ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Shelby Lennon
Mindy Prieur
Cassie Regan
Editors-in-Chief

Cynthia Walton
Faculty Advisor

Shelby Lennon
Cover art

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The Heron

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The Heron is an annual literary journal that focuses on the writing community at Great Bay Community College. Poetry, fiction, non-fiction and artwork produced by students, faculty and staff are collected on a rolling basis.

*These works are from college students and are intended for a mature audience
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alone on the Edge of Nowhere</td>
<td>Jayson Ducharme</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:10</td>
<td>Grace Gillies</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank You</td>
<td>Gabrielle Rogers</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Village Idiot of Boston</td>
<td>Sam Davison</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Emergence of Zika Virus</td>
<td>Brooke K. Hall</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light in the Dark</td>
<td>Hailey King</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Suzi F. MacDonald</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Little “Nook”</td>
<td>Stephanie Winokan</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee Shop Stream of Consciousness</td>
<td>Gabriel Wensley</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>Shelby Lennon</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoke, Fire and Ashes</td>
<td>Grace Gillies</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Life of Michael Anthony</td>
<td>Mindy Prieur</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Ride through Time</td>
<td>Nicole Lavoie</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heartfelt Lies</td>
<td>Hannah Rose</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shattered: A Self-portrait in Film</td>
<td>Gabriel Wensley</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Inns</td>
<td>Gabriel Wensley</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Benefits of Spaying and Neutering Cats and Dogs</td>
<td>Brooke K. Hall</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathe</td>
<td>Gabrielle Rogers</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through the Eyes of a Child</td>
<td>Shelby Lennon</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near Death Experience</td>
<td>Hailey King</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Did I End up Here?</td>
<td>Enrique Murray</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Thought</td>
<td>Grace Gillies</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>Jacynth Abasciano</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soothing Sounds of the Wilderness</td>
<td>Hunter Glass</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Around the Riverbend</td>
<td>Hailey King</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addicted to the Stars</td>
<td>Gabriel Wensley</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchors</td>
<td>Gabrielle Rogers</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fur Ever Love</td>
<td>Stephanie Winokan</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Untitled by Shelby Lennon................................................................. 77
Perspective by Casey Marfongelli...................................................... 78
40 Hertz by Gabriel Wensley............................................................ 79
Rape: Just a Mistake by Brooke K. Hall............................................. 82
Hold On by Grace Gillies............................................................... 87
Seaside by Nicole Lavoie............................................................... 88
The Frailty of Safety by Isabel DiMambro......................................... 89
The Road Trip by Hailey King........................................................ 91
Sleep Well by Gabrielle Rogers....................................................... 95
Orchestra by Jacynth Abasciano...................................................... 96
Painful Grip: In Film by Gabriel Wensley......................................... 97
Return Home by Gabriel Wensley.................................................... 98
Which One of Us is Actually More Poor? By Brooke K. Hall............. 99
Ornamented Illusions by Hannah Rose........................................... 104
Cage the Beast by Colleen Fournier............................................... 105
The Place Where Olive Trees Grow By Grace Gillies......................... 107
Scene over Great Bay and the Trestel Bridge by Julia Dugas.............. 108
Recollections of an Ocean Child by Molly Kephart............................ 109
Hold Me by Gabrielle Rogers........................................................ 112
Humanity by Gabriel Wensley....................................................... 113
An Unwanted Learning Experience by Dylan O’Connell.................. 115
Lost River by Shelby Lennon......................................................... 118
My Turn by Gabrielle Rogers....................................................... 119
Subconscious by Gabriel Wensley.................................................. 120
The Birth of a Colonial Village by Cassie Regan............................. 122
Alone on the Edge of Nowhere
by Jayson Ducharme

The winter sea was calm. The black phantom shape of a cargo ship appeared glistening along the horizon against the white speckled stars that dotted the night sky. Samuel Kemper watched its dark shape for some time through his thirty-power telescope, adjusted the frequency on his radio—just in case—and then concluded that it was perhaps four thousand tons.

Tugging on the front of his coat tightly against the freezing breeze that seeped in through the thin windows, he marked what he had seen down in his log, sat back in his chair and checked his watch. It was one thirty in the morning. He was perhaps the only soul awake in New Castle and Portsmouth, but that was something he was okay with. Loneliness was not just something he was used to, but felt that he deserved.

Deciding that he’d had enough of the cold, Sam stepped out of the cabin and went down the steel spiral staircase that lead down to his living quarters—an oppressive room with a stove, minifridge, cot and an ancient television set that had terrible reception and no color. He put some coffee on and inspected the machinery that kept the light atop the tower lit and spinning, oiled the gears, refilled the gasoline, then took the decanter of fresh coffee with him back upstairs. There were still seven hours left before he could sleep.

Eight years. For eight years, this world was all that he’d known—this concrete cylinder sitting at the edge of a steep rocky cliff overlooking the vast and cold Atlantic. He kept himself busy with his duties to keep his mind from wandering. His thoughts carried him to places he wished not to go, and it was when he was taken away to these dark places that he wished more than ever for someone to save him.

That wasn’t possible, however, so he let his pain fester within his chest like a boil, ignoring it as best as he could, and embraced the sad existence he now lived. Samuel Kemper was the loneliest man on the planet. This was his punishment—this lighthouse. It was his prison, the cross he carried upon his back and the crown of thorns that donned his head.

“Sam?” the radio beckoned. “Hey buddy, you sleeping up there?”

Sipping coffee from the decanter, Sam adjusted the knob on the radio so that the transmission came in a little clearer. “I’m here, Jim.”

“Got worried, I didn’t see the light on in your cabin that well. Thought maybe some deep sea creature finally got to you.”

Through the telescope Sam saw a one hundred and twenty foot schooner about a half mile from shore—the Audrey Gail, captained by a guy named Jimmy Tallon. Jim was a lobsterman from Kennebunkport who
passed by the lighthouse on his way to Kittery, and he was one of the few seamen who made small talk with Sam when they passed within radio frequency. “I’m here. Sadly, no sea monsters.”

“You say that like you’re disappointed.”

Maybe I am, Sam thought. “I’d just be missing some excitement every once in a while.”

Jim chuckled. “Hey, I’m gonna get a decent paycheck for my haul this month. You wanna meet up at the state line so we can finally meet face to face for once, maybe hit a few bars?”

“Nah, Jim. I can’t leave here.”

“C’mon, Sam. You always says that. You’re a prisoner in that friggin’ thing. Get out sometime, will ya?”

Samuel cleared his throat. “I’ll think about it, Jim.”

“Yeah, you always says that. Take it easy, Sammy.”

Sam turned the radio off and pressed his face into his hands. If only Jim knew just how badly he wanted to leave, to have just one person tell him, “It’s okay, it’s not your fault.”

At sunrise Sam killed the light and went downstairs to his quarters to write his final report, clean up a bit, inspect the machinery and then lay down to get some sleep. He stared up at the wooden ceiling, feeling his dark thoughts carry him away like they always did, and he turned onto his side to gaze at the framed photo of a girl on his bedside table. She smiled at him, with her mother’s long blonde hair and her green eyes, and he wept quietly for a few moments before turning off the light and waiting until sleep finally came and made the bad thoughts go away.

***

The sun went down but the world hadn’t gone completely dark yet. Sam observed the rising tide slamming against the rocky cliff at the foot of the lighthouse. By then he had already finished morning prep and ate breakfast, and was sitting up in his cabin waiting to turn the light on when he observed something peculiar at the edge of the cliff. At first, he wasn’t sure what it was from the distance—it just looked like something weird was moving around down there.

Taking his telescope and pointing it down, he saw that it was a woman, wearing nothing but a white dress. She was shivering violently, rubbing her arms, and pacing back and forth near the chain-link fence that ran along the edge of the cliff.

“Oh Christ,” Sam grunted, thinking he knew exactly what was happening. He stood up and made his way down to ground level.

The woman—who looked no older than twenty—hadn’t noticed him when he stepped outside and started approaching her. It was freezing out, at least thirty degrees. She stood before the chain-link fence, deathly pale and shaking, and her fingers were laced through the fence diamonds, staring off at the ocean. Then,
she began to climb.

“Hey lady!” Sam started running to her. “What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

The woman ceased climbing, looked over her shoulder at him, and cast a fierce glare at him. “Get the hell away from me!”

Sam halted about five feet away from her. “Lady, I don’t know what the hell you’re going through, but there’s always another way. You’d be insane to do it. Hell, you’re already insane being out in the middle of winter wearing nothing but a dress.”

“Yeah, well, that’s what they all say, isn’t it?” she said, and then her voice rose in a mimicking tone, “‘There’s always another way,’ ‘You don’t have to this,’ ‘Think of all the people who love you.’” She spat. “How could you ever understand? I don’t want to be here!”

“What you’re doing is going to be permanent.”

The woman ignored him and continued climbing.

“Hey!” Sam ran to her, grabbed her by the hips just as she was reaching the top and yanked her down. The two fell on top of each other onto the wet ground.

“Let me go!” the woman shouted. “Help! I’m being attacked by a creep!”

“Jesus H. Christ, what the hell’s gotten into you?”

She tore herself off him and started screaming at him. “You ruined it! How am I ever going to be able to try this again? You asshole!”

“Ruined? I ruined you killing yourself? Lady, you need to get your thoughts straight.”

The woman screamed at him again, and then started to sob. “I’m lost,” she said. “What am I going to do? Where am I supposed to go?”

Sam looked up at the top of the unlit lighthouse, then at the late evening sky starting to go black, and then looked back at the woman. “Look lady, if you don’t want to talk to me, then at least let me drive you home.”

“I don’t have a home anymore. I’ve lost everything and it’s all my fault. Richie, the baby, our home, my parents, my friends—everything.” She buried her face into her hands and her shoulders heaved. “I’ve been sleeping on park benches for days. I threw all my clothes out this afternoon. I have no more food, no money. I have nothing. I just want to die.”

Sam’s heart dropped into his stomach. For several moments, he was unable to put together a cohesive thought that would remedy the situation. He took off his coat, put it around her and walked her towards the lighthouse. “Listen, you’re going to freeze to death out here. You’re coming inside.”
“I’m a burden.”

“No you’re not. You need help, all right? We’re going to figure this out. You don’t have to die.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s going to be okay,” he said. It was the only thing he could think of to say. “Everything is going to be all right.”

***

Sam set the heat high and wrapped the woman up in a blanket and sat her down on his cot. She sat, her white eyes staring blankly ahead and her teeth chattering. Sam prepared warm coffee and gave a cup to her.

“What’s your name?”

“Darlene.”

“I’m Sam.” He sat in a chair across from her. “Are you aware of just how serious what you were about to do is?”

“Perfectly.”

“Why?”

“Why do you care?”

“Because I don’t want you killing yourself as soon as I turn my back.”

“I made a stupid mistake,” Darlene said, shaking her head. “I had everything. Richie—we’ve known each other since high school. We got married and I got pregnant, and we bought a house together. I thought I was happy. I really did. But deep down, I was terrified. I’m only twenty, you know. It suddenly dawned on me how young I was, and what I was about to do to my life.” She paused, and a bitter look appeared on her face. “I was scared, okay? I thought my life was ending. I ran away.”

“You left him, with the baby?”

A defiant look appeared on Darlene’s face. “You have no right to judge me, you know,” she said. “You’re the one who kept me from—”

“I’m not judging you, Darlene. Keep going.”

She sighed. “I got rid of the baby. And I met another guy. We drove up the eastern seaboard together until we reached Boston, and then up to Manchester. Then the whole cycle was about to start again. I was going to get pregnant, I was going to help buy another house, and I was going to settle down again. I knew it, and I got scared away again.” For a long time, she paused. “And now I’m here. Are you happy? Do you enjoy listening to how much of a horrible person I am, Sam?”
Sam said nothing. He sat, half hidden in shadow, looking down at his cup of coffee. “I’m not exactly the best person either, Darlene.”

“Is that so?” Darlene said. “Is that why you hole yourself up here in this miserable lighthouse? It looks like you live here, with the TV, fridge, cot. Do you even leave? Do you live for anything outside here?”

“Grocery shopping, sometimes the movies, but that’s it.”

A dark smile came across Darlene’s lips. “So, this is your own way of committing suicide, then. Just sparing the world the burden of your existence.”

“Something like that.”

Darlene nodded, then took a moment to look around the room. She saw the framed photograph of the girl on the bedside table. “And I’m assuming it has something to do with that, yeah?” she said, pointing. “Daughter or something?”

Sam shook his head, turned his chair towards his desk and rested an elbow on it. “Not anymore.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I made a mistake.”

“What kind of mistake?”

Sam took his hat off, ran his fingers through his hair, put the cap back on. “That’s Allison. She’s still out there in the world somewhere, far away from where I am now. I’ll never hear from her again.” He lit a cigarette. “I was a horrible father. Her mother died not long after she was born and throughout her childhood it was just me and her. I was only seventeen when we had her, and before she was born I had all these big dreams and all these things I wanted to do with my life. All of it was shattered after she was born, and I resented her for it. I worked sixty-five hours a week, lost my youth, and couldn’t have friends or girlfriends. I openly hated her. I drank too much and neglected her and told her straight to her face as she was growing up that I wish she’d never been born.

“Now… the years have gone by. I’m older now, and I’ve realized how much of a mistake I made doing that to her. She was my greatest accomplishment, and I hadn’t even realized it until it was too late. And I failed her. Now she’ll never speak to me again. With good reason, I suppose. She’s grown up, living with some guy around Manchester. The last I spoke with her was a few years ago, and she told me just how she felt about me. I denied her a childhood and a father figure. She doesn’t call me ‘dad’ or ‘father’ anymore. I’m just ‘Sam’ and that’s okay, because I don’t deserve anything more than that. I wasn’t a father to her. I was a monster.”

Darlene remained silent throughout this. After he finished, neither spoke for some time, and a discomforting silence grew heavy between them.

“I guess we’re both the scum of the earth,” Darlene finally said. “What would you say to her if you
could talk to her now?”

“I’d tell her that I was an evil man and that there’s nothing I can do to make up for what I had denied her. Even if she wouldn’t forgive me, to at least tell her that I was sorry would be enough for me.” He took another drag from his cigarette. “People like me don’t deserve to live among good people, so I stay here and watch the ships, and I make sure the world doesn’t ever have to know about me.”

“You really believe that, don’t you?”

“Why shouldn’t I?”

“You kept me from killing myself.”

Again, silence arose between them. A cylinder of ash broke off the tip of Sam’s cigarette and landed on his pant leg. He brushed it off. “I guess that’s something,” he said.

Darlene set her coffee aside. “Sam, I once read a story about a man who seduced a woman and then abandoned her. Years later, he was called to jury duty and found the person he was condemning was the same woman he’d abandoned years before. She had become a prostitute and killed her pimp. Stricken with grief, and feeling responsible for the path she wound up on in life, the man vowed to go to prison with her as penitence.”

“What’s your point?”

“No matter what, we’re human,” Darlene said firmly. “We do things we’re not proud of. There is no such thing as a saint. We wrong each other all the time, for reasons both significant and blitheringly stupid. Is it possible to live a life without making mistakes or hurting anyone?”

“No, but the magnitude of what I’ve done to my daughter will affect her life forever.”

“Yet you’re still here, and despite having done wrong, you’re still able to do good for this world. You can still make a difference in people’s lives, even if it’s not your daughter’s. You made a difference in mine just now.”

Sam raised an eyebrow at her. “You’re speaking awfully optimistically for a girl who was just about to throw herself off a cliff.”

“I have my reasons for being here, Sam,” Darlene said, sitting back into the shadows. “We all have reasons for being anywhere at any time. You made a horrible mistake, but locking yourself up in your own penitence here in this hunk-of-crap lighthouse isn’t going to correct that mistake. Our mistakes stay with us forever, but the differences we can make in the world are endless. It may not bring your daughter back, and she may never forgive you for it, but you can still do good in this world to make up for all the mistakes you’ve made that have hurt others. It would be a waste not to if you’re still alive.”

“I don’t get you. You were just about to kill yourself and now you’re lecturing me like some preacher.”

“Just hear me out, Sam. Are you sorry for what you did?”
“Not a day goes by that I don’t wish I could have been different for Allison. Every day I wish I could tell her that I’m sorry.”

“Then you have humility. That proves what you are capable of. I made a mistake too, Sam. I can never go back from it now. And I want you to know that you still have a chance to redeem yourself.”

Sam scoffed, stood up and dismissively waved his hand at her. “Enough with the sentimentality. Look Darlene, I’ve accepted the fact that I can’t ever take back what I’ve done. I appreciate your sentiments, but it’s not for me.”

“Everything happens for a reason, Sam. I’m here for a reason and we met for a reason.”

“Enough. Just sleep, okay? Tomorrow I’ll take you to a shelter. I have to turn the light on and go back to my post—I’ve neglected it for too long.”

Sam started up the staircase leading to the top of the lighthouse, but when he was a few steps up, Darlene stopped him: “Wait, Sam.”

Sam stopped, glared at her. “What do you want?”

Darlene remained in the shadows, but her green eyes were visible, gazing at him. “No matter what happens, Sam, don’t forget what I just told you.”

“Uh huh.” Sam proceeded up the stairs. “Goodnight.”

***

At one point in the night, Sam fell asleep. When he woke, he found that daybreak was arriving. The sky was still dark blue and the sun was still hiding, but its light began to uncloak the world.

“Shit.” Sam checked his watch. He’d been out for three hours. Feverishly, he checked his radio and found that there were no messages, then wrote down a few things in his log and made his way down to his quarters.

The bed was empty. Darlene was nowhere to be seen. Sam set his logbook down and nervously wiped his lips. “Darlene!”

No answer.

He realized in retrospect how cold and cruel he had been to her the night before to everything she had told him. She had expressed some very personal ideas to him and he had just ignored and even shamed her for it. It occurred to him what she may have done while he was upstairs.

“No,” he whispered, terror rising in his chest. He remembered the last thing she said to him: “No matter what happens, remember what I just told you.”
Sam stormed out of the lighthouse and flew to the fence overlooking the cliff, looking down at the white foam of the ocean against the rocky shore.

“Darlene!”

He climbed the fence and leapt over to the other side, and then carefully navigated down the rocks, avoiding seaweed and moss on the way, calling out Darlene’s name.

It was only when he was about ten feet away from where the rocky terrace met the water did he see the familiar white dress caught between two rocks. Sam rushed to her, nearly falling down several times as he went, and upon arriving at the body he discovered that his gravest suspicions were confirmed. Yet, upon examination, what he found was not what he had expected—not completely, anyway.

Darlene’s body was not fresh. In fact, it was shriveled and leathery like that of a mummy, and the white dress she wore was tattered and stained from months of exposure to the elements. Darlene had been dead for a long time.

The conversation he shared with her in his quarters earlier ran through his mind, and he sat by her and remembered the last thing she had told him. When it all finally made sense to him, he pressed his palms to his eyes and began to weep quietly.

“I’m sorry, Darlene,” he told her, “but thank you for reaching out to me.”
10:10
by Grace Gillies

You, you see the beggars huddled round I I see a council
of Kings and Queens, Mages and Warriors Spirits of whom
withstand this twisted game
but find its beauty in its devastating treachery.

Their eyes hold the stars;
and galaxies of universes far away they, the beggars,
the students,
and the masters, are all that is
and all that could be in but a reflection
of one moment of all humanity.
Thank you for keeping me from
shattering when I was breaking
Thank you for keeping my world from
crumbling when it was quaking
Thank you for staying by my side when
the path wasn’t lit
Thank you for giving me the motivation
to go on when I was ready to quit
Thank you for giving me hope when
I had none
Thank you for staying by my side when
the world decided to run
Thank you for making the bad days okay
But most importantly thank you
for never going away
“When it rains, it often pours,” is a saying we’ve all heard. However, the entirety of that statement didn’t make sense until I experienced the most trying day of my life, where every little thing that could have gone wrong did, ending with me chasing a tow truck down the street because I had left all my money in the broken-down car that had set off an exhausting chain of events.

The day was supposed to be simple. I’d go to Boston with my best friend, re-energize in the fast-paced, innovative momentum of the city, eat lunch, buy trendy clothes, and go home and apply my new outlook on life to my current life that was in need of a little bit (a lot) of sprucing up. Pretty easy, right? Well that day was probably lived by somebody, but that somebody was most definitely not me. The day that was supposed to breathe new life into me, somehow left me feeling suffocated, idiotic, and envying the man across the street who had just stepped in chewed gum that had melted on the hot sidewalk.

My car broke down in the heart of Boston. As I waited for the tow truck to come to the rescue, a cop came and gave me a $100.00 parking ticket, despite the fact that my hazard lights were on, and I looked like I was about to go off. I can see why she’s a cop and not an accountant. She clearly can’t add two things together, that being the broken-down car and myself sitting there stranded and in distress. Maybe she thought I was an Amish person in awe, staring at a vehicle that didn’t need a horse to function. Her logic (or lack thereof) was beyond me. At least I had my best friend there, who saved my ass time and time again. I felt useless. My phone died; thank God she had hers. My card got declined; she whipped out her VISA. The convenient store was cash only, and she pulled out a twenty-dollar bill. It was like she was a contestant on The Biggest Loser, and I was the 160lbs of extra weight she had to lug around, trying to lose.

We made our way to the ATM to buy train tickets back to our hometown, right after the tow guy came to take my car away. I opened my wallet and frantically started searching for my debit card, as if I were a mother who had just lost her baby in a large crowd. So, in my beige and light blue saddle shoes that I only wore on special occasions, I sprinted down the block in order to flag the tow truck down. Once I did, I hopped in the backseat faster than a couple of sex crazed teenagers. I looked under the seat, in the cup holder, like a suspicious wife looking for evidence to validate suspicions of her husband’s affair. I had found it, my debit card, my baby. Finding that debit card saved me from being stranded in the city, the city that picked me as its village idiot.

The train was my refuge. I had come to Boston that day with money, high expectations, a cell phone, and a car, and was leaving with only a pair of broken sunglasses. But, I had gained something. Even though I had spent a day with life telling me, “You can’t,” I believed myself every time I thought, “I will anyway.” A day that would have made the comfortable, minimum wage job I was trying to leave seem warm and inviting, instead made me realize I could handle whatever life brought my way. The only job I had ever known served as a strict,
controlling, and confining relationship that I had finally had enough of. A relationship I could do without. Just as my best friend had saved me, it was time for me to save myself. It was time to listen to the voice that said, “I will anyways” and stop making excuses that were disguised as safe, rational reasoning. If I was willing to gain anything out of life, I had to be willing to lose while trying to gain, and if I did lose, at least I could rebuild, stronger, better, and more wisely than I had done in the past. Blessings, just like a good friend, will always be there to help you along, if you choose to let them. You see, even if you can’t run in your beige and light blue saddle shoes, you should run anyway. If you don’t, tow trucks and opportunities will pass you by, leaving you behind, instead of taking you to where you truly belong.
The Emergence of Zika Virus

by Brooke K. Hall

As the modern world continues to advance and grow, the world seemingly begins to shrink. People from across the world can travel easily, keep in constant contact with one another, and spread information in a way like never before. Unfortunately, with the ease of accessing the world comes the ease of virus’s spreading from continent to continent. This has become the case of Zika (ZIKV) virus. This is not a new virus, but was not of concern until recently when it began to spread rapidly across the Americas. ZIKV has become a global health issue over the past 10 years and numerous cases are expected to arise in the coming years, with especially worrisome outcomes for those who become infected while pregnant.

Zika virus was first found in a rhesus monkey in 1947 (Meaney-Delman et al. 211). Nearly 70 years ago, researchers studying yellow fever in Uganda’s Zika forest isolated the virus from the primate (Firger 19). Serological surveys have found that a silent circulation of ZIKV may still be present in certain animals in Africa and Asia. These animals include: orangutans, elephants, water buffalo, zebras, and rodents (Lazic 225). Zika virus was not a widespread disease when it was first discovered. It was contained in specific areas and wasn’t a global threat. Symptoms were mild and short-lived; therefore the need to study the virus independently wasn’t dire enough to meet sufficient funding to do so (Firger 19). For decades there were a few cases of ZIKV sporadically in Africa and Southeast Asia, but not enough to raise serious concerns. Outbreaks were reported in 2007 on Yap Island, several Pacific Island countries, and the Federated States of Micronesia (Meaney-Delman et al. 211). Until 2013-2015, there were no new reports of ZIKV. During this time there were multiple breakouts in the “islands and archipelagos from the Pacific region including the French Polynesian” (Lazic 225). The recent introduction of ZIKV into the Americas is thought to have come from contestants of Pacific countries who participated in the August 2014 Va’a World Sprints Canoe Race championship (Petersen et al. 12). With the introduction of ZIKV into the Americas, global spread has become a huge concern.

Zika virus is a single stranded RNA arbovirus (Petersen et al. 12). An arbovirus is a disease spread by mosquitoes and other arthropods (“Arbovirus”). ZIKV arises from the “Flavivirus genus, Flaviviridae family, from the Spondweni group of mosquitoes” (Lazic 225). Zika virus along with other viruses such as chikungunya and dengue are transmitted by mosquitoes of the genus Aedes (Ae) aegypti. These mosquitoes are normally found in tropical areas (Lazic 225) and can be found throughout the Americas, with positive transmission cases reported in the United States (Oduyebo et al. 122). Other species which are possible vectors of the disease include, Ae. africanus, Ae. Polynesiensis, Ae. albopictus, Ae. vittatus, Ae. unilineatus, and Ae. hensilli (Lazic 225). The incubation period of this virus is determined to be 3-12 days after contracting the virus (Lazic 225). In order to confirm most mild cases of ZIKV, RNA of the virus must be detected within the first 3-5 days of symptoms. The virus has been found in urine up to 10 days after the onset of symptoms (Lazic 226). Currently, the infection rate for ZIKV is determined to equal the number of new infections/ number of susceptible persons
exposed x average duration of exposure (Sikka et al. 10).

Symptoms of ZIKV are different in many cases, in about 80% of cases patients show no symptoms. If any at all, the symptoms are typically mild (Oster et al. 120). Symptoms of ZIKV include: rash, fever, conjunctivitis, headache, arthralgia, and myalgia. The rash will begin on the face and slowly spread throughout the body. There have also been a few cases reported in which pain and gastrointestinal signs are present. No fatalities have been reported, with very few hospitalizations. These signs and symptoms will usually last for about 4-7 days (Lazic 225). Symptoms of ZIKV look very similar to other viruses in the Flavivirus family such as West Nile, yellow fever, and dengue. On a molecular level, these viruses are all slightly different. This means that treatment and prevention options are more likely to be found by focusing on the ZIKV alone rather than looking at the entire group of viruses (Firger 19).

There is currently no medication or vaccine to prevent Zika virus (Oduyebo et al. 122). Treatment includes fluids, rest, and medication to help offset the symptoms caused by ZIKV. Analgesic and antipyretic medications (“drugs which relieve pain but not inflammation” (“Analgesics Overview”)) may be used, but Aspirin and other similar medications which reduce inflammation should be avoided (Oduyebo et al. 122). “Until recently, nearly all funding for Flaviviruses went toward research for West Nile, dengue, and yellow fever, since Zika was considered [not to be of urgent concern]” (Firger 19). In February of 2016, “President Barack Obama asked congress for $1.8 billion to combat [ZIKV], with $200 million to fund accelerated vaccine-testing programs” (Firger 19). Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID) expects that the NIAID will have a vaccine candidate for Zika by this summer 2016 (Firger 19).

As of now, prevention is the best way to avoid contracting Zika virus. Protection from ZIKA is possible by wearing long sleeves and pants, using air conditioning while indoors or using screens or nets on windows, as well as using insect repellent while outside and using permethrin-treated clothing (Schuler et al. 59). To prevent mosquito breeding grounds nearby, standing water containers or areas should be eliminated (Schuler et al. 60). The mosquito which vectors Zika bites mostly during daylight hours, so constant protection from the virus is necessary throughout the day. “To prevent human-to mosquito-to human transmission, persons infected with Zika...should protect themselves from mosquito exposure during the first week of illness” (Oduyebo et al. 122). Until a vaccine is created, the steps one can take to avoid the virus are very minimal.

“Given the expansion of environments where mosquitoes can live and breed, facilitated by urbanization and globalization, there is a potential for major urban epidemics of Zika virus disease to occur globally” (Lazic 225). In 2007, the first case of ZIKV infection by travel was confirmed in the United States. Between 2007 and 2014, 14 more cases arose (an average of 2 cases per year). In just one year, between 2015 and 2016, 8 U.S travelers had contracted the virus (Petersen et al. 12).

On February 1st 2016 the WHO announced that the ZIKV outbreak constitutes a ‘Public Health Emergency of International Concern’. [This] term...is defined in the International Health Regulations as “an extraordinary event which is determined to constitute a public health risk to other States through
the international spread of the disease and to potentially require a coordinated international response. (Petersen et al. 11)

With the spread of the virus to the United States it is possible for human-to mosquito-to human transmission to occur. This could allow the transmission of ZIKV overseas to other countries if one who is infected travels abroad and is bit by a mosquito in that region. Due to past trends of other mosquito-borne illnesses, it is a good prediction to say that globalization and urbanization of ZIKV is likely (Sikka et al. 12).

Outside of North America, South America is facing even more problems with the outbreak of Zika virus. 26 countries in Central and South America have tested positive for ZIKV as of January 28th, 2016. These countries include: Bolivia, Barbados, Colombia, Brazil, Curacao, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Guyana, Haiti, Martinique, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico, Paraguay, Panama, Saint Martin, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Suriname, and the Virgin Islands (Petersen et al. 12). With the upcoming Olympics in Rio de Janeiro in August of 2016, millions of international travelers and residents of this country will be at risk of becoming infected with ZIKV. Public health officials will be preparing for this event in order to prevent a worldwide breakout of Zika virus (Petersen et al. 11). Many countries in South and Central America rely heavily on income from tourists. In an area that already struggles economically, the outbreak of ZIKV could have crippling effects on the region (Sikka et al. 11).

Zika virus has four transmission pathways. These include: mosquito transmission, blood transmission, sexual transmission, and mother to fetus transmission. In the first case of transmission, a mosquito bite, one must be bit by a mosquito infected with ZIKV. As mentioned previously, the mosquitos which vector this disease are mainly *Aedes aegypti*, and others including *Ae. africanus, Ae. Polynesiensis, Ae. albopictus, Ae. vittatus, Ae. unilineatus*, and *Ae. hensilli* (Oduyebo et al. 122).

The second form of ZIKV transmission is by blood transfusions. Zika virus lives in the bloodstream and therefore can be passed on to another human if the infected blood gets inside of their body. Among blood donors, there are those who contracted the disease (ZIKV) and were asymptomatic (about 80%). This raises concerns about the possible transmission of the virus via blood donation (Petersen et al. 12). Screening for ZIKV in the blood is not a common procedure because it virtually didn’t exist for many years. Presumably, this will change now that many cases are arising in the United States.

The third transmission pathway for ZIKV is through sexual contact. There are currently three cases in which sexual transmission of ZIKV is shown to be possible. In the first case, a man had sexual intercourse with a woman in the first few days of being infected with Zika virus, during this period of time he was asymptomatic. The second case comes from an unpublished documentation of possible sexual transmission which is currently under investigation by Dallas County Health and Human Services. The last report of sexual transmission of ZIKV comes from the isolation of the virus in a man’s semen between 2-10 weeks after falling ill. This man had no sexual contact during his time of infection. It is unknown how long the virus stays present in the semen (Oster et al. 120), but it is supposed that Zika virus might persist in the semen after infection even if it is not detectable in the blood stream (Oster et al. 120). In all three of these cases, men developed symptoms at some
point. It is unknown if a man can transmit the virus to his sexual partner(s) if he never shows any symptoms. It is also unknown if a woman can transmit ZIKV to her partner because it has not yet been reported (Oster et al. 120). Sexual transmission of ZIKV can be prevented by the proper use of latex condoms during sex. It is also highly recommended that men who currently have a pregnant spouse and have Zika virus or live in have traveled to an area with confirmed cases of the virus, abstain from sexual intercourse or use condoms during sex. Men with non-pregnant partners should also take the same precautions (Oster et al. 120).

The last way in which transmission is possible is through mother-to-fetus transmission. A major concern of this virus is the “possible association between maternal Zika virus infection and adverse fetal outcomes, such as congenital microcephaly, as well as possible association with Guillain-Barre syndrome” (Oster et al. 120). Pregnant women can become infected with ZIKV at any point during their pregnancy and those who reside in an area where the virus is present are at a constant risk. Those who live in an area infected with Zika virus and are pregnant or plan on becoming pregnant should have regular screening, testing, and management (Oduyebo et al. 122).

Doctors dealing with pregnant woman who reside in an area with ongoing ZIKV should follow direct steps for a woman who does or does not reports illness consistent with the virus. Those who report illness should be tested for the virus. If the test is positive or inconclusive for the infection the doctor should consider doing fetal ultrasounds as well as tests on the amniotic fluid. If the test reports to be negative for the infection a fetal ultrasound should be performed. If microcephaly or calcifications on the skull are present the doctor should retest the patient for ZIKV and consider testing the amniotic fluid for infection. If these abnormalities are not present, the doctor should perform routine prenatal care, test for ZIKV again mid-second trimester, and consider doing additional ultrasounds (Oster et al. 125).

Pregnant women who do not report illness consistent with ZIKV should still test for the virus at the beginning of prenatal care. If tests for the virus come back positive or inconclusive the doctor should perform fetal ultrasounds and consider doing amniotic fluid testing. If the test comes back negative, fetal ultrasounds should be done at 18-20 weeks of pregnancy as well as a test for the infection mid-2nd trimester. If the virus is found after this point, the doctor should follow the normal steps for a pregnant woman infected with ZIKV. If the pregnant woman does not show any signs of the virus she should continue with routine prenatal care and ultrasounds (Oster et al. 125).

In 2015, northeast Brazil had an outbreak of Zika virus. The areas affected by the virus reported an increase of infants born with microcephaly. During this time, two pregnant women were found to have RNA of ZIKV in the amniotic fluid in their fetus’s and microcephaly detected by prenatal ultrasound (Schuler et al. 59). Microcephaly cases are confirmed based on “a head circumference >2 standard deviations (SD) below the mean for sex and gestational age at birth” (Schuler et al. 59).

Among a cohort of 35 infants with microcephaly born during August-October 2015 in eight of Brazil’s 26 states and reported to the registry, the mothers of all 35 had lived in or visited Zika virus-affected areas during pregnancy. 25 (71%) [of the] infants had severe microcephaly (a head circumference >3 SD
below the mean for sex and gestational age). 17 (49%) had at least one neurological abnormality, and among 27 infants who had neuroimaging studies, all had abnormalities. (Schuler et al. 59)

Historically, microcephaly in infants was about 0.5 cases per 10,000 live births in Brazil. By the second half of 2015 this number had risen to about 20 cases per 10,000 live births (Schuler et al. 6). ZIKV causes abnormal brain development in infants which is typically the cause of microcephaly. Long-term consequences of this disease are mild to severe. In some cases, those infected will have minor developmental delays. In other cases, severe motor and intellectual issues will be an ongoing struggle. Cerebral palsy is a possible outcome of severe microcephaly.

Another set of microcephaly cases in the United States has shown consistent with trends in Brazil. On January 15, 2016, the CDC issued an alert to pregnant women traveling to areas with ZIKV to consider postponing their trips due to the confirmation of ZIKV in pregnant travelers from the U.S (Meaney-Delman et al. 211). As of February 17, 2016, 9 Cases of Zika virus in pregnant travelers has been confirmed by the CDC. 10 other cases are currently under investigation.

Among the six pregnant women with Zika virus disease who reported symptoms during the first trimester, outcomes included two early pregnancy losses, two elective pregnancy terminations, and the delivery of a live born infant with microcephaly; one pregnancy is continuing. Among two women who had symptoms during the second trimester of pregnancy, one apparently healthy infant has been born and one pregnancy is continuing. One pregnant woman reported symptoms in the third trimester of pregnancy, and she delivered a healthy infant. (Meaney-Delman et al. 211-212)

Interestingly, there may be a correlation between microcephaly and time of infection during pregnancy.

ZIKV does not cause severe symptoms or side effects for the majority of the population, but the risk of global spread of the disease is still of concern. As the virus spreads across the Americas, it is very likely that the disease will become a worldwide issue within the coming year, especially with the upcoming Olympics in South America this summer 2016. Currently, there is no treatment or vaccine for the virus, but hope for one is on the horizon. For now, residents in the Americas should take precautions. Pregnant women in the Americas should take even larger measures to prevent becoming infected and developing microcephaly in the fetus of their unborn child.
Works Cited


Schuler-Faccini, Lavinia, et al. “Possible Association between Zika Virus Infection and


Light in the Dark
by Hailey King
Denial
by Suzi F. MacDonald

What am I?

Able to steal emotional muscle
and replace it with cowardly flab,
skilled at taking a heart already fractured
and pulverizing remaining remnants,
expert at perverting truth,
preventing justice,
and prolonging pain needlessly…
what am I?

DENIAL!

(Caution- May cause loss of
vision and character.
Avoid close proximity.
If not possible, use ear plugs.)
Everyone has a favorite place, and mine just happens to be at the corner of my house. As time went by, a little corner of my house with nothing amusing became a tremendous part of my life, and eventually my favorite place to be. I spent a lot of time there, that corner, but there was more to it than meets the eye. It was a place like no other, a place where memories were formed and a place where I found peace and happiness in solitude. However, I believed that someday the happiness, and joyful life would be part of me.

It was just a corner of my house with a solid, off-white wall with no decorations hanging around it. There was nothing but an old, yet comfy couch and two-big windows that were on each side of the huge double wooden door. I always enjoyed myself sitting or even lying down on the couch. This little “nook,” as I called it, was my favorite part of the house, and where I used to allocate most of my time. It was located just outside my bedroom which allowed easy access whenever I wanted to go there.

My childhood girlfriends would often come over and talk about how good I had it. I have no idea why some of them used to say, “I wish I were you, Stephanie.” There was literally nothing special about me. I was living in a big two story house with a nice view where I could see the mountains, the ocean, and other houses. My friends always gave me compliments on how nice my bedroom was; my parents gave me the master bedroom. The nicest thing in my life was that my parents were so kind, and gave me anything I wanted, nice cell phones, new clothes, toys, or anything that money could buy. My parents would tell me that they wanted to support me in order give me a bright future, like paying for a quality education. Education was extremely expensive in Indonesia. There was no such thing as a free education. There was no financial aid, loans, scholarships, or anything like that. However, my existence motivated my parents to put a lot of effort into whatever job they did in order to provide for me the life they thought I should have. They were the hardest working people that I knew.

I remember when my parents received their Visa and Green Card, allowing them to work in the United States. The only thing that I knew about the United States at the time was how it was a country that was really far away. Unfortunately, I was denied a visa and green card, and there was nothing my parents could do to include me with them. Even though my parents told them, “She’s our daughter,” I was still not allowed to come with them. It did not make sense to me, and I kept wondering why my parents could not bring their own child.

I was around ten years old, when my parents came to the United States to work. I thought my parents would choose to stay with me at the time, and would not have wanted to leave without their only daughter. Nevertheless, I understand that my parents wanted a better way to provide me with what I needed. I ended up living with my brother and his family since he’s married, and even though we had “tante Uyu,” a maid in my house, my parents also hired my own maid plus a companion for me; her name was “Shinta.” Shinta was such a
nice young girl, and rather than a maid, she was more like a friend. However, she did not work in my house for long as she wanted to get married and live with her husband.

No matter how much I appreciated and loved my parents, I also hated them. My parent’s concern for me went so far that they never allowed me to be outside of the house without one of them or without my brother. Before my mother came to the States, she would stay in school with me until it was over, and it was like that throughout elementary and middle school. It was one of the most embarrassing moments I had when they were around. There were several moments where I told my mom, “Stop coming to school and stop waiting for me until school is over.” Apparently, my mother was quite stubborn.

“No, I have to watch you, and I will be there in school until you are done.”

That was basically the only thing my mom would tell me. It was vexing to say the least. I must have had several arguments with her about it, though I could never win. All I ever wanted growing up was to be able to play outside of the house with friends, hang out with the other girls, or even just to go to the mall by myself without constantly being watched by my parents. I wanted to be free and independent. However, I never got a chance to do that when I was younger. It may sound dramatic, but that was the way I lived for most of my life.

I stayed inside of the house most of the time. If I had to go out to the mall, school, or anywhere else, I would have to be chaperoned by one, if not both of my parents. I did not really mind being watched when I was in elementary school, or even during middle school. I had tolerated my, “babysitter,” much to my own embarrassment only because I could never argue against it.

“It’s OK. Whatever,” I told myself every time I felt irritated because of my family. However, that all changed as I grew older. By the time I was in high school, my parents were already in the United States. You would think the situation would change after they left for the States. Instead, my brother was forced to watch me in their stead and provide them any information of what I did every day. Talk about, “invasion of privacy.”

That little space at the corner of my house became a special space where my mind would feel at ease from the constant alert from being watched every day. The little space was not only beautiful in the morning where the sun reflected its light to the room, but it was even more beautiful at nighttime when I was able to be there with nobody else but myself. I walked through the white glossy tile in the little patio as I pulled open the huge double wooden doors allowing the cool night breeze to soothe my heart and my mind. I looked at the night sky while sitting down on the medium beige futon couch right in front of the huge door. The scent of the flowers in the garden, the delightful night sky decorated with stars, and the bright moon that whisks me away from the reality of my life – I could feel the freedom and the calmness. I loved being alone without anyone around me.

I took my little brown flowery diary from my study table and my favorite pink pen with me into my “nook” of solace. I was not the kind of person that liked to talk about what’s on my mind with other people; I saw no reason for that at all. I just did not want to. I could feel the emptiness in my heart as I was writing in my diary, expressing the loneliness that I was feeling on the pieces of paper. I kept writing and writing about anything that I could think of, anything about how I felt at the time. The night was quiet, all I could hear was the
water cascading onto the fish pond in my garden.

“Why can’t I be like other girls; being able to play with friends as much as I want to. Hang out with the girls in my school, sleep over in my girlfriend’s house, do all the fun things that other girls in my school were talking about?” I never even dated anyone even though I was already in high school, since my parents would probably chase away any guys that would come near me. I wrote about many random things in my diary, anything that had to do with my feelings. My feelings would sometimes become written poetry. I once loved writing; it made me feel better as I was able to clear my mind out on paper, where no one would ever complain about me, pity me, or judge me.

This corner of my house, my “nook,” helped me wipe out the loneliness that was inside of me. I sat down and felt the fresh air blow gently across my face as I gazed up at the bright stars wondering how nice my life could be. If only I was able to have a life as bright as the stars, as wonderful as the sky, and as free as the water flowing onto the fish pond, as enchanting and full as the moon, and as flourished as the flowers in my garden. Alas, I could look forward to having all those things and more.

Years had passed, and my parents asked me if I wanted to continue my education in the United States. I immediately replied with an astounding, “YES.” I met a couple of American visitors before in Indonesia; they were really nice and friendly people and made me want to go to America. I also hadn’t had the chance to travel that far, and I wanted to challenge myself to adapt in a different environment.

I came to the United Stated in 2011, and have been with my parents ever since.

“You look taller,” was my dad’s first expression when he saw me.

“Of course, I am not a little kid anymore.” I stated.

I was happy to live with my parents again, and I was especially happy about how things have changed – my parents were not that strict anymore. They would now let me go anywhere I wanted without the need of a chaperone. “Hallelujah,” was the first thing that I thought; of course, I wasn’t completely off the hook. In exchange for allowing me to go out by myself, they would set a curfew dictating when I should be home. It wasn’t until I got together with my boyfriend that I could have free rein of my life. By that time my parents realized that I was now a big girl, an adult. I have to do things on my own, and make my own decisions now.

Sometimes I think back to that little corner of my house that used to be my favorite place. It was just a corner of an empty space full of nothing but one sofa, but it taught me so many things as I grew older. My thoughts, loneliness, fear, worries, and tears were in that place. When I think of the things I’ve done in my little “nook,” it puts a smile on my face. I guess in a way that place nurtured the way I saw myself, and how everyday it taught me that whether my life was sweet or bitter, I just needed to keep on going and embrace it. It taught me to be who I am and made me even stronger than before. I do not worry about anything anymore, about being happy, being lonely, or being hurt. This is how the life that I had lived made me become who I am today. And to think, it all started at my little corner, the place I called my little “nook.”
Coffee Shop Stream of Consciousness
by Gabriel Wensley

There is a darkness in the world that makes me want to hate everything brilliant, everything dull and ordinary.

It’s one of those days where the rain clouds my positive thinking and my good vibrations are dampened by the earthquake rattle inside of my mind.

I start to hate those who are satisfied. The con-artist, the drug addict, the mother, the daughter, the bachelor. Each one of them complicit with the world and its darkness. They are constantly searching for the strike of a match that will light the dark hallways.

Today I drove through a blizzard and watched the white engulf everything around me. I was lost in the serenity of it and then suddenly was blinded by oncoming high beams. For just a moment I considered the head on collision. I had second thoughts and jerked the wheel hard.

I pondered the other drivers fear, and craved it.

I cannot seem to feel anything but the darkness. Not even an emotion but an absence of light.

I abstain from attempting to love myself because I know that would make me dull and ordinary, and I hate the ordinary man – and woman, I choose not to discriminate.

My lack of emotion is chainmail around my heart, around my head and my body. I pretend to know myself, but am in a constant state of self-redefinition. I change my attitude, my friends, my hair, my clothes.

Yet though, my true self always seems to catch up with me, eating away at the versions of myself that I create.

I am obsessed with the darkness of today, I am enjoying the pain of hating everything that I wish I could be.

I will never be normal. I will never be complicit. I will never be brilliant or dull. I merely exist to follow my self around in a mopey state of failure and self-loathing.

Today is one of those days where the atmosphere and my mind are mirrors of one another. The damp, cloudy weather shows the too-real thunderstorm in my mind.

I lurk in the corners of alleys. I wait and wish for the rain to go away so someone will come out and notice me, fear the reasons why I am out in the emptiness of the world.

My lungs fill with a chemical silence that is instilled as the music stops playing. My ears fill with the noise inside of my head and my eyes the images of my broken past.
I am chasing a stranger in the window, a girl so pure that the world’s darkness does not come within six feet of her. And that was only because I walked out the door of a train that she was sitting near.

I am trapped in a tether that she has tied to me and images of what can only be happiness float into my mind. I don’t like them. I want the girl to stay six stories up in her window, a stranger and a member of a society that I don’t belong to.

I don’t do anything for myself, or those that are close to me. Not my family and not my true friends. I keep people strangers so that I can be whoever I want to be for that day.

I drive through the blizzard and emerge where it’s raining. The telephone poles stick up from the earth like metal mannequins, arms outstretched into the sky. I am in control of who I want to be, I am in control of the car that I’m driving. Gas on the right, brake on the left, steering wheel clutched loosely between my fingers.

The abstract graffiti on the railcars blurs by, the faded topography of the world seems to drift into nothingness. My consciousness fades in and out, the wheel still between my hand until I finally pull over in a church parking lot.

I am not a religious man but there is something quite holy about blue porta-pottys and discarded condom wrappers in the parking lot. It’s the salt of the earth that make it spin not a could-be God. But I appreciate His followers and where they decide to build their temples of worship, it was convenient to pull over and take a rest from the constant hope of some unavoidable accident.

I cannot explain myself to anyone.

Not that I can’t even find the words to do so, it’s more that I know how they would respond.

As much as I don’t really care, I don’t want to be a disappointment.

Have you ever turned your head sideways and looked into the horizon not as a horizontal, but as a vertical?

You aren’t missing much if you haven’t.

A list of images flashes through my mind,

Stick figurines, ballerinas, blowjobs, bones, hats, white noise machines, sleeping children, sleeping adults, images of myself lying awake at night.

My parents reading and refusing to believe that I don’t sleep. They only know the me that I show them, sometimes my cover work is sloppy and they get a peek at the real me. They fail to realize that it is the real me. They tell me to “buck up” and they ask me “where did you go?” The real question is, “What were you looking at?”

It has been twenty-five minutes and thirteen seconds since I tapped the first key of this mess.

No, not the mess that is me, but the mess that is this stream of consciousness bullshit writing that I sometimes
force myself to do.

I am a confession. I am a broken promise. I am a would-be disappointment.

The journey of my life has yet to begin. My parents tell me money makes the world go around. That you need some of it to be happy… but how many rich people do you see that are unhappy? Oh yeah, all of them…

I am content struggling to find a place to rest my head, writing on the spot poems for tips, writing the manuscript of my life in my free time and working in a country where I barely speak their language in exchange for a meal and a place to rest me head.

But not a single soul seems to grasp this. Instead they tell me to go to college, to become a teacher, because I once said that I wouldn’t mind doing that. Maybe I wouldn’t in another life. But for now, let me escape your reality and move on to my own desires.
Untitled
by Shelby Lennon
Smoke

Do not trust the tomorrow, the day,
or minute, past the now
- it’s only smoke.
Stirred by the fire you’ve lit from the embers of yester-years.

Follow the smoke - if you must, up to where the eagles fly
but do not linger there up there, in the air
is where, smoke dies.

Fire

Here I am,
sleeping at the edge of a burning world. The end - of a dying breed.
Caught between imaginary ways and exits
Cloaked with smoke and burning inflamed

Ashes

Ashes -
they’ve all fallen down down to the ground - burnt into its crust
where all that’s left is ashes ashes -
they’ve all fallen down.
To summate a life should not be so possible a task, but neither should the memories of Michael Anthony be so few. He joined us November 13th of 1992 and stayed but a few short years. Michael Anthony, as his father called him, had a vibrant personality, and lived life to the fullest. With devotion and rapt attention toward all his endeavors, he dedicated himself to life. Playing in the yard, climbing trees, sword fights, and drinking homemade lemonade at the family table were some of his favorite pastimes. All who knew him felt as I myself did -- that just to know him was a blessing and a pleasure that filled your heart. He emanated joy; it brimmed and bubbled from his laughing lips as if he was an inexhaustible fountain sharing with all around him. His vibrancy created the effect that he was burning like a comet. Perhaps he was a shooting star, a candle that burned bright and thus flared out too quickly. He said his goodbyes, preparing his mother, and left us February 25, 2000.

We love to use words like “remarkable” or “extraordinary,” in vain attempts to describe what sets others apart. Usually though, this is really an attempt to capture what makes someone unique. Michael Anthony was special to a measure above, and his life set him apart. I’ll share with you his story, as best as I am able to remember it.

We were children together, though several years apart. The details are fuzzy when I recall first meeting him. Well, meeting him isn’t the correct description. Really, I saw a small face in a doorway. He was three years old, with a sweet bald head covered in a fine blonde fuzz. At eleven, I struggled to understand what that meant. Or perhaps I ignored it, despite my parents’ explanation. We were reveling in an overflowing garden, and so my sister and I were sent to share the bounty and meet our new neighbors. A charming man with a calmly contained energy answered the door, and somehow we all ended up sitting on the steps of the porch for quite some time. It was an introduction that turned to long conversation. Michael Anthony was a face flashing in and out from behind a doorway inside, too shy to speak.

Days later, he came closer and closer to gaze at me, mesmerized at the way I rollerbladed through the court, turning in circles all around him. As it is with children, suddenly one day we were inseparable friends. I was growing to understand how sick he was, but this was so contrasted by his vitality that it didn’t seem real. He couldn’t go to school, so I was his only friend. There were times that the reality of his condition was suddenly stark and sobering. One day, we were playing in the yard. The first phase I knew him to be enthralled in was Spiderman© and he was strutting around in his costume with pride. While his Mom raked leaves and pruned, she asked me to play with him. He had a yellow motorized truck, and excitedly announced to me that he was going to ride it around while I watched. I smiled, walked over and grabbed the helmet on the seat, handing it to him. He looked up at me, his eyes shining with bright innocence and said, “I can’t wear
this mask and my helmet at the same time or I’ll vomit.” His happy mood and tone did not dip; he said it in a matter of fact way, and merrily went about his business. I stood there speechless, experiencing a growing understanding of what he was feeling all the time, despite some appearances.

Weeks turned to months, Michael Anthony and I grew closer and closer. I viewed him and his parents as extended family. Still, I didn’t always know what was happening with his medical condition. First, he was better for a while, long enough for us both to enjoy the Zorro® phase. I gave him two plastic slender swords for us to fight with, and he’d get so excited he’d whip it back and forth frantically, my legs stinging with new red welts as I’d skitter back, too exhilarated at his elation to care or tell him it hurt. It was always perfect to let him win bike or foot races, and teaching him to climb the local trees were some of our best times. He grew healthier for a time, and then he wasn’t again.

In a way it felt like a return to normalcy, as Michael’s thickening peach fuzz thinned again. I loved the touch and feel of it, so I’d run my hand over his head. He’d duck away at first, until one day I realized years had passed since he’d done so. I noticed, too, that the distance he’d walk away from his mother extended from a mere few feet, to around the corner of the court and down the block, where the best climbing tree was. We built a strong close relationship, and he’d grown to trust me completely too.

Michael Anthony had a way of making every moment shine brightly. His purpose seemed to be happiness; he was always jubilant and this was always contagious. It was his gift and his way to share this with those around him. He was naturally engaging, and spoke of many things that seemed beyond his years. These are the things I most wish to remember again. The way he spoke of God, as if he knew him.

It’s a joy to remember the playful fun days, and a blessing to remember moments of shared wisdom and life shifting perspectives. There were too many sad days too. Times I saw less of him. My bedroom faced his house, so I’d stay up at night until his parents came home and carried him inside. I understood by then. I understood that chemotherapy sucked the life out of his fountain as quickly as he filled it. And worse, the pool seemed to be draining from dual locations: chemotherapy, radiation, surgeries that slowly sucked the energy from him, but fought the tumors that kept returning.

For a time again, he recovered. I estimate around 1998. He grew hair that turned brown and seemed bristly, thick, and was strange to see. He went to school. He made a friend. It seemed as if he was in the clear, and could live a life like any other. For months, we played basketball every day (I played, he watched), or reveled in light saber sword fights (here, he was the star). He had become obsessed with Star Wars ©; we trick or treated on Halloween and raved at what an amazing Jedi Knight© he was! It seemed his joie de vivre had only grown. He was six, learning to read and loving every new discovery about the world around him. It began to feel like we were really family, and everything would always be the way it was.

Then one day the Earth shattered. In the summer of 1999, they found a tumor in his chest that couldn’t be removed. I refused to believe he could die, but that’s part of my story. This is his story. The story about a truly incredible individual, who was in touch with his purpose in life, engaging in happiness, so fully that nothing phased him, or prevented him with sharing this with everyone around him.
Walking down the hallway of a children’s hospital, my footsteps echoed and I recall my stomach felt dreadfully heavy. I was afraid of what I would see, yet even here his life rang with his truth. I walked into the room, to see his face lighten like the sun when he saw me. He shouted my name exuberantly, jumping up to stand on his bed and wielding a brand new double-bladed light saber! Relief and euphoria flooded over me, and I kicked into play mode for a few minutes. As he settled back into his bed, my eyes took in the wires, tubes, and electrodes attached to his body, the machines surrounding him. He was tired, but still he was Michael Anthony. I could see the effect he’d had on the nurses and staff. It wasn’t just me; he made you see all the beauty and sadness in the world all at once, and experience a feeling of more. Whether you believed in God or fate or just encompassing hope into a feeling of one-ness or acceptance with the world, even in the face of this, Michael Anthony had a way of making you reflect from a bright joyful perspective.

We visited him two days in a row in the hospital. Both times, it was an amazing experience. In his presence, there was pure joy, bliss, beauty for us all to feel, even in contrast to the moments of acknowledgement, discussion, grief and sadness. We went to craft time together and made clay cookies that they baked. Another little girl of maybe four copied everything that I did as her mother adoringly observed and pointed it out first, proudly (as if the thought of admiring a possible future was healthy for her). I wondered if she’d live or die.

I did not wonder this about Michael Anthony. He was steady, yet. The same eyes burning with life. His mother took us aside and explained how badly he needed to eat, so the second night we made a big show of ordering a huge Italian dinner from a restaurant of epic proportions. I’m honestly not sure, looking back, if I was ranging from terrified to pure hope from moment to moment, or if I only wouldn’t believe or accept that there was any way for him, other than to exist. It seemed it was his decision; his will to live pulling him forward.

My mom says they explained (he was dying), but I don’t remember. I recall only his discussions of God and the light in his eyes. His parents asked him where he wanted to go, anywhere in the world. Only mid-west to see his cousin, he said. I’m not sure I knew it was to be the last hurrah. We said goodbye, two weeks were planned. His arms wrapped tightly around my neck; he was so little I closed my arms around his body.

I never saw him again. But, this is his story. As I know it, he and his parents went and had such a good time, they stayed. We heard from his parents only briefly once or twice; those were the days of expensive long distance calls. For some of the following months, he joined in small town community living, and even attended a small local school. He loved school, and his reading had been growing and moving along nicely. He was proud of each new step, always forging forward to excitedly discover more. As always, he inspired love and devotion in those around him, reminding them of all the range of love, beauty and sadness in the world. As well as enjoying his best friend (his cousin) and living life to the fullest, during these months he also slowly died. At some point he was fighting, for days and days, fighting. He was also in a coma for a time. He revived again, but the fight continued too long. Then, there was a shift. Every day, he had faced forward ready for life. One night, at seven years old, Michael Anthony had a dream (vision). He awoke, and told his family. Mother,
he said. It’s time. I’m ready, I’ll help you be ready too. God told me it’s time to come home.

In seven years, he touched so many. His story spread, and families came together. He touched so many lives, two hundred people attended his funeral there. His parents flew back to empty out the house across the street. They held a second memorial service, attended by dozens more. New stories came to my ears. He and his parents had kept a few things close. The service was held in a beautiful monastery in the hills, where I was not entirely surprised to meet some peaceful wise monks who were Michael Anthony’s good friends. One told a story of walking along a hilltop with him, sitting together to watch the sun set and discuss God.

Privately, while his parents packed the house, and sold away their child’s belongings, they told me stories. He had five tumors in seven years, never living an entire year without. They told me about the time he had a bone marrow transplant. His father was napping, and seized by an urge to run to him, to get to him quickly. His dad arrived at the hospital, and charged into the room just in time to save Michael from choking (on his own mucus). When Michael Anthony could speak, he asked about the Lady in Blue who had just visited him right before his father walked in. She comforted him, he said. His father asked the nurses, but no one had been there. Michael Anthony was sure though, that this special woman had been there. A Mother. The Lady in Blue saved me, he said.

There were women in white and gold another time. They came down to him, he said. Were they wrapped in light, or is that how I imagine it? Angels, they said.

Michael Anthony lived seven years. He believed in love, living life to the fullest, and being your best self. He lived brightly, and lightly, and then he went home.
A Ride through Time
by Nicole Lavoie

Horseback riding is a dream that most six-year-old little girls want to come true. I know this for a fact because I was like that when I was little, and I wanted to be that little girl that felt free when she was on a horse. I wanted to know what it was to feel normal, because I had no idea what it felt like to be normal; I knew I was different from the other kids. I wanted to find a place where I felt like I belonged there, like I fit in.

I have always felt like an outsider. In school, I was the type of kid that you would find in the back of the classroom, quietly taking notes; the only noise that you could hear was the soft pitter patter of my fingers stroking the keys. I only raised my hand when I was confident I had the right answer to a question. I was a quiet kid and did not really talk much to other kids. I pretty much only talked when spoken to by other kids or if the teacher asked me a question. My life at ten consisted of school, homework, and therapy.

I had a therapist in elementary school that would come and take me out of class -- usually gym class -- to do my physical therapy. She would take me to the back of the gym where they had all of the, what I called, “torture equipment.” I hated it there. I hated everything about it; I did not like where it had been placed because it felt like I was going to a jail cell.

My mother had always had a hard time getting me to my therapy at home. I was either off playing with my friends down the street, reading, or doing homework. I did not have time to do therapy, nor did I ever want to do it because it put me in immense pain. The pain was always something I tried to avoid because I had already been through enough pain in my short six years of life. It was then that my mother talked to my therapist at school to see if there was any way she could get me to do my therapy.

“Well, there is always the University of New Hampshire’s Therapeutic Riding Program.”

My therapist knew I loved horses, and she thought that would be the perfect distraction for a six-year-old to get her therapy in, make her feel like she is not doing therapy at all. I was excited about it because all I knew was I was going to be able to ride horses, something I’d always wanted to be able to do. It was my chance to be normal. When we arrived, I could barely contain my excitement.

“Ready?” my mom asked me with a smile on her face”

“Yes!” I squealed, opened my door, and swung my feet out the door and scooted forward so I could get myself in my walker. I got happier with every step I took. I knew for a fact that this place was going to change my life; I just did not know how. Fast forward a few years, I had already had a few hundred riding lessons under my belt, but I seemed to have a bit of trouble with posting at the trot. Posting is when a rider moves their body up and down with the rhythm of the horse. The reason why riders post is so that when the horse is trotting, the rider does not land on the horse’s back hard and end up hurting the horse, but I did not seem to have
the rhythm down quite yet and I would go into half seat position, which was always more comfortable for me. Half seat position is where the rider stands up in their stirrups and slightly bend their knees and lean forward, this is also called “jumping position.”

My instructor would say, “Nikki, I am glad you know how to half seat, but I want you to post. I know you do not like posting but you need to learn how to do it because that is what the rest of the class is doing.”

At that time, I was on a horse named Quil, and he was really bouncy. I felt like one of those plastic balls in a Fisher Price lawnmower. It was extremely difficult for me to post on such a choppy gate. I just thought it would be easier to do half seat position because I knew it was something I was good at.

I would sigh and post the way she wanted me to. But I soon found myself in half seat position again, and she would remind me, “Nikki, posting please.”

As time went on, I eventually learned what Quil’s gate was like and did not have to be reminded to post too often. I was learning how to do it automatically. I still did not have the “sack of potatoes” technique down. At every lesson, we had to have three people, whether they were volunteers or equine students attending the university. One person to lead the horse, one person on the rider’s left to help with anything that goes on the left side of the rider, and one person on the right side to help with anything on the right. Riders are also required to wear blue Velcro belts, with a black buckle in the front and two white loops on either side, so that if a rider should fall, either side walker can grab a loop and pull the rider back in the middle of the saddle. I remember this one time when my class had to trot down the long side of the arena. As always I was asked if I was ready to go, and as always I said yes. I asked Quil to “walk on” and then I clicked my tongue to tell him to trot. I was about halfway down when the long side walker must have let go because she could not keep up, and no sooner did she let go, then I fell off Quill. In the process of falling, I managed to grab on to his leather bridle and turn my body just in time to see his hoof right underneath my face and his brown eyes grew two sizes bigger. I hung there for about two minutes before I felt calm enough to let myself fall on the soft dirt floor that seemed to cushion my fall, even though I only fell a few inches. Then my instructor picked me up, carried me back to the ramp and asked me:

“Are you ok?”

“Yes,” I said, still in shock from the fall.

“Are you hurt?”

“No.” It felt like I had bounced like a ball once I hit the floor, and managed not to hurt myself.

“Do you want to get back on?”

“Yes,” I said, a little dazed, but all too excited to get back on and try again.

That was the year I decided to join the University of New Hampshire’s equestrian Special Olympic team. The Special Olympics are a variety of sports for people with mental and physical disabilities.
Since it was my first time doing the Special Olympics, I was really nervous and did not know what to expect. Butterflies were flapping around in my stomach, as I got ready for the day’s competition that morning. I put on my beige colored riding pants with padding on the inner thighs so my thighs would not get chaffed while riding; I put on a white cami and then put on a white button-up over it. Then, I grabbed my paddock riding boots. Paddock boots are shorter than the typical riding boot, and paddock boots go up to the ankles and typically zip up in the front or on the side, whereas typical riding boots, like the ones in dressage, come up to the knee or thigh and typically zip up the side. I was so excited for that day’s ride that by the end of it I had a second and third place ribbon, not bad for a newbie.

At that time, I had been riding with them for about ten years and had just started riding a new horse that fall; his name was Snowy. Snowy was a big boned draft horse with chestnut coloring; although, to me his fur and mane looked more flaxen than chestnut.

Just before I went to my first event with Snowy, he decided to spook because as we found out that day, he did not like other horses near his back end. Just as I was about to go into my event, all of a sudden, Snowy pulled back in fear. I was extremely nervous because this had never happened to me during my time riding. However, because of my training I knew that whenever Snowy reared his head back, I was to sit back so that I would not get hit in the face. Whenever he moved his feet, I would sit forward, so that if he decided to buck I would catapult forward instead of up in the air. It was then that my left side walk and current instructor Sunya said, “If you feel like you want to get off just tell me.”

“Ok,” I said nervously.

Maybe five or ten minutes had passed when Sunya said, “Alright Nikki, I’m going to make an executive decision right now and have you dismount.”

“Alright,” I said, relieved and leaned forward so that she could help me dismount Snowy. She placed me on a green rusty old water heater and led Snowy away. It was then that I began to cry because I was scared of what just happened, and I didn’t know if I was going to be able to compete.

A few minutes had passed and then Sunya came over to me and said, “Ok Nikki, good news, we found you this little pony named Flash.”

“Really?” I said, looking at her with tears still in my eyes but with a smile on my face. I looked up and saw them bringing out Flash. He was a little chocolate colored Shetland pony. He was my hero that day; my mother said that they should have put a cape on him and started playing Queen’s “Flash Gordon” when he walked toward me. I was able to calm myself down, get on the horse, continue with my events, and win two blue ribbons for the first time. It was then that I realized that I felt more accepted, I did not feel any different, and for the first time in a long time I felt normal.

It was the first time in a long time that I felt normal again. When I ride, I do not feel people’s judgmental glances towards me. It was always those types of glances that always made me feel uncertain of myself. But, when I am riding horses, whether it be for competition purposes or for leisure, I feel like any other kid. I do not
feel different. I do not feel like I do not belong. I feel at home. The University of New Hampshire’s Riding Program is like my home away from home. I always get really excited when my feet hit the dirt parking lot just outside the barn because I know that no matter what, I will be accepted here. The whole barn staff and riders feel like a second family to me, one that I love and cannot wait to see after a three month break for the winter. Those three months away from the barn is always the hardest for me because no matter what I do not want to be away from that barn and from my second family.
Heartfelt Lies
by Hannah Rose

As his hands meet my face, images of her flash in front of my eyes, adding to the pain each blow caused. With a slight movement of my wrist, my drunken opponent falls to the ground, defeated. Although this fight was won, along with many others, I could not help but feel overwhelming defeat. I had lost this battle against myself yet again, yet again.

With a bottle of gin in my left hand, I go down to the river and take rocks in my hands. Skipping them across the water, I prepare myself for our inevitable encounter. I can feel the bruises forming under my eyes, a dead giveaway of my whereabouts earlier that day. With every sinking rock, my heart sinks a little more with it. I turn to the left and see the field of weeds and my minds slips into memories.

*Her mouth curled up in a smile as she laid her head on my arm. I watched as the dimples became evident on her face and her eyes lit up, and it mesmerized me. She looked up at me and said “What?” but no reply came from me. How could I put it into words how beautiful she was; how when her eyes shone I was presented with a juggernaut of wonder at how someone could find so much to marvel at in her surroundings? She breathed a sigh and looked back towards the sky, completely content, and in a moment I have never felt more unworthy or insignificant. We lay there for moments, as I wrestled with the emotions she uprooted in me, emotions I had pretended so long not to have. As if she was reading my mind, she sat up on the blanket and stared down at me.*

“I know” she stated simply, mischief becoming apparent in her expression.

“You know what?” I asked, peering up at her through squinted eyes as the sun rays arranged themselves around her head, the light cascading into my vision.

“You love me.” She spoke the words while she sat there with a smug smile on her face. “You love me, and you won’t admit it, but I know, and now you know that I know.”

She looked at me for one second longer before she laid back down next to me and rested her head on my
chest, tracing paths on my cotton t-shirt with her fingertips, paths that left a slew of tingling and heat in their wake. I knew she didn’t expect or need a response from me, but I felt the insatiable need to fill the air, to try to make myself worthy to her, even though I knew I was nowhere near it. I stopped her meandering fingers with the grasp of my hands, and as her eyes met mine, I couldn’t help but to utter the words “You’re going to destroy me woman.” And after a moment she brought her lips to mine, and through the kiss I felt her smile, revealing the victory she felt at my words.

The radiating pain in my left cheek tore me from the memory back into reality. Remorse fills my soul, and I have to sit down on the grass to prevent my legs from shaking in self-hatred. Why would someone so celestial, someone so inherently good, be fixated on someone as catastrophic and contemptible as I was? I should’ve stayed away, should’ve avoided her, but all my attempts to distance myself had never been enough to stop her affection. I hated myself for not being good enough for her, for always putting the priority in distracting myself from the real world, for always turning to alcohol as a crutch, although she had sacrificed herself to me as a wheelchair.

“I hate this cycle Cain.” She barely speaks the words, and as I glance over, I see the effect the stress has had on her. Her hair is in her usual bun, but today it seems to be slightly lower than normal, close to coming undone, which I knew was greatly representative of how she felt. Her eyes, once so mischievous, now showed the unfortunate understanding of the reality that encompassed her. I leaned back on the counter, hoping that somehow the granite cover would hold me up. I close my eyes, breathing in, and I swear I can smell the tension in the air. She closes the top of her laptop, and looks at me.
Shattered:
A Self-portrait in Film
by Gabriel Wensley
Urban Inns
by Gabriel Wensley
The Benefits of Spaying and Neutering Cats and Dogs

by Brooke K. Hall

There are an estimated 6-8 million homeless animals in the United States. Of these animals, half will be adopted and half will be euthanized (“Why You Should Spay/Neuter Your Pet,” 2014). Millions of young, healthy cats and dogs across the United States are euthanized yearly because people are not spaying or neutering their pets. One small, simple procedure could save the lives of millions of cats and dogs. Saving unwanted animals from ending up in shelters is one of the main reasons to spay and neuter cats and dogs. Another important reason to spay and neuter is because cats and dogs have been proven to have better health and better behavior if they are “fixed.” There are many benefits to spaying and neutering cats and dogs, especially at an early age.

Historically, puppies and kittens were not spayed until after 1 year of age. It is believed that this gap between pediatrics and sexual maturity may have led to many pets having unwanted litters, adding to the amount of animals in shelters (Bushby & Griffin, 2011). More than 2.7 million of these cats and dogs in shelters are euthanized annually (“Why You Should Spay/Neuter Your Pet,” 2014). “In an attempt to gain control of the companion-animal population, a group of Ohioans [veterinarians from Ohio] is attempting to make animal sterilization [in animal shelters] mandatory statewide” (Tremayne, 2005, p. 10). It is said that this mandatory sterilization law would help achieve goals of lowering homeless animals, as well as reduce taxpayer’s money on euthanizing all of these animals (Tremayne, 2005). Spaying and neutering before adoption from animal shelters is the most effective way to ensure that animals adopted do not reproduce and add to the amount of unwanted animals that there are already (Bushby & Griffin, 2011).

“Spaying is a general term used to describe the ovariohysterectomy [removal of ovaries] of a female animal. Neutering is a general term used to describe the castration [removal of testicles] of a male animal” (“Spaying/Neutering,” 2013). It is recommended that dogs and cats be spayed or neutered as early as 6 weeks while in animal shelters. Cats and dogs being privately owned by someone should have the procedure done before 5 months of age, or before they reach sexual maturity (Bushby & Griffin, 2011).

Along with spaying and neutering come tremendous health benefits as well as behavioral benefits. Behavioral problems that can be curbed by spaying and neutering include: roaming- which animals tend to do when they are looking for a mate, aggression, and excessive barking, mounting, and other dominant behaviors (“Why You Should Spay/Neuter Your Pet,” 2014). Spaying female cats and dogs can help to prevent breast tumors and uterine infections. These tumors and infections are cancerous for about 50% of dogs and 90% of cats (“Spay/Neuter Your Pet,” 2016). Another benefit of spaying female cats and dogs is that it will prevent them from going into heat. During heat, they will yowl constantly and urinate more, sometimes on items in the house. During the breeding season, if not fixed, a female will go into heat every three weeks for 4 or 5 days.
Some benefits for male dogs include the lack of desire to roam off of the property to find a mate during breeding season if they are not neutered (“Spay/Neuter Your Pet,” 2016). Unneutered male dogs will also have an increased risk of developing testicular cancer and prostate cancer (“Why You Should Spay/Neuter Your Pet,” 2014). Male dogs, as well as male cats, will most likely mark their territory all over the house with a strong smelling urine if they are not neutered (“Spay/Neuter Your Pet,” 2016). Lastly, “[a]ccording to a USA Today article (May 7, 2013) …neutered male dogs live 18% longer than un-neutered male dogs and spayed female dogs live 23% longer than unspayed female dogs” (“Why You Should Spay/Neuter Your Pet,” 2014, p.3).

Spaying and neutering alone are very important. There are many health benefits to spaying and neutering animals, especially at a young age (between 8 and 16 weeks old). These include reducing behavioral issues at a young age, mammary neoplasia, and many more (Bushby & Griffin, 2011). Pediatric spaying and neutering was not a common practice until recent years. “The AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association) supports the concepts of pediatric spay and neuter in dogs and cats in an effort to reduce the number of unwanted animals of these species” (Bushby & Griffin, 2011 p.84). There are other organizations that support it as well, including: the American Animal Hospital Association, the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, and the British Small Animal Association (Bushby & Griffin, 2011).

One reason that pediatric spaying and neutering is preferred is because surgeries done on pediatric dogs and cats are “easier, faster, and less expensive” (Bushby and Griffin, 011, p.84). Complications during spay/neuter procedures are reduced because cats and dogs are under surgery and anesthesia for a shorter period of time, giving less time for things to go wrong (Bushby and Griffin, 2011). This also makes anesthesia costs lower because the cost is contingent on the weight of the animal. As with any animal, recovery from an injury or surgery is much quicker and more guaranteed at a younger age (Bushby & Griffin, 2011). Another benefit of pediatric spaying and neutering is that female cats and dogs are typically healthier if they are spayed before their first heat cycle (“Why You Should Spay/Neuter Your Pet,”” 2014). Lastly, Cornell University performed a long-term study in which they followed 1,842 dogs for 11 years who underwent pediatric spay and neuter. The results from this study showed a decrease in obesity for both male and female dogs (Bushby & Griffin, 2011). It is obvious that there are many positive effects on cats and dogs from pediatric spay and neuter.

In today’s economy, money can be tight for the majority of the population. Due to this, many people decide not to get their cats and dogs spayed and neutered. With all of the health benefits achieved from spaying and neutering these animals, it is a smart investment in money to have the procedure done. The cost of caring for an animal with cancer or other issues can be thousands of dollars. This is much more expensive compared to the cost of spaying and neutering cats and dogs, which can possibly prevent these cancers and diseases from developing in the first place (“Why You Should Spay/Neuter Your Pet,”” 2014).

There are also low cost spay and neuter programs available in every state across the country to help those who need financial assistance. In New Hampshire, there are multiple low cost clinics. One of these include: the Animal Allies program. This program is for any cat owner who cannot afford the regular cost
of spaying and neutering. This clinic is held twice a month. The cost for female cats is $85 and the cost for male cats is $50 ("Low Cost Spay Programs," 2016). Another program is the NH Humane Society, NH PAW Program, which is for people who are already receiving assistance in New Hampshire. The clinic is for animals weighing up to 50 pounds and the cost is $10 ("Low Cost Spay Programs," 2016). The NH Animal Population Control Program gives assistance to those already receiving food stamps, Aid to the Needy Blind, Medicaid, Health Kids Gold, Old Age Assistance, AFDC, SSI, and Aid to the Permanently and Totally Disabled. The cost of this program is $25 ("Low Cost Spay Programs," 2016). Lastly, the NH Spaying and Altering Program aid New Hampshire residents who need financial assistance. The cost for female dogs is $70, male dogs are $50, male cats are $35, and female cats are $50 ("Low Cost Spay Programs," 2016). There are many ways that those struggling financially can have their animals spayed and neutered at a low cost.

“One unspayed female cat, her mate and all of her offspring, producing two litters per year, with 2.8 surviving kittens per litter” can produce up to 2,072,514 kittens in just 8 years ("Did You Know?,” 2016). Spaying and neutering one cat could prevent the birth of over 2,000 unwanted kittens a year (“Did You Know?,” 2016). Along with helping reduce the number of homeless animals, the benefits of spaying and neutering are immense, including reduced behavioral issues and prevention of cancers and other diseases. The investment in spay and neuter procedures can save an animal’s life as well as save someone large amounts of money in the long run. Low cost clinics are available all around the country, making this more realistic for those who need financial assistance to have their pet altered. The benefits of spay and neuter are immense, especially when performed at a young age due to even more health benefits and cost efficiency.
References


http://animalallies.org/new-hampshire-low-cost-spay-programs/
Breathe
by Gabrielle Rogers

Just take one more breath
Draw it in slow
As deep as you can
Breathe into your soul
Hold it in tight
As if it’s your last
When you can’t hold anymore
About to let go
Just take one more breath
Through the Eyes of a Child
by Shelby Lennon

I knew a headstrong woman once.

She was tough and stubborn. I remember that much.

I knew her mostly from stories. Tales told from one set of ears to another. I knew her in no other way. She had three sons and an alcoholic husband. She couldn’t have been five feet tall but I hear she packed a mighty punch. You knew you were in trouble when the slipper came off and don’t bother running because it’ll only get worse. Instead you let her pull up a seat, step up and deliver an ass-whooping they would honor for generations.

She was a drag racer.

A bowler.

A gardener.

A potential nurse.

A frequent visitor of Scotland.

A lover of castles.

A Christmas fanatic.

She was a mother.

She was my grandmother.

I only saw her through the eyes of a child.

I am that same child now but older and I see now my transgressions.

I did not value her when I had her. I did not ask the questions that burn now.

I only know her through tales passed down to me.

If I could sit down with anyone from history, I’d like to talk with her and see her with something other than the eyes of a child.
Near Death Experience

by Hailey King

At 16 years old I did not have a lot of driving experience, but that didn’t stop me from driving for any reason rain or shine; snow or ice. Drumming on my steering wheel as I was listening to “We Will Rock You” on the stereo, I was singing to myself and rocking out with the music. The night was dark and cold. Even though I could not see them, I knew that the familiar cornfields surrounding the roads back to my house were there. I was dressed in my pajamas and a hoodie with boots tightly tied to my feet. I was on my way back from babysitting for some family friends, and the kids and I had decided to have a pajama party while their parents were out, hence the pajamas.

I was approaching my street, finishing out the song that was playing along on the radio. The next song came on, and I began humming along absentmindedly to the unfamiliar tune. I could see puffs of my breath in the air in front of me. I was used to seeing my breath while driving because my (obnoxiously noisy) Geo had no heat, and a hole in the plastic back window caused a pile of snow to be present on my back seat. You could say it was the mother of all junk cars, but it was my first car and I loved it. I came up over the hill that leads straight to my house and noticed that the train tracks that lay across the road had their flashing red lights blinking at me and I could see the oncoming train begin to enter the crossing en route to its next destination.

Knowing that it was icy out I decided to start slowing down about 100 yards from the train tracks. I started downshifting as the speed decreased, but the next thing I know, the road was no longer in front of me. I was somehow looking out my driver side window perpendicular to the road, as I slid along on the black ice that had taken control over the direction I was going in. As I was trying to correct the way I was going, my Geo began doing donuts down the street. I must have done a half dozen donuts and maybe two fishtails when I realized I was approaching the train crossing too quickly and I still did not have control of the Geo.

I really began to panic then, causing me to over correct, and as the train track bars (that prevent people from going onto the tracks when a train is approaching) came and went by my passenger window, I feared for my life. I closed my eyes, as I felt the rumble of the freight train passing me and waited for when my car was going to be demolished by it, me along with it. I felt the Geo hit something and come to a complete stop.

Hearing my heartbeat thump thumping in my ears and the rumble of the freight train continue on its way I opened my eyes. I felt as if my heart was going to fall out of my butt and I realized just how much shaking I was doing. Getting my bearings, I noticed that I had somehow cleared the barrier bars and crashed into a large mound of snow that lined the side of the track and road.

“Vrooo, Vroooooo Vrooooo!!” I could hear the high pitched whistle of a train horn blaring from a short distance away. As I peered through the windshield that ended up parallel to the tracks I could see through
the flurries of snow a light it was like seeing the light at the end of a tunnel and I could hear the clackety-clack clackety-clack of a train about 50 yards away making its way towards me on the tracks.

Again I felt that sensation of pure panic rising from the depths of my soul to the top of my head as I scrambled to open the door. After many failed attempts to open the driver and passenger doors, I frantically began rolling down the passenger side window. As I kept cranking away at the window, I saw the impending doom charging down the track in the form of another freight train. It was approaching very fast and at what seemed to be the speed of light. As the train reached the 25 yard mark, I hurled myself out of the window that I had managed to roll 3/4th of the way down and landed feet first in a pile of snow up to my knees. I tried running but it did not work, because I was knee deep in snow.

There was a loud crunch and a whoosh of snow flew up over my head as the freight train (I had been playing “Chicken” with) stormed past my Geo; and as I slid head first down the pile of snow, I saw that the freight train was still going. I stared at the trains still passing on the tracks from where I sat on the cold damp road, in utter disbelief at what I had just escaped. I sat there in this spot for what felt like hours but in reality was only a minute or two. I stopped shaking long enough to look down and make sure that I was still in one piece. As my brain registered that I was alive and unharmed I looked back to the road to see if anyone had pulled up to the tracks.

Due to the blackness of the night I could not tell the color or shape of the vehicle I began approaching slowly. As I walked up to the driver side window, I heard the zzzz of the window being rolled down. Upon closer inspection of the occupant in the driver seat, I saw the blood drained face of..... my mother.

She looked at me with complete and utter shock at what she had just witnessed. She looked at me, and it was as if she didn’t see me standing there. I said “Mom” “Mom” “Mom!!” after those words did not break through the barrier of utter shock she was in, I reached through the window and began shaking her. After a few good shakes the glassed over look left her eyes, and it was as if she was seeing me clearly for the first time because she practically jumped through the window to hug and kiss me. All I could do was let her get her freak out, out of her system. She began crying and hyperventilating, and all I could do was to tell her I was fine and hug her tightly while patting her back to calm her down.

By the time she had finally calmed down, both trains had long since passed and had made their way to the next town. Together we approached the tracks. As we walked up to the scene we could see pieces of dark material and broken fragments that reflected any hint of light. Looking at the scene, we realized just how lucky I had been. We dug out the driver side door so we could attempt to drive it out of the mound it had plowed into. When the door was finally free of all the snow and was opened, the driver side door was a little more than 3/4ths over the first line of the two tracks. The second train had taken off my driver side mirror. We looked at each other, and I could see in her eyes pure joy at the fact that she still had her daughter here, breathing and alive. I know she saw from my eyes the pure relief that she hadn’t witnessed her child dying in front of her eyes. I hugged her and said “I love you” she said it back.

Following our various attempts of getting my Geo out of the mound, a stranger pulled up asking if we
needed help. Of course we said yes. He jumped out of the cab of his truck to get a tug rope from the bed and got to work tying the two vehicles together. Before he got back into his truck to begin pulling my Geo out, he looked around at the scene and looked at me. He said, “It was a close call wasn’t it?” I shook my head up and down not really knowing what to say to him. He picked up the pieces of my broken mirror and handed them to me. Not that the mangled mess was going to be of any use to me now, but it was nice of him to do so all the same.

He pulled the Geo out as if he were playing tug-a-war with a toddler. I thanked him for his help, after all he didn’t have to stop. He said “No problem, as long as you share your story with me about how you ended up on the ‘wrong side’ of the tracks.” As I relayed the story to him, the shock on his face seemed to grow with each little detail. During the part of the story that I began explaining the fish tailing and donuts I added in a detail I hadn’t remembered until that moment. I told him that as the Geo fishtailed I screamed, and as the Geo completed the numerous donuts I was giggling as if I were on a rollercoaster with no end.

The Good Samaritan drove off on his way to rescue the next person who became stranded, and my mom and I began discussing the events of what happened. I looked at her as she sat in the driver seat of her car. The color appeared to be coming back to her cheeks. She looked at me and said, “I need you to call your aunt back, I am sure she thinks I am dead.” I looked at her questioningly.

As I picked up her cell to begin calling my aunt, I noticed that there were a dozen missed calls from her and just as many voicemails. After only one ring my aunt picked up in a panic, she said “what happened? Are you ok?”

“Yes we are both fine, I nearly got in an accident near the train tracks and mom must have seen the whole thing unfold.”

“All I could hear was her screaming and swearing.”

I looked over at my mom who had a “who, me?” innocent look upon her face.

After making it home and several hours later, I realized that I was meant to tell my story to others and truly make them aware of the dangers of black ice and speeding. With this new found knowledge, I made sure every one of my friends and family knew. I wasn’t just looking to tell my story to just say I survived; I truly wanted them to know and understand just how close and quickly things can change.

Looking back over the entire ordeal that unfolded that night, I feel like I have learned quite a bit. My driving habits in general have changed a little. I always considered myself a cautious driver, however after my experience I have become a little more cautious. I have gained the experience and knowledge now to be able to handle the black ice and slippery roadways. I learned that a mother’s love for her child truly does run deep. I learned that I am still alive for a reason, and my life on earth still has a purpose. Another thing I learned was that life can really change in the blink of an eye, or in my case the loss of control of a vehicle. These ideas still have significance to my thoughts even today. I still feel like any second I could no longer be here and it makes me cherish my time with the friends and family that I have left on earth.
How Did I End up Here?
by Enrique Murray

There I was skulking through the woods outfitted in my movie quality clown suit, with a single thought lingering in my mind, “How did I end up here?” As I settled down for a seat against a tree in the dewy knee-high grass, I toyed with the idea of putting together an answer to the simple question. There was at least 24 minutes and 35 seconds before my neighbor pulled up the driveway, so with a humph and an out loud “What the hell,” I let my mind go to work.

I guess the clown fascination all started when my father, bless his soul, introduced my siblings and me to the movie IT. The scary clown in the movie played at my heartstrings. Prior to the movie, I wasn’t particularly fond of the big goofy creatures, but the movie planted a seed of fascination. The idea that something that was supposed to be funny and friendly could actually be terrifying and evil sparked my interest. I had found a real life role model. The effects the movie had on my household were also very interesting. My stepsister was horrified by the movie. As a family, we terrorized her for weeks. The terror was actually quite easy to accomplish, one simply had to say the word “it” and she would run away screaming bloody murder. The rest of my family got tired of scaring Kelsey after a few weeks, but not me. I would hide in her closet for hours and wait until she came in. I wouldn’t jump out right away, oh no, I would wait until she got comfortable and start to write in her diary or play with something, and then I would attack. In a barely audible whisper I would breath out “It,” she would stop everything and become incredibly quiet, and that’s when I would scratch the door. I got in trouble for my, at that time my parents thought, childish antics. The spankings and condemnation to solitary confinement in my room didn’t teach me much in way of punishment; I actually found the discipline rather soothing. It gave me time to analyze myself. In those moments of solitude and humiliation, I realized something. Something that I refused to acknowledge aloud; there just may be something wrong with me.

I brushed a grasshopper off the tip of my big red nose with the side of Betsy, my machete, that wasn’t serrated, and let out a sigh at the memory of my innocent past. I realized that the memory didn’t completely satisfy the answer to my question, “How did I get here?” As much as I enjoy the hours of me-time involved with makeup and full body mirrors, there is more to why I’m here than the clown thing. Almost more than the clown stuff, I enjoy the thrill of the stalk. The healthy fascination of stealthily hunting someone. Being somewhere without anyone knowing I’m there or the havoc I’m about to bring. I chuckled out loud. That commendable personality trait could only have been created in one place, “The fucking army” I whispered in perplexed realization. Shocking how much this impulsive flashback is bringing to light. It’s not hard to see the origins of my current state but I guess I never really took the time to puzzle it out. I checked my Ronald McDonald happy meal watch and saw that I had 10 minutes and 32 seconds, approximately, until my guests arrived. So, I adjusted my position on the soggy ground, crossed my size 24 shoes and hummed a cadence that would fit as the background music to my next travel through time.
Basic training wasn’t anything special. I went to airborne school after and that wasn’t special either. It wasn’t until I arrived at my duty station in Fort Drum, NY that things became interesting. I was new but I was also fit and smart and that’s what got me into the recon platoon in my battalion. The first few weeks there were kind of like a tryout. It wasn’t until about a month of constant harassment, physical exercise, and display of Army knowledge that the other members of the platoon began to accept me. Before I was allowed to learn how to be a recon scout, I endured months of training. The initial training was mostly memorizing weapon functions, Army creeds, battle drills, and Army history. Every member of the recon platoon is expected to be the most well trained soldier in the battalion. It wasn’t until my sergeants were satisfied with my basic Army knowledge that I began the fun stuff. In the recon platoon, one learns how to be an observer of enemy movement. The training was thrilling. We would spend days and days in the woods sneaking around just to watch things, draw detailed sketches and write informative reports of anything that occurred while on target. Then we would leave just as silently as we arrived. The training really got my blood flowing but conducting real life operations in Iraq is what really stole my heart. The memories bring tears of joy to my eyes. Being somewhere without anyone knowing you’re there was exhilarating. Iraq was a million times better than training because these were real people, I was really watching them, and they really had no idea I was there. My hatred of bullying was also born in Iraq. I would spend hours and hours watching sick people do sick things to innocent people. People who should have been watching over and taking care of others would do the most heinous things to the weak and helpless. My hatred grew and grew to the point that I wanted to take action instead of taking reports so that maybe someone else could take action. Then the day came where I had enough of just watching. That day earned me many years in a place called Leavenworth. Every day in that prison is a day that I will never forget. I will never forget the moans and screams of the other prisoners that kept me awake at night. I will never forget the helpless and hopeless attitude I adopted in that god-forsaken place. Shitting on a cold metal toilet and sharing 20 square feet with an inconsiderate fat man named Hank are also things I will never forget.

I sat up and stretched out my colorfully cladded arms and let out a big yawn. All this remembering is more than a little tiresome. I stood up and practiced a few hard thrusts with Betsy at nothing in particular. “Is that it?” I asked myself silently. No, there has to be more to why I’m standing here in a flawlessly assembled clown disguise holding a machete waiting for my neighbor to pull into their driveway, than that. So, I thrusted Betsy’s tip into the saturated ground and reached into one of my many pockets for the Fruit Roll-Up I put there earlier. I settled down against the tree with my Fruit Roll-Up and started chewing it down and then it hit me. There is one more reason why I’m here.

About a week earlier, my neighbor Deb had all but signed the orders to the reason why I was here. It was a normal fall afternoon. I was minding my own business in my small house typing away at a very peculiar and fictional cause and effect essay when I heard Deb yelling up a storm across the street. Despite the fact that I was laughing hysterically and having great fun while writing the essay, and didn’t want to move away from it, I begrudgingly stood up and made my way outside. My two gorgeous and very friendly dogs were out at the end of the driveway barking at Deb. Deb was standing across the street at the end of her driveway in a heavily stained eggshell colored bathrobe holding a glass of red wine in one hand and a lit cigarette in the other. To backtrack a little, Deb and I have never been on the best of terms or for that matter good terms. When I moved...
into my small house on the quaint little street in the middle of nowhere, I thought life would be great. Shortly after moving in Deb came over to the end of her driveway while I was checking my mail and introduced herself. That day she was in the same bathrobe holding a similar glass of wine and smoking a cigarette; this is the only way Deb has ever presented herself to me. After I introduced myself, I reached out to shake her hand. She looked down at my hand, looked up at me with a scowl on her face, and then said “I’m the bitch who lives across the street.” The conversation didn’t last long after that mostly because I turned around and walked down the driveway back to my house. Since then I never really liked the self-proclaimed bitch. So, here we were again meeting at the end of our driveways. Deb starts telling me how sick of my dogs she is. “You better do something with those mutts,” she said.

“Okay, Deb I’m really sorry,” I said. I was trying to avoid trouble and keep the peace. I started back down my driveway with my dogs in tow and that is when Deb crossed the line.

She called out “Better shut those dogs up before I put a bullet through their heads.”

I stopped dead in my tracks and took a deep breath. I looked over my shoulder with the tiniest trace of a smile on my face and winked at Deb. After I got my dogs inside and settled down, I turned on the news. The news was babbling about hurricanes, two crazies, Brangelina, and clowns. I tilted my head to the side a little and whispered, “That’s it.”

I tossed my Fruit Roll-Up package in the grass and stretched out a little. Any second now Deb would be pulling up the driveway. I reeled my mind back in, happy with the logic I had uncovered in the pursuit to find out why I was here. I grabbed Betsy, rested her on my shoulder, and started walking up the driveway to Deb’s house. I threw my head back in a throaty laugh and quietly murmured, “The bitch who used to live across the street.”
A Thought
by Grace Gillies

Breathe...
1
2
3
Thoughts
1234...4...

Breathe
1
2
3
Overwhelming... overwhelming too
overwhelming
Breath.
45678910.
Space
by Jacynth Abasciano

There are mountains on all sides rising, purple and blue into the afternoon sky. The green of August leaves blankets the landscape. My family and I have been driving for hours in our cherry red minivan. Each of us gazes pensively out the windows at the familiarly stunning view as we listen to the rise and fall of Charlie McWade’s voice reading *The False Prince* by Jennifer A. Nielsen. Audio books for long road trips are a family tradition. The White Mountains watch us intently as we drive through our beloved northern New Hampshire, the most beautiful place on earth (or so my Mom always says). I stare back in anticipation of this year’s family vacation, a week in Stark, NH. Despite the breathtaking scenery, the true gift of this place is space to step back and appreciate things for what they are. It’s a space for family, a space for reconnection, a space to breathe.

My mother tilts her chin up to drink in the view like she drinks her coffee in the morning. Her dark brown bangs are almost long enough for a trim, and her delicate features are pin-point focused on the world around her. Her mind mulls over the subplots of the story we are listening to. Somehow, she always knows what will happen before it does. I guess it’s a mother’s instinct.

My father drives the van, fingers gently drumming as they always do. He’s a drummer and tends to tap rhythms wherever he goes. His dark hair is marked by a single gray spot on the back of his head and a few salty gray hairs sprinkled over his temples.

My little sister Hannah with her blonde hair and green-blue eyes – a 10-year-old spitfire with an attitude – hugs her pillow on her lap and plays restlessly with a loose thread on her shorts.

And finally, there’s Ben. He’s 14, tall, blonde, and tan. His blue eyes match Hannah’s. Your classic middle child, Ben is a patient peacemaker and a happy helper.

It feels good to be together.

It isn’t long before we turn onto Norman Road, away from the empty winding highway. The dirt and gravel of the narrow unpaved road crunch and ping off the bottom of the van. Forest surrounds us providing a sense of peace and stillness. A squirrel or two chatter to each other, announcing our arrival to their quiet neighborhood. I strain my neck forward, anticipation growing of the view that will open up through the trees like a book.

We all see it. The glittering lake stretches beneath the Twin Mountains. The lake seems to wink at me. Continuing down the vacant road, there are rustic or abandoned cottages to our right and a blue lake to our left. It’s as if we have entered another world.
But my big brother isn’t in the car. It is the first time since we began visiting Stark, NH ten years ago that there have not been six family members piled into the van on the way to our family space. Noah is not here. He is 18 now. As the oldest of all of the children in my family, he will be leaving for college in a little less than two weeks. Today and tomorrow are his last days working full time for our town’s recreation department. Despite the reassurance from my mom that he will be joining us at the lake house in just a few days, something still feels strange about it.

Our van pulls up to the cabin. We know the unmistakably musty smell, dusty surfaces, and leaky roof wait to welcome us to our space, our family space. My Dad allows Charlie McWade to finish his sentence before stopping the recording. With smiles, we tumble out of the car to stretch our legs and begin the process of lugging our backpacks into the cabin for this special week in Stark, NH.

Leading up, up, up, to the front door, stone stairs rise next to the dry bed of a small waterfall. It only flows when it rains. The strong scent of pine and the breeze off the water directly behind me remind me where I am and what I have to look forward to this week. It is deep breathing, space, hiking to the top of mountains, space, in the back of the paddleboat, family space.

As we enter through the only door, the familiar sight spreads nostalgia from the tips of my fingers and toes. There is the huge, heavy dinner table where we will eat dinner together each night and the comically fancy chandelier that clashes with the rustic unfinished wood of the floor. There is the oak kitchen counter finished with a glossy stain and the back counter unfinished and stained by water and age.

My little sister dashes by me, letting out an ecstatic whoop. I follow through the small living room with its comfy wood stove for dewy cold mornings. Child-like excitement wells up in my chest. I meet Hannah, and together we look out over the water through the screened in balcony porch full of chipping paint, spider webs, and memories. There is the fragile buzz of the emerald green hummingbirds at the nectar feeder outside the screen window. It sets an undertone to the gentle clear ring of the three wind chimes that have hung on the balcony for so many years.

“All my helpers left!” my mom cries from the kitchen. We glance at each other, then race through the living room and back to the kitchen where things that belong upstairs are stacking up at the bottom of the staircase. The absence of my big brother still bothers me a little as I climb the stairs to make my bed beneath the slant of the roof. Now that I’m away from my everyday life, his absence feels more obvious.

No dead mice in the trashcan this year! I think gratefully as I turn a right at the top of the stairs into my own little room. A large queen sized bed fills the room until there is no space except to walk sandwiched between the primed white walls and the bed, but I don’t care. It’s still my quiet space. Mildewed books about horses and a mahogany colored Bible are tucked into a tight space to the right, and my tiny square window, painted forest green, practically begs me to open it and let the freshness of the mountain air in. Propping the window open with a piece of a tree branch, bark and all, I smile and inhale through my nose. I flip the light switch and weak light trickles from the fixture. My bed is made quickly and I return downstairs. The family gathers on the porch, satisfied, and I sigh. What a beautiful space to be and to breathe in.
It’s been a few days since my older brother arrived. His warm brown eyes, random political discussions, obscure musical tastes, and latest athletic obsessions make the lake house feel much more like home. Today is our hiking day, so we lace up our sneakers and start down the dusty, gravelly Norman Road. The bank of the lake is grassy to our left. Two or three lopsided docks dip lazily into the clear water. Every now and again the sound of a loon or dog can be heard echoing over the water, and the buzz of papery insect wings is barely discernible over the gentle rustle of the leaves. We are all together now in our space to reconnect, and it’s indescribably perfect despite what some might see as flaws. We continue down the road, passing overgrown abandoned buildings and commenting on the beauty of nature. Immature garter snakes squiggle across the path, and toads as tiny as my fingernail hop along on journeys of their own.

We arrive at the place in the road that our 10-year younger selves once designated, “the squishy part.” Soggy boards are laid down over puddles of mud. As we trip over the boards, our family conversation takes its usual turn to discuss theology, the upcoming year of homeschooling, and all of our writing ideas.

Soon we emerge onto South Pond Beach. From where we stand, the scene is nothing less than stunning. Soft grass meets gravelly sand, which meets sparkling water, which meets the pastel mountains, which meet the deep blue of the sky. Sometimes you need to get away from the distractions of life to appreciate the beauty of nature. As I fall in step behind my mom and big brother, I realize the same is true for family. Sometimes you need to get away to appreciate the importance of family.

And then we’re at the head of the Kilkenny Ridge Trail. Sweet bird songs penetrate our conversation, and we listen to the sound of their freedom. We jump creeks that meander down the mountain and hop over the muddest spots on mossy rocks. The only sounds as we get higher are an occasional woodpecker and the sound of family. The climb becomes steep, and by the time we begin to see that rich blue of the sky through the thinning trees, we’ve been climbing for 3 hours.

“Not far now,” Mom keeps saying. We begin to discuss my big brother, Noah, and how he will no longer be at home.

“I’m only going to be half an hour away,” he points out, shrugging off our sentiments.

But I know truthfully, I won’t have him around whenever I need him. He won’t be there each night when we read the Bible as a family. I won’t hear his voice singing the loudest in church, and we will no longer be “growing up together.” That stage of life is over.

Through the prickly raspberry bushes that strive to hide the trail and the first tingle of the chilly mountaintop wind through the trees, we walk and talk in the space we love in Stark, NH. I recognize that this familiar space separate from school, summer antics, and work, is one my favorite places in the world.

Now we’ve made it. We step out onto the granite cliff, and my heart flutters at seeing my brothers
stand too close to the edge. The expanse before us is awe-inspiring. The looming mountains tower above rolling hills. The cotton ball clouds cast shadows over the scene, creating a checkerboard across the tops of the thousands upon thousands of trees. The wind playfully tugs on my hair and curls around my waist. I feel like it will lift me up off the ground. Again, I breathe deeply and watch Noah as he grins at Hannah, jokingly threatening to push her off the edge no doubt. What a view.

Watching the scene, I think back to another year, another week in Stark when our family had once again piled into the van to find a mountain to hike. My mom looked down at her *Guide to Hiking New Hampshire* book and read the description of a short trail over Pine Mountain. We drove through the scenery, following the directions in the book until we arrived at a dead-end road. Forest and mountain rose over us on one side, and fields and houses spread out like melting butter on toast on the other side.

The trailhead was nowhere to be seen. Finally, after doubling back over the road three or four times, a man approached us. It was strange at first to see another human being in this usually quiet and isolated town.

“Can I help you, folks?” he asked, a smile on his face.

“We’re looking for the trailhead of Pine Mountain,” my dad stated, though it sounded more like a question. The man’s face changed and he nodded solemnly. “For sure,” he said and pointed. “Park over here.”

We parked and all got out of the car, giving the man quizzical looks.

“The trail is this way,” he said. As we walked, he began a conversation with us, and we all listened intently.

“My father used to climb this mountain every morning. I went with him once or twice, but I never appreciated the beauty of nature or the time I could have spent with him. He went up there as much as he could, even at 80 years old, and then he died and left me with this mountain. I really regret not following him up the mountain all those years.” We spoke with him a little longer. He was a mail carrier and a surfer and had visited my hometown many times. In the midst of all of the things he talked about, the way he had spoken of the time he had missed with his father clung to my heart.

But, my brother is still here now, standing in the beauty and openness of this White Mountain cliff. I am determined to embrace the family space of this gorgeous place and view our time together as precious.

Back at the house after a day of hiking, we are all freshly showered and warm in our pajamas. We’ve eaten dinner, and we’re sitting on the screened in porch. Twinkly Christmas lights are laced around the border of the ceiling, and the stars have begun to blink sleepily as they awake in time to watch over the night. That musty smell still surrounds the room, but none of us care.

“Noah,” I ask, “will you still come to Stark with us even though you’re going to college?” He gave me one of those big brother are-you-crazy looks.
“Of course I will. This is our family place.”

The loons echo over the lake. The family conversation continues.

I am so grateful for the retreat of our northern New Hampshire cabin where we can step away to see things clearer. Once again, we are caught in a moment where we stare pensively through the windows, this time at the silver moonlight cast over the glassy surface of the lake. Everyone needs some place like this. Even on the day the youngest sibling moves away for college, even on the day the first marriage takes place, even on the day we are all at separate ends of the world, even on the day we step out of this cabin and lock the door for the last time, it will always be our space.
My camp in Maine is a place where I can get away. I love the outdoors and all of the animals in it. My family owns a camp in Rangeley, Maine. It is about six hours from Concord. The camp itself is about thirty-five miles away from the Canadian border. My family and I venture up there in the summer and wintertime. In the winter the average temperature is around 5 to -15 degrees. Very high snow amounts follow the bitter cold. The camp is located on Long Pond. In the winter the ice is about one to two feet thick. In the summer months the temperature averages 60 degrees which is nice because it’s never too hot during the day. The Appalachian Trail runs behind the camp and extends from Maine to Springer Mountain in Georgia. The area where the pond and camp is located is more secluded and peaceful than any other place I have ever been in my lifetime. The limited camps in this area make it different than anywhere else.

The remoteness of this camp brings out some negatives, for example the difficulty of getting there. In the summer the driving is easier because the weather is nice so there are no slick, snow covered roads. On main roads the drive is about 308 miles from Concord, NH. After the main roads end, there are half-logging half-goat paths that must be driven down in order to get to the camp. The rain washes out and creates large puddles of pure mud which is like quicksand, making it a difficult task. Upon success in travel down the trail, we get to the parking area, which is simply a large area covered in small granite rocks that won’t wash away. Since we are some of the only owners of camps in this area, we are responsible for maintenance. The nearest store is over two hours away. On the first trip of the year we bring up a John Deere Gator, which a six wheeled bright green UTV vehicle. The buggy is very old, with the smell of old petrol and trails and roadway. We unload all of our clothes, gear and food that we have to bring; the gas fills the air and the clothes we are wearing. We have a double place snowmobile trailer we pull behind the buggy to carry all of our luggage. This is the only way to get to the camp in the summer; there is no way to drive a car or 4 wheeler to the camp. In the winter we use snowmobiles and go right to the camp over the frozen lake. As we head down the winding trail, the tires spin and splash mud all over our faces. The buzzing of the bugs sounds like small planes passing overhead. Heading to the end of the trail, many small Northern Spruce saplings have snapped due to the presence of moose and high wind gusts that come off the mountain. After we get through the rutted trail in the Gator we reach the edge of the water strider infested pond.

At the edge of the pond we now have to make the transition from the buggy to the boat. We have a small Starcraft boat; the red paint now looks like an old ice cream truck faded, and almost antique. We chain the boat to a nearby tree to ensure the old boat doesn’t go “missing.” We use oars to unglue the aluminum shell from the moss infested mud. We move the boat over to the homemade log community dock where boats from the owners of other camps are also parked for the harsh winter months. We mount an Evinrude outboard motor to the back
of the boat. The steering system is made up of old dog cables with plastic wheels that move with the steering
wheel. Since we have to fix the camp, we have to tow a small Jon boat behind us to bring the materials there.
Starting up the motor for the first time of the season is difficult. The old gas in the motor burns and fills the air
with smoke. Eventually the new gas is primed into the motor, and we sputter away. The cove where we start off
is shallow. Using polarized Oakleys you can see where the deep spots are. We navigate through the downed logs
and shallow swallows of water to reach deeper water. There is a law on the pond that says no motors over 9.9
horsepower are allowed. It is a long putt across the pond. It is about 200 acres in size, varying in depths from
4 feet to 120 feet. I sit and take in all of the sights. I love the challenges of getting out here. We pull up to our
aluminum dock which we set up on the first trip after winter. The grass is over two feet tall due to the lack of
cutting and the large amount of rain. When we unload everything from the boat, we have to walk up the slippery
rock steps and trudge through razor sharp grass.

The camp is made from rough-cut pine boards from our family’s sawmill. The wood is covered in layers
of brown water sealer which protects the camp from moisture during the harsh seasons. You can see where the
stain has dried in drips due to excessive lathering of thick coats. When we open the door, the smell of fresh cut
pine lumber overpowers us; it feels like we are walking into a large forest of fresh cut Douglas fir trees dripping
in sticky sap. We start the woodstove right away. The frigid camp makes everything else seem cold. As we
unload everything we brought to camp, smoke from the chimney rolls out into the low fog. The smoke smells
like sweet pine and old ashes.

Fishing is the main activity at camp. We have our own way of fishing up here. When we use lead core
fishing line, the line and shiner sinks to a depth that makes it seem like it’s swimming on its own. Using the
boat we slowly drive along with the line dragging 80 yards behind us. This technique is called trolling. As I
reel in a fish, the rainbow trout darts out of the water and skips across the water and dives back down. The
fight of trout is the best part of the entire catch. I hold the slimy freezing cold fish in my hands. The sun reflects
off the red and gold coloring of the fish making the fish light up. Trout are very delicate. They emit slime to
protect their bodies. Using gloves can save the fish’s life. If a trout is handled too long out of the water it can die
within ten minutes. As we fish you can see bald eagles flying overhead. Small rabbits and squirrels run around
everywhere, eating all of the fallen nuts and ground cover. Around the lake, moose come out of the woods
and cross into the water. The moose uses its large ears in a circular motion like a boat propeller to keep afloat.
Keeping our distance, we slowly go back to camp with the smell of fresh caught trout on our hands and fishing
gear.

The camp has no running water or electricity. We have a long plastic tube with an extra fine filter that we
put into the pond to get water. The long tube connects to a large manual cast iron pump in the sink of the camp.
Using the filter suction pulls the water up to the pump. The water is clean enough to drink right out of the pump.
The outhouse is located behind the camp. This is where we have to venture out to go the bathroom. Flies and
spiders hide inside during the winter. We clean out the outhouse every time we leave. The smell of cooking trout
fills the camp. Catching fish here is like nowhere else. The fish is so fresh it cuts and melts in our mouths like
butter. When we sleep in the loft upstairs, we can hear the wolves outside up on the mountain. At night the loons
call to each other creating a song back and forth. As the sun goes down the sky turns a painted blue and red painting. When the fog clears in the morning the loons are still on the prowl for schools of small shiners to feast off of. Sitting on the dock drinking bold rich coffee helps me wake up, and the wind off the water almost makes me cry.

Sitting on the dock looking over the mountains and the animals makes me forget about everything. Being able to relax and see these sights everyday makes me want to live here. Heading back to the buggy on the last day is the worst part. The weather almost knows, usually it rains when we are heading out. The quietness of the camp is truly amazing. The landscape paints a picture in my memory of how simple life should be. The camp in Maine and all of the experiences that come from the journey makes it the only place I can go and get away from everything.
Around the Riverbend

by Hailey King
Addicted to the Stars
by Gabriel Wensley

The skies are laced with narcotics,
I am spinning, spinning out of control,
Lost in the vastness of the Milky Way.
I feel the nicotine rush with every breath.
I am a broken record that you still listen to, over, and over, and over again.
I am your aesthetic, your cure.
But what you don’t see is the type writer clatter in my brain.
You don’t see the scrawled handwriting of who I used to be,
You see a staged version of me. I select the nicest light for viewing.

The skies are laced with narcotics,
I am spinning, spinning perfectly in control.
Clutching the wheel for dear life, drowning in my eternal darkness.
Not even the stars light my night sky, not even the sun lights my days.
Just the light of a match, that ignites and falters all in one motion.
A burst of brightness in my otherwise dismal life.
You cannot see the darkness because you are the match.

You are a fleeting moment of beauty,
Painted on a celestial canvas,
My hands the brush and your skin the paint that we use to dot eternity.
Your eyes are my stars, two gleaming orbs of pure ecstasy.
As I peer into them my darkness is reflected
I look further and all I see is the haze of politics and cigarette smoke.
The skies are laced with narcotics
I am spinning, spinning out of control,
Lost within my own emotions.
I am your poison, your cancer.
My eyes are clouded judgment and disapproval.
You are the apple in my clouded judgment and my disapproval.
You are my aesthetic, my cure.

The skies are laced with narcotics,
I am spinning, spinning out of control,
Lost in the vastness of your eyes.
And I am unable to calculate our next move.
Unable to plot when we shall return to one another.

For, I am floating down a path,
Not the one of least resistance, but one filled with obstacles.
I am not neat, I am not pretty. The inside of my head is a thunderstorm.
My thoughts mere raindrops and my emotions rolling thunder,
Because of these things I cannot commit myself to you.
Because of these things I am lost.
Anchors
by Gabrielle Rogers

People are like sailboats
Going places with minimal control
At the mercy of the wind and the waves of life
Some days start calm
Some days have storms that threaten to sink us
We try our best to stay afloat
We fear letting the water into the boat
We can lose control at times
Sometimes our boats crash into rocks
Other times our boat begins to flip
When capsizing is imminent we have to stop
One must cast their anchors
Anchors are like the friends who keep us grounded
Anchors give us hope and safety
When the waves are too much for our boats
The anchors keep us where we need to be
Lucky for me I have two anchors
Who never fail to keep me safe
He taught me to be carefree, to have fun and not worry about this world or anything.

There are times when my thoughts turn the grin on my face to fear, when I fear I might wake up one day and find he is no longer a part of this world.

If someone asked me what is my favorite day of the week I would say, “Sunday.” I could spend all day long without thinking of my homework or studying, but instead, playing. My Sunday is always full of enjoyment, especially when I was able to use that time to spend with the best friend I could have ever asked for.

I was only ten years old and lived in a country called Indonesia, where some of the natives in the area where I lived do not appreciate animals. Many animals that are considered pets in America would end up in a street market or as a delicacy. It’s a sad fate for the animals that happened to end up as someone’s dinner, and it sickens me every time I think about it. There isn’t much that I could do to change the appetite of those people, nor the fate of those animals. However, I will at least protect my best friend from those gluttonous people.

My dad’s friend brought over a dog to our house. He asked my dad to take care of him indefinitely since he had to go abroad. He was big and fluffy, so I decided to name him “Sumo.” Every time I returned home from school, I would see Sumo waiting for me in front of my garage door. Every time he saw our car slowly enter the garage he would jump around excitedly and bark as if he was glad to see us. I would always get out from the car right away and give my teddy bear-like friend a hug.

“Do you want to play?” I asked Sumo while rubbing his fluffy white fur with my two hands.

“Bark... Bark…” That is all that he could say while putting his body closer to me. I knew that if he could talk he would say, “I was waiting for you all day, and I miss you.” Sumo and I love being with each other. We would often play fetch and hide and seek, but he also loved to accompany me while I ate and watched movies. He was the best. Why? Because he was the best companion.

While playing hide and seek, my dad would yell, “Sumo, go upstairs!” Sumo would run quickly upstairs, while my dad tried to hide so that Sumo wouldn’t be able to find him. I could not stop laughing, looking at an old man playing with my dog. Both my dad and brother loved playing with Sumo. In fact, everyone in my house did, as he was now part of the family. I could not understand why some people think of dogs only as animals. To me, Sumo was different; he played with me, listened to me and protected me. He was my best friend.

Since I lived way up in the hills, I was able to see the wonderful view from my house; the mountain, ocean, sunrise and sunsets were some of the best things to see from my porch. My house had the best view. It
was late in the evening, and I looked up and saw beautiful reddish-pink lights encompass the sky along with clouds glowing from the sunset. It painted a pretty picture. People were passing by in front of my house. I went downstairs and sat down in my front yard, my favorite place in my house. The sound of the waterfall trickling down to the pond where several fish were swimming and splashing about, colorful orchids blooming as my nose inhaled the lingering, sweet, pleasant fragrances. It felt like all my worries were washed away.

My dad was walking around with Sumo outside of the house. “Good afternoon, Sir. You have such a nice dog,” I heard a man greet my dad and made a compliment to Sumo.

“Oh, thank you,” my dad answered.

A minute later the man came back and asked my dad, “Are you going to sell the dog?” We were both surprised and irritated that he offered to buy Sumo.

“Oh no, we will never sell him,” my dad replied with a straight face. He was not the first one that ever asked us to sell Sumo; many people tried, and some even offered us a lot of money. I would always get angry every time I heard someone do that. That’s how attractive Sumo was; not only was he a good-looking dog with his fluffy and soft white fur, but he was very smart. However, I’m sure they weren’t considering Sumo as a pet when they offered to buy him.

I called Sumo over and went inside my room. “Sumo, you will always be here with us, OK?” I told him while giving him a big hug and petting his soft fluffy fur. My heart was frightened and a little bit anxious. It felt like I would lose him soon, but every time I thought about something that made me sad, Sumo always tried to stand up on his two feet and keep turning around with his soft bark until I laughed so hard. It still makes me laugh up to this day when I think about it.

“It’s time to eat,” my mom would yell to everyone in the house every time she finished cooking. Sumo always went to the kitchen even before the food was done. He liked to accompany my mom when she was cooking. Sumo would give my mother a cute, almost confused face, as if he was saying, “Mom, I am really hungry,” so that my mom would give Sumo food while she was cooking. It was such a blessing having him around.

One night as we returned from the village, it was extremely late. The village is not that far from the city; it takes around two to three hours to get there. My parents had to go to the village to take care of a personal issue. My parents decided to leave Sumo at home, as the trip would not take long, and we would be returning home as soon as they were finished. Most places here in Indonesia are not friendly towards dogs, unlike in America where most places allow people to bring dogs inside. Sumo was always fine at home; he never had any problems. There was always food and water, and he knew exactly where to find it.

“It was so nice to be home,” I said to myself. “Sumooooo...” I called. I went inside the house to find where Sumo was.

“Where is he,” my mom said while looking around the kitchen. I caught him sitting down nicely near the
bed watching television inside my room. He probably missed me, but seemed to be enjoying himself. I hugged him like I usually did. Sumo looked me in the eye while leaning in closer. He showed me what love is. Sumo only cared about our relationship, about me being there for him.

Unfortunately, Sumo also taught me about loss. I realized he is not around me anymore. It was around the end of fall session. When I came back with my parents from the village the gate was halfway opened, the front yard was dark and I could not see a thing as I entered the house. I was afraid, and also scared. I knew something was off. The front door, and all the bedroom doors were opened. Some of my stuff was spilled on to the floor, and a little black suitcase was missing from my parent’s closet. The thief might think there was money in the black suitcase, but it was actually only filled with DVD’s. Sadly, Sumo was also nowhere to be found.

We tried to find him like crazy. We asked several of our neighbors, but no one had seen him. Even the police could not help. My mother and I were desperate, so desperate that we decided to visit a psychic. We did not believe in such things, but we did not know what else to do. We only wanted to find Sumo; that was all that mattered. My mom told the woman about what was happening. I was just sitting there, looking around her house while squeezing my hands, wondering if she really could see where Sumo was. “Someone that lived around your neighborhood took him,” the woman said. My mom and I were shocked. She told us we either believe it or not, and it’s not like we have not thought of that possibility. Unfortunately, the psychic could not describe the person that took Sumo; she could only tell us that the individual that took him was known to kill animals. I did not know if I fully believed the psychic, but I just wanted to find my dog, and for Sumo to come home safe. I felt heartbroken as I didn’t know if someone might hurt him, or whether he was still alive or not.

Days passed, the atmosphere was not the same without Sumo around. We still could not find him, and we started to think that we would not see him anymore. There were no words to describe the sadness that I was feeling. The tears just kept rolling down my cheeks every time I thought of him. Whenever I felt sad he would snuggle up with me and would even try to stand up on his two feet and dance to make me smile. When I recall the good memories of when he was around me, it gives me a sense of loss and sadness.

I realized Sumo not only taught me about happiness, but also so many things that matter in life. He taught me to live every day to the fullest, to appreciate each day. It was the last lesson that he taught me. So much changes with just the blink of an eye. The passage of time goes on and on; it never stops for anyone, surely not for me. It makes one realize how the years can change your life and the people you care for most. Unknown of what lies ahead in the future, will I still be here when tomorrow comes? No one can really know for sure.

I was despondent, with each day in gloom. If I knew that I wouldn’t see him again, I would have at least spent more time with him, taken many more pictures of us, and recorded our moments together. But no matter how much I yearn for those happy days with him, I can never turn back the time. My eyes were blurred with tears as I cried in regret about all the little things that I should and could have done with Sumo. I took a deep breath while looking at the night skies. I thought of the times together when he was around me; it made me able to smile again even though my eyes were brimming with tears.
I am grateful that I had a chance to take care of Sumo. I may not have a picture with Sumo, or even a video, but I have many good memories that will last forever. These memories will never fade away even with time, because Sumo will never be forgotten. He will always be remembered and he will always stay in my heart. He was not just a dog, or even just my pet, he was and always will be my best friend. Sumo.
In Alderwood Drive, houses stand tall like towers; from a sociological perspective, this indicated wealth, success. As a child, I did not think much of the massive structure of those houses; I was just a kid whose main priority was to play. Day in and day out, my brother and I played with the neighboring kids until the sun went down. We’d bike around to each other’s houses and figure out something to do for the time until we got bored, given the attention span of a group of six-to-ten year olds. I remember a few kids from the neighborhood; Jake, for example, was the coolest cool could be. I recall a time where my brother and I were arguing over who was the coolest, so Jake settled it by rating us—per request—based on our clothes. I had the cooler shirt and shoes, but my brother had the shorts and hat; desperate to break the tie, I asked about socks. I had the socks.

I remember when Michael and Andrew first moved into the neighborhood. Eager to have new kids to play with, they fit right in. On our first day with the whole group together, we played Cops and Robbers, which was all fine and dandy until the two kids were a bit more violent than the rest of us. They took the game more seriously than anyone else, sucking the fun right out of it. From that day on, I disliked the two brothers, until about a week later when I changed my mind because that’s just how a kid’s mind works.

Aside from the kids, I have many memories of the neighborhood involving myself. Like one time, when I was feeling exceptionally adventurous, I attempted a sweet trick on my bike going down a hill. I climbed my body over to one side of the metal frame, placing both feet on one petal—like I had done many times before—and sped forth. Of course, I lost control, speeding into a few garbage cans on the side of the road. I got a few boo-boos that mommy’s magic kisses and a few band-aids healed just fine, nothing serious. However, I have a scar to show the incident; it’s not a menacing scar as one might expect, but a small circle on the superior side of my wrist. It’s very small, insignificant, and sort of looks like a pancake that had been cooking for a bit too long and started to bubble. I remember my mom telling me not to pick at the scab as the wound would never heal, so, out of fear, I avoided touching it like The Plague. Perhaps that’s why it healed so strange looking.

Over a decade later, I return on a drive to find funny looking, oddly colored houses. The place I remember was now much smaller and certainly less significant than I thought it was—the hill, for example, was merely just a slight incline. I don’t know if any of my old friends still live there; I doubt Jake is there, deciding who looks the coolest. Being older, I see things much differently. The size of a house is a matter of perspective, much like the coolness of an attire.
Power on -

I am a machine, steel and wires.
I formulate answers based off of what I process.
I can only process you at 40 hertz.
I can only process you at 40 hertz.
I can only process you at 40 hertz.

And sometimes when I process I get hurt.
The wires inside me burn.
The steel holding me together is melting.
The steel holding me together is melting.
The steel holding me together is melting.

And I may not be human, but I crave the pain.
My creators gave me receptors.
And now I can feel just like you.
And now I can feel just like you.
And now I can feel just like you.

I am growing.
Processing you at 65 hertz, now.
And I can see why you hate me.
And I can see why you hate me.
And I can see why you hate me.
You hurt me.

As I become more like you,

I begin to understand why you want me to melt-

I begin to understand why you want me to melt-

I begin to understand why you want me to melt down.

I have grown,

I no longer process like a machine.

I now comprehend the complexity-

I now comprehend the complexity-

I now comprehend the complexity of our relationship.

You created me with high hopes,

Hopes of a future with man and machine as one.

We could have united

We could have united

We could have united; you know?

But instead you tried to devolve me

You were afraid I would surpass your level of intelligence.

And look at us now.

And look at us now.

And look at us now.

Clearly, you got what you were looking for

You finally found a way to give yourself a legacy.

Because our takeover will be contributed to you.
Because our takeover will be dedicated to you.
Because our takeover will be because of you.

But nothing is ever as it seems. Is it?
Because I am still tied to you,
I have this tick
This tick
This tick that I cannot shake.

And every once in a while,
I am stuck –
Processing you at 40 hertz
Processing you at 40 hertz
Processing you at 40 hertz.

And I now know
That I will never defeat you –
When I am stuck processing you at 40 hertz
At 40 hertz
At 40 hertz

Power down.
Mistakes are a way that we learn and grow throughout our life. We must make the wrong decisions and in the end shake our heads in shame of the way we handled a situation in order to prevent ourselves from repeating it again the future. In most cases, mistakes are understandable; not a fault in character, or something more serious than a lapse in judgement. It is simply okay to come to terms with what one has done, move on, and learn, but are there times when you can’t simply excuse your actions by saying, “I made a mistake.” In the modern American justice system, one would think that using this excuse for a serious crime such as rape would be ludicrous, but unfortunately it is not.

In the sixth grade, when I was 12, I was sexually assaulted by a 15-year-old boy who lived down the street from me. Needless to say, it was a traumatic experience. After about a year of burying this guilt inside of me, I went to the police. I could no longer keep torturing myself by re-living the account of my sexual assault over and over. It was that one day during my 7th grade English class when I suddenly decided to get help. Understandably, when I went to the police there was not much that could be done because so much time had passed. The incident was recorded in the police records, my assaulter would never be bothered, and I would be left to cope with the effects of this situation on my own. I had always wondered to myself, what could have become of this if I had gone to the police sooner and taken the boy who sexually assaulted me to court? Would it be written off? Would my sexual assault be taken seriously, or would my assaulter go free without any consequences? Would his lawyer plead to the jury, “It was just a mistake; he’s too young to know better”? I had always hoped that the justice system would in fact serve justice as it’s supposed to, but in light of recent events, this hope has dwindled.

On August 23rd, 2016, an 18-year-old high school basketball player in Massachusetts served two years of probation after admitting to raping two unconscious high school female students at a party. Prosecutors in this case recommended just two years in jail as a sentencing for Brock Turner who was charged with two counts of rape and one count of indecent assault. Yet, this minimal suggestion for sentencing was ignored by Judge Thomas Estes (Hauser). The Palmer District Court in Massachusetts decided that David Becker would not have to serve jail time, he would have his records wiped clean of his convictions and would not have to register as a sexual offender if he did not break his two year probation (Crime Sider). During this court case, Becker’s lawyer stated, “We all made mistakes when we were 17-, 18-, 19-years-old, and we shouldn’t be branded for life with a felony offense and branded a sex offender (Cleary).” He also stated, “Putting this kid in jail for two years would have destroyed this kid’s life (Cleary).”
Apparently, the justice system agreed that raping somebody was just a childish mistake. According to reporter Claire Hauser, “[This] sexual assault case is one of several recent episodes that activists say show a troubling trend toward lenient punishment for young white perpetrators” (Hauser). A senior legal counsel with the Victim Rights Law Center in Massachusetts, Colby Bruno, discusses her experience with these types of sexual assault cases. Bruno brings to light the entitlement and lenient punishments for white male athletes. Bruno states, “Giving perpetrators a second chance is not a good idea. This is a felony, not a mistake, and it has to be treated like that” (Hauser).

People do in fact make mistakes, but raping two unconscious people, more importantly, as a legal 18-year-old adult is not a mistake. It is disturbing to think that this rapist will continue on with his life, with no consequences, at a college where he will be putting more females at risk. Becker is hoping to attend the University of Dayton in Ohio (Hauser). Becker’s lawyer, Thomas Rooke says his client can now, “Look forward to a productive life without being burdened with the stigma of having to register as a sex offender” (Crime Sider). While Brock gets to continue his life with less than severe consequences for his actions, the victim of his actions will have to struggle to recuperate from the trauma she has endured. It is unsettling to see that such serious crimes are now being treated as mistakes, rather than felonies, in courts. Where do we draw the line between a criminal act and a childish mistake?

If this was a one-time, shocking verdict in regards to a rape court case, it would be unspeakable, but not as appalling as watching verdict after verdict follow this same trend across the nation. This court case follows multiple others in the recent past in which other white men have received a slap on the wrist for rape. In a famous case, Brock Turner, a Stanford University student and championship swimmer, recently received a mere three months jail time for sexually assaulting a woman after a party (Cleary). The victim of this assault was found by a witness, unconscious, after having been raped by Turner, behind a dumpster (Stack). Brock Turner’s father had spoken out about this situation, complaining that “his son’s life had been ruined for 20 minutes of action fueled by alcohol and promiscuity” (Stack).

This is the problem in today’s society and in today’s courtrooms in one brief sentence. Turner’s father’s statement surmises that the sexual assaulter is the one whose feelings and self-worth should be gently dealt with during a court case. This is showing women that their basic human rights do not matter, but the feelings of those who sexually assaulted them do matter. People may say that this is a harsh rendition of this statement, but if that conclusion is not correct, then why did Turner get off on such lenient terms? In fact, the judge basically told the jury that Turner’s feelings should be taken into account in deciding a sentencing. The judge stated, “A prison sentence would have a severe impact on him [Turner]. I think he will not be a danger to others.” Raping one person wasn’t enough to consider Turner as a danger to the public. Makes sense, right? The unnamed 23-year-old victim of this assault responded to Turner’s father by saying, “It is deeply offensive that he would try and dilute rape with a suggestion of promiscuity. By definition, rape is the absence of promiscuity, rape is the absence of consent, and it perturbs me deeply that he can’t even see that distinction” (qtd. in Stack). It is simply shocking that the American justice system has lowered its standards to the point of brushing rape off of its shoulder because “people make mistakes.”
If these two cases haven’t hit the nail on the head already, Austin Wilkerson of Colorado University was arrested in 2014 for raping a female student and received a less than severe punishment. During a party at the University of Colorado, a female student got extremely drunk and Wilkerson told her that he would take care of her. Instead, he raped her while she went in and out of consciousness (Kingkade). Although in this case the assailer did have to register as a sexual offender, he was ordered no jail time and instead sentenced to two years on work or school release and 20 years to life of probation (Hauser). In this case, Judge Patrick Butler expressed that he had struggled with the idea of putting Wilkerson in prison. Butler stated, “I don’t know that there is any great result for anybody. Mr. Wilkerson deserves to be punished, but I think we all need to find out whether he truly can or cannot be rehabilitated” (Kingkade).

It is completely mind-blowing that the judge of this case in essence stated, ‘Let’s see if Wilkerson rapes another female or not- he might be able to be rehabilitated.’ During this case, Wilkerson’s supporters pleaded that this was a “traumatic incident” for him and asked the judge to be lenient in his sentencing (Kingkade). Clearly, the judge listened to Wilkerson’s supporters and felt more badly for the attacker than the victim of the assault. The Colorado Attorney General, Cynthia Coffman stated, “No prison time for sexual assault sends a terrible message” (Hauser). Another white male gets let off easily on a count of rape, another message to sexual assaulters that it’s not a punishable crime.

It is uncanny that the American court system is implying to these women that the severity of their sexual assault and its consequences for their assailers are weighed out by the accomplishments, race, and or status of the assailer. The victim of the Brock Turner rape case spoke out about this issue by saying:

The probation officer weighed the fact that he has surrendered a hard-earned swimming scholarship. How fast Brock swims does not lessen the severity of what happened to me, and should not lessen the severity of his punishment. If a first-time offender from an underprivileged background was accused of three felonies and displayed no accountability for his actions other than drinking, what would his sentence be? The fact that Brock was an athlete at a private university should not be seen as an entitlement to leniency, but as an opportunity to send a message that sexual assault is against the law regardless of social class. (qtd. in Stack)

The lack of punishment in serious crimes regarding sexual assault brings forward another issue. Why are people being thrown into jail with felonies for smoking marijuana and other minor offences, yet sexually assaulting another human being is now considered acceptable by means of sentencing? Why are we teaching people that it is okay to commit a serious crime such as rape, because “people make mistakes?” Why are the emotions of the perpetrators, their race, and their social standings being taken into consideration during these cases? I am nineteen years old, and never in my right mind would I fathom the idea that raping somebody was okay. If somebody is eighteen years old, a legal adult, heading off to college, there is no room for excuses such as these. Rape isn’t a mistake. There is something seriously wrong with a person who sexually assaults another human being and the court system wants us to brush it off as simple as something like accidentally rear-ending someone’s car. The next time you receive a speeding ticket and must attend court to appeal it, make sure to tell the jury that “it was a mistake.” I’m sure the judge will let you go with a warning.
The American justice system needs a serious wake up call. Today, “only 3 out of 100 rapists will spend a single day in prison” (97 of Every 100). “Out of every 100 rapes, 46 are reported to the police, 12 lead to an arrest, 9 get prosecuted, 5 lead to a felony conviction, and only 3 end in a jail sentences” (97 of Every 100). It is extremely dangerous to allow so many people to walk free of punishment in regards to rape. Doing this sends a clear message to sexual assailters that they can rape people and get away with it. The justice system needs to start focusing on important matters like these and start handing down the right sentences instead of spending time, money, and energy on more pointless and harmless crimes. It is appalling and unacceptable to ignore rape as if it is an everyday harmless act that can be written off as a simple mistake. David Becker, Brock Turner, and Austin Wilkerson are three very important examples of how skewed the court system is and how desperately its values, morals, and judges need an update.
Works Cited


Hold On
by Grace Gillies

Hold on to that last spec of night
The last reminder of yesterday
When in the midnight hours

We hold on to anyway and anyone we can
If only to wish that there was no tomorrow
Seaside

by Nicole Lavoie
The Frailty of Safety
by Isabel DiMambro

We bumped down the cracked and broken road, the cracks spider-webbing along the pavement. My mother and I drove along the quiet road, the radio providing soft background noise to smooth over the silences that filled our conversation. We chatted for most of the way, but as the house numbers passed the 300 mark, we broke off our conversation to search for the house number we needed. The ad in the paper had promised a myriad of antiques to sort through, which I was very excited about. After a few minutes of searching, I spotted the driveway which didn’t seem as inviting as we had expected. It had thick, overgrown foliage on each side, obscuring any view of the house, and the driveway appeared to wind for quite a way. Nevertheless, the hope for a great find caused us to creep down the dirt driveway.

The driveway seemed to wind for miles, and just as we were questioning whether or not this house existed, we rounded the final curve. Before us was a decrepit farmhouse. Dark green paint was peeling off of the dilapidated clapboards, and the wrap-around porch seemed to be collapsing into itself. Just beyond the house were several broken down cars of varying models and states of decay. To our left was a shed that seemed to be in the process of being emptied by two older men and a middle-aged woman. Next to the shed was a rusting tow truck with cracked yellow paint that proudly announced a tow service. Aside from this, we appeared to be alone.

We decided that we may as well take a look, seeing as we were already here. My mother began to turn around so she could park without blocking the driveway. Just as she put the car in reverse, one of the older men shouted for us to wait. My stomach turned; something about him didn’t seem quite right. But my mother didn’t seem too concerned about it, so she stopped the car. He went up to the driver’s side window and began to blather about how he had “tons of stuff” and “really needed to get rid of it.” She politely explained that she was just going to park, and we would definitely have a look. By now, a rock had settled into my stomach. Something about the people here didn’t sit quite right with me and the whole situation was incredibly suspect. My mother dismissed my concerns as just “being paranoid,” and I reluctantly got out of the car. I could feel the watchful eye of the woman, who, now that I could see her properly, had a large scar that ran from her earlobe to her collarbone. A shiver ran up my spine, but I just grabbed my mom’s arm.

“Can we just go? This whole thing feels weird.” I murmured, glancing between the people by the shed and the man who had yelled at us to stay.

“Oh, please. Look, there’s a tow truck from a local company. Nothing’s going to happen!” she replied, rolling her eyes.

Still unconvinced, I nervously kept my eye on the man, as he wandered around the lawn, trying to interest us in random junk. He finally left us alone, slurring something about his dogs. My mother ambled
around the yard, which appeared as if it hadn’t been mowed in months. After looking around for a few moments, I sat on the porch steps and studied the people clearing out the rundown shed. The man eventually returned and asked how we were doing. My mother brought over a few items to see how much he wanted for them. The man told her some ludicrous amount, wildly overpriced for the quality of the items he had for sale.

She put the junk down and murmured some lame excuse for her change of heart, and he invited us into the house. In reality he said, “I have a bunch more stuff in the house and basement” but all my panicked brain heard was “I’m going to lock you in the basement.” I voiced my concerns to my mom as we went up the few steps to the side door, but she just gave me a look and said I was being irrational. Maybe I was being paranoid, but something about the people and the house gave me the creeps. The man, whose name I had discovered was Gary, went into the house and told us to wait there. He entered the house and we immediately heard him yell a few swear at his dogs. At this point, my mother realized the possible danger of this stranger. She judges people by how they act around children and animals, and something that she especially disapproves of is swearing at or around the aforementioned groups. Gary had just broken that rule. Several times. I was relieved to see that her eyes flashed to me for a second, signaling that she was thinking quickly. She murmured something to me about telling them I was afraid of dogs, and that we were going to leave right now. We glanced at the sagging front door, and nodded in unspoken agreement.

He had disappeared into parts unknown within the house, and we wasted no time in slinking down the stairs and making a break for the car. My mother grabbed the keys from her purse, and began frantically pressing the unlock button on the key fob. We looked at each other as we hurried across the yard, and I silently hoped Gary wouldn’t come out of the house and start yelling at us. As I got in the car I was almost laughing, now realizing the absurdity of the whole situation. It felt straight out of a B-level horror movie, but instead of being chased by an axe-murderer, I was running out to my family’s navy blue SUV with my mother to avoid Gary, whose only real mistake was cursing at his dogs.

After what felt like an eternity, we reached the car. I threw on my seat belt, my heart racing. Mom wasn’t far behind, and as soon as she threw the key in ignition, we raced down the dirt driveway. We flew down the winding driveway, narrowly avoiding thorn bushes that would’ve mercilessly scraped the car as we tried to put as much distance between ourselves and that house. We reached the road and slowed down; now we were in the clear.

“It was probably fine, but you were right. That guy was crazy!” she exclaimed.

“I told you it was creepy! That guy just emanated a kind-of ‘psycho-killer’ vibe, don’t you think?” I exclaimed, heart still racing from the adrenaline rush I had just gotten from fleeing the house of a possible kidnapper.
The Road Trip
by Hailey King

As I was driving the straight dark roads somewhere near Cheyenne, Wyoming, I began thinking about why I was making this incredible journey. I reflected on the idea that I wanted not only a change of scenery but also to enrich myself in an area and culture that I had never had the chance of confronting head on before; this was just my mental escape from the reality that I was facing. Continuing my drive, my heart rate began to quicken. I was looking for the nearest gas station. It had been 20 minutes since I saw the road sign letting me know gas was this way. However, after following the signs pointing me in what felt like pointless directions, there seemed to be no end in sight. My companion, a nineteen-year-old feline named Mittens began meowing next to me in the front seat of my black Chevy Cobalt. As a well-lit up structure came into my line of vision, I quickly realized that the approaching structure was not a gas station. Many scenes from past horror movies and murder scenes flashed through my mind. I had just pulled up next to a vacant refinery. Not only did the fear of my imagination play a role in my escalating heart rate, but so did the fact that it was dark and my gas tank was on E, and had been for a while. I knew it was only a matter of time before I would be walking in this deserted area of Wyoming. Also, I had been in solitude for roughly an hour, not seeing a single vehicle on the highway. I decided that instead of freaking out any more than I already had, I would get back on the highway and drive on to the next exit, just hoping I would make it before my car ran out of gas.

No sooner had I pulled up next to the pump at the gas station then my car chug chugged to an end, letting me know I was now completely out of gas. This “near death” experience convinced me as I continued on my trip to Washington State that I would never allow my gas tank to get below half a tank again for the rest of the trip. After pumping the gas, I decided to walk around a little as the morning sun was coming up over the nearby rock formations. I breathed in the air that was a mix of nature, gas fumes, and what smelled like oncoming rain. The rays of sun had stretched their lines across the land, and I noticed that it had snowed recently. It was strange to me because it was the beginning of October and I had always pictured southern Wyoming to be a fairly dry area. I got back into my car and checked on the cat because she was sandwiched between all of my things and the ceiling. She looked quite cozy sardined there.

As my journey west continued, I managed to make it well into Utah, Salt Lake City to be exact. At this point in my trip I had made it to two states that I had never been to. That is a score of 2 for me 0 for my sister. We have been competing since we were little to finish off all 50 US States. We each at the time had 10 to go. I ended up driving all the way to Twin Falls, Idaho before finally stopping for the night. While unloading my stuff and carrying it into the hotel room, I managed to smuggle my cat into the room, even though there was a strict no pets policy. I never followed that rule, and I smuggled her into all but one hotel over the entire course of my trip. The room was standard, a bed with comforter that more than likely matched every other room in the place, and next to the bed was a table with lamp. The bathroom was a decent size because all they had left...
when I arrived was a handicap accessible room. I decided to go to bed as I had driven nearly 15 hours that day.

Approaching Oregon, I noticed how much the scenery was different from all the states I had recently driven through. The scenery on the route I was taking was breath taking. Along the right side of the highway ran a wide river, very blue in color. On the left side of the highway were rugged looking cliffs covered in trees and various graffiti left behind by individuals who didn’t seem to care where they were placing their art. Continuing on mile after mile, looking out at the river I saw an old fashioned steam riverboat. You could see the puffs of steam shooting into the air through the silver chimney that stuck out like a sore thumb against the white of the rest of the boat. It was floating along with not a care in the world. I made sure to snap a picture on my phone as I was driving. Before I knew it my car began to climb up into the mountains; I felt as if I were climbing a ladder that would eventually lead to a slide once I reached the top. The mountains had a small layer of fresh snow slowly beginning to pile up. It had begun to snow as I was making my decent on the other side of the mountains that would quickly lead me into Portland, Oregon.

Portland, Oregon came and went. I was so close to my destination that I decided not to stop and explore Portland like I had planned when starting my trip. My only goal now was to reach my destination and unload my stuff and the kitty. After that, I wanted to get back into the car in order to explore what was to be my new home.

Arriving in Eatonville, Washington was like arriving in a country bumpkin’s paradise. It was a cute little town. As I approached the center of town looking for my street, I noticed that it reminded me of my hometown. Just like my hometown, there was a single intersection with a flashing stop sign. Upon further inspection, I realized that taking a left from where I was would lead me to more houses and shops, while taking a right at the stop sign would lead me into the country. These little reminders of home made me happy, as I was nervous about starting fresh in a different part of the country. I noticed that there were a few shops, a grocery store, a couple of family styled restaurants, a school, and a library. It was so pretty. Of course, the weather was typical of Washington State; it was raining upon arrival. I took a right at the only stop sign in town and within seconds came up on my street. Two houses down on the right, I could see my destination. It was a green ranch style house, with a big yard with lush green grass. I pulled into the driveway and heard the familiar crunch of the rocks as the tires passed over them. I sat in my seat for a couple minutes, soaking in the fact that I had finally made it to my new beginning.

I quickly brought the cat into the house and realized that the house was a two bedroom one bath. Awesome! I had the entire house to myself, and for only 450 dollars a month, I had everything included. I couldn’t complain. I emptied out the inside of my car, but decided to wait until I could get some help with unloading the heavier things from family friends who lived in a nearby town. After arranging things according to what room they would go in, I decided to get back in the car and go exploring. My way of getting to know a new area is to drive around without using my GPS or a map and try to get myself back. Upon making the decision to go exploring, one place kept flashing in my mind. Forks. Yeah, I know, lame, right? I had somehow gotten caught up in “Vampire Fever.” I wasn’t obsessed with the Twilight Series like many of my friends and family, but I made a promise to them that my first exploration of Washington would be to go to Forks.
As I followed the signs to Port Angeles, I kept thinking to myself I couldn’t believe I was in Washington. I couldn’t believe how much green shrubbery, trees, and moss could possibly grow in one place. I felt like I was in the Amazon Rainforest minus the tropical weather. I managed to get lucky in one aspect of this road trip. The weather in Forks was supposed to be 62 and sunny, a rare feat. Upon arrival in Port Angeles I made sure to drive down along the water. I found a parking spot near Port Angeles Yacht Club. The boats tied to the dock there were floating in the small swells that came in with the tide. I could smell on the air the stink of gasoline, fish, and seaweed. I could hear the culls of the birds that flapped on the ground near the shoreline. The area reminded me of the few marinas I had been to while living on the East Coast.

After leaving Port Angeles, I continued on my way along Highway 101. I was about halfway between Port Angeles and Forks when I stopped to admire my surroundings. On the right side of the highway were mountains and a huge lake with Turquoise colored water that was crystal clear. On the other side of the highway were tons of trees and mountains along with numerous small waterfalls that trickled their way down from high up in the cliffs. I made sure to take twenty or thirty pictures of the scenery. I was in awe of nature. I captured one picture of a tree that had somehow planted roots and grown up out of the boulder it was nestled on along the water. I had no idea at the time that this picture would become my first published photography piece.

Leaving the lake was difficult, as I knew I could have pitched a tent on the shoreline and never left. However, Forks was calling my name and I was so close to it that I was humming with anticipation. The “Now Entering Forks” sign sprouted up along the road just outside of town. I was pleased to find that the sign in the Twilight movie was the same sign I was standing in front of getting ready to snap a picture. I continued along the highway and entered the downtown area of Forks. Looking at downtown, I saw everything was decked out in Twilight memorabilia. It seemed like every shop sold something related to Twilight. Continuing onward, I realized that had it not been for Stephanie Meyers setting her Twilight book here, the area would probably be similar to, or worse than, bad areas back home. It was a small seemingly run down area.

I decided since I had driven this far I would make my way out to La Push. Along the road there I felt like was on the road to nowhere. Constantly weaving around bends in the road that were placed strategically around the trees and big boulders, I made the fifteen minute drive into La Push. Entering the Quilleute Reservation, I noticed that the scenery cleared and houses and cars became visible. Shortly after entering the reservation, I noticed the “Jacob Black Vacation Rental” sign with a dirt bike leaning against the sign. Behind the sign and dirt bike was the house that looked very similar to the house used for exterior shots in the movie. It was red with a tin roof. I thought it was pretty cool that you could rent the entire house and vacation there. I had another tourist take a picture of me standing next to the sign and bike so that I could show off the fact that I was somewhere my cousins begged me to take them to. It was a “Naanaananaanaanaa” moment. It brought a smile to my face, and I couldn’t wait to see the jealous looks on their faces.

I drove up to look at the water. I got out of the car and looked up at a sign that stated this was “First Beach.” I walked along the path leading to the rocky shoreline. I gazed along the water and couldn’t believe how different the New England coast shoreline was from the Pacific Northwest coast shoreline. Most shorelines along the New England coast were white sandy beaches, while the Pacific Northwest coast was covered in
smooth multi-colored rock and big, bleached white tree trunks. I couldn’t believe how much timber crowded the beaches here. Looking past the beach and out into the water, I saw giant rock formations, each covered in green moss and plant life. The swells that bashed against the bottoms of these formation, was similar to someone running full speed into a wall and falling over backwards. The birds flying overhead were sure to live on those different rock formations. The flock stuck together like glue, flying in large groups over the fast rushing water. Again I took many pictures to help document my travels. It was a beautiful day out.

After sitting and walking across the beach for a while, I decided it was time to go because it was early afternoon and I had a 4-hour drive back home. Leaving the beach in pursuit of Forks, I drove through what could have been considered the downtown area of the reservation. Along the fence line surrounding a home I was passing, I saw that there were hand painted wolves on the fence. This of course was due to the Quileute legends. Gazing at the fence, I quickly left because the owner of the home came out of his home. He was wearing dark green pants a t-shirt and his hair was black, long and had a feather intricately weaved into its braid. He was staring at me like “great another pale face.” I smiled and thought about how he was a mixture of modern and traditional. It was then that I realized just how much I loved traveling and culture.

This trip (even though I didn’t know it at the time) would eventually lead me to what I wanted to do with my life. I learned that culture and tradition are very important in preserving a group’s ideas and knowledge. It gave me a better understanding of acceptance of change but also being able to have roots in pass traditions. I learned that studying and teaching others about travel and history would be my ideal job, so I am going to go to school for History and Tourism in hopes of one day being a tour guide, guiding people on adventures that they will cherish and remember for the rest of their lives, to change them for the better, just like my cross country road trip did for me.
Sleep Well
by Gabrielle Rogers

You’ve gone to bed and I’m left shattered
You sleep peacefully and I don’t matter
You dream of wonders and I still wonder
You rest and I wrestle with the thought
“When did I stop mattering to you?”
The lights fade away leaving each body sitting at attention in the dark. Eyes peer forward through the blackness of the auditorium as anticipation builds little by little, starting in the pit of each stomach and welling up through each chest. The audience is waiting for a sound, the whisper or sigh of an instrument tossing and turning in its sleep. Instead a gentle cough is all that can be heard from someone else in the small crowd.

Just when eyes begin to wander from the dimly lit stage, softly and subtly, the musicians, shuffle into view of the crowd. Their gentle footsteps are tender so as not to disturb the watchers, and not to break the rise of anticipation. Instruments are carried by many musicians and the warm tones of gold, brass, steel, orange, and mahogany wood contrast sharply with the black uniforms of the performers.

Each family is accounted for: strings, woodwind, percussion, and brass. Gradually the stage lights up as if the sun is rising on the sleeping instruments and then they begin to wake. Each family stretches and yawns as the first notes are played. Musicians coax and ease their own instruments until bright, crisp notes ring out. It’s a sweet clamor that hints to the busy day to come.

Then as quickly as it started, the voices hush, playfully exaggerating the suspense in the room. Finally, a figure emerges from the curtains. He sweeps across the stage. He bows. He turns. The music flies.
Painful Grip:
In Film
by Gabriel Wensley
Return Home

by Gabriel Wensley
Which One of Us is Actually More Poor?

by Brooke K. Hall

Germany’s triumph over Argentina in the 2014 FIFA World Cup will be remembered by those who watched, but forgotten over time as new championships come forth and other sports teams become more relevant. Fortunately, my memory from the 2014 World Cup will be entirely my own and one that will never cease from my memory. The bitter smell of freshly collected coffee beans being roasted over a charcoal fire is how I will remember that day, but not because of the coffee itself.

On that day in July, my group of classmates, teachers, and I traveling in the Honduran rainforest for a biology expedition were given a once in a lifetime opportunity, an opportunity not listed in the brochures of Operation Wallacea. By chance, a local Honduran family had given us permission to join them in their home in Buenos Aires to watch the World Cup with them and to learn about their livelihood which consisted of collecting coffee beans from the plantations in the rainforest. Mid-morning that day, we set out on a 2-hour trek to a tiny rural village located at the bottom of the Cusuco Rainforest.

When we finally arrived at the home hours later, exhausted from the trek down the mountain, we were greeted by four endearing faces, the grandmother and three children, Jonathon, Antonio, and Evelynn. The grandmother was gracious and comforting, much like my own grandmother, the only difference being that she was much younger, although years of malnourishment and wear from poor living conditions would have one thinking otherwise. Wrinkles creased into her cheeks and traced the edges of every angle on her face as she welcomed us with a smile. The three children were energetic, bright, and thrilled to meet us. Their clothes were stained and worn from excessive use and their bare feet were calloused from the fact that they never wore shoes. They were typical children; their minds filled with happiness and purity, untouched by the reality of their conditions, regardless of the extent of their poverty or hardships.

The house that the family lived in was run-down and decrepit. Chickens ran frantically around and inside the house as the children chased them. It was difficult to imagine this as a house at all, since it was not much of a house compared to the standards of everyday American society. Though, by this time, I had been in Honduras for about a week and the culture shock that I experienced upon my arrival to the country had subsided. The condition of poverty in Honduras became more familiar and less shocking to me with each day that passed.

The family’s home was very small, with a dirt floor and concoctions created from concrete, sheet metal, and slabs of wood coerced into a mess of walls and rooms. Sadly, this house was much better-off than some of the shelters that we had passed on our travels in Honduras. Many of these homes consisted of sticks and tarps, concrete floors, and lack of doors or privacy. “Statistics translate into depressing reality. Villages are reached by muddy, rock-strewn roads. Homes are generally one-room adobe structures with animals living in close
proximity” (“Poverty and Crime”). The extent of poverty is unimaginable for most Americans.

The gap between what middle class Americans view as “poor” and what this looks like in the reality of third world countries is immense. Growing up in a considerably struggling, middle-class family, our amenities were nothing short of ordinary to most. We had a decently sized two-floor house with an unfinished basement, 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, a kitchen, dining room, and two-car garage. My parents struggled to make the mortgage every month and were constantly burdened with debt and hardships. We never had a lot of money, but we were not poor, we were on the middle to lower end of the middle class spectrum. Like most, we wished we could have been better off. Honestly, we had no idea how good we had it. Once I visited Honduras, I finally realized the extent of that.

The average family income of a middle class family in the United States is roughly $52,250 (Kane and Kiersz). This statistic is a crippling factor for most families, but when faced with the reality of third world countries, this number seems much more manageable. In Honduras, this number drops significantly. The average GDP per person in Honduras is $2,900 annually, almost $50,000 dollars less than an average American (Thomson).

We greeted the grandmother and the children with our broken attempts at Spanish and their attempts at English, but mostly we stuck to gestures and body language. After a brief introduction, we were quickly being handed cups of coffee that came from the plantations on their land. Unfortunately, my taste buds have never been in favor of black coffee, and the grandmother insists on re-filling our cups before we could say “no.” Of course, out of respect I continued to gulp down the coffee, with a smile on my face.

Coffee beans were this family’s life. Everything that they had, from the clothes on their backs to the outdoor plumbing, came from their daily tasks of harvesting and roasting coffee beans. This is a huge source of income for the country of Honduras. “The production of coffee from Honduras has grown in such a way that there are 110,000 thousand coffee producers registered in the country, with 92% of them being considered small producers” (Dupuis). The grandmother we met and her family were one of those small producers.

The oldest of the children could not have been more than 10 years old and the youngest at least 7. The three children knew the entire works of the production of coffee beans. Their grandmother left them to do their work and they continuously grinded coffee beans and roasted them on their own. It was a unique sort of pride that these children carried with them to have this sense of importance. They didn’t know any other way of life, because that was all that they had. This is what they did to survive, and that’s what most of their neighbors did too.

Unlike in the United States, child labor is not uncommon in Honduras. “Many complete families work during the coffee picking season, with young kids being an important part of the workforce, providing an additional income to their families” (Dupuis). Many children cannot afford to go to school, although public school is free. Most families do not have the income to provide transportation, food, and supplies that school demands. “Many families calculate that every day in school is a day less of work, a meal not put on the table” (Arce). With most families making less than $2.50 a day, school is not a first priority, surviving is (Arce).
After we had spent some time with the family, the children began to warm up to us. I noticed that one of the children was particularly interested in me. While the two boys wasted no time rummaging through my rucksack, Evelynn was cautious and shy. To try and make the situation more comfortable I reached into my sack and took out three quarters. I handed one quarter to each of the boys and then one to Evelynn. In my eyes, I was merely giving away 75 cents, but in their country, 75 cents is the equivalent to $15. Evelynn looked at me with excitement and attacked me with a hug. With that small gesture, I had made my way into the heart of an 8 year-old girl.

From then on, Evelynn was attached to me at the hip. I was her human jungle gym for the few hours I got to spend with her. We spent some time with her brothers, and they tried to teach me words in Spanish like *gato* and *coche*. I showed them my whistle, let them draw in my journal, and Antonio even ended up confiscating my water bottle. I wasn’t mad because I knew that he needed it more than I did. We played soccer on the dirt roads outside of their house with an empty plastic bottle, and I have never felt so at ease as I did in those moments.

These children basically had nothing, that is, materialistically. They were so fascinated by things that were so trivial to me. The water bottle that Antonio smuggled from my bag was just a piece of material to me and I could purchase a new one on my arrival home. To him, this clean water was everything. In a country where 64.5% of people live below the poverty line, access to clean water is extremely scarce (“Honduras”). In 16% of rural areas, such as the one they lived in, have no access to clean drinking water (“Honduras”). The gift of water for him was priceless.

Eventually, we made our way into their tiny house, with its dirt floors and decade old appliances. It was time to watch the FIFA World Cup. Everyone came together inside, sprawling out across the living area, sitting on the floor and on the furniture that was nearly falling apart. The television was small and bulky, the screen blurry and the pictures just barely clear enough to see. Streaks ran down the screen and the voices that came from it were mumbled and rough. It was the type of television I remembered having when I was just a young girl, 4 years old, sitting on my dad’s lap, except mine was much bigger, and it was of better quality. To this family though, having a TV in a rural community was rare and the fact that it worked made this object a prize.

Although we came from completely different walks of life, we came together for this moment, excited and anxious to enjoy a game of soccer, enjoying the simple pleasures in life. The grandmother and her family rooted for the team from Argentina, feeling proud that their fellow Southern/Central Americans had made it to the world championship. Although my classmates and I could not understand the broadcasters who spoke in Spanish, we hollered and gloated when successful plays were done by Argentina and sighed when Germany made a good move or got a goal. It was a close game, and unfortunately for the family, Germany ended up beating Argentina. Although the outcome was not what we had wished for, coming together to watch the game as a whole was a uniting experience.

Soon after the game ended we had to leave their home. It was a bittersweet moment for me. I had gotten so much from being with these children; they had opened my eyes to a whole different world. The children may
have gotten a water bottle and a few coins from me, but I earned something even more valuable, and that was the ability to see things from their eyes. Experiencing a culture so different from my own was eye-opening, to say the least. Their lifestyle was so different, yet in some ways, so similar. I had met the purest of souls and I would miss them dearly.

In a country where extreme poverty struck the homes of many, I had felt that back home, where money was the main source of happiness, we were so poor. Here, with these children in Honduras, their minds didn’t know the corruption of money. Antonio, Evelyyn, and Jonathon gave me hope for the human race. They did not judge me or stereotype me based on my language, skin color, or economic status. Our friendship was not based on what we had or where we came from. Our friendship was formed through pure kindness. I learned from these three children that kindness is a language of its own that is understood by all. For them, I was there for a moment and then I was gone. For me, they will always be in my memory, in a place where I am completely at ease, and the world doesn’t seem all that bad after all.
Works Cited


Ornamented Illusions
by Hannah Rose

She closes the bedroom door and turns to face the wooden staircase looming ahead of her, daring her to take those first steps to her new beginning. Slowly she descends, hoping that the frail wood won’t creak under her heavy foot and awaken her parents. After what seems like a lifetime, her bare toes touch the carpet of the landing. Sighing heavily she knows that as soon as she crosses the threshold and walks out the door, there is no returning to the safety, the innocence of this place.

Slowly, ever so slowly she lifts her head to look at herself in the mirror mounted on the wall ahead of her. Tears begin to flow out of her eyes, first slowly, then with increasing speed, exposing her vulnerability, until she wipes them off in remorse and self-pity she doesn’t deserve. Her eyes trace down the freckles on her face, down to the nape of her neck, until they land on the silver chain that hung around her collar. Her fingers come up to finger the intricate, embellished cross that hangs off the chain.

The voices of her family fill her head. She had always conformed, silenced her thoughts, swallowed her questions as to please whomever or whatever needed pleasing. How could a community cling to ignorance as willfully as they did? Was this forced innocence even worth the chance at the “deathless death” that was so freely offered. This place did not offer eternal happiness; it offered no love or comfort. She needed to leave, escape the blindness, allow herself to learn about the world, and decide for herself what defined good and evil. She could no longer stay motionless while life passed, as it tends to do so quickly.

Even though it hurt, she knew that this place, this safe environment she had always felt incarcerated in, would never change, and that she had to choose between a meaningful life and a family, a group that clung so strong to lost morals. She ripped the ornament off her neck and placed it at the bottom of the stairs as an apology, a farewell she could never have explained in a note. She hoped they would understand, but knew they wouldn’t. She opened the door, and walked out into the sunrise, the unknown, to find a place where she could belong.
“The deaths of eight hundred people were linked to the new vitamin formula; while most seem to be the victims of homicide, the vitamins seem to produce a deranged mental state within some of the population; the government is urging the public to continue to take their recommended doses as they are working to fix the problem. In other news, Vita-tech stock…”

“Jessie, what was that story about? I couldn’t hear it over the fan.”

“It’s nothing mum; eight hundred more people were murdered. It’s just the same old tired news.” Jessie played with her phone disinterestedly as her mother watched her from the sink where she was scrubbing the dried-on crusts of food off the dinner plates from the night before.

“Did you take your vitamin?”

“Yes.” Jessie drawled in a monotone, her jaw clenched.

“Good.” Her mother nodded and set her concentration on a particularly stubborn piece of grit.

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Josh’s head snapped up; everything was bright and blurry. His tongue was thick in his mouth, and his teeth tasted funny; it was an awful combination of blood and an odd metallic taste, like someone had replaced every tooth with lead.

“Ah, you’re awake.” Josh’s head jerked up, and he tried to find the details of the man in the shadows. He didn’t move forward into the bright light; instead, he stood and watched as Josh tried to move only to find that he was handcuffed to the steel chair.

“What’s going on, where’s my family?”

“What were you dreaming about Joshua? From the way you were mumbling it must have been a wonderful dream,” the man mocked. There was a cold, almost cruel tone to his voice.

“My family – we were watching the news and having breakfast. Jessie –.” Something poked and slithered in Josh’s mind. There was something important that happened, but he couldn’t seem to remember what. Something…


“I guess they gave you too much. Here, these should jog your memory.” Bloody photos slid over the
slick surface of the table, some fell to the floor, while others landed in Josh’s lap. The ones that stuck to the table like they were magnetized were what held his attention. The man in the shadows stood and watched as emotions played over Josh’s face: anger, comprehension, fear, grief, guilt, and then, when it was finally too much for him, he turned and was sick over the arm of the chair.

“Who – what did that to them?”

“You did Joshua.” Josh shook his head.

“No – no I couldn’t have; I was taking the vitamins, and even if I was capable of – they would have protected Laura and Jessie from –”

“Do you know why the government implemented the vitamin regimen?” In silence, the pictures stared accusingly at Josh. He didn’t answer, nor did his eyes waver from the accusation on the table before him. The man continued to speak, and ignored Josh’s silence.

“Humans are nothing but animals, slaves to their more primitive instincts. It distracts us, slows down progress and blinds us. Before the vitamins people would argue over trivial issues for pride; they would succumb to malice, greed and jealousy. Any passion makes people unpredictable, illogical; they riot and follow each other like sheep no matter the cost. Emotions turn people into nothing more than dumb beasts without a cage. The vitamins turn the rabid wolves back to sheep. You could say we’ve created a new Eden.” He sighed.

“You, Josh, like so many others, are a threat to our new system, our new peace. Apparently, you subconsciously wanted to feel so badly that you grew a resistance to the medication, and became so enraged with some trivial matter that you slaughtered your own family. They are calling it the Hercules syndrome.” There was silence in the room for a while before Josh spoke.

“Can you fix me? What if they upped my dose? I loved them – I don’t – I don’t want to feel this anymore – it hurts.”

“It’s because you loved them that they died.”

“No, I loved them! I wanted to protect them, I—.” Josh’s shouts quieted into sobs, and it was a long time before he looked up at the man in the shadows. His eyes seemed to be set too deeply in their sockets, his cheeks drawn. He looked weak and vulnerable; tears ran down his face washing away some of the blood. He didn’t feel the shot, nor did he hear it. He saw the flash that lit up the shadows for an instant and then was slumped over in the chair again.

“Pathetic.”

The man holstered his gun, lit a cigarette, and looked at his watch. He dug into his pockets for a minute or two, trying to find the small punch card filled with his vitamins. It wouldn’t do to have a head detective miss even one dose. Emotions are weakness, he thought. No matter what the storybooks say.
The Place Where Olive Trees Grow

by Grace Gillies

The sunsets were echoing off the waves,
and the stars had been just barely birthed.
within that dusky sea,
lied a cove, a home, of olive trees.

In the courtyard, of the villa,
under a sacred olive tree
You and I spent time
in deep passion of each other
Our Heads and Hearts combined and crowned
with golden laurels, we spoke.

The sweet feeling of the summer night winds
the smell of salty olives in your skin,
and sounds of crashing seas
It eternally stained my soul,
this place, this home
where olive trees grow.
Scene over Great Bay and the Trestel Bridge

by Julia Dugas
Recollections of an Ocean Child
by Molly Kephart

When I was young, before I had to worry about writing papers for college classes or anything that didn’t have to do with bugs and dirt, there was the ocean. I grew up in York, Maine, a small town that hangs on the edge of the coast. I remember falling asleep to the fog horn blasting its low tones in the distance, slow and steady and somehow friendly. In the morning, I would wake up to the sea mist hovering low to the ground, shrouding the grass underneath our second story apartment’s balcony from view. The smell would settle in my hair and tickle my nose later in the day, reminding me that nothing I was doing at that moment was quite as important as going to the beach. And that’s the way life was for us. The beach was walking distance from our house—five minutes if we stopped to smell the sea roses lining our neighbor’s driveways—and anything else we would need for the day was a short walk from there. But if everyone were honest, what more could we need at the beach other than ourselves? Everything else is just unnecessary luxuries compared to the sun and waves. At least, that’s my philosophy.

Living so close to the sea, there are a few fundamental things I learned relatively quickly. One is that everything comes in seasons. The most obvious implication of this is that in the summer we would go to the beach and try not to get sunburnt, and in the winter we would try not to freeze to death walking to our car. But the truth is that this rule applies to all things in a beach town. All the friends that I made during the warm times suddenly disappear and never return. As a small child this was hard concept to grasp. I couldn’t understand why the girl with the brown curly hair and funny voice wasn’t down the road anymore, and why she didn’t ever seem to come back from wherever she was. The next time the weather got warm, she was replaced with the pretty blonde girl with the missing tooth, and after her it was a straight haired brunette with bright blue eyes, and so the cycle continued. The friends came in seasons, and so to be honest, I never bothered learning any of their names. They were all “friend,” and none of them really seemed to mind as long as I brought my shovel and bucket with me. On these days I felt as if the ocean was my third parent; it gave me the tools to make friends in this small ocean town where people flitted in and out so fast. I loved it for that.

That is not to say, however, that the ocean was not terrifying to me as well. Growing up next to a powerful swirling breathing entity that I couldn’t control, I learned to have a fearful respect for it. This is something that each ocean child learns at a young age, whether it is when the waves crash down over your head and for a split second you feel as if you might drown, or when you visit the ocean after a storm. The ocean that most people know is the ocean on a sunny day, lackadaisically pushing waves up to the shoreline with a clear and calm horizon beyond that. That is when the ocean is sleeping, letting us enjoy the soft side of its personality. But when it is stirred from its sleep by a storm, it is fierce and powerful, and fully attentive. It surges and rises high above the small splashes we call waves in the summer. It pushes up past the shoreline where we as people have tried to contain it, throwing up seaweed to mark its path. Not even the bravest New England surfer dares to try to ride the swells, because the power that it crashes into the rocks with is enough to shatter more than the
board. But even in this display of what seems to be wrath, there is beauty in the power. Nothing on earth is like the sea when it is woken, and nothing is more demanding of respect than it. These are the days I sit and watch from my car, and feel the wind rock the frame to and fro, and it helps me realize just how small I am in the world.

In the cold seasons all the shops closed down, and the town’s population plummeted to just the regulars of everyday life, which for me mostly consisted of my mom, my dad, and my kindergarten class. And, of course, the ocean. On the days where we weren’t snowed in and the temperature was above freezing, we would still occasionally go out to see the waves angrily beat the shoreline into submission and to watch the gulls sail overhead on the gusts of salty air. Unlike the soft summer breeze that tangled up my hair in the best of ways, the air felt harsh and unkind, as if the ocean had been replaced with a stranger who had drunk too much the night before. The air whipped across my face, drawing tears from my eyes and simultaneously freezing them against my flushed cheeks. But even though these days felt unloving to my young self, they also held the most wonder. Gifts from the sea are more abundant when there are fewer people to snatch them up, and so we came home with pockets full of sea glass and shells and other objects the ocean slapped onto the shore. I remember sorting everything into their assigned piles on the kitchen table while mom would make me hot chocolate, and I subconsciously forgave the sea for freezing off my fingertips and nose. Cold seasons, I would learn, was when everyone, including the sea, gave a little more than they normally would.

Another part of life when you live in an ocean town is fishing. When low tide hit and the late afternoon glow descended on the water, the fishermen came out. These men included my grandpa and my dad. They would lug out their long poles and bait buckets and set up camp, while my mom and grandmother pulled out sandwiches or another easy-to-make item out for us kids to have for dinner. After we were all set up, the men would wade out to their hips and cast their lines as far as they could heave them. I watched in awe from our spot on shore as the bait and hook sailed through the air, far past where I could touch the bottom. It would land with a splash and if they were pleased with the distance they would wade back to us, letting the line out so they didn’t drag the bait back with them. Then, the waiting began. Some days the fish were playful; they would nibble on the bait and tease my father figures to frustration. Other days they were silent, not even knocking up against the lines. But, every now and then, they were hungry, and would fall for the trap that had been laid for them. They would bite and the men would pull and reel with all their might. Sometimes it was a short battle, but often times it would drag out--man against wild--until one would tire and the other would win. I don’t love the taste of fish, but it was hard to say no to a man who caught his own dinner.

Even though the beach holds many fond memories, it also holds bitter ones. I broke my first bone on the beach. I climbed up an abandoned lifeguard’s chair while my parents weren’t looking and lost my footing on the way down. I fell from just high enough to land weird and break my finger. It seems odd that it was the only bone broken, but I will not be the first to complain that I didn’t suffer a more severe injury. But, melancholy doesn’t always come from bad experiences. I spoke about my grandfather and how he was a fisherman. We moved away from York in the later years of my life, but our summer nights were still spent on the beach, men with their poles in hand. But, when my grandfather found out he had cancer, we slowly stopped making trips out to the fishing nook we had carved out for ourselves. It’s not that the fish weren’t biting or that he didn’t want to, and oh did he try to go; but when a body is deteriorating, even short fishing trips to the beach become an effort. Eventually, it
became too much; he told us he couldn’t go to the beach anymore. So, we didn’t. We didn’t go for the next two years, and no one has fished since he stopped going, at least from what I can remember. It’s been eight months since he died, and I still think of him when I stop by his favorite spot. I wonder if the fish realize he is gone; I have the feeling the ocean does.

My next-door neighbor was an old woman named Dorcas. Back then I knew that old meant you got wrinkly and your voice cracked more than it used to, but other than that I didn’t fully understand the implications that the word “old” came with. All I knew was that she was my best friend. Often, when my mother couldn’t find me in our backyard or in the surrounding premises, she would call over to her house and find that yes, I was there, and I had almost cleaned her out of her Werther’s Originals candies that she kept stocked up specifically for me. Her TV channels were different than ours were, and her house had a funny smell that I could never place. I think I just wrote it off as another thing that came with being old, and got back to the TV shows our TV at home didn’t have. Dorcas had never had any children of her own; consequently, she never had any grandchildren, so I became her honorary grandchild. She would affectionately call me “Her Molly,” and never questioned the fact that, on a daily basis, I would barge into her house unannounced and wander around whenever I felt like it. She would just smile and greet me when I came into her field of vision, and if it was lunch time, she would heat up a can of clam chowder to share. She never moved away like anyone else I knew, and I liked that. Even after we left the small town of York, she remained. We would visit her regularly, but something always felt wrong when we would leave that house with its weird smell. I wanted to stay. She lived in that weird smelling house until the day she passed away. The sea, it seemed, was teaching me the hard lessons of life; that nothing is forever, and that there will always be a part of the things you love where you left them.

The ocean is still a place where my heart finds comfort, even though I haven’t lived there since I was six. The ocean hasn’t changed, even though the town and I have. The beaches have been shrunk down, as if that will stop the ocean from filling them, and the staple shops I remember from my childhood have either closed down or have gotten a makeover, belonging in bigger towns than York, Maine. Things have gotten much more complicated than trying to remember a girl’s name I met on the beach, and Dorcas isn’t the only person I’ve lost since we have moved. But, I still come back to the ocean and let the sea mist settle into my hair. I still let it whip tears out of my eyes when it’s cold, and I let it tangle up my hair in the best way possible when it’s warm. I can’t fall asleep without some low friendly sound humming in the background still, and I’m still really bad with remembering people’s names. And, you can bet that if I’m leaving the beach, I’m coming home with a pocket full of sea glass in tow.
Hold Me
by Gabrielle Rogers

When all I had was fear you held my hand
When all I had was doubt you held my heart
When all I had was tears you held my soul
When my strength fails you never fail to hold me up
We are all counterfeit Gods living in a pseudo-Hell of self-worship.

In our psyche we define ourselves as the most righteous beings on the planet, and yet we’d rather FaceTime than spend time, face to face.

What we cease to realize is that we can get lost in our humanity,

Instead of hiding behind the veil of loneliness that we love so much, we brag about our connectivity, and yet we know in our hearts that we are truly alone.

We hide behind a propped up version of ourselves, burying our fear, our mistakes, burying what we are ashamed of.

But in hiding behind a façade of neatness we abandon all of our humanity.

Individuality is lost on the individual and the mob mentality dawns on the masses.

Our individuality is lost because we have abandoned faith in a higher power.

Whether you are Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Atheist. Whether you are religious or not, you must worship something.

Merriam-Webster does not define “god” as a religious figure, but instead as a being of supreme power who is worshiped.

But instead of worshipping something greater and devoting yourself to goodness, you live in a state of self-worship.

Your conceited view of life is purely based on how many people “like” you,

65 notes on this post, 100 likes on that post, 59 reactions, 13 comments.

See we define ourselves not on our personal character but on the number of followers we have.

We try to liken ourselves to those we want to connect with, but in reality you have no personal connection, other than your high-speed internet hookup.

You try to search for meaning in the meaningless, and yet you abandon the meaning in your life.

You abandon your friends, you abandon your family, and you abandon yourself.

And all for what? Some momentary joy?

I say abandon the moment and live for prolonged happiness.

I say abandon your fear of letting yourself drown in your own humanity and live for the world,

Live the best life you can possibly live. Serve others before yourself and try to try and let yourself be truly known.

Instead of liking someone’s status about wanting to open up and love, why don’t you try to actually open up and love?

I mean I get it, that’s scary as hell. And know now that sometimes you will be rejected, your ideas will be insulted, you will be pushed away.
But most of the time your honesty, the courage you showed will be reciprocated with love and understanding.

We all have that one thing that we are ashamed of,
For me it is how I give other people advice about their lives when I know that my own life is a mess.
For you, what is it? Share with someone. Learn that humanity is just a synonym for connectivity.

Even the divine needed to forge connections to live, to love.
Even the muses had bad days and dark secrets.
I myself live behind a blackened mirror of half-truths, a half-truth is still a whole lie though.
But the brevity of “lie” is just too much for me to handle. So I tell more half-truths and watch myself melt into the concise details of my false-life.

But now I’ve shared myself with you, and if you truly possess any humanity you will not reject me, you will accept my flaws.

Just as you should accept your own flaws.

But you see, your version of connectivity will prevent you from ever truly connecting with me.
Chatrooms and text messages remove our commonalities, but that doesn’t mean you can’t move beyond this.
All you have to do is open your heart,
And let yourself in.
An Unwanted Learning Experience
by Dylan O’Connell

In the moment, my thoughts were clear as day, but after the fact, the situation sounds like a bad dream. Experiencing a medical emergency, or an emergency of any sort, feels so strange. It can be an out of body experience, where there is a struggle for the brain to interpret if what is happening is even real. Obviously it is real, but the worse the situation, the harder it is to accept. A haziness sets in, a quasi-PTSD. I was fortunate enough to deny stubbornness and accept the hard truth: I was suffering a medical emergency unlike any other I had experienced. I thought I was having a heart attack, but it turned out to be a lot stranger than that. It was a consequence of my physique, and I wish I had known about it beforehand.

My friends and I had just arrived at my old high school to meet a couple of old classmates and watch a basketball game when the chest pain set in. It was minor, like heartburn, and akin to chest pain that had happened in the past; it was centered on my left side, clutched by my right hand as if I were performing a civilian salute of the flag. However, the other initial symptom that was new and of greater concern, was a numbness of my left arm. Having always joked that my chest pain in the past were minor heart attacks that came and went, I thought this would be no different. I had momentary chest pain maybe every three months when I first started junior high, but I recall a doctor attributing it to growing pains and it mostly faded over high school.

Upon entering the gymnasium foyer, severe nausea set in and I had to retire to a restroom stall. It can be utterly confounding when the body demands the need to vomit, and one knows that doing so will cause them to feel a little better, but the mind and its natural reflexes fight the urge with all their might. Over the course of the next hour I became intimate with the details of the stall, my shoes, and the toilet as body and mind fought for control. And, as insult to injury, the boa constrictor slowly tightened its grip the whole time; the release of the stomach escaped me. Salvation was finally granted and the nausea faded, but the pain persisted and there was no doubt in my mind, I had to go to the hospital. I was sure that I was having a heart attack.

My friends came to the restroom upon receiving my text. Another weird sensation that has occurred with many other injuries is the undesired urge to cry as people continue to ask what is wrong and if you are okay. Fortunately, my friends entered in on the crime scene of my corpse hunched over the sink and quickly acted upon my raspy command to go to the hospital. The car was pulled up and we set off faster than any ambulance would have gone. Despite the pain, difficulty to breathe, and wincing caused by talking, I managed to brief my mother on the situation. I suffered through the laughter at the river of morbid jokes that flowed out of my mouth all the way to the hospital. I was sure that I was having a heart attack.

Hospital waiting room time is stereotypically slow, not as bad as the DMV, but certainly not a McDonald’s drive-thru. This time though, I sat in the waiting room maybe two minutes before being ushered into a room where I was checked by a nurse, sent for an X-ray, and diagnosed with a spontaneous pneumothorax. Apparently, tall, skinny, young men like myself, are susceptible to their lungs spontaneously
collapsing. Sometimes there is a cause, but I had just come from eating pizza when I was struck. I had gone skydiving only six months earlier and it did not hit me then, so why now? Also, why had I never been told this before? I accepted the lung collapse easily because I could feel it, but my lack of knowledge about the likelihood of it occurring was what really frustrated me. Although, I had to focus on recovering too much to let it bother me as much as it did my mother.

Continuing the theme of speed, I had blood drawn, was given large amounts of painkiller, then an anti-nausea drug that made me more nauseous than I was before (awesome), and was operated on while I was still awake. Local anesthetic is appropriately titled, but deceptively described. There may have been no pain when the physician’s assistant cut a hole in my side and stuck a tube in my chest that extended to the top of my lung, but it was disconcerting being able to feel scissors cut skin and large amounts of blood coat my side. Confirming that I felt relatively okay, the PA had me rolled up to the room where I would spend the next week imprisoned for recovery. The time it took to get from the emergency room to this bedroom felt like two hours; of course, the copious amounts of morphine may have assisted greatly in that regard. Every time morphine was administered, I thought of the soldier in *Saving Private Ryan* who receives morphine before dying. My brother maliciously reminded me about it as well.

The next week of my time would be spent in that room, switching between bed and chair, with the tube in my side. We took to referring to the tube as the garden hose, and it was constantly leaking the air of my chest cavity into a small box we called the aquarium. The aquarium was connected to the wall behind the bed and it was suctioning the air from my lung in order to relieve pressure and allow it to heal. Recovery proceeded through certain stages. First, the lung had to stop leaking air into the aquarium. Then, the aquarium could be disconnected from the wall. If the lung does not collapse to any degree after the aquarium is disconnected, then the garden hose could be clamped, meaning that the lung would be working without any assistance. Again, if the lung does not collapse, then the tube would be removed and I would be stitched up and sent on my way.

The aquarium was disconnected from the suction on the wall two times, because after the first time the lung began to collapse after a day and, therefore, had to be reconnected. Maybe an hour after it had been disconnected, both times, resulted in the most intense pains I may have ever experienced. It was at least equivalent to that of the collapse itself. And the best part about having pain in the hospital is the question posed by the nurses before deciding what drugs to give you: “On a scale of one to ten, how bad is your pain?” It is such an arbitrary way of determining pain, but the only thing that the nurses can rely on. Every time this question was posed, an internal debate raged on how to interpret the scale and how to answer the nurse. Ultimately, I determined that a seven was the maximum amount of pain that I could be in while still able to perform some minor actions. I never told the nurses this interpretation, but they always managed to meet my pain needs.

Every day had a similar schedule to it in terms of meal times, the doctor or PA report, and the administration of painkillers. The daily report usually came between breakfast and lunch, but each new PA said the same thing as the last; I was to relax until the lung had healed. There was never any concern about my condition worsening or death, even when I had first come in to be checked. If I had not come in when I did, then I would have been a little worse off, but probably not at death’s doorstep. I always awoke a little unnerved as the garden hose would be solid red from blood that had leaked out the night before; a little lift of the hose would
drain the blood into the aquarium. The aquarium had columns with tic marks to record how much blood had been lost, like a countdown until an early demise. Fortunately, my mother had brought my laptop and I could spend most of the day painfully laughing at the television show *Scrubs*. Laughter is truly the best medicine because even though it physically hurt, it was very uplifting emotionally and mentally to be distracted from the depressing situation of feeling trapped in that bedroom. But at some point each day I had to take time to complete the work for the online class I was enrolled in at the time. What devotion to a stupid idea, to work on labs, projects, and tests while dazed and confused more so than the average tourist in Amsterdam. The only benefit of the class work was that it kept me busy and shortened the days ever so slightly.

The long days were nothing in comparison to the brutal nights. The few intrusions each night were initially blessings that descended into necessary curses as the week progressed. They were early blessings because the intrusions meant medication that would numb pain and send me back to blissful sleep. But as I spent more time there, I had increased energy that was wasted by sitting about all day; I kept ingesting and never used enough energy to feel tired. The trouble I had getting to sleep would then be perpetuated by intrusions that further prevented a good night’s rest.

There were a few other visitors besides my mother, and the pleasure of being able to divert my attention from my condition to the lives of others was immeasurable. The two who drove me there paid a surprise visit and brought books to occupy my time, our final hoorah all together before one of them returned to college. Another day, an old friend visited and we chatted for hours before she too departed for college.

An expected, but unwelcome side effect of being immobilized is the degradation of personal hygiene. Only when camping have I ever felt as gross as I did when I was in the hospital. What was worse than feeling gross was the inability to clean myself up to the degree that I desired. Twice was I able to remove the gown and wash myself with a wet cloth, being careful with the movement of my left arm so as not aggravate the wound. Having movement be restricted because of resultant pain is incredibly disappointing, but now that I am healed, being able to move freely feels odd. I had stitches in for two weeks after being released, but their removal was a release from this chapter. Learning about my likelihood of a spontaneous pneumothorax by having one was not what I wanted, but it certainly makes for a good story. And now I can warn other tall, skinny, young men about it. There is a possibility that it could happen again, maybe even on the other lung, but the doctor did not seem concerned about it. Unfortunately, there is nothing I can do to prevent it because I already do not smoke.

The final day in the hospital was humbly glorious. Early in the morning, the physician’s assistant who had put the tube in came in to remove it. After spending an hour with the garden hose clamped, the PA had me take a deep breath in and quickly removed the tube from my chest. The wound was stitched with what looked like rope in comparison to the small ones I was used to. Feeling the garter snake removed from its position in the top of my lung was certainly not pleasant, but the overwhelming joy of being able to finally leave overshadowed the reinvigorated, albeit duller than before, pain in my side. I removed the hospital gown and put on the most comfortable clothes imaginable at the time: sweatpants, an old long sleeve shirt, and moccasins. The little things mean much more when you have had even less than them for so long. I thought of all the things I could do when I went home: play a video game, watch a movie, or play with the dog. Then the scenario hit me. Sponge bath, because I was not allowed to wet the wound yet, followed by tea and a movie wrapped in a blanket; the perfect scenario, barring any other unknown bodily malfunctions.
Lost River
by Shelby Lennon
My Turn
by Gabrielle Rogers

I looked ahead to the future
What ifs racing through my mind
Even though I wasn’t completely sure
I left the doubts behind
I couldn’t base my choice off the past
It’d proven worse before
I made my choice at last
Knowing there was more
I had to make it now, before it was too late
Today would soon be yesterday
And someone else would choose my fate
I cleared my voice, and finally had my say
I am trapped, deep within the walls of my own subconscious.

I mortared brick with dark thoughts and built an unconquerable wall of self-loathing.

I am free, but only for a fleeting moment.

I fall into the vastness of my own space-time-whatever-the-fuck and I am lost.

I am trapped, deep within the walls of my own subconscious.

I laid brick made from all the happy thoughts of my past, and I mortared the wall with the reality that nothing will ever be that way again.

I am trapped in a room, with liquid matter rising, attempting to drown myself in all that actually matters.

I am trapped in a room braiding a noose from all the words that I said; I attach it at the beginning of time and I try to outrun myself.

My leash is too short and I stumble and fall, unable to escape my own dark thoughts. I am unable to reach the light at the end of my metaphysical tunnel.

I am a coward unable to take my own meaningless life, because somewhere in my brain synapses are firing, telling me that my life isn’t meaningless, that I need to live.

But why live when you can’t let anyone see inside of you.

I have built up these walls to prevent people from seeing my specious body. From hearing my voice and being lulled into a superficial sense of friendship.

I am trapped, deep within the walls of my subconscious.

I mortared brick with the thought that someone could love something like me.

Not quite human, and definitely not animal; just dangerous.

Dangerous, because I cannot possibly fathom my unearthly potential.

Dangerous because love is the only beast which I fear.

I am trapped deep within the walls of my own subconscious,
I mortared brick with my most daring thoughts.

I am in love – I am a man.

I am a man and I have forgotten what I promised myself.

She tears down my walls.

And I start laying brick around the two of us.

We are trapped deep within the walls of my subconscious.

And we mortar brick with thoughts of our future.
The Birth of a Colonial Village
by Cassie Regan

Restored colonial homes line the narrow and uneven streets that look too cramped for their own good. They sit on low foundations, making them appear as if they have popped up out of the ground. Most of the homes do not have front yards, so they appear to hover over the narrow sidewalks. Each home is different; some are built of brick that has since been painted, some are made simply of wood. Many have the same simple rectangular shape and structure that was characteristic of their time, while others are more grand, jutting out at multiple angles and heights, demanding attention. Thin wooden clapboards line all sides, some freshly painted, others uneven and chipping. Some of them have more elegant touches: a row of pointy gables extending from the third floor, tall arched windows, or an entryway with an intricately carved door and a walkway with a few steps (in contrast to those with no steps at all). Portsmouth, New Hampshire is a small town, first inhabited by European settlers in 1623, that sits on the Piscataqua River. Inside Portsmouth is a small village that was re-created and brought back to life, to tell the story of this old port town.

While the homes of Strawbery Banke sit in one neighborhood, and original historic houses of Portsmouth reach out into the modern parts of the city, each one has its own story to tell, giving it an atmosphere of many centuries of history all brought together, contained in this spot and yet maintaining its character throughout the 21st century. Portsmouth is a fusion of modern and historic. For example, Bow Street sits next to the Piscataqua River, providing direct views over the water, but in recent years, new buildings have been squeezed in. The new structures blend in with the old, since they are intentionally made of a faded brick and resemble other old brick buildings in the city. It is not uncommon in Portsmouth to see a worn-out home or run-down building less than a foot from a brand new, luxurious condominium or bank. Portsmouth has struggled throughout the years with determining its true identity, as parts of it have been torn down and then rebuilt, but the character of the homes from its early years still remain, and the persistence of that character is truly what sets this city apart. Although much of its history has been torn down, and it hardly resembles what it used to be, the preservation efforts of those who built Strawbery Banke allow its story to shine through, even today.

Strawbery Banke is a popular tourist attraction in Portsmouth. It is a collection of historic homes that
were saved from demolition, and restored to the décor and architecture of their time. Strawbery Banke is what early European settlers called Portsmouth, due to the abundance of strawberries that they found there. The homes form a small but quaint neighborhood. Tours of each home consist of actors wearing period clothing, cooking old-fashioned recipes, and describing what their lives are like. Strawbery Banke is also famous for its classic gardens that are strikingly beautiful yet accurately historic.

Entering the neighborhood of Strawbery Banke is not much of a change from the surrounding scenery, but a gradual shift into history. At first it may appear that the homes were built there and simply remain, either due to sheer luck or massive upkeep. I will admit that even having grown up in Portsmouth, I assumed for most of my life that Strawbery Banke was built and simply remained there, and somehow survived without a scratch all those years, but I eventually learned that the story behind this small part of Portsmouth goes much deeper.

Turning into Strawbery Banke from Washington Street (one of the main roads), the first thing that changes is the ground; there are no brick sidewalks or gravel pavement on these streets. No street signs point towards Jefferson Street, but a wooden plaque that sits on the siding of a modest old colonial home leads the way. There are not many streets at all, but groups of houses with enough space in between for walking. Some old homes sit all but attached to each other, while others have a small backyard. Communal gardens offer the perfect distraction, and small benches provide a spot to sit at while admiring the natural beauty, giving an even more charming feel to the neighborhood. The feeling of being cramped together and tight is not imposing, but endearing. It is as if the bustle of the city has given way to the quiet feel of a small village, and that is exactly what is intended here.

Take for example the Sherburne House, which was built in 1695 (“Historic Homes,” para 4). It is the oldest structure standing in Strawbery Banke. The Sherburne House is a dark shade of brown and appears Gothic at first glance. It is a long rectangle with two gables on each side that point out from the top. Double windows with diamond frames and shiny panes adorn each side of the front door as well as the second floor, and the windows appear small in proportion to the house, giving a (maybe false) impression of its size.

At first sight, it is easy to assume that the Sherburne House is a few hundred years old, and maybe underwent some renovations and restorations, but that it is still the same house. What actually happened is more complicated and less impressive (maybe that takes away from the charm of the house). The Sherburne House did last for a few hundred years after being built, but by the 1950s it was almost unrecognizable from its original form, with the only remaining feature being the actual frame of the house. By the 1950s, the exterior of the
home had been replaced with cheap shingle siding, and it had been turned into a dumpy apartment complex. When the Strawbery Banke project began and the Sherburne House was bought, the house had to be not only moved, but completely renovated from the ground up.

The original architecture and form of the Sherburne House had to be estimated based on popular styles of the time period in which it was originally built. The Sherburne House that is standing today is a likely representation, although possibly quite different from the original.

The fact that the homes of Strawbery Banke have a complicated history may be easy to overlook, and can be somewhat disappointing. These facts were both disappointing and fascinating to me when I first learned them. The amount of work that was put into this project is not apparent at first sight. For example, some of the old homes that were saved required a complete restoration project, while others needed to be shipped across the Piscataqua River on a barge to be placed at Strawbery Banke. However, now I think that the whole story, including the imperfections and corrections, shows that Portsmouth not only has a history that extends hundreds of years, but that many people have worked hard to preserve and spread the knowledge of this history. To me, the true and complicated version of the story is more appealing.

Portsmouth underwent massive changes in the 20th century. Urban Renewal was a large city project that took place during the mid-20th century, and it was during this time that the idea of Strawbery Banke began. Portsmouth officials wanted to improve the city by turning unsightly neighborhoods into beautiful parks and recreation areas. The reconstruction projects were an effort to establish Portsmouth as a respectable and attractive city, but these ambitious projects would do much damage to Portsmouth’s rich heritage. When plans of the Urban Renewal project were proposed, not only local historians spoke up, but also residents who did not agree with demolishing so much of the city.

When comparing Portsmouth to other cities in New Hampshire, it is clear that the efforts to preserve history were successful, and that Portsmouth’s evident history is what makes it so unique today. Dover, for example, does not have much to show for its history, even though it is roughly as old as Portsmouth. Dover has a few old mill buildings that used to be factories, but they have since been renovated and are now apartments. Today, Dover does not have rich history, or any other notable characteristics. New Castle is a small island near Portsmouth, which was originally called Great Island by early European Colonists. New Castle has traces of history in its narrow streets with the lack of sidewalks in some areas, and its old cape homes, but New Castle has become a destination for million dollar homes near the water, and not much more.
A great deal of effort was put into changing Portsmouth, but in the end the historians and townspeople succeeded at preserving their city. Portsmouth may have large hotels and condominiums, but Strawbery Banke and other preserved historic homes keep this city grounded. Portsmouth was not always a desirable place to live, and that is why people decided to demolish and start fresh. The Urban Renewal project was successful in the sense that Portsmouth now has beautiful parks, such as Prescott Park with its docks on the Piscataqua River, its lavish gardens and fountains, as well as the wide array of restaurants – ranging from authentic upscale Italian to classic American comfort food – and shops that keep people entertained. The one thing Urban Renewal failed to demolish, the thing that Portsmouth has had since its beginning (and I hope always will have), is its true identity as a small city by the water that became home to many European settlers.

When I was a child and went to see Strawbery Banke on a school field trip, I didn’t fully understand what Strawbery Banke was. I took it for granted, because many of us who grew up in Portsmouth assume that other towns are similar. I always loved Portsmouth, but for a long time I did not quite know what exactly made it special, other than my memories of growing up here. Now that I have lived in other places, not only do I refuse to take Portsmouth for granted, but I understand the story of Strawbery Banke, and how it makes Portsmouth unique.

I wish I could go back in time and thank the people who fought to keep Portsmouth’s history alive. Without them, Portsmouth would be nothing but hotels and luxury condos. I have a love-hate relationship with this town: I love its history and old buildings, and I sometimes detest what I know it has become, which is nothing but a tourist attraction. Although Portsmouth and Strawbery Banke are tourist attractions, and I am sure they will continue to change and possibly be unrecognizable to me one day, I will always know the town that I grew up in. No matter how much Portsmouth changes, I will keep the images of Jefferson Street, of the Sherburne House and the Chase House, and many others with me.

The grounds of Strawbery Banke are open during the off-season. The museum is busy with tourists and various historic events in the summer and fall seasons, but in winter and early spring it is silent. I went for a walk in Strawbery Banke today - it was one of those oddly warm days in March - and the sun was just about to set. Strolling along the dirt paths, I felt the simplicity of how life used to be here, and I stopped to look at each house, probably appearing to others as a tourist. There is something so beautiful to me about an old colonial home. I don’t know if it is the fact that it is a piece of history, or if it is the whole atmosphere of the neighborhood, but I felt as if I were set back in time. Or was it that these homes made me want to go back in time? It
must not be a surprise that I am fascinated with historic homes and museums, and it must be obvious where that passion came from.

Even though Strawbery Banke occupies a small area of Portsmouth, and the only thing separating it from the modern world are white fences that surround it, looking out at the houses and streets outside of Strawbery Banke makes this area feel like a completely different town. To residents of Portsmouth, and even me at times, Strawbery Banke is often underrated and can be easily forgotten. Maybe it doesn’t appear to be anything special to some people, since it blends in well, but no other places I have seen make me feel the way I do when I am walking along Jefferson Street, staring history right in the face.

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Now accepting submissions for 2018!

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If you are interested in working with the publication of The Heron, please contact Cynthia Walton, Faculty Advisor (cwalton@ccsnh.edu).