. I wanted our business to be our business.

In happier days my Mom, had this fun creative idea to store all of her dry goods in glass jars in the cupboards. She was frugal and innovative at the same time. She collected gallon jars from a myriad of resources. She got pickle jars, the bulk ketchup and mustard glass jars from the local drive-in. She even ventured out to get some from a local bar that had contained olives, pickled eggs and pickled pig's feet. She brought them home and scrubbed them thoroughly. She soaked and peeled the labels off and made the jars look pristine. I was personally grateful the pickled pig's feet jars were no longer discernible from the other jars. My mom's thought process was to have the jars on the shelves so she could see at a glance what she needed or didn't need at a moment's notice. Little did she ever know that the wonderful idea she had would backfire and prove to be on sight inspection we had no food.

I stared at the boxes with their brown and white paper labels; the plastic clear labels and cans of stuff that filled the kitchen. I picked up a bag of flour and held it like it was a hand grenade. I held it gingerly and at the same time wanted to throw it and blow up everything around me and all of its contents. I carefully grabbed a glass container off the shelf and poured the flour into the jar. I grabbed a dish towel and wiped off the flour dust off the jar. I replaced the lid on the jar. The jar was no longer empty. The jar was labeled flour. The flour was flour and no longer had that welfare label. It was food, just like normal everyday food everyone else ate. The jar was full.

I grabbed the sugar and filled the sugar jar. I threw the brown wrapper in the waste basket. One by one I filled empty jars with oatmeal, pancake flour, brown sugar, spaghetti and macaroni. I was freeing food from ugly horrible labels that I hated. Each label that I placed into the wastebasket lifted my soul. I grew excited as the wastebasket filled with brown and white packages labeled as food from the state. The same joy filled me as I placed full jars on the cupboard shelves. For the first time in a long time, I felt my spirit lifting.

One by one the jars were being filled. The cupboards were no longer bare. My Mom's vision of full jars was taking place right in front of me. The food was precious to me. Tears of gratitude started to come, but

the feeling in my heart was refreshing as I emptied boxes and the jars took on a new appearance.

The counters were now void of boxes and food was placed in full cupboards. No one was around me. What happened next was nothing short of a miracle to me. I grabbed a mixing bowl and a mixer. I grabbed the flour, brown sugar, raisins and the oatmeal. I preheated the oven. I measured the butter and mixed the ingredients together. The cookie sheet was greased and I baked cookies. The smell of fresh baked cookies permeated throughout the house.

My brother had returned from his friend's and along with my younger brother peered through the kitchen door. My Mom came out of her room. The cookies were cooling on a towel. Each grabbed a cookie as if they were a delicacy that we had not had for a long time. We were still silent, but the feeling in the room was much lighter than I had felt for a long time. My Mom then got up and looked at her cupboards and the full jars. She never said a word, but I knew she was pleased. We had not been overburdened by this event that had been placed on our back. The final straw had not broken my back or others. We had food, and our burden had been lightened. I felt resilient. This event along with previous events did not bring my family or myself down.

Horticulture

Jessica Guynn

A perfect bloom so carefully raised
Credit to the gardner's skill
Trimmed and dug with expert care
Defining beautiful
Its unencumbered roots spread wide
Raised to rule the earth they own
Interfering weeds are plucked
Patrons bend to worship
But how much more the tiny bloom
Discovered in a shrouded wood
Choked by rocky earth and branch
No sun to warm the soil
Small leaves prickle in defense
Roots claw for water's grace
Buds cling to wiry stem
Scraggly in their countenance
Petals open warily
Patronless
Without acclaim
But fuchsia in the shade

Greed

Shirley Fifer

A few days ago, my breakfast companions asked me to write an explanation of greed, so here it is.

We were discussing greed as the main cause of the world's problems.

But why is it?—because of selfishness. And this is a sin—because we are commanded to love others as ourselves, and if we loved others we couldn't steal another example of the wisdom of our Heavenly Father. If we kept the GOLDEN rule, and treated others as we would like to be treated, we'd all be happier. Is such a slogan old fashioned? Probably, but human nature has always taken the same path, gimme gimme.

I don't know of any statistic that proves we have changed for the better from the 'good old days.' The exceptions to gimme gimme people have been so startling that they have been published for the world to read. I don't know what kind of a rich man King Midas was, so I apologize, Your Majesty, and just use your name as an example. King Midas, and all the rest of the rich people shouldn't be grouped together, because the only ones that get mentioned in the newspaper, are the ones that give a lot away.

How do you get to be rich? (If you weren't smart enough to have rich ancestors?) Rich people know how to hang onto their money and perhaps know how to plant it to multiply, which is good, if they don't forget everything else worthwhile. But after all, if we were all of the same pattern, wouldn't the world be DULL? Some would say, that would be wonderful because it would be so peaceful.

So, if you want the world to be a better place, share your nickels, and work an extra hour every week.

LAC Letter

Fran Crookstone

Wednesday, March 12, 2014

Dear Learners and Volunteers,

I appreciate that the Literacy Action Center's main focus must be to develop the skills of Learners. They need to pass the tests to move forward in their lives. The fastest way for this to happen is through formal instruction; one Volunteer can help several Learners at the same time. However, I find myself unable to call whatever I do teaching. The tutor training I have received here showed me how backward I am on the rules of grammar, punctuation, and phonics, let alone the skills for planning a lesson. Instead I hope that I can help others realize how important writing can be for their lives, even if whatever they write never is read by anyone else.

Since November 2009, when I started mentoring this writing group, I have reflected on what helped me learn how to compose sentences and ultimately express my thoughts. There are a few classroom experiences that I remember decades later. But most of what I know came through other methods such as playing games, reading, and personal experience. One of the most important experiences that enabled me to write was letter writing. In junior high school, I had a friend living north of Philadelphia while I was living over 250 miles away in western Maryland. Every Saturday a group of us went to bowl and I would compose a letter to Blythe with the input from other bowlers which made a good time better for me.

When I went through volunteer training at the Community Writing Center, the instructor talked about how all writing is a dialogue. When we write, we are addressing our thoughts to another. A letter is for a specific person but reports written as an assignment are a means of the instructor verifying that the student has learned something of the topic and how to convey their thoughts to others. Composing a story is for an audience. What we gain through writing is the ability to share what is happening on the inside with others including ourselves to move from the rut we are stuck in to the next place in our lives. Life without this type of connection is isolated.

Please write letters to yourself and others!

Love,

Fran

Songs of the Old

Sam Dickey

When you are old and gray, and your limbs and organs start to grow tired and weak, when your mind fades and the faces and the names all run together, it will be the music that saves you.

Your family will put you in a home, and surrounded by the unfamiliar you will slowly succumb to the oblivion. When your children come to see you, they will anxiously remind you of their names before you have the chance to admit you don't remember them. You will pick up the habit of smiling and being pleasant to anyone who seems to know you by name, so as not to offend.

You'll have a plethora of post-it notes wallpapering your small apartment.

Reminders about when to eat, or shower, or go to bed.

Reminders about what to do next.

You'll find you can't read books anymore; the text just bleeds together and you are inevitably lost just a few paragraphs in. Movies and television will all be pointless noise—a confusing jumble of pictures and sounds, all of it non-sequitur no matter how hard you try to concentrate. It can be a hopeless feeling: frustrating at the best of times and terrifying at the worst.

Sometimes you'll wake up in the morning and not know where you are—other times it won't happen after sleep, but in the middle of a meal or a conversation.

But fear not, brave pilgrim of age. You will have seen and done more things than most everyone else around you; you will have had an entire lifetime of love, loss, wisdom, and music.

No one tells you this, but it is the music that will save you.

Long after the memories become fuzzy, long after the dates and the people you swore you'd never forget have fallen into the cracks of your crumbling mind, the music will bring you back.

Lyrics, tempo, and melody: the music is stored in our hearts, hidden deep somewhere that the dementia can't reach. Songs of your childhood, songs of your faith. The songs on the soundtrack of your life will remain with you always.

Upon hearing them, you'll have a stream of lucidity, a merciful gasp of air as your blood pumps faster and your dry, cracked lips whisper along to the words.

Choose your music wisely, young one, while you still have time. It will be what soothes your soul when you are old and gray, and everything else has faded.

Angel

Jessica Guynn

Soft like whispers
Light as air
Wings so wide they shade the sun
Mothered by clouds
God's seed
Sent from throne to footstool
Branches bend beneath the grace
Rivers freeze in reverence
Nature burrows from its might
Flowers go to sleep
And slowly with each touch of sky
Earth enrobed in Heaven's cloth
Reflection of a spotless being
Purity in death

Manifestations

Angie Watson

I know I am old because the hair wisping across my face is gray.
And also because my identification card says so.
There are still some who rock in their chairs grumbling about their age.
Not I though. No. I like being old.
I like being past the childhood tantrums that went on into my forties.
I like the strength I gained while moving into my fifties.
With certainty I can say seventy five hosted my best birthday party ever
and
My eighties were by far my most passionate decade.
Yet, what I am especially proud of at my age is
Today I am one hundred and three and carry no baggage.

~

'Tis interesting when One contemplates their life in retrospect.
We can thank Einstein for his insight on that.
He taught me that each individual moment is kaleidoscopic in perspective
and
When looked at as a whole One gains the ability to see a uniformly systematic development of their history.
Thank god we did that.
It made unifying our Nations a bit easier.
Okay. Not really. John Nash was what made it easier.
Einstein was simply icing on the cake.

~

One must admit life was pretty out of hand there for a while.
It took a rock hitting us on the head for us to wake up and look at how
we were behaving and to
Pay attention to these people.
We acted as though it was okay to lie, cheat, steal, rape, pilfer and force
others
As long as we got away with it. It was everywhere.
It infiltrated our news. It permeated our air. It broke us down and
Corrupted even the best of us with a loss of passion.
The scientists said The Flutter Of A Butterfly Can Literally Be Felt On
The Opposite Side Of our Earth.
Yet, for the longest time I heard no One say

**Well, if that is true,
What about all of that we just talked about?**

Oh well.
At least we finally asked.
Then when we did it was like a light bulb going off.
And we realized it is us that is the butterfly.
And our words are the flutter of our wings.
And if our words can change the molecular makeup of water
By either breaking it down or crystallizing it up then
What must our words do to ourselves, which is after all mostly water?

~

Upon these realizations is when life settled down and now we're friends
with ourNeighbors.

We are interested in our differences. We are proud of our differences.

And we

Learn how to weave them all together into the beautiful tapestry we can
now call ourLives.

Thus,

As I enter into my hundred and fourth year
I ask mySelf What Is It I Am Now Most Passionate About
And without a doubt, now that I am free, I am going to
Learn to play Bach's most elusive song within my pyratron.

Wakefulness

Caz Ondra

I was suddenly... awake. I felt as though I was somehow a dream within a dream - not quite sure if I had just opened my eyes or if I had dreamt that I was there, asleep, opening my eyes within a dream, recognizing the light coming in ever so slightly from the bedroom door, indicating that it was now some hourly version of what anyone else would refer to as daytime and what I so lovingly refer to as herewegoagain.

I didn't need to pinch myself. It wouldn't help anyway. I've pinched myself before in one of those inception-like dreams. Even then, many layers deep within the catacombs of having never been a morning person, I could feel the sting of a lucid pinch and continue in a sleepwalking state before coming to the sudden realization that... here I am. Captured in the depth of rapid eye movement, I felt awake and still, unable to escape the depths of a powerful exhaustion. I rolled to my stomach, trying to prolong the short night just one more minute, checking in with my internal Feng Shui before quickly deciding rolling to my right side would be best. ...Maybe my left. Fuck these pillows! I hate them all.

Wake up.

I thought it. Like some mental Matrix mainframe, I typed it out in the blank DOS-like spaces of damaged memory slowly booting up for the day in so-called Safe Mode.

Wake up.

I woke as if in the midst of a dream about falling, moments before hitting the ground. Unable to pry my body from its paralyzed state, my heart was racing. I closed my eyes again, feeling the reassuring weight of the bed beneath me. I began again—first one eye and then the next. I woke as if in fear that this time I couldn't; in fear I may discover that I am no longer alive, or even worse, that I have not yet experienced life. I unwillingly forced my body to follow my brain and join the world of Human Doers. Two minutes into the day and I already felt like I had survived a week. Sickofthiscrap.

Alone, I stood at the edge of the living room, one foot on top of the other, somewhat vulnerable in an old band T-shirt that hung as if from a skeleton-made hanger, just long enough to hide the faded pair of PINK polkadot hipsters from the neighboring skyscrapers filled with people that would be hard at work, done with their morning cups of coffee, already bored by the morning routine of sorting through their inbox. They rarely concerned me although my husband had oft reminded me that they'd have less desirable things to do than peek at their reliable 9AM eye-candy.

Staring into the dust-free abyss of morning, there were no leaps and bounds of energy. I felt as blank as the canvas that lay before me in the form of luxurious living space - glowing as a somewhat orderly and untouched beacon of downtown, high-rise living. Nothing had changed. For days I had moved through the spaces of this house in a ghost-like state, leaving no absolute evidence that I truly ever existed other than the hours clocked by the television remote.

Arms crossed over my chest, keeping warm I peaked into the room, stepping forward slightly, but not enough to be seen by my bored, neighboring onlookers. The room was filled with bright sunlight. The way the light fell across the black suede of the antique couch seemed strange and inviting. The best place to take a nap, I considered.

I moved towards the couch slowly, still expecting an indication that I had somehow changed and that things were somehow different. I sat on the black, suede cushions and soaked in the sun. This is nice. Why had I never done this before? I rubbed my hands across the suede, mesmerized by my ability to move the fabric this way and that. I smiled, feeling the amazing warmth pour over my shoulders. I could get used to this. As if from nowhere, my brother suddenly appeared. "What are you doing?" he snapped. "Get off your ass and figure it out yourself!"

My contemplative silence felt violated as I looked over my shoulder, somewhat alarmed. I had no response. My gaze felt absent as I watched him walk back towards the front room before he disappeared around the corner with an audible huff. I guess that's where he came from? We hadn't seen each other over a year. A final, unspoken grudge ran deep between us, causing our interactions to skim the surface of mutual respect at best. There was nothing left to say except that none was forgiven. I would have thought it was obvious. But, he's here now. I wasn't quite sure what that meant for myself? Was I avoiding taking a stand, telling him I'm not going to let him into my life once again, or was I caught in my own retrospective past with that hope that I could just live there, in that ignorant, best-friends-forever part of our lives before all was said and undone? The question forever hung in my darkest thoughts, hiding like a monster in a closet visited only by my subconscious. I had forgotten he was staying with us although I couldn't remember for how long. He's been here before for as little as a brief nap during the day. He's always on his way to somewhere, propelled by a lack of time. Still, figure what out for myself?

He must've been referring to a work question I had asked him recently. I thought he could help me improve in my career by sharing what he had learned in recent years. We hadn't always worked within the same field. Being nearly the same person with drastically different perspectives, I thought he might be able to clue me in to his way of thinking. I expected whatever insight my big brother had could change my career forever and make me somewhat of an expert. I did, afterall, look up to

him.

With one hand rested on the edge of the keyboard and another on the mouse, I considered my tired reflection in the darkness of the computer screen and admired how the power button glowed, dimmed, glowed, and then dimmed, emulating a deep, digital snoring as the computer sat in sleep mode. What was I doing?

I scrolled through my daily to-do list, mentally noting each task with an internal, emotionless blah, blah, blah. I stood, distracted by an urgent sense to water the plants and clean the house then sat again, forcing focus. I have a great idea for a new project. People will love it. Man, why hadn't I ever thought of this before? With a smile on my face, I envisioned perfection. This is going to be brilliant!

I hesitate. Feeling the weight of my favorite pen in hand, tip hovering just above paper, I suddenly couldn't remember the big idea. I peer back at my to-do list in hopes that it might reignite the spark of my initial inspiration. The tasks before me are muddled. Some of them, years old, bringing up a time of my life I hadn't thought about in so long. Lost between what needs to be done and what great, new thing I want to try, it takes only a moment for me to recall how much I have accomplished since the creation of those red, expired due dates, and push my emotions deep enough to move forward once again.

"Please stop working." The message subject line appeared at the corner of my screen as I stared, hot on the trail of my previous thoughts. The client couldn't afford to pay me if I put in any more hours. The message seemed blunt and I felt overwhelming discouragement. Like a gripping hand, my emotions had the best of me. How was I going to make ends meet? I was going to starve. Tears brimming, I held tight to my desk and tried not to think. I was just doing my job for Christ's sake! This is how I'm rewarded? Maybe I wasn't really good at what I do. But, it's the only thing I've ever really wanted to do? Crap. My life quickly reduced to memories of couchsurfing for a roof over my head, surviving weeks at a time off nothing more than energy drinks and expired saltine crackers. I thought I had come so far. Maybe I had. I thought, at least I had more to fall back on. It was, after all, just one message. I talked myself down, convincing myself that it wasn't forever. It was just for now. It's not like I had been fired.

What a nightmare.

9:32

I felt the sudden urge to take an early break. Craving only one thing, I pushed the large, glass door open and exited my office with a fierce intent - morningquickie.

**"I suddenly
couldn't remember
the big idea."**

I moved through our open living room with an excited sense of purpose. The sun hung in the Southern sky, illuminating the thick layers of red and yellow pollution that hung over the city like a plague. Just the sight of it made me cough out loud, startling him as I entered his dimly lit office.

He jolted as I opened the door, half way standing as he adjusted himself; shoving his junk back into his boxer shorts as I stood in the doorway, unsure of what had just happened.

“Fuck, I’m sorry.” Somehow the apology is what alarmed me. If he could have managed a lack of surprise and slowly pushed his laptop closed, I would still be standing seductively in the doorway with the unknown as my blissful, mental foreplay. Instead, I tried to find some level of rationalization. This must, in some way, be my fault.

I watched myself, as if life were just a television show and I was merely viewing myself from a careless distance. It seemed as though everything paused in that moment and I just sat, watching my television persona throw the door wide open, hard enough to send the handle straight through the wall, causing the various bags and credentials I had hanging on the other side to fall to the floor in a colorful display of onceuponatime. I left a part of me there on the floor, on my knees for the blatant disregard and consideration. Whataboutme?

I turned away, arriving quickly at denial. I was unsure if I was even angry until I considered just how long this had been going on and how many times he might have preferred someone else over me. I’m tall and model thin. I take good care of myself so what was possibly the problem? Perhaps his desire had faded with time. We had been married for a near decade without children as an excuse for a new chapter. He had every reason to move on.

My mind raced. I wasn’t sure how to feel. I suppose he had a similar midday fantasy. I couldn’t be mad that he felt the same urges I did. But the more I thought about it, the more infuriated I became at the idea that he didn’t at least consider me as his afternoon delight. I felt disgusted, as though we were suddenly just friends living together in some kind of casual and precarious roommate situation where I was never informed that time had faded what was once between us. Like a mutation, my mind expanded and folded in on itself. I felt a panic caught in my chest and the sudden desire to disappear.

He didn’t follow me as I paced between the kitchen and the living room, feeling an overwhelming desire to swallow a handful of anything to fall into a deep, mindless sleep. I was so tired. So very, very tired. I didn’t have the energy to deal with this. I needed to swallow it alive, repress it, sleep it off, and start again tomorrow. I could just wake up and pretend that none of this had ever happened. I stood quietly with a blank appearance on my face. Only I could know how infuriated I was deep inside. My temper boiled. I don’t want to lose him, yet I felt I

should get rid of him all the same.

In desperation, I tried to harness my thoughts. This had to be post traumatic stress of some kind. I was reacting to something bigger. Deeper. My mind calculated the far reaching sides of reality against possibility. Stopped directly in front of open medicine cabinets, I stared at my hands as if counting one odd against the other. I was preparing the perfect speech. Practicing. The entire argument played out in my mind and I was winning. I grit my teeth with all I had to say to him in this moment, then suddenly felt better that we had arrived at some kind of conclusion there within my mental stand-off.

My vision blurred and my mind was suddenly reduced to a repetitious doldrum. HALT! HALT! Hungry. Angry. Lonely. Tired. HALT! It was something I had learned in rehab. Never make a decision if you are hungry, angry, lonely...

The front door slammed behind me as I finished putting my jacket on while frantically pushing the down button to the elevator over and over again. Come on, come on, come on, I thought. I wanted to get out of there before I made an even more final decision; before I found some way of understanding that this really was all my fault. Wait, is it my fault? Maybe I was the one that was taking this all wrong. Maybe it wasn't even what I thought it was and I should go back in there, apologizing. But, why should I have to apologize? I was the one who actually thought to consider him as someone who might satisfy my afternoon urges. My mind argued like two opposing demons.

It was a long elevator ride down to the depths of internal hell. I felt as though my chest may cave in. My mind moved so rapidly, it seemed as though my body trailed my thoughts in a blur, unable to keep up. None of it seemed real. It all felt too intense to deal with. I could see how I was reacting, what I was saying, how I was moving as if part of me was just a ghost on the ceiling, observing. The whole experience seemed, in part, supernatural and still, there was a gaping hole in my heart.

I felt as if I were drowning, flailing in a struggle to keep my head above water, and each time I came up, a harsh tide would pull me under once again. Breathe!!! I could see the beams of sunlight, shining through the dark, senseless ocean and I longed to be saved by the muffled scream deep inside of me begging, pleading, demanding all along... Wake up!

9:48

I was suddenly... awake.

Helping Hand

Winnie Mae Walker

The old piano sat forlornly on the showroom floor.

It was a thrift shop where it came to rest.

Sometimes a child would plunk its keys or a man might hit a chord,
but a woman came along to try her best

to coax a little music from this broken, damaged shell.

The song she played was called "Sweet Bye and Bye."

To her surprise, an older man began to sing, quite well.

Who would have thought that this disheveled guy

would have a song within his heart, since it was pretty clear
that life, for him, was anything but bland.

By coaxing music from what simply happened to be near,
she may have given him a helping hand.

Animals

Jessica Gynn

Cats are women
Dogs are men
A hip swish. A tail flick.
Heavy breathing

Soap Box Derby

Paul Rosser

My dad built my brother and me soap box cars in 1964. I helped my dad build the cars in the backyard. Each kit came with an axle, wheels, cable, steering wheel, and steering column. He bought plywood for the bodies and 2x4s for the brakes.

Building My Car

The frame was made out of 2x4s. The steering wheel was connected to the shaft. The shaft sat in holes through the top of the frame. The cable was wrapped around the shaft three times and connected to the wheels by I-hooks to turn the car. The back axle was bolted only to the frame. The body was covered with thin bendable plywood, and the floor was made out of two-inch thick plywood.

For the brakes, we made a hole in the floor about twelve inches long and wide enough for a 2x4. Another twelve-inch 2x4, angled up into the inside of the car, was used to stop my foot from moving when I hit the brake pedal. The brake pedal was made of two six-inch pieces of 2x4s that were hinged together. One of the six-inch pieces was screwed to the twelve-inch piece of 2x4. A spring, connected between the two hinged six-inch pieces of 2x4, went down when I hit the brake pedal. The brake, a twelve-inch piece of 2x4 with a piece of tire nailed to the bottom, was in the floor of the car. When I hit the brake pedal, the rubber hit the road, and the car stopped.

The wheels were tall, about twelve inches. To keep the wheels going fast, we lubricated the ball-bearings on all four wheels with 3-in-1 oil. I had fun building the cars with my dad. When we got done building them, I spray painted my car light blue and my brother's car red.

Racing My Car

The Soap Box Derby started at Hogle Zoo. A bunch of other kids and I raced from the zoo to the corner of Foothill Drive and Sunnyside Avenue. I went down the race course twice. The first time was for practice. The second time was the race. The practice run was the first time I drove my car.

Only two cars raced at a time. Each car sat on top of a ramp that was twelve feet long, four feet high, and about ten feet wide. Starting blocks held the cars in place. A man sat between the ramps. At the start of the race, the man sitting in the middle said, "Ready? Go!" The man pushed down a lever, and the starting blocks went down. The cars started racing. Driving my car was fun! My car went down the track well during practice. The steering column got stuck during the race, but I still went down the track straight.

I wanted to keep racing, but I had to go home. The race was over!

Haiku



Steve Proskauer

Soft purr sleeping cat

Wakes to play with paw and claw.

Scratch! I came too close.

Outversion

Audrey Weigel

Last year I spent
Time in spring air
In winter
Far and not far away

Crisp, crackly, vibrant
Shimmered as I walked
Possessed of none
Present, whispering

My age requested
Relocale to family
The birds sung by lake
Impaled by a gray haze

Choking the birds and I
I thought me a hazing
Perhaps a dazing
Round about

Locals spoke of machines
Locals spoke of money
Locals spoke of necessity
Locals spoke of distraction

I spoke of being choked
My bird friends
The rapture of
Conversing with Nature

I've heard it progressed
Finely in other locales
Why not here? Why not now?
Outversion

My Confessions

Alonzo Douglass

From the journal of Candice Wickes
March 20, 2013

Today my heart is full of grief and yearning. Grief because last summer I lost the soul of my youngest son. Yearning because 27 days ago I lost his physical presence. No one knows where he's at.

When a mother sends her son out into the world to serve the Lord as a missionary for the Mormon faith, she expects his service to give her and her family comfort and joy. Isn't this one of God's promises? To have him sent home early in dishonor and excommunicated is heartbreaking. To have him come back as someone entirely different than who he really is is devastating.

I want the genuine Jayden Wickes back. Where are you my precious baby? Did you go to Florida to find him? If you did, damn you. I mean it. DAMN! YOU!

Dear child, as I write the only thing I can put my hands on that connects me to you is your last letter. You know the one, right? The one you wrote to the Stake President. The one where you told him what happened in New Zealand. President Leytham gave it to me Sunday morning at church. Just out of the blue he handed it to me. Somehow he thought I needed it more than he did.

Now that I have your letter, what am I suppose to do with it? Do I rip it up or save it? I really want to rip it up, shred it to pieces, but something tells me to wait—to just slip it inside my journal. But why? Because it's connecting me to you? Because I'm worried about you? Because I love you?

Oh, Jayden, I do. Despite everything, I love you with all my heart. I just want you back. And though you may hate me for saying it, I want the real you back. Now call me. Tell me where you're at. I'll come get you. Even if I have to walk there, I'll come for you.

Letter from Jayden Wickes to Stake President Dwight C. Leytham
January 12, 2013

Dear President Leytham,

I appreciate the time you spent with me Thursday night. The things you told me aren't new. I heard them from my mission president the night I was excommunicated and from your predecessor President Muir. Again, I know what it's going to take for me to repent; I'm determined to walk the full length of that road and to follow all your instructions; and I know the process will take incredible effort on my part and many

months if not years. Every day I pray for the strength to endure to the end.

You told me to come back when you had more time to hear my story. I regret to have to say I can't tell it anymore. First, I told it to my mission president, then to my disciplinary court, then to my parents, and finally to President Muir. If you don't mind, I want to write it this time. I don't think I could bear looking into your eyes. All the other eyes I've looked into have either shown disgust or pity. I understand the disgust; I can't take the pity.

I want to start by saying I'm so glad I had the privilege to serve in New Zealand. When I describe the place to Americans, I try to get them to see how beautiful it is by saying it's like Yellowstone with beaches. This isn't to say I fell in love with my mission on my first day there. My trip from Salt Lake to Wellington, New Zealand, took about 24 hours. One day later, I was put on a train to the farthest area on the west coast. I felt jetlagged for three weeks. Then I didn't like my first home or my first companion. To this day, I think my companion's middle name is Snob. He had nothing good to say about Kiwis, ever. Once I had more energy and we moved to a different house, I fell in love with the people and the land to where I told myself I didn't want to leave New Zealand one day before I had to. One of my worst punishments is to be here instead of there.

My first companion never improved with time. He remained biased against the people we tracted and taught, but he was a hard worker. When we became companions, he'd only been out for three months. The speed of his advancement from greenie to trainer was an all-time record in my mission. I wanted to match it. Thus I worked hard, but my opportunity to train a new missionary didn't come about until I'd been out for nine months. Now I'm glad I had that extra time. I could have been sent home by my 7th month instead of by my 13th.

Elder Gavin Ruvio, my fourth companion and my trainee, was from Florida. He was an avid surfer, and he grew up where every town he knew ended with the word "Beach." His hometown was New Smyrna (add "Beach"); his first substitute hometown was Daytona (add "Beach"); his second substitute hometown was Cocoa (add "Beach"). The way he was raised was the polar opposite of the way I was raised. That is to say he was exposed to every kind of person and type of living. My family and friends seemed to live in houses where all the doors and windows were shut tight to keep the inside in and the outside out. Ruvio's family and friends seemed to live in houses where every window and door was propped open to let the inside out and the outside in.

I've been asked if I loved him. All I can say is there was absolutely nothing I could hate about him. He was beautiful physically and in spirit. Think of someone who lives his entire life outdoors and uses his body in everything he does. Then think of someone who is welcoming to all

and judges no one. Everyone loved him. How could I be any different? With these things said, I think I should go back to telling you my story, Ruvio and I served in a town of about 3,000 people called Taihape. Our zone leaders and most of the other missionaries lived in Wanganui. The two towns are only 70 miles apart, but it takes about one and a half hours to drive it. Then our area was the largest in the mission. If you used Wanganui as a starting and ending point and drove the roads that encircle our area, you would drive 269 miles. Because most roads are narrow and windy, your total drive time would be five to six hours.

“He only did these things when we were at home and under certain circumstances.”

The most interesting thing about the place is it has two active volcanoes. The larger one has a lake in its crater and seems to be asleep. The smaller one spits out hot boulders almost daily. When we were close by, we could hear the popping sound when the boulders were shot out and the whizzing sound when they flew through the air. In modern times, the sleeping volcano—the larger one—has taken more lives. Here I'll just say on Christmas Eve 1953, the lake in the crater overflowed and took the lives of 141 men, women, and children.

My reason for telling you about our area is twofold: First, I want to try to get you to fall in love with New Zealand—even little Taihape, and, secondly, I want to show you we were isolated. Because of the time it took to drive from Wanganui to Taihape, our zone leaders didn't come to see us without calling first. Then we didn't have many members who lived in our area. I don't think we ever saw more than 20 people at church. Most of them lived in the town north of us. We always went to them; they never came to us. Our isolation from everyone gave us our freedom. We could always do as we pleased.

In this one sphere “do as we pleased,” Ruvio was the freest and most uninhibited person I've ever met. I could fill three pages about his antics, but I better limit myself to the one that mattered the most: Ruvio liked to expose himself to me. I'm not saying he unzipped his pants or stripped down anytime or anywhere. He only did these things when we were at home and under certain circumstances.

In the mornings, Ruvio wore something to the bathroom to take his bath. (Our flat was in a very old, converted building and we didn't have a shower.) When he came back, he was always naked. Most times he stood in front of me pink skinned and hung from 10 to 15 minutes to groom and get dressed. Then when he used the water closet to urinate, he always left the door open. Sometimes he wanted to talk to me. “Don't go anywhere,” he said when we came in the house. This was my cue to stand in the doorway while he did his business and we finished the conversation we started on our way home. Instead of putting his back to

me, he stood to one side of the toilet. I tried as best I could to keep eye contact with him, yet, every time I failed. My eyes always landed on his hand and what he was holding.

Imagine if I asked Ruvio why he did what he did, he would have said, "I'm at home. Why wouldn't I?" If I were he, I would have added, "I have a great body. What do I have to be ashamed of?" In my opinion, Ruvio was stunning from head to toes.

Why didn't I protest? Why didn't I try to stop him? By now everyone—including you—must know I suffer from same-sex attraction. Ruvio coming from his bath naked and urinating in front of me fulfilled some of my deepest desires. Also, he was in all my dreams—the ones at night and the ones during the day.

An accumulation of my affliction, how Ruvio acted and thought, and the accident led us to sleep together. Hmm! the accident. I guess it's time to tell you about it.

In all seriousness, it was nothing to write home about. We didn't crash our car and end up in the hospital. Literally, it was over spilt milk. In Taihape, we always ate our breakfast while sitting on our beds. We had a practical reason for doing this, but that's not important. What's important is afterward I couldn't sleep in my bed.

One morning, Ruvio and I carried our bowls of cereal from the kitchen to our bedroom. Ruvio went straight to his bed and started eating. I put my bowl on the corner of our desk nearest my bed and hurried out to finish a task. When I returned, I found Ruvio standing at our desk. Somehow he'd knocked my breakfast into the middle of my bed. Even though we started mopping up the mess immediately, my mattress was soaked through for about a week.

After the accident, the only place I could sleep was on the floor. I didn't sleep well. By the third day, I was so tired I dragged my butt around as if it had lead in it. That night Ruvio said he wanted to trade places. He'd sleep on the floor, and I on his mattress. I said no and we went to our respective beds. For the fourth night in a row, I kept waking up to shift from one hard spot to another. The difference this time was I found Ruvio woke up almost as often as I did. Most times we acknowledged each other and then turned away to try to go back to sleep. We spoke for the first time at about one in the morning. One more time, Ruvio offered to switch places. One more time, I refused.

"Look," he said, "this is all my fault. Take my bed."

"No," I said, "I couldn't. Really. I can sleep on the floor."

"This is the fourth night. Look at you, you're wiped out because you can't sleep."

"Yeah well, being wiped out is exactly why I'm going to fall asleep tonight. It'll be my best sleep, ever. I'm sure."

"If you won't take my bed, then come sleep with me."

Instantly I was nonplussed. He'd hit on the one thing I wanted to

do more than anything since he arrived. I physically shook with fear. "I can't," I stammered. "That's completely and entirely against the rules."

"I don't see the mission president or any of his enforcers here," he said. "Come sleep with me."

His voice was a command. I wanted to obey.

"No," I said waspishly.

"Please," he said and turned back his blanket and sheet to welcome me. This time he was pleading.

"No," I said angrily. We stayed silent for a time, and then I said, "Besides, your mattress is just a twin."

"If you weighed 300 pounds, I wouldn't have offered. What are you? 135, maybe a 140 pounds?"

"A 145, thank you."

"I'm 152. The two of us can fit. I promise."

I became stern. "I'm your senior companion and I say no."

"I see how it is," he said. "We're not friends. You're the boss and I'm your grunt. Fine. Sleep on the floor."

He pulled his sheet and blanket over him and turned to face the wall. I did the same, but I couldn't sleep. A fear more intense than anything I'd ever felt before roared through my body. I could feel heat because of it.

At three in the morning, I was still awake. Ruvio stirred and looked at me. We started to talk, again.

"You told me you'd go to sleep because you're wiped out," Ruvio said.

"I thought I would," I said.

"But you haven't, have you? Listen either take my bed or sleep with me."

"You're trying to tempt me, aren't you?"

"Sorry?" he said.

"If I could, I'd sleep with you."

"There's no reason why you can't"

"Missionary rules," I said. "Then . . ."

"Then? . . . what?" he said.

"Nothing. I promise it's absolutely nothing."

"I think I can guess."

"Please don't."

"You like me, don't you?"

I couldn't speak.

"Not only that, you want me."

"No!" I said harshly.

"Yes, you do."

I found I couldn't lie to him. "Sometimes," I said, "but that's not who I am."

"Your voice just then said that is who you are," he said.

One more time, I couldn't speak.

"Well?" he said.

"How did you know?" I asked.

"My life has never been typical Mormon, and I'm not from Utah."

"Elder Ruvio," I said, "I can't do this."

"Elder Wickes," he said, "I can."

"Are you gay?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "Are you?"

"I hope not."

"Why don't we find out?"

"No," I shook my head. "Let's not."

He pulled his blanket and sheet aside and said, "Come sleep with me."

"I've never done anything like this before," I cried.

"I have," he said. "Come sleep with me."

My fatigue was overwhelming, and my desire was all consuming. I got in bed with him. His mattress was narrow, but we were both small-framed and, to me, the fit felt right. Ruvio put his arms around me and pulled me into his body. For a moment, I felt as if I was going to go mad. Then I burst into tears and cried until I fell asleep. About 45 minutes later, I had a potent wet dream. What came out of me soaked us and our sheets. At first, I was horrorstruck. Then Ruvio burst out laughing. He asked me if I'd just dumped my breakfast in my pants. Then I laughed.

Before we could try to go back to sleep, we each needed to take a bath. I went first. When I was drying off, Ruvio came in as if we always shared the bathroom, stripped down, jumped into my dirty water, and took his bath. When he got out, he grabbed my towel off me and dried himself. This was the first time I stood naked in front of him. Throughout my entire life, I've hated my body. What I see in the mirror is skin stretched tautly over pointy bones, but Ruvio was pleased with me. I think we would've initiated sex on the spot; however, I realized he was overacting and flaunting himself at me. This scared me, and I became inhibited. He saw what he was doing to me and gave me back my towel.

When we were in our bedroom getting dressed to go back to bed, Ruvio convinced me to just put my boxers on. He did the same. Then, for the second time, he pulled me into his bed. Once again, he was kind instead of overbearing. Even though we caressed, we didn't start anything. We were bone tired and fell fast asleep.

The next I knew, our bedroom was filled with sunlight and Ruvio was standing over me holding a plate of scrambled eggs, bacon, and toast. He said he thought about bringing me cereal and laughed. One more time, he was making fun of my wet dream. When I looked at the time, it was two in the afternoon. During my entire mission, I never slept in. That was the first and last time.

Ruvio and I ate slowly. When we finished, we set our plates and cutlery aside. Then Ruvio took me in his arms, kissed me, and, for the third time, pulled me into his bed. In short order, we stripped and Ruvio showed me how one man makes love to another man. In the beginning, during the middle, and at the end, I felt and believed everything was right. I always had girls for friends—I dated some of them—yet, after receiving from and giving to a man, I thought all my past experiences were wrong. Only my time with Ruvio felt right.

The next time I was able to look at the clock, it was just after six in the evening.

Everyone who has ever needed to know what happened between Ruvio and me has asked for details of what we did and how often. If you think you really need to know this, I'll tell you. However, I don't want to write it in a letter. I will tell you how long we slept together. Ruvio arrived in Taihape November 14 the year before last. On the 20th, he dumped my breakfast in my mattress. The first time I got in bed with him would have been Thanksgiving Day in the States. From then on, we kept one bed. Ruvio had a very crude way of saying what we did. His way was a long Thanksgiving prayer. So that you fully understand me, I'll reword what I'm telling you: Except for 10 days, Ruvio and I slept together and experienced each other. That was almost four months to the day. I was transferred out of Taihape in March last year. In June, I confessed to my mission president. He had me excommunicated that evening, and I flew home the following day.

I've been home for seven months now. You probably want to know if I've sinned in any way. Physically, I'm entirely clean. In my mind, I sin in some way every day. When I'm awake, I have ways to stop it. At night, I cannot control my dreams. In them, I see everything I desire. I hold, touch, taste, smell, and use it. I swear none of this comes to me because of what I've seen on the Internet, TV, or in a movie. The images just come to torment me.

I have one more problem I can't seem to fix. Without thinking about it, I often curl up my second pillow and hold it. I will not lie to you, my pillow is a substitute for Ruvio. When I recognize what I'm doing, I push my two pillows on the floor and sleep flat or kink-necked on my mattress. Yet, so often, I wake up with a pillow curled up against my back. To me this is the same as Ruvio getting in bed with me.

How long will Ruvio haunt me? I don't know the answer. All I know is I can't walk the entire length of the road in front of me—that road to full repentance and fellowship in the church—as long as Ruvio comes to sleep with me. If I can't put him entirely out of my mind, I will lose my battle. I will never be free of my sins. I will never be whole, again.

Please pray for me.

Sincerely,

Jayden A. Wickes

Summary of Part II

In late February 2013, Jayden flies to Daytona Beach, Florida, to find Gavin Ruvio. Although he finds the man, he doesn't find the person he thought he knew. This new reality forces Jayden to take a difficult journey. Before he finishes it, he makes an important discovery about long-term relationships. On September 9, 2013, Jayden breaks his silence with his parents by writing a letter to them about his journey and his discovery.

Author Bios

Kelly Albrecht—If you want to know Kelly better, offer him a couple glasses of wine, and when you pour the third glass, ask him what his dreams are.

Jacques Angualo—Jacques is a refugee from Congo D.R.C. He moved to SLC in 2013. He is married and has one daughter. He enjoys reading.

Marti Grace Ashby—Marty is a sporadic writer happy to have found a group of people who are supportive and help her work on this craft. Marti truly believes every person has art within them, and the need to create.

K.E. Concannon—K. E. Concannon received her M. A. in Writing at Johns Hopkins University and is completing her PhD in English at the University of Leeds. Her work has appeared in PennUnion and Stand.

Richard Clegg—Richard invested his first 33 years in Salt Lake Valley, the next 33 in love - living in and loving Germany/Europe with the man of his dreams. He is now back in this strange, marvelously entertaining valley.

Fran Crookston—Fran has mentored a writing group at the Literacy Action Center on Thursday evenings since November 2009.

Busaya Dimitrov—Busaya always likes to learn new things. Busaya believes that when we do new things, we can learn about ourselves and make adjustments in our lives.

Elizabeth Ernsten—Elizabeth is the pen name Grace Anne Mercie. She has been writing almost four years now and enjoys her writer's group very much.

Gordon L. Ewell—is a 24 year Army veteran. During the war in Iraq he helped write the Army's First Route Clearance Handbook. He was blown up six times in Iraq and received the Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

Shirley Fifer - She was born in Montana and rode to school on horseback or pulled on a sled by a Shetland pony driven by her brother. She has retired after working over 50 years as a secretary and bookkeeper.

Mary Garrity—When someone yells “hey Mary” 3500 people say “what.” Mary writes about things and folks she likes. She has no idea if her readers like her. Oh well!

Jessica Guynn—Jessica is a graduate of Brigham Young University with a degree in journalism. Between raising her four children, she likes to write

of life through poetry. It's her hobby to put beauty into words.

Sokla Hay—Sokla is a refugee from Cambodia. She has lived in SLC since 2006. She studies English and she is married.

Appio Hunter—Appio Hunter is a positive change coach and owner of Appian Way Enterprises. He blogs at ww.reflectionsonreality.com.

Christine Ireland--Christine has lived in SLC for 30 yrs. She enjoys reading, writing, cycling, psychology and word entomology.

Judith Johnson—Judith is writing her personal history so her children and grandchildren will know her, her parents, and her great grandparents.

Kae Kae Kai—Kae Kae is an American citizen, she is also proud of her husband and daughters, and their accomplishments. She loves her ma, dad, and mother-in-law.

Peggy Kadir—Peggy Kadir is a professional painter and illustrator, who has held numerous exhibitions at home and abroad. Her writings have appeared in Utah Sings, Panorama, sine cera, and Small Canyons.

Ked Kirkham—Ked has been a member Gay Writes writing group for three years, and has found a renewed pleasure in poetry.

Julie Liljenquist—Julie is married, has three birds, and she loves car races. Julie is thankful that her family would pay for her to see the race.

Diane Lockard—It has been a productive third year for Diane as co-mentor for the Silver Pen Group with an average of eight participants and a variety of poems, stories, and ideas.

Betsy Maxwell—Betsy Maxwell is 33 years old. She loves being creative. She loves horses and also making new friends. She is working on writing stories on paper.

Leesa Myers—Leesa Myers a coach specializing in helping people build stronger happier relationships. She is a published author, columnist, speaker, host on Blog Radio and PositiveMindset.tv.

Awes Muhina—Awes is a father of six children. He is taking care of his family. He likes reading and writing. Awes is working now so his life is good.

Caz Ondra—Having recently learned to accept her life as a diagnosed narcoleptic, Caz felt compelled to begin illustrating this life of traveling between the gray spaces seen here as, *Wakefulness*.

Stephen Proskauer—is a psychiatrist, psychotherapist, and Zen monk in his 70's who writes visionary novels, flash fiction, and poetry. "Maisie and the Magic Pear" begins a children's story series.

Jonathan Ricks—Jonathan enjoys being an internet game addict, gourmet sex with his girlfriend and making song parodies, oh and sometimes he writes a bit.

Sarah Rose—Sarah is a retired speech therapist. She is excited to spend more time writing. She attends the King's English Writing Group and is co-mentor of the LAC Writers Group.

Paul Rosser—Paul likes NASCAR, football, basketball, and his pets. He gets around on his bicycle and is pleased to be learning more all the time.

Jacqueline Skinner—Jackie loves writing and reading in addition to her love for animals. She owns Pet Pro, a local dog walking/pet sitting business, and is currently writing stories about her adventures.

Shahla Soltanianzadeh—Shahla is a fifty year-old mom from Iran. She visited SLC in the fall of 2013 and these are her experiences from Iran and the U.S.

Andrew Vogen—Andrew is 78 years of age. He writes for pleasure and enjoyment; nothing into publishers. Only to his own satisfaction. He owned several businesses and did all of his advertising workups.

Angie Watson—has lived a sheltered life while travelling the globe.

Winnifred M. Walker—Winnifred wrote her first poem in high school, another couple in college, but didn't start expressing herself until after her divorce when she had all kinds of jumbled emotions release.

Audrey Weigel—Age 65, mother, past nurse, grandmother, loves nature, writes, pain.

J. Phillip Wilkes—J. Phillip Wilkes is an advocate for homeless people, a bit of a political activist, and volunteer at SLCC-CWC. John has appeared in past issues of this anthology, as well as other local publications.

Doug Woodall - Mentors the Gay Writes Writing Group and has a Master's of Professional Communication from Westminster.

Chan Wook—Chan is 19 years-old and he is from South Korea. His hobbies are reading books and listening to music. Chan can't speak English well yet, but he is trying hard with the English experience.

