

GOING ON 15

memoirs of freshmen*

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For the families and friends of the authors

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INTRODUCTION

In ninth grade English, most of us remember reading the so-called great works of literature, which we may or may not have recognized as such at the time, completely distant as they were from our own lives. Written by Homer, Shakespeare, Dickens, or Frost, those stories were alien to us and we struggled to see ourselves in their worlds; after a successful year of reading, maybe we finally saw our fleeting reflection in the glimmer of a character's eye. Maybe. But many of us did not.

As a ninth grader, I was one of those students that did not get it. Completely frustrated by the obscurity of *The Outsiders* of all books, I couldn't for the fourteen-year life of me figure out what Ponyboy meant by quoting Robert Frost, saying, "Nothing gold can stay." It seemed to me great literature was written in a secret code that I would just never understand. That frustration led me to study literature in college and eventually become an English teacher. But, as a teenager, when feeling a part of something constituted my entire sense of self, being alienated from what was considered "great" took quite a toll on my feeble freshman self-esteem.

I explained to my own ninth grade students that memoirs are the great equalizers of literature. Everyone has a story, and everyone's story is valid. You don't have to be dead and white and male; you don't even have to have perfect grammar. You've lived, you've struggled, and your stories about life legitimize you as a human being and as a writer. This would have been the solution to my self-esteem problem, I thought.

So often the subject of news reports, studies, and parent-teacher meetings, teenagers are discussed but rarely included in the conversation, instead, asked to sit mutely at the sidelines. Likewise, literature written by (and for) young adults is largely omitted from the canon, filed under juvenilia and left for the archivists, too undeveloped to merit serious reading.

The memoirs in this collection, written by freshmen at Durham School of the Arts, however, prove that teenagers besides Rimbaud write eloquently and reflectively about their lives, revealing not only a talent with words, but also a deep understanding of the themes of "great literature": the foolhardy nature of love ("The Soundtrack of Summer"), the dichotomy of self and persona ("Naughty Little Chinese Gal"), the incomprehensibility of death ("Memories of Edward"), the placement of the individual in society ("Hometown Glory"), and the nostalgia for childhood ("My First Best Friend"). Adult readers will reacquaint themselves with what it's like to be a teenager and remember how far from childhood fourteen really feels. Teenage readers will see beyond the façades they encounter in the hallways and across the cafeteria to ap-

preciate these stories usually only told to close friends over long, midnight phone calls.

By publishing these memoirs, written for English class, then rigorously edited for months on end by a small team of students, I hope the authors can feel a sense of belonging in the world of stories, and recognize that their themes are as great as those in the literature we read together.

*Alexa Garvoille
Carrboro, NC
July 2010*

LIVING HELL

1122

In this world things are unforgivable
Some... unforgettable
People cause damage to those who don't deserve it
And their hearts break bit by bit
I am one of those people in that group
With suffering in a giant loop
For my name . . . it shouldn't be shown
But my writing will make it known.

As long as I can remember, my life's been what some would call a living hell. I've lived so deep in at times, I might as well consider myself a resident.

It all started when I moved to North Carolina three years ago. My family, which consisted of my mother, third stepfather, and I, lived in a trailer park in Creedmoor. I was attending Hawley Middle School for sixth grade, but after the single month I went there, we had to move again.

This move had my family living in Durham on East Main Street, and I went to Neal Middle School. Just as I thought my life was going well, I was about to start my living hell.

It was November 27, a week after my eleventh birthday and the first day of the sixth grade at Neal with the first stressor of the day: missing the bus. I had to get my stepfather to drive me to school. My day began with the usual first day of school concerns like, *Will anybody in the class accept me as a friend? or Will this school year be any better than last school year?* I entered my homeroom ignoring those thoughts and found that the class was normal, except for a few arguments that required me to dodge flying objects and step back from desks pushed so hard that the floor shook.

As my school day progressed, I found myself walking to the bus lot. However, I'd forgotten my bus number and stared at two buses with similar numbers, which worried me. The phrase, "history is doomed to repeat itself" comes to mind, because I missed the bus twice that day and had to walk to the office and make a phone call so I could get a ride home.

As my stepfather drove us up to our home, I had only one thought on my mind: how sleepy I was. I told him I was going to take a nap at the house. My stepfather said that I might as well come with him to pick up my mother and that I could sleep in the car. The events that came after that were a blur, but I remember that after we picked up my mother she said, "We're going to eat somewhere that my coworkers told me about." That's when I fell asleep.

It turned out the restaurant was Hardee's, and as we ordered our food and sat down at a table, my stepfather received a call from someone in our neighborhood. I remember the words he said exactly.

"Hey Panches. — What are you talking about? — I don't have any time for your games. — There's a what?!" We threw out our food and ran home. And that's when all hell broke loose.

We drove up to our house and saw a sight that caused my heart so much pain: our home had caught on fire and there was nothing we could do to stop it. Everywhere around me there was confusion and depression and smoke in the air. My mind and senses were struck with fear and I couldn't bear to look at the flames without tears welling up in my eyes.

All I saw were fire trucks, ABC news cars, and paramedics. One of the paramedics approached me and tried to calm me down, but all I do was put my head on my knees and cry softly. I kept repeating, "It's all a dream. When I open my eyes, I'll be in the car sleeping." But no such thing happened.

The American Red Cross helped us out and my family ended up in a hotel for the night, but I couldn't sleep or close my eyes. What happened had caused some kind of trauma in me. This became apparent as weeks passed and I couldn't speak or eat or sleep. I couldn't even move. I only felt emptiness. I could only stare at a wall at the friend's house where we were staying.

For months, I kept to myself. No one else in the world could ever have guessed what I was thinking, but only one thought stayed in my mind during those months. Why?

Why did we have a house fire? Why did this happen to my family? And the biggest question of all: Why didn't I die? I was left with a curse called fear that fed off me like a parasite. Little did I know that there was even more pain and fear coming.

It was February of 2007. A church had helped us with the deposit on a house, and, even though it wasn't ready, we thought it would be a good idea to live in it. After about a week with no electricity, no water, and no heat, our realtor told us that the workers had quit working on the house. That was when we decided to do some research in the city archives. Not only was the place we were forced to stay in condemned, but the place we were renting was condemned, too.

We had to find a new place to live. The two good things that came from all this was that first, we got to stop living in that crummy place, and second, that realtor got fired from her job. I almost danced when I heard the news.

The church decided to help us out even more, so they had us live with another family who volunteered to take us in. Another person said that we could rent out a home of his for a low price as soon as he had it fixed. I had to smile; it turned out that there was good in the world.

In March, the house was finished and we were able to rent it. With some help from the church, we re-decorated the house with wallpaper remover, paint,

and a lot of hours. After two days, the house was finished. Little by little, memories were created, some good and some bad. Soon possessions we could call our own were appearing. I started feeling happy and speaking again.

I went back to school, and soon my achievements became noticeable as I passed the sixth grade after missing three quarters. I started dealing with my anger and depression by writing whatever came to my mind. But what really showed that I was getting back to normal was that I started reading challenging books without difficulty once again.

But every happy moment has to come to an end. My stepfather left us right before the new year. That left my family, which now consisted of only my mother and me, in a tough situation. But it was nothing we couldn't handle.

Now I live in a life with occasional problems, with a dog who I fight with and with a different stepfather, who teaches me Spanish without even realizing it. I couldn't be happier since I accepted that whatever problem comes, I can solve it as long as I have someone nudging me forward. I realized that I didn't need to continue my downfall alone. I knew there was always someone beside me helping me up when I fell.

I haven't seen my living hell for a long time. I have taken up poetry to help me with any confusion, which my pen pal Aliena and my good friend Alex read. I know that there will always be someone right next to me helping me little by little, and I have

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to thank the people I consider my extended family for my happiness.

EPIPHANY

Ayo Alabi

I DON'T WANT to get up, but I still do. I convince myself that I should get out of my bed by telling myself that if I continue to act lazy, eventually I will become lazy in everything I do. I will be unable to accomplish my goals in life. With this thought in mind, I bound like a cheetah to his prey. I know it sounds funny, but just go along with it.

I check the clock to see how to schedule out my time. It is 4:30, which means I have thirty minutes to shower and almost three hours to complete the things I both want and have to do. I don't necessarily have to spend thirty minutes getting ready, but I prefer to do things in thirty-minute periods.

I put my duvet back on my bed and rush to the bathroom. As usual, I put on my music as loud as I can and step into the shower. I relax for the time being.

Time always seems to go more slowly when I am in the shower. Sometimes I think I am in there for an hour, but it is really only twenty or thirty minutes.

I get out and layer my body with Vaseline. My skin is a solar energy panel and my head a huge light bulb. My clothes are in a mess all over my room, so I neatly put them in place and begin to ponder what my outfit for school will be today. I choose the shoes that I want to wear and my outfit comes together elegantly.

I usually do not like bright lights, but since I cannot find my glasses, I flip the switch. The light is actually aesthetic to the eye in its contrast to the darkness outside my window.

I take my book bag and leave my room. I look back at the door. I feel as if I am missing something, and it makes my stomach curl. I do not know why, but for some reason when things are not done a certain way or I think I am forgetting something, my stomach curls and my mind enters a state of disorder. I feel uneasy and it takes a long time for me to get over it. I spend a lot of time just thinking of what I forgot to get or do. Luckily, no one is around. I can be quite irritable when I am in these moods. The result is usually a slap, depending on how rudely I choose to respond.

I try to distract myself, to clear my head by watching television in the upstairs living room, but it is not very effective and I forget more in my attempt to untangle my mind.

After I feel suitably relaxed, I take my leave from the upstairs area, turning off the music, television, lights, and fan. I remember myself wishing as a child that I could jump from wall to wall on the first eight steps, and for the next eight, slide down the rail and land without falling. I laugh at the thought and walk

down the stairs. I peer out the window at the end of the first eight stairs. I wish it were raining. I turn around and walk down the rest of the stairs.

Just as yesterday, there is nothing new in the fridge. I know there is nothing new, but I still open it, a very bad habit of mine.

I attempt to remind myself what I need to do. First, I should probably wash the dishes. Never mind. I don't feel much like doing that; maybe I will do it when I get home from school. I know I am procrastinating, but I am just not in the mood to wash dishes. I am not feeling the "I want to do something good for the house" feeling, also known as the "manual labor" feeling. Maybe I should do some extra credit for class. I don't think so. That would take away from my time to surf the net. I know I am doing it again, but I have to take the time I have in the morning to do all the things I cannot do on the weekends.

My parents believe that I play too much. It is funny because they have had that thought for the past seven or eight years of my life. Play, as my parents say, includes watching television, playing video games (which do not even exist in my house), reading books for fun, talking to friends, drawing, listening to music, and doing anything apart from homework, eating, and sleeping.

I understand people need to study, but they have been trying to make textbook readings "fun" by removing everything normal children love. I gave my PS2 to my friend because I was sure if I kept it, the par-

ents would come up with some lame reason to take it away, like, "Oh, it is in a bag on the couch and it makes the room look messy, so we are going to take it from you and hide it even though we did not pay for it."

This has happened before, and I promise you, I have left out no details.

If I was feeling froggy, I might have said, "Don't you always say that you should not take things that are not yours? And yet you took my PS2." Then I would call them hypocrites and receive a burning slap; you would think the mark it left would stay there for life, but it would instead disappear after only a few minutes.

I wonder why people are offended when you call them hypocrites, or even when you tell them the truth. I believe everyone is a hypocrite. As humans, we just can't help it. We do it without thinking.

For instance, you could say that my mother is a super neat freak about every inch of her house apart from her own. I say this because her room is in constant turmoil, and she doesn't even share it with anyone. My father works abroad. But whenever I happen to have one shoe out of order or one book on the floor, she seems to think I am the untidiest person in the world.

I try to communicate with my mother, but each attempt leads to more arguments and misunderstandings. Even though I know it is useless trying have a good relationship with her, I cannot help it. My brothers and sisters have failed, but I always feel as if my mom needs someone to talk to. I feel sad for her because she is getting old, and as much as I tell myself I do not care about her, I cannot help but keep trying to

be kind and caring. Sometimes. I guess love does go pretty far.

Vmmm. The sound of the fan on my computer is always loud, but it seems louder in the morning. I assume this is because I am listening so hard for my mom's footsteps. I feel uneasy.

Then the feeling thunders in my heart and I am stricken with confusion. This is the state of pandemonium. My mind is clearing out the trash blocking me from thinking straight. My brain was thinking about too many useless things, much like a computer when it gets viruses. Because it's too busy taking care of the viruses, it can't operate as fast as it should. People do say the brain is one of the most complex machines.

I am quick to lose focus. My mind wanders everywhere and wonders about everything.

After I disarm the alarm system, I walk outside the house and just put my arms up. I look in the sky and stare. It is still dark gray, the entire sky as far as I can see. The moon is shaped like a cartoon representation of a crescent, a fluorescent bulb flashing through crescent-shaped paper.

I walk down the red brick stairs and onto the pathway leading to the place where the cars are parked. I cannot smell the weed killer or the pesticides that were sprayed on the lawn. The breeze blew it away. All I smell is the coming rainfall. The gentle wind seems to infiltrate my clothes and caress my body.

It lasts no more than seconds. I completely forget about most of the things I thought I needed to do. My

heart and mind are calm. I feel at one with my inner self. I wonder if this is how it feels to meditate.

I walk back inside the house. I feel like a new creature freshly spat out from the mouth of God. I grin. When I get inside, I go to the computer and take a good look at it.

My eyes do not want to look at it. I sit in the computer chair, but my body does not want to respond. I have lost my motivation to stay awake and talk trash online as I killed people in my favorite third-person shooter. I click on the icon for the game and, while it is loading, I cancel the program.

I open my music folder and click play all. As I listen to the music, my “I want to do something good for the house” feeling comes up. I forget about all the things my mother does that I hate and I think about all the things that my mother does that I love. I forget how restricted my life is and think about all the things that are good in my life. I guess you could call this . . . an epiphany. I just sit in the chair and listen to my music.

I watch the sky slowly become brighter. It’s around 7:00 by now. The bus will arrive in just over half an hour. I think, *Today could be a really good day.*

I go to wait at the front of my house in the visitors’ room for my bus. Grief washes over me for some reason. I don’t know how the thought comes up, but I wish that everyone could just be happy and live without worries. So many people are worse off than me. I know that this isn’t my fault, but I can’t help but feel as if I’ve done something for having a good material life.

I have food every day, a warm place to stay, and the opportunity for a good education. My mental life is decent, could be better, but what can I do about that?

I hear the bus in the distance. I see it from afar and start to put on my super annoyed face. Either the bus driver can't drive properly or the bus doesn't work properly. I open the door and walk to the street. The bus is here.

I walk in. I sleep. I get up, take my book bag, and get off.

Accept things for what they are. Enjoy the moment whenever it happens to run by. Forget about sadness. Let your mind flow with joy.

THE PETALS OF A ROSE

Rose Anderson

The Dog

IT ALL STARTED about a decade ago at the Durham County animal shelter. My parents went without me, since it was a school day and I wasn't about to miss school. They were on a mission to get a cat, though they didn't want a cat. I wanted the cat. I was still hung up on the last dog we had, Stella. I was still upset after her death and no other dog would do. But, as fate would have it, the cat area was being cleaned that day, so no one was to enter. They were there anyways so they thought they would take a look at the dogs.

There were two long hallways with many cages filled with dogs. The first hallway was the small dogs, with their sharp little yaps. My parents just skipped that hallway. Small dogs are a no go in my family. Then came the large dogs. They had loud, bellowing barks.

My new puppy was the only one not barking. She sat there and just looked at them as they passed her. She was gorgeous, from her dark brown snout and ears to her shiny tan coat with its black guard hairs. It was love at first sight, for all of us. The only thing was I had to come in and *approve* of this dog.

The wait felt like forever, the wait for the dog, that is. Finally, they brought the dog in to see us. The moment she saw me, she put her oversized paws on the bench that we were sitting on and licked my face like I had rubbed a steak on it. And that was that.

It took me a long time to adjust to the new dog because I was still upset about Stella. But that day changed my life forever. That day, that dog became my dog. Now, she is my Bubala, my Baby Girly, and my Betty Spaghetti. Her real name is Betty. That's what everyone else calls her and everyone loves her. Still, she is my Betty and my Betty alone. She comes with me to each of my parents' homes. Life is good with Betty in it.

Ocracoke

My favorite place to go is Ocracoke. The Cedar Island ferry is the worst part of the trip, though. I hate it. The blazing sun burning on your skin, the stupid drivers leaving their SUVs running while they sit in the air-conditioned cabins. Did you know it's illegal to leave your car running on a ferry? Their cabins smell of cigarettes and processed air.

Even though I hate being on boats, there is one perk: the seagulls. They are so funny. I love, love, love to throw chips and bread up into the air and watch the birds gracefully catch them. As I weather the passage I know that the ease and beauty of a natural paradise lies ahead.

You can tell when we are almost there because of these two smoke stacks sticking out of the water. Those smoke stacks are from a ship that sank a long time ago. The ferry starts to twist and turn to avoid the sand beds as we approach the place I've been waiting to visit for a while.

The docks are on Silver Lake. Silver Lake is like a cul-de-sac. It's manmade and it's got a few old burnt out shacks among some newer buildings. Nothing built over three stories high, though. When the ferry docks, all you can see is the ugliest part of the island. It has a North Carolina Ferry Service building and a get-away learning facility for teachers. It used to be a coast guard building, but they fixed it up and turned it into, well, a getaway. But if that's the worst the island has to offer, all the rest is all the better.

There is a long, winding road down through town and along the island: Highway 12. The island is Ocracoke, in the Outer Banks, OBX that is. It's about fourteen miles long and about five miles wide at most. Once you step off the boat you can literally feel the stress you had before just melt away. The island is special; you can feel it. It's a natural seashore. There are no buildings on any of the beaches. In fact, most of the island has no buildings on it at all. Also, there

is not a single commercial business on Ocracoke: no McDonalds, no Burger King, and no putt-putt golf. Not one.

Everything moves slower here. It's like they know that you need to slow down. There is even a sign as you get off the ferry that says, 'Slow down, you are already here.'

Riding bikes is a tradition when we get there. You can ride your bike everywhere and see the whole town in one day. There is something so rejuvenating about getting on your bike and floating through town, with the ocean breeze on your back offering relief from the sun. This may all seem boring to some, but there is always something new. Somewhere there has been a change: a new shop, new visitors, things that are familiar and welcoming yet give the place a slightly different feel.

This little island has so many different restaurants. It has Thai food, Italian, and a lot of seafood. My favorites are the seafood restaurants. Café Atlantic is my ultimate fave. I love, love, love their clams casino.

All in all, this island is wonderful: great food, great shops, great historic sites, and long, beautiful beaches. I'm glad that it's mainly locals here; they help maintain its simplicity. This place moves slowly, like a little creek. It relaxes you. That's why I love it. From the local shops, to the cool waters that slap Ocracoke shores. The sea breeze helps my lungs. Betty loves it, too, except she drinks the ocean water and it makes her sick. But besides that, it is my favorite place on earth.

That Day

On the morning of February 26, 2006, I awoke, ignorant of what had happened the night before. I got dressed and slowly and sleepily walked downstairs. As I entered the living room, I saw Dad sitting in his chair. When he saw me and said, "We need to talk," there was a look in his eyes. I couldn't figure out what it was exactly. It seemed like worry or stress. It was something.

When he told me that Mom was at her friend's and she was very upset, I knew what was going to happen next on the timeline. They were going to get divorced. He didn't think I understood and even if he did, he would never give me the specifics. I subconsciously knew that it was his fault. Dad and I never really got along well.

My dad and I are alike in many ways. We somehow, sometimes know what the other one is going to say. We sing the same song at the same time when we hear a word or two that reminds us. In some ways, we are too much alike. We both have this horrible anger. But there is a difference in our anger, and I don't drink to hide my feelings. I also admit that I have anger issues; he just glosses over them. He knows he has issues, but he pretends he doesn't. That's where the drinking comes in. All that anger spills out with the drunkenness. That is what caused this to happen. I knew it.

When he and I were done talking, I walked into my crafts room. I sat down at my desk and began pondering why this had happened and what was going to happen next. I was angry and sad and confused all at

once, not knowing which way to go, not knowing who to talk to. Then I remembered Kathryn.

Kathryn Avery was my best friend and still is. Up until I moved because of financial reasons in my family, we lived two houses apart. We've known each other since first grade. So I knew I could trust her with my feelings.

We've always made each other feel better, we've always make each other laugh, and when we laugh, we laugh hysterically. After I had spent hours playing at her house that day, I still hadn't told her what had happened because I completely forgot. Eventually, I had to go home. I didn't want to go, but I had to.

As I walked from yard to yard, I again began pondering how things would be with them divorced. I wondered, *What is going to happen after they separate? What is going to happen to me?* I walked slower and slower, not wanting to go home; the safe haven that once was is no longer. My feeling towards my dad had changed from love to anger and uneasiness.

I wanted my mommy, but not knowing where she was, I would have to turn to Betty. I was never really fond of Betty up until this point since I was still sad about Stella. I had even ignored her, but now she was going to help me get through this.

When I walked through the back door of our olive green house, I realized that Dad was outside on the hammock asleep. I didn't want to talk to him, not after what he had done. The whole house seemed wrong. It felt like I didn't live there; it felt like I was walking into some stranger's home. The kitchen was the way it had

always been, overstocked with food, but it seemed unfamiliar and cold. My room was the only one that was warm. On my bed lay a big, fluffy, down blanket and on top of that lay a big, fluffy furball named Betty. She looked at me with her big, brown eyes as if she understood. Her look beckoned me to come sit next to her and talk about it. I told her everything. Later, when my parents sent me to therapy, the therapist even said to them, "She doesn't need me. She's got Betty."

I stayed in my room with Betty the rest of that evening and fell asleep without dinner. My dad eventually came to say goodnight, and when he saw me asleep, he just kissed my forehead and turned out the lights.

Now, when I think about this day, I still feel the sadness and the anger, too. But then I look at where I am today, and I realize that if this messed up day, week, month, year, hadn't happened, I wouldn't be where I am now. I am now closer to my dad; I see him more than I did before the divorce. My schedule is complicated: every other weekend with Dad and weeks with Mom. My mom and I now live in a condo in Parkwood, no more than five minutes, by car, from Kathryn. I still have my baby Betty. And life . . . isn't as bad as I thought it would be.

Wow

The process of getting somewhere is not my thing. Sitting on a plane for a total of fifteen hours wasn't fun. In fact, it was frustrating. But when I

thought of Betty, everything became simple and easy. When we got off the plane, we took a trolley to a spot three blocks from the house we were to be staying in, and walked the rest of the way. Being in Amsterdam, though we were totally exhausted, was magnificent.

When walking or biking down a street in a country you've never been in, you have no clue what's going to happen next. My location at this point was somewhere in Amsterdam, near the Van Gogh Museum. The life-style in Amsterdam is the way I think I'd like to live: get up, eat, have coffee, then bike to work or wherever you are going. Life seems simpler there. It appears everyone has a roof over their head, there's not a lot of fancy cars or clothes, but people seem happy and light. Wonderful cafés are everywhere. The food in restaurants is okay, just different. I loved their fish. My favorite was the fresh herring sandwich with pickles and onions, served much like our street hotdogs.

Being in Holland, I realized I belonged here. It was the most wonderful place on earth. I felt more at home than I do in the U.S., not just in Amsterdam, but in Europe in general. If I were ever to move there, I would have to bring Betty, of course. She would love it. The dogs don't have to be on a leash, and she hates the leash. The dogs there are all well behaved, as is she.

The world is mine if I want it to be, and I will jump on any opportunity to go there again if it comes my way.

THIS IS A JOKE, RIGHT?

Marika Ball-Damberg

Not a shred of evidence exists in favor
of the idea that life is serious.

BRENDAN GILL

We live in a crazy world, and if you want to get through it with your body and soul even a little bit intact, you might as well be crazy yourself. It couldn't hurt. And it just might help.

KINKY FRIEDMAN, *KILL TWO BIRDS AND GET STONED*

Chapter 1

No, Groucho is not my real name.
I am breaking it in for a friend.

GROUCHO MARX

MAFREAKA. MATIFA. MARAFFE. Marere. The list goes on and on. No, it is not America. No, it is not Maria. It's Marika. Very simple. Probably the most nicknameable name in the world. It all started at church. Just me, a shrimpy little fourth grader, and my fellow churchgoers, Sam and Travis Bordley. We were play-

ing a game of “dodgeball.” This pretty much consisted of hitting Marika with the ball as hard as possible. At the time, these two geniuses thought it would be just fabulous to come up with a “better” name for me. They ended up with Mafreaka Bald-Hamburger. Perfect in their minds.

It has now practically become a requirement to have some sort of nickname for me. To say I have many would be a serious understatement. If I ever get called Marika, I guarantee it is by a teacher, someone who doesn’t know me, or a figure of authority. Even most of my friends’ parents have a nickname for me.

Sometimes, people even get bored with my nicknames. For instance, one of them, Matifa, went from Ma Teef Teef to Teefy to just plain Teef. So, adding to my regular nicknames, the list keeps growing. The circle never ends.

Pronunciation is perhaps the worst aspect of my name. For someone to pronounce my name correctly on the first try is completely unheard of. For adults, I just feel bad. In attendance, or different sorts of award ceremonies, my name usually comes out something like America Bull-Damberg.

My family’s names are Sarah, Rich, and Hannah—not one of them abnormal or unusual—and then there’s Marika. I am the lucky one who got the strange, random name. On Christmas cards, whose name gets spelled wrong? Marika. On the letters from school, or the doctor, whose name gets spelled wrong? Marika. My personal favorites are on automated voice messages. I’ve heard everything from Jariyka to Matikee. Quite amusing.

By definition, Marika (a variant of Mary) means “star of the sea.” In another definition, it means “sea of bitterness.” Now we’re talking. Another adds “uncertain” to the list of meanings. So, my name means “star of the bitter uncertain sea.” Well, fabulous. That’s a happy little definition now, isn’t it?

I myself am very into pop culture. But when looking to see if any famous people share the same name as me, the closest I could find was an obscure body builder. Not even one person I know has the same name as I do. That can be a downer because sometimes I don’t even have a name in people’s minds; I am just “that girl with the weird name.” But then again, it also has a positive side. Weird name, weird girl. Perfect fit.

I often complain about how many nicknames I have, and it’s true, sometimes it can get a little hectic being given ten new nicknames a day. But I have grown used to it, and I love having nicknames. I think they are markers of true friendship; you can’t let just anyone call you “Mafreaka.” I know I have good friends when I hear all my nicknames. It is also entertaining to see how creative people will get. Some of my nicknames are very thought out to match my personality. Now that’s what I call friendship.

When sitting down and thinking about it, I realize that I really love my name. I wouldn’t have any other one. It individualizes me and makes me different from the crowd. I am always bitter about it, but truly, down under all that, I love being the star of the sea of bitter uncertainty!

Chapter 2

All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered; the point is to discover them.

GALILEO GALILEI

It was just a typical Saturday, me in the backseat with my hair blowing out the car window. My dad was taking me to a friend's house, and I was greatly enjoying the breeze.

"Hey, need some water?" my dad asked.

"Sure," I replied, annoyed that my movie moment had been interrupted. When he handed a water bottle back to me the inevitable truth hit me. I gasped in shock. So that's what the holder was for! You are supposed to put your cup in it! With all kidding aside, my entire life I had always eyed that strange circular holder, curious as to what it was. Just in that moment it struck me. I was in utter disbelief that I could have been so oblivious. Astounded, I set the cup down into it and, of course, perfect fit. I sighed in awe. I figured telling my dad would not be the brightest idea, seeing as he already thought I was weird enough as it is. No, I would keep this amazing discovery to myself. I was so excited, even if I was the last person in the world to recognize this small invention!

Chapter 3

Hey, has anybody told you that you look like her?

Summers in Durham are unbearably hot. My mom, sister, and I all have huge amounts of thick, brown, curly hair. Heat and long, thick hair do not mesh well. I had put up with it for thirteen summers, and finally, when I turned fourteen, I decided I couldn't do it any more. The summer was just too hot. I had reached my limit.

I walked into the Garden Salon, ready for a new do. I was going for a bob, which I had never had before. My hairstylist, Kelly, put my hair up in two pig tails and chopped them both off. I could already feel a huge weight gone. *Oh good Lord, that is short!* I thought as I saw my reflection in the mirror. It was just below my chin, pin straight. Pretty much the opposite of what it had been when I walked in.

I loved it, it was amazing. I felt so much better. Only one problem: I now looked like the twin of teen pop sensation Selena Gomez. She had recently gotten her hair cut the same way. Regardless, I proceeded to go home and post pictures on Facebook. Gotta show off that new do, of course. And, guess what? Every single comment had to do with Selena. "Hey, wow you look like Selena!" and "Well hey there, Ms. Gomez!" were the general responses. Great.

Now, I had this really cool hair cut that I really loved and everyone thought I had modeled my hair after some tween actress. Let's just say that wasn't

exactly what I was going for. So now basically, I am the uncertain sea of bitterness that looks like Selena Gomez. Wow, dream come true.

Chapter 4

I personally think we developed language
because of our deep need to complain.

LILY TOMLIN

I have come up with this theory: these random things that always happen are only happening to me. I get to be the lucky one with the crazy life. Now, I'm not talking like I have all these traumatic, crazy events happening to me. No, my life is pretty normal. Only, odds are it is the most random one on this planet.

First, there are my friends. I love them to death, but you could not find a weirder group of people if you searched the world. For instance, a few of my friends and I are convinced we are T-Rexes. I don't even know how it got to be that way, but we all say we are T-Rexes. Plus, we have strange obsession with poop bags. Don't ask. Another one of my friends and I call each other Shanquiqui and Zanquiqui. As far as how we came up with these names, who knows? Oh, and we can't forget that I am supposedly married to another one of my friends, and our names are Spudilation and Bubkus. As you can see, we are not exactly what you would call a "normal" group of people.

Going out with friends is always an interesting experience that usually ends with me being eternally

embarrassed. We all get so crazy, especially one buddy. Her name is Davia. Everywhere we go, people look at us like we are the strangest human beings they have ever seen, which could very well be the case. We are very loud and we like to do extremely random things that “normal” people don’t do. We often get overly excited and, in turn, start shouting. That is where the eternal embarrassment kicks in. But, you know, after this happens so often, you tend to get used to the stares.

Then there is my family. Where to start? First up, there is my sister Hannah. I would say a good percentage of my weird qualities are her fault. I have grown up around her wild, loud self for my whole life, so there is really no hope for my future normalcy. The damage is done. You might be thinking, *Oh, come on; all girls think their sisters are weird*. But no, this is on a whole different level. Does your sister hiss? Does she call you Warila? Does she sing to you in a made-up accent? Does she turn everything into a terribly off-pitch song? Hannah does, constantly. I have grown used to thinking that it is a normal occurrence for her to sing to me while I do my homework. I do not really notice anymore. I only realize how strange she is when someone else (usually a freaked out friend) points it out.

Next, we have my dad’s side of the family. Saying that family get-togethers are a little insane would be an understatement. It is utter madness. I love it. My grandma is a woman who knows what she wants and gets it. She lived in the Philippines and speaks fluent Spanish. My favorite times with her are when she gets angry. It’s not that I like the fact that she gets angry, but

rather how she responds. She either goes off on a rant in Spanish, or simply replies “Bah!” That has become a big hit in our family, and now whenever anyone gets mad, we all say “Bah!”

My dad is where both my sister and I got our peculiar sense of humor. He is one strange guy, but you gotta love it. He will take anything and somehow turn it in to a math problem. We always have to watch what we say, or else we will have a very difficult story problem on our hands. And it is impossible to get an answer from him. When you ask him a question, he waits a good ten minutes and only then graces you with a response.

The award for at least attempting to be normal goes to my mom’s side of the family. They are civilized, organized people. Always sweet as can be. Every once in a while, a little peek of their inner craziness will come out, but most of the time they are decently sane. The only real crazy one is my Aunt Virginia. I always look forward to spending time with her. She is definitely the rebel of the family and proud of it. It has always been that way, so everyone has gotten used to it. I like whenever Aunt Virginia comes over because she brings out that crazy side of everyone, even if only a bit.

Lastly, there is me. I would say I do my fair share of talking. I won most talkative girl in the sixth grade, one of my most prized achievements. I have trouble making friends with introverts, only because I am such an extrovert. I take barely anything seriously, unless I am forced to. I find jokes in everything, and that shows through whatever I do. I am a very sarcastic person,

which can be problematic at times. I am one of those people who believe literally anything can happen. For instance, when I tell people I want to be famous or be in the film industry when I grow up, everyone says, "Set realistic goals for yourself." But I think, how is that vital? I believe I can get there.

I am a very optimistic person. I don't like being friends with negative people; it is just too hard. I think I have such a random, crazy life because it matches my personality. I make it that way, and I absolutely love it. I mean what's not to like? You gotta keep things fresh and new, and what better way to do it?

Yes, my life is crazy. Yes, it's jam-packed. Yes, I have the weirdest friends and family in the world. And yes, I love every minute of it.

Chapter 5

There is nothing more beautiful than sarcasm.

ANONYMOUS

As I am sure you have come to realize, I have a bit of a sarcastic side. That is just me, like it or not. For my entire life, I have had an uncanny sense of humor. It is one that people never really understand. I find that even my closest friends really don't get my personality; they have just come to accept my strange ways. All of my heroes are comedians, and I will always choose a funny movie over a sad one. I have tried to tone it down, to be a quiet person, but it fails time and time again. All that trying has taught me that you have to

just accept who you are and embrace it. You can't be someone you're not for your whole life or you will go crazy! Now I am not going to get all sappy, I hate when stories do that. But I just wanted to give a little background on why my humor is as it is.

Conclusion

A conclusion is simply the place where someone got tired of thinking.

ANONYMOUS

Congratulations, you have now successfully made it through ten pages of pure sarcasm. A bunch of stories with no point, stuffed to the brim with my sarcastic outlook. I hope you enjoyed my ranting. Whenever I write another random memoir that most likely only about .00000001% of the population will have any interest in reading, I will let you know. Thank you for choosing Marika Ball-Damberg's memoir, please come again!

JUST A COUPLE SPIKES SHORT OF A PORCUPINE

Sarah Bernacki

This memoir is dedicated to anybody who has ever had an odd thought, eaten a bowl of cereal, had a best friend, or been scared of the dark.

The Day of Sorrow

THE DISMAL GRAY clouds above my head created an aura seemingly composed of authority and power, and yet so fragile, so delicate that it seemed like the intake of a single breath could shatter it into a trillion pieces, and there would be nothing like it ever again. I sat out on my concrete porch, scared to breathe.

For some reason, I can always sense when there's going to be rain, and I always sit out on the front porch, waiting for it. Nothing was special about this day. I sat. The rain came soon and I watched as it drenched the world. The smell of rain is intoxicating to my senses, and I let it pour through my soul as I closed my eyes

and just listened. I heard a small bird fluttering in a tree. I heard squirrels running over bark mulch, trying to escape into the dry. I heard the rain as it dripped off the rose bushes and formed small puddles of liquid crystal on my front walk.

The ear-splitting shriek of a police siren suddenly penetrated my consciousness and wrenched me from the depths of my mind, much like one would jerk a fish from its pond. I opened my eyes and sighed, slightly miffed that my peace had been disrupted. I heard the siren come closer and closer to my street and then fade away into the distance.

Sighing again, I got up and walked down the brick steps onto the walkway. I paced to the middle and stopped. I looked upward until everything was white-grey, and let the rain splatter my face. I could not, however, return to my peaceful state of mind. The police siren had disturbed me, and that had got me thinking. How, when the world was so at peace, so beautiful, and everything seeming to be alright—if only for a moment—could horrible acts be committed? Who in their right mind would want to destroy such a perfect day?

This train of thought led up to one very important question: Why were humans put on this earth? You’re probably thinking, “Oh, what a generic question to ask. Humans were put on this earth because . . .” Blah, blah, blah, and give me some scientific definition. No. That’s not what I mean. What I mean is why were humans put on this earth if all we do is destroy things?

I looked at my house, where trees undoubtedly stood before it was erected. I glanced around at my

neighbors' houses, where trees also used to stand. I began to think back (not long ago, in fact) to when the construction companies started clear-cutting the abundant forest that surrounded my neighborhood for about three miles down the road. I counted all the way up to six new housing developments within a one mile radius of my house, and another on the way. Not to mention all the apartments and business complexes. I remember being so furious when they started clear-cutting that I seriously contemplated sabotaging the machines as they sat alone at the construction sites in the night.

I laughed a little at myself, realizing that I'd never have to guts to actually do anything like that. This led me to another realization: Humans are cowards. So many of us voice plans of grandeur and rebellion, but so few of us actually carry them out. That's why we have dictators. Everybody is too spineless to stand up to the one in power, and the dreams of those who aren't scared are crushed by the ones who are.

The world to me suddenly seemed to be sliding down a hole into a giant black abyss, digging its bloody fingernails into slick stone walls in a futile attempt to stay away from the inevitable darkness. This was a battle, and the world was losing. We were all going to die because of ourselves. Because of our own unwillingness to fix what we have destroyed or even to admit that anything is wrong in the first place.

And that was all mine. That was the world I was growing up in. That was the world I and every other child was going to inherit someday. It made me dis-

gusted to be a part of it. I glanced around again at all the beautiful rain-covered flowers and well-kept lawns and couldn't feel anything but disgust. Not even the rain could rid me of it. Now every time I see a "Coming soon!" sign, I can't help but finish the advertisement in my head:

"Coming soon: the end of the world!"

Bunnies and Schizophrenia

"And here we go again, with all the things we said and—"

"Shut up! Can you just shut up for once? This is all your fault anyways."

"Meanie! Fine. I guess I'll stop singing. So, what should we start with?"

"Psht. I don't know. How about Geometry? That's usually not hard."

"How did it get to be 12:47 and we haven't even started our homework! Gah!"

"I already told you, it's your fault. You sat there reading and singing and doing everything but our homework."

"But I haaaaate homework. It makes me so tired. And it has no point. We do all this at school! Why should we have to—"

"Shut up! And still you procrastinate, you lazy! And look, even now you're procrastinating, talking to yourself all alone in your room. Just because your personalities don't get along, it does not mean you get to voice all their arguments out loud!"

"Well why not? If my 'childish' personality wants to fight with my 'responsible high school' personality, then why can't it?"

"Look, just whatever, okay? Just open that history book and start reading before we pass out, goddamnit!" And then I start my homework.

My various moods often come to life via spoken words. Mom says there's nothing wrong with me, so I guess warring with yourself is normal. This sometimes motivates me, depending on which mood is winning. It's really hard not to fall asleep if Childish wins, which is unfortunately a lot of the time when it's so late at night. Right now I believe it's 2:47 a.m. I've become nocturnal. Like a bunny.

What? Did she just say bunnies are nocturnal? What kind of mental child is this? But I only laugh at your ignorance. And here's why: I was sitting on my porch at some ungodly hour, as I often do, and guess what I saw? No, not that! Good God! Bunnies! I saw bunnies! Two of them, just running around the rose bushes in my front yard. They were so unexpected that I originally thought they were rabid squirrels or monsters of some sort.

"Hi bunnies!" I said, and waved at them. They stopped dashing about for a moment and poked their little pink noses in my direction, sniffing the air as they did so. I waved again. After seeing I wasn't any threat to them, they continued to romp and chase each other.

I've encountered the cute little beasties a number of times, and thus, have come to the conclusion that bunnies are nocturnal. That or they just

love to come see me. Yeah, I'm pretty sure it's the first one.

Eh? Tom!

“—and after you chloroform him, don’t forget to tie him up good,” Erica said with excitement in her voice. “Oh! And be sure to put a blanket over him after you throw him in the backseat, so he isn’t easily seen by a passing car.”

I laughed. “Def, def. We don’t want the cops to catch me like last time, right? I barely got away.”

“Exactly,” Erica said. We both burst into fits of laughter and immediately started coughing up our various guts and whatnot. We were both sick and thus, talking on the phone as we often do. We had come up with another half-realistic scheme to kidnap Erica’s permanent obsession, Tom Kaulitz, the guitar player for international pop music sensation, Tokio Hotel. I say permanent because she’s been obsessed with him for three years now, and it’s only getting worse. I kick myself often because I was the one who first introduced her to their music and, by association, their guitar player. And like I said, she hasn’t shut up about him for three years.

“Oh, and Sarah?”

“Yeah?”

“You have to remember to tell everyone aboard the ship they have the day off, except the ones who drive it, ‘kay?”

I laughed again. "It's a warship, my friend. But I'll see what I can do." Our plan this time was for me to kidnap Tom via chloroform over the mouth (because I magically know where he is at all times apparently), shove him in the back of my car, then drive him to the marina and throw him on my ship (because I apparently joined the Navy and got a ship). Once he was onboard, the ship would sail to the middle of the Arctic ocean (no escape for Tom), and Erica and Tom would be married on the deck of the ship (I had bribed a priest to marry a very willing person to a very unwilling person).

So that was the scheme of the day, and we spent all of four minutes making it up. This was actually a very mild plan compared to what usually comes out of our collaborative oven of creativity. I usually have to drive a suspicious-looking black van, fly a helicopter with a large tub of blue paint attached, crash a motorcycle into a wedding, and use a whole heck of a lot more chloroform. Sometimes, I even get to blow stuff up. For some reason, I always end up doing the dirty work in these plans.

Why do we worship famous people? Unhealthily at times, even. They're just like us normal people, right? The only thing that sets them apart is that they have large amounts of money, look insanely beautiful all the time, and usually have a talent worthy of making them famous in the first place. Okay, so maybe they're famous for a reason, but I still don't understand this attraction that everybody (including me) seems to have to entertainers. Nobody seems to be able to explain it to me, either.

Well, maybe I can ask Tom when I do kidnap him, and I'll eventually have to, if for no other reason than to shut Erica up. And then I'll come find you. No, not your imaginary friend. You. Because, hey, guess what? Technically, you knew I was going to kidnap him. You say, "What? I didn't know anything!" Ah, but you just read it, didn't you? "Darn it," you say. We'll just have to hope that Erica never drives me insane, though she probably will soon. Just remember, when you see a crazy teenage girl on the news for attempted kidnapping, that will most likely be me. And no, that's not your imaginary friend I'll be waving at. It'll be you.

Transgender Brick

"Hey, you're in my way."

"Psht, whatcha gonna do about it?"

"I have a brick in my locker. We could take this outside if you like."

"Nah, nah. Gotta get to class."

"Mmhmm, me too."

"See ya."

Yeah, I did actually have a brick in my locker. But this wasn't any ordinary brick, mind you. This was a Transgender Brick!

Now I know what you're thinking: WTH? Right? Well, allow me to explain.

My best friend Dorenza and I shared a locker in eighth grade. I can't remember why, but one day I decided to bring a brick to school. It was a very old brick, stand-

ing about two inches high with six holes in the top so you could see all the way to the other side. It had no straight edges at all. While showing Dorenza the newest addition to our locker, she said, "It's very dirty on one side."

"Why so it is," I said, and rotated Transgender Brick so I could see the side she was talking about. It was mossy and green.

"And it's really smooth and clean on this side," Dorenza said.

I rotated it again. I laughed. "It is, it is. Almost like a masculine side and a feminine side." We paused and looked at each other. Thus the concept of Transgender Brick was born. The days to follow would be filled with, "Hey did you switch Transgender Brick yet?" "Yup, yup, I did! I think he's on his feminine side today!" and so on and so forth.

Currently, Transgender Brick sits on my dresser, staring out a window holding so many memories he should've exploded by now. Maybe I'll find him in my attic years from now, and he'll become a memento of the epicness that was eighth grade at Kestrel Heights School. Either that, or I'll finally be put away for becoming extremely excited by an old dust-covered brick in my attic. "We're just going to give Mommy her meds now. Go back to sleep, children."

Three Cheers for Identity Crisis

It was raining. Normally, I would be outside playing in it, but I was sleepy, and my mom had asked me

to go through my clothes and sort out all the ones I didn't want for Goodwill. I sighed, got up, and started to go through my dresser lazily. *Let's see, what do I not wear?* I pulled out shirt after shirt, sorting them each in turn.

I did this for about ten minutes before it dawned on me: I don't like any of these clothes. Do I wear them? Yes. Do I like any of them? No. Everything was either Abercrombie or Hollister, save a pair or two of jeans I had from Target. Come to think of it, I only bought clothes from those stores when I was with friends who shopped at those stores. And come to think of it again, when do I ever listen to the music they listen to, except when I'm with them? Or wear my hair like they do? Or talk like they do? What was going on? I don't even like these things. Subliminal peer pressure, I guess.

That day I threw out all my clothes (except for a select few things), deleted all the songs I didn't like on my iTunes (basically all of them), and drifted into a state of limbo, in which I began my first identity crisis.

Overactive Imagination

My mother and I were having a conversation. I can't remember what I said, or even what we were talking about. All I remember is that it was very late at night and I had more sugar than any child should have ingested in a week.

"...and humans weren't meant to walk upright," my mother said.

Instantly, an outrageous image came to mind: a humanesque beastie gremlin thing, crouched down like a monkey, walking on its fists, with grey, dirty skin and scant, stringy hair. Its beady, black eyes bored into my skull, while its bony, clawed, disgustingly long-fingered hand reached out towards me. It hissed slightly, and I saw that it had low-cut, sharp, jagged teeth and a long, snake-like tongue. It drooled a little.

My mind had created this image in about half a second and I wanted nothing more than for it to disappear even faster. I screamed in my mind, but on the outside I was just staring at a place on the carpet, where I had imagined it to be.

"Well, I'm going to bed now. You should too, Sarah."

"Mmhmm," I said, still staring horribly at the spot in front of me. I heard my mother's footsteps fade up the stairs and I was immediately paralyzed. That thing wasn't there, but my mind had created a presence for it. I had felt it.

I put my back up against a wall, so I knew it wasn't behind me. I dashed out of my living room and into the small corridor that led to my stairs. I thoughtlessly glanced in the hallway mirror like I always do. *No! it could be in the reflection! Right behind you!* Panic set thorough my body. The adrenaline made me feel as though I was going to explode all my guts out of the top of my head. This terrible, exhilarating feeling only increased as I dashed by a just-open closet door and leaped onto the stairs. I had imagined a grey-skinned, taloned hand reaching out and grabbing my ankle, dragging me into the dark, interminable abyss, before gutting me and

eating out my entrails while I screamed, not because my entrails were being torn from me, but because I had to watch the gremlin creature devour them.

I dashed up the stairs and into the hallway that led to my room. However, to get to my room, I had to pass the pitch black bathroom with the completely open door. Then, I had to get to my door, open it, and get in before anything could grab me. With all this rushing through my mind so hyper-fast because of the sugar, you could barely tell I'd paused to consider it. I couldn't even grab hold of the door handle before my body smacked into the wooden barrier, the only thing blocking my way between the dimension of terror and my sanctuary. In the third of a second it took me to get the door open, it felt like my adrenaline had shot my guts out my head.

I could feel filthy little monkey-gremlins running their evil little fingernails over my flesh and down my neck and spine. I swear I even felt something grab my ankle. In my mind's eye I saw scores of them congregating behind me, in the small, narrow hallway. Dropping off the ceiling, appearing out of every dark corner and open doorway (all three of them), creeping out of the floor, dripping down the walls. I could hear them hissing as they all slowly crept towards me, drooling and flicking their tongues as if they could already taste my delicious red blood.

I crawled over my debris-covered floor and hoisted myself onto the low mattress, immediately pulling the covers over my head and pushing myself as flat

against the wall as I could. I was not in the mood to have my entrails forcibly removed from my body. I knew they couldn't get me in my room, but my quilt was extra security. If I couldn't see them, they couldn't see me.

I suddenly felt too impermanent. I felt as if I'd become a leaf that had just fallen from the tree of life, and was being swept away on an unfamiliar current of wind into the unknown. I felt as if I could just be plucked from the earth, and no one would notice. I felt small and insignificant. I realized that I probably was. Even if the gremlins had gotten me, the sun would still rise tomorrow. I suddenly felt so lost, so detached. I was nothing more than a leaf, blowing in the ever-changing wind of the universe. I fell asleep that night squeezing my pillow to death (or holding on for dear life) and praying to God, any god, that my gremlins wouldn't devour me in my dreams that night.

THE SUNNY SIDE OF CHILDHOOD

Sam Bordley

Ukulele

“HEY, HAYDEN.”

“Yeah?”

“What the heck is this?”

“Oh, that’s a ukulele.”

This conversation was held about four months ago, and it completely changed my life. Playing ukulele is one of the most invigorating things I do. I always look forward to playing it when I get home from school. I have no real teacher. I learn from ukulele tabs, friends, YouTube, and improvisation. I think of a song I really like, then pull it up on YouTube and learn to play from that. I can play about fifteen songs, but my favorite is “I’m Yours” by Jason Marz. This is the song I chose to perform at my camp talent show with my friend Sarah.

That night I had butterflies in my stomach. They called out our act and we walked up on stage in front

of three hundred expectant peers, their shining faces gazing up at me. I felt like I was on my way to the guillotine, playing a song I'd learned the day before. I felt my heart beating against my chest and that sinking feeling in my stomach. I'd never been that nervous.

We sat down, waved to the audience, and started to play. Sarah was on guitar and I was on my ukulele. It was a mind blowing combination, and soon everyone was singing along. I was super stoked about the performance, and I couldn't wait to get back out on the stage.

The opportunity came two months later. My family and I were at the music festival my uncle holds every year.

"Where is my nephew Sam?" my uncle called into the microphone when the band had finished.

Everyone turned to look at me sitting in the audience with my ukulele. My uncle asked me to come up on stage. I went up and got a full view of the two hundred people watching me. I played by myself "Breakdown" by Jack Johnson and "Don't Worry be Happy" by Bobby McFerrin.

The band that played before me came out, and together with my uncle, we played "Wagon Wheel" by Old Crow Medicine Show. With three guitars, one ukulele, a violin, and a cello, the sound was amazing. After the song, I enjoyed the thunderous applause of the crowd and left the stage content.

I used to have a deathly fear of talking and performing in front of crowds, but now the fear is replaced by a craving for that churning feeling in my belly.

Now, I'm getting into harder songs and riffs and loving every moment. I can play almost any song I set my mind to. Ukulele is a great thing because it's so easy to express your personality through the songs you like. Playing the ukulele connects me to the beach lifestyle, which suits my personality. When it gets cold and ugly here in Durham, I have my own piece of the beach in my arms.

Guatemala

I was walking towards a huge airplane. An awful feeling was rising in my chest, a mix of sorrow and loneliness that I couldn't shake. For some reason, I kept walking to the aircraft. My palms were sweaty. I had my suitcase in my hand and my traveling backpack on my shoulders. I was leaving.

I woke up, expecting to see an airplane. After a few seconds of disorientation, I realized I was at home, in my bed. It was around two in the morning. At seven o'clock, my family (me, my older brother Travis, my older sister Eliza, my mom and my dad) left the house. Coming with us was the Skillern family. They had a ten-year-old and a thirteen-year-old, Robin and Zan. I was very nervous; I was leaving America for the first time.

When we all arrived in Guatemala City it was unbearably humid. We took a bus to a lake called Abilene. It was surrounded by volcanoes that billowed smoke throughout the day; the lake, over a thousand feet deep, was filled with crocodiles. We stayed in a

small hut, exploring the small villages around the lake for three days.

From Lake Abilene we drove to the dense jungles on the coast. We stayed in another small hut and every day we swam in rivers, played with monkeys, and found tarantulas. The tarantulas were everywhere: in the rooms, the courtyards, and anywhere else you could think of.

Once, were walking around in the jungle. We came into a clearing and saw the "Grand Jaguar Paw," a Mayan ruin over three hundred feet tall. We weren't allowed to climb in that ruin because it was sacred. However, there were many surrounding ruins that we were allowed to explore.

After more than a week in the jungle we left for a coastal town. We stayed with a lady my parents knew, and we went to a Guatemalan school. The rest of the kids and I often left class to go play soccer in the streets. The town wasn't very safe; we were not allowed to go down some streets because we were told gangs would kidnap us. But it was fun to swim in the lakes and walk through the markets.

After another week, we packed our bags and got on a small plane to Belize. From the airport we took a boat over to a small island called Kea Kalker, a post-card island with clear blue water full of brightly colored fish. We stayed in a hut once again. We would wake up early every morning, go out to the dock, and swim with the fish until the barracuda came. They were scary, with huge teeth and looming silver bodies. But we got used to them eventually, and soon we were

swimming side by side with the local Rastafarian kids. We would go out at night to fish in deep waters, looking for barracuda and sting rays.

One day, we went snorkeling. We went out to a reef on a small boat, guided by a man with five foot dreadlocks. One spot was infested with sharks and sting rays. The guide told us that if we would stay calm, they would stay calm. It worked well; we swam with the sharks and rays for a long time, occasionally feeding them. We swam until the guide spotted an electric eel about thirty feet below. They were known to attack and were very territorial. Then, we got out of the water.

Snowboarding Trip Yeah!

I grew up in Durham, but my second home is in the mountains. The old house belongs to my uncle, and I absolutely love it there. It's peaceful and beautiful out in the Appalachians.

I sit in the cold thinking about nothing in particular. At first, the flakes are small and flimsy, but soon they are falling fast and thick. Inside the cabin, it's small but cozy. There is almost always a huge fire burning and crackling in the stone fireplace. Clothes are scattered around, draped over chairs and heaters.

This time, there are seven kids lounging around: me, Zan, Robin, Harris, Figgy, Neil, and Robbie, all packed into the cabin for our "Annual Snowboarding Trip Yeah!" That is what the trip is always referred to.

We are all in pajamas, talking fervently. We are planning what to do tonight, tomorrow, and the next two days.

“Let’s go sledding down the Bald!” suggested Harris.

“No, let’s sled down Turkey Run!” said Zan.

After much fighting, throwing of Poptarts, and wrestling, we decided to take a midnight hike to the top of the mountain and sled down.

“I don’t know man, this looks really steep.”

“Don’t be a wimp, dude!”

“I don’t want to die.”

“Fine, then find your way back in the snow. . . in the dark.”

After that, we decided to venture down Turkey Run. We were catapulted into the air, flung into trees, and piled on top of each other. We returned that night, tired and bloody, but content.

On the trip, we went out in minus five degree weather to go snowboarding. We went through the woods, off jumps, and had a very good time.

We sledded down an even steeper slope and ended up ice skating on a frozen pond. It took almost all day to get back to the house because we often broke into snowball fights.

For the final day, there was so much snow on the ground, we couldn’t all ride in the car because the weight would be too much. We had to sit on our snowboards and ride down the entire mountain. We snowboarded for around nine hours that day, and had the time of our lives. On that last, perfect day, the sun came out.

WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A REAL PRINCESS

Maya Bryant

“MOMMY, I WANT to be a princess when I grow up!”

“Baby, you already are. You’re my princess.”

“No, a real princess with curly hair and a big dress . . . and a crown.”

Seven years later, I found myself at the Marriott in Winston-Salem standing on a Fourth of July-decorated stage with curly hair and a big dress. I clutched hands with the other top five finalists that had the same hopes and dreams I had. Then the emcee called out the fourth runner up, third runner up, second runner up, first runner up, and, “Your next Miss North Carolina Preteen is Maya Danielle Bryant!”

On Saturday, July 6, 2008, those words changed my life forever. As my hands covered my face and tears of happiness flushed down it, I almost dropped to the ground. The 2007 queen placed the crown that I had been dreaming of on my head and the banner over my strapless pink evening gown. She gave me a hug

and a high five and whispered in my ear, "Congrats, Maya. I knew you could do it!"

I took my first walk as Miss North Carolina Preteen. And after that came a year of so many exciting opportunities, never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine that something that spectacular would happen to me. I had been competing in pageants for six years, but no title had meant so much to me. After my years of hard work, it all paid off.

When my year began, and I was able to use my title as a platform to get more involved within my community. I was able to feed the less fortunate, and seeing the smiles of those families really made my face light up. It made me feel warm inside.

I was able to introduce Durham to our very first Hats Off for Cancer fundraiser. Alone, I raised over one hundred hats, and was able to personally donate the hats to the Ronald McDonald House in Winston-Salem and a local hospital, and take a tour of both locations. I participated in numerous festivals, parades, and walks for causes. I was able to cut the ribbon for the opening ceremony at the North Carolina State Fair and I was announced at a Durham City Council meeting.

I began to be very grateful for the life I had. I also met so many wonderful people, including Miss North Carolina 2008, Amanda Watson (who was such an inspiration); Miss North Carolina 2009, Katherine Southard; Miss America 2008, Kristen Haglund; Sydney the Kidney; Wool E. Bull; and many city and state officials.

As the reigning Miss North Carolina Preteen, I traveled all the way to Orlando, Florida, during

the week of Thanksgiving to compete against pre-teens from all across the country for the title of Miss American Preteen. It was such an honor to represent the wonderful state of North Carolina. Nationals was very different from the state competition. The hair was curlier, the dresses were bigger, and the competition was much tougher. Between competitions, I was able to spend time at the Disney parks with my family and new friends from across the U.S. I rode my favorite ride, the teapots, and my crown almost fell off my head. Then I had a delicious turkey leg while my brother got on Space Mountain.

Nationals week went by very fast, but as the years go by I will never forget that experience, especially the final day. It began with the final rehearsal for the opening number. The preteens that year were lucky to have the famous choreographer Mr. Carter Butler working with them. His dances were pretty tough, and it was taking everyone a while to get it, but Mr. Carter never gave up on us. After rehearsal was over, we all returned to our rooms to get ready for the final pageant, what we had all been working so hard for.

It seemed like the two hours we had to get ready took forever. I just kept waiting, and then finally 6:00 p.m. came. My mom walked me down to the dressing room and then fixed my hair and whispered in my ear, "Maya, I love you no matter what the outcome is. We all do. Good luck and remember to have fun. You have made it this far, so always remember you can do whatever you want in life as long as you set your mind to it."

She kissed me on the cheek and walked into the ballroom. All the preteens and I waited impatiently for the opening number, and when we heard the Jonas Brothers' "Start the Party," we ran on stage and began to dance. As the dance went on, we all began to have lots of fun with it. I glanced over at Mr. Carter sitting in the wing. He had this huge smile on his face, the biggest smile he had all week. Right then I knew I was a part of something great. After the opening number, we all went backstage to change into our evening gowns and get ready for the judges to take their final look at each one of us. It all came down to this!

As I walked on stage, I listened as the emcee said, "Contestant number 394 is Maya Danielle Bryant. Her favorite color is pink, her favorite food is french fries, and when she grows up she would like to be a Dallas Cowboys cheerleader and CEO of her own daycare center. That was contestant number 394, Maya Danielle Bryant."

That was it. I knew I did a great job. There was no reason why I shouldn't go home with a national title. I waited backstage for the rest of the national contestants to have their time in the spotlight, and then it was time to name the new Miss American Preteen, the girl who would represent the American Coed pageant system and all the girls across the country.

It was just like state. They called the fourth runner up, third runner up, second runner up, first runner up, and, "Your next Miss American Preteen is Raven Delk from California."

My name wasn't called. What could I have done wrong? I knew that I deserved that national title. I

mean, don't get me wrong, I became very close friends with Raven Delk that week of nationals and she definitely was well-deserving of the title, but right then I couldn't understand why she was more deserving than me.

After the crowning, I stepped off stage. My mom and the rest of my family were standing there, and I busted out into tears. They told me that they loved me and that I was always a winner in their eyes, and then someone tapped me on the shoulder. I quickly turned around and it was the 2007 North Carolina Preteen.

She told me not to cry. I was already a winner when I walked into the door because of the many friends I had gained, and let's not forget about my state title. She made me realize that nationals wasn't about getting the big national crown and the big trophy, but it was about making new friends and having a wonderful experience, which is of course the best prize anyone could walk out with. She said that I had inspired her without even knowing it, and to me, hearing that was better than any nationals title.

That night, as I walked out of the Hilton resort hotel with my state crown and banner on, my head up high, I knew that I was a winner.

After nationals, my year as Miss North Carolina Preteen went on, and every young lady I encountered was able to teach me a little more about myself. And I hope I was able to inspire each and every one of them. My year quickly came to an end; I never knew that a year could go by so fast. It was now time for the 2009 North Carolina state pageant. At the end of the week,

I would be part of making another lucky girl's dreams come true.

When the time came for me to take my final walk as Miss North Carolina Preteen, a rush of emotions swept through me. I was excited because some other lucky girl would get to start the wonderful year that I just finished, but I was also sad because I really didn't want my year to end. So as my farewell DVD played my voice-over and presented my pictures, I waved to the audience and walked across the stage. Tears flushed down my face just like they did one year before. As I turned to my right, coming on stage to hand me a gift was the 2007 North Carolina Preteen. She had inspired me so much that year and was there every step of the way.

That year was definitely the highlight of my fourteen years. It made me realize that there is so much more to life than MTV, texting, iPods, make up, hair, clothes, and boyfriends. Life is only what you choose to make it, and that year serving as Miss North Carolina Preteen has made me hungry for all life has to offer. It taught me that the sky is not the limit, because there are footprints on the moon. As I close this chapter in my life and continue reaching for the moon and writing my own life story, I will never forget the year when I became proof that hard work and dedication really do pay off, and dreams really can come true.

A DAY IN A LIFE

Jhonny Calderón

IT WAS A WARM AND BREEZY DAY. IT WAS THE PERFECT DAY TO GO OUTSIDE. THE SUN WAS SHINING, BUT NOT TOO HARD. IT WAS JUST THAT PERFECT TEMPERATURE THAT FEELS SO GOOD. YOU COULD SEE AND FEEL THE BREEZE. I WOULD WAKE UP EVERY TEN MINUTES, LOOK OUTSIDE, AND SAY, "A LITTLE BIT MORE, THEN I WILL GET UP." I KNEW THAT I WOULD SAY THAT, BUT MY BED FELT SO GOOD WITH ALL THE FLUFFY PILLOWS AND THE CLEAN, WHITE BLANKET THAT WAS SOFT LIKE A BABY'S SKIN.

MY HEAD WAS ON MY PILLOW DREAMING ABOUT HOW COOL IT WOULD BE IF I GREW UP AND BECAME SOMEONE IMPORTANT LIKE A LAWYER OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT. I BELIEVED THAT DREAM UNTIL MY UNCLE'S GIRLFRIEND SHOOK ME AND WOKE ME UP. SHE IS NOT USUALLY UGLY, ONLY WHEN YOU FIRST WAKE UP AND DON'T WANT TO SEE ANYBODY. I HAD GONE TO SLEEP REALLY LATE THE NIGHT BEFORE. I WANTED TO SLEEP TILL ONE.

SO SHE WAS SHAKING ME, AND I SAID, "QUÉ?"

At first I was pissed off. Then, she said, "*Tu tío dise que si vas a jugar con él.*"* I was really sleepy but I said yes to it anyway. She said that the game started in ten minutes and that I needed to get ready fast. I jumped out of my bed really fast, then went to brush my teeth. I do not remember if I ate before I left because it was quick. Then I remembered that I had to do something that afternoon. That did not matter right now; all that mattered was that I was going to play soccer with my uncle.

I got to the soccer field, and they were already playing. One of the guys told me to put on a uniform and get in the game. I was surprised that he told me that because I thought I was going to be a replacement. I threw my clothes on and put on all my soccer gear. The shorts were too big, and so was the shirt, but I was happy because I had jersey number ten. The number ten has a very special meaning for me, because two of my favorite players on my favorite teams, El Salvador and Barcelona, have ten as their number.

Nothing fit on me except the socks, but I got in the game as quickly as possible. I was playing right-middle, and I had to run up and down the field all the time. I am a pretty good runner but not the best. I had to try to pass balls for the outfielders to score. I tried to put some out there, but the guys up front were not that good at running or getting the ball.

My uncle told me to watch myself because these guys played dirty. I tried to watch myself, but some

*"Your uncle is asking if you want to go play with him."

you just can't dodge. I got slide attacked in my right leg and at the time it really did not hurt, so the ref did not give him anything. But my uncle did. My uncle came from the back and tackled him. He almost got a yellow card, but then the ref just told him to chill a little. My uncle was glad because he already had a yellow card, so he would have been thrown out of the game. Even though they were playing dirty, he just kept playing. Halftime was almost there and we almost had our first goal. We were close so many times, but could not get the ball in. When halftime arrived, I needed some water. We all went to get a drink, then waited for the ref to start the second half.

The second half came around and both teams decided that they wanted to play a clean game. Then the ref blew his whistle. We played a pretty good game from then on, but we were not expecting it when the other team scored. The defense was almost in the middle of the field when one of the guys threw the ball and we just could not get it. The a guy from the other team ran until he got it. He was a fast runner and had good skills. When he got to the goalkeeper, he looped it up in the air, and the goalkeeper jumped but could not block it. That was the goal of the game because no other goal was made. We were close, but not there. The ref announced that we had two more minutes in the game. We could not do anything in two minutes, but we tried.

We lost. I started to take some of my soccer stuff off and found out that I had two purple spots on my right leg. It hurt a little, but I would deal with that later.

As I walked toward my uncle, he said, "You play good for a little kid."

I felt proud of myself that day and will always remember it. Know that as I am writing about this, I cannot play on the school team, so it seems really cool that I can remember playing on a man's team.

MY CREATIVE WORLD

McKenzie Drake

McKenzie

MY PARENTS NAMED me as though I were born to be creative. It's an unusual spelling of an unusual name. It feels like a famous portrait, detailing every part of my life in the lines of the letters.

I was actually named after a girl up the street in my hometown. I have never met her, but was told that she had an older brother with the same name as mine. Likewise, a neighbor here in Durham decided that she liked the name McKenzie and thought I was a nice girl, so she went ahead and named her baby after me. I got to hold little McKenzie before she and her family moved away. I guess she will never really know me, just as I never knew the girl up the street.

When I write anything with a k in it, I tend to write it as a capital. It's just a habit of mine because of my first name. It just doesn't feel right to leave the k uncapital-

ized. Milk always seems to be written milK, Drake is usually DraKe, and think generally ends up as thinK. It's just a natural movement to my hands and brain.

My middle name comes from my great grandma, Elizabeth Beran. As with my first name, I never met the Elizabeth I was named after.

You could say I really like my last name. It reminds me of the creativity of my dad and my grandfather. With art running in my family, our house looks like a museum.

McKenzie Elizabeth Drake, a name that is personal to me. For the many things that other people have that I don't, I can always be happy that I am the only person with this name. I am glad that my parents put time and energy into naming me and my brother. My name is original and I am glad that it fits my personality perfectly. I wouldn't change my name, because I feel that it's a portrait of my life.

Iowa

I wish Iowa were my home state. The farmland, like green fur, covers miles of space, blowing in the cool, northern wind. Sometimes I think Iowa is the canvas of God, who uses trees, towns, flowers, and fields to make a beautiful picture. I feel that I am in this beautiful picture, sometimes. I live in a world that is not the cleanest or the most wonderful, but feel blessed to be here and will make simple changes to help life as we know it.

When I go to Iowa, I love to visit my grandparents' towns. My grandpa's town, Lenox, has fewer people than an average high school. On my grandpa's street, when you stand in the middle and look to the left and to the right, you can see cornfields between the houses. There is little traffic, and my family has pictures of roads with no cars going either way. You could lay in the middle of Main Street and you wouldn't be noticed for an hour. Some stores in the town have closed, and the pharmacy still sells twenty-five cent sodas made right in front of you.

Before she moved into her assisted living center, my great grandma had been living in the same farmhouse since she was twenty-three. I love the house and the land. Her house has an unusual scent, like old perfume and home cooking. There's a magnificent flower garden and cornfields all around.

I have been to her house every year for fourteen years, and it has never changed. My mom's aunt, Laura, is gutting it out to make it her home. The home is getting new plumbing (much needed) and a make-over for the walls, floor, and electrical system. Her house used to have cats running around it, with a new batch of kittens born each summer. Oh my, how I loved those little kittens climbing up my arms and down my legs with their little voices ringing in my ears.

My great grandma calls lunch "dinner," which confuses me a lot. She makes potato salad that cannot be trusted, lays out cheese that has gone bad a year and a half ago, and makes pudding that may have been in her cupboard too long. We call the water in her house

“vitamin water,” because it’s off color and tastes like minerals. Grandma has been drinking it for seventy-three years, though, and she’s still going.

My other set of grandparents lives in Orange City, a town much larger than Lenox. My mom and dad went to college in Orange City, which is where they met. Every year, I seem to get the same old tour around the city, looking at the homes where my dad lived and hearing the stories that go along with them.

While we are in Orange City, we usually have a dinner at my aunt and uncle’s house. They live a couple of blocks away from my grandparents’ home and have a house that was made by a person who knew what they wanted their home to look like. When we come into their home, there is always a feast because my grandma thinks we don’t get fed enough. Good food and hilarious stories fill the table.

My grandpa carves wood to make beautiful creations, and my great grandpa did the same thing. My grandma is a writer and writes amazing articles that sometimes appear in magazines. My uncle is a photographer. He has his very own darkroom in his house. It will be a fun trip this summer seeing him now that I’m taking photo at my high school.

Iowa is always a different story, and I will always love the land that looks like green fur.

Biking

With the stress of homework, tests, and people running through my brain, my bike is my personal therapist. On it, I can let my emotions out. My emotions go up and down like the hills in my neighborhood. The same old hill challenges me each time, because every time I ride up it, I want to go faster. Downhill is the same way, breaking the speed limit of twenty-five miles per hour.

I am proud that I learned to bike at a young age, or I would have lost out on this activity that makes me feel like every ride is a journey through life.

The Storm

Hearing the harsh wind make creaking noises in your house might be terrifying for some seven-year-olds, but it wasn't for me. As a little girl, I loved the rain dripping on my forehead. But this was different: it was a hurricane.

I remember sitting on the living room floor playing Monopoly with my brother, Michael, listening to my house talk to the wind. The tree in the front yard was bending toward the house like mother nature had just punched it in the face. If it snapped, I was ready to run.

Another Monopoly game passed, and I was getting upset because I lost, again. That's when my dad came in. He asked if we wanted to go outside because

the thunder had stopped. My brother immediately got up to enjoy the wind and the rain on his body, but I just stared at them.

Despite my initial reservations, it didn't take long before I was convinced to go outside. I wore my brother's extra large T-shirt and shorts. Feeling the rain hit my face with mother nature's tears was a bit scary at first. Then, seeing my brother run in the saturated grass getting mud all across his legs made me think that it might be fun.

After an hour of running in the wind and rain, I was soaking wet. I was cold and getting the shivers, so I went inside and changed my clothes. I hung my clothes up, came downstairs, and played another board game with my brother, and lost.

The Beach

Stepping out onto the squishy, wet sand going in between my toes delighted me. I loved watching the dark blue waves tickle the shore and listening to the shore talk back in its own hushed tone.

Most people go to the beach just to get tan or to surf, but my family's favorite thing to do is make sand creatures. My dad is really the artist, but my whole family helps. My brother makes a pile of sand, and I walk back and forth carrying water to pour on the sand so it's easier to sculpt. Mom walks up and down the beach collecting shells to use for the eyes, mouth, or toenails of the sculpture.

It takes a couple of long hours in the sun to make one of these creatures, but it is always worth it because the final product is amazing. While we make it, lots of people come by asking, "What is it?" or, "What is it going to be?" So I get used to giving them the same answers of, "It's a dragon," or, "It's a rabbit," or my favorite, "It's a giant foot." One of my favorite questions people ask while looking at this magnificent sculpture is, "Do you do this for a living?" My dad tells them he's a pastor, and the random people quickly end their conversations and walk away.

Every year we make five or six sculptures, each about four feet tall and long. They fill the beach. The sculptures look like they're part of a competition, and it's fun to see little kids be inspired and try to build some of their own.

One of the other traditions my family has at the beach is eating Swiss Rolls. It is pure junk food but surprisingly delectable. My brother and dad like sitting in beach chairs and watching the waves while they eat these treats.

Once, we went to the beach with our dog. The thing is, our dog is more sociable than our whole family put together. My dog enjoys sniffing someone's leg secretly from the back. When the person feels his breath, they look around and are scared to find a dog a mere centimeter from their body.

One time at the beach, my dad decided to go to a nearby McDonalds to get some lunch for my family. When he came back, I noticed that he was carrying a bag of canned food. I asked him what it was and he

said, "Alpo." I didn't know what Alpo was, but I saw a dog on the label. "I thought our dog was hungry, so I picked him up some Alpo."

My dog's face said, 'Oh my gosh, this is so good. Why don't they feed me this more often?!" I smiled and giggled that my dog was enjoying eating out, too.

Leaving the beach is always a bummer. We have so much fun enjoying the sunlight, the waves, and my family's fabulous traditions. We go for a final walk across the beach and take in as much clean oxygen as we can before the three hour car trip back to stress and the routine of life.

I realize that I was put on the earth to remember for the rest of my life the things that keep my relationship with family, friends, and art strong. My name has my life written between the lines.

HIGH POINTS, LOW POINTS

Jonathan Duggins

Alaska

IT WAS THE summer of fifth grade in 2005. My mom, dad, I, and ten of our closest cousins went to the Land of the Midnight Sun as they call it—Alaska. Of the three families, one family flew from Charlotte, another from Richmond, and we flew from Raleigh. We all met up in Minnesota. There we got to see everyone except our cousins from Richmond, whose flight had been canceled due to bad fuel. That meant that we and the Charlotte family had to wait for another flight. So we cruised around the airport trying to make the time seem shorter. We got a bite to eat somewhere, but soon wanted more. Once we all got to Fairbanks safely, we were so hungry, we had Italian in our hotel at 1:00 a.m., North Carolina time.

Our expedition to Alaska lasted two weeks and involved two parts: land and cruise. On the land portion

of our journey, we stopped in four locations to see the amazing views of Alaska: Fairbanks, where we started; Anchorage; Denali Wilderness Lodge; and Kenai Wilderness Lodge. We went from Fairbanks to Denali and Anchorage by train, and from there to Kenai by bus. The most glorious stop was Denali Wilderness Lodge. It is home to the largest mountain in North America, Mount McKinley, which travelers can only see ten percent of on a normal day. Yet the thirteen of us saw it in the clearest blue skies you would ever see. After that, the bus ride to Kenai was boring, like watching paint dry. It was about three hours long and involved a stop at a little zoo, which wasn't even fun.

From there, we went to the town of Wittier to get on the Coral Princess Cruise Boat for a seven-day cruise of the three cities in the Gulf of Alaska: Skagway, Juneau, and Ketchikan. In Skagway, we took a tour of the city in a yellow bus and saw a lumberjack show like the ones on television. Juneau is the capital of Alaska and can only be reached by boat or plane. There is no car transportation into the city, only around the city. In Juneau, we had smoked salmon for lunch with other cruisers.

That vacation was the most fun I ever had in my young childhood, and I can still hear the laughter and see the smiles of my family. Our waiter on the cruise was named Elvis, and each night he would pick his Priscilla from one of my cousins. That trip changed our family: now, our family is closer, and we see those cousins more often.

My Name

It was the beginning of a new life here at DSA. After my very first sixth grade science class, I headed into language arts. While I was sitting in the class, another Jonathan walked in—Jonathan Zimmerman. Ms. Suther, our language arts teacher, realized that two Jonathans in the same class might be confusing. That's when she came up with the nickname Duggins, which is my last name. I suppose it's not much of a nickname, which I find funny at times.

Whenever my dad comes to school and hears that name he thinks someone is talking to him, since he is used to the name from work. My dad's name is also Jonathan Duggins, so at home my nickname is JD. My full name is Jonathan Ross Duggins; my dad didn't want me to be a third, but at the same time he did want me to have the same initials as him. So, he picked the first name and my mom got to pick the middle name.

Normally, I tell teachers that my name is Jonathan, but occasionally I will tell them the nickname like I did this year with Ms. Garvoille. And last year for most of second semester, Mrs. Bugg called me Duggins. She caught on because the next period was coming in and they would say, "Hey, Duggins," and she kept wondering why they called me by my last name. Then I explained the whole story to her. When she comes back from her maternity leave, I am sure she will still call me Duggins.

To me, the name Duggins is perfectly fine. I think if you asked anybody who knows both of the Jonathans

in our grade they would say we are nothing alike. That makes me feel good because I don't think we are alike either. So thanks, Ms. Suther, for starting my nickname, Duggins.

Breast Cancer

I would like to dedicate this piece of my life to my loving mom and dad, my aunt Penny and uncle Jeff, my two cousins Jeffery and Alston, the Jarells, and the Hoopers.

In the spring of 2007, my mom felt a small lump in her breast. It was something she did not think was cancer because of its location next to her rib cage. She knew her annual appointment to see the gynecologist would be in August, so she waited until then to ask about it. My mom went to the doctor and was referred for her mammogram and ultrasound. After those tests were complete, she would have to have a biopsy.

Mom went to Raleigh Surgical Group, Incorporated for a consultation on a Friday in the middle of August, and another doctor was able to do the needle biopsy right then. The results were to come back on Tuesday or Wednesday of the next week.

On that following Tuesday, my mom called the office and she was told it was breast cancer. She had to have a MRI to make sure it was only that one lump in her right breast.

In order to remove the lump, she would have to have surgery. She had a surgical consultation and

the surgery was set for September 11. The procedure was a right breast lumpectomy with a sentinel lymph node biopsy. It would be on an outpatient basis, so she wouldn't have to stay in the hospital. The final results of the biopsy came back three days later.

The doctor at Raleigh Surgical referred my mom to the Rex Hematology Oncology Associates. The chemotherapy drug named andriamycin is very strong and can damage your heart, but my mom had a mega-scan and passed; she would take the drug. She needed four treatments of ACT which is andriamycin, cyclophosphosphamid, and taxotere. After she completed that set of chemo, she had four treatments of another type of Taxol, which made her a little drowsy and seem unlike herself.

After chemotherapy was completed, Mom went to Rex Radiation Oncology. He examined Mom and her record and figured that thirty-six treatments would be needed. The radiation process lasted five minutes, so my mom was spending more time driving to and from the treatment than actually being treated. She tells everyone that the radiation was just a high-powered X-ray.

During this whole cancer experience, the three families we had grown close with, my dad, and I came up with an idea to surprise my mom with a unique T-shirt quilt with everything we liked and did with each other sewn into it. It was hard for my dad and me because we knew the secret—we had the quilt and everyone would be there to surprise her with it—and we had to try to convince Mom to go out to dinner with

us at the meeting place, which happened to be one of her least favorite restaurants. She did not want to go; it almost came to the point where we were going to have to leave her and go alone. But we finally convinced her to come and we will never forget that day.

Later, over spring break in 2008, we went with the same family members that gave Mom the quilt to Walt Disney World to celebrate the end of the cancer experience. It was really fun to share the end of this chapter with our closest friends in Disney World.

The whole process that we went through has brought us together. She is a two year survivor and she is working on her third.

Outer Banks

What an experience the Outer Banks of North Carolina was: the crashing waves, the flying gulls, the Corolla Lighthouse, and the fun with family friends. During our week at the Outer Banks, we experienced many places and things, like the town of Duck, the Wright Brothers Memorial, and the odd Brew Thru. Before we even got to our rental house, we went to a restaurant called The Dunes. It was a great way to start the vacation.

Our house was in the town of Southern Shores. It was not on the beach, which I would have preferred, but there's always another time for that. The house had a pool, which was well endorsed, and a hot tub, which was a little hot, but fun.

On Monday, we went to the beach for a few hours. That sand was like coals on my feet. We went walking and boogie boarding. The water was not too rough, but it was icebox cold.

That night, it was my cousin Kelsey's birthday. She loves seafood, so we went to Awful Arthur's for her birthday. When we went into the gift shop at the restaurant, Amanda, who doesn't like seafood, and Melanie, who is a vegetarian, ironically both got T-shirts. The last night my cousins were there, we went to Rita's for the best Italian ice and custard I have ever had. The custard had a whipped cream consistency. It was amazing.

We went to Arthur's a second time with my friend Taylor's family on Thursday. I think they enjoyed it a lot more than our family, because they have been going there for so many years. The wait for Awful Arthur's was over an hour, so we decided to go to a pier across the street. We sat there, watching the waves crash and the fishermen catch fish.

What an experience. My first, and definitely not my last, trip to the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

THE THING ABOUT BEING MORMON

Joanna Ehrisman

Preface

I SHUFFLED INTO my room, eyelids aching with weight. I passed briefly by my book bag, considering putting the assortment of notebooks, papers, and other paraphernalia away. Then I simply let them drop to the floor as I decided it wasn't worth the effort.

Stumbling blindly forward, I felt my knee bump against the mattress. I let gravity pull my body onto the soft relief of my bed, too tired even to appreciate the lingering moment of free fall.

It had been a depressingly typical day. Depressing in a way that had less to do with its monotony, but more with the too familiar exhaustion that accompanied its end. Once again, the stack of requests, necessities, and common courtesies had piled themselves high on my back.

And so I found myself just lying there in my exhausted stupor, too tired to change out of my jeans, too

tired to reach out my arm and turn off the light, too tired even to remove my glasses. I just waited for the sound of Sleep's soft-approaching footfall.

But he wouldn't come.

It had been a long day in a string of long days. My mind begged me for, was literally aching for, rest. And even lying down, it made me slightly dizzy to consider what the next day would bring.

So why had Sleep, friend and companion of all, suddenly abandoned me? As the minutes dragged on, I considered what I might have done to offend him.

It felt like the crack of a baseball when the bat hits it in a packed stadium: abrupt, so clear that the sound of it can cut through the largest of crowds, the waves of noise and impact bouncing sharply off of every corner. That was what the answer felt like as it swooped down on top of me.

As I crawled out of my safe haven, I was still marveling. It was not sleep that had kept me up. It was someone much more powerful.

I knelt. Following a pattern taught to me in the cradle, I considered the high points of my long, long day. I expressed gratitude for my blessings, mentioning my friends and family, as always, as well as the more specific things that had happened that day. I then thought about where I needed help, in the areas where my own best effort would not suffice, and asked for assistance. I closed with a solemn, "Amen."

I crawled back into bed, and immediately felt the beginnings of sleep wash over me as my weary mind attempted to consider what had just happened.

And I was still considering as the undertow dragged me in.

Samuel

When Sarah was still living in our house, it seemed like she would go to almost any length to get away from us. But once she had moved away from her troublesome siblings, she appeared to want to spend as much time with us as possible.

And so it was that, with all of us in tow (Samuel and Esther because she missed them, me for crowd control), a trip to Target was taken. The voyage had more meandering to it than actual purpose—we wandered about. Thing One and Thing Two were gazing glassy-eyed at the propaganda, while Sarah and I were continuing some conversation from the day before. Then we turned a corner, landing ourselves smack dab into the center of the ladies lingerie section.

Samuel, horrified at the sight, immediately threw his hands over his eyes and bolted—right into the nearest rack. Clothes toppled with him as he smacked onto the floor. Laughing, we pulled him up. As his own arms were still being used to shield his eyes, the assistance seemed necessary.

“Get me out of here!” Still smiling, we guided him out to an area deemed safe. As we continued our journey, I would periodically hear him say to himself short phrases such as *“Gross!”* or demanding, *“Why do they put it where everyone can see it?!”*

Because it's normal, I answered in my head. Because everyone is used to it, and that somehow makes it acceptable. And because Mormons are weirdoes.

Her

Kindly oblige me with your tolerance as I attempt to disclose the abstraction of a juncture.

There once was and may still be a girl whose name is not important. She lived in a house, in a city, in a country, but her precise location is not overwhelmingly significant. Nor is her precise age crucial to the overall plot. Suffice to say that she was young enough to believe that her life would never change, but old enough to realize that she never wanted it to.

One day, her mother called her into her parents' room and asked her to close the door and sit down. The daughter did as she was requested, and joined her mother on the bed. The mother then imparted a small piece of information that would change her daughter's life.

Her father had been asked to become a Bishop—a Mormon minister—and he had accepted.

After the long conversation that followed (the main topic being the fact that the daughter could not tell anyone else, as it was not yet public information), the daughter left and entered her own room, shutting the door behind her. She then proceeded to fling herself across the bed and cry hysterically into her pillow. She had no idea why, at the time. Shall I tell you?

It was the same reason for which many cry. More than half of the world's momentarily relentless tears are, I would guess, based in this reason. It was a reason that her conscious mind hadn't discovered yet, but that her subconscious was already mourning. It was because she was going to have to say goodbye.

She would be leaving the building where she had been attending church for as long as she could remember. The building was familiar, its sight comforting. She knew what lay behind every door, and what windows were always left open in case you were locked out.

It was a lot like expecting the first day at a new school, except she hadn't been going to the same school since the day she was born.

Alex

I met my kindred spirit at the beginning of my year of torture.

Alex is my friend because she knows everything about me and still loves me, impossibly. In many ways, she's closer to me than Sarah, my older sister, or even my mom, who seems to be continually under the delusion that I'm perfect. As far as me being Alex's friend is concerned, I'm not sure what I bring to the table—entertainment, perhaps.

During the too-frequent nights that I find myself up well past midnight in the name of science or drafting my latest manifestation of freedom of the press, I amuse myself by considering that the one touchy sub-

ject between Alex and me is the same topic I'd always felt most comfortable discussing with my parents.

On the first day of a new round of textbooks, information sheets, and adults who wouldn't learn my name for weeks, the discussion between me and my fellow captives turned to religion. A Presbyterian, a Baptist, and two people of the Jewish faith were declared present, before the assortment of laser eyes fell on me.

"I'm Mormon." They followed the expected procedure: two nods of recognition, and a half-dozen looks of bewilderment. My traditionally brief explanation followed (a form of Christianity, Book of Mormon, etcetera, etcetera), and the totem pole passed to the stranger next to me.

She hunched over slightly, arms folded tightly around her stomach, shoulders curled in. Her dirty blond hair covered her face, which was fixed on the smooth, fake wood of the table in front of her.

"My family doesn't go to church." Shockingly, the other girls showed no sign of noticing the extreme discomfort in her voice. The conversation moved on. As Alex and I slipped fluidly into friendship, then glided past it, I occasionally mentioned church—the activity I'd gone to the night before, or an upcoming duty that I was worrying over. Each time, Alex turned to stone before my eyes. I soon learned to avoid the topic altogether, lest she become a permanent statue.

Joey

I was practically bouncing with excitement—like a two-year-old who just ate three pans of double-chocolate brownies. If I wasn’t careful, I was going to put a dent in the hood of the car.

I couldn’t help it—I was singing inside. During my short time in public school, I had always been the girl that was everyone’s third or fourth best friend, except for Alex—and she and I only emailed each other during the summer. I was never on the guest list for parties, and I definitely wasn’t asked to spend an afternoon at someone’s house, just her and me.

Mom dropped me off at the sidewalk in front of the house. I had to force myself not to run up the neat steps and then across the long porch to ring the door bell.

Woolf, Woolf! The door swung open, and there was Joey—holding back a dog slightly larger than I was precisely comfortable with—looking just as she always did. I wasn’t sure why this surprised me.

We plunked ourselves down on the off-white carpet of her living room floor, surrounded by a sea of the hundred and some pages of her latest masterpiece that I had been called upon to help edit. We started picking up chapters, reading over them, discussing and correcting as we went. Eventually, when we’d gotten through a good bit of it, Joey called a halt to our work.

She pulled out a Scrabble set and taught me a new variation of the game I hadn’t seen before. Once I had gotten the hang of it, conversation started back up.

And for the absolute love of Pete, I still can't figure out how we got around to the topic of polygamy.

"The thing is," I began carefully—it was a touchy subject, even among other Mormons—"pretty much anywhere the church went at the time, they were shot at. And because people were mostly aiming at the men, there were a lot of widows with children that they couldn't support, because women couldn't really get jobs back then. And so the prophet asked certain men to have more than one wife so that she and her family could live with those men and be provided for. At least, that's always been my interpretation of it."

"Oh," she replied, considering. "So it wasn't like a concubine thing or anything." She nodded like this made sense, then fired off another, less controversial question about Mormon beliefs.

My respect for Joey, already much higher than that for most other people, doubled. There were many Mormons who couldn't accept polygamy as calmly as she just had.

There were days when I wished that everyone in the world was like Joey. The earth would certainly be a much louder place.

Avi

My first impression of Avirm Stein was that he was cynical, antisocial, and that he swore *way* too much.

No one in my family swore—it was a Mormon thing. The few swear words I knew, I had picked up

from TV, and I wasn't really quite sure what they meant. Avi doubled my unusable vocabulary the first day I met him.

The only reason I initially gave him the time of day was because he was Joey's friend. Otherwise, I would have most likely ignored him—I generally avoided people who swore. It made me uncomfortable just to be around them.

Then, in Journalism, the teacher paired us together to work on some project—I can't remember what now. Nothing hugely important. But, for some reason, our conversation lead him to use the phrase that sealed the deal on our friendship.

"Well, purple banjos!"

I burst into hysterical, uncontrollable laughter.

The whole room was staring at me as I gasped for air, crying from laughing so hard. Avi started laughing, too (although admittedly not so hard), simply because I looked so ridiculous, I suppose. But I couldn't help it. Those two words struck me as the most absolutely hilarious thing I'd ever heard. To this day, I can't hear them without laughing. They were my trigger words.

After that, Avi and I were fast friends. And all would have been happily ever after, except for one thing: the swearing.

It seemed to get worse once I started hanging out with him. It got my nerves so badly on edge that I practically flinched when he started speaking. He must have just thought I was twitchy. Eventually, I couldn't stand it anymore.

"Hey, Avi? Could you please try not to swear around me—it's one of those weird Mormon things, and it makes me really uncomfortable."

"Sure."

And that was it. He wasn't offended, and he didn't decide to never speak to me again. I rejoiced—I thought I was in the clear.

I think Avi must have been swearing for quite a long time. Habits taken up in childhood are always the hardest to eliminate. He tried. He honestly wasn't trying to offend me or anything, I could tell. But he kept forgetting.

At first, I just politely reminded him. I expected him to slip up a few times—in the beginning. But time passed. And he kept going. And going. And *going*. And being just as full of patience as the next person, I was frustrated. Then . . . I got a bit irritated. And then, I got mad.

The explosion occurred during lunch.

Alex and Avi were sitting at the end of a table and I was standing, as usual. I don't think I had gotten very much sleep, even for me, because I wasn't in the best of moods. Avi was talking—and a swear word slipped out.

I snapped.

Swiftly, I jerked back my knee and kicked his leg, hard under the table.

"Don't. Swear." He rubbed his leg, a rather comically shocked expression on his face.

From then on, whenever Avi slipped, I had a plan. Because I usually wore flip-flops, kicking eventually

gave way to smacking him upside the head. And you know what? He learned not to swear around me really fast after that.

I'm also pretty sure that's why people think I'm a psychotic nun.

Her Again

Above all, she dreaded being known only as the Bishop's daughter. To be appreciated not for an actual talent or characteristic she possessed, but for her father. It wasn't that she disliked her father or anything—quite the contrary.

She considered her father one of her closest confidants. He also treasured what she held to be the second most important thing in the world: books. They read books together endlessly.

Her father showed her how to cook, how to write, and, more importantly, how to live. That didn't mean that she wanted being his daughter to be her only accomplishment.

But as is the way with self-fulfilling prophecies, once she began looking for it, she found it. As she walked down the hallway after another Tuesday meeting, she saw from the corner of her eye a little boy, around two or three, tug on his mom's skirt.

"Look, Mommy! That's the Bishop's daughter."

Kevinfish

“It’s cruelty to animals.”

“We don’t torture them!”

“Oh, no—you just shoot them and eat them!”

“Exactly—they’re killed humanely. And it’s not just sport; we use deer for food.”

“But that’s exactly my point! You don’t *need* to go out in the woods to find dinner anymore. That’s the whole purpose of grocery stores!”

I held back a smile, waiting for the heated retort I knew would come.

Kevin was more fun to argue with than anyone I’ve ever known. He was one of the two people I knew that could give me a run for my money in a debate, and it was more entertaining because unlike debating with Joey, whose opinions I respect, I had no qualms against burying him.

Kevin and I started arguing about four seconds after we laid eyes on each other, and we never really stopped. It didn’t matter if it was something serious or completely stupid—the day before, we’d had a heated battle deciding whether boys or girls were smarter. It had taken more effort than I knew I had to stop myself from laughing at his statement that “girls are the real cause of global warming because they release so much hot air when they talk.” It was so true.

It didn’t even matter if it was something I actually cared about. Like that day when we’d started in on the integrity of hunting. I couldn’t have cared less if he went out with his dad and shot deer every week-

end. That was his choice. But I'd never admit that to Kevinfish—it was something to argue about.

Alex and I started calling him Kevinfish when the aquatic sculpture she'd been working on came out with an expression exactly like his. After laughing our heads off, we resolved to call him Kevinfish from then on purely to annoy him.

At least twice a week, someone asked me if Kevin and I were dating. At first, I just laughed. Then, it got irritating. It was even more annoying when, after explaining that Mormons didn't date until they were sixteen, most of them asked if I *wished* I were dating Kevin. My response ranged from a curt "No," to a Glare of Death, depending on my mood.

One day, I was walking down the hallway when I overheard a guy asking Kevin if he liked me. I turned quickly to see the horrified expression I knew would appear and was not disappointed. Had I not known the cause of his look, I would have been sure that he had just swallowed a huge slug.

Still, it kind of bothered me that so many people had come to that conclusion. The answer to their ever-persistent questioning was obvious. Couldn't they see us arguing?

Esther

"It's too low, babe. You need an undershirt."

She was twirling around in front of a mirror in a sparkly red dress, her favorite pastime. She looked up, frowning into the mirror at my reflection.

“Come here, I’ll show you how to tell if it’s modest.” She skipped over to my side, happy little devil, as always. It was hard to believe she was nine; she barely came up to my waist.

“This is your collar bone.” I showed her the long bump, easy to find on her small frame. “Hold your hand against it, like this.” I held my fingers out perfectly straight, tucking my thumb under them. Then I laid my hand against my chest so that the top finger was against my collarbone. “If the bottom of your neck line is below the fourth finger, it’s too low.”

The next morning, while munching through my daily bowl of cereal, I watched Esther climb onto Mom’s lap in the next room. Esther held up her hand to Mom’s collarbone.

“Your shirt,” she began briskly, “is not modest.” Her small voice rang with authority. “It can’t come below my hand.” My eyes met Mom’s, and we exchanged warm smiles. Esther’s tiny hand barely came two inches below the base of Mom’s neck.

Herself

It wasn’t until several months later that she realized that she hadn’t spoken to any of her friends from the old ward for ages. It had been a gradual process. At first, she had called or emailed them all (and they her) several times a week. But as we all know, a friendship cannot be kept alive solely through communication. You must physically be there with someone, sharing

experiences, creating memories. That is the life blood of friendship.

And so, as there steadily became less to talk about and share, one week turned into two, and so on—as is the way of things. And that is how the three girls she had once considered her best friends became utter strangers.

Anna

“I’m a ninja, I’m a hoodie ninja.” We sang in unison, her sporadic dancing full of head banging and various other moves I didn’t know the name of. Anna was my only connection to ‘modern’ music.

“I’m a ninja, I’m a hoodie ninja!” I had never actually heard the song, or seen the video that accompanied it. The lyrics, in addition to my limited knowledge of twenty-first century dancing, I had learned from Anna.

“I’m a ninja, I’m a hoodie ninja.” Alex briefly met my eyes, trying not to laugh. If we hadn’t been in the middle of a packed courtyard, she might have joined in.

“I’m a Hoodie. Ninja.”

Performance over, we sat back down on one of the picnic benches, smiling. The little dignity I had left these days seemed to vanish completely in Anna’s presence. She had some sort of bubble around her: a Magical Bubble of Not Caring. When I was with Anna, it didn’t matter that I was surrounded by people, or that I couldn’t dance to save Alex’s life. With Anna,

other people's opinions ceased to have weight and simply floated away.

"*Josh!*" Anna bolted over to a guy I barely knew and threw her arms around him, a completely normal greeting from her. She did the same thing every day at the beginning of fourth period, when he walked past our classroom door. Our World History teacher wasn't exactly thrilled, but Anna was never one for keeping her emotions bottled up inside.

She half dragged him over to our small group, talking about something that probably had to do with theater. I turned to talk to Alex, when a single word jumped at me from behind.

"*F***.*" It was Josh.

"*Please don't swear.*" It was the same request I made of anyone who seemed likely to be around me for more than ten minutes. "*It makes me really uncomfortable.*"

"*I don't f***ing care.*" He turned his back on me and continued his conversation with Anna—or tried to.

"*Josh, this is serious—it's part of her religion.*" Anna's voice had gone quiet and deadly serious. It was the same tone that had made stronger-willed men than Josh head for the hills. Somehow, he seemed oblivious to it.

"*Why should I f***ing care?*" His voice sauntered with attitude.

"*Josh, if you're not going to stop, you can leave.*" The smirk slid off his face as he finally heard her. He glanced at me, then quickly glanced away and started talking to someone else.

I should probably let Anna know that if she ever wants my soul, she can have it.

All

We sat in one of the old waiting rooms of the college, savoring last moments. Eric was giving our final group devotional. Tomorrow morning, we'd all head back to where we came from.

The history-drenched old room we currently inhabited was similar to the rest of the main building. I had been thrilled when, on the first day, I had happened upon a suit of armor in the hallway, natural as anything. A Victorian couch, upholstered in what looked like red velvet, rested against the wall across from the girls' bathroom. Similarly rich colors filled the eye in this room, deep reds and faded greens.

The week had been filled with music, classes, smiles, and acute homesickness. But mostly, it had been filled with an amazing feeling of peace. There were no groups, no drama. Everyone just accepted everyone else for who they were. It was like a mini-paradise, completely devoid of petty contentions.

But I was somehow unsatisfied. Everyone I'd talked to before leaving for EFY told me how much it had strengthened their testimony. Certainly it was easier to feel the Holy Ghost here, but I hadn't experienced any huge boost of faith or anything. Maybe I was expecting too much, but I felt kind of . . . ripped off.

“Alright everyone, let’s pray.” Eric knelt, and we all followed him to the floor.

This was it—the end of my week in paradise. And what had I gotten from it? I stopped thinking and listened to Eric’s prayer. I don’t remember what he said. But I do remember opening my eyes.

Suddenly, I could *see* the twenty-three people around me. Before, I’d thought I was looking at strangers, acquaintances of barely a week. Now, I saw the truth. I was standing with the sons and daughters of God. I was standing with my brothers and sisters.

Silently, we all stood. I turned to the person next to me. My sister. I reached out at the same time she did, and we pulled each other into a warm embrace. Around us, I could sense others doing the same. I stood in the embrace, drowning in the flames of my sister’s love.

I turned to my next sister, and my next. Each time, the heat of another family member’s love burned through to my soul.

A brother this time. It did not surprise me that this embrace was devoid of the awkwardness that filled the air the few times I’d hugged other boys. It was exactly the same as hugging Samuel or Christian. And why shouldn’t it be?

Twenty-three moments of perfect clarity, and we stood silent once again. I looked around at my family. Some of my sisters were crying, makeup smearing across their faces as it attached itself to the salt water. I felt something wet roll down my cheek. A more solid object blocked the flow of oxygen through my throat.

The air felt saturated with our combined emotions, too great to hold inside.

Mom

I sat numbly on my bucket, waiting. For what, I wasn't sure. For breakfast to magically appear? For someone else to take down my tent? Doubtful.

I was in a floor-length skirt and a bonnet. I'd been "sleeping" in a tent, with no pad or mattress between me and the plastic floor, for two consecutive nights. It was July. On Fort Bragg. We had walked ten miles the day before, pushing a wagon with our luggage and water in it. And the Indians had just stolen my breakfast.

I was ready to go home.

Apparently, our leaders had other ideas, because today we were crossing a river, wagon in tow. At the moment, I was trying to think of a good reason *not* to just sit there until someone called my Dad and he came and picked me up.

"Mail call!" Mail call? Well, I guess the pioneers got mail. Authenticity and all. I forced myself to stand long enough to receive my allotted starch white envelope. Wondering who on earth would write to me in the middle of a pioneer reenactment on Fort Bragg, I pulled out the letter.

July 11, 2009

Dear Joanna,

So, you are on the last leg of your trek? Maybe thoughts of Tuesday night in the air conditioned cinemas have kept you going through humidity and bugs? I have no doubt that whatever challenges you have faced that you have not only endured them, but you have endured them well.

Joanna, you are my great role model for endurance. More times than I can count, you have had siblings borrow and break your possessions and you have forgiven them and then either baked something for them or read to them or did something you knew would make them feel good.

You are the devoted daughter who, by example, speaks in soft tones and nudges us gently to study scriptures every day. You are the Young Woman who quickly says yes to anything that is asked of you and also looks for the best in your fellow YW. You are the child of God that understands Heavenly Father's plan and sees people with His eyes, accentuating the positive.

Today, my Uncle John called me. He asked me about you and was very excited that you are a writer and on the journalism staff. (He was once a newspaper editor and English professor.) I also told him about your gentle and kind personality, which he knows is a likeness to his brother, my dad, who we all loved so much. Having you in my life is like having a bit of my dad and my gran.

I feel so honored to be your mother. You have been a precious gift from the start. I only hope to be a good enough mother to such a wonderful daughter.

I have been asked to bear my testimony to you and am pleased to do so.

I know that God lives. I know this because He has been present in my life and has listened to and answered my prayers. I know that Jesus Christ lives and that He is my Savior. I know that Joseph Smith was the first prophet of this dispensation and Thomas S. Monson is the living prophet today. I know that the priesthood of God has been restored to the earth. I know that the Book of Mormon is the word of God. I know that our family has been sealed for eternity and that we will be together forever if we continue to be faithful. I know that God loves you and your family loves you. I love you! In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Love, Mom

Mom always did have a gift for making me cry.

Us

Hey, you!

Yes, you, sitting there reading about my life. I'm talking to you. It's me, the author. I realize that this isn't exactly traditional, but as you might have inferred, I don't really care. We need to talk.

The thing about being Mormon is that there are some things you just don't talk about, even with other Mormons. They're considered too holy to discuss in a casual conversation. It would undermine the importance of the topic in question.

"It is not that they are secret, but they are sacred, not to be discussed, but to be harbored

and to be protected and regarded with the deepest of reverence."

That's how Boyd Packer, an apostle, explained it. And when an apostle says it, it's generally a good idea to listen. The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are counselors to the Prophet, who leads and receives revelation from God about the church. So basically, anything an apostle says is approved by the Prophet, which is approved by Heavenly Father. Again, we tend to listen when the Prophet or an Apostle asks us to do something.

So as the Apostle says, there are some things that you can only talk about with the people who are the very closest to you. The experience is so personal, so spiritual, that talking about it to just anyone makes it less important.

And that's really all I can say.

Her Own

As she passed classroom doors, she greeted everyone warmly. They all knew her as she knew them, through familiarity. They were all part of her family.

Coming to the door she wanted, she entered into to her sanctuary. As she sat down, there was a general chorus of hellos and how-are-yous, which she responded to with a reference to the activity the Tuesday before, which made Kambyl laugh. She complimented Jasmine's new shoes, asked Sister Neeley if she had already chosen someone to conduct, and then

turned her attention to the front of the room as the meeting started.

Just another Sunday.

Avi Out

“Sparta could have beaten them with their eyes closed. The technology—”

“Exactly! But what if—”

Boys. It took a considerable amount of effort to keep from shaking my head, and hiding the smile was a lost cause. Once Avi and Sam got off on a hypothetical battle between armies that could never have met, nothing short of a court order could get them to stop. I stood in the back of the classroom with them, pretending to listen as I waited for the bell that would send us off to second period.

“Don’t swear, Sam, Joanna doesn’t like it.” The sound of my name pulled me back.

“It’s one of those Mormon things,” I added. Sam nodded, then reached down for his book bag as the bell rang. Avi fell in step beside me as we headed for the same building.

“Joanna, do Mormons believe in hell?” I almost stopped, but the flow of traffic behind me didn’t allow me to. “What about other religions? Are they all just wrong? What about—”

“One question at a time!” If I didn’t stop him now, the questions might never end. “We do believe in a hell, sort of, only we call it outer darkness. And it’s

pretty hard to get there. Most people go to one of the three heavens—”

“There are *three*?” I smiled. I was going to have to pack a whole lot of information into the next seven minutes.

And Alex

“Hey Alex?” I didn’t know I could keep my voice that calm while I was having a nervous breakdown; maybe I should have been in the theater pathway after all.

“Yeah?” She didn’t even look up from her homework. Well, why should she? As far as she knew, nothing particularly exciting was happening.

“I’m in charge of the activity at my church next Tuesday. We’re painting T-shirts. Would you mind coming? For moral support?” My throat was dry. It was sink or swim now.

“Sure.” Totally calm. No statue.
I flew.

Just Kevin

Today it was something I actually cared about, which always made it more interesting. As we left band together, we debated which instrument was superior, flute or trombone. As I pointed out that mine was far more portable, he was illustrating how to use his as a door opener.

The end of the school year was less than two weeks away. Exams had finally crawled to their end, and everyone occupied themselves chiefly by sitting around waiting for summer to start, *especially* the teachers. And unfortunately, the time had come for me to deal with something I'd been shoving to the back of my head since I'd found out about it.

If I hadn't been searching through Kevin's backpack, I might still not know. He wasn't really the type to think of telling that girl who's always arguing with him that he was transferring to another high school, and that he'd probably never see her again.

"I hate missionaries." Apparently, I should have been paying closer attention to the conversation. How had we gotten to this, of all subjects?

"My brother is a missionary."

"Oh." He quickly backtracked. "It's just that half of them are completely self-righteous, and the other half are just trying to feel good about themselves."

I wasn't aware of choosing to speak. I didn't even know what I wanted to say. I just opened my mouth, and there they were: the words waiting to be said.

I looked him straight in the eye. "Kevin, I can honestly tell you that I know, without the slightest hesitation, that God lives and that my church is true."

"Then," he said, slowly, unwillingly, "I guess I'm really jealous of you."

DREAMS FROM MY GRANDMOTHER

Michael Eubanks, Jr.

Chapter 1

ETHEL BURDEN, THE mother of Linda Burden and my grandmother, lived up to the age of eighty-two. She was a great grandmother to me and a great mother to my mother. She had a big heart just like my mother. She always kept a smile on her face even when there were bad times and when she was in pain. Even with her illness, she still lived a long time; she kept fighting till the end.

My grandmother would do the weirdest things, but she would always make you laugh. She was famous in some places, like in our church. Eighty-five percent of the congregation knew her. Then there was the neighborhood. Everyone knew my grandmother in the neighborhood. My grandmother had it going on in her time.

She gave me hope for things that no one else would believe in. Thank you, Grandmother. May you

rest in peace. I know you are looking over me right now and making sure I do the right thing.

Chapter 2

It was hot and bright that day and I was coming home from a field trip. It was a slow ride back home for me. In the car, I was telling my mom and dad about my trip. After I was done talking, my parents started asking me all these questions that finally wound up at my grandmother. I didn't know that my folks were trying to tell me something. I asked them why they were asking me all these questions. They told me. I had to ask who they were talking about because I couldn't believe they were talking about my grandmother. They were.

That day took the joy out of me. I felt my heart break in two. That day I lost someone who had given me hope and who was very important to me. I wanted to run away, but I knew that this problem would find me and keep on following me.

My mother was in more pain than me, so I had to man up and go help my mother. It was my mother's mom and she had raised my mother by herself. I could feel that she was hurting more than me at the time.

She was the best grandmother in the world to me. She always had my back when I got in trouble. She had faith in me. On that fateful day, I made a vow to myself to do my best to live up to the dreams my grandmother had for me.

JAZZ AND THE CITY

Elijah Fox-Peck

Kind of Blue
1995, AUSTIN, TX

WHEN MY MOTHER was pregnant, she would play me *Kind of Blue*. Miles Davis's soaring trumpet would echo through the halls of her small apartment in Austin, Texas. The tinkling piano and soft, eerie saxophone drifted me to sleep every night.

After I was born, when I had fits of rage or could not stop crying, my mother would put the dusty old cassette on, and it would immediately quiet me. I would drift back into a relaxed state where the music and nothing else mattered. After the age of four, I never really listened to the album again. I'm not sure what happened—it may have been lost—but I never heard it again until one rainy day while sitting in the car.

The song I heard that day was "Flamenco Sketches." It is the last song of the album and it starts

with a slow, mournful piano while an acoustic bass lingers in and out. At first, when hearing this song, I didn't know what it was, but it reminded me of my childhood, and memories flooded through my head. Memories of lying down in my bed in Austin, of seeing the hot summer nights fade away through my small bedroom window, slowly drifting into a dream of other planets and other galaxies. The music-spun dreams behind me flowed back through my mind, and I couldn't speak for a minute.

"Who is this?" I asked my mom from the backseat of the car.

"Miles Davis. Honey, I played this to you when you were little," she replied.

As soon as we got home, I rushed up to my room with the CD and lay down and listened to it. I felt as if I were hearing the music for the first time, the sounds floating off the Brooklyn Bridge and into the wilderness of the Manhattan night. The sounds of an old upright piano, played by a large Asian woman in a small bar downtown, floated through the door and flew up into the mystery of the chilly New York sky.

The Know
2004, DURHAM, NC

I first found out about The Know through an ad in the *News and Observer*: "The Know jazz jam, Friday nights, all welcome." I played jazz piano, so I at once was very excited. I leaped off the couch and rushed

upstairs to tell my mom about it. She told me we could go the next day after she taught her yoga class. I went to sleep that night wishing it were Friday.

As I climbed into the car on a rainy Friday night, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. I looked out at the rain-soaked streets passing by through the window. When I arrived, I first studied my surroundings for a minute. It was an old cinderblock building with one story and almost roman pillars that were worn away by time. I finally got up enough courage to walk in, so I headed towards the old, creaky screen door. When I entered, an elderly man greeted me and asked what instrument I played. When I told him, he got excited and said he played piano, too. I would later find out this was Yusuf Salim, a jazz legend who lived in New York and played with Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk.

The Know is a bookstore, cultural center, and restaurant. The jazz jams every Friday night are held in the restaurant section. It is a small, dimly lit room with a battered up drum set and an old upright piano under a dusty old lamp. It reminds me of one of those saloons you see in old movies.

The band was already playing, and I was at once encircled by noise. The drums pounded a steady beat as the saxophone fluttered around the chord changes, and the piano accompanied the saxophone on his journey through the music. Before I knew it, I was being pushed onto the makeshift stage and asked what song I wanted to play. I told them "My Funny Valentine" because that was the only song I knew by heart at the time.

The song started, and I was madly following the trumpeter as he played the melody. When it was my turn to take a solo, I played slowly, working up to a faster pace. Since I was just a kid, I knew that the audience was waiting to see how good I could play. Suddenly, I got lost in the moment and, consequently, lost my place in the song. Thankfully, the trumpet started to play and saved me from being totally embarrassed. As the song ended and the audience clapped, I knew I still had a lot to learn.

Virgin Gorda

2007, BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

When I opened my eyes, I found myself on a private plane flying to the British Virgin Islands as the guest soloist with the North Carolina Central Jazz Band. I saw the paradise islands and tropical waters hundreds of feet below. We were playing two concerts at a Catholic school on Virgin Gorda, one of the three main islands. The Catholic school had requested someone younger to play in order to connect with the students at the school. I was twelve at the time and was missing a science project, so I was overjoyed.

As we neared the landing strip, I started to get scared because we were flying too close to the mountains for my taste. I fixated on the sharp, pointy rocks below, but we made it safely.

I grabbed my suitcase from the back of the plane and walked up the beach toward the apartment we

would be staying in. My dad had come with me, but we remained silent as we walked, taking in the landscape around us. The island looked so perfect, it deserved to be on a postcard. Little huts ran up the sides of the mountains, and the inhabitants of the island had chickens roaming the streets, and, set upon rusty, old bicycles, were the locals themselves.

Our apartment was small, but rested on a steep mountain overlooking the water and the rest of the village. It was six o'clock but still perfectly light and warm, so I was eager to swim. Before we went, my dad and I found a restaurant and asked the owner if she knew a good spot. She told us to go to The Baths, a series of caves partly submerged in water with a beach at the end.

The next day was the performance, and I had anything but performing on my mind. As soon as we woke, we went back to The Baths and spent nine incredible hours playing by the ocean's edge. Soon it was time to head back to the apartment to get ready for the performance.

We walked to the school, and I realized how very awkward I felt, just a twelve-year-old, walking in an expensive suit through neighborhoods of extreme poverty.

We finally arrived at the venue. I saw a lot of people sitting on the grass in front of a stage with water behind it. I walked to the back of the stage and greeted the students I had met earlier at the rehearsal. Since I was not playing in all of the songs, I stayed backstage and waited for my turn to wow the Catholic school students.

The band was going strong, and everyone was having a really good time, but soon the weather took a turn for the worst. Out of nowhere, rain started to fall. A beautiful day had turned into a raging thunderstorm, and the band played on.

People started to leave and find shelter as the rain continued to pour. The band was still playing hard, but, try as they might, they just couldn't keep the people in their seats. As the second song ended, Ira, the bandleader, beckoned me forward onto the stage. There were only a hundred or so stragglers left in the audience while the rain continued to tumble down. We started the song and everything went as planned: the horns were right on the melody and the rhythm section kept a steady beat behind them. I became so totally involved in the music, I forgot about the rain entirely. Before I knew it, the song was over. I got the music out for the next song, ready to play.

There was no one in the audience. Not a single person. Even my dad had left for cover under the school's main building. Just like that, the concert ended. After three short songs, the concert was over.

I had come 1,573 miles on a fully paid vacation in the British Virgin Islands to play one song for an audience of none. I couldn't have been happier.

City Air
2008, NEW YORK CITY, NY

Instead of living in New York City, I would go back to my small, Southern house and dream about

living there. I would go into my room and daydream about it while I listened to jazz on my radio, reminding me of the big city.

I first visited Manhattan with my mom to see her friend, Miranda, who lived in the Village. I remember one night we ordered takeout from an Indian restaurant and went up on her roof to eat; I could see all the big lights and felt as if everything was constantly moving. At night, the city became even more alive as people frantically ran from place to place.

The roof was kind of shabby with a few chairs and a beach umbrella, maybe a dead plant or two. I watched people on other roofs eating, playing guitar, and singing into the starry summer night. I felt as if I were sitting in the center of the universe and all the roads and people eventually ended up here.

WHERE I AM MEANT TO BE

April Galbraith

I Home Away from Home

“HELLO, THIS IS your captain speaking. We will be landing in Salt Lake City, Utah, in approximately fourteen minutes. The current time is 11:46 a.m. Please observe the seatbelt sign is on, and enjoy the rest of your flight. Thank you for choosing Delta.”

I watched out the window with anticipation as we began our descent.

I was born in American Fork, Utah. I lived there for six years with lots of my cousins, aunts, and uncles. Since then, the family and I have gone back to visit nearly every summer. My favorite part of arriving in the Salt Lake Valley is when I look out the window of the plane and see the Rocky Mountains. The view from so high up is mesmerizing. We descend to the elevation of the mountains and finally to the ground.

I find it hard to comprehend how great in size and beauty the mountains really are.

A satisfying feeling of home overcomes me. Grandpa gives us all big hugs and then asks about our trip. He drives us home from the Salt Lake City airport. Grandpa is one of my favorite people. He's the most giving person I know. His days are always filled with little acts of kindness, like making you a yummy snack of Nutella on bread with chocolate sprinkles at the perfect time, or slipping a little cash in your pocket for something fun. He also has a great sense of humor that makes everyone smile.

I look out the window of the car. A rare mass of deep blue and gray clouds creep behind the mountains, a beautiful contrast against the khaki-shaded Rockies. The roads are long and flat in the valley. As we near Provo, the familiar sights trigger memories that come pouring back to me. I remember how one night my parents woke me up at midnight just so we could all go to the BYU Creamery for an ice cream. I smile as we drive by other places with stories. At the foot of the mountain, we turn onto Grandpa and Otien's street. As we turn into that driveway, I am bursting with eagerness. I get out of the car, already feeling my lips become chapped from the lack of moisture in the air, reminding me that Utah is a desert. But this little spot where I stand is an oasis. Family members who have gathered from all over the country come out of Grandpa and Otien's house to greet us with hugs and kisses.

"Otien" is the Dutch word for grandma. She was born and raised in Holland, which anyone could

tell by her obvious accent. Otien is all about family. Her hard work in genealogy shows on the multi-generational family tree hanging on the wall in the hallway. Much of this wall is covered by the display of major accomplishments shown for each name listed. She is the one responsible for this gathering. Otien planned, plotted, and organized so that nearly every family member could come to Provo. She also planned for all of the fun things we would do on our visit.

Inside is wide, open, and welcoming. My cousins and I are close. We talk about how summer has been and how we are going to make the best of the time we have together. School drama seems so far away and unimportant when I'm here. I like it that way.

After a day of four-wheeling, music, and just hanging out, it's dinner time. Everyone looks forward to spaghetti night when Grandpa cooks. The sauce is completely homemade, down to the last tomato from the garden in the backyard. The only rule on spaghetti night is that you are not full unless you absolutely can't fit anymore in. Grandpa says a blessing on the dinner, his prayers genuine and grateful. He never runs out of things to be thankful for. Praying is one way we all connect as a family. We eat, talk, and relax. Life is good.

We finish off the evening by playing our favorite games. First Rook, then Pit. My family can only play a few rounds of Pit because in a matter of minutes, we all lose our voices shouting to be heard in the intense trading market.

Together we laugh and enjoy each other's presence for the short, sweet week we are together. If this isn't home, I just don't know what is.

II

Sunday Morning Epiphany

The morning started off like any regular Sunday morning. My alarm rang. A familiar tune obnoxiously disturbed my dreams of escaping school and having a pet giraffe. I rolled around under my tangled blanket for a few seconds until I got my wits about me. Dizziness overcame me when I stood up too fast. I lunged over the pile of tried-on but discarded clothes that had grown to a heaping mountain throughout the week. My digital clock read 8:22 a.m. We had to leave for church, which is two minutes driving distance, at 8:50. It's a rare occasion that all seven family members are actually ready and in the car by that time, but we try. I crossed the hall to enter the bathroom; instead, I found a locked door in my face due to my sister running in for a shower. Time was ticking, so I jumped up two flights of stairs to my half-room.

Before the school year began, our family took in a foreign exchange student from Korea. This resulted in me living in the attic with my sister. It's really more of a spacey room than an attic. Some of the walls are a wicked bright green and the rest are an orange-pink salmon, and they light up the room with a fun energy.

Bright digital numbers stared at me from across the room. It was already 8:38 and all I had accomplished was locating my lip gloss deep inside my book bag. I hadn't decided on my outfit or even thought about my hair. I buried myself in the closet, searching desperately for something suitable to wear. Nicole, my sixteen year-old sister, came upstairs already dressed in what I had hoped to find in my closet. It was a medium length, casual-but-cute dress with blue and black flower print.

"I was gonna wear that! I've been looking for that dress all morning!" I exaggerated my argument to help my case. It didn't help.

"Well I already have it on, so find something else. Oh, have you seen my pearl earrings anywhere?" She ignored my moment of distress and changed the subject to her petty earrings. Typical.

I replied no and continued the search for an outfit. I settled on a pink skirt and navy shirt that looked promising.

The blow dryer broke my concentration as I was putting in my contacts. My eyes started to moisten from irritation. My hand eventually steadied enough to pop in the left contact. I visualized from afar Nicole blow drying her hair and me rushing around doing makeup and hair just a few minutes prior to leaving. *Why?* I asked myself. There is no logical reason for all this stress and rush over such trivial things. I remembered, in this moment, that I'm not going to a beauty pageant; I am going to church. Church is a place to forget worldly things, and here I was caring way too much about them.

I used the next ten minutes to help my little sister, Gracie, get dressed and ready. I realized then how little I really knew her. A hidden feeling of regret seeped into my thoughts. *Well, it's not too late*, I thought to myself. I never knew Gracie's favorite dress was the purple one with kitties on it, or that she felt most like a princess when her hair was in two little braids. Now I do, and that's what matters to me. This is when I decided to reprioritize. Family is what's important, not hair and clothes.

III
Stay or DSA?

“Mom, do you realize this is the fourth new school I’d be attending in just two years?”

“Yes, I know that. You don’t have to go; I’m supportive either way. This could be your one chance to go to DSA, but if you’re happy where you are at Riverside, then that’s perfectly fine.”

This was ridiculous. Not even ten minutes ago, my mom had pulled me out of class to inform me about an opportunity to restart high school. I had half an hour to make one of the biggest decisions of my life so far. Durham School of the Arts was calling to me. It was full of classes and opportunities to better my talent and love for drawing and design. I maybe hoped to make it my career and this high school could take me there. Academically, I was satisfied with what I heard about it. Socially, I was scared. I’d have to start over . . . again.

My pocket vibrated. This was the fifth text message I had received since I left school. One of my best friends knew where I had gone and what decision lay before me. Let's just say he wasn't going to be happy to see me go. As for me, I was torn about the matter. This was a time when I really needed to reconsider my values. If I went, I would lose the tight friendships I had. That was unavoidable. It's impossible to stay "in the loop" enough to be included once you leave. That's a plain fact that I learned a year ago when my family moved to Durham from Pennsylvania. For those who don't know, moving sucks.

A thin rush of cool breeze cleared my head. Mom had taken me out of class to a quiet park nearby. No one was there but us at the time. The only sounds were the songs of joyful birds and the occasional acorn toppling through branches to the ground. It was a calm and happy environment, two things I was not. An old wooden bench lay under a great shady oak tree. The scene looked like it belonged in a picture book, the way the light shined through the leaves onto the bench. I admired that old tree and watched it grow in size as I came closer. That ancient tree must have gone through a lot over the years and it was still standing strong. It provided a safe haven for many, including my restless mind. I sat down and seemed to melt into my surroundings. The sounds of nature took over my thoughts for just a minute. I prayed then. I prayed for help to know which school was right for me and where I needed to be, for a little comfort in the decision I had to make. A moment of peace, finally.

It didn't last, of course. Mom snapped me back to reality a moment later.

"April, I need to un-enroll you in an hour if you decide to go to DSA. I know this is very rushed and hard for you, but we need to go soon."

My head went back into a panic state. It was one of those times when not even your parents know what's best for you and that made me frustrated. Unlucky for me, tears seem to be hardwired to frustration in my brain. I went over my options again, the pros and cons of staying or leaving. I had the impression that the better choice was to attend DSA. For what reasons exactly, I did not know yet, but it felt right. Who says prayers aren't answered?

I ignored my vibrating cell phone and my friends with it. I knew what I had to choose and not much of anything could have changed my mind at that point.

The drive back to school was an emotional roller coaster. I was having second thoughts and was just plain afraid of losing my close buddies. Making new ones in an unfamiliar environment didn't sound so appealing, either. Then I realized I wasn't all at a loss, that I wasn't moving again. Therefore, I could and I would see my friends again. This was a reassuring and comforting revelation.

The next hardest part after the decision itself was telling my friends and trying to get them to understand. Some of them didn't agree with my decision. They didn't want to see me go just as much as part of me wanted to stay.

The sun had not risen yet, but I was wide awake and dressed, one of the many joys of early morning seminary at six o'clock. A little sarcastic smile crept onto my face when I grasped my situation. I would be waking up each morning at 5:30 a.m. when school now didn't start until 8:45 a.m.

My first day at Durham School of the Arts was the following morning. It was only after an emotionally confusing night that I finally felt okay. I knew the drill; been there, done that. New schools and new places weren't new concepts to me. That was some encouraging motivation.

Any remaining stress I still felt seemed to have melted away as I sat in a room full of many close friends. My youth group felt like family to me. The closest buddies I had here would still be my best friends no matter what school I went to. Right then, that was one of the most important facts I could hold onto as I went forward on this new experience.

The 3:45 bell screamed at us, informing everyone school was over for the day. What an unhappy sound for such a wonderful occasion. I gathered myself and my books together, took a deep breath, and walked down the hall. Somewhere inside, I knew this was the place I was meant to be.

MY ROOTS

Jennifer Denise Garza

Chapter 1: Introduction

I CAN'T KNOW where I'm heading; I'm just fourteen years old. Yes, fourteen and I'm writing about my long life. When I was five, my mom taught me how to count, how to read, how to talk, how to write. Of course, any loving mother would do that. But I'm not native to this land. Born here, yes. Ancestors in this side of the world, no.

Years before I was born, all of my grandparents immigrated to America when they were young adults—as young as nineteen, as old as thirty-six. At that time, both of my grandmothers were pregnant and gave birth to my parents in the same year. In 1968, my mother was born in Dallas and my dad was born in Houston.

Only a few years had passed, but my grandparents couldn't stand it anymore. They decided to leave,

to raise their children where they were raised, somewhere old and hot, full of the colors of the earth and sun, where life is hard and beautiful.

I am Mexican. Not Salvadorian, not Brazilian, not Colombian. I am from old, hot Mexico; therefore, I know how to read, write, and speak the language of my ancestors—Spanish, of course.

Chapter 2: Lunch

In elementary school, I had friends until third grade. After that, it seemed like everyone hated me. Was it because they were jealous of me or was it because I was Mexican? Some people made fun of me when I was in class, when I was at recess, and when I was at lunch.

It was a Wednesday. I was in fifth grade. I had no friends. The white kids hated me because I was Mexican. The Hispanic kids hated me because I looked white. I sat alone, with no one to talk to, when all of the sudden, a boy, out of nowhere, sits in front of me. Smiling with those yellow, smelly teeth and looking at me from under that dark, black hair, he made me sick. It looked like he hadn't washed it in ten years.

Then, he said, "Hey, fat girl. Mind me calling you fat girl? Cause you're fat." A pause. "What, you don't know English? Oh, well why don't you go back to where you came from? Huh? Huh?" Another pause. "What, now you're not going to say anything?"

I calmly took a sip of milk, then just as calmly poured the rest of the carton all over him. Everyone stood in silence. A red faced, red eye-balled, crumpled eye browed, clenched toothed monster screamed words of hate, cursed, cried, and worried it was going to get worse.

It did. Kids began to throw food all around the room, screaming "Food fight!" laughing, and running. Two minutes had passed when the doors opened with a big *bang!* Teachers and administrators came in and every child in the room froze. A few seconds passed. Then kids began pointing and screaming, "She did it! He did it!" Everyone was arguing.

"Stop!" yelled the principal. And like that, the room was quiet like the moon. Afterwards, the principal made sure each child in that room got a phone call home and, as for the boy and me, we sat in the office in a corner.

The boy looked at me, threatened to beat me up, to send me back to where I belonged, to hell, and cursed me out as if it were not over when it was.

Chapter 3: Family

It's good to have family. You know you always have someone to watch your back. Someone to look up to. Someone to care about. In my big family, I have a brother, a sister, four aunts, six uncles, eight girl cousins, and five boy cousins, all of them different.

My brother's name is Arturo, Jr. He is a boy who loves trains and wants to be a conductor or engineer

one day. My sister's name is Ashley.

My aunts number four, two on my mom's side of the family and two on my dad's side. On my mom's side I have Aunt Virginia. She is a good person and lives in Mexico with her three children, Kevin, seventeen (he likes to party); Karen, fourteen (she likes fashion); and Yarency, twenty (he is in college studying). Also on my mom's side is Aunt Juany, my favorite aunt. She is a great storyteller and has a way of making everything fun. She has two children whose names are Oscar, age eight (he likes Spiderman, macaroni and cheese, and telling stories, like his mom) and Scarlett, age four (she wants to be a fashion model one day and likes her Barbie dolls).

From my dad's side of the family, I have Aunt Azalea. She is an aunt who helps those in need. She has my cousin Gigi, age four (he loves Hannah Montana and wants to be a rock star someday). And there is also *Tía Lucy*. She enjoys the beach and likes the color purple. She is very hospitable and wants my sister and me to visit her in Mexico. *Mi casa es su casa* style.

The oldest uncle on my mom's side is Uncle Paco. He loves music, karate, and anything cool. He got married recently to Ms. Anne. There is also Uncle Heri, the smart one. He loves airplanes and doesn't talk much. Uncle Marcelino says that seeing is believing. He is a painter and a good person. He has my cousin Natalie, age two (she is so cute and talks, sings, runs, and draws; she is a smart little one). Then, there is baby Marcelino, Jr., who is four months old. He laughs whenever his dad talks and is a gift from heaven, blessed by my

Aunt Consuelo. Uncle Ramon, the youngest one, has begun his life with a daughter named Vivian. Vivi is my cousin. She whines a lot, that's what I know. But I don't see her much because she lives in Mexico. There is Uncle Thomas, who has two sons and one daughter: Osen, the oldest; Chucho, the youngest; and Stephanie, the middle child. Last, but not least, is Uncle Hill. He loves church and is married. That's all I know about him. I don't know if I have any cousins from him because we don't talk much. He lives deep in Mexico on a ranch where there is almost no communication.

My family are important to me even though some of them I never see.

Chapter 4: My Mother's Garden

When I came home from school at 4:00, I knew something was not right. I have no house key, but Mom is usually there, so normally I have no worries. But on that evening, all the windows and all the doors were locked. Mom's car was parked where it usually was. Everything seemed normal; nothing seemed to be out of place. I sat down at our picnic table. An hour passed. I was done with homework and had nothing else to do. It was just me and my sister Ashley, talking about some classmates and what they did that day, who got in trouble, and all the school drama.

Soon, out of nowhere, five pick-up trucks pulled in carrying a cargo of red mulch, bricks, and some plastic drapes (the kind used to cover up weeds to kill them).

Five men, one from each truck, started to unload the bricks onto the driveway where Dad usually parks. The bricks were stacked on a blue tarp. As for the red mulch, that was unloaded where the trash and yard clippings are placed and covered by a blue tarp. Once the four trucks were unloaded, the men left me and my world in shock.

Could this be true? Or is this a daydream? Why is she doing this? Is this going to be a new hobby? How long is this going to take? I snapped back into the real world.

“Jennifer, *¿hay algún problema?*”*

“*Ái, que no, Mamá. ¿Cómo estás? ¿Y qué hay con todas estas trockas aquí? ¿Para qué son?*”

“*¿No te dije que vamos a hacer un jardín cuando agarramos una trocka nueva?*”

“*Sí.*”

“*¿Entonces, qué esperas?*”

“*Mamá.*”

“*Sí.*”

“*¿Me puedo cambiar de ropa?*”

“*Oh, okay.*”

We spent all afternoon working, doing what we could. I knew we would have lots of fun making this

“*Jennifer, is something wrong?*”

“*No, Mom. How are you? And what's with all those trucks? What are they for?*”

“*Didn't I tell you we were going to make a garden when we got a new truck?*”

“*Yes.*”

“*So, what are you waiting for?*”

“*Mom?*”

“*Yes?*”

“*Can I change clothes?*”

garden. To cheer us up after school, Mom would usually tell a story in the car or when we ate dinner at 4:30, and if we liked it, Mom would tell us more and more. She told us stories as we worked, only stopping to say something like, "Could you please get that for me?" That was one way of getting us to work. Since my sister knows how to cook, she also has some inside chores and duties, but the rest of the time helps Mom outside. It took us one year to finish placing the bricks, plastic (to prevent weeds from growing), and the mulch before we could start with the real stuff. Then, we bought all types of flowers and fruit-bearing plants: pansies, elephant ear petunias, chilis, tomatoes, squash, melon, apple trees, fig trees, and lots of flowers and aromatic or flowering bushes. We would garden early in the morning or in the evening when the sun was set or setting.

Our house used to be a plain old house. You had the main door, the stairs, a huge bush on both sides of a falling mail box, boring and plain, a Christmas bush on the right side of the driveway. No color, no nothing. Just old and boring. When we were there doing our work, nosy neighbors would walk their dogs or walk outside to pick up something or use binoculars to see how our work was coming. By the end of that first day, Dad knew what we'd been doing. And almost everyone in the neighborhood knew my dad, a mechanic at Garza's Auto Garage and Towing. Now, everyone knows which house is his. It's the one with the garden.

THE SOUNDTRACK OF SUMMER

Erin Glosser

Dedicated to Paolo Nutini, for the best writing-inspiring music I have ever listened to, and for just being an absolutely amazing singer. Also dedicated to Marielle LaCosse, Tiffany Ames and Guthrie Brown, my best friends, for getting me through life.

“I'M BACK!” I peeped into the phone, barely able to contain my excitement. I switched the phone to my other shoulder, holding it down with my chin while throwing my overstuffed suitcase onto the bed.

“Really?!” Guthrie yelped, sounding overjoyed. I smiled, a goofy grin seemingly permanently held there.

“Yeah, can you meet me somewhere? I only got an hour, but I really want to see you before we start camp and get too busy,” I explained, my tone hopeful. Tomorrow would be Monday; he had musical theater at Live Arts and I had fencing at Charlottesville Fencing Alliance. Both were very time-consuming activities, so I learned; I myself had been going to Live Arts for four

years. I shifted uneasily as he went to ask his parents, slathering on my favorite cocoa-butter lotion, a sort of signature scent for me. I snapped to attention the moment I heard his presence in the background.

“Hey. Meet me at the park, at our table, okay?” I could hear him smile. I jumped high into the air, doing a little victory dance, hopping around and swinging my hips.

“No problem. See you in a few.” I flicked the neon-orange ‘off’ button and spun around, swiping on some mascara and eye shadow, slicking on my favorite ChapStick and straightening my hair to the best of my abilities. I then rummaged through my suitcase, finding a shirt and an audio book, and snagged a collage I had made from off my bureau, stuffing them all into the first bag I could find. Of course, the bag screamed ‘Happy Birthday’ in headache-inducing neon colors. I shrugged and shot up the thirteen steps like a bullet.

“Gramma! He said he could go to the park!” I breathed excitedly, bouncing. She sighed and lifted herself lazily off the couch, setting down her knitting.

“Alright. Are you ready to go?” she questioned, making her way slowly to pick up her purse and keys. I nodded, unable to sit still. She tossed the keys at me. I blurred out the door, keys in hand, starting the car in a matter of seconds. I managed to get myself over to the passenger’s seat and waited for her somewhat impatiently in the cave-like, beige interior of the well-used Hyundai. I watched as she waddled down the sidewalk and wrenched open the door, plopping into the seat and sliding her feet into place at an alarmingly

tortoise-like rate. I squirmed in my seat; her speed was unbearable. I breathed a little easier as she began to pull out of the driveway cautiously, looking back and forth multiple times. I lowered my head in my hands and groaned dramatically.

“Gramma, please, I only get to hang out with him for an hour. Could you speed it up a bit?” I pleaded, desperate for any way to get me to him faster. She smiled and laughed her high-pitched chirp, putting a little pressure on the gas as I tried to relax by taking deep breaths. She looked over at me, a shadow of some old, resurrected understanding held in her watery, ice-blue eyes. I had always coveted her eyes, wondering why I got stuck with hazel. She moved at a steady pace down to the intersection, then the highway, moving closer to historic downtown, better known to residents as the Downtown Mall, where I had basically grown up. The Downtown Mall was the place for the teenage and young adult crowd in Charlottesville, Virginia. There was everything you could ever want: a fantastic chain of ice cream parlors, a few good restaurants with decent prices, jewelry shops, antiques, crafts, toy stores, everything. During the summer, it was invigorating, with Virginia weather at its peak. The park was placed next to the mall area, nestled just beside the public library. My heart jumped at the sight of it.

I was nervous. I hadn’t seen him for three weeks, and I had been on vacation, for one of them seven states away. My thoughts were raving, bouncing off the walls of my consciousness.

“Make sure to let him know we can drive him home,” she reminded me. I nodded, not really paying attention to anything, but rather just calming my nerves. Butterflies danced clumsily in my stomach as the car crept down the narrow street beside the park. I looked up warily at the giant, equestrian Robert E. Lee statue looming in the shadows of early evening. I spotted the familiar, small, stone-mosaic picnic table placed beneath the protective branches of a nearby oak. The tree was old with numerous carvings of long-forgotten romances. Its body was large and sturdy with strong branches—perfect of climbing. I looked over at my Grandma and kissed her goodbye, clutching my ridiculous gift bag in hand.

“Be at this spot at nine o’clock Missy-pie. No later,” she said semi-sternly, raising one silver eyebrow. I smiled despite myself and nodded. I sucked in a breath and managed to drag myself out of the car and up the sloping hill that led to the picnic table tree.

I reached the spot and, looking around, saw no one except a smattering of teens and homeless men. Troubled, I set the bag down next to the table and lightly jogged on my toes towards the statue, while scanning the grassy field stretching out beyond me. Oddly, the sound of rustling leaves tickled my ears. I turned, only to watch a body come tumbling out of the tree, a few leaves trailing behind it. He landed on his feet, then proceeded to waver backwards a few steps and fall squarely on his backside. A smile quickly spread across my face.

"Guthrie Brown," I called out, laughing. His chin jutted upward, revealing his trademark Cheshire cat grin. I glanced back at the car and saw Grandma laughing as she drove away. I leaped at him as he sprang back up on his feet and buried my face in his chest, happily encircling my arms around him. "I missed you," I mumbled into his shirt. He was so warm. He chuckled, his chest vibrating.

"I missed you, too, Erin." He wrapped his strong arms around my waist, towering over me with his tall, lean body. I reveled in the sweet aroma of pine trees, maple, and a touch of spice.

Dizzy with happiness, I suddenly remembered to ask, "Oh, are you alright?" I leaned back, attempting to examine him. Guthrie squeezed tighter, pulling me in closer to him. I felt my cheeks redden, and backed away gently. He released me and smiled, his shaggy, dark-chocolate curls falling in front of his warm, golden-brown eyes.

"I'm fine," he replied. His calm, steady voice visibly relaxed me.

"Yeah, yeah. You're always 'fine,' I know," I mocked playfully, quoting his word from previous discussions. My heart lugged at the memories of our past conversations. The most recent was particularly vivid, not but two days ago. He told me that he loved me. I was shocked, of course, seeing as I'd been his friend for six months and I had managed to spill the fact that I loved him, oh, a week after I met him. We had only hinted at doing anything romantically inclined within the last two weeks. In these two weeks, we managed

to talk on the phone every night for no less than three hours, making us closer to one another than either of us had ever been to anyone.

I sighed, then brightened, remembering the small gift bag patiently waiting to be revealed. I tilted my head in the direction of the table and started to walk toward it. He complied, taking my hand. I jolted, looking down at our touching hands and grinning like a fool. A soft glow seemed to consume my body, swaddling me with heat. I sat down and picked the bag up. His eyes widened.

“Erin, no!” he exclaimed, pouting. “You weren’t supposed to get me anything.” I giggled.

“I was in Wisconsin and went to a gift shop; can you blame a girl?” I asked, tilting my head innocently. He covered his face with his hands, chuckling. I pulled out a blue, Chicago Cubs T-shirt, big enough to fit a horse, and tossed it to him with a triumphant grin. “Remember when you told me you’ve never had anything too big for you since you were little? Well, there is no way you’re outgrowing this,” I reported, clearly pleased with myself. He laughed and slipped it over his head. It hung on him like a tent.

“It’s perfect! Thank you, Erin,” he said, pulling me towards him for one of his signature bear hugs. I blushed slightly, holding the back of his neck in my hand. He lingered, seeming content to continue holding me. Finally he let go and sat down on the chair closest to mine.

“I’m not done just yet,” I added shyly, not meeting his eyes. I heard him groan and giggled. I plunged

my hand into the bag and retrieved the audio book. "I think it's about murder . . . I'm not really sure. You said you liked audio books I . . . well, I don't know." I was rambling. I shoved it before him and brought out the collage I had agonized over for two hours. I had meant to give it to him three weeks ago when I last saw him but forgot. "And you already knew about this," I remarked, finally able to look at him. He took the small canvas and examined it happily, grinning.

"It's great, thanks." He leaned over and hugged me again, tighter this time. Suddenly, he was tickling me. I squealed and wriggled, trying to escape his fortress-like arms, to no avail. He knew how ticklish I was and took advantage of the fact that there wasn't one place on my body that wasn't ticklish, mercilessly running his fingers all over my stomach. I squirmed, laughing until I was almost in tears. He finally stopped, looking down at me, a satisfied glint in his eye. I scrambled and ran over to the safety of the tree, backing up against it. Out of the corner of my eye I could see an older, homeless man watching us with intense interest. I returned my attention to the beautiful menace, glaring at him. He laughed and beckoned me. I raised one eyebrow. He held up his hands defensively. Cautious, I slowly made my way over to him.

Once I got there, he opened his arms for a hug. Still suspicious, I hesitated, but a hug from him wasn't something I could easily refuse. I stepped into his arms, and the minute I did he was tickling me again. I shrieked and pushed my way out of his arms again. I stuck out my tongue and collapsed into the stone chair,

hitting my spine at an uncomfortable angle. I flinched at the biting pain. Guthrie noticed and ran to me.

“You okay?” he choked, genuinely worried. I tittered and nodded, rubbing my back. He frowned and hugged me close. My cheek touched his neck, the connection of skin sending little pulsing shockwaves through me and, just as suddenly as it had come, the pain was gone.

The night went on, growing darker as we sat together and talked. I turned on my Sansa mp3 player and placed my headphones on the table, turning the volume all the way up so we could both hear it, and listened to “White Knuckles” by Alter Bridge while I showed him pictures of my trip. “You’re so pretty, Erin,” he commented, smiling. “Beautiful.” A red hue traveled across my cheeks. His expression changed suddenly, as if he was deep in thought. I giggled at his look of complete concentration. He looked over at me. “What?” A cute look of puzzlement crossed his face. The next song came on, “Gravity” by Sara Bareilles. I blushed. I thought this stuff only happened in movies. “Erin.” He drew out my name, the way he always did when I wouldn’t tell him something. I was sitting sideways, leaving my back open for him to drape himself over. He wrapped his arms around me, grasping both my hand in his. His chin was rested on my shoulder, his lips at my neck. My face burned. “Please, Erin?” he pouted. I felt his warm breath on my neck and shuttered subtly, then smiled.

“It’s nothing,” I replied softly.

“Please?” he pressed, squeezing my hands. I sighed and gave in.

"Alright, fine. You made a cute face. Happy?" I answered, arching my neck away from him. He snickered and detached himself from my side. Part of me wanted to pull him back and lose myself in his warmth.

"I guess . . . I'll see you later," I murmured, sounding defeated as a horn honked and lights flashed, signaling that my hour with him was over.

"Erin, can I ask you something?" he requested. I nodded, words catching in my throat.

"If you'll have me . . ." he said finally, letting out a breath. I grinned and buried my face in his chest once again; it was the happiest I had ever been.

"Of course," I squealed, holding him so tight my arms began to ache. Grandma honked again, jarring me back to reality: I had to go. My body drooped with the realization.

"I'll call you later, okay?" he reassured me, brushing my unruly blond curtain of bangs away from my greenish-hazel eyes with slightly shaky hands. I smiled, blushing, and nodded, hugging him one last time before sprinting over to the car.

"Did he not want a ride home?" Grandma asked

"Oh, dear God," I complained, annoyed with my senior citizen-like memory. I opened the door and raced up the hill, hoping to catch him around the corner. He was nowhere. I ran back to the car and fell in a heap into the passenger's seat, breathing hard. Grandma just tittered, starting the car.

"Maybe we'll catch him on the sidewalk. Just look for him," she said calmly, knowing my sometimes pessimistic attitude all too well. I grumbled something

incoherent and looked out the window. We searched every street and I was about to sit back and give up when I saw him sprinting down the sidewalk.

“It’s him!” I shouted needlessly; Grandma was already veering toward him. I rolled down my window hurriedly. “Guthrie!” I yelled out the open window at the exact moment when Grandma honked the horn. Guthrie jumped sideways, away from the street and spun around, looking frightened. “Guthrie!” I yelled again, waving him towards the car as we pulled in to the gas station just ahead of him. I laughed, falling back in my seat. He walked up to the window, smirking.

“Well, hello there. Could I help you with something, Miss?” he asked formally, coughing a laugh. Grandma giggled softly.

“Come on in, Guthrie. We’ll drive you home,” she said, nodding towards the back. He smiled.

“Thanks!” he replied enthusiastically, jumping into the backseat. I was suddenly flooded with regret that I hadn’t thought to sit in the backseat, so I could sit with him. Grandma did a U-turn in the gas station parking lot, swerving back into the flow of traffic.

“Gave you a scare there, huh?” she chirped. Guthrie chuckled.

“You could say that. I thought I was going to get hit,” he confessed. I spaced out, wishing I was back there with him instead of having him just out of reach, the most irritating thing I have ever experienced. My mind wandered distractedly as they carried on their conversation. Guthrie was my boyfriend. I could hardly believe it. When my close friend Tiffany intro-

duced me to him, I never dared think he would like me the way I liked him. I had been hurt too many times to think that. Spring break changed everything for me.

Here was this beautiful boy: a well-mannered and well-spoken young rarity in men, who wrote poetry, played violin, acted in productions, and had all As in all honors classes. And there was me: average looking, shy around guys, dizzy-headed and forgetful, energetic-almost-to-the-point-of-hyper, who had a problem with blurting out whatever came into my head.

I would always tell myself, *Why are you even trying? You're not good enough*, whenever I started to think he was flirting back. When I left to go back home to Durham, he gave me his email and our friendship began. I could tell him anything. Fights with my mom, bad grades, good grades, possible boyfriends, idiot ex-boyfriends. Anything I wanted to tell him, he was there and would listen.

That's when I realized that's what I'd wanted. All I'd ever needed. But nobody was willing to do that for me until I met him. This boy I had just met was touching my heart in a way nobody had before. I fell in love with him a week after I met him. Of course, I was appalled by this. You're not supposed to fall in love that quickly: you're supposed to be friends, then best friends, *then* maybe if you're lucky, boyfriend and girlfriend. I was doing it all wrong. But thinking this didn't help: I was in too deep. One day, when he asked me what was wrong (God knows how he figured out I was upset over Gmail chat), it just . . . slipped. The truth was out, just like that. I loved him and he knew it.

His response to this was so mature and polite, it made it hurt twice as bad. He respectfully told me that he loved Kate (his girlfriend at the time), and he was very sorry. Of course, I took this in stride, insisting that it didn't matter, I'd be fine. After a few friendly emails, our communication trickled down to a smattering of "How are you?"s and "Haven't talked to you in ages!"s. I finally came to terms with the fact that he would never love me.

When I came back to Charlottesville for summer break, Tiffany got us together and the three of us went to the Downtown Mall, hanging out in the park for a few hours. Tiffany left early, leaving Guthrie and I alone at our table for a good hour and a half. In that time period, we learned even more about each other than we already knew (which was a lot). I was ecstatic. If I couldn't be his girlfriend, I was more than happy to be his friend. He left for a two-week violin camp after that, during which he called me every night and we had extensive, open, nothing-held-back conversations that lasted into all hours of the night. Things just seemed to flow from us like broken river dams, spilling over with what we could never tell anyone else before.

This was when I found out about Kate's nasty habit of pulling him around by a string. They went out for two months and then she broke up with him without giving him a reason. She asked him out again. Another two month relationship. She broke up with him in the middle of his first week of camp. I knew he was hurting and tried my best to comfort him. He told me later that I was the one who kept him sane

through that rough time. We became best friends, and I was overjoyed. I may have fallen in love with him earlier than I "should have," but at least I was going somewhat in order.

Over the week I was gone on vacation, we emailed each other every night. I would sneak out of the hotel room and tiptoe to the computer lab with what I liked to think of as ninja-like stealth, talking until early morning hours, when I would sneak back into bed and wake up a few hours later. This was when Guthrie managed to tell me he loved me, though I had been saying it for two weeks. I was completely thrown for a loop. I had not expected this so soon after his break-up with Kate, the only girl he had ever loved. Heck, she was the only girlfriend he had ever had! I—

"Erin? Erin," Guthrie was calling me. I came to attention, swiveling my head around to face him. The car was stopped and he was halfway out the door. "I'll talk to you later, okay?" he reminded me, chuckling at the far-off look in my eyes. I rose out of the open window as he got out of the car and slammed his door shut, poking my head, then my torso out of the small space of window.

"Talk to you later," I echoed, faking a smile. He saw through my feeble attempt to hide the fact I was sad to see him go. He smirked and hugged me gently, angling himself so he wouldn't squish me against the car. It was warm outside, the kind of warm that manages to ingrain itself in your pores, lingering there until you go inside. It was warm and dark. I could barely see his house, a single porch light flaring brightly as if to call him home.

I snaked my arms around his neck and inhaled his comforting scent. I felt him shiver beneath me. Grandma cleared her throat. I snickered and pulled away from him, untangling my arms. I knew he would call me in twenty minutes, maybe less, but it was nothing compared to actually having him there, feeling the warmth of his skin. I sighed and wormed my way back into my seat. He smiled and winked at me before sprinting off in the direction of the porch light. I watched as he darted around the corner like those little fish you see in the lakes or ponds, vanishing before you can really get a good look. I kept looking as Grandma pulled down the road, heading for home.

It was 9:40 when we arrived. I went upstairs into the kitchen, grabbed a gigantic glass of milk and a bag of Oreos, snatched the phone, and made my sluggish way down to my bedroom. I set down my munchies and burrowed into the covers, the phone right by my side.

After nineteen minutes of fighting off the droop of my eyelids by snacking on cookies and milk, the phone rang. I smiled and answered immediately.

“Hello?” I said anxiously, realizing I hadn’t checked the caller I.D.

“Hello, Erin.”

DANCING THROUGH LIFE

Adine Graves

Life

I GREW UP in Durham but was born in Raleigh. Throughout my whole life I have gone through changes; everybody has. Some changes are as simple as going from elementary school into middle school. Others are more complex and may even involve dramatic loss. I would say that my experience is somewhere in between those two extremes; my life is full of simple, but meaningful changes.

I've always noticed that no matter what we go through, we have someone there to help us get through it and survive. I know, I know, everyone says that, but I am saying it again because it's one hundred percent true.

For instance, there is never a day when I don't think about my friends. After the age of about two, I would go back to Raleigh every once in a while (more

than I do now because at that age I was not as busy as I am now) because even though we had moved, we still had really close friends there. I remember going back to my friend's old house and riding back and forth on her zip-line. Molly and I clicked, and ever since, we've been close friends. A few years after we had settled into our Durham house, a family moved into my old neighborhood. Just up the street from my dad's house is where I met Rosa. Molly and Rosa are two of my very best friends.

Everyone has ups and downs. I always rely on a friend to support me, and I can support them, too, of course. Because of friends, I always have someone to catch me when I fall.

Needless to say, in life I have my ups and downs, but no matter what, I always have my friends and family there next to me.

Second Fall

My heart raced.

I'd been into an emergency room once before because of fainting. But this time it was different. After I had fainted, doctors were called in to take my blood sugar level. The results were not good.

The scene started out with me going to my grandmother's salon; I was getting a pedicure. As I was getting a pale pink nail polish painted on, I felt like something was wrong and asked for water. Suddenly, everything went black, and, just like before, I fainted.

Sitting in the emergency room, with an IV in my arm, I listened to my parents explain to me that my cousin had diabetes and that I might have it, too.

After an hour or two, the doctor came in and told us that I was fine, and everything would be alright. We were stunned. I knew how my parents must have felt, waiting there for hours expecting the worst. It's one of those feelings you can't explain in words.

January 24, 2009

Cold from winter and tired from school, I really just wanted to get home, snuggle into a blanket, drink hot chocolate, and watch TV. That's what I tried to do.

I dropped off my bags in my room, then headed to the kitchen, calling to my dad (I call him Papa) that I was going to make hot chocolate. He then responded, saying, "Okay, and you can use that new one minute kettle pot thing that we got for Christmas."

"Okay!" I plugged in the red kettle and the red button lit up. Then, I went to add water and close the top. As I was waiting, I grabbed my new Walt Disney mug, eager to start relaxing. After waiting for about another thirty seconds, I guessed the water was boiled enough, and poured it into the mug, mixing it in with the sugary chocolate powder.

I didn't know what I was in for. Nobody can predict the feature. When you least expect it, anything can happen.

I placed the mug of hot chocolate in front of the kettle to let it cool. After about a minute went by, I realized the red light was still on. I looked closely at the red light and decided I needed to check if the kettle was on or not. I reached over with my right arm to check, and found it was off. Then, as I brought my arm back, the mug fell onto its side and hot chocolate splashed on my face and on my arm. My heart raced, just thinking about the fact that only a minute ago I was perfectly fine. I screamed. My dad rushed in, and soon I went off to change. As I was in my room, I noticed something that would affect the rest of my life.

My left arm was burned from my wrist to the crease of my elbow. I sat that night on the couch with a wet towel on the burn. The pain ached and one big blister formed right below the crease of my arm. I remember thinking to myself, *Why did this have to happen to me?*

Just like I said, when you least expect it, it hits.

Always a Time to Move On

As a baby, I had moved from Raleigh to Durham and gotten along just fine. But this move was different.

My old house in Durham, the house I remember the most from my childhood, was the house I grew up in until I was around thirteen and a half. My room had been a green color. It was somewhat small, with one closet, a door that had to be held closed with a crafts box, and wooden floors that left me with splinters whenever I tried to dance.

Walking with Rosa from Locopops back to our houses, walking past the pumpkin patch and the day-care, I looked at her and said, "I remember the day you moved up the street and when your mom first came over and you were all shy. I am going to miss all the days when you just walked into my house to find ice cream sandwiches and watch TV on the couch."

From the day we moved into my old house, I knew there would be a day we would move out. There, everyone moved. We had a neighbor who moved from one side of our house to the other, "right across our lawn," is what my dad said. Then, people started to move out of the neighborhood. And soon it was our turn.

I miss my old neighborhood like crazy. It was urban, so I could walk to all my friends' houses every day. Now, in my new house, I try to ride my bike up to the Subway. Yeah . . . Well, I haven't been able to get there yet. I have to say, I like my new house, but I loved my old neighborhood.

Every weekend now, I drive past my old house, and memories that I've had there return. I feel a slight sadness. Even though I knew we all had to move on, I wonder if Rosa moved on happily, without looking back or if she had felt the same way as us. As I drive by, I notice everything that we did to the house that has been swept away and replaced.

There's always a point when it's time to move on.

New House

Where I feel comfortable. Where I learn. Where I feel safe. Where I can control the noise, and I can have it be only me. Where I have fun either dancing, acting, singing, reading, writing, chatting on the phone with a friend, hanging out, chilling, or even just sleeping. It's my room.

My house is set up somewhat like my grandmother's house—the floor plan, at least. My room is so much bigger than the old one. As you walk inside, you might smell the slight sweet pea smell of my favorite body splash from Bath and Body Works. Then, turn to the left, and you see a ballerina pink wall covered with brown, white, hot pink, and lavender polka dots. And then you turn to the right and see two large closets full of clothes and shoes, with a stereo on top. Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know. When I first moved in, all my friends would tell me, "That's every girl's dream, to have two closets to herself." There's a bed, a nightstand, a dresser, and a vanity. My desk is in the guest room with my computer. I think this room suits me.

Cleaning. Well, that's a different story. If I am in the mood for cleaning, then it happens, and I even have fun doing it. But then there are days when you are just too lazy, and you can't do it. I still remember that day about a week after I moved into my house when my best friend Rosa came over. Looking at my room, she said, "Wow, Adine, this is the first time I've been over to your new house and your room is not even clean."

My room is the most important place in my whole life. It is where I spend most of my time. And there is enough space in there for me to do what I want.

My room is where I express myself. It's only me in there at times, and that's when I am able to make that room mine.

Dream

Every morning I wake up, but not at the time I planned to. As I rush to get ready, I sometimes have the realization that school is our whole life. I mean, seriously, if someone asked, "What are you doing with your life right now?" I know I would say, "School." At this moment, at the age fourteen, I have done school my whole entire life. Yeah, I have breaks every now and then, but every year come fall, it's all school.

Every day when I get home, I set aside a time when there's no homework, and I can go into my room, shut the door, and sing a song, go over lines, or dance. I think I was in the fifth or sixth grade when I suddenly stopped in the middle of this time to myself and thought of about I wanted, what I really wished to do with my future.

Since I was about five years old, I 've been dancing, and since I was about ten, I've been acting, and singing has just followed naturally. As I paused there to think, I realized that throughout my whole life I've always wanted to pursue a dream, either dancing or acting. I don't care about rejections because I know

that is what you get in both of these careers. I just knew then, that was it. That was what I wanted. I tell everyone my dream, but all they say is that I “need a backup; both of those are really hard to pursue.” But I am ready to hear a change in what they say.

THE ULTIMATE FAN-GIRL

Lexxie Ichihara

Prologue

HYPOTHETICALLY, WHAT IF you and I casually bumped into each other at Starbucks and began talking about our past lives? You may talk about your happy childhood, your confusing adolescent years. You may even talk about your family, your likes and dislikes. Then, after you spilled everything out to me, a complete stranger, you would expect me to tell you my story.

Well, to be honest, I have no story. My early childhood is a blur; occasionally, images of the past find their way to my mind. Honestly, all I remember is my parents arguing and eventually my dad leaving. My “confusing adolescent years” weren’t confusing at all, rather more annoying than anything. Although much of it has been erased, I do remember pain being a main factor. Pain was there during puberty. There it was when I developed my first crush. This unwanted

feeling was so conceited that it would find any way to make sure it was the only emotion I felt.

Now here is the question: what am I going to tell you? You were eager to tell me your seemingly happy and perfect life. If I tell you about this troublesome life two things would happen: 1) I would put a damper on things, and 2) you would make a conjecture stating I am the person who sees the glass half full, when actually that is not true.

“My childhood, you ask?” I sip my coffee as if the words I was looking for were in the caffeine. “My childhood was nothing more than anime and music-filled days. All I did was eat and breathe music. With every sound I heard, I would compose the noise into a harmonious song. I remember with each step I took, I would count one, two, three, four, over and over. My music instructor, taking note of this strange habit, suggested the drums.” We then share a brief laugh. “Oh, and anime was the basis of all the goals I have ever achieved.

“While I was in school I would daydream about my favorite characters busting through the window, glass shattering everywhere. My peers would have confusion and awe written all over their faces. Then, depending on who I decided to use in the fantasy, in most cases it was Gaara, the hero would tell me to grab the important things I needed. Then he would fly me away, thus saving me from doing my dreadful school work.”

I stop and stare at you. Your eyes hungry for more, your ears perked up like a rabbit’s, your lips parted

in stupefaction, you lean in slightly. This amuses me because even though it is all true, what I said, I had just winged it and hoped for the best. The reaction you gave me is more than what I expected.

“This is how it all began . . .”

Chapter 1: The First Drug

It was eleven o’clock at night and my two sisters, my oldest sister’s friend, and I were watching *Adult Swim*. Saturday was “Anime Night.” This was when I was in third grade, so I didn’t know what it was or that it was originally Japanese. The moment I saw this beautiful half-demon tearing apart another one of his kind with his bare hands and then receiving a radiant pink shard as a reward, I knew I would be hooked on this genre of entertainment for the rest of eternity. *Inuyasha* will always be my favorite anime because it was my first.

Sure, way back when I was even younger, I watched anime, not realizing what it was. Shows like *Pokémon* and *Dragon Ball Z* were my favorites. But that was kiddie anime and was by then too silly for me.

Today, not only have these Japanese cartoons turned into a daily routine, but they have also become a destressor. There is nothing more relaxing than watching a team of ninjas demolish some bad guy after a long day of school and chores. When I watch anime, reality is not a factor anymore. I forget the arguments and the late assignments. It can be as simple

as *Shin chan* or as elaborate and abstract as *Ghost in the Shell*. I lose all sense of reality and awareness of my environment.

For a few short years, I started to take up more extracurricular activities, like dance (for a very brief, dark period) and soccer. With papers piling up, filth smothering the plates, and my floor replaced by a sea of clothes, there was just no possible way to balance sports, school, and my home duties with my own enjoyment.

As soon as I moved on to the sixth grade, it was a part of me again. I used to get up at five o'clock in the morning just to watch *InuYasha*. When I hit seventh grade, I started to expand my horizons. The only thing my mind focused on was *Naruto*. That was the only thing my friends and I talked about. The sequel is still overseas, but that didn't stop us. *Naruto: Shippuden*, among other shows I've watched, hasn't yet been dubbed, so I have to read subtitles. Sometimes it is a pain, but I would rather read subtitles than not have any at all. It is like watching the Spanish channel when the only Spanish you know is *Hola* and how to count to ten.

Anime has opened so many doors for me. I have met friends who are into it just as much as I am. To think that there is a whole community of people who enjoy it is truly unreal. There are so many websites I am a part of that cater to this genre of entertainment. Anime has introduced me to the whole Japanese culture.

If I had never witnessed the glorious demon that night many years ago, I would be confused every time my friends opened their mouths, I wouldn't know how

to speak Japanese, nor would I want to go to school there. Thank the heavens for that demon.

Chapter 2: A Chat with Lexxie-chan

If it weren't for my thumb, I would be lost. My thumb is the key to my happiness. My thumb is the only finger that can efficiently press the buttons on my iPod. Every second of every minute of every day, my iPod is either near me or feeding the music into my ears.

My schedule tends to be wake up, get ready for school, grab iPod, snatch key. I would rather be locked out my house than be without my iPod.

One day I was listening to "Filth in the Beauty" by the GazettE. I swear, as soon as he said "To true daughter," I realized something about myself. I have a playlist full of Japanese bands and one Norwegian band. I thought to myself, "Lexxie-chan, you own more than enough music. Out of all those songs, twenty-four of them are from a different country." But by this time, two songs had already passed. I swear my brain has really bad timing.

Although, what I said was true. To myself, I replied, "Hm. What of it?" I took a moment to answer because sometimes my inner self can be as dense as lead.

"What of it?" You listen to those songs more than the American songs."

"Wow, you are right!" I said, amazed. My other me just smirked in response.

At that moment, I felt as if Rafiki had hit me on the head with his clarity stick. Foreign music affects me in a different and more powerful way. When I listen to imported music, I feel what the artist is trying to tell me, even if I don't know the words. There is no one telling me what I should feel; American music could never move me in that way.

Chapter 3: The Rise of the Ultimate Fan-Girl

Since when did I become a nerd? And I don't mean an academic nerd; I am talking about the one that knows a lot about one particular subject. Such as, I don't know . . . Anime! I own books, posters, clothes, trading cards, theme and ending songs, and drawings. In addition to that, I want to go to a convention.

How I wish it were all cheap. When doctors ask me if I do drugs I say, "Who has the money for drugs when you are addicted to anime?" Cosplay can start at one hundred dollars. Then books are ten bucks each. Oh, if you want box sets for the shows you like, that can cost from forty to over one hundred smackaroones. Now do you understand the whole "Who needs drugs?" line? I am surprised I haven't stooped so low as to sell my things just to get the latest book.

Last year, I wanted to go to the convention known as Animazement but didn't have the money. Judging from my friend's stories and pictures, it seemed like fun. There were hundreds of people of different races and backgrounds. Some were in cosplay and some in

regular street clothes. Everywhere you looked, there was something of interest. You could buy DVDs, manga, weapons, Japanese food, and T-shirts. The awesome thing was that you could get some of your books signed by the authors themselves. Animazement also had entertainment: live J-rock bands and fan-skits (fan-made skits about the characters, which have no relation to the actual show whatsoever).

I plan on going next year. I am most enthused by the theme: horror. I will finally be able to test out this make-up design that makes it look like my skin is unzipping (which also requires a lot of money). Honestly, I wonder how I am going to balance anime with music when I am older.

I have already planned what I am going to buy when I go. Knickknacks like contacts, books, shirts, weapons, and lots of pocky are all on my "To Have or You Will Die" list.

Another event at Animazement that has me fired up is the rave. I may not exactly know what it is, but it sounds like fun. I am guessing it is like a wild, raging party. That sounds like something I would enjoy. Plus, I wouldn't be the only person acting crazy for the first time in my life.

Yes, as you can tell, I am totally psyched. I have planned this since May 2008. There is an internal countdown going on. There is just eight months and two days to go, but it doesn't matter. Just as long as I am going, I can wait with a huge Cheshire cat smile on my face.

Life is my creation
Is my best friend
Imagination
Is my defense
And I'll keep walking
When skies are grey
Whatever happens was meant that way
KERLI, "THE CREATIONIST"

HOMETOWN GLORY

Essence A. Jacobs

ALBANY, NEW YORK, is my hometown, but Durham, North Carolina, just happens to be my second. I remember the day I left Albany, saying goodbye to my little friends and my little boyfriend. I was four years old at the time, so I didn't really understand why we had to leave. But nowadays, it's the other way around: I don't want to leave North Carolina because it makes me the person I am today—someone with a good personality who isn't afraid of anything and doesn't care what people think. Someone who has had good people around her to show her what a good person is supposed to look like. My whole childhood life was spent in North Carolina. It's not a place I take for granted. This place is my identity—it's who I am. This place is my hometown.

Self-Esteem

“Goodbye, Essence,” my mom and dad said after they had walked me to the front door. It was the first day of my kindergarten class. I was so scared. I didn’t know who these people were, they probably already had their own little friends, and their accents sounded too country. I didn’t think I was ever going to fit in with them because I was this tall little kindergartener with a strong New York accent. But within a couple of days, I already felt like a North Carolinian.

I used to be this shy and quiet person who couldn’t and didn’t want to break out of her shell. I had low self-esteem; I didn’t think I was pretty. When I was in fourth grade, I used to get picked on a lot for my hair. It was short and people used to think it looked ugly. I sobbed every night because I thought that I was never ever going to have any friends because of how I looked. But now, everyone loves my uniqueness and people say I’m pretty (even though some days I don’t really see what everyone is talking about). I am fourteen years old now and I am no longer in that shell. I have set myself free and have become a crazy, funny, unique person.

These days, my identity is a roller coaster. I never know what the next bend will bring. So many things add to who I am: my appearance, my friends, even my mood. The first loop in the rollercoaster began when my mom put locks into my hair. I have to admit, it was something I never wanted, but my mom said it was to honor her brother, who also had them. Today, I am proud of my locks.

Family

Durham is the only area of North Carolina I know well. Yes, I have been to other cities and counties, but Durham has something to it that says home. Durham is where my family began and where it broke apart.

My family used to live together in one happy home, but now we are all separated. I used to be Daddy's Little Girl, but things changed. Regardless of the pain, that is what helped me have a strong personality. I can now be a stronger woman. The sky started to get clearer, and as I got older, I began to understand things. If I ever become a single mother, I will know what to do and how to stay strong just like my mom is doing with me and my sister.

Some days, I wish I could go back in time to when life was good. Even though my mom raised us on her own, we were doing well. Nowadays, North Carolina isn't doing so much for my mom. The economy is so bad, there are no good jobs here.

But there is something about Durham that keeps a smile on our faces. Durham is so real, free, and fun; it's a place where I can express myself because it helped me discover my talent.

DSA

I didn't choose DSA; it chose me. It's a school where I can let all my dancing and singing take over. It's a place where I think I have met long-term friends.

People call it the lame school of Durham because it doesn't have a football team and fights hardly ever happen here. I used to imagine my school like the one in the movie *Fame*: it was the one everyone would want to go to. But it's not like that. It's a performing arts school that doesn't work hard enough on its arts. When I was little, I wanted to go to DSA because my sister went there. It used to be the best school ever. But now that I'm older, everyone wants to leave. DSA is a good school, but I think the only thing that keeps me here is my friends; they keep me alive. At DSA, you need friends like that because if not, you will have the worst school year ever.

DSA also helped me with my identity because if I had gone to any other school, I don't think I would be able to express myself and act crazy like I do. For example, most of my friends that I knew from elementary school now go to Southern High School. Even though I've known them for a long time, when I see them or friends from another urban high school, I have to pretend to be someone I'm not. But with DSA people, I'm myself.

Conclusion

I have gone to seven different schools and I think of every person I meet as a little piece of me. My friends in the past have made me the person I am today. When I talk them, I see a little bit of me in every one. I treat them like they are my own family.

Friends have always seemed to be the biggest factor in my life. I guess it was from those Disney Channel movies I used to watch when I was a little kid. Now, everyone comes up to me for advice because I learned all that I know from television shows.

I can be this loving and caring person who loves to give people relationship advice and help people with their problems. I can be this mean person who doesn't feel like giving people advice and has an attitude problem with everyone (but that person only comes once a month). I can be this quiet and calm girl who stays to herself. I can be this loud and crazy person who doesn't care what people think because she was not put on this earth to please anyone but God. I can be the sassy girly girl who adores makeup and can't live without it. I can be this girl who doesn't like the way she looks and sometimes wonders why dudes are so afraid to talk to her. I can be this girl who always falls too deep once she sees the guy she really likes show her some attention. All these personalities are somehow combined into this one me.

THE STRUGGLE FOR SUCCESS

Jacob Jayala

The Fear of Swimming

THAT HUMID DAY is as clear to me now as glass: the fear that saturated my brain like water in a sponge, the pain that never hesitated.

On the second day of September, I received an invitation to a swimming party. Ballons were on the birthday card; the yellow paint caught my eye like gold. My dad would take me to the party.

Our relationship had a sturdy foundation. I scratched his back and he scratched mine. We went to many places when I was still in my young years: Carolina Beach, Virginia, Wilmington, anywhere that was fun.

My heart raced since I knew there would be swimming. I loved and still do like sports. Volleyball, soccer, track and field, anything that involves movement. Maybe I would not have faced death if I did not like athletics.

I went to the party in black swimming trunks that I had never worn. My dad accompanied me. He had the height of a professional rower, and the width of a sturdy six-foot tree. His muscles stood out slightly because of his own experience in track and field.

We approached the burgundy fence of the swimming pool. I could see through the fence to the blue color of the pool. It was shaped like a grass green soccer field encircled by an orange, synthetic track. I heard the children's laughter, the splash of water, the shrills of excitement. As we let ourselves in, I embraced the scenery. There were African-American, Caucasian, and Asian faces drifting on the surface. Drinks and snacks stood around the outside of the pool. There, arranged on a large table, were a variety of refreshments.

My dad and I decided we would swim first, then eat later. My dad helped me into the pool, careful to make sure I stayed in the shallow end. He then taught me the freestyle stroke. I loved to use my feet like slick flippers and hands like huge pads. The adrenaline surged through me and exhaustion did not dare come near.

When my dad finished teaching me and I had had enough, we left the pool. We approached the potato chip mountain surrounded by children of all ages. The people encircled the mountain, desparately reaching for chips. My dad and I went to the organizer of the party, a Chinese woman with jet-black hair.

While my dad talked, my imagination remained with the pool. I loved the feeling of water on my skin as I dipped beneath the surface. I loved pushing off

the wall with my skinny legs using as much power as possible. My dad remained preoccupied with the organizer, engaged in a deep conversation in the adult language of a large vocabulary.

I wanted to go to the pool like an orphan who wants a family. I did not wait for my dad's approval. I raced back to the pool like a jet taking off at full speed. I plunged into the water, noticing that it had a very deep bottom. I had not yet learned from my father how to swim back up to get oxygen.

I felt the pain and water running into my lungs like a glass about to break because of a shrill sound. The water did not contain any chlorine, so I could see around me. There were no other legs dangling from the surface like they were walking on air. How could water be so blue, filled with color and emotion, while I suffocated?

Panic surged through me. I kicked off the side wall, bobbing up for air. As I went up, I could only see feet strolling in different directions. The contents of sandals, sneakers, dress shoes. Couldn't anyone see me? I thought all hope had disappeared. The water covered my body like a blanket. Seconds passed like minutes.

Death still had a tight grip. It put cramps in my legs, stiches in my sides. I wondered why I should try to seek help when no one could see me, as if I were invisible. I let go of my efforts and drifted back into the water. My vision started to blur. The pain ebbed away and the world began to blacken.

All of a sudden, a dark figure approached me, swimming as if it had fins. The pain returned, trying

to overwhelm me, trying to break my spirit. I could not let it prevail. I reached out my hand and felt a tight grip engulfing it. My dad had come to the rescue.

He pushed off the bottom of the pool and brought me back to the surface. I immediately coughed up water and clung to him, not wanting to face that horror again. Death's heart felt colder than dry ice, his fortitude that of a lion. My dad asked me if I could still breathe, even though the dirty water from my mouth trickled onto him. The water had filled my lungs.

I still swim occasionally, but not with the same passion. Now, I only watch swimming on television. If it were not for that incident, I might have become a swimmer, but the fear would not let go. I learned that to become good at what you love, you sometimes have to hold back.

The Eight Hundred

Mamudu flew past his competitors. His parents were from West Africa. He had a short and skinny stature, not your typical eight hundred meter runner. He attended Brogden Middle School and he meant business.

The orange track encircled a professional-looking soccer field. The grass had a nice trim, the white lines freshly painted. The track had a grass slope surrounding it, making it resemble a small stadium with steps leading down.

My teammates and I took a small area of the slope. We were a team of twenty-eight. There were chants of

“D-S-A,” Durham School of the Arts, a winning team. We were psyching ourselves up for the track meet, trying to let in the adrenaline. The boys were loud as ever, trying to hide the feeling of butterflies tumbling in their stomachs. The girls were gossiping. For them, track was more about socializing than winning. Our coach ordered us to complete our warm-ups. He had an average weight with glasses and a shaven head. Our first assignment consisted of two laps.

We jogged the laps in a disorderly fashion in our sweats. I looked ahead to see Lowes Grove, a team in matching black sweat pants and sweatshirts. They jogged in a line, evenly spaced. Could I win against a team so formal? When we finished our warm-ups, we went back to the grass slope.

I visualized how I would run the eight hundred, my event. It required speed but also endurance. I would sprint the first hundred, go at a moderate pace, and sprint the last hundred. I pictured the recognition I would get from my coach, teammates, and strangers who would congratulate me. I knew today would be a special day. I had to do a good job, I had to come in first place. I might have intimidated some with my 5'9" height and eight percent muscle build.

My thoughts were interrupted when the loud-speaker announced, “First call for the eight hundred.” My teammates wished me luck and I slipped out of my sweats.

I jogged to the starting line, replacing warm-ups with stretches, getting my body loose. My muscles felt like jello. My knees shook as my arms and shoulders

became tense. "Second call, eight hundred," announced the loudspeaker. I looked at my competition.

Most of the competitors were 5'7". Many of them looked as if they weighed 140 pounds. Mamudu had this event. I had watched him win the fifteen hundred earlier. He would go out fast like a bullet to wear out his opponents. "Third call, eight hundred," announced the loudspeaker.

I approached the registration table which stood beside the starting line. I told an elderly lady with gray hair my first and last name and she gave me my lane number. "Good luck," she said with a faint smile. Lane number three would be just fine. I placed the lane number sticker on my right hip and again set my mind on the race.

"Runners, on your mark," said a gunman. I shared my lane with a short boy who wore glasses. Mamudu remained in lane one. He looked tired and bored, as if he were being forced to compete. "Set!" I leaned slightly into the lane, getting ready to take off. The gun sounded. I sprinted the first curve trying to get out of the ambush of sharp spikes and hard-nobbed elbows.

Mamudu and my teammate Lucas eventually caught up with me at the half of the first straightaway. Lucas, a Hispanic endurance runner, stayed behind me and Mamudu went in front. I knew from the start that the pace would be too fast for Lucas.

I drafted off Mamudu, taking in as much air as possible. As we came near the second lap, the crowd chanted, "Go, Mamudu!" I would disappoint the crowd. As we finished the first curve of the second lap, Lucas and

I were side by side, going at the same pace. An African-American with kinky hair gradually approached us. Mamudu was only had a few steps ahead.

Lucas started to lose the pace. "Go get him, Jacob," Lucas said with exhaustion.

"Okay!" I creped onto Mamudu like a cheetah on a gazelle. The African-American eventually caught up and passed me, but then slowed down in front of me. I would not let these two stop me from achieving victory. I skipped the other boy and followed Mamudu in the line. I followed him for the last curve. He gradually started to fade, allowing me to pass like a thief.

With the adrenaline pumping, I threw myself over the finish line. I crouched down as my teammates encircled me, cheering. Mamudu looked displeased as my head turned towards him. His eyes were bloodshot and his back hunched. He had wanted it just as bad as I had.

Track Practice

Stress disappeared as I ran. Track and field brought the anticipation of adrenaline. I liked the pain I felt in my lungs and legs. Track brought me to new heights by making me feel better. Hadrian Drive provided the workouts that left me gasping for air.

The black concrete over a slight hill; the short grass covering the housing compounds; the two intersections on a street with little traffic; the houses of medium wealth, some fairly big, others quite simple.

This spot brought no visitors most of the time. I would start at the beginning of the incline, picking up speed like a race car.

Track and field encircled my life. I trained for it, watched it, and dreamed about. I never went a day without thinking about it. I wanted to go places with track, like the shiny streets of Paris and Rome. I wanted to be someone special, someone who won every event he or she chose, someone who people respected, someone who they regretted teasing.

I started one memorable practice by jogging around a street corner to warm up. I passed by the compounds like a well-run car, extending each stride. Today, the pain would be intense. The practice would be ten one-fifties. There would only be a forty-five second break in between each one. As I jogged back to my driveway, with the blue Nissan Sentra, finishing up my warm up, I started second-guessing my career in track and field. I already felt the exhaustion coming on like the darkness of night. This had never happened before. Already exhausted, I went through the drills on my lawn. There were high-skips, butt-kickers, and sets of karaoke. These drills took more energy; they were twice as hard as running. I then approached the lonely, gray driveway to do some stretches.

I hated when my body felt tired. Psychologically, I was prepared, but my body could not handle it. Some may want to study for an entire day without sleep, but the body needs rest. Some may want to be famous, but can never seem to put in enough effort.

As I stood up from the pavement to do my final stretches, I looked at the scenery. There were birds flying south, synchronized. The sky had few clouds as the sun beat down mercilessly. The street had only the cars for company. Exhilaration passed over me as I noticed the silence. There would be peace. No one would interrupt me as I sped down the street, not caring that puddles covered it like craters on the moon.

I proceeded to the top of the incline. I looked down the street and noticed the multiple cars on the sides. Why didn't they just park in their driveways? Now, I would have to veer away from the cars, wasting time. Time never waited for anyone during a sprint.

I leaned in slightly and exploded out of my starting position. I still needed to work on my drive phase. I tended to rock back and forth and pop up quickly. But sprinting left me no time to think. It all happened in a blur. I felt my toes hit the pavement like baby steps. My arms were moving back and forth, my fists hammering an invisible desk. My legs were moving as quickly as possible, driven by a machine. I had passed the 150 mark.

The wind stopped buzzing in my ears, and I felt my heart racing. Nine more distances to cover. I walked quickly back to the start, giving myself a little break. I got myself in position and exploded once again, emphasizing the drive phase. My head needed to slowly lift up so I would not lose any speed.

As I passed the one hundred mark, I felt my body slow down. As I passed the 150 mark, I got frustrated. Did athletes perform like this? I went

back to the top of the slight incline. This time I would do it right.

Exploding out of my starting position, I realized that I did not have the same drive power as before. I could feel the tension creeping into my shoulders as I zoomed by the finish line. Seven more one-fifties were left. The pain wanted to show up now, while there were still more distances to cover. My anger overpowered my pain. I raced back to the starting line. This time I would do it perfectly.

I got in my position with my left elbow slightly forward and my right elbow slightly back. I drove out of my position, but it only made my start worse. As I finished, I kept wondering why I felt as if I were about to die. Yes, I had worked out earlier in the week. Were those practices so hard that they had left me with little energy for today?

I went back to the starting line and tried to concentrate. I would overpower it, if it took me all day. Six more were left. I exploded out of my position with a better start but again began to fade after the one hundred. Perspiration drenched my shirt. I knew I could not continue.

Then, it struck me why I could not continue: I had been over-exerting myself. My body did not have that kind of endurance. Some things I could not just expect from my body. I would have to work at it and get better. People who ride a bike for the first time have the same experience: they cannot expect to know how to ride immediately without falling.

Desperation

“Man, this game is going to be sweet.”

“We’d better win.”

“They must cry out for mercy.”

These were the chants as we rode the white bus. I felt the will to win in the air. Our heads were bobbing up and down to music. We were the Bouncing Bulldogs preparing to face Carrington Middle School in soccer. None of my teammates looked afraid. They looked like exuberant children ready to mock any who fell. We thought we would win this game, then advance to the championship round. We were a team that had only lost twice.

The long, narrow bus then approached the rock path. As the rocks crunched under the tires’ weight, I took in the scenery.

The baseball field on the left lay closest to us. There girls were practicing in their short black shorts, long white shirts, and white and black hats. The school stood to the right, multiple brown buildings interlocked. Ahead, the narrow path of rocks continued. Tall, shrubby trees stood on each side. We could not see the soccer field yet.

This game would separate the men from the teenagers. We had to win. As the bus pulled up onto grass, I saw the field. It was narrow but wide, shaped like a green mound. The two goals stood in their ends. Two benches were placed in the middle of the farthest side of the field. Carrington sat at the one on the right.

Their best player sat on the far left, gulping Gatorade from the container. He always listened to his coach, trying to find ways to improve his technique. He came from Brazil, was 5'11", and had impressive moves. He could kick a soccer ball in flight, as if he were a ninja. His footwork matched his foot speed. We all knew this because of our previous game. If we could shut him down, we might win.

My teammates and I exited the bus, dragging our luggage as if our bags were packed with bricks. "Guys, remain focused!" yelled Coach Barringer. We were about to do what we loved. Soccer entertained many around the world, and tonight we would give them a show.

Soon, we met the gate that encircled the field. It matched the field's size. Right behind it sat the spectators in the stands, eyeing us as if we ought to have been ashamed of ourselves. My soccer team did not seem to mind. They laughed at anything that stood in sight: the blue sky that would become dark, the crowd that filled the silence with disapproval.

We settled on the benches and slipped on our black, shiny cleats. Most of them had just recently been purchased. We then began our warm-ups, running around the field. Carrington watched us closely, eyeing us down, too. We next went onto the field to do some stretches.

Coach Barringer looked at us. "Hey Jacob, come here for a sec," he said.

"Yes," I said as I hustled towards him.

"I want you to stay on number thirteen, the Brazilian boy, David. Can you handle that?"

“No problem, Coach.”

As we practiced our shots, I imagined myself guarding David. Would we get so much into the game that a fight would break out? He had an intimidating stature.

“Captains, center of the field!” yelled the referees. Lucas and Devan went to the center of the field. They looked like little children standing beside two adults, the picture of Carrington’s team.

Meanwhile, our coach huddled us up near the sideline. “Look for the offense on the outside, defenders push forward, we will win.”

We yelled our chant, “D-S-A! D-S-A!” The referees blew their whistles. The game would soon begin. I played starting defense, stopper. I looked ahead to see the black jerseys (DSA) versus the orange (Carrington). Nelson, a medium height teenager with blonde hair, and Fermin, a small child with impressive skills, started the game.

The offense made nice passes to the outside, avoiding defenders. Nico, a cocky, blonde boy, tipped the ball from the right over to Nelson. Nelson quickly trapped it and kicked it into the left corner. “Goal!” exclaimed my teammates. Everyone piled around Nelson, clasping him in a manly hug.

David started the ball for Carrington. I quickly came up to him, pressuring him to lose the ball. His teammate Patrick luckily ran near the left side when he finally passed it. Patrick zoomed to the goal, drifting by the defenders as if they were standing still. His legs moved as fast as lightning, covering the ball as he

proceeded. He kicked the ball into the upright corner. Antonio, a short, Hispanic teenager, our goalie, did not have a chance.

The game progressed and I stayed with David. When he ran down the field, I stayed with him. When he tried to retrieve a pass, I blocked it. We scored the next goal, thanks to Fermin. Carrington's team started to look discouraged. Their posture slouched as they trudged along.

"Come on team, embrace the pain!" yelled their coach. He stood tough as nails, showing pride. That seemed to revive their energy. Patrick, with his broad shoulders and lanky stature, zoomed to the left side. I still defended David, but he faked, leaving me running to the outside. He gladly accepted Patrick's pass and kicked the ball into the goal with tremendous power. The soccer ball appeared as another white blur. He rallied around the field with his jersey off as his teammates followed. The whistle blew: half time. The score remained two to two.

My team and I ran back to our bench, encircling the Gatorade container. The benchwarmers said we were doing well. I quickly reached for a cup and drank. Coach Barringer then had us sit in the opposite goal for a little pep talk. He looked tired, maybe because of all the yelling. Bags hung under his eyes while crowsfeet spread at the sides of them.

"Good job, everyone. We were making passes to those on the outside, Jacob nice defense, and we have minimized their scores. Continue what you are doing and we will win. We must win!" Everyone cheered as

Marcus, a chubby African-American, led our chant. The whistle screeched. The second half would begin.

We started again. Javier, a good Hispanic player with black, gelled hair, ran down the right and lobbed in the soccer ball. The goalie of medium height thought it would go out. My teammates and I cheered at the early goal. We still had thirty mintues remaining. I stayed with David, eyeing his every move.

He then tried to score a long shot like David Beckham but my foot deflected the ball and it sailed past the sideline. He threw it in to another tall player. My team played heavy defense. Arms were grasping shirts and cleats continually banged against each other.

“Handball, number twenty-three,” yelled the referee. I wore the number twenty-three jersey.

“What? I didn’t even touch the ball,” I said with frustration.

“Don’t worry about it, Jacob,” said Fermin.

“Free kick!” yelled the out of shape referee. We made a wall as David set up the ball. Patrick gazed at us from behind. David ran for the kick as we jumped up trying to block it; I knew it would be a fake, yet I helped my teammates with our body barrier anyway. Patrick drilled the ball into the upper left-hand corner with surprising speed.

The whistle blew. I had played the entire game. I felt the fatigue wash over me. “Captains, tell a referee that we will do overtime instead of penalty shots,” said Coach Barringer. We set up once again with fifteen minutes left on the clock. I told Coach Barringer to let me stay in the game.

Everyone else looked worn out as well. Carrington's offense eventually pushed our defense back with two minutes remaining. Devan, Lucas, and Brian were exhausted. They were just trying to endure the final minutes of the game. They had played hard. Lucas, another Hispanic player, participated in all of the corner kicks.

Brian, a boy with brown skin and black hair, guarded the goal, swatting away the ball like it was a mosquito. Devan, a chubby dark-skinned boy, played cautiously. He made sure every move he made did what he wanted. Antonio stood in the goal, leaping to cover shot attempts.

Could I endure? Carrington set up for a corner kick. Their player raised up a number one with his stubby finger. It felt as if time had slowed down. The ball curved inwards toward the left post. David jumped and headed it down as I tried to throw my side to block it. The ball had faintly touched my jersey, and I lay on the ground gasping for air. The whistle blew and Carrington yelled in happiness.

Wrestling with a Tiger

I heard the bell ring. "Come on, Jacob. Let's get this over, already!" yelled Shyheim. He had a brown, plump face with disheveled black hair. He had an average weight and height. I, on the other hand, had a lanky stature in addition to being underweight. The shine on my close-to-shaven head matched that of my pearly white teeth.

We both jumped over the huge brick wall that blocked the entrance to the concrete track. Clouds covered the sky. The birds were awake, chirping as if there were no tomorrow. You could hear the distant cars on the busy streets engulfed in the morning traffic. The trees gently swayed to the east.

Shyheim wore a long-sleeved sweatshirt with black and white stripes, tattered green pants, and white shoes. My attire included my gym shirt, blue pants, and white running shoes. We met at the wrestling spot. The long grass had a faint touch of rain from the morning drizzle.

“Let me stretch, first,” said Shyheim. That would not be a problem with me. Shyheim and I were both World Wrestling fanatics. We talked about it every school day, debating who was the best in the business. Shyheim always went on about how he could beat anyone at this school, Durham School of the Arts.

DSA’s buildings were old, since they used to be part of Durham High, a city high school opened in the twenties. Brown bricks covered the huge buildings. The stench of fresh paint lingered in the air. Shyheim said he had always made his former opponents give up or tap out in a match. He said they fell at his wrath, bowing down to kiss his feet.

I did not believe any of this. I thought he just wanted to be tough. I did some simple stretches along with him. I imagined Batista, a brawny wrestler at my side: ‘Try to get him off his feet. Do that and you will win. Do not fall to his ignorance either.’

“Alright, let’s do this!” I yelled with hesitation. We circled a spot of decaying grass and crouched into

our positions: knees bent and arms extended, prepared to entangle.

Shyheim grabbed my forearms in a firm grip. He tried to push me back, but I had power for a sixth grader. I gently swayed around him, leaving him grasping at the air. He turned around, stunned by my speed. "Nice!" he exclaimed. A crowd started to erupt from behind the wall. Everyone, high-schoolers and middle-schoolers, loved a fight.

Shyheim kept charging at me like a bull, but I countered with a two-leg slam. As he hit the ground gasping in pain, I squeezed his back in a bear hug. It had little or no effect because he stared at me, clueless, wondering what to do. Meanwhile, Iris, a cartoonish character in a skinny body yelled, "Beat him up, Jacob!"

I could imagine the bets being placed. Twenty dollars would be placed on me, twenty-five on Shyheim. This would be a long morning. Shyheim eventually twisted out of my grasp and retreated back to his position. He went for slams, but I used my speed and endurance to knock him away, pushing him back.

I moved like a nimble squirrel away from an attack, jumping from spot to spot. I eventually ran out of places to move, being cornered by Shyheim near the brick wall. Exhaustion came as I dodged. I could barely keep up my head. The crowd's chants felt as if they were a mile away. Shyheim then put my head in a front headlock.

I could not see anything from the blackness of his sweater. His grip put enormous pressure on my neck. My arms were at his side. I did not have any energy at

all to move them. "Come on, tap!" Shyheim exclaimed. I felt my blood circulation cutting off as my head began to turn red. My vision started to blacken.

I could hear the shrills of amazement as I gently hit his left shoulder three times.

The Urgency of Leisure

The orange basketball pounded the concrete in a hard slap. Joss trudged for a right layup, as if he had extra weight on his left side. Vernondo, a chubby boy, tried to guard Joss as he went for a right hook. We were in a small parking lot that stood beside the church like a lawn beside a house. The sky showed few clouds.

The church stood like a gigantic, brown box, its multiple domes beside the playground. The playground had yellow swings, swings which were secured by black wires. The playground had a blue and yellow slide which children were eager to use.

The girls were preoccupied, gossiping on the silver jungle gym. The temperature had brought out people's worn-out summer clothes. Stella wore glasses along with a small black jacket that melded with her skin. Her white shoes shone. Joanna wore blue matching pants and shoes. She had blonde hair and hazel eyes. Lucy wore her usual summer attire of shirts and shorts with sandals. Erica stood awkwardly away from the others, her muscular stature apparent.

Meanwhile, Joss and I continued to play a round.

Vernondo did not play much basketball. He mainly talked and watched from the sidelines. Joss and I practiced our offense and defense. He copied my moves. If I faked left, he tried to imitate it when he received the ball.

I loved the beat of basketball. The music played softly in the air. The slap of the ball, the swish of the net, the screech of the feet all felt like orchestra music, synchronized. Joss liked the technique of basketball: the fakes, turns, twists, cross-overs. He played like a child full of glee.

The girls watched, laughing at our careless mistakes. "You couldn't do better yourself!" I exclaimed.

"Really?" Joanna asked.

"I am pretty sure about that."

"I don't think you are sure of anything."

"How about Joss and I take on all of you?"

"We never decline challenges."

I did not expect much of this game. They did not play basketball. This would be like taking candy away from a baby.

"Man, y'all are going to lose badly!" yelled Joss. The girls walked slowly to us, as if they were models on the catwalk.

"You two are cornballs. Did you know that?" asked Lucy.

"Save it for the game!" I exclaimed. We let them start with the ball first since they were wannabe women. I walked to guard Lucy, who had the ball, thinking she could not play offense. She had the stature of a retired athlete. She passed the ball to Joanna

who drove for the left hook.

The ball plopped in, making a swish sound like a slap to water. This left Joss spellbound. He never showed mercy. He played hard against any competitor. "Make it or take it, by the way," said Joanna.

"What?" asked Joss.

"Don't worry about it, Joss," I said. "We'll win anyway."

We started with the ball again. The girls tightened up their defense with Lucy as their main blocker. She went after the ball like a cop after a thief. Joanna scored the points, constantly driving for short-range shots and lay-ups. Erica made many of the assists. She attempted shots only from the free throw line. Stella accompanied Vernondo on the sidelines. She did not care that much for athletics because of the pain of exhaustion. Their points grew as ours remained the same.

"Time out!" I yelled.

"What's the matter, Jacob? You look a little worn out!" exclaimed Lucy. I did not feel sore, just surprised. They played better than I had expected. Joss and I stepped ten meters away from them to huddle. "Okay, we are going to give this game everything we have. Get open for passes. Now, remember, go easy on them. They are girls."

"I know," said Joss in an annoyed tone.

We started with the ball this time. I faked left, right, getting as close as I could for the shots. Sometimes, when I reached the basket, I passed it to Joss while the girls' attention stayed on me. The score was twenty

to twenty. My dad's green Subaru pulled into the driveway.

He honked the horn, emphasizing the importance of time. "Last point!" I yelled. We started the ball again. All the running, getting around defenders, exhausted me. Victory stood between us, trying to figure out which side to choose. I threw a fast pass to Joss to get this done quickly.

I suppose it moved too fast because it flew out of his hands and hit the sideline where Stella picked it up. Vernondo stayed in his own trance, caring less. Lucy trudged over to Stella, seizing the ball. They looked even worse than I. Their shoulders slouched and their feet barely moved.

Lucy readily got in position to throw in the ball. Her legs were wide apart as her hands took the ball behind her head. I ran from Erica to Joanna, trying to block both at the same time. Joss did not have that much speed. Then Lucy did the unexpected. She faked it to Erica and passed the ball to Joanna.

I ran to half court while Joanna ran gracefully to the hoop. I turned and ran for the block, not caring anymore that they were girls, but Joanna layed in the ball.

Lucy exclaimed, "I told you so!" and I collapsed on the soft grass.

A MIRACLE

Lisa Leslie

THE DAY I was born was difficult. I was halfway out, halfway dead, and turning blue. The doctors had to get me out, or my mother would also die. I can imagine the pain she must have been in because I was a ten pound baby. I can also imagine my dad's fear that there might have been two deaths in one day.

When the doctors got me out, a miracle happened: I was brought back to life.

Now, I have conquered what most people fear. During my birth, the doctor damaged the nerve in my left arm. It is weak now, which makes me unable to do some things, but my family tells me even though I have a disadvantage, I can still do anything other kids can do. Practically anything. That anything I chose was sports.

Sports are all I think about. I spend most of my spare time playing sports. My sister, Natisha, or Tisha for short, got me hooked on sports. She was the same

way I am now, always playing a sport. When I was in elementary school, I would imagine being in middle school playing sports as well as or even better than Tisha. My dream of succeeding at sports came true, but sometimes at a price.

In high school, peppering for volleyball, my partner, Sammy Jo, once shot the ball at me when I wasn't looking and it hit me in the face. As the game against our rival Hillside started, I noticed that my nose was bleeding. It stung so badly my eyes began to water. My nose was sore for two days after that.

When I was in eighth grade, we played a conference basketball game and only seven people came. Even the sound of the whistle to start jumpball made my stomach queasy. I was pointguard, so I had to take the ball down the court, but the other team stole it a countless number of times. At one moment during the game, the ball was on the floor free, so I literally dove for it. I couldn't get a good grip on it so I turned over on my back and pressed the ball down under my body with all of my might. Everyone was laughing, but I was serious. The feeling of letting that game go will burn within me forever.

Some days, like that one, are just painful and hilarious at the same time. Once, the team and I were going through a play when all of a sudden Katy passed the ball without calling my name, and again I got hit right in the face. My coach immediately fell out of her seat laughing as I got up off the ground. She was crying, laughing, and imitating me all at the same time.

After volleyball and basketball, that leaves track. Last year's team was unbeatable—well, the girls were. At DSA, the track team had some great times together. Plus, my eighth grade crush was on the team, which really made my running experience more exciting. During track, I ran relays, the four hundred, the eight hundred, and competed in long jump and discus. I did things in track that I will be proud of for a long time.

My parents are always telling me to do my best at whatever I try. Tisha tells me to this very day that she is proud of me. But she *also* says the only way *I* could be better than *her* was if she were either disabled or dead. My job is to prove her wrong.

Without sports, I would probably be a television-addict and a couch potato. Me without sports is like a sentence without spaces or a shoe without laces. I believe since things were difficult in the beginning, God has a plan for me. If he helped me escape from death, then he obviously needed something.

COUNTING THE BEATS

Kellie LeVine

EVERY LITTLE KID will tell you what they want to be when they grow up, be it a dancer, doctor, racecar driver, or baseball player. That's because every little kid knows what they like and don't like, even if it may change in the future. I didn't. I was that one little girl who, when asked what I wanted to be, would say, "I don't know."

"But isn't there anything you're interested in?"

"No . . ."

And no teacher could seem to understand that I simply did not know what I wanted to do with my life when I was an elementary student. I simply did not understand why I had to know, so it never really struck me as something to find out. I made my As and joined the chorus at the request of my mother; she thought I needed a hobby. I had a few friends, but I truly preferred to keep to myself. Of course, I hadn't known this then, but my parents were worried about me. So I went to that first choral meeting, expecting another

event where I could lay low and get through, riding on the bare minimum; instead, it took a turn for the completely unexpected. Mrs. Hilliard, the teacher, played a gentle tune across the piano and handed us each a sheet of words. "Lyrics," she said. "Now sing."



Anyone who has had a puppy knows a dog's reaction when he first hears himself bark—like he didn't even know he was capable of emitting the sound, like he's stunned it came from him. If you know that reaction, you can easily picture the look on my face as I left that class. I could sing. Now, I was no judge of whether or not it was good, but I could do it. And I really, really liked it.



It's weird how moms are always right. It was like someone had shown a flashlight in my face, the way this opportunity was thrown at me. I looked forward to rehearsals, memorized words at home for fun, and became obsessed with music class. There was a whole other world I'd been completely oblivious to, and, like a toddler with a new toy, I couldn't seem to get enough of it. When I sang, I truly felt like I had something that was mine alone, something solid and figuratively tangible that kept me from going back to that ghost of a person I'd been, floating through life just to move on—not knowing what I really wanted to be. I'd found a

part of myself. It was another piece in that unfinished puzzle that was me, and I felt absolutely ecstatic to have finally figured out where that piece went.



One day as we sat in chorus, Mrs. Hilliard announced solo auditions for one of our Christmas songs. As it goes with my fabulous luck, she asked me to sing first. This was something I'd never wanted to do: I had a thing about crowds of people all staring at me. What if I messed up? Forgot the words? Tripped? A million things rushed through my head as I walked to the front of the classroom and stood by the piano. "Okay, ready?" I remember her asking, more rhetorically than I would have preferred.

The notes started, my stomach flipped, and, without thinking, I started to sing. The notes flew from my throat without thought, following the simple melody she'd played on the piano that first day. Like the song was fire, it raced through my body, destroying the butterflies and filling me with the confidence to keep pushing forward. I just sang and focused on each word as it came, till the last had passed, and I stood smiling at my accomplished feat.

But everyone was staring at me. My self-consciousness flared inside of me; I'd sung the wrong song, that was it, right? I felt my cheeks burning under the scrutiny. "Kellie," Mrs. Hilliard said, "I want to speak with you after class." *Oh no. Oh no, no, no.* I kept my head down as I walked back to my seat, and didn't open my

mouth for the rest of rehearsal, squeezing my eyes shut and wishing I was somewhere else. When I opened them finally, the last student was walking out the door, and Mrs. Hilliard was looming over me. I expected the worst in the first moments of silence. "I want you to sing by yourself," she said. This floored me. *What was she talking about? I'd messed up!*

"Pardon?"

"I want you to sing a song. By yourself. At the concert."

"I . . . Why?"

"You're very good. I think you should have a chance to show off, don't you?"

I knew my face was flushing again. She thought I was good. Me. I couldn't contain my enthusiasm as she handed me the song: "Somewhere Out There," a duet. A three minute duet, and she wanted me to sing it alone because she thought I was good. That day couldn't have gotten any better.

I had probably sung my song a million times by the time the concert came around. The butterflies that wouldn't leave me alone returned with a vengeance, choking me as I walked down to center stage, in front of my whole school. The music started, and they came full force; I closed my eyes and counted the beats. A last bout of butterflies flipped my stomach and threw me into the beautiful music. I lost myself in the song, concentrating on just doing what I do till it was over, and the music ended, and a huge silence filled the gym. Thunderous applause, deafening, roared to life—all for me. These people I had known and been fitfully

ignored and teased by were smiling at me, applauding, whistling, and whooping. I was somebody. I felt the biggest smile light up my face as I stood and took in what had just been given to me. This was my talent, my fight. It make me feel wanted, loved, whole, embarrassed, nervous, and disruptive; it was the best feeling I'd ever experienced. I never wanted to let it go. It felt like another piece had fallen into place in my puzzle. An important one, one that made the picture what it was; that piece that lets you know you're almost there, and look what a beautiful picture you're making.



My last year of elementary school passed swiftly. I had to start thinking about the next big step: sixth grade. More importantly, I had to think about which middle school I'd be attending. My mom told me I would be going to Carrington, like all the other kids in my grade. But I needed a change of pace, because these kids were reminders of something I wanted to put behind me. What I needed and wanted more than anything in the world was a chance to start over.

Durham School of the Arts. The name told me everything I needed to know; this was where I wanted to go, where I really would be the best I could be. I convinced my mom to let me enter the lottery, full of high hopes and not a single doubt in my mind. "You might not get in," my mom would constantly say. But I'd brush off her statements like dust; I knew I'd get in. It was where I thought I was meant to go.

Weeks passed. A few of my friends came to school, ecstatically talking about their acceptance letters into DSA. Where was mine? I must have come up with hundreds of explanations to ease my mind. My letter was lost; they took their time; mine was the last in the stack. But with no reply for days more, it was clear. I hadn't gotten into DSA after all. I felt my whole world collapse around me, all my dreams and plans, the glue that had been holding me together. I came home that day an emotional wreck. My parents sensed my discomfort almost immediately. "We have a surprise for you later," they'd said. *Great, a surprise. Just fantastic.*

It *was* fantastic, actually. It was my letter from DSA. I'd gotten in. A piercing scream escaped my throat, which I let continue for a good five minutes. I'd actually gotten into DSA. I'd get my new start, my education, and my newfound art all rolled into one. Talk about an easy A in chorus class! It was the first time in my life when I couldn't wait for school to start back up again.



Walking into that huge, looming building on that first day was probably the scariest thing I'd ever had to do. I followed everybody else and made a few good friends, enough to get me through the first few weeks of school. But chorus class was absolutely humiliating. We were the dead bottom of the food chain, my sixth grade choir, and we still didn't have much to show for it. But we all must pay our dues till the judgment day.

In this case, judgment day arrived with our placements in the seventh grade choirs, either Mixed Ensemble, or the Advanced Middle School Chorus. The teacher, Mrs. Delauney, seemed to like me, as she wished me a heartfelt good luck before I sang for her. Bad girl as I was, I snuck a peek at her sheet as I walked away from the piano. All looked well, but it didn't say what I'd been looking for. I had to wait another whole week to find out my fate. Along with most of my friends, I'd made it into Advanced Middle School Chorus. It was all going just as I'd hoped for my time at DSA. I had become quite the extrovert, loud and even participating in class, obsessed with glitter and glowing with confidence, all because I felt like I *could*. All because of chorus. I was counting the beats through life.

Eighth grade year came much quicker than I thought it would. I once again took up a senior spot in the Advanced Middle School Chorus, my staple and pride. Chorus was going to be my pathway, I'd decided, so I had resolved to make this my best year of chorus yet. I'd take all the opportunities, do all the extra credit, try out for all the solos. So I did, and I worked harder than I ever had to be a standout in my class and to make the most of my last year of middle school. I was out to be the best.



The music filled the theatre, echoing every note and individual timbre, combining them into one beautiful sound. That sound represented a weekend's hard

work of long technical rehearsals that had pushed our skill. We were the 2009 Middle School North Carolina Honors Chorus, and the sound we resonated left little to doubt. It was the only time this group of people in this place would ever be together, the only performance we had with our new friends and old. This was our once-in-a-lifetime chance.

We were in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, a large and beautiful city that reflects in its appearance a renovated past. The buildings, though some were new and close together, maintained a small town feel. They were tall, some red brick and some gray stone, lining two-lane streets that were dotted with cafés and small shops. The cars streamed by, supplying an ample amount of traffic, the evidence of busy lives and business people; but when walking the sidewalks, there was still a gentle, homey feel around us. The air was brisk, as it was early springtime, and within all the noise there could still be found a peaceful resonance—almost like listening to an orchestra and picking out the sweet music presented by the violins. To say the least, I felt welcome and could see myself there, in that small, big city.

Our DSA group stayed at the Marriott Hotel, one of the larger and more modern buildings in our part of town. Conveniently enough, the convention center where our group would be practicing was located a short walk down the street, allowing us a crisp taste of morning air before rehearsal, and the cool caressing wisps of night breeze after. The city would come alive at night: cars' headlights, changing stoplights,

welcoming restaurant fronts and brightly lit office buildings ripe with activity. You could almost feel the energy in the air, the kind that makes you want to drop everything and go for a nice, long jog. Or maybe that was just me.

Rosalia, Jordan, Brennan, and I were all rooming together. We would ride the elevator up to our room and be about our own business, giddy with autonomy. We would race through the monochrome halls, past typically decorated hotel rooms, to our own, which held so much laughter and memories so hard to forget. Before we went to bed every night, we'd whisper to each other through the darkness until sleep overtook, the general exhaustion of a long, hard day of singing finally setting in upon us. These moments were always a bit melancholy, for nobody wanted to end the day. But there was always that excitement and anticipation of the day soon to come that made letting go of the current one that much better.

Each morning we were in Winston-Salem, we were awakened from our room with a loud knock. As unpleasant an alarm as it was, we couldn't wait to get down to rehearsal, dressing quickly and rushing through breakfast, so we could arrive a few minutes early to socialize with new friends before the long day ahead made it impossible. We'd enter the rehearsal, practice for hours, and then break for lunch just to come back and do it all over again. After every day, we'd walk back to our rooms, discussing the pieces that would be stuck in our heads for hours to come.

The day of the performance, we were all full of eagerness and anticipation. Dressed in our concert attire, we walked down to the convention center. Even though I had butterflies flitting around in my stomach, I forced myself to have a friendly conversation with the girls on either side of me to distract myself. Before I could become any more of a nervous wreck, we were lining up backstage, and then filing onto the risers. The heavy velvet curtain heaved up in front of us, revealing a dimly lit crowd, which almost resembled a full house. The butterflies flew again, as the conductor raised his hands in front of us. The orchestra began its introduction, and then we all took a breath, listening as the music filled the theatre, echoing every note and individual timbre, combining them to one beautiful sound. One beautiful, once-in-a-lifetime sound.



With the most prestigious of choral honors under my belt, I felt very successful in my goal for that year. As that year, like all the others, began to draw to a close, we all began to think about high school. Plans for semi-formal were being made and the eighth grade graduation ceremony loomed over us all. Summer and freshman year were on everyone's minds as we counted down the days. As I counted down the beats of life.



Nicole Shepherd, one of my chorus friends, came to me one day in the halls. "Let's sing 'For Good' for graduation!" she had said. "For Good" was a duet from *Wicked*, a musical we both were obsessed with. Student performances were being allowed at the ceremony, and the lyrics fit all too perfectly the occasion of closing times and lasting friendships. So I agreed.

Our first run-through of the song was absolutely horrific. But we put aside time and worked out the kinks, switching up parts and harmonies, and fitting the song to our voices. We only ran into one problem: our accompaniment. It was written for the piano, but we needed someone to play for us, and wouldn't the piano override our voices? We put these worries aside, and continued to practice our duet. I was Glinda, she was Elphaba. It never got old. We couldn't wait to perform.

One day before chorus class, Nicole and I were singing our song a cappella. Anders Borg, one of my good friends, had his guitar out, and began to strum chords along with our singing. It sounded absolutely gorgeous, so we employed him to play with us, along with the piano. It was all great and good, but as the ceremony drew closer, so did the problem with the piano. Nicole wanted to drop the guitar; people were telling us that both accompaniments were too much and took away from our singing. I wanted to drop the piano, as I was quite the sucker for acoustic. We got a large group of our friends together, sang through the song once with just the piano, then just the guitar, and asked for their thoughts. They agreed. It sounded

fabulous acoustic. We changed the song. Amazingly, Anders taught himself the whole piece by ear, and we sang through a million more times till we exceeded perfection. Our performance would be flawless at this rate.



The day of the eighth grade graduation ceremony, both of us were filled with butterflies, felt jittery, and itched to have it over with. It seemed like a thousand years before it was finally our turn to take the stage, then it started to fly by all too quickly. I followed Nicole and Anders up on stage and stood, looking out at the dimmed audience. It was my entire grade, all our parents, and even some of the seventh grade—way more people than I'd bargained for. There was no time to freak out, though. Anders began to strum the intro, beautiful and melancholy; the change of mood was almost tangible in the atmosphere. I waited, returning Nicole's smile, as anticipation filled me. And then I began to sing, my voice echoing through Weaver Auditorium. *"I've heard it said, that people come into our lives, for a reason . . ."*

The applause roared deafeningly throughout the auditorium, continuing for an extremely long time. It had been gorgeous: Anders's playing, our harmonizing, and the audience couldn't have been more appreciative. We hugged, smiled, and walked hand in hand offstage to our seats, congratulations following us the whole way. Flawless, perfect, and vivid.

I felt like I'd truly found myself in those moments up on stage. All that had mattered was the music. It was the only thing I'd cared about. The puzzle of my identity—I felt like I'd finally found that last and final piece, and fit it snugly into place. Through singing, through chorus, I'd put myself together and found who I was supposed to be. I'd found my voice.



RECTANGULAR ROOFS

Isaac Little

Prologue

THE FOLLOWING MEMOIR focuses on various buildings designed by the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959). He originally worked for J. L. Silsbee; dissatisfied with Silsbee's work, however, he soon applied for a position with Louis H. Sullivan. He became Sullivan's right-hand man and eventually proceeded to develop his own style and business. Some of the characteristics of the buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright include changing ceiling heights to give an effect called *catch and release*, irregularly shaped polygonal rooms, long platforms cantilevered far from their bases, natural lighting, and a very artistic feel and design. My family likes to see Frank Lloyd Wright's work and attempts to visit any of the buildings we happen to be near at any given point in time.

Fallingwater

The year was 2004 and I was just a nine year-old kid wishing we could get on with our vacation and get back home to see my friends. I was annoyed that we had to take another detour on the way to our destination. We had stopped at Fallingwater near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Designed for the Kaufmann family by Frank Lloyd Wright, the house is built beside and, in some cases, over a river and waterfall, which gives it the name. Little did I know that this would be the beginning of a series of adventures.

I wished I could get it over with, but since we couldn't skip it altogether, I decided to pay attention. The first thing I noticed had nothing to do with architecture at all, but with nature: as soon as we stepped out of the car, the air felt wet and I heard a loud sound coming from a little ways away. My parents explained to me that it was a waterfall and we would be touring a famous house. *What?* I thought. *We can see a house at home. Actually, isn't that just what our home is? A house? So why don't we just go home and see our house.* It turned out later that this was in no way like our house, not in size, nor in style.

My brother Thomas and I, being both under the age of ten, got to take the children's tour. It included the kinds of things most people would consider unnecessary and obvious, though were great additions for six and nine year-old kids. We began by going down to the river where we talked about what kinds of animals we could find there. We learned about the history of the

land and the people who had lived in the house. The lady who was showing us these things told us about the ecology of the river and why the house was important. She also told us about Frank Lloyd Wright, which was quite useful because I had no idea who he was or why he wasn't living in his house. Architecture isn't a passion for many nine year-olds, so that really cleared up some things for me. Still believing it would look like my house, I was shocked when we first walked up to it. My first question was how does the house stand up when it extends farther than the foundation? Counterweights weren't exactly common knowledge for children of my age.

We first saw the house from what some would consider the front door, but what Mr. Wright would have said is only one of many ways to enter the abode. As we stepped through, I was amazed at the transformation from the outside, with its ridiculously long, rectangular platforms covered by plants, to the inside, a decorated room of many angles. The changes of style corresponded to an intricate shift in design and use from room to room. These transitions would have seemed unnatural in our house, where everything was predictable. But strangely, the variation seemed natural. The rooms flowed flawlessly from one to the next with no thought at all for what *should* happen and much more for what *could*. If you found yourself in a room without Wright's traditionally massive windows, it was lit with electric lamps, their light warm and yellow like the sun's. The soft colors relaxed me; I felt as if this massive building had been built specifically for the

calming of my nine year-old body, which was usually on at full speed.

But this feeling changed when I entered a room designed to excite me. The art also changed from room to room to reflect the feelings brought out by the architecture. Of course, the home had things like dining rooms and bedrooms, but many rooms, equipped with fantastic overlooks of the valley, were designed just for relaxing. I was amazed at the paradoxical simplicity of the gardens: they seemed to be filled with everything though in reality only contained the necessary elements. The combinations of different ferns, flowers, shrubs, bushes, and small trees set against the decorative fountains and shrine-like objects all led to a mix of wonder and pleasure in my mind.

One of the most interesting elements of Fallingwater is the pool. Most pools consist of a man-made structure, often concrete, filled with stagnant water; this was different. I noticed straight away that the pool water was actually flowing. Water traveling from the river passed through both a concrete rectangle (the pool itself) as well as a side passage. If you wished to swim in calm water, you could pull a switch to direct all of the flow to the side passage. I thought that was the greatest invention ever; you could have a pool but wouldn't ever need to drain it or even pay for chlorine for that matter. I suddenly felt guilty for spitting in the water upstream.

As we left that remarkable building, I was astounded by the idea of complex simplicity. The complex designs of simple ideas made it impossible not to

understand the architecture. You had to see the big picture through the details, though the details only made sense when viewed through the big picture. It left me with an elusive feeling of amazement. That feeling entranced me and I wanted to learn more. I was glad that I had decided not to wait in the car.

Chicago

During the summer of 2005, my family visited Chicago. In the suburb Oak Park, we stayed in a hotel that contained the oldest operating elevator in the country. We stayed there for three days and visited many famous landmarks in the town where Frank Lloyd Wright got his start in architecture. Though we were able to see Frank Lloyd Wright's house, sadly we couldn't see the Robie House because it was being remodeled, nor could we tour a few other homes that are still used as private residences.

Wright's home doubled as an office, though he did have a studio in another part of the city. The building was equipped with many rooms so that his family could live in style and comfort. While standing in the massive crowd waiting for our tour, I wondered how we would all fit through Mr. Wright's narrow hallways. I wished we were alone; in my experience, the only way to truly enjoy the buildings was with one person speaking directly to you about the space.

The tour began in a gift shop filled with various memorabilia to help you "remember your trip" (it was

really to provide funding, but you're not supposed to think about that part). The first room we entered was the dining room. I admired the glass table in a shape that appeared to be rectangular but didn't actually have four corners. I imagined the long hours spent designing and creating that table and appreciated the fact that it wasn't even meant to be shown to a large crowd of people, only to satisfy the needs of one family. I noticed daylight all around us and wondered how in a two-story building you could have skylights. I looked up and noticed the room was protruding past the rest of the building about ten feet in order to allow a majestic amount of natural light to come through skylights in the roof. There were also gigantic windows covering most of the outer wall, which allowed the family to witness spectacular sunsets while eating dinner.

Our next room was a sitting or smoking room, depending on who happened to be in it at the time. It was furnished with many models of houses and a trove of wonderfully different art. I was shocked once again at how unique everything was while still forming a cohesive whole.

The third room we entered was an office. I suspected that the room was there so that if Mr. Wright had an idea while at home, he could put it to paper right away. Now, I had heard about writers and artists keeping a notebook or sketchbook by their bed in case an idea came while they were falling asleep or waking from a dream, but this—an entire office—really took it to the extreme. The room's drafting tables and walls were covered with sketches of buildings that had never been built.

We proceeded upstairs. Our first stop was the master bedroom. It was brilliantly white with troves of natural light coming in through the windows at all angles. The guest bedroom used a technique I had never seen before and was amazed by: there was a grand piano built into the wall so that only a portion (about the size of an upright piano) showed inside the room, yet it still sounded like a grand piano. This was accomplished by having the back half protrude into a nearby stairwell. As we traveled to our final stop on the tour, we passed through a narrow hallway with a living tree growing up through a hole in the floor.

The next and final rooms were the kids' bedrooms. I really wished I could have had these bedrooms. They were immensely tall, but, now that I think about it, I have no idea what I believed I could do with a ceiling sixteen feet taller than me. There was one room for girls and one for boys, both of which contained many different stained glass windows which, when the sun shone through them, would illuminate the floor in kaleidoscopic patterns. Looking up, I noticed that the the dividing wall had a gap between the top and the ceiling; the two rooms were actually one. The guide explained that it was designed so that if a kid wished to give something (non-breakable) to a sibling on the other side, he could just throw it over. That was our final stop and our tour ended where it began, in the fund-producing room—I mean, gift shop.

When we left, I was once again surprised at how the buildings I use in my everyday life are mainly functional and not at all decorative. I began to wonder why

more people didn't have massive amounts of art and uniquely shaped rooms in their homes. Another visit filled with wonder was complete, and I couldn't wait for the next one.

Pope-Leighey House

In the spring of 2008, I visited the Pope-Leighey House in Virginia. We were in Washington, D.C. and realized that with only a slight detour it would be on our route back. The building had been moved for preservation to the grounds of the Woodlawn Plantation, which is where we visited it. We had originally thought that the Woodlawns had just heard about Frank Lloyd Wright and asked him to build a small guest house for them on their land; we assumed it wouldn't be very elaborate. It turns out that it was richer in history than we expected.

Frank Lloyd Wright built the house as an experiment to see if he could make a decently affordable home for the average person. Loren Pope had wanted a new house and was planning on just getting a standard Cape Cod-style house, when he read an article in *Time Magazine* about Frank Lloyd Wright. Pope liked the style, so hired Mr. Wright to build a house. As Frank Lloyd Wright had been looking for a way to make a fairly inexpensive house, Mr. Pope's limited finances gave him a chance to do it. The house eventually cost the Popes around \$7,000 in 1940 (about \$110,000 today) and is considered Wright's first Usonian style home.

The Popes lived in their house for four years and then, in 1946, sold it to Ms. Marjorie Leighey. She lived there her whole life and took good care of the home. The only drawback was she smoked, and the cigarette smoke changed the color of the cypress wood in the house's interior from brown to red. In 1964, Ms. Leighey got word that her house would be destroyed for highway expansion. To help preserve this great piece of American architecture, she donated her home to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. They then uprooted the house and moved the home to its current location on the Woodlawn Plantation.

From there, she continued to live in it, allowing it to be used for tours on weekends. We heard a funny story from our tour guide about how if people showed up during the week for a tour while she was at home, she would give them a tour in exchange for some help with chores.

Our tour began when we met our guide. He was a man who appeared to be in his early sixties and had obviously been doing this for a long time because he knew the facts by heart. He began to tell us about the history of the house, much of which I have already mentioned here. We proceeded into the kitchen, which had many sliding cabinets to provide more space for the small house. Our next stop was the living and dining room, which had a fireplace with a corner that protruded into the room, leaving two sides open to give off warmth. In this room was a sample of the kind of wood the house was made of. It was cypress with plywood in the middle, which allowed for stability, beauty, and cost-effectiveness.

Next, we went into a very narrow hallway, designed so that the bedrooms would seem more spacious when you entered them. The effect certainly worked well: as soon as I stepped into the bedroom I felt as if the room should have been the size of the whole house. All along, I had been admiring the windows, which are made of two rectangular pieces of wood with designs cut in the middle and panes of glass between. I was entranced by how the light hit the floor in designs that resembled turtles.

Things can be much more than one expects at first.

Taliesin West

The swarms of familiar, flat, rectangular roofs extended beyond the walls as if they wished to get as far from rest of the building as they could, giving the impression that the red brick awnings were amiably shading the snaking sidewalks from the Arizona sun. The waves of rising heat seemed to levitate those roofs, suspended in the air. Slowly, my family and I exited the relaxingly air-conditioned car on that hot summer day and entered the terrible midday Arizona sun, once again making me wonder why we decided to visit the land of sunburn over summer vacation and not winter break. As we crawled out of the vehicle, the temperature around us soared instantly from seventy-five degrees to 105, incinerating our North Carolina bodies, more accustomed to humidity than pure heat. We dashed towards the granite and brick gift shop, the nearest

source of the magical thing we call air conditioning. We were at Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Taliesin is a school for architecture designed and founded by Frank Lloyd Wright. One part of the school, called Taliesin East (or North) is located in Spring Green, Wisconsin, where the students spend their summers. Where we were, Taliesin West, is where they spend the winter. The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation gives tours of the school all year. It being summer, there were no students present during our tour. The school, like many others, is equipped with classrooms, dining halls, study areas, workrooms, a library, auditoriums, and many different gardens filled with various sculptures. We decided to take the family tour and, because no one else signed up for it in that time slot, it ended up being a private tour.

Our guide was a man in his forties or fifties who was all too excited to be getting to show another group of people the work that such a great man had produced. He also seemed very impressed by the number of Wright houses our family had seen and toured. Our tour began with a explanation of the campus and a photo op by the fountain.

We proceeded to what used to be Mr. Wright's personal study. It was an irregular pentagonal room that had been decorated with many pictures from his life and with various drafting tools. I imagined how this room would have been used and who used it now; I imagined different people researching, coming up with ideas and putting them down, revising them, and working all the way to a final model or drawing

that most likely would never turn into anything in the real world. I once again was amazed at how the people who did this for a living worked long hours, often to no avail, just in the hopes to one day possibly create some fantastic work of functional art. Our tour guide proceeded to talk to us about various elements from the life of the great architect, most of which I already knew from the other tours but was all too happy to hear again.

After that, we entered a meeting room with many chairs, some attached to the walls, some freestanding, and most having a very good view of the valley. The overlook was slightly obstructed by telephone poles, the erection of which, during his life, Mr. Wright had fought vigorously against. I was saddened by the all too real fact that regardless of your emotional efforts in life, only the physical, material things remain.

We proceeded through a circular door designed to make you contort your body to fit through, showing how you need to fit into what exists in the world, not install things to fit your existence. It led into a garden filled with sculptures, some from famous artists, but most from current or former students of the school.

Our next stop was an auditorium, which demonstrated Mr. Wright's abilities in the science of architecture. Inside of the auditorium, next to the stage, there was a stone cavern into which you could move a piano or other instrument, quieting it more the farther you moved it inside. For instance, if you were playing the main part, you would leave the instrument out; but playing the supporting role, you could quiet the

instrument by dampening the sound in the cavern. Being an avid trombonist, I greatly enjoyed the attention to acoustics as well as visuals. Next, we looked through the doors of the dining hall, though couldn't enter because it was being prepared for a ceremony for an employee. Then, we got to see a workroom filled with computers for creating digital models.

Next, we arrived at a few very unique places, including a theater where a student's creations were being displayed. They were gigantic colorful sails designed to give you decorative shade. Our next stop was a garden that had a sculpture of a dragon equipped with a propane line that allowed it to shoot jets of fire. Our final stop was the library, where we met Frank Lloyd Wright's former doctor who was working as the primary physician on staff at the school. He began to tell us some stories about his former patient. One thing we didn't see on the tour was housing for the students. That was because there is no building with that purpose. Every student at the school gets a ten foot by ten foot platform, a canvas tarp to put over it, and a cot to sleep on. As juniors and seniors they apply for grants to build their own "houses" on these platforms. We saw pictures of the kinds of structure some students had built: they varied greatly from a wooden flying saucer-like figure to a glass pentagonal structure.

As we climbed back into the car and waved goodbye to the school, I looked at my brother's and my drawings of our own imaginary concept structures. I saw various faults in both that didn't seem so obvious when we had created them. Mine was extremely prac-

tical: everything had an immediately visible use but no aesthetic sense at all. My brother's, on the other hand, was so unique and decorative that there wasn't even a bed, and if it were to rain, everything would be immediately drenched. It looked as though mine had been the better drawing, while he had truly captured the essence of Frank Lloyd Wright. But together, we had everything that was necessary in fantastic-looking and functional structures.

End?

I guess you could call this the end, but I wouldn't. I still have my whole life to visit the few places I have left to see. I hope that now you, too, want to visit some of the buildings designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

A YOUNG GIRL FINDS FAITH

Danielle M.

Through My Eyes, in His Home

CONSTANT YELLING, LEATHER belt broke across my back after being repeatedly struck with its steaming blows. Punched and smacked all over. Strong gusts of air right before his heavy hand. My already-aching skin.

As I try to protect my face from his everlasting hits, I steal a look at the face of this beast that stands over me. The rage in his eyes tells me I am going to die, as bullets of sweat stream down his face, and veins pop out of his neck and forehead. I have no choice but to believe his convincing words and pray that I will live through this.

As a young girl, I was put through so much, I was forced to grow up too quicky; I didn't have a chance to live as I imagined. My younger days were filled with hurt and distress. I hated it. I hated life. I looked at everyone in my life and couldn't bear all the fake smiles

that didn't see the real pain I had to live with every day. I hated them, too. I was miserable. And because I was young, I didn't fully understand what I was going through. I thought it was never going to end. I knew what I could do. How could I carry on with the pathetic excuse I called life?

In His House of Pain

In the house with Sir, the man who made my life hell, his two sons, my stepbrothers, and I were always in order. When I say order, I mean there were rules and specific things that had to be done. But I was the only one who seemed to do everything wrong. At least the only one who was severely punished for my wrongdoings. Sir wanted to find anything to punish me for, from not making my bed to putting the silverware away with the utensils facing the wrong direction.

Everybody's stress was taken out on me. I was a human stress reliever and not in a good way. Mother even began to follow the others. Usually, she was my savior, the one who ended the agony I was forced to tolerate daily. But Sir didn't like that at all; he began to abuse Mother just like me. So in an effort to save her own life, she stayed away more and more, and pretended she didn't see what was going on.

I was now alone in the little world I lived in. *Why me? What did I do to deserve this? Did I even do anything?* These questions zipped through my mind daily.

Sir began to torment me while Mother was at work, or he found reasons for me to stay home with him while the others went out. The moments at home with Sir were bloodcurdling, soul-wrenching, and horrifying. I never knew what was going to happen next. Sometimes Sir would wait all day until I was asleep, my only time of serenity, just to wake me up.

One time, the night before my eighth birthday, Sir thought it would be amusing to pour a pitcher full of ice water on me. He did it, with no remorse. As the bone-chilling water hit, my sleeping body awoke, screaming, to receive a punch in the mouth for its trouble. Sir's fist connected with my mouth and sent me sprawling to the ground. On my way down, I hit my head on the bed rail and started to bleed. The intense pain of my soaked and shivering body combined with my aching jaw and bleeding head caused me to vomit.

Sir yelled to clean up the mess. When he left the room, I waited until I heard his bedroom door close. I crawled into the corner and rested my head on my knees as the salty tears streamed down my face. *God help me*, I said to myself.

I knew this wasn't the end. What was going through his sick head? Was God really there for me? What did I do to deserve this? What was I going to do?

My Pain: Struggles Continue

Things at Sir's house calmed down for a while. I guess he got bored with tormenting me everyday. Or

maybe God was answering my prayers. Whatever it was, I didn't care. I was just happy to be out of the spotlight. But my happiness came to an end.

I had just gotten home from school and started doing my chores. Sir came rushing downstairs, yelling at me for forgetting to vacuum upstairs. I apologized, but it was no use. Sir continued to yell at me and kept stepping closer and closer. I continued to back further and further away; I knew what was coming. I closed my eyes. A hand wrapped around my throat, cutting off my air supply, forcing me to fight back, interrupting my window of hope. This was my moment of truth. I knew I was going to make it through this; I had faith. Fighting back made things worse, but I didn't care.

With the release of his hand, I gasped for air. It worked. He let go. Had I won? I could tell the high pitch of my screams pierced through his ears like sharp needles. My screams must have been unbearable, because he grabbed me and threw me against the wall to shut me up. I was told to go upstairs, take a shower, then go to bed. As quickly as my limp, lifeless body could, I pulled myself up off the kitchen floor. I turned on the shower but I didn't get in.

Before the mirror fogged up, I looked at myself, bleeding and bruised, not able to identify the girl looking back at me. I collapsed to the floor, and curled up into a ball. As I shook from the pain, my eyes filled up with water. I couldn't fight back the tears. They continued to fall one after another. I layed on the cold tile floor crying, praying, and giving up on life. The door opened slowly. It was Mother.

Mother looked at me, beaten, bloody, hopeless, and helpless as I waited for her to comfort me with love. She just looked at me, lowered her head, and in a soft, un-comforting voice said, "Stop making him so mad."

In disbelief, I lifted my head to try and wrap my heart around what she had just told me. I sat up and faced reality; Mother turned to Sir, who was still heated and highly aggravated, and said, "Next time don't hit her so hard."

Faith. What is faith? To me, faith is having belief that the future will get brighter. My drive to want things to get better kept my faith alive. Only faith kept me going.

Struggles Continue: The Good Life

As the years went by, Sir calmed down. I guess because I was getting older and smarter, he couldn't really do what he wanted, anymore. I figured out how to twist things around to where I was in control. School was an outlet; my teachers took an interest in this little girl who they knew had a hurtful past. My family stood up for me. They put fear into Sir's soul, the same fear he had put in me for years. My fear is gone now. Faith pushed it out and I had no time for fear. I had no time for hate. My soul was being rebuilt; God was answering my prayers. I could breathe again. I was me, the real me.

Mother left Sir and I forgave him. The wounds of mental pain and some physical scars are still here, but

the hurt is gone. I can look in the mirror and smile at myself, for I know that my past isn't going to affect my future. Is this "the good life"? It is to me.

My old story ended a long time ago with my pain. But my new story isn't anywhere near finished. I sat in the car, driving away with my grandmother and Mother, finally leaving Sir's house. In the backseat, I bowed my head and prayed. *Let the Lord be my shepherd. Thank you, God, for delivering me from evil.*

IN HER FOOTSTEPS

LaQuesha Mangum

WHEN YOU LOOK at me, you would never know that not only am I African-American, but I'm also white and Indian. My great grandfather was half white and my grandma was fully Indian. If you look closely at my eyes and my hair, you can see the Indian features.

My last name comes from my great grandfather's side. Mangum was the last name of white workers and butchers. I carry this name with pride because it made me who I am today. From what I have seen from my parents, grandparents, and other family members, we were placed here to be leaders. My grandma, who is no longer living, was that person who gave me the power to be a leader and a strong independent person who will grow up to make it through anything, no matter the circumstances. Ever since I lost her, I have tried to the best of my abilities to walk in her footsteps, and I will continue to do just that.

High school gives me an opportunity to be a leader for the younger ones and for my friends and family who may look up to me. High school is *no joke*. I will tell anyone this. It is totally different from elementary and middle school. The atmosphere is different; you're separated from your friends. Back then, you spent more time with your peers than ever and it could really get you off task. I never thought of that as a problem until the first day of high school. It felt so weird because even though I wasn't new to the school, I had never been so isolated from my peers; it just felt wrong. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that in life you can't always be with who you want and won't always have things go your way.

Now I apply these lessons to school. I have finally learned that school is school (not social hour) and it's important that I keep my head in the game. That's part of being a leader for the younger crowd and for my peers who feel that you can't be both popular and smart. I want to prove that with an education and with independence, life can take you so many places beyond the popular crowd in high school.

MY BIZARRE LIFE

Leslie Martinez

Part 1

IT WAS JULY 28, 2007, when I was being dropped off at the airport in my mommy's white Expedition. She quickly walked with me to the sliding black doors through which a blast of cool air tickled my feet around my brown flip-flops. When I got to the point when my mother could not pass on with me, she gave me a tight five second hug and watched me check through security and go up the slow escalator.

I have been flying since I was literally a baby, so I felt comfortable as I sat there in the stiff, cold chair, watching my plane slowly creep up to the gate. Passengers were soon tromping like ants in an endless line into the gate area. It was time for me to get on the plane. I was happy to be heading to Florida for a week, staying with my uncle and aunt.

Bing. The red light went over the barcode. As I strolled down the jet bridge and onto the plane, I began to look for my seat among the aisles. Finally, I saw 15E, my seat. I was sitting right next to the window looking at the large, silver wing of the plane. When the plane was full, we started heading down to the long runway.

About a minute after, we took off into the clear blue, fluffy-clouded sky. Twenty minutes into my flight, I looked outside the petite, gray, oval window and began to notice something about the left side of the wing. A screw began to slowly unleash itself. I was thinking to myself, *Is that supposed to happen?* I kept looking at the little screw, and then, finally, it shook out and fell. I wondered if it would fall on someone in Georgia. My thoughts began winding through my head like a show on fast-forward, and I began to prepare for the longest drop of my life.

"Are you okay?" the little girl next to me asked. I started to laugh and nodded my head. We began to talk about Florida. She was going to visit her grandparents; they were going to go to Disney World. We had a lot in common. All this talking took my mind off the screw that I had thought was going to make us crash.

The pilot started the descent as we got closer to the Florida airport. We finally touched down and slowly wound towards the gate. The seatbelt sign quickly turned off, and everyone in the plane grabbed their belongings and walked out of the aircraft. I grabbed my bag and followed the crowd as I said goodbye to my new friend. I walked to the shuttle in the arrival area, where I saw Aunt waiting for me outside of the

sliding doors. I dreaded the idea of leaving the air-conditioned building to venture out into the scorching heat of Florida. This was the beginning of my exciting summer vacation. For the one short week, lots was planned and much would be done before it would come to an end.

When the week was over, I headed back to the airport and caught my plane going back to Durham. When I got home, I was happy to see my bed as it always was. Then, my mother said to pack my bag again, for we were going to Maui. I was happy to go, but mad because I hate packing and unpacking. So, once again, I gathered all the things I was taking, loaded them into the car, and headed off to the airport.

Part 2

This strange man was tall and chunky; his face was full of pimples. His skin irritation was life-sized and scarlet red, and his blackheads were as murky and waterless as a glazed chocolate Dunkin doughnut. You'd think he was back in high school on picture day. His feet were a Sasquatch's and his cold fingers were long and boney. His eyes were as dark blue as the bottom of the misty sea. This strange-looking man would be my pilot to Maui.

My family and I were headed to Hawaii for vacation, waiting for a connecting flight to Maui. When the plane from the mainland had finally crept up to the gate, we filed out of the aircraft and headed to the bag-

gage claim. Unfortunately, we had missed our other connection and were stuck on the Big Island. About an hour later, a strange man that looked like a passenger walked past us and proceeded to the restroom. Five minutes later, the same man came out, not in his street clothes, but in a pilot's uniform. I began to laugh in my head, trying to keep it in. The man then turned to us and said, "Let's go to Maui." We looked at him bizarrely, as if he were speaking another language.

My mom, dad, brother, and I, along with four other passengers, gathered our belongings and strolled out the door into the humid night on the runway. I saw the plane that we were going to be flying in: an extremely tiny, red, unstable-looking aircraft. As each person boarded, we had to tell the strange pilot our weight, as he mentally balanced each side of the plane for safety reasons. I thought that was very funny because I had never seen that done before.

After that entire headache, we got settled into our miniature seats. Then, the pilot hopped in and slowly turned around in his seat to ask us if we were buckled in and ready for takeoff. Simultaneously, we all nodded and prepared to take off towards Maui. The strange man, now known to us as our pilot, had estimated that the flight would take about an hour and a half. I fell asleep because the tiny aircraft kept on shaking like an earthquake in the sky; I said to myself that if we crashed, I would have at least liked to die in my sleep.

I was suddenly awakened by my mother, who stated that we had safely landed at the Maui airport. I

was glad to get off the plane, for I had a headache and was shaken up. Walking towards the terminal, I could see that I would have lots of fun here because Maui was very pretty—palm trees were everywhere. I thought to myself, *If it looks this beautiful now, then I wonder what it will look like in the morning when the sun is up.* We got our rental car and started heading to the resort.

Driving on the quiet, winding road, I saw things that had never been in my sight before. I saw wild chickens on the road walking around like no one cared—even roosters! Getting closer to our destination, I saw tons of shopping centers and restaurants that looked pleasant to visit alongside the beaches. We finally arrived at the resort and were ready for a long nap after this wary day of flying. Since we missed our flight, the resort people thought that we were not coming anymore, so we had to wait for a while for someone to come and give us a key to our room. We didn't feel like waiting around in a parking lot, so we drove around Maui. By this time, it was two in the morning. There were so many national artifacts, places that looked very interesting to go and see their culture. We drove past a dark, long, foggy road leading up to a endless hill, and I wondered what could be up there. I didn't want to find out. Maybe when the sun was up, and it was bright out.

The moon was shining like there would be no morning. It looked pretty when the reflection hit the calm, waveless ocean. We began to head back to the resort. When we got there, a lady was waiting for us to check in at the front desk. She had this look like she had

been sleeping and was mad that she had to wake up in the middle of the night for a guest. Our room was on the bottom floor, which I normally hate, but this time I liked it because you could walk out the back sliding door and head to the beach, which was right next to the resort. The room was very cozy-looking and had two beds and a bath. Since my brother is bigger than me, he got the bed. I slept in the living room, which I really liked because the bed was my perfect size, and I was closer to the bathroom. After taking a nice, warm shower, I fixed my bed and began to doze off.

When the sun came up, it came through the window, shining directly on my face. I got up and started watching TV just like I would have done any other day back home. My mother was already up and about. Finally, my dad and brother woke up to the sight of the morning sun and the smell of bacon. After breakfast, we all got dressed and headed out to the grocery store; we looked around and saw people walking with surfboards and some running for their daily exercise. I saw this big ice cream cone that grabbed my attention. The ice cream store was called Tastee's, with a fancy T. Along the side of the road, there were other stores that looked interesting. I knew from this beautiful scene that my vacation was going to be the talk of my life to come and that I would hope someday to return with my family. As we ventured out to visit the other smaller islands, I thought that someday I would like to make one of the Hawaiian islands my home.

Once my vacation to Maui was over, sadly it was time to head home. On the bright side, we didn't have

to ride in the scary deathtrap jet to the Big Island. When we arrived at the airport, it was just about time to board, so we quickly went through security and headed to the gate. As we boarded and sat in our seats, I said goodbye to Hawaii one last time, and I couldn't wait until we returned again. I was sad that summer was over, and it was time to go back to school.

When we landed in RDU, we were all tired and couldn't wait to get home. I was happy to see my big bed again and snuggled into my cool sheets.

A week had passed since my trip to the Hawaiian islands. It was time to go back to school and start going to bed earlier. I did a little school shopping so that I could be prepared on the first day. I set my alarm clock, for it was the last night of summer, and the first day of school was in the morning.

Part 3

It was tuxedo black and its hair was thick and wildly tangled into big, tight knots. It looked like a bad hair day on four legs. Its claws were long and sharp like a new knife ready to stab. The creature's eyes were bright like the moon, made of mystical colors from sunset skies, with pupils as dark as midnight. The bizarre-looking creature was the black cat from next door.

Every day I wake up and get ready for school with about twenty minutes to spare until my bus comes. I don't eat breakfast, so I normally just go on my com-

puter or take the dog outside to play. When the bus comes, I have to face the middle schoolers' drama at the back of the bumpy bus. The next thing is to stay in school for eight hours of boredom and the same lunches every day. Then, finally, it is time to go home. When I get home and it is 7:00 p.m., I go outside, walk around, and take my dog, Princess, with me.

One day, when I was going out at 7:00, this strange-looking cat came onto my property and slowly crept up to me. I gave it a sign to go away, but it just took a few little steps back. I ignored the poor cat and began to run down the hill for fun. Then, all of the sudden, the black cat leapt in front of me. Falling down the hill in fright, I saw, at that exact moment, an extraordinarily bright object fly across the night sky. I stopped, trying to tell if it was a shooting star or maybe even a UFO.

As soon as I thought of UFOs, I knew my family would think I was even crazier than if I said it was a shooting star. So I kept it to myself. Ever since that day, I keep looking up at the sky to see if it will come back. Perhaps in the next hundred years. I may not be around anymore. I have learned to always have an eyewitness when something bizarre like this happens. I hope the next person who stands in the same spot I did, as a witness to this strange life, will see a flying object in the sky.

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

Kaitlin Medlin

Writing a book is an adventure. To begin with it is a toy, an amusement. Then it becomes a mistress, then it becomes a master, then it becomes a tyrant. The last phase is that just as you are about to be reconciled to your servitude, you kill the monster and fling him out to the public.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

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Every word written is a victory against death.

MICHEL BUTOR

“YOU NEED TO find a hobby and take your mind off things, or you may develop a pathological disorder.”

My family was a mess, my aunt in and out of jail, arguments all the time, causing hurt and confusion. My therapist and his hair-brained schemes were the only thing keeping me sane, stopping me from committing the one fatal act that would cease the pain, discontinue the hurt, and destroy everything. We started experimenting and the next thing you know, I was reading and writing fiction.

Words are my safe place. A place I can escape to whenever I feel the need. Devouring every book I read, I enter a world where the impossible and unimaginable happen. Reading inspires my mind to go beyond the realm of reality and into a void where anything is possible.

I am married to my reading, but writing, writing is my mistress. You never know what will inspire you, being able to decide when to close the book, and leave the reader hanging, unlocking new doors, facing a new challenge with every word.

Having nothing but a book, paper, and a pencil, I can write to enchant, inspire, and consume. I read to be enchanted, inspired and devoured. Millions upon millions of books, billions of words all bending to my will.

Words of love, of hate. Words of war, of peace. Words of destruction and of creation. Words are my safe place, my panic room, my life. Without words I am nothing: a body without a soul, a shell, a walking corpse.

My therapy has ended and my “talking cure” has turned into a “writing cure,” soothing the insanity. Words are still there, even though my therapist has left. Ready to be read, ready to be written. Ready to protect me from the evils of my world.

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It is defeat that turns bone to flint; it is defeat that turns gristle to muscle; it is defeat that makes men invincible. Do not then be afraid of defeat. You are never so near to victory as when defeated in a good cause.

HENRY WARD BEECHER

I will always remember the day vampires became an immense part of my life. It changed my way of thinking, opening new doors into my imagination, letting me enter places I never knew existed. Having read so much about them, I can answer any question about these pale-faced beings before it even leaves your mouth.

Anything—stories, poems, songs—about these cold-blooded animals interests me. Nothing is safe when I decide it is worthy of my attraction. *Twilight* started it all, the thrilling tale of Isabella Swan and her vampire lover Edward Cullen.

Walking into the school library was like walking into a gold mine: books surrounding me along every wall. Walking these miles upon miles of books, I searched for one of such power as to quench my aching thirst for the unknown. Randomly stopping at the top shelf of a middle row, I looked up to see a book just sitting there as if someone had known I would look up at that very place. The name was mysterious enough to draw my curiosity. Instinctively, I picked the book up. Fitting it nicely into my hand, I slipped into a chair and started reading the first chapter. The book drew me into this mysterious world of vampires, feeding what was once a fleeting interest. An epidemic had begun, consuming my soul like a vampire drains its victims of blood.

Some days I question what I got myself into. Have I let this go too far? Is it getting out of hand? How long will this go on as I grow older? Will it die out or only get worse? These questions force their way to the

front of the line in my brain, endlessly nagging, sending doubts into my mind. I feel I *have* let this go too far. But most days I embrace it and let it entice me. It is both a curse and a blessing to be trapped between two worlds, fantasy and reality, to have my fantasies become reality and have my reality become fantasy.

Do I even want to be free from these vampiric bonds, this vampire curse? To be free from this enchanting prison? Clearly I do not, for it is obvious that love has cursed this life. I long to enter a world of fantasy at my very command, to be master and servant to the very beings that imprison me, enchanting me day and night.

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To Ms. Garvoille, without whom I would never have written these stories.

To my therapist (whose name I forgot), without whom I would never have a story to write.

To my family, just because that's what you're supposed to do.

AUNT SISTA

Dominique Moody

THE FACT THAT I was going to die one day, I couldn't even think through. The hotness of my throat I can't describe. As my brother was talking, I kept thinking, *What am I going to do with my life?* The room felt like hell, like I was on fire, and the cool air from the fan was not cool, but hot. I thought my throat was frying, and my headache seemed like a bomb in my head that had just ticked off. The flies around me were buzzing in my ears. I wished I could be like James McAvoy in the movie *Wanted* and shoot the wings off of them. The stupid insects were burning up, Trey was on fire, that dog was in hell, yelling and barking for water. *Why can't he just shut up?* Those idiotic chickens needed to stop jumping and flying around in that small congested coop. The bedroom was congested with all the things that nobody cared about anymore. While I was looking anywhere but at my brother, I saw New York Knicks posters, basketball and baseball cards, old game

systems, hats, shoeboxes, and a fresh, never used two dollar bill hanging in a photo frame.

This house had seen so much excitement. My aunt was a comedian in so many ways. When she told a joke the neighbors would laugh. My aunt would say things like "Remove your fingers or I will cut them off," or "Why the *hell* did you do that?" Whether it was the grinding of her teeth or her first words to us when we got there, "Where y'all coming from?" or the way she said okay when it was time for us to leave. It would be something to remember. She was gone.

Back when my grandmother passed, my aunt was sad because they would always talk. At the funeral my aunt said, "Wake up Irma, you ain't dead." We all thought she was joking, but she was angry. My aunt was very alone after my grandmother died. She would just sit on the porch and watch the traffic go by. We call my aunt Aunt Sista because she was our grandmother's sister. When I think of Aunt Sista and my grandmother it reminds me of Whitney Houston's song "I Look to You."

MY DAYS AS A WARPED FAN

Kassandra Nichols

The Show Begins

“MANAGE ME! I’m a mess,” I screeched. “Weightless” by All Time Low was blasting through my blue sound-cancelling headphones on this hot morning in Virginia Beach. Seven a.m., and we were already piling into the packed SUV (the “we” being my dad and me). July 22, 2009, was the big day; the day I’d been anticipating for over a year was finally here. This was the biggest concert in the United States. Fifty-plus bands all packed into a venue that was too small to even hold all of them. The day had come for Warped Tour. All those days of listening to A Day To Remember and All Time Low had paid off.

As we made our way to the car from our room in the Red Roof Inn (which ironically didn’t have a red roof), a wave of excitement crashed over me and engulfed me in its current. The day had arrived, so why

was I so nervous? We pulled into a McDonalds as I was trying to calm my nerves. After ordering a McGriddle, I inhaled it just as fast as I got it. We left the fast food building as I flipped through every song I could in the short time I knew it would take to get to the Verizon Amphitheater, where the event was being held. *Let the adventure commence*, I thought.

After about ten minutes of driving, we pulled into the parking lot, only to find that we showed up too early. We were instructed to park to the side and were allowed to go inside the venue if we chose to do so. Once my dad parked, I made a bee-line to the side entrance where, ultimately, all the bands arrived and unloaded. Gaping in awe at the giant trucks, many tents, empty space, and lack of people, I knew that the fun had only just begun.

The Freaks Come out at Punk Concerts

The bright morning sun was beaming down upon us. The weather man had predicted rain in the forecast, but there was nary a dark cloud in sight. It was as if God himself dubbed the world be clear and the skies empty.

Trudging through the back entrance wasn't something I'd expected to do. As my heart raced, I kept thinking that someone would kick us out. The feeling was exhilarating. To my disbelief, we entered the venue with ease and sat at the Hurricane Bay, a bar. From there we waited for the fun to actually start.

Which it didn't. At least not for another three hours, because we got there at eight, and the concert didn't start until eleven.

Hours had passed, and still nothing had happened. Those same workers who had been folding merchandise when we arrived were *still* arranging merch, folding shirts and hanging ties and belts. Anxiously waiting for something significantly interesting to happen, I rose to my feet and walked to the main entrance of the venue to find there were over one hundred people all grouped together on the other side of the red bars. Cheering, jeering, and laughter erupted from the fiery pit of the crowd. The sound of a band was noticeable, but I couldn't for the love of me figure out who it was. All I knew was they were giving out free T-shirts, and I couldn't get one.

Finally, the masses started entering. First, they let in the people with presale tickets, like me, who didn't go through the back. Then, the general audience was permitted inside. Within minutes, the area was packed, and I found myself dodging people and sprinting back to the bar where my dad was, only to be stopped by a security guard asking for an I.D. Knowing that I lacked one and seeing as I was under the age of twenty-one, my dad left the bar and we made our way to the arena, where the fun was about to start.

We sat in the bright red seats of the arena, a few rows from the front, and I watched the gaggle of youth gather in front of the stage. I recall staring at the drum set reading the words "F*** Breathe Carolina," an electronica band from Colorado. I watched them set up,

adjust the P.A., tune the guitars, and joke around on stage. I could just picture myself on that stage, shredding on guitar, and belting out lyrics into that pink-taped microphone. Life was so grand.

David Schmitt Loves to Share with Fans

The act commenced. This was their first time playing on Warped and I couldn't have been more excited. I was down in front, jumping up and down with the rest of the ecstatic crowd. I shouted lyrics like the crazed fan I was. Tripping over people, I filmed the entire set until it ended, which, unfortunately, it did. They announced that their signing time was at 12:15, which was only twenty minutes away. I proceeded back to where my dad was sitting and pulled him to his feet.

"We need to get to Breathe Carolina's booth so I can get an autograph," I recall saying to him. Dragging him behind me, as if he were a red wagon, I hurtled us to the other area of the venue, which was actually where we entered the building. But we were suddenly stopped by pedestrian traffic that was going only two miles an hour. "All I wanted was to get out," I whined, and in a state of anticipation, I started knocking people out of the way. We reached the opening and to my left was a Breathe Carolina poster. Like a dog stuck outside scratches at the gate, I yearned for the poster. Being short sure doesn't have many advantages. My dad was able to get it for me, luckily. We paced around the once-empty lot until we found the Breathe Carolina booth.

I was eighth in the line and decided to chat with the other fans. I offered them my assorted sharpies. Then, it was my turn. I handed the band the slightly torn poster and asked them to sign it. I also got a picture with them. Being a huge fan, I felt compelled to ask for David Schmitt's (the lead singer) Monster energy drink, which he actually gave me. The day couldn't have gotten any better.

Déjà Vu

To my utter shock, it was 1:00. Wandering around the venue certainly made the time fly, but I continued to wander—at least until it was time for All Time Low to play on the Vans Main Stage, which was at 1:45. Frantically pacing on the tan dirt, I unknowingly walked straight into a game of charades. “Only I could end up walking into a group of people,” I muttered to myself. I played the game, however, and lost horribly. Once more, I paced the area, waiting, looking at my schedule, and constantly checking my cell phone. Then that blessed moment arrived. It was 1:40! I ran to the Main Stage, and my eyes bulged. There were at least three hundred people, and I was in the back. I shrugged it off, however, and just beamed. They walked on stage, singing that same song I was singing only a few hours ago. My eyes welled.

The Maine, North Carolina, and Energy Drinks

I looked at my cell phone for the umpteenth time. The time was 2:15. "Oh God . . . The Maine!" The Maine was one of my favorite bands, and their signing was in fifteen minutes. I wove my way out of the huge crowd, and sprinted to the AT&T truck, where the signing was going to be. Luckily, there weren't too many people in line, so I got there in time.

As I waited, I chatted with some of the other fans who were in line. I cocked an eyebrow when some said they were from Raleigh. "I'm from Durham," I replied shyly. "So, why are you guys in Virginia?" They said that their dad worked for Monster. My jaw dropped. I managed to exclaim a rather loud "Lucky!" which was so loud, in fact, that people turned to look at the commotion. The line steadily shortened, but my feet were killing me. Airwalk sneakers and rock-encrusted dirt don't mix when you wait for long periods of time. Finally, by the grace of God, I was getting my poster signed (which coincidentally I had just swiped off the Hurley table). Beaming from ear to ear, I swapped a quick hello with John O'Callaghan (The Maine's lead singer) and he informed me that their set was at 8:30 later that evening. "I'll be there," I said, grinning. I practically fell off the AT&T truck while I was descending the short steps. *These steps were made for midgets*, I thought. I checked my bright red LG Scoop cell phone once more and saw I had five missed calls. Flipping through the calls section, I saw they were all from my dad. "He is going to kill me . . ."

Where's Waldo?!

Dodging people as if they were bullets being shot out of a Magnum 45, I stumbled into that same red chair I was in when the first set played. Offering my dad some shaved ice, I apologized for being late. He shrugged and said, “I just wanted to know where you were. Your mom told me be with you the whole time, but I know I cramp your style.” I playfully shoved him. God, I love my dad.

“Wanna go back to the other opening with all the other stages?” I asked him. He nodded and got up. “I want my shaved ice back, though.” Smiling, he handed it to me. Once again, I was weaving my way around the overzealous crowd of people, trying to squeeze my way through the narrow pathway that led to the other half of the venue. When I got back to the main stages, the number of people had multiplied like rabbits in heat. There were a lot more people now than there were only thirty minutes ago. “This is like a really hard Where’s Waldo,” I said to my dad. He shook his head and we walked around the packed venue once again.

This Album Is One Hundred Percent Pure Violence

“You *have* to eat,” my dad kept lecturing me. We’d been at this argument for over twenty minutes. I had Subway, but I refused to eat it.

“I’m fine, Daddy,” I said bluntly. This had become my catch phrase of the day. But fine or not, he sat me

down and forced me to eat, which I did. We decided to sit in front of the AKAs who were a punk band.

"We are the AKAs," they yelled, "and our new album is not about boys liking girls, boys dating girls, or boys breaking up with girls. This album is one hundred percent pure violence!" My dad laughed as I washed down my sandwich and I smiled for another time. My face was beginning to hurt from all the smiling.

Then the distant sound of 3OH!3, a band everyone knew, rang in my ears. They were singing their song "Starstrukk." "Would you like to go over there?" my dad asked sweetly.

"Absolutely not," I replied. I finally got the chance to sit down, and I was taking full advantage of it. Besides, they were loud enough to hear from where we were. It turns out 3OH!3 isn't as hot as everyone thinks they are. Frankly, their live performance was nothing shy of awful.

After resting for thirty minutes or so, I rose to my feet. It was time for me to start moving again. My body did its usual time check, and, surprisingly, it was 3:12. All Time Low's signing was in two hours. I raced back to the AT&T truck to find that there was already a line that was a mile long. I walked to the end, to be greeted by a woman who was passing out cards, our passes that granted us the privilege to attend All Time Low's signing. I was lucky enough to get one.

Jack, Will You Marry Me?

Minute by minute, the line extended. Squawking girls were jumping up and down as All Time Low's new album *Nothing Personal* blasted from the truck's speakers. The woman who was passing out the cards then said the four words any diehard fan would hate to hear: "The line is closed!" A wave of moans, groans, cursing, and finger flipping erupted from the latter half of the line. I watched them all, laughing. Girls were so dumb sometimes.

All the fans without cards left, and we, the chosen ones, waited. We waited for over two hours. Then the line moved. One by one, a girl would go up, then come down. There was, of course, the occasional boy who would pop up, but then he would depart as well. Step by step, I inched closer. My left foot reached the step. Then followed my right. Left, right, left . . . until I locked eyes with the band. I handed them with shaking hands the *Nothing Personal* CD I had purchased directly after leaving their set. Alex Gaskarth, the lead singer of the band signed it, then passed it along. One by one, the band signed it. Then it reached my favorite musician of the group, Jack Barakat. I looked him dead in the eyes and said flat out, "Jack, will you marry me?"

He laughed and gave me a high five replying with "Absolutely!" Giggling, I received my CD and bounced off the truck for the last time.

Bumping into my dad, I showed him the CD. "They signed it," I said happily. "They signed it!"

How Bad Can a Kick in the Head Be?

My father and I interlocked arms and walked down to the Kevin Says Stage (named after the founder of Warped Tour, Kevin Lyman) to watch Ice Nine Kills, which is a hardcore band. Once there, I ran into Tiffany Mink, who is the Warped Tour pit reporter, our news specialist for all things Warped Tour related. I asked for a quick picture, which I received and skipped my way to the front of the crowd. Turning to the right, I saw AlexIsOnFire's mosh pit. It was enormous. My dad and I swapped glances and I shook my head. Unless hell froze over, I was not setting foot into that group of people, no matter how much I loved the band. Ice Nine Kills's set began, and I left before it got underway. I tugged on my dad, and we proceeded to the Hurley Stage, where AlexIsOnFire was playing. Resting against a gate, I sat my already dirt-salted butt on the ground.

When AlexIsOnFire left the stage, I got up and filed in behind the rest of the Escape The Fate fans. I was tucked in between a couple who were kissing and a group of girls who were around my age. So I did the kind thing and introduced myself. We talked for a little while Escape the Fate's crew was setting up. Massive cheering broke out, and I turned around to see the band walking on stage. Craig Mabbit's hair glistened in the setting sun, and, as if they were in a musical like *Rent*, they all burst into song. The lyrics to "The Flood" came pouring out of his mouth like pure, sweet honey. Yelling the verses with the rest of the insane crowd, I

soon got kicked in the head and fell over. Crowd surfers had started flopping all over the place, landing wherever they may fall, which incidentally happened to be on me. As I lifted and avoided crowd surfers, I sang along with Escape the Fate and recorded what I could with my camera.

Then the mood changed. It wasn't so happy-go-lucky anymore. It was serious and heavy. I was being packed tighter and tighter into the crowd, but I was unaware of what was going on. Then I saw it. People were moshing. Swinging and running around like idiots. This is the one time that I ever wanted to be an idiot, so I did the idiot thing and ran into the pit with the other people. Things started to get a little too intense, however, and I slipped back out before I lost any of my teeth. Escape The Fate's set ended and I got out unscathed. At last it was 8:30. The Maine's set was up next. I started running people over to get to the front, and you better believe I got to the front.

Sex Sells, Your Sex Cells

After waiting all day to hear The Maine, the introduction to "The Way We Talk" began to play and the band filed on stage, getting into their positions. All of the girls, including myself, started screaming. I'm convinced we busted the security guards' eardrums that day. John O'Callaghan's pasty skin glowed orange in the stage lights. I whipped out my camera to film the entire set and John flashed a big smile towards

me. I could tell by his facial expressions he loved performing. "Sex sells, your sex cells," the crowd chanted. We sounded like dying animals, but it was all for the fun of the concert. Their last song was a cover of Def Leppard's single "Pour Some Sugar on Me." This song was louder than any of the other songs that they played because everyone knew the words. "Pour some sugar on me, in the name of love," the fans sang. John ended the set with a big thank you to the fans and we all dispersed.

I latched onto my father and we walked to the car. I opened the same grass green door that only twelve hours ago had released me into the wild. I interlaced my fingers with my dad's, and, as he pulled out of the parking lot, I rested my head on the leather seat and said in a muted voice, "Thank you," as we drove into a star-speckled horizon.

Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank my mother and father for letting me have this experience. I know that I "grind your gears," but I appreciate all you do, even if I don't show it. I love you both very much.

I'd also like to dedicate this memoir to Krista S., Dalton G., Obadiah K., and Erin G. because you all have the best taste in music that I know of and you're all awesome.

Lastly, I'd like to thank Ms. G., for letting me share this experience with others in hopes of enlighten-

WHAT THE CRAP?

D. Joyce Powers

I SHOULD HAVE known what my name was gonna be. Curly, brown eyes, Hispanic in disguise, I guess I looked like a Dionna, or at least in my family's eyes. To some Hispanic people my name is amusing. To some Americans my name is confusing.

I only came down to Durham, North Carolina to visit family members. A summer visit turned into a year, then a year turned into two, then two turned into three. I remember that hot June night when I stepped off the Amtrak. Lawd, when I got off the train it looked different than New York. All I saw were trees and dirt. I was on that cold-behind train for almost eleven hours with no blanket or anything. I didn't do anything on that train except sleep and watch *The Addams Family*.

When I got to Durham, my aunts and uncle checked us into some weirdly named hotel. After that, we went out to eat at the Waffle House. I had a deli-

cious bacon, egg, and cheese sandwich with ketchup, a side of hash browns, and a cup of orange juice.

The first full day I spent in North Carolina we had a cook out. There wasn't anything special about it because I knew everybody there; there weren't a lot of people, only my four cousins, my aunts, uncles, and godparents. I was introduced to some neighbors, including a boy who looked like my cousin. I was also introduced to some disgusting bugs. Lawd, I hate bugs. They are small, they crawl, and they bite. Bugs hate me because when I was younger I would either pour water on them or squish them with huge inanimate objects. I've hated going outside ever since I moved down here 'cause of the bugs and the heat.

I live here with my mom. She and I have a lot in common. She likes to draw and I like to draw. She writes poetry and I write poetry. We even act kinda the same, too. When we first meet people we both tend to be quiet—not because we are shy, but because we observe the scene and the behaviors of the other people in the environment. When we feel like we know them, we open up.

Our close relationship resulted in a weird-behind nickname. I think I was about three or four. She was probably thinking too fast because she called me Dijanna. I still answered her because the name was cool beans. The nickname is between my mom and me because nobody else knows it.

*

Warm in the winter, cold in the summer, filled with laughter, soaked in tears, filled with love. Drawings screaming to be free just to know they're being captured by me. My private sanctuary, undisturbed by others. Like a butterfly in the jungle, free to be itself. It can pass as a box, but there's enough room for a family of elephants. The exotic jungle is my magical bedroom where words mean everything. Emotions chill behind the words that were once on my mind in lights you can see from the heavens.

DOWN BY THE GREEN RIVER: A SUMMER STORY

Rosalia Preiss

I would like to dedicate this memoir to all of my friends at Green River Preserve and to all the people in the world who seek the joy of being alive.

And Daddy won't you take me back to Muhlenberg County
Down by the Green River where Paradise lay
Well, I'm sorry my son, but you're too late in asking
Mister Peabody's coal train has hauled it away

JOHN PRINE, "PARADISE"

Introduction

GREEN RIVER PRESERVE is a fitting name for the place. Everywhere you look, you see green. Trees, moss, grass, plants growing in the garden, all spread across this 3,400 acre camp in the western North Carolina mountains. Beautiful doesn't even begin to describe the nature-focused camp. The gentle hills roll down into a big field surrounded by dark forests of oak, pine, and poplar trees. The rocky paths lead to the

big, wood cabins. The dining hall perches on top of the quiet, shady hill. And best of all is the view of the great, blue sky from the apple orchard in the back field, the giant climbing tower outlined against the white clouds. Something about the place is magical.

During the day, it's warm, but there is a cool, gentle breeze that caresses your skin and makes you shiver. The weather at night is perfect for bundling up in warm, fleecy sweatshirts and flannel pajama pants. When the sky is clear, you can feel the sun warming your skin and the tiny droplets of sweat beading up on your forehead as you hike. When storms come, bringing torrents of warm rain, the moisture seeps through your clothes, leaving a cool tingle on your bare skin. The grass is as soft as a couch cushion and the water is as refreshing as a glass of cold lemonade.

At any point, if you listen closely, you can hear the faint strains of a melody someone is strumming on the guitar. You can always hear the birds singing (or the crows cawing at five o'clock in the morning), including the fascinating Whip-poor-will. The trees rustle in the wind. Kids laugh and run down the paths, their feet crunching against the gray gravel. Dogs bark and run after them. The older girls sit on the hill, their gossiping and giggling carrying across the lake. And then, if you are lucky, you catch the land in a silent moment and just take it all in.

Everything smells like earth. It is the smell of cut grass and leaves and water and sweat and dirt, too. The smell is reassuring in a way. It shows you that you aren't dreaming; the beauty surrounding you really

does exist. And all you need to do is lay back and be a part of it.

This past summer was my third and last year at the Green River Preserve. I am too old to go back. My sadness about the fact that I will not be returning to the base camp as a camper is overwhelming. There are expeditions run by the camp that explore North Carolina's coast and mountains, and, while I'm sure those would be fun, I doubt they would hold as much wonder or magic as the actual preserve. So many memories of the place are stored in my head: the first time I arrived and met my future best friend, Jaclyn; dealing with drama queens Kathryn and Kelly; my first view of the surrounding mountains from Upper Bald; our tent getting washed away during a midnight flood on campout; and overcoming my fear of heights by reaching the top of the climbing tower.

Green River was more than just a camp to me. It was a retreat, a shelter, a home away from home. It was a place for me to be whoever I wanted to be without worrying whether I would be judged. Each year, the staff and other campers became less like strangers and more like a giant family to me. And I think that is the point of the camp: to end up being more than just a camp. And that is why I kept returning to that green paradise year after year.

YEAR ONE

Welcome to Green River

I remember the first time I walked into my cabin at Green River. I was in Whip-poor-will One, the left half of the oldest girls' cabin. It was the summer after sixth grade, and only the second time I had gone to sleep-away camp. The year before, I had gone to Camp Kanuga with my two best friends, Davy and Emma, but this year, I was going to a camp where I didn't know anyone. I really didn't want my dad to leave me all alone. The thought of being by myself made me weak in the knees. As I threw my bags down on the bottom bunk of the bed next to the window, two girls walked in and smiled at me. I shyly smiled back.

Later that day, I learned that these girls were Kathryn and Kelly, twins from Pinehurst, North Carolina. Also in my cabin were the shy but pretty Annie, the wild child Jaclyn, and the funny and understanding Katie. Our counselor was strict Heidi and our co-counselor was quiet Cassidy. On the first day, we also met our brother and sister cabins. Our brother cabin was made up of the entertaining duo of Hayden and Ian, both from Durham as well, the super polite Jake, the chatty William and his quiet friend John, and the curious and slightly batty Frank. Everyone seemed to be very nice, and nobody made a big deal about the fact that I was new.

For the first few days, I missed my parents and cried myself to sleep more than once. But as time went

on, I was having way too much fun to be sad. My daily activities were fencing, knitting, archery, outdoor cooking, and pottery. I loved everything about the camp, from the silly skits the counselors did at mealtimes to the fact that I had gotten to the top of the climbing wall despite my fear of heights. Time was flying by, and before I knew it, it was time to go on campout.

Campout

While I had been having a great drama-free time, I could not say the same for other girls in my cabin. Katie and Kathryn both liked this boy named James, and he had gone for Katie. This resulted in Kathryn having a melt-down crying fit the day we had to leave for campout. Naturally, this really irritated our counselor, earning us a very stern talk about how boys were not important, and we shouldn't talk about them or think about them for the rest of camp. Well, good luck telling that to a bunch of middle school girls.

The first night of campout, we were staying at Upper Bald. It is this high rock that gives you a great view of the preserve. There is a giant field behind it, and this is where we would pitch our tents. We ate a horrible dinner of undercooked mac and cheese, and then we went to bed. We had already set up our sleeping pads and bags, so we just crawled in and went to sleep. To our great discomfort, we woke up in the morning covered in stinging, itchy, fire ant bites. Turns out, the field was covered in their hills.

After eating oatmeal for breakfast, we set off on our hike for South Prong. Clouds covered the sky, but it thankfully didn't rain on us while we were hiking. We had another mediocre dinner, then set up our tent at the bottom of a large hill, crawled in, and went to sleep. Big mistake. Around one in the morning, rain began pounding on our tent. The girls in my cabin piled together in the middle, but I didn't think it was a big deal, so I just stayed in my spot and fell back asleep. By four, all of our stakes had come out of the soggy ground and we were drenched to the bone, basically lying under the downpour with no roof. Annie ran for the shelter to report back that we were allowed to go there and that our brother cabin had been there since the rain started. And people say boys are tougher than girls. Please.

The hike back to camp made me weary. We had to trek six miles in the pouring rain. We were cold and wet, and upon our return raced to the shower house. That night, we all went up to the lodge for movie night. It was a nice, peaceful way to end our tiring day. I wouldn't say campout was fun that year, but it was definitely a great learning experience that toughened me up quite a bit.

Closing Ceremonies

The last few days of my two weeks at Green River were packed. I had to paint my spirit stone (a rock that you place around the fire at the closing cer-

emony), glaze my pottery, find my lost laundry, start packing, and get everyone's email. On our last night, we all crowded around the campfire to place our spirit stones, hear stories, and sing songs. As we lit our candles and floated them across the lake, tears slipped down my cheeks. It was at that moment that I realized what the camp's motto, "Seek the joy of being alive," truly meant. I really had felt joyful there, more than anywhere else. And that's when I knew I would have to return.

YEAR TWO

Happy to Be Back

I couldn't wait to go back for my second year of Green River Preserve. It was such an amazing place, and I was anxious to return. I had been counting the days until check-in, and, after what seemed like forever, we were packing up the car and driving to Brevard.

As a returning camper, I was a lot less nervous. I had a good feeling when I learned I would be in Whippoor-will One again. I was in ecstasy, seeing all the familiar sights and knowing that nothing had changed. This year, I chose the same bed by the window, but took the upper bunk instead. Our counselor was Rachel, and she seemed to be much nicer and sillier than Heidi had been. Things were looking up.

Jaclyn was the only person I had known the year before who was in my cabin. Along with her were

sweet Anna and her best friend Audrey, shy but funny Claire, and slightly whiny and irritating Anjae. Our sister cabin was made up of quiet Lily, sarcastic Everett, pretty Katherine, mousy Rachel, and Emilie, who was from Switzerland. We had another great brother cabin, including national champion fencer Alistair, shy singer Richard, quiet boys Ben and Michael, wise Isaac, and creepy Nick. It was a great group.

Camp Life

In my free time, I mostly hung out with Jaclyn and Claire. We balanced each other well. Jaclyn was jumpy and excited, Claire was sweet and modest, and I was sarcastic and funny. We were the unstoppable trio. I did several new activities also, including juggling with Michael and Ben. I had never really been close friends with people in my brother cabin before, so I was glad to get to know them.

Since I liked my cabin, all the group activities were much more fun. I enjoyed banding together with my girls to win capture the flag and to find the staff members hiding in the woods during staff hunt. For the game Predator-Prey, we were hawks and at the top of the food chain, so we had to dress in bright colors. Somehow, Claire, Jaclyn, and I all ended up in bright orange. Claire decided that from then on we should be known as the Tangerines. Now, every time we go to camp, we have one day when we all wear our signature orange tops.

Campout was fairly uneventful that year, or, at least, it was compared to the year before. There were no ridiculous fire ant attacks, no midnight floods, and no boy drama breakdowns. The one funny thing that happened was one morning we had woken up early, and our brother cabin didn't know we were awake. We were just lying there quietly in our tent, when Alistair screamed, "Nick! Stop looking at the girls with your binoculars!" Of course, we all looked out of the tent, and there was Nick, his binocular-covered eyes poking out from under the flap of the boys' tent. Needless to say, we were always careful when we were changing.

Time to Go Already?

The two weeks seemed to pass by faster than they had last year. This time, I started getting people's emails early, because I had learned the year before that it is really too hectic on closing day to do anything. The end of this year was sadder than the past year, because nothing had really gone wrong. It was like I had found Utopia, and as soon as I got used to living in that perfect world, I had to leave it and return to everyday life.

That year, I painted my spirit stone orange to represent the Tangerines. Claire and Jaclyn did the same. For my group project, I decorated the lodge for our final banquet. I also got to make a pie for my cabin's dessert. As we sat there enjoying our last meal together, I didn't feel sad, but rather hopeful. As I released my candle into the lake for the second time, I hoped that I would

never forget the people I had met, that I would get to feel loved like this again, and that I would be able to return again for another summer in Paradise.

YEAR THREE

Green River Miracle

This was my final summer at Green River Preserve. I was a rising freshman, and the only session I could go to was for three weeks. I was rushing my mom to sign me up for the session. I knew Claire and Jaclyn were already going, and I couldn't wait to see them again. Finally, we sent in the form.

In three days, we got an email from the secretary at Green River. She said that the three week session was already full, and so I would have to be put on the waitlist. Anger and sadness boiled up in me like a volcano. I don't think I talked to my mom for the rest of that day. That night, I had a conference call with Claire and Jaclyn. I told them that it was doubtful that I would be able to go to three week with them, and, for now, I would be going to the two week session. They were both upset.

For the next few weeks, I moped around and didn't want to hear anything about GRP. When a letter came for me in the mail from them, I just gave it to my mom. I didn't talk to any of my camp friends. I couldn't believe that my last year of GRP would have to be spent without them.

Then, two weeks before the session started, my mom called me into the living room. As soon as she told me she had just gotten an email from Green River, I was disappointed. I really didn't want to hear anything more about what I was missing, but I stayed. My mom called me over to the computer to read the letter. To my joyful surprise, it was an email saying that someone had dropped out of the session and I could take their place. I jumped up and down and raced to the phone to tell Claire and Jaclyn the great news.

Beginning of the End

Camp didn't look any different. This year, I was finally in another cabin, Whip-poor-will Two. While I had Jaclyn again, Claire was in another cabin. Thankfully, all three of us got put in the same hiking group. We had great times playing games like Uno and Apples-to-Apples on our hikes, and we did numerous activities together. It was turning out to be the best year of GRP ever.

I had an amazing cabin group, probably the best of all my years at camp. There was silly Carson, loud Sarah, shy Elizabeth, and sporty Baheya, whom we nicknamed Bahey-hey because that was how we all greeted her. Our counselor was named Becca, and she was wild. We spent many a night listening to Hanson on her iPod, and dancing and singing as loudly and crazily as possible. Most of my time in the cabin was full of laughter and smiles.

Our brother cabin was pretty great, too. I knew David, Bryce and Thomas Worm from past sessions (yeah, no kidding, that really was his last name), and Jason, Joe, and Michael were friends of Carson and Sarah. All of them were obsessed with having “raves,” where they would put their headlamps inside colored water bottles and dance around. We were very similar groups. Their counselor was Rich, and he was great at telling stories. Campout was fun, and even though we had to stay in the fire ant field, we managed to keep them away by spraying the perimeter of our tent with bug spray. Time seemed to be going faster than ever.

The Fawn

One morning, I was hiking around in the woods on the preserve with my hiking group. I loved exploring the land and seeing plants and animals I didn’t see much of back home. The mountains are beautiful in the summertime. The air was perfect, not too cold or hot, and the trees made it nice and shady. I had been hiking every day with my group for the past two weeks, and we hadn’t seen too many animals, which was uncommon. Suddenly, our mentor Derek, who was walking a good bit ahead of us, called out that he had found something.

It was a tiny fawn. It was lying on the side of the trail in a pile of leaves and couldn’t have been much bigger than the length from my fingertips to my elbow. It still had its white spots, so it had probably only been

born the last spring. Its big, brown eyes were open, staring into nothingness. Aside from that, it looked like it could have been asleep. Its four legs were curled up to its body, and its head was slightly cocked to one side. As we watched, a big, black fly buzzed past and landed on the baby deer's face.

No matter what I did that day, I could not stop thinking about the fawn. *How could it have died? Was it separated from its group, left to wander in the forest until it starved? Did it fall prey to one disease or another? Is this the way we will all end up? Alone and forgotten?* So many questions were racing around in my mind, and it bothered me that I couldn't answer them. As the second and third fly landed on the body, I realized how fragile not only this fawn's life was, but how fragile our lives are as well. You never know when the end is going to come. And that uncertainty is the most frightening thing of all.

Seek the Joy of Being Alive

Despite the incident with the fawn, I managed to have a pretty great time towards the end of the session. One day, we went into town for pizza and then went tubing on the French Broad River. After we dried off and got dressed, we went to a local ice cream shop called Dolly's. It was honestly the absolute best ice cream I had ever had. Even Jaclyn, who is lactose intolerant, ate some, and, despite the fact that she took eight Lactaid, she still got sick. Another night,

around eleven o'clock, Carson began showing us butt exercises that were in the latest *Seventeen Magazine*. At the end of that, we were laughing so hard we were at the point of tears. During staff hunt, our cabin found the mentor Bob, and he was worth more points than anyone else. Along with him and two other counselors, we got enough points to win. It was very exciting. Between Fourth of July fireworks and our second campout, the fun never stopped.

Although three weeks was the longest I'd ever been at Green River, it went by faster than any other session. It was as if we had arrived, and then all of a sudden, we were walking up that familiar path to the Upper Council Fire that signified the last night. I started crying almost as soon as I sat down on the ground. Sandy, the camp owner, came up and read a speech by Chief Seattle just like she had at the end of every other year. We sang "Paradise," just like we had at the end of every other year. Bob told a story, just like he had at the end of every other year. And yet, this was different than the end of every other year because it really was the end.

Jaclyn's pale face was glistening in the firelight, and Claire had her face buried in her hands, which surprised me; I had never seen Claire cry before. We clasped our shaking hands together as we walked down to the lake, and I felt my stomach jolt. I really didn't want to leave the next morning. Some of the co-counselors handed us our candles, and we slowly descended the hill, as if reluctant to let our candles float away, not wanting to believe that it was really over. My

whole body shook with sobs as I bent over, reached into the water, and released my candle. I clung tightly to my friends and sat by the lake for what seemed to be a lifetime. Finally, the music stopped and we had to return to our cabins.

All of us were pretty teary once we got back. Becca immediately turned on some random Hanson song and we all sat on the floor eating chocolate and gummy worms. Pretty soon, we were all laughing again. We passed around sheets and wrote our phone numbers on them for everybody. We must have stayed up until midnight or later, just reminiscing about all the great things that happened that session.

The next morning, it was time to go home. I had pretty much cried out all the tears in my body, but when my dad's car pulled in, the last few started rushing out. I hugged all of my friends, then hugged them all again. I took one last look around the camp, and then got into my dad's car. As we drove down the long, gravel road, I thought of all the things I had learned at Green River Preserve and promised myself to always seek the joy of being alive.

THE IDEAL

Yanina Quesada

I don't remember how we happened to meet each other.
I don't remember who got along with whom first.
All I can remember is all of us together . . . always.

UNKNOWN

EVERYONE NEEDS SOMEONE at some point. It doesn't matter who talked to whom first or who knew whom first. All that matters is that you're friends and you are still by each other's side. Being a friend means being there for someone when everyone walks out on them. I've learned to be a friend and to know who my true friends are. These are just a few.

Sonia Velazquez

When you're a little kid who barely knows English, it is hard to communicate with the people around you, and even harder to make new friends. It was my first day at R.N. Harris, and I was not fluent in English. I could only just get by.

As I started to set up my school supplies in my desk, a black-haired, light brown-skinned girl walked up to me. She stared at me for a second before saying anything. *"Hola,"* I heard her say. *What a relief, someone who speaks Spanish.* Her name was Sonia.

Sonia was Mexican, and I am Honduran, so we spoke a little differently, but that didn't matter. On the first day, we became best friends. We had so much in common. For one, we were both Hispanic. If I didn't understand something, I could ask her what it meant, and since she probably knows me better than anyone, I usually go to her first for advice.

She can trust me with anything and vice versa. We keep each other's secrets. When other people figure out those secrets, we just laugh because they are so late. She is like a little sister, and I will always have her back. Even though we don't get to hang out that much anymore, we still are very close.

Krista Smith

On May 11, 2007, I got on the bus to go on my G.R.E.A.T. trip. A blonde, white girl about 4'11" got on the bus. She sat next to me. Her name was Krista Smith. This was the day we became best friends.

We have been going to the same school for three years now. I know I can trust her with anything. We're like family.

Krista and I have gone through a lot even though it has only been three years. I know if I am going through

something that I can't handle by myself, Krista is only a call away. She's the shoulder I can cry on, the person I can rely on. I would not trade her for anything in the world. Nothing can break up our friendship and I know wherever our lives end up, we have made a difference to each other.

Ashley Campbell

Curly brown hair, light brown eyes, Puerto Rican accent, and about 5'4". We haven't been friends for a year yet, but we hang out all the time. She and her family moved to Raleigh and I don't get to see her as often as I did, but she comes to stay with me for the weekend sometimes, and vice versa.

Ashley and I love food, so we have little food nicknames for each other. She's Brownie and I'm Cookie because those are our favorite desserts.

I have been through a lot with Ashley. She's had her ups and downs, and I've had mine. We have been by each other's side this whole time. No matter what happens, we don't judge; we support.

We can't hang out every day like we used to. But we still talk on the phone. We stay up to date on what happens in each others' lives, so when we see each other, we aren't so surprised.

Our friendship now is closer than ever. Even though we are miles apart, it doesn't change anything between Cookie and Brownie.

Kisha Street

“I am just kidding,” I said as I finished eating.

“What? You’re a big kid?” replied Kisha.

We have some hearing issues, and we’re a little weird, but that’s why I love our friendship.

Kisha and I live in the same neighborhood. I met her through Ashley. Some people may judge our friendship because she’s a lesbian and I’m straight, but I could care less. She is my homegirl and my little sister.

When we have movie night, it is the best ever. She judges the girls and I judge the guys. And when *she* judges the guys, you know they are out there. She is a guy in a girl’s body, which makes her my best guy-in-a-girl’s-body friend.

Mariana and Stephanie Martinez

“Hey, can you go to the mall with me?” my brother Adan asked me.

“But you never take me to the mall with you,” I replied.

“I know, but Mariana is taking Stephanie with her and she asked me to bring you along.”

“So you are only taking me because she asked you to? I barely know Mariana. And I don’t know Stephanie at all.”

“Well, you can get to know them, so hurry up and get ready.”

“Okay, fine then. Give me ten minutes.”

Mariana is my brother's girlfriend, and, up to that point, I had barely talked to her. I only talked to her when she called Adan on the house phone and I answered.

Stephanie and I were both really shy until she showed me a picture of Rowdy. I had given Rowdy to Mariana because my mom didn't want a dog anymore. Stephanie was funny and crazy, which is why we got along so well. We texted each other nonstop. I soon became good friends with Mariana, also. They would have sleepovers at my house, which is where Stephanie and I premiered our own YouTube show.

I get to see them only every once in a while now because my brother moved to Miami. So now I go to Chapel Hill and stay with the Martinez girls when I can. We are still really close friends. We talk all the time. Not really talk on the phone, but we text each other for advice whenever we need it. And we make each others' days with inside jokes when we are feeling kind of blue.

I guess this is just how friendship is. But I love it. I don't know what I would do if I didn't have them in my life.

FOR THE NIGHTS I WON'T FORGET

Maria Salazar

For faith in humanity that we can all make a difference. For all my true friends that may be miles away but have left a handprint on my heart. You are my inspiration.

One day our generation
Is gonna rule the population
So we keep on waiting
Waiting on the world to change
JOHN MAYER, "WAITING ON THE WORLD TO CHANGE"

Introduction

"STAR OF THE sea," that's me, yet I'm afraid to be in the open sea. It's not that I'm scared of water, but being far into large bodies of water terrifies me to the bone. I love going to the pool but shrivel in my bathing suit when it comes to the deep end. It all started when I nearly drowned one day very long ago. I felt nothing but the numbing of my lungs and the racing of my thoughts.

From then on, I knew the purpose of my life was to breathe and dance, dance and breathe. I wake up every day with the desire to have music follow me everywhere I go.

Summer 2007: Quinceañeras

The scenery enchants me with a spell that makes me always return. I get lost in the feeling I have whenever I'm there. I'd stay there forever if I could. My mother, father, sister, and I had left behind my two little brothers in North Carolina to fly to Houston, Texas. We would be partying and planning. We had flown there to look for quinceañera dresses for my sister and to order anything we would need for Jessica's party in July.

Passing by the three Escapade clubs, we finally arrived at my cousins' house, the Vaca residence, where we were greeted by all the Vacas: Gabby, Crystal, Eddie, Aunt Teresa, and *Tío* Lalo. My mommy and Aunt Teresa pranced around like sixteen-year-olds gossiping about everything you could think of and talking about their recent weight loss. When we got settled, all of the cousins, including Liz, Gus, and Danny, my cousins' cousins, drove to the taco stand next to the corner gas station. We ordered what seemed to be an endless amount of food, but it didn't last long once we noticed how starving we were. We had to drive back and get more.

The next morning, I awoke to the oh-so-sweet smell of Gabby's death farts. That day would be ev-

erlasting. We started by getting lost on our way to The Galleria, the best mall in Houston. Squeaking with joy, I ran inside and gazed upon the eighth wonder of the world: an ice rink on the second floor, a dance studio, a candy shop that makes you feel like you are in Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, and even a waterfall—this was my type of mall. Looking at the time, we decided to leave two hours later and go to Mary's Boutique before they closed so we could look at the dresses.

That weekend went by rapidly. We all had to return to our normal routines as my family returned to boring old North Carolina.

Each day from February to May seemed eternal. My daydreams of summer became a reality that June, the summer of 2007. Everyone who was invited was getting ready for Jessica's quinceañera on July 14, 2007, in Mexico. Jessica had never really wanted a party, but she was still excited about it.

My quinceañera, on the other hand, would be my life. Dreaming of it was all I did every day and everywhere. My party would be my legacy. Our family, family friends, and friends of friends, along with other families from Guanajuato, Mexico, went to one every summer or winter break, or both. That summer, it would be Jessica and Valeria's quinceañeras. Michelle, Valeria's sister, is one of my best friends, and we were both so excited for our sisters' parties.

Even at seven o'clock in the morning, being woken up by mariachi music was the sweetest thing I'd ever heard. It was my sister's quinceañera and she emerged wearing her first dress of the day, a golden one that

brightened the whole town. She gracefully stood on the balcony while the mariachis and everyone else watched her from the patio below. They sang to her "Las Mañanitas," a traditional Mexican song. To her, it was just her big day, but to me, it was her transformation from a girl to a young woman.

The church bells rang like wind passing by chimes on a breezy fall morning. The sun shone outside as everyone made their way to church for Jessica's quinceañera ceremony. She had changed into her second dress at last and looked like a princess, with a red corset-like top with rhinestones all over and a big, puffy, white skirt with designs rising from the bottom. Her wire petticoat enhanced the size of the skirt, which made her seem even more like Cinderella. Jessica entered first, followed by her court of honor, and all eyes were on her. I could have jumped for excitement, but I didn't want to mess up my hair, did I? The church was filled with decorations and enough flowers to have you smelling like rose petals for a week.

After the ceremony and banquet, the waltz, the father-daughter dance, and the surprise dance came next. The spotlight closed in on Jessica and voices poured into my ears. I examined the crowd to see if anyone was watching because tears ran down my cheeks; then and there, I had witnessed a fairytale in the making. Faces blur in my memory of that night.

Summer 2009: The Stars at Night

My room was so much cooler because then, in 2009, in Mexico, it would be summer all year long. There were fifteen foot high palm trees on the patio outside and breezy ninety-eight degree temperatures in the afternoon. At night, you could go outside and look up at the stars, and it looked as if God had poked little holes in the sky, and you could see heaven shining through. Every detail would be so clear, you would think you were on the moon. I would stay up, sitting on the balcony and listening to music, deep thoughts racing through my mind.

Jessica had given me the freedom of the streets that summer and past winter break. I would sit in the passenger seat as she asked me where to navigate. I made a mental map of all our favorite hangouts and directed her to our "chill spot." She took my suggestion. We arrived with chips, drinks, chocolate, and, of course, my Redbull. From our view, we could see the crops going for miles to the horizon. We sat at two cement tables with tiles filled with carvings made by couples and friends. For shade, there were leafy palm trees that extended their leaves from table to table. The hidden trail lined with pomegranate trees completed the view at our perfect spot.

Before it got too dark, my sister's and my favorite thing to do was go out on our sleek, red Italika moped. The place I most loved going to was the neighboring town, which was only five minutes away. It was my father's hometown and home to my closest friends.

At night, when the weather was dark, my friends and I would go out to study the dusk, the dawn, and the sunset. And as our stomachs growled (which was always), we would walk to the food stands around the corner to kill time.

On the weekdays, we'd burn daylight at the playground, swinging on the swings, going up and down on the see-saws, or catching rides on four wheelers, dirt bikes, motorcycles, and mopeds. We would also get milkshakes at our favorite town restaurant. Once I had gotten my hand-sized turtle, Panchito, I would take it out for walks and let my friends hold onto it. Panchito had bonded with Tony but was not too fond of Vanessa, who dropped him three times. As for Fridays, Saturdays, and especially Sundays, we went out, wasting gas just to cruise around.

Everyone I needed and loved was there. They all came from different places: Texas, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, California. We always anticipate summer or winter break when we can go to our vacation homes in Mexico.

Friendships

Luis Cortés and I had learned that our parents knew each other back in the day. We started off only knowing each others' names and that we had some of the same friends. Soon, we shared past stories and thoughts no one could understand. In a matter of hours, we were best friends. The laughs would last a

lifetime, and tears would fade away. That unforgettable summer held laughs, tears, parties, and even a few small punishments. And those were for the nights I won't forget.

"I'm crazy about you. See the crazy things I do for you?" I stood there in utter silence as I listened to his heart beat when we hugged. I'd never heard such beautiful words. My tears wanted to fall and expose me, but I held them back, unnoticed by anyone. My eyes had wandered onto the vast road that faded to a black hole. His voice echoed in my head that night, for my eardrums desired more. "*Hija*, let's go," my mother called. My family and I were going to the airport that morning to return to North Carolina. It was over. That's how one of my last days with Leo went in the summer of 2009.

At the end of the summer of 2007, I had been introduced to Leo. It was 2008, and who knew what would blossom from our friendship. The sun's rays hugged my shoulders as I made my way out the gates of my house. With my little brother Bryan by my side, I had spotted someone very familiar. "Leo?" I turned to him with a confused smile. We got to talking, and he accompanied me to go play air hockey with my brother. Although at that point we didn't know each other too well, we had an open conversation. Soon his cousins had to snatch him away, though, because it was getting too late.

One day, we decided on meeting at the next party to hang out. He would be wearing a yellow polo so I'd know who to look for. The surroundings were dark,

with flashing lights and yellow shirts all around me. After endless searching, Eliset, his cousin and my close friend, found me and directed me to him. "Sorry, I forgot to wear yellow," he whispered looking at the ground. He was wearing green. I didn't care that he'd forgotten; all that mattered was that we had found each other.

Days and nights had flown by, and I never wanted to leave. I was returning to North Carolina on August third. He would be returning to South Carolina on August sixth. I regretted that I couldn't spend three more days with my friends. I grew and flourished those two months; I learned the meaning of caring and true friendship; I made my fondest memories.

During the summer of 2008, I had gotten to know him. We were young and spontaneous, with the whole summer ahead of us. Every night he would come over, and we'd forget how to breathe every step of the way. Having spent a lot of time with him, I had given him my trust. I had grown to notice every little thing he did, and they're the little things I miss.

The summer story was a song I danced along to as a lyrical dancer. It had sudden movements, jumps that were graceful and some that you had to try again. There were arm motions that were so delicate and sweet, and others that were strong yet fragile. It was over. The puzzle was left undone. Summer nights—so calm and beautiful.

To see the Summer Sky
Is Poetry, though never in a Book it lie -
True Poems flee.

EMILY DICKINSON

THE ACCIDENT

Miguel Silva

IT ALL HAPPENED so fast. It was a surprise for everybody, including me.

It all started when I was at school having a wonderful time, me and my friends. I couldn't wait for school to end because the wrestling team and I were going to the Durham Bulls game to make money for our team. I was having fun making Mexican food for the people who were there. When my coach and I left the game, there was nobody left, it was that late.

My coach dropped me off at my house. When I got home, I went straight to my room and jumped in my big, fluffy bed, which felt like heaven; I was so worn out. I was lying down on my bed, and I could hear my mom from the living room on the phone. I could hear, but not that well. I heard my cousin's name and the word Duke. I hopped up to listen to what she was talking about; then she started to cry. That's when I went into the room.

She said, "Let's go to the the hospital, Skin." That was my nickname.

Soon, I was in the car headed to Duke Hospital. It was the longest ride ever. When we finally got there, some of my family was already there, aunts and cousins. By then I knew something had happened to my cousin Tremaine; I just didn't know what happened. Everybody looked sad, including me.

Then, the doctor called the whole family into a tiny room. He told us what had happened.

My cousin had been in a very serious car wreck with his friends. Even though he was supposed to be at home, like his mom told him, he hadn't listened. They got hit by a police car, which hit the side of the car he was on. He was the only one seriously injured.

The doctor told us that he might never walk again. When I heard that, my eyes got watery, and my heart dropped.

I just saw him, like, last week, I thought. We were just chilling together, having fun, playing basketball, like always. Then I started to think we might not be able to do things like that together again. A few days later, the doctor said he would be paralyzed from the neck down. It didn't hit me till later that he would be like this for the rest of his life.

He is still paralyzed. He is getting better now, slowly. He can move his shoulder. I go over to his house a lot to keep him from getting bored because I know I would get bored.

This happening to my first cousin has been a life-changing experience for me. I'm just grateful for what

I have, because my cousin can't do just anything he wants to do.

I also learned to listen to my mother.

THE LOVE FOR GRANDMA

Lynette Spearman

IN YOUR LIFE, you will need somebody to stand by you through thick and thin. For most people, that somebody is a member of their family. Family is the reason people choose to do right, choose to live each day to the fullest. Family is a blessing and there are some people that have never had anyone to call their family.

Being in my family makes you wonder where you fit in, since there are so many different personalities. There are some rude, disrespectful, and out of control people. Then there are some people like my grandmother Mary. She is the sweetest, softest-spoken, and the wisest woman. How she dealt with family members that have so much drama, I will never know. My family doesn't really have what you would call family reunions because we get together every other week.

Grandma Mary would always say, "Stand by your family." Because we are so close, the thought of losing a family member was heartbreaking.

On June 29, 2007, Grandma Mary died. It changed the cohesion in the family. The week before she died, she had fallen out of bed and bumped her head on the night stand. At the hospital on the day of the twenty-ninth, she had made great progress, so we assumed that we would bring her home. But at 11:53 a.m., she died.

July 5, 2007, was the day of the funeral. The family and friends showed up and sat in the front row. My great aunt Cynthia whispered, "All these people can come and see her while she's dead, but when she was alive, they couldn't pay her a call, give her a visit, or send her a card."

The funeral went downhill from there:

1. The nieces and nephews. The nieces wore mini-skirts and halter-tops and the nephews had on jeans and wife-beaters. They all came down the aisle arguing about who did more for Grandma.
2. The casket. When they got to the casket, they tried to get in with her.
3. The flowers. In trying to get into the casket, they also knocked down the flower arrangements beside the casket.
4. The screaming. They brought their kids who misbehaved the entire funeral. They were screaming and running around while the preacher was praying.
5. The gossip. The elders were whispering and gossiping about how tacky and messy the funeral was and how the immediate family looked worse than the guests. As they gabbed, they started passing out peppermints, which made even more noise because every-

body wanted a piece. The unwrapping of the plastic was louder than the choir that was singing.

After that mess they called a funeral, we were to go to the grave site. But before we left the church, the nieces and nephews once again made an exciting scene about who should ride in the family car. It was a pointless argument because Grandma's immediate family was her three children and maybe her grandchildren—definitely not the nieces and nephews. But the argument turned into a fight. Three people left with bruises and four left mad.

Finally, Great Aunt Cynthia gave the family a lecture about how if Grandma were still alive, they wouldn't act like that, and she would be very disappointed if she saw them showing off in public. After everything was under control, we drove to the cemetery.

When we got there, the grave diggers were nowhere to be found. The funeral directors got them on the phone and reported that they were taking a break but would be there in ten minutes. Of course, while we waited for them to arrive, it began to rain. After so much chaos already, we were not even bothered by the rain, and we stayed, soaking, until they arrived.

Even though it was an "interesting" funeral, it all boils down to the fact that we are family, and families fuss and fight. But the question is, why were we acting like this? Maybe because the peacemaker is not here anymore, so the peace isn't either. It was always Grandma Mary's soft, sweet voice that calmed everyone down.

*

"Ma, what are we going to do now that Grandma is dead?" I asked my mom on the way home.

"I don't know yet."

"I mean, where am I going to stay after school since you have to work?"

"I said, I don't know yet. Don't worry about that. I will figure something out."

"Ma, I really miss Grandma. Do you miss her?"

"Yes, I do. Please change the subject because I don't want to talk about Grandma anymore."

"Why? If you miss her, love her, and did all you could for her, why don't you want to talk about her?"

"Because I said so."

"Is this how you grieve? I feel that if you let it out instead of holding it in, you would feel better."

"Lynette, shut up. You are working on my nerves."

August 27, 2007, was my first day back at school, and I was trying not to worry about Grandma's death. It seemed like that day went by so fast, and I never thought about her once. But when I stepped off the bus, I began to realize she was gone. At the time, though I wasn't expressing my feelings to anyone but myself, I began to realize a lot. I realized that Grandma loved me unconditionally. I realized that life may not be as hard as people make it. I realized that what Grandma would tell us about life and how to live right really made sense. I also finally saw that my life and my family's life revolved around her.

My life without Grandma has been trying. I have chosen to do better than the people in the generation before me; I don't take my cousins as role models. Grandma told me before she died, "Child, you are going to do great things in life, and I want you to remember that. You can. And when people doubt you, your greatness proves them wrong."

As these words sit quietly in my mind, my eyes water. Just the thought of her not being here physically turns my world upside down. Emotionally, no one can fill the space she had in my heart. For me, that somebody I had to stand by me was my grandmother. But now she is gone.

WRESTLING

Albert Swann

When I went to Carrington, I wrestled for them. At first, I didn't know anything about wrestling, but when the season was ending, six went twelve to one. Practicing does make perfect.

I once had a match against this guy who was twice my size, and I thought I was going to lose. When we first started wrestling, he almost had me pinned. I was determined to win, so I didn't give up. I reversed him and I pinned him. That was one of the greatest matches of my middle school wrestling years.

NOT LIKE THE CAR

Portia Taylor

My Name

I LOVE PORK chops, but I don't think I like them enough to be named after them. How do you get pork chops out of Portia, anyway? One day Mama asked me if I liked my name, and I told her I didn't know. Or maybe I said yes. Right now, I'm not sure.

I get tired of the substitute teachers mispronouncing my name. Por-tia? No, it's Portia. Honestly, I think I'd get it wrong too, if it weren't my name. Por-tia is how my friends say my name to remember how to spell it.

My whole life people have equated my name with the luxury car, just upon hearing it, but that's not where my name comes from. They make jokes about my name or say that my mother didn't spell it right. I tell them my name is Portia and they say, "Where is Mercedes?" My mother was much more creative and reflective when choosing my name. My mom named

me after a friend, but on Google my name's origin is Latin. It means pig, which isn't much better than an Italian sports car. On other websites, my name means offering, but I'm not sure what I'm supposed to be an offering of.

I was walking in heels at the age of two, any that I could find, none of them mine. I had a kind of rhythm to my walk, so Nana called me Bebop. I also think it was because when I was younger my favorite character on Barney was the ballerina-slipped Baby Bop. I loved when she appeared on the screen.

I was maybe three when my mom started calling me Tweety. She'd said it was because I had a big head. I don't remember being offended; I wish she still called me it. Now all she calls me is Sassy. It is her catch-all term for describing my behavior as being "grown," mean, inconsiderate of others' feelings, and a lot of the other sides many people don't know about me. Sometimes, I take it as a warning from Mom, even an insult. But I somewhat like it now. I even put "Lil' Sassy" as part of my screen name on Facebook.

I believe it's not what people call you, but what you answer to. I answer to all of the incorrect pronunciations of my name, but I'm sure to acknowledge and correct the mistake.

Torn Stockings

That crisp fall day, I wore one of my favorite outfits: a pink dress with pink, white, and blue flowers

all over it. It was late autumn, so a white long-sleeved turtleneck and white stockings covered what the air would have chilled and ashed. I think I wore brown Mary Janes. I hadn't seen Daddy in a while for whatever reason. My mom and I met him at an office building. He was sitting in his truck, waiting for us. I jumped out of the car and threw myself into his arms. After a short chat with the usual, "How are you doing?" "How was your day?" "What have you been up to?" we decided we would race.

I ran my fastest, but not my most careful. I slipped and the dirty, black asphalt tore my clean, white stockings. Daddy scooped me up off the gritty parking lot, examining the wounds. He then put me in the truck and Mama followed.

When we got to Daddy's house, he rushed me to the master bathroom and sat me on the closed toilet, with Mama on his heels. In the mist of my tears, I watched him pull items one by one out of the cabinet underneath the sink. He pulled out a brown bottle, cotton balls, a clear bottle with clear liquid, a yellow and green tube, and band aids. He then got on his knees with the now-opened brown bottle and began to pour the liquid it held on my knees.

Immediately after the liquid fell upon my cuts, I began to wail. My mother held my face and told me not to look. It felt as if my skin was being dissolved by fire. Through the corner of my eye, I could see the bubbling on my open skin and the stains of blood and black asphalt on my once snow-white tights. The clear bottle was then opened and also poured on my knees. I

remember the feeling of skin being torn off the bone to be consumed by the liquid. I hollered out of terror, so Mama held me tighter, but still the substance attacked.

Now that I'm older, I know what the immoral liquids are. But I still hate when Amya comes to me with scratches and cuts, because I know the horror of rubbing alcohol and peroxide.

My Nightlight

I used to see the matching outfits of sisters. I remember the matching bikes of brothers. I couldn't match anything with anyone, except for a few of my cousins, but that wasn't fun.

I was eight, and when my sister was born, I got to name her. I don't really remember where I got it from. My mom got her middle name from our aunt. Her last name, of course, came from my dad. Her name is Amya LaShoni Taylor. She was seven pounds and eight ounces, just like I was.

I spent Amya's first night in the world tucked into the roomy bottom shelf of a TV stand in Mama's hospital room. I stayed in there listening to all the praises of her beauty and uniqueness. I heard them say I would have to stop being selfish. I used to get all the attention. I used to be the oldest, middle, and youngest. But now, I was oldest, and when I thought of the oldest, I thought of the first sibling to die.

Amya was born the Thursday before Thanksgiving, two days after Papa's birthday. We had Thanksgiving

at our house that year. Everyone said she either looked like me, my dad, or my grandmother.

She was very light. She was lighter than a high yellow. Dark eyes and rosy purple lips gave her an elegant but serious face. Amya slept all the time, which made her no fun. And she didn't always smell of baby powder and Johnson & Johnson.

As months passed, I grew again to love the baby with the heart-shaped head. I had first started loving her when I discovered she existed inside my mother, but that love was erased the night she was born. When she was in the womb, though, I loved something that I wasn't sure loved me, and I didn't care as long as she was mine.

In eighth grade, I wrote a poem about my baby sister. I wanted to write about something I knew no one else would write about. Also, it was easy to talk about something so great. Here is a stanza of it:

*I'm bigger than it, but
it brings me comfort.
It shines more brilliant than the rain;
without it I'd be insane.*

No one has a robot, debate partner, boss, tattle-tale, or food-eater like I do. She says she wants to look like me, but I tell her to be prettier. She says she wants to dance like me, but I tell her to dance like a choreographer. She says she wants to be smart like me, but I tell her to be a genius. Because she's around, I think about my actions before I pursue them. I know she wants

to be like me, so I don't want to make a bad decision for her to follow. I try to make choices that I wouldn't mind seeing her make. I want her to be better, because she makes me better.

My mom calls her my boss. I wonder when I'll get paid. I guess her way of payment is letting me have the last cup of oranges. She's sweet most of the time, but other times, she's a fighting machine, filled with insults and terror.

She worships the ground I walk on—that's how my mom puts it. I don't know why Amya mimics me; I'm no goddess or queen. She doctors me when I'm sick, as I do for her. We pass colds to each other every flu season; I guess that's what we get for loving each other so much.

Strangely, I cling to Amya almost as much as she clings to me. On nights I have uncomfotting thoughts, I hold her close to me and drift off to sleep. Amya asks playmates if I can come along, even though I insist that I don't want to go. Amya was born into a house of love, but understands loss. I still pity her for not having anyone to wish happy birthday to two days before her own.

The Last Time . . .

"When you get home, pack you and Amya some dress clothes—something nice, to wear to Papa's wake and funeral."

I'd had a decent day at school, but still looked forward to its end. It was Friday, and it meant that I

would finally get to see my sister and mother. Amya had gone to our aunt's house for the week, since Mama had stayed at the hospital with Papa. I missed them both and thought of them almost constantly.

It was a sunny winter day. I stood with Jzabri in the carpool area, anticipating the big, green Expedition that Daddy would be driving. When it came, I promised Jzabri I'd text her until my signal went out and walked over to the truck.

Daddy started the conversation this day, with the usual parental question, "How was school?" There was no traffic, and Daddy seemed different, but I thought nothing of it. Dad and I are working on our relationship, which may seem strange since I've known him all my life. A lot of our conversations are cut short by phone calls or we just lose interest in the subject and are quiet until we find something else to talk about, but this particular one had been particularly fluent until a few moments of silence settled in. I took the silence as an opportunity to take in and admire the day.

"When you get home, pack you and Amya some dress clothes—something nice, to wear Papa's wake and funeral."

Puzzled, I said, "What?"

He repeated it, slower this time. Each word sank in fast, making the day suddenly seem so dark, empty, and iced. My thoughts began to freeze. The trees that had once given the day a sense of peace, began to shorten. The green leaves and grass began to fuse together. They all became mush at the ambush of my tears.

My heart poured out of my eyes, and my brain clouded with grief. I cried, not only because I had lost my grandfather, but also because of how insensitively the news had been broken to me. I heaved out memories that had been long forgotten and unsentimentally appreciated. I moaned out of worry for the well-being of our family.

The last time I had seen Papa, he was on a hospital bed. He was on a hospital bed with several tubes connected to his body, cloudy-eyed, clay-colored, and sedated. I didn't tell him I loved him when I had a chance.

When I think of the day my grandfather died, I relive the realization that I avoided my grandfather more than I embraced his presence. Now, I tell my family I love them at all occasions, not just when it's time to go. I tell them how much they mean to me and their significance in my life. My grandfather's passing not only changed how I treat the people I love, but also how I view life and death. I now hug longer, appreciate more, and laugh harder with the ones I love, because now I understand how fast someone you love can be snatched out of your arms. I try to think of death as being better than life, since my grandfather is now experiencing it. He was in indescribable pain for several years, so it helps me to know that he doesn't hurt anymore.

"When you get home, pack you and Amya some dress clothes—something nice, to wear to Papa's wake and funeral." Papa's wake was a week later, on the day of my arts placement audition for DSA; his funeral was the following day.

Dance for Me

Instead of watching Amya's swimming lessons, I would go back to the bench and fantasize about performing. I would go back to the bench and daydream about dancing while I listened to instrumental songs, all of the ones I had, which was no more than six.

I haven't been dancing long. Not modern dance, anyway. In sixth grade, when I signed up for dance, I expected to learn what I saw on *106 & Park*, the stuff you see in the music videos. I didn't care much for pointed toes, *tendus*, *dégagés*, leaps, and all the other things my friends weren't doing.

I never expected to love it the way I do. There's no place like a dance studio. The floor is a blank sheet waiting to be written on. The space is a tree waiting to be cut and smoothed. I carve my story through the tree, and anticipate its reading. The dance studio is infinite with possibilities to an unimaginable power. It's meant to be a place of creativity, but judgment doesn't stay at the door.

Placement Audition

The Friday after Papa's death was my placement audition. At my school, by your eighth grade year you must pick a concentration. I attend an arts school, so theoretically the students there are interested or talented in some type of art, whether it's dance, drawing, writing, photography, or anything else. Depending on

your art, you submit a representation of your skill—a placement audition—and the teachers of that department put you in a level equivalent to your talent. Of course, dance is my pathway, so I had to perform a solo that was at least a minute long, demonstrating level, body-half, good technique. I did my best to show my abilities and hide my weaknesses. I love dance in general, but improvisation and choreography are my passion. I found improvisation to be like a diary entry and choreography a memoir. Dancers use improvisation as a tool for creating choreography, so I found it easy to make up my placement audition solo.

I rushed out of my fourth period with my pass in hand to a neighboring building called the Carr Building, which held the main dance studio. I burst in the dressing room, quickly changing into my all-black attire. My hair is short, so I didn't bother pulling it back and didn't have to worry about messing up the hairstyle meant for the wake.

I stood in the doorway watching my friend Keyona perform her solo. I nervously bounced, trying to warm my body. My friend Adam passed on his way to the gym and hugged me, making me feel a little better. I stretched to ease my body's tension and stiffness, then finally Ms. Fischer called me into the studio. I smiled at her and Ms. Adams, then handed her my CD to put in the sound system.

I ran to the middle of the dance floor, making the mirror my facing. Then I got into my starting position, and the music began. The uneven rhythms traveled from the sound system to my ears and escaped

through my body. I tried to be as professional as possible, which I was successful at the first time, but the second time, when I made a mistake in my choreography, I let the dance teachers know by the expression on my face. But I quickly shook it off and continued as if I had done it perfectly. I used every chance I got to catch a glimpse of my judges' faces. I hadn't found anything unsatisfying.

When finished, I sat at a desk with my teachers, and we discussed my conduct in class and how well I used the required elements of dance. I couldn't get mad with what they said; I had no need. I planned to take their criticism as an opportunity for improvement. After it was over, I skipped happily to lunch.

When Daddy picked me up that afternoon, I couldn't get it out faster that I was being put in Advanced Dance Fundamentals the following year.

A Temporary Mask

I wash my face every day. I use certain cleansers because I have acne. I try not to let it bother me, but it's hard to do when others constantly mention it. It seems that they worry about it more than I do. The more they bring it up, though, the more I begin to worry about it.

They try to pop the pimples, make the dark spots disappear, give me treatment systems, or clean my face for me as if I don't do a good job myself. It's always something. I wonder why it bothers them if I'm not

worried about it. I'm convinced that it will go away as I get older, like my mom and aunt told me.

I always feel conscious of what people see when they look at me. I wonder what they see. Do they concentrate on the dark spots, white heads, and crater-like scars? Or do they concentrate on who I am as a person?

In life, we try to change things that we see as unfit when we could be embracing them as a sign of something better to come. I'm an ugly duckling. My acne is like the young swan's rusted feathers: temporary. One day the acne will go away as did the duckling's feathers, revealing something much more beautiful than the ugliness that once covered it.

MUSIC TO MY EARS

Tee

I REMEMBER MY mother used to tell me I had no rhythm. I would always laugh, even though deep down, I knew it was true.

Ever since I was a child, I have always enjoyed listening to music. Every time I hear a song, I feel the need to dance and sing. It doesn't matter what type of music it is: R&B, Hip-hop, Latino, or even Gospel. You name it, I can and will dance to it.

Sometimes, I just sit back and listen to my grandparents tell me stories about how, when I was younger, every time they used to play music, I would get up and dance and sing. At family functions, I was always the person to get the party started; I was the smallest person with the most energy.

I have never been a shy person. And if it's something I love to do, I am going to do it. I had no rhythm and I was stiff, but I knew one day, I would become a famous dancer—or even a choreographer. Then, my

mother would see that I finally had rhythm and was not stiff anymore.

When I got to Durham School of the Arts in sixth grade, I wanted to take a dance class, but the class was too full. When I got to the seventh grade, I tried again, taking Intro to Dance. It really helped, working on all those different dances. Stretching my muscles worked the stiffness right out of me. We had two concerts that year, and I worked very hard on both.

When my teacher said to me, "Tee, you are a great dancer and you have a lot of talent," I was surprised. No one had ever told me that before. Even though half of the time I didn't like the type of dancing we had to do, I dealt with it because I wanted dance to be my career path and I knew I would have to work very hard to get there.

So when my mother saw me dance and she said, "My baby got rhythm now!" I just laughed. I knew that one day I would prove her wrong, and that day had come.

MEMORIES OF EDWARD

Shannon Terwilliger

Introduction

“START PACKING FOR New York.”

“Why?”

“You don’t know?”

“Know what?”

Usually, I go up to New York to see family and have some time away from my parents and brothers. The summer of 2009, I devoted most of my free time there to the veterans’ home, visiting my great grandfather. Soon, everything changed.

Hearing the News

The late winter, spring, and summer of 2009, both of my great grandfathers were starting to show their true ages. Great Grandpa Mike, who is ninety-

five years old, had been in and out of the hospital for a little more than a year. Great Grandpa Ed was ninety-three years old and had been in and out of the hospital as well. In the spring of 2009, he was put in a nursing home for veterans in New York.

On Thursday, September 17, 2009, I had just gotten back from school and was walking up the enormous hill to our house. My little brother J.P. was out in the street, talking to his friend Billy, who had come over because he had some questions about weather maps for their science homework. J.P. looked at me and said, "Start packing for New York." By then, I was up the hill, and I could see his face. The look that he gave me was unfamiliar.

I asked, "Why?"

J.P. and Billy looked at each other. After a long moment, J.P. said, "You don't know?" He had a sad look on his face, like he was confused and depressed. His brown hair was blowing in the wind and his eyebrows were squinted together right in between his eyes. A twinkle in his eye glimmered in the light; I thought it was a teardrop.

"Know what?" But as soon as the words came out of my mouth, I knew.

I dropped my school bag and purse and ran down the driveway to where my mom and her friend were talking. I was sobbing, crying so hard that all you could hear through the tears was, "Who?"

My mom wrapped me in her arms and said, "Great Grandpa Ed." I broke through her arms and sprinted up the stairs into the house.

I was crying hysterically. My face was red and my eyes were bloodshot. I tripped on the small and final step leading up to the front door. My dad held me, steadyng me from my fall. I had so many questions, and I started to mumble rapidly. All you could make out through the tears was, "When?"

My dad held me tight and whispered, "Today at twelve p.m."

I ran up to my room and slammed the door. I turned on the radio to G105.1 and turned it up as loud as I could, so no one could hear me crying my heart out. I cried for twenty minutes. While crying, I thought about how it was going to be different when I went up to New York. There would be no presence of the 5'6" man with the white hair telling war stories. My heart felt crushed. I was up in New York the previous weekend for my Aunt Stephanie's baby shower. I had wanted to see him, but I was too tired and lazy to actually go. I felt horrible.

As soon as Billy and his dad left, I made my way down the stairs and into the kitchen to get the phone. Back in my room, I turned off the radio and called my best friend Carley.

She answered the phone like she usually does when my caller I.D. pops up on her phone. It's like a normal "Hello," but all enthusiastic. I guess she heard me crying because she immediately said, "What's wrong?" I told her that I would not be at school the next day, which was a Friday. "Why?" she asked. I took the phone away from my ear so that I could catch my breath and clear my throat.

"My great grandfather just passed away, and he meant everything to me, and he was my idol." I started to cry a little harder. "Carley, I really have to go, so that I can start packing for New York. I'll be okay. I'll call you again later."

I added, "Have fun playing volleyball in P.E. with Elizabeth tomorrow." We both laughed and said our goodbyes.

I was still laughing a little bit when I hung up the phone, knowing that for Carley, P.E. was going to be an interesting experience. Elizabeth is one of my close friends, but when it comes to sports, she can be a little hyper. Last time I played volleyball with her, she ran around yelling crazy words while trying to slam the ball. Just the thought of her brightened my day, and now it was starting to make me feel a lot better than I had before I called Carley.

I went downstairs to put the phone back on its charger, then went to the laundry room to pull clean clothes from the dryer to throw into a basket. I took up the load of clothes in my arms and walked upstairs. I pulled my blue and white striped bag out of the closet and started packing for New York, the two wakes, and the funeral. While packing, I started to think of all the memories of my great grandfather.

Memories from Childhood: The Stories

My great grandfather Edward was one of those men who loved to be around family, telling stories. I re-

member sitting around the old glass table in my grandmother Estelle's backyard and having Great Grandpa Ed tell us stories about being in the Ghost Army in World War II. He told me that he was the one in the army who kept track of the weapons and guns. He said he would walk around with all the men and give them the weapons that they needed. Anything weapon-related that needed to be carried, he carried.

Once, when I was little, he told me a story about walking around in a nasty body of water in a Middle Eastern country, talking to the men around him. This story was one of the many that he told about the Ghost Army. He would talk about what happened in the other countries and the interactions he'd had with other men in the war. They played sports, built, and talked about America and what they did back home.

When I was younger, he told me about how there were only men in the war. I asked, "Why weren't there any women in the war?" I was confused.

He looked at me and said, "Back then, women weren't acting like they do now. Women weren't standing up for themselves. Women worked at home, cleaning, cooking, and watching the children. There were some women who worked in factories, but not many."

I looked back at Great Grandpa Ed and told him, "Well, I guess I should be happy that I'm not living as a woman back when you grew up because I would not like to be cleaning and cooking all of the time. I like being active."

Great Grandpa Ed let out a big laugh and said, "Well, women are still working at what they believe in, and they have come a long way. They are still fighting for their rights. So maybe in seventy years, you will be talking to your great granddaughter and she will be complaining that it would have been hard to live back when you were growing up. You might think about it and laugh at what she says, just like I am laughing at you."

We both just sat back and laughed, enjoying the moment.

I remember my grandma Estelle and my mother tried to set up a recorder while Great Grandpa Ed was talking about the Ghost Army. He would just freeze up. It was like he was going to expose top-secret information from the government and he would be sent to jail. Now those memories are gone forever and no one will be able to hear them, especially since most of the Ghost Army was gone, like my great grandfather.

I am going to miss him coming down and telling stories at the kitchen table. I am going to miss going up to New York to hear his stories while we sit at my grandma Estelle's old glass table in the backyard. I am going to miss most of all sitting in his kitchen and his living room listening to those stories and life lessons.

Great Grandpa Ed's House

When I walked into Great Grandpa Ed's house, it smelled like old people. It was a relaxing smell that

wrapped itself around my brain like an embrace. In every room, there were pictures that he had taken over the years of nature and family. Even when he was in the veterans' nursing home, he continued to take pictures.

When I walked into the living room, I saw an old couch from what looked like the 1950s. It was worn out, just the way he liked it. Great Grandpa Ed had a wooden duck that sat in the bay window, facing the world. Everytime I saw that duck, it seemed to be looking out the window.

When I walked into the dining room, there was a bookshelf covered in pictures of family and close friends. There was also a large, eight-person table that was solid mahogany, with glass to protect the top. Under the glass were random pictures of everyone in the family, ranging from being taken thirty years ago to five years ago, spread in no apparent order on a white tablecloth background.

Every time that I went to visit, I would look at the familiar pictures lying on the table. The pictures to my mind are now a blur, but I know that they were there and that they were a big part of the feeling of the house.

Great Grandpa Ed's kitchen was a sight that I remember the most out of the entire house. There were pictures of all the children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren on the refrigerator.

There was a picture of my little brother Dillon, sitting in his baby bouncer with a baseball cap on, his face mashed together so that it looked like he had a ton of wrinkles. Above that, there was a picture of Great

Grandpa Ed. They looked like the same person: Dillon had Great Grandpa Ed's ears and Great Grandpa Ed always wore a baseball cap. Those are the best pictures in the whole house.

When I looked around the kitchen, there were no cabinets. He had taken off the doors about fifteen years ago so that he could customize them himself. Since Great Grandpa Ed was such a perfectionist, the cabinet doors never really got done. To this day, there are probably no doors covering those giant holes in the wood. I could always see where he kept things and know where everything was.

I would sit at the three-person table that stood next to a large wall in the kitchen and look at "the famous paper towel." Whoever came into Great Grandpa Ed's kitchen would be shown that old paper towel, just lying on the table. Even now I think of it as a part of his personality that I love and miss.

My aunt Stephanie had drawn on that paper towel in the 1980s while she was sitting at that table in the kitchen. Great Grandpa Ed was so proud of it that he just kept it on the table. I remember he kept asking Aunt Stephanie to make another one so that he could keep it in the nursing home with him, but she never got a chance to make one for him before he passed away.

Winter of Late 2008 and 2009

For my family and me, these are the scariest memories that we have of Great Grandpa Ed.

It was a little after Christmas 2008 when my dad started watching Great Grandpa Ed overnight at his house. All the family members had been taking turns caring for Great Grandpa Ed during the day and at night. My dad thought that since he worked nights and would be awake, he would go over and watch Great Grandpa Ed for a while, so they could get some rest.

I would overhear him talking on the phone in the morning when he came back from the house. He would be talking to his mother, Grandma Cathy. I would hear him saying that Great Grandpa Ed wasn't doing well. He couldn't get up on his own and was forgetting who he was.

Everyone in the family was scared that would be Great Granpa Ed's last week alive. He kept getting worse by the day, so the family thought that he would live only a couple more days. Finally, my parents convinced my grandmother Estelle to put him in the hospital.

Great Grandpa Ed had five children, three of whom lived a mile away from him. The other two heard the news from my dad. The came up to New York from Virginia Beach and Durham. Everyone was afraid we were going to lose Great Grandpa Ed in a couple of days.

From what I overhead from the conversations in my grandma Estelle's house and from the snippets I heard during my dad's phone conversations, it seemed like Great Grandpa Ed was getting a little better now that he had medicine and proper care in the hospital.

We were leaving. My dad decided we should go see Great Grandpa Ed one last time, just in case it would be the last time ever. We drove twenty minutes to the hospital in Peekskill, New York, where we rode in the elevator up to the third floor. Down a long hallway, filled with the quick beeps of machines, we arrived at the door of his room.

I saw him, and I was scared. He was ghost white and had trouble breathing. This wasn't the man I grew up with. He wasn't the man that, at eighty-five years old, was hanging from a tree twenty feet above the ground, cutting off branches.

At first, I thought that we had the wrong room, so I walked out of the room to look at the little board that says the patient's name. It said Edward Fitzgerald. I walked back in and found a seat next to him.

He looked at me with a confused look on his face. It was an empty expression that wondered, "Why are you sitting next to me?" Great Grandpa Ed didn't know who I was. He didn't know that I was his great granddaughter Shannon, who loved him and cared for him, who worried about him and had been concerned for the last couple of weeks.

His expression was challenging. I didn't know what he was thinking. I guessed that he was thinking, "She looks familiar," but it had to sink in that I was his great granddaughter.

I had had enough of all the confusion and the heartbreak. I wanted to leave the hospital and head home. I loved him, but I didn't want to see him the way he was.

I was truly scared that he wouldn't live to his ninety-third birthday.

Spring of 2009

Once Great Grandpa Ed got better in the hospital, my grandma Estelle signed him in to the veterans' nursing home in New York. I didn't get to see Great Grandpa Ed at all in the spring, but I got to check in on him by emailing the nursing home.

After a couple of months of keeping in touch, I found out that he was starting to enjoy the nursing home. I would try to send him letters, but they never went through. My mom would email my grandma pictures, so that she could print them out and give them to Great Grandpa Ed. Grandma Estelle told me that he hangs the pictures on the wall in his room.

Great Grandpa Ed told me once that he was getting lonely now that summer was arriving and asked me when I was coming to see him. I told him that I was going up to New York for most of the summer and that I'd try and see him every chance I got.

Summer of 2009

When I came to visit him in the summer, I started to notice little changes about him, like how I was taller than him, his stuttering was getting worse, and when he got new glasses, they were so big, they made his

face look small. His personality was the one that I remembered, but the same personality didn't cover how old he looked now. At least he looked better than he had in the winter.

After three and a half weeks in New York, I had to tell Great Grandpa Ed goodbye and that I would be back in a few weeks with Madison and Quincy, cousins of mine.

When I got back to New York and went to see him, he was so much worse than before. I found him at his usual seat, but this time he was in a wheelchair. I walked up to him, and he gave me a weird look. I smiled at him. "Hello, Great Grandpa Ed. I'm Shannon."

"Oh, yes. You came in the beginning of the summer, didn't you?"

We talked for a little bit, but soon he got tired, and we started back to his room. On the way back, we passed by a piano, and he asked me to play. I told him that I didn't know many songs, but he insisted that I play him something. So I sat down at the piano and played "The Entertainer." As I played, he just sat there and smiled that crooked smile I loved so much.

Once I was done, we said goodbye and exchanged hugs. I didn't know that this would be the last time his whiskered face would rub against my face when he kissed my cheek to say goodbye.

Two Wakes

I knew that Great Grandpa Ed knew a lot of people, but I never knew how many until September 18, 2009, at his wake. There were almost two hundred people that came from all over the state to say their goodbyes to Great Grandpa Ed.

There would be two wakes, one in the morning and one later in the day. During the first wake, I had friends all around me, and it didn't sink in that he was dead. I didn't cry until the second wake, when it finally hit me. Everyone was crying at the second wake.

It was a tradition when a fellow firefighter died to ring a bell so the man or woman's soul would make a safe journey to heaven. They rang a bell for Great Grandpa Ed.

After the official ceremony ended, many of his friends came to us and wished us well.

The only thing going through my mind when we made that car ride back to where we were staying were memories of my great grandpa Ed.

The Funeral

The next day, we had the funeral for Great Grandpa Ed. Because he was a fighter in World War II, Great Grandpa Ed had a flag spread over his casket, and my uncle John was given the flag, since he was Great Grandpa Ed's only son. After the casket was lowered, we put a flower on the gravestone and headed for our

cars, where we cried and said our goodbyes to each other. I knew now that my great grandpa Ed was gone forever.

WHAT IS A FRIEND?

Cinthia Vargas

1

WHAT IS A friend? I think a friend is a person that is always with you in the good and the bad times. That is what you call a true friend. My true friends are Diana, Cecilia, and Sonia.

Well, starting with Diana, I have known Diana since we were four years old. We went to Glenn together for kindergarten and first grade. I met Diana because I used to cry when I was left at school, and she would come up to me and tell me not to cry and that she was going to take care of me. The funny thing is that Diana was smaller than me, but she was still going to take care of me.

Soon, my mom transferred me to another school, Club Boulevard, while Diana stayed at Glenn. That did not matter because we would still be friends. During middle school, we went to separate schools: she went to DSA and I went to Brogden.

Cecilia and I have been friends since fifth grade. I met Cecilia when Diana took me to her house. Diana had asked if I wanted to go to one of her friends' houses, and I did, so we went. When I first saw Cecilia, I thought she was white, but then Diana told me she was Mexican. Cecilia is a really funny, cool, fun person. We are both crazy, we love to dance, and we could care less what people say about us.

Sonia is another one of my best friends. I love her so much. I can tell her whatever I want and know she will keep it a secret. When I need her, she is always there for me and helps me out when I am stuck. Sonia is crazy, cool, and funny. She is a really good person. We have known each other since we were eight years old. Both of us went to Brogden, and we both went to Riverside. That is, until my mom transferred me to DSA.

2

I will always remember my mom telling me I was going to DSA. I went to Riverside for one glorious week: all of my friends were there and I was incandescently happy. Then, my mom dropped the bomb.

"What!" I screamed, cursing my mom on the inside for applying me to that horrendous school. She repeated that I was going to a new school.

I cried so hard that night, I had rivers of tears streaming down my face. I did *not* want to go to DSA and leave my friends behind. I was used to Riverside and all of my classes. It was a nightmare I wanted to

wake up from but couldn't. It was the worst thing that could happen to me.

September 1, 2009, was my first day at DSA, and I was scared, confused, and angry. I got lost on the way to one of my classes because DSA's campus is so big. But a ray of light in endless darkness, a childhood friend, Diana, saved me and told me where my next class was. She even walked me to the class. I thank her for that.

The second day of school came. I was not scared anymore, but I was angry. I knew where my classes were, but I still did *not* want to be at this despicable school.

I want to go back to Riverside, back to my friends, back to the place I was comforted by. That is where I want to go.

A CHILD OF ARTISTS

Fenn Walsh-Seaman

EVEN AS A young man, the early memories of my life seem to escape me. I remember only the events that make me who I am today.

One of my earliest memories is from when I was five. At the time, my family owned a house that was too large for a small family of three. I would wake up at about ten, tiptoe to the refrigerator, and take the Chunky Monkey out of the freezer. Then, I would find the perfect spot on the couch and watch *Ren and Stimpy* far into the night. Life was simple at that time.

After living in Baltimore for a few years, I traveled a measly three thousand miles to the glimmering mud puddle that is Los Angeles. My apartment was next to an In-N-Out Burger, a fifties-styled burger joint with some of the most delicious meals. California always seemed to change a person, like an uncomfortable rash that never seems to go away.

During a party in my apartment, my parents gave me a very juicy detail that stunned me immediately: I was to have a sister. At seven years old and the only child, I had been living the high life. My sister was like a nuclear bomb going off in my life. She was my exact opposite: the blonde haired screamer that lay comfortably in a crib in my living room. I never cried as a baby, and growing up I was a large, chubby child. If I wanted something, I hatched a simple plan: lie down on the ground as dead weight and scream at the top of my lungs until I got what I wanted. Other than that, I was a relatively quiet child.

After my sister's arrival, the family came to the conclusion that we needed a bigger house, made for four. So at eight years old, I moved to a house in Rhode Island with big pillars and a brick wall. If houses could talk, that place would be laughing. Every time we fixed one thing there would be a new problem that manifested itself. The house had a bad foundation, termites, carpenter ants, and water damage. Home sweet home.

Rhode Island is where my first adventure began, and his name was Mark. He was my exact opposite, too: the grungy, angelic, auto mechanic, surfer boy who craved attention and ate danger for breakfast. Mark was the man who sold the world. Every day was a new adventure with him. One day, he talked me into riding a lawn mower down a hill and taking it over a plastic jump. Needless to say, the whole experience ended in tears and laughter.

Right before moving to North Carolina, I spent an entire day in Rhode Island with Mark. We started out

the day with a bike ride through the town. That day, all the colors were brighter, nothing seemed bad, only our laughter reminded us I was leaving. In the middle of the day, we prepared his two old eighties mopeds to be ridden through my hometown, Pawtuxet Village. I rode the beautiful turquoise scooter with the brown Italian seat and the broken clutch. He sat on a bland-looking, American-made moped, a dingy hot rod red, and looked as if he was about to deliver pizzas. We were quite a pair, riding down the street, and my moped stalled out right in front of the bike police.

Later that night, his father took us out in an early sixties Chevy truck that had been gathering rust in the driveway for a while. He took Mark and I out on one helluva drive. We went behind the local Shaw's grocery store and did doughnuts on the ice. The ice turned into a large steam cloud, and the smell of burnt rubber filled our hearts. We then went to some Christmas parties in the village. Later, when he tried to park, Mark's dad broke one of the over-sized mirrors on his truck against a terribly placed pole. Afterward, Mark's father went into a bar, while Mark and I roamed around the town and witnessed a rarity in Rhode Island: a meteor shower.

That night, we went home tired and sad because I was going to leave the next day. I grinned in my sleep and woke up in the morning feeling a weird mix between elated and depressed.

The only other place in this world that means as much to me as Rhode Island is New Hampshire. That state has its own special place in my heart. My grand-

mother had an old farmhouse in a little town called Wolfeboro. The farmhouse was surrounded by freshly cut grass, thick woods, and my grandmother's beautiful garden, which I took pleasure in weeding. Every single large holiday, most of the family would gather up in the house. We would swap stories, and love would cover the walls.

My grandmother always seemed to have this infinite knowledge and had a concise answer to all of my questions. As a child, she could speak high German and eventually became a nurse and then an epidemiologist. My grandfather was a man who loved his grandchildren. He taught me how to speak some Gaelic and was fluent in many languages. He was a surgeon, and he worked up until three weeks before he died in 2003.

During the summer in New Hampshire, I was on a swim team. Twelve years old, what a naive age. I didn't understand that soon I would be enlightened by my new activities in the Wolfeboro Swim Team (WST). In my opinion, whoever thought of having an outdoor swim team at nine o'clock in the morning in the early New Hampshire summer must have sustained some kind of brain injury. The chilled morning water gave me instant goosebumps and froze my joints until I felt like a living buoy. Once I got out of the water, sand made my oversized feet extremely uncomfortable, and my towel was always too small for me. I was still dripping in the car during the trip home.

The thing that made my experience worthwhile was swimming in the rain. The rain made the water warmer and created a thick fog that shrouded the

mainland. The pollution gave Lake Winnipesaukee an orange tint, so when it rained it felt like my entire being was engulfed in marmalade, and the only thing that reminded me that I was human was breaching the surface and gasping for air. It was a beautiful feeling that I would trade anything for now.

I was rather good at doing laps, but getting me to dive, well that's another story. After most dives, I was left with a stinging violet stain on my torso. Eventually, I mastered the belly flop and my body wasn't left with the keen sting of the uneventful relationship between flesh and liquid. My body had a language of its own. When I practiced each of my strokes, my muscles would rebel and ache. You inadvertently learn how to breathe; when it comes down to competitive swimming, breath is a component which affects all techniques, a simple, Zen idea.

I found that my true opponent was not psychology, but muscle spasms and exhaustion. When I swam against my sly opponent, all I had to do was exert all my energy under a minute, and then reap the benefits. I usually had the upper hand because I practiced my technique in a lake. If the philosophy at the time was to push myself to the brink, the problem was that many other swimmers used the same philosophy. One day, I will meet someone who has learned the true story of the predicament between people and water.

June 2006 was the big swim meet between the Wolfeboro Swim Team and White Mountain Rapids. My comrades and I were lined up side by side wearing yellow T-shirts with WST placed in the middle. It

looked like we had done laps in a truck stop bathroom toilet beforehand. I was called to the podium in front of the pool, and when an electrical beep went off, the race was on. Front stroke, my specialty. I zoomed past my competitors, and then, at the end of the lap, I took part in an underwater ballet, returning in first place.

MY FIRST BEST FRIEND

Davia Young

The Faeries

AT FIRST, I just started seeing them out of the corner of my eye. Occasionally, I saw a wink of silver or gold here and there. I would see dramatic shards of color sticking out, not belonging to our world.

But the first time she showed herself, it was still a surprise. She was sitting there on top of the AC box waiting for me. Her dress was sleek pansy velvet, a butterfly design. I was sweaty from recess and wiped my face off on my Jump Rope Club T-shirt. The sun was glaring in my eyes, and I blinked and scrunched my eyes closed, not sure of what I was seeing.

I opened my eyes, nudged Leila, and pointed. Leila let out a small gasp and slowly began to grin as we both stepped closer. This fairy was here for us and only us. I knew by the way her head tilted as she smiled and the way her wings seemed to reflect gold and lilac in

the sun. This tiny spark of life wanted to be our friend, and we wanted to be hers. We would gladly become a part of her world.

But we were going into school and school was not a place for faeries. School was a place that smelled like pencil lead, snotty children, and cold linoleum. You had to sit quietly and try to figure out five times six while your imagination was kept locked up.

So we told her we would be back as soon as possible and knew she would be waiting in the exact same spot when we returned.

The Flower Perfume

Eyes on the prize, we crept silently towards the old, wise camellia tree. The gold and pink petals were strewn all over the damp earth. We gathered and gathered until the bucket was so heavy, we needed four grubby hands to pick it up. As we snuck past our parental watch, we giggled to each other because they didn't know the secret that lay at the bottom of our bucket. We luggered it back to the covert hiding area under my tree house. There were spider webs dangling from the ceiling with month-old dried up flies hanging in them. We didn't care that our billowy summer dresses were getting dusty as we dropped to the ground.

We spread the petals over a flat rock. The rock in my hand fell, crushing the petals again and again until our bottle was full of sweet-smelling brown juice. The aroma swirled around and pulled us in. We dabbed it

here and there, the soft place behind the ear, the wrist and neck, and it stained dark brown. The spider webs transformed into crystal chandeliers, the dusty ground into diamond sparkles, our summer dresses into ball gowns as we twirled and twisted around the room. We felt like princesses, elegant and hypnotic, but smelled like ogres.

The Onion Soup

The air was hot and sticky, like a warm, damp blanket wrapped tightly around you. The sweetly sick scent of soggy onions wafted under my nose and filled the tree house. I stirred and stirred and stared at the brownish green goop in my pot.

“Yum, about ready to eat!” I shouted.

“Oh good sister, I’ve been hungry all day,” Leila replied. She slammed open the door with her feet and marched in with a pile of thin twigs from the yard. She placed them under the pot and pretended to stoke the fire.

The soup is looking a little thin; more onion grass is what it needs, I think to myself.

“I’ll be right back,” I tell Leila. “Watch the fire.”

I ran outside into the bright sunlight of the hot summer day and searched the ground for the dark green grass. It’s all over, infecting our yard, yet Leila and I didn’t think of it as a weed, but a blessing. I ran over to a slightly shady spot next to the garden. I gently rotated the ends closest to the ground in the circle until

they were loosened. I pulled at the roots until a pod of small onions shot up from the ground and sprayed dirt over my hair, clothes, and face. *Perfect.* I ran back up to the tree house, crushed them on my rock, and sprinkled them into the soup.

“Dinner’s ready!”

The Goodbye

“What time is it?”

“We still have ten minutes.”

“Last game of cards?”

“Sure!”

“Okay, whoever wins this one is winner forever!”

“I wi-in,” said Leila with a smile and a poke.

It was quiet time at camp Riverlea. Leila and I were sitting at the far edge of the group, so when her parents came they couldn’t see us. In honor of our friendship, we were playing one last round of a card game we made up.

We were laughing and rolling in the damp grass with our garish one piece bathing suits and neon shorts over the bottom. We wore our twenty friendship bracelets on each wrist, with brilliant colors and complicated designs that I don’t remember anymore. The cat’s cradle string rested silently on my chest as a necklace. We were both just trying not to think of the time and what was left of it.

By the time the counselor found us, Leila’s moving was forgotten in our heads. Our stomachs ached from

laughing; we had leaves in our hair and had scratched our mosquito bites red.

We snapped out of it in seconds. We knew that time had run out. Sobered up, I helped Leila gather her stuff. Each object was specifically Leila: her pack of cards we played with everyday, her towel with the Hawaiian flowers we sunbathed on, her Life Is Good water bottle, and her ratty blue plastic lunch box.

We somberly walked towards Leila's awaiting parents. Her plane was leaving that night. And that was too soon.

"Well, bye."

"Yah, bye."

I gave Leila a pat on the back. We stood there for a few more seconds until we both busted out laughing. Leila dropped her bag into the dirt and we gave each other a giant hug. We stood there for five minutes before her parents tapped her. We let go of each other and Leila picked up her dusty bag.

Her parents gave me a quick squeeze and rushed Leila to the car as if she stayed a second longer, it would make her refuse to leave. I fiddled with my cat's cradle string and thought of all the tricks we had learned together with it. I realized I wasn't going to see Leila at school anymore, drawing crazy pictures of our teacher. I wasn't going to have her come home after school to my house and look for fairies in my back-yard. I wasn't going to be able to call her up and see if she wanted to cook onion soup with me, or make flower perfume. And we weren't going to be able to share all our jokes.

The car crunched over the gravel as it drove out to the road. We waved and waved until we couldn't see each other and even after.

Today and Tomorrow

What Leila and I had, I now realize, was special and out of the ordinary. At the time, I thought it was normal to have such close friend, a friend who seems to complete you. We met in kindergarten, when we were five, and she left in third grade, when we were eight. We only knew each other for three years, but it was a strong bond, and I've yet to experience it again. We would build off of the other's ideas, drawing and drawing at the kitchen table for hours. The key element that made our friendship strong was imagination.

We would create a whole new world together, just by drawing, or playing with nature, or by closing our eyes. We helped each other, too, but in different ways. Leila was shy, whereas I was not, but Leila was a more talented artist. I could introduce us, or instigate a playtime with our other friends. Leila could show me how to draw people's hands holding something or how to make a house look three-dimensional.

Leila was the person I formed my first strong friendship bond with. We never lost that bond, and hopefully never will. Now, our interests have begun to differ, but when we see each other, we click right back into place, like no time has passed.

When we're not together, we send emails, text, and talk on the phone for hours. We send each other updates on grades, or the best new short anime. We always see each other once or twice a year, whether I go up to Leila's house in Boston, or she comes to visit me on my birthday in the summer.

When she comes, we play basketball and hang out in my tree house drinking lemonade, though we are fourteen. At night, we sleep in my basement with the window open to let in a breeze. We talk about our different schools and friends and anime as the moon rises high into the sky. Outside, as the stars begin to shine, our fairies dance among their friends, their wings catching soft moonbeams. The breeze brings the soft scent of camellias and memories, and an old pot of soup sits, marinating on a fire that's been burning since kindergarten.

NAUGHTY LITTLE CHINESE GAL

Ling-Ling Zhou

Cherishing Memories

THE BRAIN IS like a video recorder. It keeps many episodes of life. Some are happy, some are sad. Some are exciting, some are traumatic. The episodes are kept in tapes. Sometimes, a tape can be forgotten, left behind. Other times, one keeps a tape close to them at all times, never letting it go. And maybe there are a couple of tapes that one can never get rid of, no matter how much they want to. That's just how it goes with memory.

I have only been through three stages of my life so far. I've been through the innocent baby stage, the exciting and playful childhood stage, and I'm currently going through the homework-filled teenage stage. Being a baby, you know absolutely nothing about this world. All you do is eat, sleep, and cry when you want to eat. The years go by like a flash of lightning. One moment you were just being born, and the next

moment you're starting kindergarten. You didn't even have to do anything! You were the king of the house, your servants there for your every need. Seated on the throne, the only thing you were in charge of was looking cute. What a simple life.

Next came the childhood stage. It was the part of your life where you were introduced to the world. You were still naive and a little simple-minded, but you started to get a taste of life. You were annoying, but still an adorable little angel to everyone, with the exception of your older sibling. This was when you had plenty of fun and no worries. Then came the teenage years.

The teenage years are filled with drama, homework, stress, and disobedience, but all that stuff is supposed to be considered the highlight of your life. I haven't been through much of this phase since I'm only fourteen, but I've experienced enough.

Even so, to me, my childhood years were the best. I had the most amusement without the bad teenage stuff like emotional tears and heartbreaks. My heart yearns for the past, when the episodes of my life were entertaining in a fun way. As a baby, you have no adventure at all, and you can't remember much. As a teenager, you're so focused on school and who's-going-out-with-who that you barely have a chance to relax and do things you actually want to do. That's why, if I had a choice, I'd keep all the episodes of my childhood instead of the other two stages filled with embarrassment.

My childhood was filled with goodies from bad behavior like biting people and stealing their ice cream to getting run over by roller skates; all the commotion

without the complicated other stuff. I had immunity to the defective portion of the real world, and that's probably why I was able to do all the absurd things I did as little Ling-Ling Zhou.

If only people came with a real video recorder to save all the recreation of life, so that you could laugh or cry your heart out when you watched it . . . But we mortals don't. That's why our brain has a function called "memory." That way, you can recall events, stories, and emotions that don't involve math equations and why Rome collapsed.

Memory is a precious thing, and it can become a great story if told. One doesn't have to keep it to themselves. Why not let your friends hear your story? Who knows, maybe your story can change a person's life.

Let Me Have a Bite

I may not seem like it now, but I was extremely bratty and troublesome when I was a kid. I looked innocent with that adorable round face, big eyes, and ponytails, but as they say, looks can be deceiving. I lived in China back then, and I was known as "the disobedient one" in my neighborhood. I would kick down piles of cucumbers that people were trying to sell and get my mom in trouble because of it . . . I also had another little problem. I bit people.

It wasn't like a disorder or anything, and it's not like I randomly bit people. I had perfectly good rea-

sons for biting. If you didn't give me what I wanted, then I'd bite you. It was that simple.

One hot, summer day when I was about four years old, my parents and I were walking back home from a playground. It wasn't burning hot, just around eighty degrees or so. A couple of cotton candy clouds floated effortlessly in the sky, and a light breeze danced by every now and then. There were many tall apartment buildings around us, towering over my little head. Then, I caught sight of this girl by a building cooling herself with milky white ice cream.

Her name was QingQing and she was about two years older than me. She looked like your typical Chinese gal, with medium black hair and round brown eyes. Of course, she wasn't nearly as charming as me. She was the daughter of my parents' friends, but I didn't care about that. *All I cared about was the deliciously delicious-looking yummy stuff she was eating.*

"Don't run off with her ice cream, Ling-Ling," my mom whispered to me. My head bobbed up and down. We went over to say hi to QingQing and her mother, but all I looked at was her scrumptious sweet treat. It called out to me, "Eat me, eat me!" That ice cream should have been in *my* mouth.

My feet dragged me up to QingQing. Who cared if she was older than me? Who cared that I promised not to take her ice cream? I sure didn't. My hand involuntarily reached for the mouth-watering cold goo that should've been mine. QingQing pulled back. That's when I grabbed her by the hand and sank my undeveloped fangs into her soft velvet skin.

“Aaahh!” The deserving victim released her possession and I snatched my prize. My tongue didn’t wait to dance over this thrilling tasting ice cream. The taste of victory mixed with frozen yogurt was exhilarating. *Mmm. Yum.* I had won, but I didn’t expect to lose my capture so quickly.

My mom took the ice cream out of my hands in a flash. I lost my trophy faster than I had gotten it. What a shame . . . Here comes the lecture and the scolding.

“Ling-Ling!” the queen yelled, “You said you wouldn’t do that! You know better!”

Blah, blah, blah.

“I’m sorry.”

After a giant pile of scolding and apologies, we headed home. Oh well. At least I got a taste of my prize. Turns out it wasn’t as good as I thought it would be. *I wonder if I left a mark on QingQing’s hands . . .*

I don’t bite people anymore. Must have grown out of it. This was almost typical of me back then, being a bad girl, annoying others, and stealing ice cream. “The disobedient one” really did fit me.

Childhood Mischief

Our substitute walked into the room with her grayish-black hair pulled into a bun. She was wearing elderly people’s glasses, the kind with a chain that goes around the back of the head. A few wrinkles were planted on her aging, brown skin, and there was a smile missing from her face. Her beady, black

eyes seemed annoyed and unkind. They looked at this class of kindergartners, and almost immediately she regretted her decision. She walked to the board and wrote "Mrs. Williams." Then she spoke. Her voice was cranky with a hint of a Southern accent.

"Good morning, class. My name is Mrs. Williams and I'm gonna be your sub while Mrs. Beatty is out."

She proceeded to call roll. After she marked the absences, we began class. I found out that Mrs. Williams wasn't as ill-tempered as she seemed. Or maybe she was just trying to hide her displeasure. I was only five, so I couldn't really tell.

As we went through our morning activities involving coloring, storytelling, and a couple of show-and-tells, I whispered to my best friend of that time, KaCie, "Mrs. Williams isn't that bad."

"You're right. But she's not as nice as Mrs. Beatty."

"Alright, class. Lunch time. Line up," Mrs. Williams called.

KaCie and I got into line near the end. That's when I saw this mint condition, fat, beginner pencil on the blue-green carpet. It was practically pulling at my arm. I was fascinated by this golden rod for some odd reason, and I just had to hold it. I looked at Mrs. Williams (who was still trying to get the class of five-year-olds in a straight line) and walked out of line a little to pick up the pencil.

"Look at what I got, KaCie."

"Hey!" she said with a jealous pout on her face.
"Where'd you get that?"

"I found it on the floor."

"Okay, class. Let's go," Mrs. Williams called. That's when I realized that I couldn't bring a fat pencil to lunch, so I quickly threw it away. I didn't expect it to hit the leg of a desk with a CLAAANG.

"Who threw that?!"

Oopsies. She finally erupted . . . *My bad . . .* She walked to the end of the line near where I was standing and asked again, "Who threw that?" in her bitter voice. Silence. Then she started to point at random people. "Did you do that? Was it you?" Thank goodness she didn't raise that scrawny finger at me.

The fuming volcano walked to the front of the line and faced the first person. "Did you do it?" The poor kid shook his head. She moved on to the next person. "Was it you?" Nope. Next. Nope. Next. Nope.

"Uh-oh," I whispered to KaCie. Mrs. Witch was getting closer and closer to where I was standing. I didn't know what to do.

She got to KaCie. "You?" Negative. I was next. Was I going to admit that it was me? What would happen if I did? Was I going to lie? *Oh no . . .* I looked away. *Here she comes!*

"Did you make that noise?"

I looked at her. For reasons unknown, she had skipped me and went on to ask the boy behind me. Apparently, I was invisible, but I was smart enough to keep quiet. I looked at KaCie, and she looked at me. It was almost funny that Mrs. Williams neglected me, especially when I was the one at fault.

"She skipped me."

"I know!" KaCie laughed.

I looked back at Mrs. I-passed-the-one-who-did-it and felt relief, at least until she headed back to the front of the line and started interrogating the five-year-olds again! *Oh my gosh, she's asking the dreaded question again! Looks like we're not going to lunch until she finds out it was me who caused the clang.*

One student at a time. She was getting closer and closer and closer. Almost there. Just a couple more students to go. Panic! Worry! Anxiety! *Oh no. Here she comes!*

“Did you make that horrible noise?”

Huh? What was going on? *She jumped over me, again!* Hello? Unbelievable. It was either that something was seriously wrong with that lady or I had the power of invisibility. At least luck was on my side.

Mrs. I-missed-the-culprit-again got to the end of the line and decided that it was no use asking anymore. She walked away and led us to the cafeteria, pretty much dropping the whole pencil-throwing-clang-thing. I didn’t get caught. I didn’t even lie! The secret was just between me and KaCie.

The moral of the story: Don’t throw fat pencils at the leg of a desk when you have a mean substitute. Most people wouldn’t be as happy-go-lucky or apparently as invisible as I was, and most people can’t escape the consequences. Because of this experience, I am now a follower of the rules and I try not to do things others consider “bad.” Getting caught and yelled at isn’t a good thing. Even so, sometimes I still like to play little pranks on my friends and family, especially on April Fool’s Day. One simply can’t erase the fun of it.

Roller skating Ouch

Who could forget the day when they got run over by a fifth grader in roller skates?

Even though it happened seven years ago, I remember it as if it had happened yesterday. It changed my whole perspective on careless, unprotected roller skating. I can still remember the clumsy way I fell and the painful pressure across my stomach, never to be erased from my mind.

It was the typical hot summer day in July 2002, after I finished first grade. As the sun shined its naturally golden rays on the aged earth, my ten year-old friend, Anne, came to my family's red-bricked apartment to invite me to go roller skating with her and her friend, Emily. Since I had nothing important to do that day, I delightedly said yes. After I told my mom that I was going to go play with Anne and Emily outside, I realized that I didn't know how to roller skate. Talk about slow reactions. That's when I decided to just run along while they skated. At least it was good exercise for a seven-year-old.

Our apartment rested on a giant slope, so naturally we agreed to start at the peak of the slope and rush down. We skated, or in my case jogged, all the way to the top of the black-paved road under the beating sun. When we reached the tip that was surrounded by majestic green trees, Anne had another idea. She suggested that since I couldn't roller skate, she and Emily could pick me up from each side and we go down together linked arm to arm with me hanging a foot above

the ground. Being unaware of the danger that was yet to come, I thought it sounded like a great idea and stupidly agreed.

Anne and Emily picked me up by the shoulders, and down we went, slowly at first, but then we started to accelerate. Faster and faster we flew as the wind blasted my face. We got to top speed, and it felt as if we were skydiving. Everything we passed was a blur; I couldn't even spot my apartment.

As we got near the end of the slope where it flattened out, we slowed to a stop. The wind ceased and I could once again feel the burn of the sun. The thirty second ride was over, but the exhilarating anxiety was still there. "Let's do that again!" I shouted. With all the laughter that was going around, it was clear as day that Anne and Emily had as much fun as I did, so the three of us, ignoring the blaze above, headed all the way back to the top of that gigantic slope.

We got into our positions and started to slide down. As we continued to speed up, Emily became as unstable as a vase in the middle of an earthquake. For reasons unknown, she lost her balance and toppled over. Since she was holding me by my left shoulder, I crashed along with her. But my collision with the cooked road was by far worse than Emily's. She had both of her hands to cushion her fall while I fell flat onto the dense ground when Anne let go of my other shoulder. My fight with the road ended up with me getting scratches and bruises on both my knees and both elbows. I rolled onto my back, taking in all the pain, but little did I know, Anne was headed straight

towards me in her skates! Somehow, and I have no idea how, she was rolling extra fast right towards my stomach. Paralyzed from my fall, all I could do was lay there and prepare for the pain that was yet to come.

Three. Two. One. Whoosh! Eighty-five pounds on top of my poor tummy for half a second, then gone. Even though it was only for half a second, everything seemed to have happened in slow motion. Half a second seemed like an eternity. It felt as if all of my insides had been mashed together from the pressure into an organ patty, ready to be cooked by the burning ball of fire above me. I moaned. What else could I do?

I turned my head to watch Anne disappear down behind the slope. Emily crawled next to me and started to comfort me. I was glad to have someone by my side when I felt so weak, I couldn't even cry. Even so, I could barely hear what Emily was saying because all I could focus on was the pain that enveloped my entire body. *When will this agony stop?*

A few moments later, Anne came back with my parents. I was bombarded with questions and exclamations along the lines of, "Oh my gosh! What happened? Are you okay?" How would you feel if you were a fragile soon-to-be second grader the size of a stick who just got run over by a giant soon-to-be fifth grader in roller skates? Imagine a newly sharpened knife that was stabbed into your stomach then quickly pulled out. Imagine the gruesome feeling never leaving you alone. Imagine having a disabled body in an awkward position but not having the strength to move it. Okay, so maybe it wasn't deadly, but it sure was

painful enough to become an unforgettable memory from the summer of 2002.

This experience helped me understand that safe play is always better than unprotected play. If you don't want to get hurt, then just use common sense and don't do it! But if you *really* want to do something that involves a high risk of damage, then make sure you do everything possible to *reduce* the risk factors. I don't like pain, and it is certainly *not* my friend. Even today, I like to play safe and try not to get hurt because one little precaution can prevent a serious injury.

Epilogue

Reading that I was such a free-spirited, energetic kid makes one wonder about the current me. Most of the time, I'm very quiet. Ever since I started school, I have never been the talkative one.

Sometimes, I wonder what it would be like to be the funny or outspoken one, but I'm just naturally not like that. I enjoy listening to other people talk more than hearing my own voice. I don't like it when the whole class is silenced, eyeballs glued at me, waiting for me to speak. I don't want to say something stupid or completely wrong and get laughed at.

So what happened to that playful, naughty girl who wasn't afraid of anything? She's still there, just not during school. You can find her when she's hanging out with friends or when the teacher's not looking. She still loves to goof off and do things she wants to

do, but she also knows better than to annoy the teacher, especially in high school when everything you do counts for college. That's why her outer shell is there. The exoskeleton is in charge of learning, working, being mature, and keeping her mouth shut. The inner child is then in charge of having fun, making people laugh, and being crazy.

Even though it seems as if the outer shell isn't the real me, it actually is. Just like yin and yang coexist, so does hushed me and playful me. You need both to make a complete whole and they balance each other out. The quiet half is for school, during class, while the teasing half is for home, lunch, and outside places like the mall. This is the real me and I'm not going to change, at least for now. I'll continue to be quiet during class and let Miss Fun out when I'm with friends. I'll be who I want to be when I want to be, just like anyone can be who they want to be. That way, we can all be happy little people dancing around in this world.

