

Junior Writing Portfolio

STANDOUTS

Contributed by the Classes of 2009 and 2010

During your junior year, you must compile a Junior Writing Portfolio, selecting five samples of your writing. With categories ranging from formal to creative, the portfolios are designed to demonstrate your style and skills and, ideally, represent your best writing. Now in its fifteenth year, completion of an assessable portfolio is a graduation requirement at Joel Barlow High School.

This publication of *Junior Writing Portfolio Standouts* offers a sample of some of the best portfolio pieces from the classes of 2009 and 2010. Culled mainly from portfolios judged “Commendable,” these pieces should give a sense of our standards. But they are not only models in terms of the level of writing. *Standouts* also provides information about the variety of writing in each portfolio category. The following pages provide descriptions and examples of each category, balancing thoughtful critiques of literature and history with reflections on life and a scrumptious approach to writing.

This year, we are especially pleased to include for publication “Understanding Meow,” a creative non-fiction text written this past year at Yale University by Justin Stone, an Exemplary Writer of the Joel Barlow Class of 2005. Justin was selected to deliver his piece at the New Haven Public Library in April, 2009 as part of a celebration of outstanding rising authors. So in addition to serving as a valuable tool for this year’s junior class, *Standouts* should provide an enjoyable read for you and your parents.

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Joel Barlow High School
Regional District No. 9 – Easton / Redding, Connecticut

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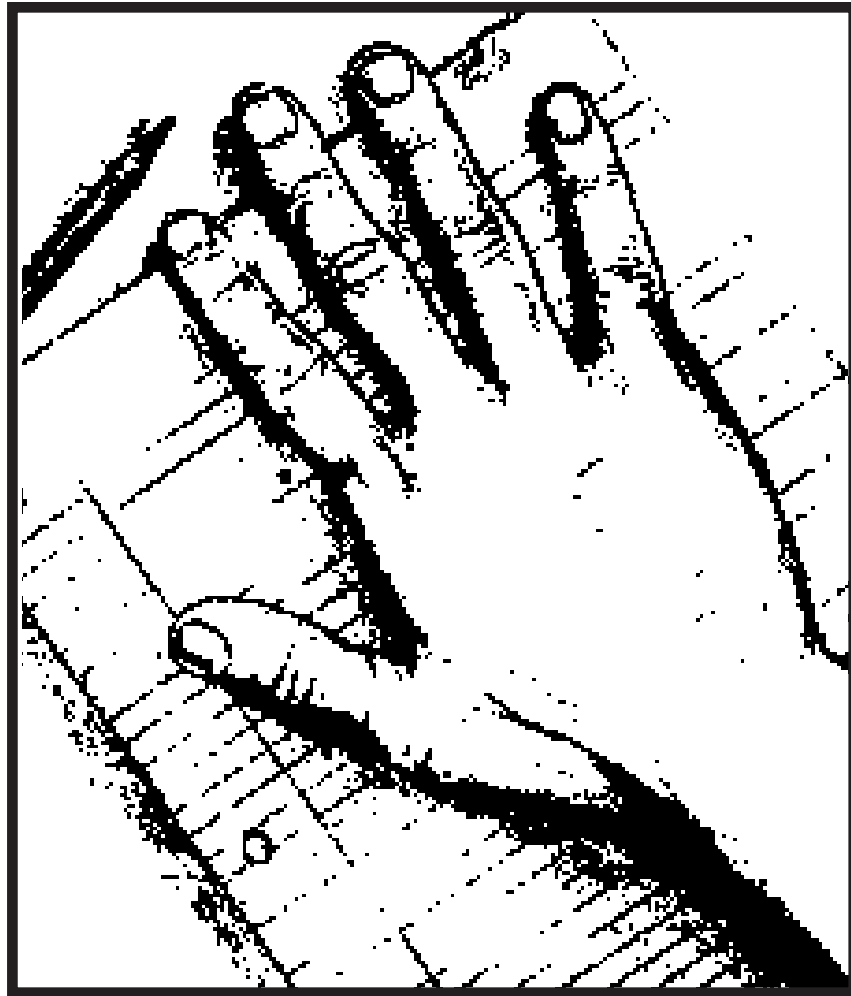
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The Reflective Letter

This letter, addressed to the portfolio assessors, introduces your portfolio. It is designed to give assessors a better understanding of you as a writer and as a person. Honest and often informal, the letter should be a showcase for your unique voice. In the letter, you may want to describe your development as a writer, assess the strengths and weaknesses of your writing, explain how you put your portfolio together, introduce the pieces you selected, or combine all of these approaches.



Joel Earley '02

Dear Assessors,

I remember Molly, an alumni of my dance studio, pointing to my brand-new pair of pointe shoes and saying, “Admit it, you were dancing all around your house in those as soon as you got them!” She caught me. It was my first pair, and every ballerina knew that being allowed to finally go up on pointe was the most monumental privilege one could receive after years of building the strength to be able to handle it. I had always been mesmerized by the older dancers at my conservatory who performed *The Four Swans* with endless amounts of grace and precision. The result was beautiful, but until my first class on pointe, I had no idea how much work, and pain, was hidden from the audience and made to look beautiful with extravagant tutus and stage makeup. At times I used to wonder if the sweat, tears, and blood were worth it.

Don’t get me wrong, I love ballet...but it’s no picnic. That year my hardest undertaking yet came when I was asked to add a little something extra to my dancing for the first time – in hip hop we call it “flavor”; in ballet we call it “heart.” Looking for my personality as a performer left me with somewhat of an identity crisis. It took me years to learn how to feel the music and how to use the instructor’s steps as a pallet to express myself with. In the end, I learned how dancing is truly an art.

When I entered high school, I had no idea it would be so similar to my pointe shoe endeavor just a few years prior. Like my early technical years of ballet, my middle school teachers set boundaries and expectations that I could move within, but not cross. I learned to please them under the given restrictions. In high school, the barricades came toppling down and I was left with a wide-open studio to dance in.

When I received the rubric for our first essay in English class freshman year, I recall being a bit taken aback by a new column I would be graded on: voice. After the teacher’s brief explanation of what this aspect entailed, I concluded that I should use the pronoun “I” a few times to boost my grade. After getting the paper back, I realized that it hadn’t worked the way I had hoped. When the teacher tried to explain it again to the class of dumbfounded freshmen, I realized that she, like my pointe instructor, was asking for heart.

The first time I really nailed the concept was the following year when I wrote the short story “There’s No Love Like Apathy.” I remember my eighth-grade brother reading over my shoulder, pointing to the word “bitch” (saying it would have poisoned his lips) and exclaiming, “You can write that in an essay for school?!” I nodded and continued tapping the keys, not realizing that at his age I would have been just as shocked to be shaken out of the formulaic safety zone that was middle school. I learned it’s not swearing that makes any paper strong, but rather telling a story the way you envision it. Once I learned to embrace the newfound liberty and not fear it, writing was a whole lot easier for me. Now, short stories are my strength because I love letting that first draft flow from my fingertips. I sat down and that paper just poured out of me. Many drafts later, I still love it, so I chose to show it off a little to you.

There are other times when I don’t feel the music right away. I can dance around a topic all I want, but it’s never quite right until I synchronize what I’m doing to the other piece of art that’s bubbling out of the speakers. When writing an analytical essay, appreciating what you are given to work with is always key. You have to be comfortable with it before you can spin

off with it in your own direction. This is my weakness in writing, because I like doing my own thing – I love to perform solo. I used to think analysis was a test of reading comprehension, not writing. High school showed me how to bounce from another’s piece into my own. I chose to include “Beyond His Control” as my analysis paper because I was able to admire Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Macbeth* before breaking it down into manageable parts to examine. I used Shakespeare’s brilliant work to hopefully create a masterpiece of my own. It required weeks of careful planning and execution to get it just right.

We aren’t always given the luxury of time. When music kisses my ears, I instinctively dance. No rehearsal or practice, just raw, candid movement. This has led to scrapes, bruises, and, once, a dislocated shoulder. But sometimes, I’m lucky and the steps hit me as if I were one of ABT’s primas. I included “Memory” as my timed piece because I got lucky. Just before class, I was chatting with a friend, Morgan, about how her grandma had recently acquired Alzheimer’s disease. It was upsetting to Morgan that, when she went to her grandma’s house, the 92-year-old lady knew exactly who my friend was, but in the turn of a moment, she had no idea who was in her house, and asked “Who is that girl?” with no recollection that she ever knew her granddaughter. It got me thinking that, maybe, if the sufferer could remember one concrete thing (being a romantic, love came to mind), then perhaps it would all come back to her. When Mrs. Staron announced an open timed writing prompt, I used Morgan’s story as a springboard; it was my music.

I would hate to leave you with the impression that all dancing requires music. As a matter of fact, I’ve done a fair share of dancing in silence, hearing nothing but my own breathing and heartbeat. Sometimes, it’s just unprocessed emotion. I wrote “The Reunion” in the moment, with no planning or thinking ahead. I didn’t know where it was going, and I had absolutely no idea that I would end up liking it. We were told to sprinkle some *Macbeth* symbolism into a short story, so take note of the paper cut (the letter as her “dagger”) and her trouble sleeping. Like my creative piece “There’s No Love Like Apathy,” this is the story of mother and daughter. However, I completely turned it around and set the mother as the main character. I took a shot and tried something new; I used the freedom of pointe shoes to its full potential in that one. I’ve come a long way since middle school.

When my friends and family tell me how beautiful my dance recital has been I never pull out my smelly ballet bag and say, “Yeah? Well look at this!” Likewise, I would never present you with anything that hasn’t been perfected to the point that the work put into it is nearly invisible. We have to make it look easy, you know? Enjoy the show!

Sincerely,

Carolyn Koleszar

Dear Assessors,

I can recall clearly, that moment a decade ago. I was six and beginning my first piece of literary work. It was a rather simple prompt — about the first day of school, But, nonetheless, it was an introduction into an unpredictable world of creative expression, passion and struggle. I was ecstatic; the minute I first grasped a pencil my imagination took shape, and often times, I'd have to run to catch up with it. I was eager to invent new worlds, unique modes of existence, and a place of belonging. I was painting my thoughts, and that fact invigorated every essence of my being.

Regardless of the quality of my work, I am always proud because it is mine — produced by me, a work that is a part of me. I remember in first grade realizing that I had finally created a map of my thoughts. A meaningless and minuscule blueprint, but, nonetheless, my horizons were expanded, even if they were only limited to the confines of a thirty-by-thirty classroom. To me, writing is like painting a portrait — the paper being the empty canvas. It is up to the creator to formulate the image and message. Best of all, like a picture, a piece of writing is worth a thousand words and, if you're Fred Gipson, a tear or two.

By fourth grade, the style of art had morphed from creativity into reiteration. The flying genies and talking ogres were replaced with chronicles of Benjamin Franklin, reports on Mount Kilimanjaro, *My Brother Sam is Dead*, and the all-important printing press. To me, this was nothing special — just a recapitulation of facts already revealed to the world. Creative writing had turned into recycled writing. Instead of forming my own ideas, I was simply restating others' in a different arrangement of words.

By middle school we had flipped the pallet to begin a new form of penning that incorporated creativity as well as history. To me this was a new beginning, a way of expressing myself while intertwining the past — something I had not thought possible before. As time went on we migrated into analytical essays that were an amalgamation of the writer's ideas along with specific support from other sources. To me, this was difficult because I'd always had trouble finding substantial support to back my claims. On top of that, I'd always had trouble creating a thesis that is understandable to the audience due to sentence structure or awkward word choice and organization. Nonetheless, I feel I have learned how to create a solid thesis supported by a sufficient and strengthening variety of evidence, as I hope you will discover in my less than favorite works of the portfolio, "Mend the Broken Wing" and "The Shattered and Broken-Hearted." So, now on to a new bend in the forest — book reports went from simple summaries to personal connections, deeper hidden meanings and innovative locution. But still, I was hungry for more.

Of course, the most defining moment of my writing expedition came in high school. I was inundated with a plethora of expansive wisdom delivered by the highly-knowledgeable Barlow staff. Middle school surface-level understandings and connections metamorphosed into a transmigration of heart-wrenching tales of human struggle and an understanding of the nature of society. These newly acquired principles aided in the formation of my work, "The Devil is Merely a Six-Fifteen Alarm." Instead of relating to past historical figures and experiences, I am now able to analyze the purpose of our existence—the very essence of our being—and garnish it into a relatable tale, thanks to Barlow.

In regards to my creative piece, I feel my parable, my “painting,” “The Devil is Merely a Six-Fifteen Alarm,” encompasses a sense of association with which many teens today can relate. In my opinion, writing is not successful without a deeper, hidden purpose. What may only be deemed words by one can be the opening of vital doors to another. I want people to read my stories and empathize with the main characters, as I have with my fictitious Peter Simpson who is struggling to make amends while trapped in the unbearable continuum of teen love. Writing in this area of relationship and expressive uniqueness has allowed me to grow a fondness for creative and personal inscription.

With art we often times paint ourselves but mask the truth with arcane colors and thought-provoking patterns, as with those of the creative genre. The beauty of personal pieces is that we can present self-identification and tell the direct truth up-close and personal. It is like a journal, only, instead of hiding our feelings on tattered loose-leaf paper wedged within a leather-bound book, we crawl out of hibernation and allow our voices to be heard. In my short story “Angels in Disguise,” I discuss, personally, my renewed faith in society, and the human race, for that matter. My goal is that you, the readers, pick up on my directive approach and that, someday, somehow, you can relate to my words.

So, to think how far we’ve come — from the story of the little boy cautiously entering a foreign classroom to that of immense materialization. Now, in a higher degree of learning, our canvases are finessed with strokes of soliloquy, dabs of allegory, mixtures of analogy, situational irony, and of course good ol’ personal voice! Gone are the days of obscure and undistinguished art, and born is the era of works of the foremost endowment. From darkness, we created light. From hesitation, we formed realization, and from understanding, we formed change. Barlow has blossomed it’s students from Jan Botiks to Pablo Picassos, giving us the instruments to create new possibilities, paint new paths, and branch off from the established norm. After all, that is what art is in the first place.

Thanks to Barlow, we are no longer just painters; we are artists. While I may not be the best of authors, I still enjoy the process of writing more than you can imagine. I hope my work can attain your honorable respect and I pray that I can come even an inch close to your abilities.

Thank you so very much for this privilege.

Sincerely,

Michael Grainger

Dear Assessors,

I've never been deep into photography. The pictures I've taken are mostly a curious collection of cheerful subjects juxtaposed with demonic red eyes, or amazing shots of friends and family with their eyes closed, as if smiling sweetly in their dreams. Some are helplessly out of focus, or too dark. Still, nothing has been as tragic as my grandfather's pictures, where everyone's head is cut off in varying degrees. Picture taking has been a hit-or-miss proposition. Thanks to Photoshop, photography has now become more manipulative. Amateurs can do what professionals have always done, without being terribly complicated. The gods behind Photoshop can correct blinking or red eyes, change brown eyes to blue, change a background or wrinkled clothing, fix flyaway hairs, and, my personal favorite, erase acne, such as that glaring pimple that suddenly appears on school picture day. It's quite reasonable to say that photography in the digital age has become more like writing.

Yes, I will concede that pictures have more instantaneous appeal over writing in capturing one's attention. It's often said, "A picture is worth a thousand words." In my view, that's an oversimplification. As powerful as it may be, a picture can only convey limited insight; it leaves a lot of blanks. Writing is much more versatile. It has the option to be vague and invite the reader's interpretation, or it can fill in the gaps to deliver a more complete picture or persuasive point of view. For example, a photo of two children at play illustrates only the obvious. A written piece describing the same scenario can convey much more: What is the relationship of the children? What precipitated this scene, what follows it? A picture is like a skeleton — writing is the flesh on the bones.

Writing and pictures do have a lot in common. Both works originate from the author/artist's motivation. Both depend on creativity to draw attention to their work. While it's possible to get everything perfect the first time, most pieces require additional engineering. For the photographer, this could entail a change of lighting, or positioning of the camera, zooming in and zooming out, sharper focus, softer focus, cropping, or enlarging details. This could also mean using color, black and white, or sepia tone imaging for desired effect. Writers start with a rough draft, then edit, cut and elaborate. They can change narration, replace past tense with present tense, rearrange sentences and paragraphs, and consciously determine what is to be revealed and what is to be hidden. This craft is reinforced by my current English teacher. She encourages students to resubmit written assignments in the belief that writing is an evolutionary process of continuous revising and editing to a better product: buffing and polishing to a fine shine, so to speak.

The pieces I chose to include in my portfolio are all reflective of this process; that is, they are all essays that have undergone a lot of revisions. By its final version, my analytical essay, "Bloodline Politics and Government," was held together by a binder clip, a bulky testament to my numerous revisions. This essay, I believe, gives the reader modern-day parallels to the absolute monarchy of ancient Greece, and shows how the governing styles of various regimes, past and present, relate to each other, despite the wide space of time. My creative choice, "The Competition," is a modern-day parody of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The relationship between the mother and son in this story has a lot of intensity beneath the surface, and required more

revisions than just a few flyaway hairs. The reader gets a sense of what's going on inside this confused young player's head and how guilt affects him and his game. My writer's choice, "The Founding Fathers," is a round table discussion that might have occurred among our country's earliest political leaders as they collaborated on the formation of U.S. monetary and banking standards of post-Colonial America. It was a challenge to "put words in the mouths" of these great patriots. Bringing them to life and infusing each of them with personality and purpose through dialogue demonstrates the inventive side of my writing abilities.

As you read my writing selections, may they come to life for you with vivid imagery and thoughtful reflection, as I have intended them to. I hope you will enjoy this brief scrapbook of fine-tuned "portraits" which I proudly call my portfolio.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Allen

Dear Assessors,

It is no secret that these writings have been compiled amidst the seemingly constant possibility of debilitating snowfall (more commonly known as January). It has left our daily high school schedule at the threat of dismemberment at any moment. I can't say that I don't spend the nights before pacing, dreading, resenting the impending snow day. This may not seem like normal behavior, because it isn't.

No matter what the circumstances, I become anxious at the idea of an icy tempest blowing through the JBHS seven-day rotation. For one thing, I've nearly made myself sick pondering the imbalance of successful class periods. For another, finals week in June always happens to include my birthday. This may be the reason all my fingernails are down to the quick, for with each day the school year is pushed, I have to newly anticipate which two exams I will have to take during the day, and which two I will have to study for that evening. I haven't had a pleasant birthday since the eighth grade.

But once it's finally morning after a long night of biting the nails off of crossed fingers, and I get a chance to wake up after the sun rises, my attention is locked into the shine and smell of the ice and the fleeting freedom.

Ironically, as its anticipation always sends me reeling into the future, snow in its physical manifestation is one of the few elements that force me to revert — back to what sensual memories of childhood I have left. Perhaps this is because snow has such captivating effects on each of the senses—the shine that catches your eye in the early morning, the way the cold can numb your senses of smell and taste—leaving you in a strictly observational existence. Snow can mute far-off sounds until everything — the plow reeling down the road for the third time, or each of my brothers wreaking havoc on the opposite fleece-wrapped body, to the sound of my father's strife in ridding his car of ice — all sound gentler, and become thus.

Perhaps this is why the experience with the homeless man (which you can read all about in “Enlightenment at Duchess”) has been etched so distinctively in my memories of childhood. If it had instead been 40 degrees and raining, would I still be calling it the moment that changed my life? This is something I sincerely doubt, as it would have likely fled like the rain.

I feel like snow serves the way that New Year's Eve ought to. Snow days are distinctly separated by aging years — experiences that can track a life through its development. Here I am, under the same circumstances which my seven- or eight-year-old self would have happily sprung at. Yet, instead of rolling around in it, I am quietly seated at a desk against a window overlooking it, sipping a cup of coffee.

I must thank you for accepting these works of mine during my favorite time of year — the time when I am most reflective. In addition to the snowy personal essay, I've included a Hemingway imitation which takes place on a hot summer day no more than a year ago, since this is the only summer I can vividly remember. I've also included what I found to be one of the most sophisticated assignments I've ever been given — in which I had to analyze two very

different translations of the same text.

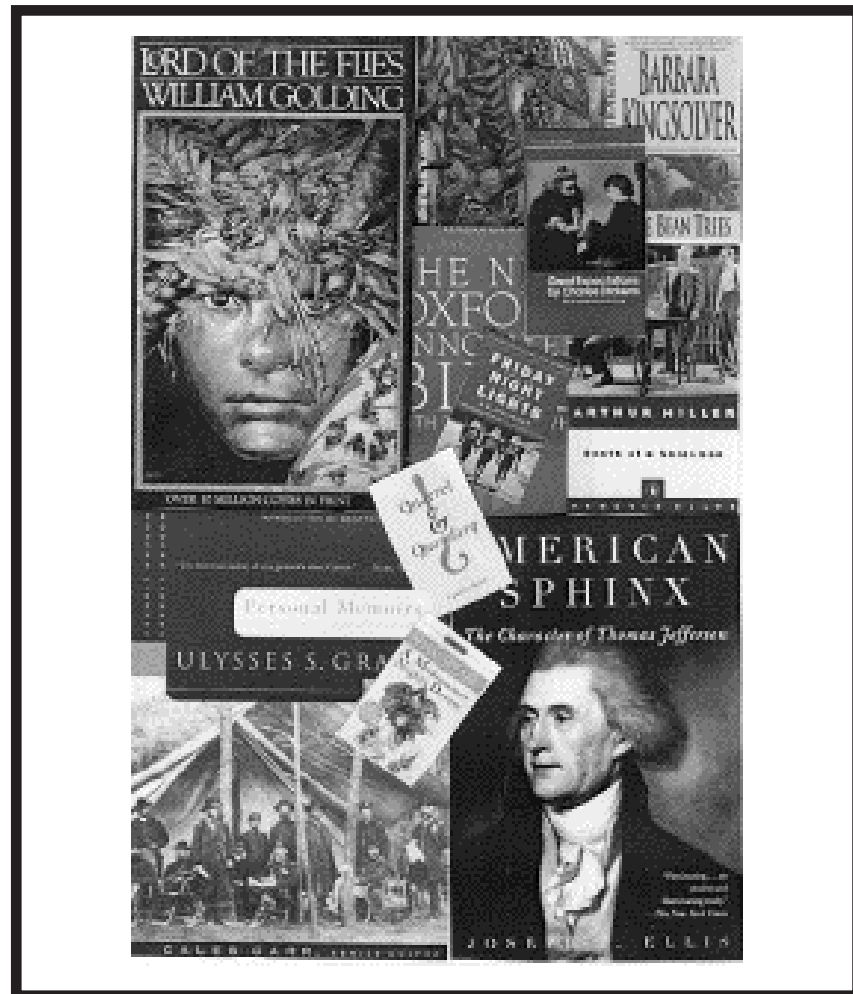
And thus, I hope that, in this proper season, I have to offer an effective snapshot of myself as a student. Thank you, and let's hope for no more snow days.

Sincerely,

Grace Cannan

The Formal Analysis Paper

The formal analysis paper has an objective perspective with an emphasis on sound inquiry. It may be a literary analysis, a position paper, a thesis-based research paper, or an analysis from any subject area. It must have a clear thesis, support with specific examples, and a logical conclusion. Even if secondary sources are used, the reader should come away with a strong sense of your position on the text or issue. All secondary sources must be clearly and properly cited.



The Economic Branching of Slavery

by Peter Mattson

From 1619 to the Civil War era, the slaves who lived within the borders of the United States were a distinguished group of people. More specifically, they were more oppressed than any other group in the nation's history. As the years passed and the nineteenth century emerged, slavery was discussed more often and soon connected to every controversial issue. The North and the South bickered and debated, as the irresolvable issue of slavery was foremost in the minds of many government officials and a growing number of citizens. Slavery was in the economic roots of America, so the concept of slavery was commonplace. Moreover, slaves were an essential part of the success of cotton in the South. Southern plantation owners knew that, without slaves, their region would crash and burn economically. Therefore, one can conclude that slavery was an economic system.

Ever since the United States learned to walk and talk, slavery was present within its boundaries. As a result, the system of slavery quickly became part of the nation's identity. The initial need for a large amount of slaves in the United States came after Bacon's Rebellion (Bailey 70), which was when the indentured servants rebelled against their masters (the rich, major farm owners). As a result, the masters wanted a more obedient and reliable source of labor. They chose the Africans, who began to be imported into the United States in large numbers. Thus, the first time the United States ever called for slaves was for an economic purpose. The farmers needed a workforce that would truly help (and not disrupt) their crops and ensure great profits. A fair number of early citizens in the United States felt that slavery was unjust, but they also felt that it was vital for the South's economy. Thomas Jefferson, who was a slave owner, thought that the exercise of slavery was a disgrace ("Quotations"). But in spite of Jefferson's words, he owned slaves at his home, Monticello. More specifically, a South Carolinian judge wrote that white men would have been much weaker if it hadn't been for the existence of the black slaves ("William Harper"). This statement captures how many people in the South felt, which was that slavery was a necessary evil. Despite the necessary evil in the South, the North still believed, according to David Donald, that the South was undemocratic for the usage of slaves (Donald). However, these accusations seem to prove that the Northerners did not understand that the South's way of life depended on agriculture just as much as the North's well-being was reliant on manufacturing. The success of all crops, which provided nearly all of the money for nearly everyone in the South, was reliant on slaves.

Even after the indentured servants became less unruly and rebellious, there were more periods in American history when slavery was significantly needed. Slavery was again called for with the invention of the cotton gin, as the economic success and growth of the South changed with this invention. An Englishman who visited America wrote about the importance of the crop of cotton and the way in which every Southerner constantly talked about it (Hall). Unfortunately, the Southerners grew so much of the crop that the demand for cotton revived the demand for black slaves (Bailey 302). Once again, the slave system was clearly economic; slave owners needed to buy and maintain the health of slaves in order to turn a profit on their cotton. The people who had the money and invested it in tools, slaves, and cotton were nearly always successful. After they made their money, they were able to influence laws that worked for their benefit (and not for the poorer farmers or the rich farmers' increasing number of slaves).

This held true despite the fact that there was only one slave owner for every five white, non-slaveholders in the South (“Selected Statistics”). So even though the white non-slaveholding Southerners largely outnumbered the slaveholders, the slaveholders still had a greater influence on the laws. This proves that the economic system of slavery was more important than the political and social systems of slavery. The economic system of slavery preceded anything that the newly rich slave owners were able to do politically or socially with the system as slavery, as being rich was a prerequisite to having a say in politics or social life in the South.

In the United States, the tree of slavery was planted when a Dutch ship carried slaves over in 1619. The main roots of slavery dug into the ground with the economic need for slaves after the system of indentured servants became unreliable. The South relied on the economy of the slavery system because of the slaves’ mass production of crops. And later, the slaves branched out and specifically grew cotton due to the cotton gin, which helped the economy of the South to finally become significant and more independent. While many may contend that slavery was more of a political and social system, economic success in the South was the first and most difficult step to gaining status. From there, some of those who were rich were then able to write laws relating to their self-interest, and through laws, they had the ability to change social structure. Therefore, the social and economic systems were merely the leaves on the tree of slavery, which only became tangible by the branching of the economic trunk.

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Gatsby in Wonderland

by Kyle Harrold

At some point in life, most people wish they could go back in time and relive something great that happened to them. One example of something that people often wish they could relive is a relationship. F. Scott Fitzgerald's character Jay Gatsby of *The Great Gatsby* is one such person. He was in love with Daisy, but had to leave her to go to war. While he was away, she moved on. Unfortunately for Gatsby, he can never accept that she moved on, and for the rest of his life believes that she will come back to him. It is this unwavering belief in his dream of Daisy that causes Gatsby's death.

Gatsby always believes that Daisy loves him and that she therefore can't love Tom. Because of this belief, he thinks that all it will take to convince Daisy to leave Tom is to show her how rich he is. According to Jordan Baker, Daisy's friend, this is why he asks Nick to have Daisy over for tea: "He wants her to see his house . . . and your house is right next door" (79). Gatsby truly believes that, if Daisy sees the way he lives she will leave Tom for him. There are two major errors with this assumption. First, Gatsby should realize that money isn't everything and that one needs more than money to support a relationship. Second, Gatsby should realize that he doesn't really have more than Tom, Daisy's husband, has in terms of material wealth. There is really no monetary reason for Daisy to leave Tom for Gatsby; she will be just as well off with Tom. Gatsby surrounds himself with fake everything, thinking that it will win him Daisy. He thinks that his impressive house, parties, and lifestyle will permanently take Daisy from her settled life with Tom. Gatsby never thinks that he will need something of real substance to persuade Daisy to leave Tom. He thinks that just showing her his fancy house, with his nice clothes, and having someone play piano for them will be enough to win Daisy over. Unfortunately for Gatsby, Daisy is only impressed enough to lead him on; she gives Gatsby an illusion that she will stay with him.

Daisy gives Gatsby the illusion that she will stay with him, but she does not fully commit to him. This is another of Gatsby's misconceptions. He believes that, because Daisy showed some interest in him, she must still love him, and so he will be able to repeat the past and have another relationship with her. Gatsby never understands that one can't go back in time to change the future. Even after Nick warns Gatsby not to "ask too much of her . . . you can't repeat the past," Gatsby retorts, "Can't repeat the past . . . Why of course you can!" (110) Gatsby is stuck in a fantasy world of the past where Daisy and he have no other commitments, obligations, or responsibilities and they can be together. Of course, in the real world, Daisy is already married, settled, and has a child. This is why Gatsby is so shocked when he sees Daisy's daughter: "[Gatsby] kept looking at the child with surprise. I don't think he had ever really believed in its existence before" (117). The sight of Daisy's daughter temporarily brings Gatsby back into the real world, which is an upsetting transition, albeit a very temporary one. Also, Gatsby never fully appreciates that Daisy already has a life with Tom. He completely believes that she can't love Tom and that she will be willing to leave her life with Tom to start anew with him: "She only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me. It was a terrible mistake, but in her heart she never loved anyone except me!" (130) In reality, this is not at all the case. Daisy has been able to move on and she really does love Tom. This is what Gatsby wants the truth to be, not what it actually is.

Gatsby is almost right about Daisy, though, as he gets her to think about leaving Tom.

It isn't until Tom reminds everyone "There're things between Daisy and me that you'll never know, things that neither of us can ever forget" (132) that Daisy comes around and realizes she agrees with him. Daisy is a fickle person; she isn't capable of making her own decisions or coming to her own conclusions; she more or less just does what she is told. This is why she leads Gatsby on for so long; she isn't able to choose between Gatsby and Tom because they both tell her to stay with them. Daisy seems to become exhausted with the whole situation by the time Gatsby confronts Tom: "Please, Tom. I can't stand this anymore" (134). At this point she chooses Gatsby, but by the end of the novel she is back with Tom because he convinces her to stay with him. Of course, she still allows Gatsby to take the blame for killing Myrtle because she lacks all integrity.

It isn't just Daisy's fault that Gatsby takes the blame, though. Gatsby himself is just as much at fault. Up until his death, Gatsby continues to believe in his dream of Daisy, which is why he allows himself to take the blame for the accident. When Nick asks if Daisy was driving when they hit Myrtle, Gatsby responds with "Yes . . . but, of course, I'll say I was" (143). His automatic, strong response shows just how deeply he is living in his fantasy world. He answers as if he is taking the blame for a brother or a wife, as if he has already started his relationship with Daisy anew. Sadly for Gatsby, he never leaves this fantasy world of his and so believes he is dying a martyr for Daisy when Wilson shoots him. In reality, he dies a fool, as at that point Daisy is back with Tom and can't seem to care less about Gatsby; she doesn't even come to his funeral.

If Gatsby were just able to come out of his dream of Daisy, he would realize that she isn't worth dying for. She just leads him on because of her lack of ability to make a decision, and Gatsby follows blindly, right over the cliff. Gatsby wants to go back to the past, but if he had just looked to the future he would have seen a whole world of opportunity waiting for him.

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Subject of Interpretation

by Anna Naser

Salamano and his dog. Salamano and the dog. The dog and his old man; an old man and his dog; a dog and Salamano—there are countless ways to say that there is an old man named Salamano and that he has a dog. But which way is the right way? There are infinite ways for an author to relay a message, but each message will relay a slightly different meaning. Is the dog the property of the man? Is it his? Is the old man important enough to be referred to by name? Each author is relaying a specific message through his words. Once those words are changed, so is the story, even if the word changed is just a “the” to a “his.” The relationship between characters is extremely important and extremely fragile: it can be broken and changed with the alteration of a single word. When Albert Camus’ *The Stranger* was translated from the original French, it seems as though parts of the story were found rather than lost in translation in regard to the relationship between Mersault and Salamano.

Matthew Ward portrays Salamano as a broken man who has somehow been put back together. Mersault is either unable to see this or simply does not care. In his conversation with Salamano, Mersault puts everything his companion says into the third person, impressing upon the reader the unimportance of the words, the unimportance of the character. Mersault does not even give Salamano the dignity to tell us his own story. Contrarily, Mersault treats Salamano’s actions as being very real and decisive as opposed to the undefined nature of his own thoughts. When Mersault returns to his apartment, he finds “old Salamano waiting” (Ward 44) at his door; later, Salamano is “mumbling” (Ward 44). In his actions, Salamano is very real to Mersault, and consequently to the reader; he is doing things, showing intent. The physical being of Salamano is far more real to Mersault than the tragedies and happinesses of the man’s life. While Mersault “felt the scales on [Salamano’s] skin” (Ward 46) when the two shake hands, he never says anything—neither to Salamano nor to the reader—to indicate that he “felt” anything at all towards the man’s story.

Through the wording of the passage, the reader understands exactly what Mersault sees Salamano to be. But the passage also shows that Mersault’s view is wrong: Salamano is a lot stronger mentally than Mersault allows us to believe. Just before leaving, Salamano remarks “I hope the dogs don’t bark tonight. I always think it’s mine” (Ward 46). Salamano is far more comfortable with himself, with his situation, than Mersault is willing to admit. Salamano is taking charge of his own hopes, he is addressing his loss head-on, he is prepared to acknowledge the tragedies of life. Surely that signifies that Salamano has a great deal of emotional strength and confidence, that his being goes deeper than the physical.

Stuart Gilbert paints a very different picture in his version of *The Stranger*. To him, Salamano is more broken than ever, a shadow of what a living man should be. Salamano’s actions seem accidental, as though he has no reason to exist at all. Mersault “ran into old Salamano” at the door; here it is not Salamano waiting with intention, but Mersault running into him with unintention. The focus has shifted: Gilbert did not find any solidarity in the character of Salamano; Ward did, but hid it from Mersault. Gilbert’s translation is especially harsh on Salamano, his character taking on such a degree of tragedy it is a wonder Mersault does not feel it; Salamano is forced to admit “that his dog was definitely lost” (Gilbert 56) and that

“the police had more important things to do” (Gilbert 56) and had been unable to help him. One can see his heart breaking. The corresponding passage in Ward is bland in comparison: Mersault relates that Salamano “told me his dog was lost” (Ward 44) and that the police didn’t “keep track of things like that” (Ward 44).

The story of heartbroken Salamano reaches its climax when he describes his dog’s illness. Ward gives us Mersault’s summary of the story; “Every night and every morning after the dog had gotten that skin disease, Salamano rubbed him with ointment” (Ward 45), translated into the third person. The effect is that the tragedy of the dog’s affliction is muted. The Mersault before his final epiphany is revealed: he has so little appreciation for life that he makes death boring and repetitive, watering it down to the act of rubbing in ointment “every night and every morning”(Ward 45). Gilbert, on the other hand, shows that there is hope for Mersault even as he further tragedizes Salamano. “Every mortal night after he got that skin disease I rubbed an ointment in” (Gilbert 58), Salamano cries; every mortal night. Salamano’s words are not subject to Mersault’s dull outlook, his passion and pain being delivered straight to the reader. Gilbert’s bypass of Mersault’s censure was likely intentional, perhaps Salamano’s words striking a deep-enough chord in Mersault that even he feels a true pang of remorse. Remorseful or not, Gilbert allows Salamano to leave a humbled man: “Let’s hope the dogs won’t bark again tonight. I always think it’s mine I hear “ (Gilbert 59). This is a horror that Salamano has already had to experience, as shown in his plaintive “again tonight,” yet he still reaches out to his companion with a weak “let’s hope.” And it is all the more sorrowful because Salamano will probably be hoping alone.

Ward, on the other hand, grants Salamano a fair amount of dignity: “I hope the dogs don’t bark tonight, I always think it’s mine” (Ward 46), he says as he leaves. Salamano proves his strength; he takes charge of his own hope, relying on no one else to hope with him, for him. This is, perhaps, a bit of foreshadowing, a hint that Mersault may come to realize that there is a reason for hope, for passion, for life. Ward’s language hints at Mersault’s epiphany one other time in this passage: while describing his relationship with the dog, Salamano remarks that “he was used to this one” (Ward 44). In a way this is Salamano’s way of forgiving the dog for all the trouble it has caused; the old man may not like it, or be used to it, but he is used to it now, and that is all that matters—the past is unimportant. Salamano realizes what he has had, just as Mersault does at the conclusion of the novel. This particular bit of foreshadowing is absent in the Gilbert translation.

Gilbert’s classic translation pours sadness into the story. His Salamano almost serves to justify Mersault’s desire to remain detached from the world, a world that can cause such grief and pain. Ward finds hope within the very same character, makes him not a source of pain but of opportunity. The relationship between Mersault and his neighbor changes dramatically in the two translations. While Gilbert’s version may have come first, it can be argued that Ward forges a stronger link between his words of Mersault’s final epiphany. However, the two translations are so fundamentally different in their portrayal of Salamano, and consequently of Mersault, that one cannot really be deemed “better” than the other. Similarly, it would be difficult to say that one is “truer” than the other; the only way to find the original truth of the story, if it can be called “truth,” would be to read the original French; and even then one might not find exactly what Camus intended, for all words, even original words, are

subject to interpretation.

Translation matters because it changes the meaning of a text. Although both translations of *The Stranger* culminate in Mersault's reaching a moment of epiphany, the epiphanies are different, both in their wordings and the ways in which they are reached. Translation matters because it tells the same story differently. Translation matters because it gives the reader an often unique opportunity: to experience a text through more eyes than his or her own.

Works Cited

Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. Ed. Matthew Ward. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. Ed. Stuart Gilbert. New York: Vintage, 1946.

The Personal Essay

This essay has a personal perspective. It uses the pronoun “I” and attempts to pull together ideas from a variety of sources, including your own experiences, to make meaning. It may be humorous or serious in tone and subject matter and unconventional in structure compared to the formal analysis. It must have a clear focus, provide specific details, and arrive at a logical, if tentative, conclusion.



“Self-Portrait” by Jamie Hart '01

With or Without Me

by Lauren Seaman

I bit into the index finger of a rubber glove. Its bitter flavor squeezed through the spaces between my teeth, and my tongue pressed to the roof of my mouth as not to taste it. The rubber dangled from my mouth until I slid the other glove onto my hand.

My thumb and middle finger circled the circumference of an Oreo cookie. I lifted it in front of me. And as the cookie moved upward, I heard the clumsy clapping of hands.

The source of the sound was a boy. A boy whose eyes watched his hands intently as they clapped. A boy without the mental capacity to do much else. His eyes crossed as he tried to use his eyes independently to watch his individual hands. His hands moved apart. Then back together. He blinked tightly to flush away the burn caused by his crossed eyes. Still, he did not look away from this hands.

I looked at those hands too large to be those of a child. His long fingers were loose as he clapped; limp wrists guided these long fingers in a wavelike motion. Hair, thick and black, grew from his knuckles. The hands of an adult. But he clapped these hands with excitement comparable to a five-year-old. He wanted the cookie I held.

And as a dog waits for a bone, he lifted his chin towards the cookie; his mouth widened. His tongue fell over his bottom lip, and oozing saliva trickled from the corners of his mouth. Holding his mouth this way, soft gurgles escaped from deep in his throat. The sounds ceased as my hand stopped at his lips.

He bit into the cookie, and it was gone from my fingertips. One third in his mouth, one third in his shirt collar, and the other third on his bib. I pinched the corner of his bib and wiped the underside of his chin. Dried saliva caked on his chin, and he stretched his tongue to moisten the pasty residue. I then mopped the saliva and cookie crumb around his mouth. He looked at me and smiled. Then he clapped his hands again.

I smiled back at him; I was upset, however, he did not eat the entire cookie – he could not eat the entire cookie. And despite this, he would continue to clap excitedly, happily. I was pleased he was happy to eat the cookie. But I only wished him able to do it without me.

Missed Accents

by Sarah Andrews

I knew the piece. I knew I knew the piece. I knew every note, every rhythm, every accent, every dynamic marking. I knew every shift, every fingering, every trill, every accidental. I even knew the notes my teacher had written in, where it said “Pull back” (measure 39) and “Soft echo” (measure 24), and all the others. I had been practicing Schubert’s “Arpeggione” in A minor almost every day since August, my fingers happily dancing to its familiar tune. Here I was, sitting in a hallway at Norwalk High School on the first Saturday in December, assuring myself that I could go into that audition room and nail the piece and get a spot in the Western Regional Orchestra. And yet, here I was, sitting on my case, full of uncomfortable butterflies that accompany being scared out of my mind and feeling incredibly unprepared.

If everyone or anyone else in that hallway were feeling the same jitters as me, I had no idea. I was surrounded by the sounds of scales and arpeggios and solos. The last few violinists were called into the audition room. A few feet from me, a girl was serenading the crowded, noisy hallway with some piece or another; I couldn’t bear to listen to the perfectly tuned notes that swirled around and suffocated me. My fingers began lazily playing a C-scale, hitting the notes I was so familiar with that I could have played them in my sleep. I had lost all motivation to do anything except wait.

The clock ticked away thirty grueling minutes. It was finally my turn. It took all that was left of my energy to drag myself into a standing position, and then to force my feet to move me to where a judge stood, holding the door open. A polite “thank you” fell from my terrified lips as my feet carried me into the audition room. I was like a convict walking toward a door that held either a warm, welcoming world or a cold, lonely chair. The three judges looked at me, expressionless. I stared back at them, armed with my viola in one hand and my bow in the other, a wooden shield against three fire-breathing dragons. The one on the far left addressed me. “Can you play us” (he glanced at his sheet), “a 3-octave C-major scale with arpeggio?” He phrased it like a question, as if there were even a chance I would refuse.

My fingers danced up the fingerboard of my instrument, and then back down again, same as I had done in the hallway earlier. My next scale, a flawed e-minor, brought a heavy feeling of defeat which settled solidly in the pit of my stomach. Then came sight-reading, the worst part of the audition. The judge set the tempo — surprisingly fast — and I started playing the unfamiliar notes. Nerves filled my head, leaving no room for musical thoughts. My notes wavered with uncontrollable, unintentional vibrato, and my bow arm was a mess, bouncing around on the strings. My triplets were barely that, and I ended up playing a staccato section entirely slurred. I wasn’t sure how it could have gone worse. Nice job, Sarah. Really great.

And then, there it was. My last opportunity to redeem myself. It stared at me, the black notes on the yellow paper taunting my nerves, my near-failure. For the third and fi-

nal time, I raised my viola to my shoulder, and began my solo. When I was done, the judges thanked me, and I let myself out.

I wish I could have said that my solo had been perfect. I wish I could have said that I had made music out of basic pitches. I wish I could have said that I proved to the judges why I deserved a chair in that orchestra. But I couldn't. Let's just say that my solo made my sight-reading look, well, not bad in comparison.

So there I sat, in that same spot as I had when I was full of pre-audition jitters. My mind was full of missed accents and bad pitch. The defeat from before had become a heavy rock, weighing me down, holding me in that hallway, preventing me from turning away from the twenty minutes that made me want to give up on music.

The clutter of music surrounded me, just as it did before. I pulled my case towards me and, with effort, packed away my viola. As I put away my rosin in a side pocket, a folded piece of white paper caught my eye. Although it was the last thing I wanted to do, I unfolded it. Inside was a blessing, by way of four short sentences in my teacher's neat penmanship: "Good luck today, or maybe good job. I'm proud of you for getting this far. It doesn't matter what happens (or happened) in that room. You're a great player; don't let anyone tell you otherwise. We'll work on the Bohm piece next time I see you." And with that, it was okay. I wasn't happy, I wasn't proud of my audition, but the rock of defeat was beginning to erode. The missed accents were still there, but now, so were the notes that I had played well, the pitches that had filled the room with warmth and art. With music. It was not even twenty minutes out of the eight years I had been playing.

I knew the piece. I knew I knew the piece. Really, I did.

Innocence*

by Drew Zembruski

The golden band of my youth was completed each summer by the gleaming baseball diamond. Fields of lush grass, quivering gently in an almost imperceptible breeze, sprawled off in every direction as far as my young eyes could see. There was even something beautiful in the gritty, brown teeth that resulted from the unsettled dust, kicked up by a teammate sliding into home. Pure as we were at the ripe age of twelve, the game was on a different level: the poetry of a well-timed swing, the scientific inexplicability of a devastating curveball, the tears in a grown man's eyes when his son finally found the sweet spot of the barrel, sending the ball beyond the fence, proving every hour of batting practice a success. For sons and fathers alike, the game forged friendships in a small town that endured the test of time. Baseball transcended the status of being a mere game; it became a legacy. In towns of all sizes throughout the nation, baseball continued its tradition as the American Pastime.

At two o'clock on Thursday, December 13, 2007, that all came crashing down.

“For more than a decade, there has been widespread, illegal use of anabolic steroids and other performance enhancing substances by players in Major League Baseball in violation of federal law and baseball policy,” began Senator George Mitchell. The blotchy skin of his face was stretched like a tent over the stakes of high cheekbones and preceded to taper off beneath his stiff short collar. His hairline was losing badly in the war against the forehead militia, forced to retreat to deep within its own territory. Large, coke-bottle glasses magnified the old, droopy eyes slightly wet with age to confirm that George Mitchell was, simply put, a weak, old man.

But in that single sentence, this weak, old man took back my childhood, putting not only an asterisk on Barry Bonds' home run crown but on my youth and the heroes whose heads still bobble on the shelf above my bed. He reached out with greedy hands and tarnished the once-pure diamond that no longer shines on the ring of my youth.

Calling for my mom, I settled into the couch, bracing for impact. As Mitchell talked on and on, America gasped in unison at each revealed name. It wasn't the mega-stars who got to me; it was the common players whom I once believed to be simple men accomplishing great things. Eric Gagne. Roger Clemens. Norwalk's own Mo Vaughn. Even Chuck Knoblauch, the man with whom I'm standing in a framed picture in my basement. The list spilled out of Mitchell's gray lips and into family rooms and sports bars in a slow drip of moral decline. The man was discrediting the accomplishments of not only players, but also teams and organizations, claiming that each of the thirty Major League programs, from their elite professionals to Single-A burnouts, was touched by this contamination. In the decade I grew up watching and emulating, nothing was as it seemed.

For the rest of the snow-filled afternoon, nothing could placate me. The snow-covered front yard beckoned for me to break the seal on the fresh coat of snow, to romp in delight for hours at a time with my dog, as I had every year I could remember. This year, however, Rigby couldn't romp, still too weak from the reparative surgery on his aging ACL. So we lay inside, Rigby sleeping the day away and me chewing the day's report into digestible pieces.

As Rigby heaved his cavernous chest up and down rhythmically in his sleep, my mind

began to wander to the baseball in my life. I was two years removed from the endless pressure of coaches telling me to swing like this for better results, lift this many times a week to keep up with my peers, give up other sports to avoid injury. It was easy for me to understand where the players went wrong, where they gave in to illegal help when the pressures became too much, and I remembered again why I gave up the sport that was once the love of my life.

My mind next wandered to the annual family Wiffleball games every July in Delaware. Uncle Steve the engineer, Uncle Paul the businessman, and Aunt Lauryn the Smithsonian lawyer would return each summer just as they had appeared the last, bringing with them Erin, Darren, Danny, Brian, Dean, Bekah, and Sarah to take on an unwise challenger in the Guttenplan World Series. Where the professionals would lace up tight cleats, we would kick off sandals, feeling the grass climb between our toes as we chased down the holey, white ball. Our motivation for pitcher-batter stare downs was merely to provide Aunt Judy with a better picture for next year's photo stack, not anything out of hate for our opponent. And with the green water of the Delaware River as the outfield fence hundreds of yards away, the field was nearly as endless as the game, which surpassed twenty extra innings on a regular basis.

This baseball game will continue, untouched, with Bubby and Zayde watching their nine grandchildren round first base in the pursuit of victory. With the controversies of much greater magnitude than baseball swirling like the cacophony of an amateur orchestra outside our field on the Delaware River, our game will go on how it has every year before. It will be innocent, hard-fought, and in the end never actually end, only spill over to the next year, where the score will start, and once again finish, in a tie. The tide of the series will roll on, each game building on the last until one year the wave finally hits the shore and one team emerges, sweat-stained and triumphant, and what a gloriously pure win it will be.

Remember When . . . ?

by Eugenia Logie

Summer walks. Feeding goats at Silverman's Farm. Playing "go fish" on the living room floor. Sleepovers. Sipping cran-apple juice. Eating cold vanilla ice cream with hot chocolate sauce drizzled on top. Playing "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" on the mammoth electric organ. Trick-or-Treating. Watching the magnetic ice skaters circle the mini table-top rink. Chasing the geese across the lawn into the pond. Playing store with fake money. Swimming in the pool. Listening to stories about "Mr. Fox" and "Old Mr. Turtle." Playing soccer in the basement without breaking anything. And replacing the "God" in "Oh my God" with "gosh" for Gram's sake.

Good memories.

Taking our store sign down. Cleaning out the garage. Hours spent cleaning carpets and sorting through things large and small that one accumulates over a lifetime. More garbage, more recycling, more stuff. One last tag sale in the garage. One last soccer game in the basement. Realtors. Buying flowers. Putting out candy. Seeing the basement empty and unrecognizable. "For sale" replaced by "sold." Hiding the "E + L Were Here" sign in the basement.

Sad memories.

If there is truly something that we can't live without, it is memory. You can pass stories and photo albums down, but no one can completely communicate to another what she saw or smelled or heard. Memories are your own, your private secrets. Nothing can take them away from you.

Except Alzheimer's.

My Grandma Lynn was an amazing person. She was polite, always on time, she saved her old wrapping paper, had a stash of soup "just in case," and always appreciated our birthday cards and our handmade "art."

When we realized that she was getting Alzheimer's, I could never have imagined what was to come in the next few years. I don't think Grams did either. If we had shown her a video at the beginning of the disease depicting what was to come, she wouldn't have believed it could happen to her. She wouldn't have thought that her memories – her whole life – would be slowly stripped away from her. Or that she would forget her own children. That she would forget how to clean herself, or how to use the bathroom.

But it could happen. And it did.

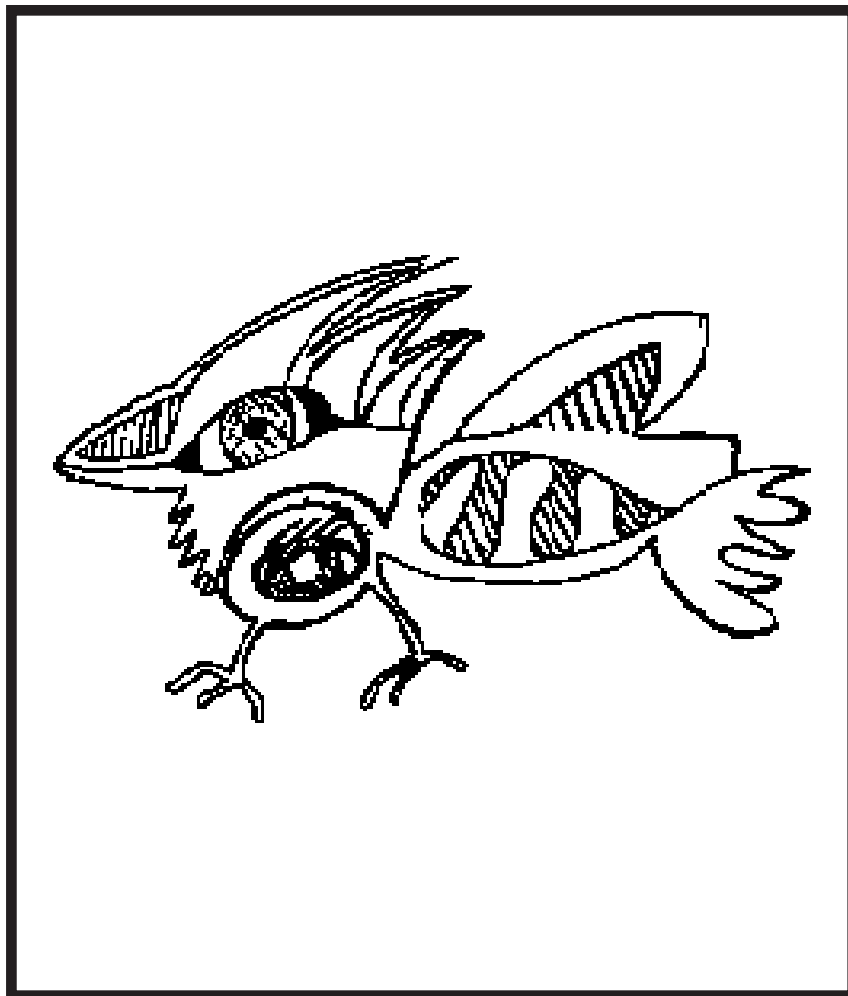
And when family members get sick with long-term illnesses, many people consider it an inconvenience and only think about the burden that is placed on themselves and their families. It was very difficult for my family to live with the fact that Grams wasn't herself anymore, especially because my dad decided to care for her in her own home instead of putting her in a nursing home full of unfamiliar faces and disorienting surroundings. But it must have been horrible to be the one with the disease. My Grams was gone a whole half a year, if not more, before her body stopped functioning. So, although we say she passed away in early 2006, it was early 2005 when she left us.

My last memories of her are unpleasant; I can still picture her withered, 85-pound frame of just skin and bones on the chair in the guest room. Yet I'll always remember her as the sweet,

loving grandmother who never swore. The worst thing she ever said was “You idiot!” when another driver pulled out in front of her. She was nice to everyone: even when she lost her mind to the disease, she never forgot to ask, “How are you doing?” And if my dad answered, “Fine,” or “OK,” she’d ask, “Only OK?” and he’d have to assure her he was wonderful. I wish she was still around today, because she’d be able to play with our puppy, Bonnie, and she’d come and watch me pitch in my softball games, and my sister could show off her artwork. But she’s no longer with us, except in my memories. As long as my mind is sound and my memory clear, I will remember her. As long as I can.

The Creative Piece

A creative piece is writing in a form other than an essay. It must stand on its own and may be nontraditional or traditional in form. Poetry, short stories, plays, fictional autobiographies, songs, and satires can all fit into this category.



Kevin Fitzpatrick '00

The Expanse: A Sestina

by Marlee Jensen

I drift off, like a baby in a cradle
And I am transported to the fog.
The dream envelops me like a blanket.
When I arrive, I am woken by a cool breeze:
It flits across my nose as I lay nestled in the grass
And I am content to contemplate the expanse.

The comfort is in the largeness of the expanse —
I am free from the bars of the cradle
Free to bury myself in the grass
Free to disappear into the fog
Free to be blown away on the breeze
Free to cover the world in a blanket.

I am adrift in the shore, adrift in my blankets.
I am set to stay forever in the dream and let the rest fall into the expanse.
Through my window I feel the breeze
And it brings me back to the cradle
And I feel smothered by a palpable fog.
My heart prays to be back in the grass.

My feet ache for the feel of the grass
And they search for it in my blankets.
My eyes look for it with them, but dizzily they only find fog.
I fall back and my arms reach for the expanse.
My knuckles crack against the bars of the cradle
And in my pain I curse the breeze.

I gather myself, and throw it into the breeze
Expecting to land safely back in the grass.
Moments pass, and I am still jailed inside the cradle;
In anger I throw off my blanket
And catapult myself into a hunt for the expanse.
I leave behind the light and dive willingly into the fog.

My mind is wrought by the fog —
It turns my thoughts from the breeze
It turns my back on the expanse
It turns my feet up from the grass
It wraps me willingly into the blanket
And all I know is the cradle.

But late at night I can see; the cradle is only fog.
It is no more than a blanket to veil me from the breeze.
I am liberated. My mind flies to the grass within the expanse.

Fall from Grace

by Zachary Frank

He dips his thumb in the oil and moves it lazily across her forehead in a cross. “Through this holy anointing, may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit.” He then anoints her hands. “May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.”

The nurse is still gone from the room, and the old woman has turned her attention towards the bluebird that has settled outside the window. He had eyed the jewelry on the table as soon as entering, and now sees his chance. Walking over to the table beside her, he brushes the golden necklace and diamond earrings into his khaki pockets. With nothing else of value in the room, there’s no reason for him to stay. He glides over and gently takes her wrinkled hands.

“Well my dear, I must be leaving, but the Lord will be with you always. God bless you.” She smiles and winces.

“Why me, Father?”

“We can’t be sure. The Lord works in mysterious ways.”

My ways aren’t mysterious. Here’s the deal. I made the world, I made everything, but I don’t control any of it really. I just sit back like an artist. and marvel at the masterpiece I have created, but I don’t change it. Yeah, I see some flaws in it, but wasn’t it Picasso who said that beauty is in the imperfections? I don’t know, I’ll have to ask him later.

Anyways, I don’t want to change it, but sometimes I have to. Generally, the universe is like an organism that has evolved to function on its own, and so it no longer needs me. That’s not to say that I don’t interfere every now and then. Know why that nice old woman had to die? Cause that was the only way to stop her from hitting Dexter Williams with her car in about three weeks. And that kid will grow up to find a cure for cancer in 2052. Kill one to save millions. Right?

There’s a problem with free will: you let people make their own choice and nine out of ten times they choose to help themselves. So when I see a person who makes sacrifices for others, I like to throw ‘em a bone every once in a while. It used to be like this with Father Jack Coulter, but not any more.

He visits three more rooms that day. Gets a watch and a Blackberry from a leukemia patient, a ring from an elderly woman with pneumonia, and a wallet with one hundred thirty-seven dollars in cash from a man who had sarcoidosis. He visits Rick Sanchez (brown hair, brown eyes, age thirty-seven) at the South Street pawn shop and gets about two hundred forty dollars for the jewelry and phone, not too bad for three hours work.

He rushes home to prepare for evening mass. It’s Saturday, and this is always the biggest crowd of the week. He loves it. The sound of coins falling with a thud into the maple wood of the donation box. The whisper of bills as they parachute into the wicker baskets of St. Bartholomew’s Cathedral.

Mass is over and he slouches in the doorway, smiling and shaking hands with the exiting crowd, a newfound excitement possessing him. When everyone has left he hurries over to the storage room and slides open the tinted glass door. Inside is a wicker basket filled with cash and envelopes. He empties some of it into a garbage bag, goes home, changes, and heads out to the

Fremont tracks with eight hundred dollars. He puts it all on Rolling Thunder to win in the third round, the odds five to one. He always bets on Thunder to win, he always wins.

But today, I'm not liking his odds. You see, Jack's lost his way. I used to let him slide on the gambling thing because he didn't keep any of the money, and would always give it to the poor or to the church. Then about four months ago he started keeping most of it, but giving whatever he had taken back to the church. But now he's on a decline, keeping all the money he wins. Last week he won twenty-seven hundred and used it all to buy a plasma TV and an Xbox. The first time in five years that nobody but Jack Coulter has benefited.

He recites his pre-race prayer and sits down in the stands to watch, a warm sensation rushing through his body causing his fingertips to throb. "Dear Lord, you have always been good to me, even though I probably don't deserve it. Just help me out one more time, that's all I ask. Just let me win and I won't do it again. I swear to you, never again."

Huhhhh... This is your last chance.

Father Jack hustles through the crowded streets of Boston, the January wind biting his exposed neck. He reaches the Lennox at midnight and enters the old brick hotel. He strolls along the newly polished marble floors, and past the reception area. He stops at the jewelry store, eyeing a gold Cartier in the display case. He barges into the store, and emerges three minutes later with the four-thousand-dollar watch embracing his wrist. He reaches the elevator and gets off on the twenty-fourth floor. There is still a good number of patrons in the bar at this hour, and Jack sits down next to an overweight businessman and his blonde escort.

He leaves the bar seventeen minutes later, after three glasses of whiskey and a brief conversation with a sixth-grade geography teacher named Heather Donovan (five foot six, short brown hair, blue eyes, long thin nose).

He waits in front of the elevator, gazing at himself in the reflective silver. His hair clings close to his square head. His eyes are far apart, but his wide nose more than makes up for it. His once muscular build has softened and years of smoking haven't served him well. As the elevator doors open he peers down at his new watch to check the time and steps through.

The officer stands outside the hotel as the body is brought out on a stretcher, enclosed in a black bag. The chief mechanic approaches him, having just arrived from his home in Cambridge.

"How bad was it?"

"Well, he fell over twenty stories and landed on concrete."

He whistles and looks down at the ground. "That elevator has always run perfectly; it doesn't make any sense. It was inspected only three days ago. And how did this guy walk straight into the shaft without seeing that the car hadn't arrived?"

"Who the hell knows?"

I do.

Sixty-Six Minutes of Rain

by Nina Corcoran

At six seventeen p.m., a cluster of storm clouds blew in to the state of Connecticut. At six twenty-two, various booms and rumbles from the sky could be heard. Then, at six twenty-eight, the first drop of rain squeezed its way through the cloud's defenses, plunging towards the ground. In next to no time, it was sprinkling itself onto everything in sight: grass, houses, water, people. It's rain, and this is its story.

At six twenty-nine, the neighbor opens her door to be greeted with overcast skies and a determined rain. She draws a breath and mutters, "Well, hello to you, too." The sticky humidity fills her lungs in an instant, a reminder of what this day brings: exhaustion, depression, and some very slow driving. She closes her eyes and exhales. Half running to her car, it assaults her Marc Jacobs raincoat. Tick, tick, tick. It smacks the plastic and, failing to penetrate, rolls down until it reaches the fringed edge and beads off. Finally reaching the shelter of her car, she grins: safe. As she settles into her seat of plush leather, a frown dampens her already gloomy mood. The rain has soaked her partially exposed Ralph Lauren sweater, seeped into her bags, and managed to somehow dampen her just-colored hair. Then it gets physical. The rain eats up her socks, burrowing itself right through the material until it's snug against the warmth of her skin. The feeling, which begins as discomfort, moves to irritation and quickly escalates to downright annoying, so abruptly that she thinks briefly about returning for a session with her brand new dryer. Scowling, she fiercely turns the key and goes on her way, all the while imagining she's crushing the rain under her tires.

At six thirty-five, Timothy smiles. There's nothing more exciting to him than seeing those little raindrops fall from above. The excitement and pride in dirtying that spotless, lemon-yellow tee gets him wound up. He jumps up and down, dancing. Quick as a rabbit, he laces his shoes, ready for action. The level of satisfaction his Olympic puddle jump will bring? Priceless. A crack of thunder echoes in his ears, and the level of happiness he feels is indescribable. Unable to wait any longer, he throws open the front door, making his way to his competition. He sprints around the front lawn, giggling in hysterics, muddy water flying everywhere. It seems a bit expected of a second grader to do so, I guess. But there's something deeper here: the challenge. The rain gives him the opportunity to enjoy, but also to challenge himself as well. All strength and energy is focused to his legs and feet, testing his athletic limits to see just how high and big he can make his puddle's splash go. Seeing it rain is a taunt, a taunt to break his last record, ignoring the inevitable stains that appear in the process. Timothy is proof that in rain is a challenge to outdo your personal best. After all, if you're too scared to jump in and make a splash, how can you ever expect to blow everyone away? As he returns to the porch, Timothy wonders if it rains in Beijing.

At six forty-two that evening, you finally give in. Tears overflow from your eyes, and cover your face in a shimmering mask of glass. Each little droplet that streams from the sky, however small, manages to take on the shape of a single tear: the very same tear that is, at this very moment, crawling down your cheeks. The tears rest on the creases of your mouth and slip onto your tongue. They taste the same as always: salty, wet, and warm, like chicken cooked in water. Only this time, they leave your mouth feeling drier than it was before. Maybe it's because you have a real reason for crying. Experiencing death is different. It's not like a break-up or break-down. It's a run through Antarctica, only you can barely walk; it's a broken record that won't stop playing in your mind; it's swimming in a pool, only you can't get a breath. But most of all, it's rain. It's little gem droplets that keep pelting your back, freezing your body, and numbing your hands. Looking out the window during a thunderstorm is always the worst for you. It's the feeling of dealing with

death all over again. Tap, tap, tap, tap - an unrelenting metronome of individual tears hit the desk in perfect timing with the rain. Unable to see things clearly, you blink away tears indistinguishable from the rain: ice cold, wet, and falling downwards without control.

At six fifty-seven, the rain beats down harder. It coats the branches, lands on the bushes, and is consumed by the ground. But what sounds dull to some is the heartbeat of life to others. It's feeding time for plants. Their elixir has been missing for days. Each droplet that lands near them is soaked up eagerly and appreciated by every little leaf and twig. Life glows all around: grass looks greener, trees more sturdy, bushes stretch out in all directions. The weeping willow appears happy for once, wrapped in blankets of rain. The oakleaf hydrangea shakes in the shower, in vain; it is beautiful. It is not a downpour of sadness, but a sprinkling of youth devoured by vegetation. From inside a branch, a bud pushes out, a pinwheel of pinks and whites. It breathes in fresh air for the first time. Suddenly, a raindrop hits. Sliding between its petals, it relishes the miracle of water and air.

At seven ten, Patricia pauses near the back door and listens to the rain beating against the deck. The sound is a drum-line heard in the distance; a pulsation as steady as the hum of a heater; a sound as crisp as the crack of a whip. She is transfixed, reminded of the older days: the walks she used to take on heated days with her husband, the evenings spent reflecting by the crackling of a fire. She remembers the treacherous walk from car to church many years ago, when it was "the worst storm Connecticut had seen." It felt then as if each raindrop were tapping upon her heart, at a constant rate. She recalls the last Christmas mass she could attend, and the last time she could walk to the market. She thinks about the different whoosh sounds umbrellas made when opened and held above her head, based on who had pushed her wheelchair that day.

"It's beautiful: the calming and relaxing vibe something so common can bring; a sound that can deliver a thousand images, a million memories, and even more connections. What a welcome miracle," she murmurs. She can only imagine what it would be like to see this latest one.

At seven nineteen, a deer pokes its head out of a small rock cave in surprise. The overpowering rush of water from the nearby stream catches his attention. Glancing at the sky, he realizes the rain's speed, which explains the extreme growth in the river's size. A squeak is heard and he looks towards the river and locates a squirrel caught in the surge, frantically attempting to claw his way out of the waves' grasp. But alas, he is no swimmer. Its current pulls him deeper into the water as the rain continues to fuel the current. As lightning brightens the scene, the deer notices a passerby observing the same commotion - a groundhog. Thunder roars. At the sound, the groundhog jumps, slips, and falls into the rapidly moving stream. A new victim for the killer rain. The groundhog's eyes widen as he searches for any way to be saved, but instead gets water splashed in his eyes, blurring his options. Relentlessly, the rain continues to gush into the stream. Both the groundhog and squirrel are nowhere to be seen. Alas, the deer sees a movement. Something brown is coming out of the water. Drenched and shivering, the squirrel shakes his coat. The deer stares as if in amazement that the squirrel made it out. But what about the groundhog? His attention returns once again to the stream. After a long while of waiting and watching, he gets cold from the beating of rain on his back.

At seven thirty, the rain begins to slow. By seven thirty-three, it's almost come to a complete stop. And by seven thirty-four, only a hazy mist remains. The storm clouds begin to blow away, carrying the rain with them. Stars appear in the darkened sky and rest seems to call everything to bed. Soon enough, the rain will return, falling downwards on everything below, and life will live on, drop by drop.

Chasing Stars and Stripes

by Daniele Caglioni

“Our fight for independence began in 1924, when the White Flag Association revolted against Great Britain. This action failed when one of its leaders, Abdul Fadil Amaz, was killed . . .”

Rat tat tat. Boom. In the middle of Abdi’s history class, the Orchestra of War, which had been playing in Sudan for years now, struck up one of their tunes of horror. The boy rolled his eyes: he had heard these songs before.

He slowly lifted himself out of his small desk and trudged out of the school, his feet numbed to the feeling of distress.

Outside it was easy to see that the Orchestra was making the most of this concert. Rebels darted through the dirt streets, yelling as they played their parts on sleek AK-47s. Eighth notes of death streamed from their barrels, punctuated by the boom of a grenade. The acacia trees, always trying to touch their creator, were once again defeated as the fires of hatred burned their outstretched hands.

But all of this was nothing new to Abdi. The rebels rehearsed at least twice a week now. Sudan was in the middle of a long and bloody war. As always, Abdi sprinted homeward past the small shops that sold everything from Korans to maize. As his slender legs glided along the streets, Abdi felt the intense heat radiating from the baked bricks of these buildings.

His onyx-black skin glistened upon his arrival home. It took him a few minutes to catch his breath, for his heart was pounding against his ribcage. When it had calmed, Abdi went into the kitchen and sat at the grainy oak table. His shirt clung to his body and adjusted to the contours of his abdomen.

“Why are you back so soon?” asked his mother, Basura. As she moved to greet Abdi, her curvaceous figure flowed and her ink-black eyes darted about in apprehension. As she spoke, her mouth emphasized each syllable of every word so that, along with her mellifluous voice, people often mistook her speech for song.

Abdi replied gruffly, “The rebels are at it again. School ended at English class!”

“Oh, don’t worry, my boy. Sheik Abdullah will resume lessons tomorrow, you’ll see.”

Abdi was not so sure of this. The sheik was very uninspiring. Who wanted to spend four hours in a room listening to a monotone voice? Not him. His saving grace from absolute boredom was the English. He had always viewed America as a nation of freedom and wonder. He had heard many stories about how buildings in New York City cut the sky and how people ran on the paved streets without having to dodge bullets or grenades. This freedom enticed Abdi; he thirsted for its language like a baby thirsts for its mother’s milk. To him, English was the key to survival.

“I ran home from school in four minutes today, Mother! That’s the fastest I’ve run in the past six months!” Abdi was also a very passionate runner. He loved how, with practice, two legs could carry a person great distances. Maybe one day, Abdi thought, his legs would carry him all the way to America.

“What’s for dinner tonight?” Abdi asked, with a hint of hope in his voice.

“Millet with carrots and onions,” replied Basura matter-of-factly.

“Why always millet and vegetables?!” Abdi thought angrily. “I know that meat is very scarce now, but can’t there be some change once in a while?”

Resigned to the fact that change was still distant, Abdi walked to his room to do his home-

work. It was very modest: the standard burnt brick walls made Abdi feel an uncomfortable sense of hopelessness: he was never going to rise from the ashes of this war, just as these soft bricks would never turn into a stronger stone. The floor of packed dirt also contributed to his feeling.

As the boy opened his English book, he saw the race flier that he had taken from school and he shivered at the prospect of having to ask his parents to run.

Almost immediately, his mother crooned, "Dinner!" By now his stomach had been growling for hours, so Abdi hurried to the table. Once there, he found his father, Ansur, already seated. His figure took up half the table. The forest that grew on his face covered his mouth so that he always seemed to grumble.

"Hello, my son," Ansur murmured. "How was school today?"

"Oh, you know, Father," Abdi sighed. "It's always the same. Today the rebels performed again, so we all had to be evacuated."

"Oh, what a shame," Ansur groaned.

Then Abdi remembered the race flier that was causing all of his anxiety. After looking at the paper more closely during his lunch break at school that day, he had found that it advertised a 5-K race hosted by the United Nations peacekeeping troop based in Juba, Abdi's town. The winner of this race would win a trip to America to go to a running camp. The race was restricted to kids ages 8 to 17, but anyone from Sudan could enter, so it was sure to be a competitive race and Abdi wanted in on the action.

So, in a cautious voice, he said, "Mother, Father, I have something to say." He took a deep breath and proceeded, "Today at school, I saw a paper on the chalkboard that promoted a local race. I want to run."

Ansur and Basura's eyes grew wide and their mouths twisted into grimaces of fury. "Absolutely not!" bellowed Ansur, the strength of his speech parting the forest.

Basura shrieked, "There are rebels out there and they could easily harm you while you run!" The cups quivered.

"But you know I love to run, and the winner gets to go to America to attend a running camp! I'm fifteen years old! I should be able to make my own decisions! I can look after myself! You must let me do this!" Abdi begged, "And besides, I've run home from school many times before and I've never been injured!"

"What difference does that make? This is your life that we're talking about!" Ansur retorted. "Surely life is more important than some silly race?"

"It's not about the running!" Abdi protested. "It's about America. The freedom. The security. The prosperity. This is my chance to experience it first-hand. I won't let you stop me!" Without another word, Abdi stormed out of the kitchen and into his bedroom, leaving Ansur and Basura speechless in his wake.

As Abdi lowered himself under the meager quilt on his cot, he heard Ansur mutter, "Silly boy," and he started to sob. It took him hours before he fell asleep in a hot pool.

The next morning Abdi awoke trembling as he remembered the previous night's confrontation. "How can they do this to me?" Abdi thought. "I won't let them take my dream away. It's what I live for. After all the studying and running I've done, they think they can just say "no"? Their words can't kill my dream."

With this in mind Abdi walked stone-faced to the breakfast table. Ansur was already there waiting to eat, but when he offered a friendly "good morning" to his son, his greeting wasn't returned. Ansur and Abdi ate their millet while Basura ate hers near the rusted iron stove. Cracked pots caked

with last night's millet still lay in a small washbowl near the entranceway.

Having finished his breakfast, Abdi briskly walked out of the wooden door, not even pausing to kiss his mother goodbye. On his way to school, he thought of how wrong his parents were to deny him of his dream. It seemed his reason for living.

His attitude changed when it came time to register for the race. During the day's lunch break, he apprehensively made his way towards the registration sheet. As he took his pencil from his jeans pocket, he suddenly felt a twinge of guilt. He knew that, by doing this, he was going against his parents' wishes. He knew that they meant well, but the lure of the dream was too strong. He signed his name on the sheet with insecure jagged letters.

The paper said that the race was on April 13, 2001. Today was March 28, 2001. Abdi only had 17 days to train. He resolved that he would practice for the race daily. Instead of going home after school each day, he would run five kilometers.

Abdi remembered that the nearest bazaar, the one with a *nan* (bread) vendor, was about two and a half kilometers from the tire swing in the schoolyard. So for the next two weeks, Abdi went for his run the moment Sheik Abdullah dismissed class. He even ran with his school pack because he knew that it would strengthen him. He slung it over his shoulder and ran to the *nan* seller. During the run, he made sure to make his strides long and lean into the hills. He kept his breathing steady and his head up. His arms never hung at his side.

After a time, he became very good friends with the owner of the *nan* kiosk, Mr. al-Fazi. Abdi explained that he was training for a race but whispered that this was private information not to be relayed to anyone. "All right, Abdi, my boy, your secret is safe with me!" the short, black man crowed. His eyes glowed as his rotted teeth shone in a smile. As Abdi turned homeward, he could hear Mr. al-Fazi chuckle in his dwarfish voice, "Oh, what a curious boy!" as he strode back into his bakery, his brown apron matted with flour.

Each day, Abdi made sure to buy some *nan* from Mr. al-Fazi so that his parents would not suspect him of anything when he came home late. "Just thought I would buy some *nan*!" he called happily when his mother asked where he had been. Then he went to do his schoolwork, making sure not to divulge the real motive behind his delay.

And so it was for 17 days until Abdi's race arrived. The start was at four o'clock p.m. sharp, a half an hour after school ended. The race would start at the center of Juba, a five-minute walk from school. Abdi decided to pack a pair of shorts and some extra water in his school pack that morning. He kissed his mother goodbye and headed to school, without even letting on that the day ahead could possibly change his life forever.

While trying to listen to Sheik Abdullah, all Abdi could think about was the race. Would he win? Had he trained enough? Even through English, these questions swirled in his head. During lunch, he hardly ate: he stared at the paper still taped on the chalkboard. It seemed to taunt him. "No, Abdi," the paper sneered. "You're not good enough for America." The boy couldn't wait to silence his demons. He knew that at four o'clock he would get his chance.

Finally, the school day ended and Abdi was free to focus on his goal. He picked up his school pack and with a face that shone with the determination of a prizefighter jogged to the center of town.

When he got there, he saw that at least fifty runners were at the start. All around him, children were warming up, stretching or yelling words of motivation. He noticed a man standing at the start line holding a gun. He wore an armored vest with a United Nations patch on it, tan pants, and a big white hat. He definitely was American. Abdi's heart went into his throat. A banner hung above

the start line. "RACE FOR FREEDOM" was written across it in large, black letters. The acacia trees stood motionless, sentries keeping watch over the proceedings. A robin's egg sky framed the radiant sun on this hot, dry day. Abdi began to warm up and after a few strides drank some water.

All too soon, it was four o'clock. Abdi, along with the rest of the racers, toed the start line. "Runners to your marks!" the official shouted. "Set . . .!" BANG! The gun went off and for a split second the start line was a graveyard as spectators waited for the first move. Then the race began.

To Abdi, it seemed as if he were running through a zoo. People screamed cries of "RUN FASTER!" and "YOU CAN DO IT!" Once Abdi thought he heard a woman's voice shriek "GO ABDI!" but the ocean of people was so vast he could not see who it was.

Upon exiting the cloud of dust, Abdi was in the front of the pack, for he had leaned into the hills and passed some runners. The drum inside his ribcage kept thundering with faster and faster rhythms. His skin was a bed of burning coals that the sun could easily turn into fire.

Even so, he still ran. Abdi's knives cut the still air while he glided down the hill. Two statues remained erect at his sides. The steady pat, pat, pat of his shoes hitting the sandy ground filled his ears.

Then Abdi saw it: the finish line. Tasting his dream, the boy sprinted with all his might towards the line. His legs moved in a blur beneath him. The rest of the pack was hot on his heels. Giving one more push, he crossed the finish line, a step ahead of the others.

In disbelief, he fell, fatigued and sore, to the ground. He had done it: he was going to America. Although his legs were reduced to jelly and his arms burned, his head felt surprisingly light, for he knew that his dream had been achieved.

In the midst of this happiness, Abdi saw them: his mother and father, whose faces were both wet and radiant with happiness. Embarrassed, Abdi walked over and whispered, "I'm sorry."

In reply his parents gathered him in an embrace and sobbed, "The dream is yours, our son. You're going to America."

Control Over Your BAC

by Rachel Ordway

Open on a small, out-of-the-way building on a country road. The sign reads "LITERARY BAR AND GRILL." A tall, thin man walks up to the door and enters.

Inside, lights are dim. A jukebox is playing the Beatles' "Paperback Writer." The man goes up to the bar and sits down beside a shorter man, who already has a drink with him.

VICTOR: I'll have a Harvey Wallbanger, please.

The bartender goes away to make the drink as the shorter man looks up.

IAGO: Do mine eyes deceive me? They do not, and yet they do. This is not Victor Frankenstein, and yet it is.

VICTOR: Good day, Iago. Self-contradictory as ever, I see. *(pauses in contemplation)* I thought you were being tortured by Cyprus officials.

IAGO: They gave me the day off. *(gulps his drink)* I had thought that YOU were DEAD.

VICTOR: *(pauses again, then shrugs)* Fair enough.

Iago sighs, then takes another drink.

IAGO: I praise the fairness of our most honest judicial system, and yet my punishment was not just. I did no wrong.

VICTOR: But you caused the deaths of . . . *(counts on fingers)* . . . of four people, three of them in high public standing and one of them your own wife!

IAGO: Well, if mine memory functions, which it does and which it does not, you yourself caused the deaths of your father, your wife, your cousin, your . . .

VICTOR: *(quickly)* Ah, y-yes, you remember quite clearly.

IAGO: But why DO we do such things?

VICTOR: Well, I myself had a deprived childhood, with only —

IAGO: I was speaking rhetorically.

VICTOR: Oh.

IAGO: *(clears his throat and settles into a speech-delivering pose)* But why DO we do such things that are not to be done? Why, indeed, does ANY man do such things that are not to be done? For if such things men were not wont to do, men would not do them,

and the world would be filled with more abundant joy and . . . a lot fewer dead people.

VICTOR: . . . Are you drunk?

IAGO: HA! (*laughs in derision and takes another swig*) Is any man ever drunk? I am not when I am. What is it that all men are drunk of? (*leans in confidentially*) POWER, my dear. Victor. Power is what men are drunk of. Power and CONTROL. Power is a thing of which men cannot have enough. Power is that thing that brings men to their graves. Oh, to control another man, to control events, is a thing of which one can never tire, that one can never hope to exhaust.

Iago suddenly thrusts out his hand.

VICTOR: What?

IAGO: Can you spare a ten-spot?

VICTOR: Ummmmm . . . sure . . .

Victor takes out his wallet and hands Iago a bill.

IAGO: (*stuffing it into his pocket*) “Thus do I ever make my fool my purse” (1.3.426).

VICTOR: . . . Did you just cite yourself?

IAGO: I did not indeed. Of course I did.

The bartender arrives with Victor’s drink, departing in favor of another customer on the other end of the bar. Victor begins to glance around nervously, as if looking for some excuse to leave, but Iago firmly grips his shoulder.

IAGO: Mine own downfall was wrought by this need for control, Victor. Control and power and desire and control. I had manipulated Roderigo so successfully that I had thought mine own DESTINY lay within the cusp of my hands, prepared to be molded into whatever shape I wished. Yes, I controlled Othello perfectly; he would never have doubted me had not that wench of mine told all at the end of ’t. I controlled them all—I controlled Michael Cassio’s employment, I controlled Desdemona’s standing, I might have controlled the entire city under the name of Othello. “What’s he, then, that says I play the villain” (2.3.356)? I do only what all men have done.

VICTOR: (*slowly*) . . . Why. . . I do believe you’re right. I, too, yearned for control, but control of a more spiritual sort: control of life and death itself. Perhaps it had been born from my mother’s death that I wished to have power over this force that had taken her away; perhaps it simply had been born from fascination with the cosmos themselves. Perhaps . . .

IAGO: Enough out of you. You’re dead.

An awkward silence ensues.

IAGO: Perhaps, plainly put, perforce mine predilection for power had purposefully preyed upon my parsimonious person as per protection of personal powers predivined from prehistory .

VICTOR: Wha—

IAGO: Alliteration. But alas, “Poor and content is rich, and rich enough;/ But riches fineless is as poor as winter/ To him that ever fears he shall be poor” (3.3.202-204). I was not content with mine own power, you see. I needs must get more. And thus I did lead the lonely Moor, the lovely Desdemona, the heartless Emilia, and Roderigo my purse to their deaths. Alas and alack.

VICTOR: Um, yes, I-I must be going.

He stands up to leave, forsaking the untouched drink at his side, but Iago claps his hand on Victor’s shoulder again.

IAGO: Deny not the truth, Victor Frankenstein. Thou art more alike to me than thou mayst admit.

VICTOR: But I’m not denying anything! (*annoyedly*) And besides, the two of us are NOTHING alike! You purposefully killed those people out of your own free will, for — for GREED! My family’s death . . . i-it was just something that happened, you see. After all, when I created that monster of mine, I had no idea that it would turn out to be a murderous beast!

IAGO: Nor did I. Hath it not occurred to almighty Victor Frankenstein that bestial Iago had not set out to kill? Oh, woe betide poor Iago! He merely found that his way could not be gotten if none were to receive knives in their backs.

VICTOR: . . . Okay, that almost made sense . . .

IAGO: Mind it not! (*grip on Victor’s shoulder tightens*) What is morality? Morality is that which men may fool themselves into thinking is a convention of society, but is truly the restriction of their own pitiful minds. Mind it not! Put money in thy purse, but mind it not! Yes, YES, put money in thy purse, so that Iago may use it for his own! For all fools are purses, vessels into which the cunning may empty their minds at will! Did Iago kill Othello, Desdemona, Emilia, Roderigo? No! . . . Well, perhaps Roderigo and Emilia, but still-eth! ’Twas the others whose vacant heads made them excellent puppets, to be strung about and moved at Iago’s will!

By this point Iago is swaying noticeably in his chair.

VICTOR: For goodness’ sake, I hope you’ve got a designated driver.

IAGO: (*ignoring him, pointing shakily at the other end of the bar, slurring his words*) You sight yonder wench at the bar, she with the creamy brown skin whom many call “Janie,” but others not?

VICTOR: Um, I suppose so. From *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, right?

IAGO: She hath been under the control of men all her life until this very day—by a farming husband who wish'd her to work, a political husband who wish'd her for an ornament, a . . . well, there's another guy, but all of them are now dead. Anyhoo, tonight she cries out her independence through intoxication.

VICTOR: . . . And your point is?

Pause.

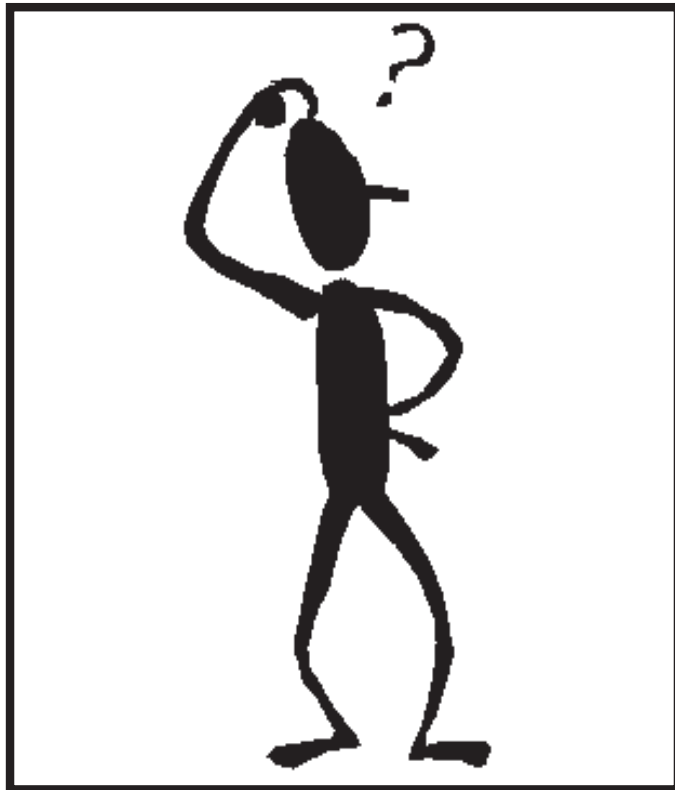
IAGO: I think I'll ask her what she's doing tonight.

He exits.

All citations from Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. New York: Pocket Books, 1993.

The Writer's Choice Piece

This piece of writing may be in any form you choose. It provides an opportunity to show your depth and range as a writer and thinker. You should select a piece that is different in theme or style from the other selections—perhaps a piece of technical writing, poetry, or a second essay or creative piece. It's up to you to decide . . .



Understanding Meow

By Justin Stone, JBHS Class of 2005 – Yale University Class of 2009

Heidi Landick calls herself a cat person, and she certainly fits the bill, but she is not, in any way, a cat lady, at least not as traditionally conceived – she is not a doddering, rheumy curmudgeon, cloistered in an attic, whiling away her senility in a rocking chair and subjecting her tabby to a relentless rubdown, but a charming woman of middle age, a devoted wife, an industrious worker, every bit as affable and voluble in her interactions with humans as in those with cats, although when both a human and a cat are vying for her attention, she is incapable of ignoring one in favor of the other. Consider the following conversation:

“Heidi, would you call yourself a cat person?”

“Yes, I am a cat person, but I am also a people person, which I’m told is—”

Reow.

(That’s her cat, interrupting)

“Hi Dribbles!”

Meow.

“I know you like to talk.”

Mrrhow.

“I know you do! – a people person, which I’m told is very rare.”

Heidi is a member of that rare breed of people who are born knowing their purpose, except, unlike most of those people, her purpose is to operate a bed and breakfast for cats. She received the relevant education as an adolescent catsitter (“far preferable to babysitting”) and then evolved into a teenage cat owner. She spent the first part of her adult life working as a vet technician and a nurse, squirreling away her earnings for safekeeping. Three years ago, inspired by an ad in the magazine *Cat Fancy*, she raided her coffers, journeyed to Old Saybrook, CT, and bought the Whiskers Inn from its previous proprietors. The Inn has catered to coastal Connecticut’s cat lovers for two decades, which, in the world of deluxe feline hospitality, makes it a primeval establishment. The cat B&B is a recent invention, and it is still uncommon – although, of course, business is business, and the relatively long-term success of the Whiskers Inn has inspired competitors (“copycats,” Heidi quips). She keeps the Inn a viable commodity, complete with a loyal clientele, because she is, by nature, flexible and generous. When she took the reins, she got rid of the waiting list and the stringent hours of operation. The basic premise is that if a cat needs a place to stay, Heidi will accommodate, even on a moment’s notice. Her doctrine comports with a storied New England tradition, probably indigenous: if you own a pet, treat it as you would treat a child, or better.

Many of the patrons of the Whiskers Inn belong to conscientious cat owners who, while on a business trip or vacation, want to be sure that their beloved mousers are relaxing in a habitat significantly cozier than the local kennel. According to its website, the Whiskers Inn endeavors to “provide an environment that enables our guests to be happy and healthy while under our care, and to return home acting as though they had never left.” In fact, some guests don’t ever leave, because Heidi is incapable of saying “no.” Whenever an owner entreats her to take in a cat, because he lacks the time, the energy, the money, or the sense of personal responsibility to care for it himself, Heidi accedes – and this does not happen infrequently. The Whiskers Inn is attached to Heidi’s home and, since she lives on the premises, she usually adopts the dispossessed cats as her own. At the moment, there are thirty-odd cats in her house and twenty-nine guests at the Inn. (She doesn’t bring home every ownerless cat; Figgles, for instance, is a “sprayer,” and, given the horrific explosiveness of his urination, he should con-

sider himself lucky to be granted amnesty at the Inn.) Nearly all the cats seem to love Heidi, partly because they can probably tell that she is a devout caretaker (dressed as she is in durable Crocs, loose pants and a Tigger sweater, and coated head-to-toe with a mane of discarded cat hair) but mostly because she loves every one of the cats. Her sincerest hope is to keep them healthy and happy and, to that end, she attends to every duty with manifest enthusiasm.

“You seem to love this. You seem engaged. Do you find it fulfilling?” I ask her. She ruminates a moment and then gives me an answer at once simple and profound and true: “Well, yes. Because I think we have a lot more to learn from cats than they have to learn from us.”

*

The most noticeable feature of the Whiskers Inn is its scent, which is a combination of poop, pee, hairballs, catnip, dozens of brands of cat food, and a soupçon of salmon. In other words, it smells like cats. That brings me to the second most noticeable feature: the Whiskers Inn has a lot of cats, all of which inhabit one big room. Carrying capacity is forty-nine felines, although residency usually hovers around thirty when it's not holiday season. The cats spend most of the day in their “condos” – 3' x 6' living spaces stacked four stories high, each containing a litter box, bedding, a basket, bowls for food and water, and some stretching room. Every so often, Heidi opens the gates of the condos and the cats are set free. The resulting spectacle is a cacophony of personalities: Kovu gallivants around; Cleopatra lies absolutely still; Soccer sits on the windowsill and watches the wild turkeys walk by; young Pyewacket scales the cat-climbers (a series of ledges at differing heights); Jack Bauer, who is horrendously uncoordinated, tries to scale the cat-climbers and fails; Toby plays with a mouse toy; Alek gets stuck in corners (he suffers from dementia); and mother-and-son Coco Chanel and Louis Vuitton, true to form, groom themselves, licking and lapping their backsides until they glisten, the two gray cats motivated to their public pageantry by Tinkerbell, the admiring spectator, who sits beside them and watches intently. (Tinkerbell is blind.) What strikes me about the scene is the utter independence of the cats; they are islands unto themselves, each pursuing a distinct course of action and ignoring everyone else's.

Cats do not merely reside in the Whiskers Inn; they also figure prominently in its décor. The wallpaper border displays cats of various shapes and sizes. Below it, a tapestry flaunts three regal cats, one silhouetted against a European quay. Heidi tracks the date by way of a cat calendar – a different photo for every day. Scattered throughout the room are wooden signs, whose messages range from the vaguely aphoristic (“Home is where the fur flies”) to the frankly hostile (“What part of ‘meow’ don't you understand?”), and even the occasional feminist polemic (“My husband says one more cat and he leaves... see ya!”). The ultimate effect of the feline adornments is that it is impossible to look anywhere in the room and not see a cat or cat representation, unless you rest your eyes squarely on the analog clock. It is adorned with twelve birds, one for each hour, and, on the hour, the bird in question emits a warbling chirp, which commands the full attention of any curious cats in the vicinity, except for Floyd, who is deaf. Aside from the birdsong, the classical music playing in the background, and the occasional rumble of a vacuum cleaner sucking up a hairball, the room is silent, owing largely to the fact that the cats are released from their cages in shifts and thus most of them, at any given time, are fast asleep. It has been said that a sleeping cat is a contented cat, and I suspect that the guests of the Whiskers Inn enjoy their stay, though I can't confirm this. (All the clients declined to be interviewed; some opted to be caressed instead.) In any case, all the cats are treated magnificently, showered with Heidi's boundless munificence and bolstered by an abundance of good food and entertaining playtoys. Recently, the cats have even benefited a bit from my presence – I'm no expert cat-handler, but I do pet compulsively, and anyone versed in the art of stroking a kitten's tummy knows that, so long as you have a few smooth fingertips, you truly can be the cat's meow.

At one point, when Persian Kovu was perched on my lap, purring agreeably as I prodded his ears, Dawn Curtis, one of Heidi's employees, said to me:

"Wow, you really like cats."

I nodded.

"What would cats do without people like you?" she asked. She removed the excrement from Toby's litter box and walked away.

I began to contemplate her question. Kovu drowsed off and I remained motionless. In my field of vision there were at least a dozen cats on recess, quietly jumping, rolling, eating, scratching, and though I had never witnessed a feline extravaganza at this scale, I was struck by the feeling that, somehow, it was not altogether unfamiliar.

*

In my formative years, my house doubled as a cat sanctuary. My parents were together two decades before they ventured to have a child, and, until I came along, they occupied themselves with felines. My mother maintains that some of her parental expertise developed through raising cats; later, she simply applied the same principles to my upbringing. (Though I am blessed with a dedicated mother, I disagree that those principles are transferable, and I have evidence. When, in my infancy, Mom needed to return to work, she hired an au pair, and the agency recommended that she write a letter specifying exactly what she expected my chaperone to do. What resulted was a lengthy document regarding the care of the resident Maine Coon cat, Crystal – for instance, how to prepare her supper of broiled fresh cod or gently steamed chicken liver, still pink in the middle – and I was relegated to a gloss on the third page: "Please bring Justin twice a day to my office so he can have milk. And don't forget to leave milk for Crystal." In truth, looking after me would require a wholly different set of principles; for instance, as Mom came to learn, I didn't like cod, I couldn't use a litterbox, and, if I started to purr, it wasn't a good sign. On the other hand, unlike child-rearing know-how, maternal affection could be transferred from one recipient to another, and so it was with little sadness that, later in life, I welcomed Crystal's ghastly demise, which occurred precisely when the plump, prim feline, prancing about a blind intersection near my house, presumed that the same manicured beauty that captivated my parents would inspire the driver of a careening minivan with winter tires and 24" rims to choose to veer toward the guardrail.)

By the time I was in first grade, we owned only one cat (loosely speaking – my father had found Cleo in the basement of his office and took her home to keep her safe), but we harbored at least seven. My house sits beside two hundred acres of forest, a habitat hospitable to wild cats and neighborhood strays. Cleo was very well fed and often took her meals outside. The forest cats, drawn in by their splendid olfaction, and further encouraged by Cleo's escalating girth, gambled that my parents' generosity would widen. They were right. We took in Jersey, Big Red, Jessica, Lonen, et alia; we gave them free rein of the property; we provided them leftover sirloin and organic milk; we kept them clean; we vetted their health; and, when Lonen became pregnant by an unknown father, we decided to care for her litter, too.

Lonen's son was called Spike, and though it was I who named him, I have no memory of my rationale (though, in retrospect, the name makes perfect sense). He was petite (even by kitten standards), clumsy, uncongenial, and endlessly talkative, his meow a shrill caterwaul, like the screech of a novice flautist, that followed me into bed and didn't leave until morning. All told, Spike was conspicuously similar to seven-year-old me, except he had it worse. I may have been a scrawny high-pitched chatterbox, a bully's bull's eye, intimately familiar with noogies and wedgies and swirlies, but I was still bigger than Spike. At first, I was merely mischievous. I'd pour chicken scraps into the dish and kick Spike away while Cleo feasted. Or I'd make a show of petting Lonen, or cradling Jersey on my lap, but I'd pay no attention to Spike. Naughtiness evolved into bona fide abuse: I'd pull his tail, clobber him with books, spray him

with a high-pressure water hose. That was nothing. One afternoon, Spike was stirred from slumber to find himself hoisted above my head, in my outstretched arms, some five feet above the ground. I don't recall what had happened in school that day. Perhaps I had been dealt a split lip, or de-pantsed at recess. In any case, my uncontrollable rage compelled me to catapult a defenseless kitten onto jagged rocks – I spiked him – and the moment that his hind legs collided with the ground, generating at once a resounding crack and a piteous yelp, the selfsame moment that Lonen, her green eyes ablaze with motherly fury, barreled toward me and sank her teeth into my shin (for she had already been de-clawed), I experienced an epiphany of unalloyed moral resonance.

As Spike hobbled away, I began to suffer from agonizing and unremitting guilt. The feeling intensified when Spike spent a day at the vet, subsided somewhat when he was miraculously released with only minor injuries, and rematerialized each time I locked eyes with a distrustful Lonen. I am still remorseful. But I take solace in the fact that I made a vow never to hurt another living thing. So far, so good. Lesson learned.

After the incident, I took special care of Spike. He spent many an afternoon perched on my lap and ate mountains of chicken. When he reached maturity, he ran off into the woods. I haven't seen him since. Lonen stuck around, but she never forgave me.

*

By my second visit to the Whisker's Inn, and because I've identified myself as a compulsive petter, I'm told I need to make some friends and I'm given a carton whose label makes this bold claim: "Cosmic Catnip is special and cats usually respond tremendously." As I deliver a fistful of amusement to the condos, I am treated to a magnificent display of affection: rubbing, rolling, licking, even, dare I say it, some furtive osculation, delivered to my forearm by Pyewacket, a kitten of ten weeks' age whom Heidi describes as "incredibly feisty." Pyewacket arrived at the Whiskers Inn by necessity. She is the daughter of a stray cat. The stray found a home but the owner couldn't afford a kitten and gave Pyewacket to Heidi. Childish spunkiness precludes Pyewacket from living in Heidi's home, so the Inn is her stomping ground instead.

Later, as I stand in the Whiskers Inn, Pyewacket is scratching at my feet. "It's time to go to the vet," Heidi announces, toting a cat carrier, but the kitten is frightened sick. She has an abnormal growth on the underside of her stomach, and though Heidi has a suspicion what it may be, she refuses to publicize her theory before she consults the professionals.

While Pyewacket is at the vet, one of Heidi's employees and I stay back and man the Whiskers Inn, ready and alert in case something goes wrong. But nothing does. The cats do what they always do: sleep or play, minding their own business.

Heidi returns with grim news. Pyewacket has a hernia; a clump of bowel has protruded through her abdominal wall, and she will need surgery within a fortnight. She's not even two months old. To help ensure the operation is successful, Heidi will have to fatten her up by about half a pound – lots of double portions. The kitten scampers around and yowls, but then comes to a rest against Heidi's leg.

The truth is, if Pyewacket lived in the wild, she would be dead in a matter of months. That is the natural order of things. But at the Whiskers Inn, I think they will be just fine – both of them, the kitten and Heidi. Because Heidi has a stake in this, too. After all, she is a cat person. What I mean is that she is a good person. She says that cats helped make her this way, that they taught her to be patient, to be resilient, to love unconditionally. She learned well. Now she is clipping Pyewacket's toenails; now she is petting Pyewacket's head; now she is clutching Pyewacket in her arms, hugging her, and Pyewacket is purring gratefully. Heidi is holding her calling and it is calling back.

The Timed Piece

This piece is a timed exercise written during a forty-minute class period. You will be provided with a choice of writing prompts. In its original form, the piece is submitted handwritten and unedited.



The Waiting Game

by Catherine Cuteri

As I glance at the twisted image to my left, my mind sees a man struck with pain sitting on a monstrous ticking clock; he watches and waits on his upcoming fate. Surrounded by murky blue water and only supported by a ticking bomb used to measure the days of our lives, this picture is the essence of fear. Purgatory. Seeing both possibilities, the faithful and the fatal, and not having any clue where to go. Almost grasping either extreme, he's always out of reach. Troy Maxon of *Fences* is this man and purgatory is his life. Stuck between two opposite lives but never really grasping either, he is simply stuck. Bouncing back from good to evil, honest to lying, ambitious to pessimistic, Troy spends his life watching the possibilities of what his life means.

The good Troy Maxon, the honest, working father and baseball superstar, sees himself at the top of the tree, reaching towards the bright heavens of the sky. In the image this breaking of sky is marked by the small but vibrant white light shining straight through the clouds, giving a spark of hope to the otherwise gloomy landscape. Right up the tree and almost close enough for Troy to touch and reach, it always is just too far and merely teases him with a taste. Troy Maxon had many good streaks in his life. He may have started out on the streets and gotten into some trouble, but he came out of it with a passion and direction. Due to boredom and angst during his jail time he discovered his passion of baseball. It was a noble thing to be good at and something in his life in which he could find pride; but instead of fully reaching to the "heavens" he was just too short. He didn't make it to the Major Leagues and lived a life of asking "what ifs?" A life where he was stuck only seeing the good that was possible, but couldn't actually get there.

The bad Troy Maxon, the lying, cheating, drool of a man, sees himself at the pitch-black collection of nothingness positioned straight down the steep slope of the bark of the tree. Still seated on his giant ticking clock, feet dangling restlessly in the water, the impatient man also sees the possibility of his life resulting in never-ending depths of Hell. No one can deny Troy Maxon was a crook. As a young man he stole and murdered a man, and even spent time in jail. Just grasping the depths of doom, he also cheated on his wife, Rose. Surely, this man sounds like he was on the fast track to an after-life of no good. But is he for sure? Yes, he stole and killed. But he did it for his own survival. He wasn't a dangerous mad-man strolling the streets at night for no good; he was a scared and parentless adolescent praying he might survive. Once again, Troy Maxon is just beyond the line of an extreme.

So what is better: living like Troy does, immersed in a real-life conundrum, or meeting real fate, falling face first into an unknown ending, even if it is the black hole of Hell? In my opinion, seeing Troy practically chained to the ticking clock of uncertainty, I'd opt for Hell. Living life like Troy does, stuck in an endless ocean of doubt and confusions, sounds to me like not living life at all. The Hell at the end of the tree may be all it's cracked up to be, the disastrous underworld, but how different is that from Troy's life now? The world of giant clocks and murky waters is a world I hope to avoid forever.

Untitled

by Will Rutledge

“I’ve got a man in England who buys my clothes.’ I believe those were her exact words,” said my wife, Linda, briefing me on her encounter with our brand-new neighbors.

“Well, I’m sure they are nice people,” I tentatively muttered as I looked out the window and juxtaposed their mammoth house against our small, antique house where I lived as a boy. “I’m going to go check and see what Katie thought.”

As I walked into my only daughter’s room, I tripped over what seemed like a mountain of textbooks. I looked at her and it appeared she was reading a horribly boring book titled *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. “How’s the book, Katie?”

“Really terrific! I thought from the cover I would hate it, but it is a great read, so far. I’ll let you know when I’m done so you can read it!” she exclaimed with delight on her face.

“Sounds great! I’ll absolutely give it a shot. Hey, Katie, you went over to the new neighbor’s, right?” Katie peered up from her book with a peculiar look on her face. “How was it?” I asked, a little curious.

“They were strange. Their lawn is impeccable; the greenest grass I have ever seen. They have these gold shutters which must have cost more money than our whole house. The man of the house was wearing a suit to help move boxes. Oh yeah, the weirdest part: they had custom boxes. I asked why and they gave me a look of horrible disdain. It was just so . . . what is that noise?” Katie and I walked down the hall and peered out the window to see the latest addition to the neighborhood: a keypad-controlled gate with what appeared to be the family’s crest. “See what I mean?” snickered Katie.

For the next two months, I most certainly did. People were always coming to see their house, like it was some extravagant tourist attraction. Some even left letters of how wonderful the house looked: the shutters, the grass, the gate, the mailbox from some European artist, the gigantic chandelier propped in front of the monstrous front window.

As more people came to visit their house, more people started abusing ours. It wasn’t hard to hear the laughter of others as they ridiculed the mailbox my grandfather and I had constructed when I was a kid, or my wife’s compost pile.

Not only were we being treated poorly by these constant tourists, but the neighbors themselves took advantage of us. I would often look all over for my morning paper and not find it until that night when I watched a car roll out of their driveway and into ours, with a little blue bag flying from the window.

Then one evening my wife awoke to the sound of sirens. We got out of bed and watched an ample number of officers storm on into our neighbor’s fancy home. A few moments later, I heard a cracking noise from outside. So I went to check it out. I opened the door and there stood an officer.

“Sorry about your step, sir, I didn’t mean to do it at all, it just gave out. The station will send someone to fix it in the morning.” The officer reported quite apologetically.

“Not a problem,” I responded. “What is going on over there?”

“Oh, well I’m not at liberty to say, sir, but I just came over to let you know everything is all under control and there is nothing to be worried about. Thank you for your time and have a good night.” And as he began to head back to his car, he said, “Oh sir . . . very nice compost pile.”

“Thanks, officer. Goodnight.” And I closed the door. The next day at school, Katie found out everything: the husband had been beating the wife and their daughter had called the cops. As the police had searched their house they had found many illegal business plans.

“They were careless people,” my daughter said as she climbed up the stairs to her creaky room.

Yin and Yang

by Evan Streams

We all know about Yin and Yang. The most common examples of Yin and Yang – indeed what most people see as the definition – relate to the balance between good and evil. I don't think that Yin and Yang is defined as good and evil. I think that good and evil are merely an example of Yin and Yang. To me, Yin and Yang are things that cannot exist without each other: one cannot have up without down, and there cannot be down if there is not up. If there is no inside there can be no outside; but if there is no outside, there can be no inside. And, of course, there cannot be good without evil, and there cannot be evil without good.

The importance of this definition is that life is about Yin and Yang. Yes, life and death cannot exist without each other, but I also mean to say that life has to be based on Yin and Yang, because one cannot have a good life without balancing Work and Play, Hope and Fear, Support and Independence, Health and Indulgence, and the Future with the Past.

Someone can strike a balance between work and play; one can put in time at one's job and do good work, and be successful, but then take some time to do what one personally enjoys. That's how a good life works. If one plays too much then one could end up in a small, uncomfortable apartment, albeit one with a killer gaming setup. The workaholic whose double-overtime helps his family afford a nicer house or nice things may be providing for his family, but he never sees them. It starts here in school. There are kids who take three AP's and are the editors of the newspaper and go to extra courses over the summer and do cross country and are taking piano lessons, but they also then make room for studying for finals and doing well on their portfolios by drinking Mountain Dew all day and sleeping four hours a night, six on the weekend. Then they finally snap and stop working or start crying or both. On the other hand, there are kids who go home and relax, then relax some more, then maybe do one assignment, or maybe just watch another episode of *One Tree Hill*. Or perhaps they spend every day at the mall, or the movies, or skating, or whatever, but schoolwork somehow falls through the cracks. The challenge of high school isn't just doing the work, it's doing the work well without doing yourself in. The successful student need only pour his soul into his work. The happy student needn't do anything. But to be happy and successful, the student must balance work and play.

As important as finding a middle ground between work and play is finding a balance between health and indulgence. I know plenty of adults who are obsessed with being thin or healthy, or both, though sometimes the two can be mutually exclusive if a person doesn't get enough calories or gets too many nutrients. Again, a balance is needed. Even if one has the self control to have not even a single slice of her favorite cake, half the time she ends up just breaking down and eating a tub of Cool-Whip a day later. My parents have found the balance: they don't drink soda, but every once in a while, if a dessert is really good, then even if it's double fat fudge with a dash of salt, they'll eat a bit, and savor it. My mom almost always makes dinner for us. Yet, while I don't find myself eating fried chicken, bacon, and filet mignon every night, we

never eat a “diet” repast with a flavor like cardboard and subtle nuances of packing peanuts. If you eat sweets all the time, you may well end up with cavities or diabetes. But if someone can't have delicious salt water taffy in a candy factory, he isn't living!

Our mouths are good for more than just eating, of course; they're really convenient tools for talking too! It's great having friends to talk to. Supportive people who care, or who are just fun to spend time with, aren't just good, they're necessary! No man is an island, after all. And loneliness is such a depressing experience (it is also the most common human emotional experience) that we need friends and support to function. There is, however, a dark side. I would submit something called histrionic personality disorder. Some of the main features are extreme social neediness, constant melodrama, codependence, and an unhealthy degree of extroversion. Less extreme is simple codependency. But in general, if someone can't spend an hour alone to write a paper, or needs constant praise and validation from her peers, she'll never get anything done, including seeking personal fulfillment.

I could go on. Optimism and Pessimism, Trust and Secrecy, Grief and Celebration, Routine and Change, are all Yin and Yang. Poor choices in life are poor balances between the two halves in some aspect of Yin and Yang. I see it all the time, and I myself struggle with finding the balance in some things. Still, in the interest of finding a balance between being thorough, and being concise, I must at this point finish, concluding by saying always look for the balance, for it is there that we all might find the true path to happiness.

