“Writing is a struggle against silence”

~ Carlos Fuentes
The Heron

2010 Vol. I

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.
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Don’t want to
Can’t think
Don’t have to
Amber hair
Fire
Grounded angel.
Can’t leave
Don’t want to
Can’t blink
Don’t have to
Amber heart
Ice
Flightless dove taking flight
Can’t grieve
Don’t want to
Can’t sink
Don’t have to

Photos By Suzette St. Pierre
Prejudice Is Wrong
By Holly Westover

Prejudice people are affecting the world extremely nowadays. Their opinions and beliefs change the way people look at themselves. Some people are prejudiced because of the way their parents brought them up. It is a shame that people judge you by the way you look, you should never judge a book by its cover. If you judge someone before getting to know them, you may be missing out on a really good friend.

I have been big my whole entire life, which I do not get because I was a preemie at birth. I was in the hospital for two months after I was born. My mom was really worried, because the doctors said I was really sick from not gaining weight. Ever since that dilemma in the hospital, I have gained weight like rapid fire. After I turned about five years old I remember having to shop for bigger clothes than everyone else had. It was hard for me to make friends in the early grades of school. People did not really like me because I was big, and on top of that I was diagnosed with A.D.H.D. I remember having to see a counselor about my weight when I was young. I thought that when I got older things would change, but nothing ever did change.

When I got into middle school, people were cruel to me. They started calling me, “Huge Holly” and “Fatso.” These names still haunt me to this day. I never understood how someone could be that mean to anyone. All I ever did was be nice to people, and they treated me like crap.

When I tried to lose weight nothing helped me. My mom and I went on the weight watchers diet together. We ate the same food and exercised every time together. She lost 53 pounds, and I lost nothing. Sometimes I think that my body wants to stay this size. When I thought things would stop, they only got worst.

I started high school when I just turned fourteen years old. Since I was made fun of my whole life, I was self conscious about my body. I always wore a sweatshirt around school to try and hide my big body. No one really said anything to me until I started taking my sweatshirt off during class. People saw me as an easy target to pick on. They were right; I was insecure and weak from being made fun of all the time. After people starting making fun of me again, I started wearing my sweatshirt all the time again, even in the scorching hot summer. I never understood why someone would like to hurt someone so much. When it was about 90 degrees outside in the summer, I walked home with my sweatshirt off. This was a terrible idea that I will never forget. While I was walking home someone yelled out a car window, “Put some more clothes on fatty!” I did not even know the person who yelled it to me, but those words hurt me so bad. Life only got harder for me as I got older.

So I moved away for college last year, thinking maybe it was just the
people in New England. I went to West Virginia, because I thought the people were so much nicer down there. Then that one day came when one person had to say something to me when they were drunk. I remember this like it just happened yesterday. I walked out onto the front porch of the dorm when this boy said, “Go eat some more burritos fatso!” I was more disappointed than hurt because, I thought the people really were nicer in West Virginia. I thought that was all he was going to say, but then he said “Run tubby lubby! Run tubby lubby!” He had the nerve to say it when I was walking back into the dorm. Now I was really hurt, I started crying in my dorm room. People just do not know what it feels like to be a bigger person. It is almost always the skinny people that say something too. I do not think it will ever get easier for me. I am now convinced that people will say mean things no matter where I go.

Really skinny people do not have it easy either. I have been friends with little itty bitty girls and people were constantly calling them anorexic. It is sad that people judge you by your looks instead of what is inside. Really petite girls or guys have the same problems as the overweight crowd. They have a hard time walking around outside without being called names by society. It is like you have to be their ideal weight in order for them to not say mean things to you. No one will ever be perfect, so these people that are saying mean things need to realize they are nowhere near perfect themselves.

My mom said that people say mean things to others to feel better about themselves. I do not see how causing someone pain is going to make them feel better. If people would take time to get to know me, they would understand who I really am. I am a great friend that is an excellent listener, and a good advice giver. I do not judge people, I give everyone a chance. I know what it is like to be made fun of, so I don’t do anything like that to anyone. I have been made fun of my whole life; I think it is my turn to be accepted. All I ask is give bigger people a chance. Get to know us before you judge us. Some of us are great people waiting for that one chance to prove ourselves. Skinny people don’t have any idea what it is like to be a bigger person. Looks can change on a day to day basis. I mean whether you trim your hair, or have a new nail polish color on. People notice the changes you make to yourself. So I say Looks can change on a day to day basis but personality stays forever. It is so much harder to change your personality than it is to change your body form. Walk in our shoes for one day, and then you will realize how hard it is. Will you still make fun of us, or will you give us a chance?
We have gathered here
For a specific purpose today
And as we sit around the kitchen table waiting
For the others to trickle in
And then we will offer them food
Because people always seem to bring food
In times like these
Even though nobody can think about food right now
We have our work cut out for us
First we have to pick up her things
From the nursing home
And go through everything
Still left from her house
We have them piled in the living room right now
And it strikes me as odd
That we now have
Literally everything
That this amazing woman had
To show for her life
And one of my aunts remembers
That since Gram grew up during the Depression
She kept her money in mayonnaise jars
On top of the fridge
And she also liked to hide it
In the pants of her china dolls
So there we all are
Stripping her lovely dolls
My mother tries to lighten the mood
By saying we are “molesting” the dolls
But the truth is that we all
Are hoping to find something
Under the doll’s clothes
Just so we can have proof
That at one point
She did exist
And that she is the reason we are all here
Today
Wishing that the thing that brought us here
Had never happened
A Day in the life at Juicy’s Arena
By Sandra Carlson

Hello my name is Juicy and I own the Juicy Arena. They call me Juicy because I hold some of the best named acts in the body of my arena. The arena is located in between Esophagus Ave and Duodenum Drive. When you see my arena from the outside, it appears to have an elongated “J” shape that is because the abdominal cavity my arena is located in. My arena is in the city of a tall and skinny super model. In order for the arena to fit in this abdominal cavity, I had the arena made into a “J” shape; to fit around varies organs within this cavity.

The structure of my arena is made up of Muscularis Externa, for all of you unfamiliar organs out there that means I have a longitudinal, circular, and oblique layer of muscle wrapped around my walls. These walls help with peristalsis. Once the boluses come rolling down Esophagus Ave, all of my muscles start moving in a wavelike motion, like they heard a good reggae song playing. Esophagus Ave is a very busy one way street, except in the case of an emergency, things get backed up and go right back where they started, in the mouth. It is great to watch a bolus come rolling down Esophagus Ave, all the boluses are calling their friends saying, “Guess who I am going to see,” or the call “You will never guess where I am?”, once I see the boluses rolling closer to Gastroesophogeal Sphincter gate, I make the call to Gastrin. Gastrin is the go to guy, he gets all the best digestive hormones, already to go, and in the right order. Gastrin lets the crew within the arena know that we are expecting guest and we need to be ready to give them a show that will chyme them up!

My arena has four regions the cardia, fundus, body and the pyloric region and two curvatures lesser and greater curvature. I had the arena made into four regions because when crowds of boluses come rolling through my sphincters in bolus masses, I needed to have uniformity throughout my arena. When boluses are in the cardia region gives them few minutes to mingle and get associated with other well known gastric juices. The fundus starts to bring the boluses to the real action, with rugae all around the arena from top to bottom, to fundus to the pylorus, this makes the space more optimal for expansion for more boluses to come in contact with more gastric juices. Many boluses don’t stay in the dome like structure of the fundus for very long, many say that it has a ‘gassy’ smell to it. Next is the body that runs into the pyloric region, every bolus loves the body that is where they get to see acts like Hydrochloric Acid and Intrinsic Factors, play and create chyme.

Hydrochloric Acid or as I call them in the Juicy Arena, the HCL’s and the Intrinsic Factors, have a really close connection. I know HCL’s and the intrinsic Factors’ agent Gastrin and any time I need the HCL’s or the Intrinsic Factors’ for a bolus they are here. The HCL’s and the Intrinsic Factors’, sometimes have
three to six shows a day, depending on how little or how much our city wants to take in. The more the city takes in the more times I have to call the Parietal Cells Office to get a hold of Gastrin. Gastrin is so busy, but once he gets the message he sends it right the HCL's and the Intrinsic Factors, so they don’t miss a bite. Gastrin is so busy because he is the agent for many well known digestive hormones that play at my Juicy Arena, such as the Pepsin and even the Renin for the youngsters. Renin isn’t a group that stays within the arena long because we use them more when we have to group coagulate milk in the city of infants. The Pepsin are a good group, because they always know when to begin the digestion of proteins within the boluses, by splitting the proteins from the rest of the group in to short chain molecules, known to us in the arena world as peptides and breaking down the cell walls of many plants that enter. In my arena I usually have the HCL's play first, just to get the crowd of proteins in a chymee mood and I have all the shows end with the Intrinsic Factors. The Intrinsic Factors always leaves the crowd with a little extra bonus at the end. When all the juicy protein contents leave the Pyloric Sphincter exit gate, they leave rushing through the streets of Duodenum Drive carrying little B-12 shirts, and many other B-12 souvenirs’ and the crowd of protein just goes rushing through all the Avenues of South Small Intestine. The Avenues of the South Small Intestine love hearing about how the group The Intrinsic Factors always give something extra at the end of each show. The group the Intrinsic Factors came up with the slogan after a life changing event they experienced at the age of 12, so they carried the slogan along with their band title. Any extra Intrinsic Factor Souvenirs’ go to a local group that is involved with in the whole city, the erythrocytes. The erythrocytes send messages all over the body in seconds such as oxygen. Oxygen is so useful in the city it helps keeps the air clean, so all of us fellow organ owners can maintain our establishments.

My Juicy Arena is a wonderful establishment. I keep things clean (for the most part) and running smoothly with strong security at the gastroesphgeal and pyloric sphincter gates. When we reach the 4 liter capacity, we open one of the gates to expel some of our crowd that has been within the arena, a little too long. Our city is a relative clean city, so we don’t get to much chaos in the pit of the arena, but occasionally the city of the Tall & Skin Supermodel eats cookies, cake and ice cream. And for some reason she always has an emergency exit back up to Esophagus Ave. Those cookies and other sweets never get to see the extras at the end of the show.

Well I hope all of you enjoyed living day in my busy life, because now apparently I won’t be busy for a while. According to the Mayor of the city of the Tall & Skinny Supermodel, we are going through a colon cleanse. Meaning there will be no shows for at least a week...
Gavi was the one who raised them. They weren’t adopted; the artist woman just attracted children who needed homes the way other women attract abusive relationships or stray cats. Somehow, the kids just found her, and she looked out for them.

She didn’t look the part of a mother. Her left hand didn’t don the proper ring, for one. As far as anyone knows she never thought about marriage. She didn’t have oversized, professionally-maintained hair or a minivan. But the children promised that even if Gavi didn’t have supper on the table at the same time every night, she always made sure that there was food in the cupboards and that they all got three meals a day. She was “that kind of person.”

Her house was clean, too. For years it was a place where the doors were always open—maybe that’s how the kids found her. Everyone knew the inside of her house. It was the kind of house elves would live in: dark, cozy, a place where things were always happening. And everything had its own little nook. The shelves in the pantry were mismatched and colorful, but all the tea boxes were stacked together and firmly closed; the chip bags were rolled up in their proper place.

The kids say Gavi made rum cakes for them on their birthdays and that she remembered to get allergen-free soap for the shower whenever she went to the store. They say she took them to see their parents in prison and bought them caramel apples when they got their braces off. From what anyone knows, Gavi was the perfect mom for them.

She was only in her thirties when the cancer came. Some people, who knew, said she came down with strange symptoms—loss of feeling in an arm, for instance—over the course of a week before she went to a doctor. She was told it was leukemia. Everyone thought she would get better. And then she let the sickness take her.

A stagnant force seized the town when it happened. Everyone was thinking the same thing: what about the kids?—but no one knew what to do. Most of the kids were grown by then, and many of them honor students or reliable employees at local businesses. But much of the community still knew them as the delinquent children—crack babies or detention-center cases, children whose fates were chosen by their parents’ bad choices. With Gavi’s sudden death, the truth of the isolation of these kids snapped into focus. Unguided compassion took the community. And the casseroles started flowing.

Because death prompts the onslaught of reheatable, one-pan meals,
suddenly Gavi’s elf-house was brimming over with shepherd’s pie and lasagna. The children were polite about accepting these, even when they began to struggle to find places to keep them all. No one knew what else to offer, though, and so the food kept coming. The kids wouldn’t let anyone past the kitchen door for two days, and all anyone could think to do was offer condolences and a stop-and-drop dinner. A few people brought toilet paper.

But then the obituary was released. It came in the county paper. No one knows who submitted the information to be published. All anyone remembers is that the day it came out, someone walked into Gavi’s kitchen bearing chop suey to find several of the children clustered around the table with the paper. Another towns person walked in with taco pie and watched as one of the girls carefully tore out the tiny notice of Gavi’s death and then pressed it between her hands to flatten the crinkles she’d made in the process. By the time the girl was done, five people were waiting and watching in the kitchen, clutching sympathy food and wondering if it wouldn’t be better just to back out quietly and come back another time.

But then one of the boys came from the living room—the room beyond the kitchen—with a basket of candles, and he began to hand them out. First to the other kids, and then to the newcomers, who balanced their casseroles one-handedly in order to oblige him. As the candles were passed, the number of visitors doubled. Perhaps it was the obituary that drew everyone to the spot. Like stray cats they came.

When everyone had a candle, the girl with the obituary, who had not looked up at anyone, carried the tiny fragment of paper out in front of her as if it were her guiding light, and she glided into the living room. The other children followed her like balloons on strings.

The guests, unsure of what else to do, eventually followed, too, and found the children lined side-by-side in the living room, not moving or speaking, but staring at the second wall. And a sacred silence overtook the guests.

A fantastic mural covered the wall, floor to ceiling. It seemed to have depth and dimension, as if someone could step right into it—the closet to Narnia. It was recognizably Gavi’s work; anyone who had been through town had seen Gavi’s paintings and collages hanging up at the coffee shops or the library. But this—this was something else altogether, something grand, something alive.

And it wasn’t a picture or scene. The vast work was a collection, a compilation of seemingly inconsequential scraps: papers, postcards, receipts. There were paper bracelets and flower petals, ticket stubs and detention slips. With great love and care, they had been arranged on the wall into a beautiful whole—a body, a dancing, working, loving body. Every piece was equal. There was no one place to look.
As everyone stared, the children with less captivation than the visitors, the boy lit a candle, and walked around the room, lighting the other candles with the one. No one spoke. Many were afraid to breathe. When all the candles were lit, the boy returned to his place in the line, and the girl with the obituary stepped forward.

At this, it became glaringly obvious that the wall was not complete. In the bottom right corner, hidden before, was a bare patch of cream-colored wall, untouched. The scraps bordering this hole—a Post-It, a letter, several pieces of puzzle—hung jaggedly over the chasm, looking dangerously like tiny children petering too close to the edge of a cliff.

When the hole was visible, the entire mural seemed to be falling toward it; the motion of the piece changed, and its integrity hung precariously in the balance. Everyone in the room seemed to realize at once that this wall was the only mark made on behalf of these kids’ lives. While everyone else wanted to forget them, one woman had strained for years to give them a place. And in six bare inches of wall space—in the span of six months of cancer treatments—her job was... unfinished.

The girl held Gavi’s obituary up to the wall. The boy next to her instinctively extended his candle and held it up to the hole in the mural. The girl reached out and allowed her hand to hover over the spot. But she did not press the paper to the wall.

She dropped her hand. The visitors, who now crowded into the room so tightly that they were spilling out into the kitchen, all seemed to breathe in at once and fail to exhale. The girl straightened.

The other children gazed at her, perhaps trying to read her or perhaps just waiting. The obituary, anyone in the room could see, was not nearly enough to cover the void in the masterpiece. It was neither long nor wide enough, and looked withered and pathetic when held up to the gap.

Long silence ensued. Candle wax began to collect on coat cuffs and the floor, but no one said anything.

Just when the visitors started shifting uncomfortably—between all the bodies and all the tiny flames, the heat in the room had picked up—the girl turned and faced everyone, causing the guests to become still again, wide-eyed and waiting. The girl held the obituary in the air and began to read.

“Gavi Ariel Van Driel of 21b Shiloh Court passed away this past Sunday, November 2. Born in east-state New Jersey, she moved to Meadowbrook to become a painter/artist; her work can be viewed in such establishments as Poet’s Closet and Mister Bean’s Coffee.”

She spoke with clarity and an apparent lack of emotion, until she came to the final portion of the notice. She lowered her hand, her eyes, and her voice as she finished: “Survived by no one. Services to be announced.”
She allowed her hand to lower the rest of the way to her side, and the kids around her gazed at her with pain on their faces. Then she thrust the paper into the air again, and raised her other hand.

Slowly, but steadily, she tore the obituary in two.

Then she placed the two halves over each other, and tore again.

A third time she tore. Then she shredded with great fury. Bits of paper escaped her clutches like ashes from a flame, but in their freedom they drifted to the floor like daydreaming feathers. She ripped and she shredded until there was nothing left to rip or shred, and she released all the bits of paper to fall at her feet. None of the other children watched them fall. They only kept their eyes on their sister. They were loyal. They were calm.

Condensation had collected on the undersides of the plastic covering the multitudes of casseroles in the room. Candles had been burned down to nubs. More people than should have safely congregated in the house couldn't have budged without stepping on other people's toes.

The boy who had distributed and lit the candles blew his out. The rest of the group took this as permission, and, in a sacred fashion, silently puffed out their own candles.

Someone set a pan of food on the arm of the sofa and stealthily wove through the masses to the door and disappeared. Then another. With great awkwardness, the people one by one left their casseroles on the floor and exited, until no one was left. No one but the children, with their mangled obituary and their wall.

It was a long night and no one slept, but in the morning the sun came up on time, and the community rose and went to work.

In the following days, several businesses around town took down any artwork they had of Gavi's, but others moved her paintings to more prominent places—in the lobby or above the most popular tables. The kids said nothing about this. In fact, no one mentioned Gavi by name again. The boy with the candles moved away to work at a newspaper. The girl with the obituary was hired at the opera house to man the information booth and take calls. No one can say what came of the other children. No one knows who owns their house. No one knows what happened to the wall.
Encroaching

By Alex Allain

Into The Woods

By Alex Allain
I would like to introduce myself. My name is Gall Bladder. I live in a country called the Human Body. In this paper, I would like to explain my role in the Human Body. I may be a small and non-vital citizen of the country but I pack a punch.

I live in the Human Body in a city called Hypochondriac. My house is located in the right upper region of the city. It’s small, only 8 centimeters in length and 4 centimeters in diameter, bluish, and shaped like a pear. The location of my house is unique; it sits in the shadow of a great big house called “THE LIVER”. Even though “THE LIVER” looms over me every day, I thank goodness because he gives me purpose. “THE LIVER” is an integral part of the Hypochondriac. He supplies me with Bile. Bile is a yellowish greenish liquid I store in the pool in my backyard. The pool holds about 50 milliliters of liquid and is filled and emptied every few hours by a good woman friend of mine called Cholecystokinin, CCK for short. CCK is very hormonal and plays an active role in the filling and removal of Bile in the pool. She is great friends with Small Intestine and is activated when the Small Intestine senses the creation of fat. As CCK becomes active, she allows Bile to release from the pool.

Bile comes from “The LIVER”. It travels down two streets called the Right and Left Hepatic Duct. The two streets join at the street called the Common Hepatic Duct. It then connects to the street called the Cystic Duct where it fills the pool in my back yard. The Bile comes out of the pool and into the Cystic Duct where it travels down the street called the Common Bile Duct. “THE LIVER” and I share the Common Bile Duct. We all work together for a common goal, health and happiness.

Another role of mine other than the storage of Bile is my role as a father to two beautiful boys. I am very proud of my two sons named Gall (after me) and Stone. The two of them are very small and very hard headed. I’m always telling them to stay close to home and not go where they do not belong but they never listen to me and roam the neighborhood. I find them in the streets all the time. I find them walking the Cystic Duct or running down the Common Bile Duct. Once, I even saw them trying to hitch a ride in the back seat of another stone headed for Duodenum’s house. I have to keep an eye on them at all times because they are not healthy kids. They both have high cholesterol. The doctor tells me the environment in which they live have a detrimental effect on their health. If there is a lot of Cholesterol in the air, they become fat and awkward and can do damage to other cities and neighborhoods. Even though they are a handful at times, I love to death.

Life is hectic in Hypochondriac. Sometimes I sit in my living room and just observe. I see the yellow/green Bile flowing from “THE LIVER” through
the streets into the pool in the back yard and then back out again. At the end of the street named the Common Bile Duct and before Duodenum's house, there is a gate called the Sphincter of Oddi. Duodenum has a popular house and the Sphincter of Oddi can control the visitors in the house. Bile plays an important role in the house. They help keep Duodenum and the cities and towns in the area clean and trim. Bile is a kind of Jenny Craig, helping the rest of the Human Body get into fit and better digests fat.

However, in the past, we have had problems with the Sphincter of Oddi. The gate has malfunctioned. It, of course, has been brought to my attention that my sons have been the cause. Gall and Stone stick their nose where they don’t belong and get stuck in the gate. When this happens, a riot ensues and Bile cannot pass to Duodenum's house. This causes Duodenum's house to get messy and Duodenum to get angry. Not good! If this continues, I have been warned I could be placed in jail and sentenced to death.

In the past week, I have been very sad not to mention very sick. I have lost my sons, Gall and Stone. I have been calling all the families in the neighborhood and no one seems to know where they might be. I have yet been able to get a hold of Duodenum to ask him if he knows where they may be. The phones have not been working at his house. I have heard Bile is rioting outside his house and the Sphincter of Oddi is malfunctioning. “THE LIVER” is getting angry too. He creates Bile and expects the Bile to make it to Duodenum’s house and it isn’t happening.

Since all this has been going on, I have come down with some symptoms. I seem to have gained weight. I feel nauseous and have been vomiting. Another weird observation, I have noticed the sky and the ground are getting a weird yellow tinge. Not sure what is going on. I’m not sure if the symptoms and changes are caused by the stress of losing the kids or a physical problem. I have recently talked to other families in other countries to see if they recognize the symptoms but they tell me from past experience the symptoms point to death….. DEATH…… I haven’t been sick a day in my life. What could possibly be wrong.

I hope my sons are not to blame for all this strife. Like I have mentioned previously, if they get stuck one more time in the Sphincter of Oddi, I will be going to jail and sentenced to death. I can only hope my sons are not stuck and life will get back to normal soon. For now, I hope and pray my symptoms reside and life gets back to normal. I will continue to search for Gall and Stone in hopes they will survive the attacks on Duodenum's house.
Inside
By Veronica Forbes

It’s
been inside me all the while
it was a tiny voice
but now I hear it loud and clear
I now must make a choice

I’d always thought I’d like to write
but never thought I could
don’t rock the boat is what I’ve learned
just do what you should

An impossible dream is what I thought
so I buried it deep inside
I never let myself believe
and so I never tried

Don’t ask me why it’s surfaced now
maybe it’s my age
or maybe I want my kids to see
you shouldn’t live life in a cage

My cage you see, I built myself
it’s made up of all my fears
I’ve shaped and molded them just so
to shelter me all these years

Too scared to take a chance and fail
I thought that would hurt the most
but I realize now that not to try
would be my haunting ghost

How the Economy Has Affected Different Age Groups
By Marshall Roux

With the Economy in such a way for the last year or so people wondered, how has the economy affected people? Ms. Muszynski, an English Professor at Great Bay Community College thought about this and gave my class the assignment to write about the topic. I picked more on the lines of ‘How the economy has affected different age groups?’ My main point was to ask three different age groups about the question; ranging from young, to middle aged and to elderly.

The first person I talked to was my brother Spencer; He’s a commuting, fulltime college student at UNH, majoring in Physics and Engineering. He typically works on the weekends and on the holidays for some extra cash, but
lately he’s been cut short. He told me that he’d applied for about 12 different jobs last summer and only one called back. “The hours I get are low; I work, only about four hours [this week]. I sometimes don’t get any.” He works at Hannaford, it’s not the place he wants to work but he’ll take it if it means getting paid. He’s looking to pick up a job at UNH or a job to work with his major.

I ask him how this economy has affected his spending. He explains to me that since he didn’t get paid as much, he didn’t go bowling, or that time playing laser tag with his friends. Like in micro economics; this would in turn mean that those workers didn’t get paid as much, so they aren’t spending as much as they use to and so on, and so on.

He told me that he drained his bank account to help pay for a grant that didn’t go through properly and the books he needs for this semester; working with grants and scholarships he’s able to pay most of it off. He laughs and shows me his wallet, inside is only a couple of bucks. He tells me that that’s all he’s got [money wise] stating it like it’s the new low score to beat.

I ask him how he feels about the [economies] future. He then illuminates that when the economy is up and people are spending, the government spending decreases, when a recession happens and people aren’t spending as much, government’s spending increases to counterbalance the weight if you want to think of it that way; like a scale. “Right now we’re in a recession; consumer spending is low and government spending is high; Higher than other [times] due to the mortgage problems.” He goes on saying the economy will bounce back, just not as much due to paying of the mortgage problem.

Next I spoke to my grandparents. The two elderly people had been retired from their jobs for many years now; my grandmother, a retired AT&T service caller and my grandpa now a retired machinist and handyman were now living off of their retirement savings they built up over the decades. Still living in the same house they first bought in Dover and going to the South Berwick senior in Maine center every other day to dance and play games with friends is now the life for them.

I asked them about how the economy has affected them. The first thing they said was that the cost of medicine is eating up all their money. My grandma describes to me that insurances like their medical keep on rising almost on a constant basis while their social security doesn’t go up to help with the cost.

I asked; with the situation that the economy is in, has it affected you socially? My grandma said that the two take much shorter and fewer trips now than before. Before they use to go on vacations four or five times a year, now they’re only planning one or two this year, cutting vacation times from a week or ten days to just a single day.

I asked my grampa about the economy and the first thing he said was that he lost a huge part of their savings, close to a third of it. He says “we’re being more cautious and more conservative about our money. We only spend
on what we get in interest from our savings.” He goes on in further detail; that if you had a hundred dollars as your principle and you make a five percent interest off of it, which would be five dollars, you would only spend the five dollars made from the interest. He tells me that they save money here and there like only owning one car instead of two, and shutting off the lights when not in use. He says to me “it’s like having ten dollars before and now only five dollars to spend.” I ask them what their thought about the economy’s future was; their response was to be cautiously optimistic.

After getting off the phone with my grandparents, my father Marty came home from work; a senior UPS driver that has been in the business for over twenty-five years. The first thing I ask him was how the economy affected him in general. He said that the negative part was that he lost a quarter of his 401 k retirement, but the good news was it was a positive on “fun” money (or spending in general). He goes into greater detail that the price of items had gone down, the retails business competes more with each other now than before, and the services are more inexpensive.

I ask him about his job and how it’s holding up. He asserts that he’s got a stable job and since he’s a union worker, his hours aren’t going to get cut. “Being in the union and having a stable job like at UPS has been pretty good. Few people are where I am where my job isn’t affected by the economy.”

Next thing is if he sees any changes at work. He says the most people that are affected are the small businesses he delivers to. He notices that some people are gone due to layoffs. And small businesses aren’t buying so much; he sees inventory declines a little but then stabilizes to a manageable amount. He also notices that people are buying more online than actually going out and driving to the mall or someplace and shop, but he states that’s been like that for a while.

When the conversation got on the topic of layoffs, he thought of the United State’s employment levels as this; “that about four percent lost their jobs in the this recession and that four percent are completely devastated, completely devastated, but pretty much everyone else hasn’t been affected to that extent.”

Last thing was the future; does it look good or more on the lines of devastating? His explanation was that people would learn from their mistakes. People weren’t going to go and rack up on their credit cards as they did before, not that bad. People will be wiser in their decisions when purchasing a mortgage or loan, and people will be saving more. His idea was like a sun on the horizon, it looked like a very good future.

This short term study has shown a lot of detail: My brother Spencer felt the pinch in his wallet from work and school. My grandparents had their retirement plan rearranged. My father Marty had felt the squeeze but was quite optimistic. So from the young to the elderly; no matter what, this economy has affected them in good or bad.
Photos By Erica Martin

[Image of frozen branches and red berries]

[Image of frozen branches and red berries close-up]
Driving Tips for a Successful College Journey
By Veronica Forbes

I have traveled many miles on the first leg of my college journey, and I must say that in many ways the road has been a lot rockier than I anticipated. When I first got behind the wheel, I didn’t use any critical driving skills at all. I didn’t have any particular destination in mind, I just started driving. I did not check my tires, my windshield wipers, spark plugs, or any of the vital fluids needed for my car to run smoothly. I didn’t have a map, and the only thing I had in my wallet was a driver’s license, which I got a long time ago and have had to squint to see the letters on the eye test to pass the last two times I’ve had to renew it. All the while hoping no one would find out I need glasses (especially for night driving). I never even told anyone I was leaving on a trip! I ignored all the road signs that were right there in front of me, and missed some important historical landmarks, winding up instead, at a few cheesy tourist traps like South of the Border. All I got from there was a lousy “t” shirt.

Along the way I started speeding and did not keep my eyes on the road. I got pulled over by the police and got a ticket for reckless driving, which I thought was a bummer until I realized it probably saved me from a head-on collision a few miles down the highway. It made me change my perspective and pull into a rest stop to recharge my battery. I popped the hood, let the engine cool and made a pit stop in the ladies room. There I met another driver who offered me some advice. Being extremely apprehensive about talking to strangers, I almost put my fingers in my ears, my tail between my legs, and run away without looking back. Then I took a deep breath and made the decision to give her the benefit of the doubt and didn’t brush her off as a “fruitcake” or a criminal who hangs out in remote places preying on weary travelers, and sat down with her at a picnic table to allow her to nourish me with all the food for thought she had to offer.

She told me of the many adventurous trips she has been on, and what she has learned along the road. She explained to me that “even the best drivers may encounter a flat or two but they don’t let it stop them from rollin’ on down the highway. The best thing you can do before leaving home is to be prepared. If you know how to change a tire it will only be a minor bump in the road and you will be up and running again in no time.” Some of the tips she gave me were to first and foremost use critical thinking to set a destination goal and make a plan to get there. Be sure to have a map, highlight your route, and have an alternate one mapped out “just in case”. Make out a To-Do list so you don’t miss any of the places you want to go, and fill out a schedule to keep yourself on the right track, being sure to leave some unscheduled time to stop and smell the roses at any of the scenic vistas you may find that weren’t on the map. It is important to review and revise your schedule often since your set priorities may change as you go. A cohort is also good to have
to keep you awake when you get tired and to share in the many experiences that lie ahead. And having a backseat driver telling you how to drive every once in a while isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Fill the gas tank, and don’t ever let it drop below a quarter of a tank, so you’ll never have to stress about running out and getting stranded somewhere. And always remember to keep both hands on the wheel, (preferably at ten and two), so you don’t lose track of time. Last but certainly not least, if you ever do get lost do not be afraid to ask for directions.

After spending this time with my newly found tutor, I came to realize that getting where I am going as fast as I can putting the least mileage on my car, and not getting any points against my license isn’t what makes it a successful trip. A winding road with a few challenging hills to climb makes the ride more interesting and helps you to appreciate the times you can see clearly down the road (as long as you have your glasses on if need be) and coast effortlessly down the hill.

So pack your bags, strap on your seatbelt, put the pedal to the metal and enjoy. If you keep your eyes on the road toward the future, you are sure to find (as I have) that college may prove to be the ride of your life!

Spaceman Spiff
By David Hagerty

Calvin
By David Hagerty
Instruments of Verse
By David Koenig

I write with a pen
a pen in my hand
Silky smooth It writes so fine
Messy and wild
Promoter of speed and freedom
Unerasable it writes on and on
It writes on and on never to pause
Till the ink runs dry
Or my dear pen is lost.

I write with a pencil
Pencil in hand
Harsh and concise it writes so cautiously,
Carefully.
Dry and firm
Promoter of detail and certainty
I pause then an again to erase and rewrite
to erase and rewrite for clarity.
till the lead snaps free
it’s sharpened to nothing
or my pencil is lost.

I type with a keyboard.
Keyboard in lap.
Clankety loud it encodes uncaring, rigid.
Springy and swift.
Enforcer of rules and formulae.
I type intermittently pausing to stare at the screen.
Stare at the screen and curse the time marching on.
Till my mind snaps
The deadline arrives
Or my PC dies..

I speak with a voice
This voice of mine
This voice of me
Uncertain, quiet, it speaks so slow.
Deep and monotone
Defender of comfort and feeling
Unease it speaks hiding emotion
hiding emotion from the threat of ire
Till I lose momentum
Fall to fatigue
Or I expire.
The most important thing for me and my family is our business; and our business is justice. I am a member of the Immunity family, and for more than forty years we’ve been able to destroy our country’s worst criminals; the Pathogens. Although all the members of the Pathogen clan are dangerous, two members of this clan are considered our worst enemies: they go by the name of Virus and Bacteria. It’s our life’s goal and commitment to protect our country; the country known as Shania Twain. We stand behind its walls and protect our provinces from these foreign invaders.

My name is T-lymphocyte and I was born in the province of Bone Marrow, and at a very young age, migrated to the province of Thymus. I am a soldier in an army of many. I would like to think of myself as the muscle of the operations. During my time in Thymus, I am expecting to fully mature in my training. Under the direction of Commander Thymic Hormone, we’ll learn to identify foreign criminals. I am pushing myself to be the sharpest and fastest of our army, because only the best can survive this training. One of my brothers, Pepe T. Lymphocyte, once made the mistake of detaining an innocent civilian, and to tell you the truth, I haven’t heard from him ever since. During our educational training in the Cortex region of Thymus, I’ll be able to identify our worst enemies. Some of us are thought to be natural killers, like we were born with this gift or something, but as I’ve mentioned before, it’s all in the name of justice. My cousin, B-lymphocyte, specializes in military intelligence to seek out our targets. He’s the brain of our operations.

A few days to go, Chicken Pox, a well known criminal from the Varicella gang, managed to trespass our barriers. We were able to destroy him within of his arrival. With the help of other comrades, B-lymphocyte was able to create a trapping device, called the “anti-body”. This tool allowed us to ensure that no other member of the Varicella gang would ever trespass again. If these invaders ever tried, the anti-bodies would trap them till we can get there and finish the job.

I have to admit that we can’t fight crime all on our own. The Phagocytes, our allies, are always there to help. Although their methods of killing the enemy are different from ours, and a bit gruesome, they still get the job done. Who says that eating the enemy isn’t just as effective, and who am I to judge. We also have an alarm system called “Inflammation”. Once these intruders pass the walls of Shania Twain, depending on their way of entry, an alarm will be activated to warn us of their presence.

I am very proud of the job I do. I, along with many others, provide our citizens with the protection they couldn’t live without. These are hard times and crime never seems to stop. Soon I plan to move to the province of Lymph
Nodes, where I will keep working to fight crime and defend those who can’t defend themselves. This is my destiny. I am T Lymphocyte, and justice is my middle name.

Photos By Abigail Priano
**How I Wish For an Endless Sleep**

My story begins when I was born. But I guess we all know how that is. One day, after nine long months in our mother’s womb, we decide to come out and join the world.

“It’s a ...” says a nurse as they pull a slimy, unsanitized body out.

And the mother says, “...’s beautiful.”

“What should we call ...?” replies the father.

“What about ...?”

What we don’t know, is all the things that will happen to us. I was born into a loving family that didn’t last long. After a few months my parents split and I went with my mom. Then, after a few more three years, I left my mom and moved with my uncle and aunt to another state.

I don’t remember much of that time, seeing how I was only three to four. But I guess the real reason is because most of the things that happen to me in the years to come took over the precious space where I kept the few happy memories of my past. I don’t really remember when exactly I was reunited with my mother; I only remember the time I spent with her. I was her only child so I had her all for myself. At least, for a while.

“Who’s mommy’s little princess?

“I am!”

“And who loves mommy?”

“ I do!”

“How much do you love mommy? This much?” she would open her arms, placing the side of her palms, one on each knee of her crossed legs.

“No," I would giggle, thinking mommy the silliest person in the world. “This much!” and I would spread my arms as wide as I could, showing her that I loved her more than she imagined, more than I can reach.

I was probably five when my step dad came into our lives. I barely have any memories of him at first but as he kept dating my mom and I kept seeing him, he was painted in the mural of my mind; over the image that was once the face of my biological father.

“Hi, my name’s Anthony. What’s yours?” he asked, with a lopsided smile and a wink of his brown eye, eyes shaped as almonds with lashes to long for a man.
“My name’s Keysha.”

“Well Keysha, do you know who I am?”

“Yea,” I said indifferently. “You’re my mom’s friend.”

“Sort of, I’m a special friend of your mom’s. I hope to spend lots of time with you too, and maybe become your friend.”

“OK.”

When I close my eyes sometime, thinking back to those developmental years, I remember him taking me and my mom shopping; once or twice to the movies; even to the beach. Next thing you know, the next image I’m looking at is the image of their wedding day. It was a beautiful wedding.

My mother looked gorgeous, almost ethereal. I remember the angelic music playing in the distance; the murmur of the guest as they stood to see the bride walk through the isle; the groom standing there in the altar waiting anxiously for his wife to be to stroll to him and say “I do”; the smell of roses and white orchids filled my nostrils as I reached the altar and turned to gaze at how gracefully the lace and satin gown, with asymmetric ruching from under the bust with layers of dropped chiffon coming from hip giving a long look in the body, accentuated with sparkling floral beadwork at the bust and vertically down the edge of the chiffon swayed as she came forward.

“Do you Janet take Anthony to be you lawfully wedded husband?”

“I do.”

“Do you Anthony take Janet to be you lawfully wedded wife?”

“I do.”

After a long time, that had seem to slip through the fingers of my memory, preventing itself from being trapped in the tape recorder of my mind, we were in the reception, partying and celebrating the union of two people in love. As I looked at the glow the radiated from my mom I thought, too, I was one of the best days of my life. How wrong was I.

The first two years of their marriage was heaven. We went out almost every day; spent time together; were a real family. I even took to calling him dad. But then again who can blame a five year old for not knowing the difference between a man who just came into her mother’s life and the man was supposed to have stay but didn’t?

“So now you’re calling him dad?” would ask my uncle when finding out, furious about the idea of me calling another man other than his brother dad.

“Yeah. He’s my dad now because he’s married to my mom.”

“Is he nice to you?”

“He’s ok. Don’t worry; you’ll still be my favorite guy uncle Rick.”
And he was. Life with my step dad Anthony was good. There was days when he even took us to his work at the office. It was all good until one night when we were heading home from a party down the street. I remembered seeing my mom standing there on the porch of the host’s house, talking about God knows what, as my dad started walking home. He swayed side to side as he lifted one foot and then the other, as if trying to walk across an invisible tight rope up in the air, except, he wasn’t wearing those nice glittery, tight outfit the acrobats wore, and he didn’t have his hands out or was holding one of those really long poles they use to keep balance with. Instead, one hand was in his pocket while the other held a brown bottle by the neck as if holding an upside down microphone, taking a big sipping every time he draw it to his lips. I ran after him, not wanting to let him go home alone I guess, and because my mom could say let’s go a million time, and a million times she would stall.

“Dad, wait for me!” I yelled as I ran after him, the frills of my yellow summer dress getting caught under the toes of my new black shiny shoes, making me lift the hem of my skirt so I can reach him.

“Aren’t you going to wait for mom?”

“You know ‘ow ‘our mo’er iz,” she slurred through numb lips. “I’z gonna go ‘ome an’ waits for ‘er zer.”

We were half way down the streets when he picked me up into his arms; wrapped, under his armpit like a pig-skin, just like the quarter back of a team holds it as he runs to score the winning touchdown. As I hung there, I could smell the scent of beef wafting up my nose as the air he misplaces with every step rubs against him and out of the way. I don’t know what it was I said to make him unleash his wrath like he did.

For a while all I could remember were the hot white flashes that passed through my minds eyes as I felt with all my soul, blow after blow, the pain he enforced on me. After the first few, it then seemed as I left my body and was walking next to him, seeing him strike as if keeping beat on the taught skin over a lakadi, the wooden bowl that make an Indian Tabla drum; seeing how cell by cell the skin on my forehead separates to allow the flow of blood as if trying to prevent my face from swelling, with no prevail. I could see how the tears flows down the only eye that, for some fortunate reason has been spared, and mix with the red goo that soiled my once innocent face. After the time spans of walking across four houses all I see is blackness surrounding me, yet I still felt his rough hands around my waist and his jerks as he tries, drunkenly, to open the door to our beautiful, cream colored house with white window boarders. After hearing the clicks of the keys and door handle as they gave way, and the taps of the five short steps from the front door to the living room, the last thing I remember is one last flash of hot white light as I drift to what I hoped would be an endless sleep where I would never have to remember or think or even acknowledge what had just happened to me.
I don’t remember what happened after that; it was as if the months that follow were nothing but a dream; a fairytale that seemed to have replaced all the bad things. It’s a funny thing how memories work; wanting to erase the freighting things and keep the surreal.

For most of my life I thanked my memories for locking the monster in the closet and never letting him out, as my mother thanked the lady with the golden scale hanging delicately from her left hand as she wield a sword in her right and the blindfold blinding her “in order to indicate that justice is (or should be) meted out objectively, without fear or favor, regardless of identity, money, power, or weakness: blind justice and blind impartiality.” (1)

**Birthday Surprise**

I was so excited, I was turning 10! I was no longer a baby or a kid or a child, I was a preteen now. I was going to be able to make at least some if not all of my own decisions, I would have more responsibility and respect. I was on my way to adulthood and I was moving fast.

“So what do you want to do for you birthday?” asked my mom with a hint of laughter at the excitement in my face.

“I don’t know. But I don’t want a party. That’s for little kids and babies. Besides, I know how tight we are right now with money so there’s no need to waste so much money so that people come, eat, laugh, and go home without a simple ‘thank you’ or ‘can I help you clean?’”

“Ah! A wise one.” She teased.

**Breathless Sparrow**

By Alex Allain

Can you see me?
Can you hear me?
You’re not looking
You’re not listening
I can smell your absence
Where you stood.
A breathless sparrow
No sight
No sound
Too hard to stay
Too hard to leave
Don’t touch me!
Please hold me.

Embalmed in support
A sigh. A breathless sparrow.
If I were on fire
Would anyone put me out?
Or is that what you’re doing when
You spit all over me?

Nephron Park
By Susan Landroche

Introduction to Nephro Park

Personage Parish is divided into four different quadrants, two upper and two lower. Nephro Park is split into two bean-shaped parks. One of the parks is in the Right Upper Quadrant and the other in the Left Upper Quadrant. They are located in the middle of the back part of Personage Parish, just below the rib cage grill, on either side of the spine road. Each bean-shaped park weighs about 0.5 percent of your total Personage Parish weight. Nephro Park itself receives 20 percent of the Blood family which is pumped by the heart of the Personage Parish.

Nephro Park has four layers in each of its bean-shaped parks. First you will come up to the renal capsule which is a thin, outer membrane that helps protect Nephro Park by filtering out the riff raff. Secondly you will run right into the cortex which is considered the outer region and is lightly colored and this is where the Blood family will be under considerable pressure. Thirdly you will quickly walk into the medulla that is in the inner region and is marked by the darker, reddish-brown colors. This is where you can find concentrated members of the Sodium and Water family. Lastly you will walk into renal pelvis part of Nephro Park, which is flattened but funnel shaped and this is where all the urine stalls are collected into the ureters station.

Guide through Nephro Park

If you look closely at the cortex and medulla layers of the park, you can see many tiny, tubular rides that stretch across both regions perpendicular to the surface of Nephro Park. In each bean-shaped park, there are one million of these structures, called nephrons. The nephron is the basic ride of the bean shaped park. These nephron rides are all built the same with each having six different parts.

But not to worry for the toxin family, if they get separated they will still end up together in the ureter station waiting for the bladder truck to take you to the urethra tunnel. However the Sodium and Water families will want to hold on tight because we are sure to lose some of your family members.

Nephro Park Warning

When Nephro Park filtrates the Blood family, it only includes filtrating
small molecules and water. No red blood cell families get filtered into this ride. Therefore, please read the following sign before getting on the rides: “No Blood family member should appear in the urine stalls under normal conditions. If you find blood in your urine stall, you should contact the park mechanic as soon as possible because it could be a sign of Nephro Park problems.”

**Transporters**

You want to be careful on this ride because you will also see transporters along the ride grabbing ions such as Na, Water, Glucose, and Toxins. (How Stuff Works, 1998-2010) This will mostly happen along the Proximal Tubule portion of the ride. Once you get into the Loop of Henle you will start to see transporters taking water by osmosis. (How Stuff Works, 1998-2010) But not to worry you will be traveling very fast and these transporters can only grab a few items at a time. (How Stuff Works, 1998-2010)

**The Ride**

So once you have ridden the intestinal ride you will be sent to one of the millions of nephrons. Here at the beginning of the ride the Interlobulay vein office will drain the Peritubular Capillaries tube until they reach Renal Vein’s office. Sodium family, Water family and the Toxin family are all aboard for the nephron ride. The nephron ride is closed ended and starts at the Bowman’s capsule. Remember around this capsule the Blood family will be filtered under pressure through Glomerular Capillaries in series with Peritubular Capillaries to maintain a constant pressure, so the ride can go along quickly and smoothly.

The ride has started and it flows through a lumen and into the Proximal tubule part of the ride which will reabsorb 65 percent of filtered NA and passively reabsorbs about 2/3 of water and other substances. So this is where the Sodium family and the Water family wants to be careful because they may lose some of their family. This is the first twisted region in the cortex after the Bowmans capsule.

Now you come upon a long, hairpin loop after the proximal tubule, it extends from the cortex descending down into the medulla and ascending back. This is where the Loop of Henle reabsorbs 25 percent of filtered Na. Oh no Sodium family you may want to hold on tight here.

Now we are coming up to the Distal Tubule which is the second twisted portion of the nephron after the loop of Henle. Sodium family has some more family members to lose maybe up to 8 percent. But not to worry this is your last corner before you enter the collecting ducts that take you from the cortex to the medulla and on to the renal pelvis where you will all meet up at the ureters station to get secreted together onto the bladder truck and down through the urethra tunnel. I hope you had a nice trip and I am hoping to see more of the Water family the next trip. Don’t forget to pick up your pictures on the way out of the urethra. Have a nice day.
Come along with me on this wonderful journey through rainforests, deserts and rocky waters. It is a very complex journey, traversing very long distances and may even take several days to complete. The entire trip will show you change every step of the way that I’m sure you will find fascinating and, yes, might even make you a little squeamish. If you can hang in there, I promise it will all be worth it in the end! Pun intended. You’ll understand more when we come to the end of the journey. Please make sure you have your seatbelts fastened, you are in for a journey you will never forget.

The journey begins when you take that first bite of that juicy hamburger. Your incisors chomp off a giant bite. Your molars crush it, grind it and pulverize it into small pieces. All the while, the rain forest in your mouth, called saliva, or to be more technical, spit, is going wild. The saliva is making sure the hamburger is wet enough to traverse down through the rest of its journey. Now the chemical reactions have begun to occur to help with digestion. Let’s continue. Your tongue acts like a shovel pushing the food to the back of your throat. No, you aren’t going to choke. There’s a small hatch that opens up called the Epiglottis to allow the food to drop down the slippery slope slide. We call the slippery slope slide the Esopho Gus. Hang on, here we go…

Down and down and down. At times it is going to feel like you’re being squeezed through the opening of a tube. Bear with me. These constrictions on the way down the slippery slope slide help to push everything down. Watch out…here comes more wet stuff. We have to be very careful to not touch it because it’s acidic. These acid rains are not unusual within the Esopho Gus. Here, too, we meet Cilia and all her friends. Cilia and her friends are leading the way for us. As you look out the window, you can see how they grab us and move us down the line. We’re going to wave back and forth along the journey so you may feel a little queasy! Hold on, we’re coming to the end of the slippery slide. Be prepared for the jolt. We are gonna hit bottom pretty soon…

SPLASH… Wow!! That was great!!! Okay, now that we’re all back and floating on the top, let’s explore our surroundings. There are a few caves that can be explored but we’ll do that at another time. It’s important to hang on here because the waves are going to be constant. WATCH OUT, here comes another one… wow. We survived that one. Make sure you’re holding on. We’re on our way into one of the caves. This is a small one.

We are now entering into the World of Small Intestine. This part of the ride is approximately 22 feet long. It’s one of the longest parts of this ride. It’s still wet and slippery, but the waves begin to slow down a little bit. Now
we have rains coming in from all kinds of different caves. We have rain from the Kidney Spout and the Pancreas Waterfall. Take note that the food train we were on is now pretty much like sitting in slop. Pretty gross, huh? This slop is because of the waves we just survived. It just keeps churning like a stewpot. The waves are nonstop but they help to get us into this new cave. As we continue on this journey, you will now begin to notice that we went from being in a real wet area to a pretty dry looking area with small fingerlike looking cactuses. These cacti are called Villa. They are the sponges in this cave. They love to suck up all kinds of stuff out of the water we were just dumped into. They’ll send it along to another cave called the Vampires Blood. We won’t be able to explore that one today, but I’m sure if you come back again, you’ll enjoy that ride as well. Now that’s a wild ride!!

The Lights at Ground Zero
By Helen Burke

For thirty-one days
They stretched up to heaven
Silent, but glowing;
Their message so clear
Of the hope still enduring
Within those on this earth;
Steadfast and stalwart,
Not flinching for a moment,
Rising from rubble
They spoke to each one,
To the heart of a people
Bruised, but unbroken;
Lifting the spirit
To the Great Spirit above,
Reflecting a bond,
A bond to continue
When they were extinguished;
the Lights at Ground Zero.
Photos By Erica Martin

[Images of scenic landscapes with mountains and trees in the background]
I awoke to the sounds of 119 other men cycling through the shower, shaving, making their beds, and cleaning their areas. I shook my head and closed my eyes, trying to get those last few seconds of peace. It was 3:25 in the morning of Wednesday May 13, 2009. I had been at Fort Benning, Georgia for a week, going through the hell that was the 30th AG Reception Battalion. This day was different though. It was the day that my actual Basic Training would begin. I was knocking at the door of the summer that would completely change my life.

I rolled out of my bunk and opened my locker. Almost everything had been packed the night before. I peeled off my shorts and t-shirt, and put on my uniform. I went about my morning routine and finished stuffing my personal belongings into an Army-issued duffel bag. At 4:25, all of us ran outside to the pavilion for the morning formation. The 120 of us were split into three different platoons. One was for Active Army, one was for Army Reserve, and one was for National Guard. I was enlisted in the National Guard. It took about fifty seconds for us to get into the right order, and shut up.

Staff Sergeant Challenger is one of the most intense human beings I have met. Standing only 5 foot 4 inches, almost all of us towered over him. Whenever he walked near us, whether it was in the classroom, the dining facility, or even the latrines, we fell silent. We had to be quiet, but even if we didn’t, the intimidation that radiated off of Staff Sergeant Challenger was so much, that it would’ve happened anyway. The first day we had the pleasure of seeing him, he was quite pleasant. “Don’t take any goddamned shit from any of you fucking pissnuts. You understand? I am a fucking Staff Sergeant! Remember that. Don’t be fucking calling me a fucking Drill Sergeant. You do that shit, and you’ll be on my fucking shit list. If you all just keep your damn mouths closed, we’ll get along just fine!”

There we were, in our final morning formation before nine weeks of torture. We were still as Staff Sergeant Challenger walked through our ranks. He grinned widely. “Enjoy your summer, ladies.” Over the course of Basic Training, if I needed to smile, I remembered a phrase that was written on the wall in one of the Port-A-Potties outside the dining facility. Jesus walks on water; Challenger swims through ice.

He led us to breakfast, and then we went back to our barracks to clean everything from top to bottom. At 7:40, all of us herded into the classroom. The classroom we used for this week of processing was nothing more than a barracks building with all of the wall lockers and bunks removed. There were no desks, no chairs. The floor was good enough for us “pissnuts.” The topic of the morning was prepping for the next couple of months. It was mainly a
bunch of paperwork and Staff Sergeant Challenger enjoying the last couple hours before we left.

The buses that would take us to our battalion arrived at 9:30. Along with them were our new Drill Sergeants. As we walked outside to line up to get on the buses, there were eleven of them standing about forty yards away, quietly conversing amongst themselves. Occasionally they would chuckle or point at one of us. Two of them walked over, adjusting their hats, making sure we knew they owned our ass.

Drill Sergeant Furlow grew to be my least favorite of the pack. He had a decent personality— if he liked you. He didn’t like me. “All right, here’s what you’re going to do. Are you all listening?” He spoke quietly, dangerously. “Take your duffel bag and frontload it. Take your personal bag and hold it in your left hand. Do not let it touch the ground.”

This was the first time we had the privilege of frontloading anything. Basically, it’s wearing the duffel bag like a backpack, only on the front of us. It wasn’t particularly easy, it being quite a bulky item and weighing damn near ninety pounds. By the time July rolled around, and we were hauling a hundred pounds of stuff we’d never use in our rucksacks, frontloading was a piece of cake. It’s said in Basic Training that soldiers can only carry 1/3 of their body weight. Bullshit.

For over half an hour we stood like that—motionless, our backs ready to give out. 120 Privates had suddenly grown to 240, the magic number of a company. A battalion was broken down into five companies of 240. A company broke into four platoons of sixty. A platoon had four squads of fifteen, and each squad had two teams. I was in the 192nd Infantry Battalion, C Company, 4th Platoon, 4th Squad, A Team.

“All right, get on the fucking buses!” All of the Drill Sergeants suddenly swarmed us like bees. As we finally squeezed onto the buses, we all thought the same thing: what was I thinking when I signed that piece of paper? Drill Sergeant Furlow was on my bus. “Keep your faces smothered in your duffel! I don’t want to see any skin. Did you just hear what I said? Then why the hell are you still looking at me?” The entire bus ride consisted of him screaming obscenities at us.

We got to our battalion in about fifteen minutes, which I later found out was absurd. In mid-June we walked back to Reception to be fitted for our class-A uniforms, and the walk took only ten minutes. It was then that the intensity that was Basic Training came into focus: the Shark Attack.

“Get off of my fucking bus! Move your ass! You better be fucking running down that goddamned aisle!” The bus drivers were kind enough to drop us off ¼ mile from the company area, making us have to cross the “sandpit.” The sandpit was exactly what it sounds like: a pit of sand encompassed by the running track. As I ran, if you could call it running with my duffle on my chest
and my suitcase above my head, I dodged my peers as they tripped and fell. This was generally followed by a Drill Sergeant sprinting to their location, making sure they knew that they were not given permission to fall down.

We were lined up in front of the pull-up bars, again told that nothing was allowed to touch the ground, and platoon assignments began. The process took thirty-five minutes. It was 11:30. I had been up for eight hours, and I was not in the best of moods. We were given our first assignment as a company. I had read about this first task about two weeks before- it was designed for us to fail. There was no way to complete it successfully.

One of the Drill Sergeants told us exactly what we had to do. We were to take our duffle bag, place it at a specific geometric angle, facing a certain way, and place our suitcases on top of it, so it looked exactly like his example. The problem was, nobody had the same suitcase, and so it couldn’t look exactly like the example. “Do some fucking pushups! You have all failed this extremely simple task!”

We all got down and started banging out pushups- our first “smoking” session. “If you aren’t even able to do this simple task, how do expect to become soldiers? I should fail all of you pitiful excuses for a human right now! My fucking grandmother can do this better than all 240 of you!” As it turned out, his grandmother was a faster runner than us, a better shooter than us, and could shove an entire meal down her mouth before one of us swallowed a sip of water.

At 12:10 in the afternoon, our platoon was brought upstairs into our barracks. We were assigned roster numbers, wall lockers, and a bed. More yelling ensued, more pushups followed. Most of the rest of the day was devoted to even more paperwork. We took a quick trip to the Post Exchange across the street to grab some essential items, such as soap, deodorant, and letter writing materials. We were granted a five-minute call home.

This day was one of the most stressful days of my life, and I will never forget it. As a whole, Basic Training was an intense and awesome experience, and I truly had the time of my life. The toughest part of it was the complete and utter cutoff from civilization, save for four or five quick phone calls over the sixty-three remaining days. What began as a nightmare ended up becoming the journey of a lifetime.
Pencil Guy (Angry) By David Hagerty

Pencil Guy (Chew) By David Hagerty
New Hampshire
By Pamela Cotter

New Hampshire is a beautiful place. 
Its hills and valleys filled with grace! 
The birds are singing in the spring 
New life is coming into being. 
Around the corner comes summer sun. 
When all of nature stirs with fun! 
Flowers are tall waiting for fall. 
The trees become an artist’s dreams. 
It isn’t real, it often seems. 
The color of gold shines so bright. 
Why it looks like God turned on the light! 
Winter time is coming soon, 
So get one last look at that harvest moon! 
Suddenly the ground is white. 
The wind is blowing with all its might! 
Christmas time is near, 
all the houses decorated with cheer! 
A post card image is what I see, 
Thank God I live in this country!

Nomad
By Alex Allain

There’s a stick on my shoulder and 
A bag hanging over 
Leaving this house and 
Heading for home. 
A gypsy 
I seek release from 
This vaga-bondage 
I’ve never been farther from 
Finding my place than when 
I’m standing still.
Even Numbers
By Jamie Lockhardt

As my sister and I made our way back home from a tiring day of shopping we merged onto the highway. Just our luck, traffic seemed to go on for miles. In order to keep ourselves entertained for the time being my sister proceeded to turn up the volume on the radio. Jim Morrison belted out the lyrics to “Light My Fire” and his voice slowly became louder with each movement of the knob. I watched as the numbers slowly increased.

As she continued to turn the knob she stopped on volume seventeen. My eyes focused on the number. I stared at it, then slowly moved my hand to the knob and turned it just one notch, volume eighteen it now read. “What are you doing, that's too loud now,” she said as she reached for the knob and turned it back down one notch to seventeen.

I reached over once again and swiftly turned it up one notch. She raised an eyebrow in annoyance and moved her hand ready to switch it back when I swat it away.

“It's too loud!” she complained again.

“It needs to be even,” I said, emphasizing the “even: as if it were a life-death matter.

She squinted her eyes in anger and switched it back to seventeen anyway. I could feel my eye start to twitch, as I look at that seventeen on the radio – an odd number. There's just something about them that makes me so uncomfortable.

I made my way back to the dial, preparing for my third attempt. This time I moved the knob down one notch volume sixteen is now read. “I can't hear anything,” she complained.

“It’s just one notch,” I said in my defense. She shot a glare in my direction.

“You’re so OCD about even numbers!” she growled.

And that's when I realized she was right.
Fox Fire By David Hagerty

Beardman By David Hagerty
Recollection
By Matt Voltz

I awoke to the sound of silence. I looked out my small window, and saw black. It wasn’t even dawn yet. A yawn escaped my mouth, and I realized I hadn’t slept well the night before. I thought back. What did I do last night? I was reading some mail around eleven, and I fell into some sort of sleep. It wasn’t a deep sleep, because I was still aware of my surroundings. When I awoke in the middle of the night, I had begun reminiscing my life. I started to do that again…

You see, twenty years ago, I had a normal life. I was happy. This particular day I left work early. I bought some flowers for my wife, the ones that smelled like they had just been picked. I had loved her deeply, and she loved me. Well, at first anyway. We got married at the ripe age of nineteen. They say high-school sweethearts never last, and they were right. No one tells you about the betrayal someone can commit, an act of treason within the sacred bond. Let me be the one to tell you: it happens.

That afternoon, walking to my door, I noticed a strange car in the driveway. I figured that it was one of Heather’s friends from church, and they were inside drinking coffee and catching up on the week’s events. Entering the house, the intensity of nothing perked my senses. Then I heard a few noises coming from upstairs. At that point, I knew. I knew exactly what was going on. I could have easily left, driven away, taken care of it differently. I didn’t. I wanted to see it firsthand, for her to see me and for her to know that I knew.

I felt a violent rage build up inside of me, not knowing what I was going to do, but still unwilling to leave. I crept up the stairs, still wanting the satisfaction of the element of surprise. Pushing open the door, I saw what I already knew. They still hadn’t seen me, and that was a good thing. I went to the closet, out of their sight, but my line of vision still included them. Them. It disgusted me, enraged me. I felt for my baseball bat, the one my father had given me as a kid.

I stepped into their eyesight, and cleared my throat. Immediately, Heather gasped and tried to sputter an excuse, but I stopped her. “How could you do this to me, Heather?” My blood was boiling, and I didn’t want a response. I didn’t even want to know why. I didn’t care. I only cared about the here and now.

“You want to know why?”

I looked at the man who said that, the man who was screwing my wife. I said nothing, just stared at him.

“She asked me here. I didn’t do anything to her she didn’t want me to.”
Apparently, you’ve been flaking in this department.”

I didn’t even think. I swung the bat, and it connected with the side of his face. His eyes bulged and a trickle of blood dribbled out of his nostrils. He fell to the ground, screaming in pain, and swearing at me. I walked around him, studying this pathetic excuse for a human being, then back at Heather. She was teary, and yelling for me to stop. I didn’t listen, didn’t even care.

The bat swung downward, and hit home. The distinct sound of breaking bones could be heard over the wails of the two lovers, whom, five minutes before, had been entwined in each other’s arms, not thinking this would happen. Again, the bat cracked against the bloodied bastard.

He was on his back, blood coming out of his nose and mouth, back broken in three places, his left shoulder dislocated, his right wrist shattered, and his legs immovable. He pleaded, apologized. I spat onto his face and lined up my next shot. The bat crashed down onto his face, crushing his nose, causing blood to spurt in random directions. I destroyed his pretty little face with each subsequent blow. I stopped, and observed the body. Movement had ceased; his face wasn’t recognizable as once having been a face. I licked my lips, and tasted his blood. It had a strong iron taste to it. Heather was screaming at me, and I advanced on her.

“I loved you! I loved you, and this is how you repay me?” I looked at her with hatred, pondering my next move. I had just killed a man, rather violently. Her eyes darted back and forth between the bloody bat and my eyes, looking for some sign of forgiveness. I had none.

“Please, Larry, please,” she begged.

I said nothing and swung the bat wildly, again and again and again. Blood pooled onto the sheets still covering her. With the next blow, the bat broke in half. I could see her still breathing, clutching the bed sheets.

“Larry,” she stammered, “Larry.”

I watched her struggle for life for a few more moments until the body went stiff. I went to her and stroked her hair for the last time. “I’m sorry, babe.”

A neighbor had heard the violent screams of pain and called the police. About four minutes after the last breath had escaped from Heather’s lips, I heard the door downstairs crash as the police kicked it in. I had known from that moment that there was no escape. I laid the half of the bat I was holding on the bed and got onto the floor, facedown, with my hands over my head, awaiting arrest.

“Don’t move!” yelled an officer, who had just entered the room. “I got him!” The officer knelt down and forced me into handcuffs. “You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to have an attorney present during questioning.
If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed to you. Do you understand the rights I have just read to you?”

“Yes,” I replied.

So, there I was. I was in custody for the murder of my wife and her lover, who just happened to be a member of the police force. What could have been two counts of second-degree murder, turned into one count of capital murder, and one count of second-degree murder.

After a few weeks, the verdict came in. It was an extremely quick trial, which I had suspected it would be. The jury filed in, and the bailiff stood by them.

“Have you reached a verdict?” asked the judge.

“Yes, Your Honor,” replied the foreman.

“Will the bailiff bring the written verdict to me?”

The bailiff took the folded piece of paper and gave it to the judge, who read it. Watching his eyes glaze over as he read with a small hint of satisfaction, it was drilled into me what I already sub-consciously knew. I was guilty. I’d spend the rest of my life behind bars.

“This verdict was unanimous?”

The foreman stood again. “Yes, Your Honor. All twelve of us concur.”

“Very well. On the charge of the murder of Heather J. Whitcomb in the second degree, we find the defendant, Lawrence R. Whitcomb, guilty as charged.”

Even though I knew that this was how it was going to turn out, I felt my stomach plunge and waves of terror wash over me. The judge continued, “On the charge of the capital murder of Detective Ronald H. Grendal, we find the defendant, Lawrence R. Whitcomb, guilty as charged.”

Two guilty verdicts were enough for two consecutive life sentences in a maximum-security prison. “The jury is dismissed,” the judge addressed them, and they filed out silently. He looked at my lawyer and me. “Is your defendant ready to be sentenced? Or do you want to wait the customary thirty days?”

My lawyer conferred with me quickly and stood up. “Your Honor, we are ready now.”

“Very well. Mr. Whitcomb, the nature and circumstances of these grisly murders are exceptionally brutal and cold.” He paused, long enough for my mind to drift back to that day. I replayed the entire scene in my head for the umpteenth time. “Due to everything presented, and the jurors recommendations, it is fit that I sentence you to death by electrocution, carried out in accordance with state law.”
This shocked me. I knew the death penalty was on the table, but didn’t actually think it would become a reality. I fainted moments after the sentence was handed down.

Now, close to twenty years later, I’m here, inside my deathwatch cell, less than twenty-four hours away from my sentence to be carried out. I looked at the wall clock. It was a quarter to six in the morning. So, I am exactly eighteen hours and fifteen minutes from my last breath.

**Arteries**  
*By Alex Allain*

![Arteries Image]

**Candle Flame**  
*By Alex Allain*

![Candle Flame Image]
The End of the Roman Empire
By Robert Reynolds

When Rome had diminished its income from exports and trade due to the rising cost of foreign energy, and the mere fact that Rome no longer created anything of value for foreign empires let alone themselves, daily living for the Romans became unexpectedly expensive. No amount of hydrogen, solar, hybrids or any other quote unquote green energy could save the once mighty Roman economy. Rome had developed into a country that consumed itself into destruction. As the Romans were sanctioned off by foreign energy suppliers, the country began to fall in on its self. The Romans sought to lay shame on energy suppliers as if they were solely responsible for the state of emergency they had been forced to face. The end of the empire was not obscure, concealed or sequestered from the Roman public. Rome chose to separate energy, income, and resources from its homeland. The Romans could no longer produce food and even if by some alternative green miracle had been given resources needed for production, Rome had suffocated its prior farmland with strip malls and McMansions that now stand as unreachable monuments of a society built on impracticality, foreign dependency, and a false belief that the Roman way of life is non-negotiable. The sprawl of the Romans in a demonstration of false wealth had extinguished any possible hope of stabilizing the crash of the Roman Empire.

Orchard
By Jeff Augusta

It was a soft fall day. The trees were not yet bare, and still held whatever colored leaves the wind had not yet claimed for its own. Autumn is the painter of the seasons, as winter is the cynic, and summer the fool. The sun was waking, and in doing so slowly whispering to all the world to follow in its rapture. As it warmed the apple trees and traveled grass of the orchard, they expelled a dew of relief. The sunlight was as it is only at dawn, not yet able to fully penetrate the sleep of its recipients, but still somber and divine enough to inspire. There was no blow to the wind, and there was not a cloud in sight. The air smelled of ripe apples and clarity, and rightfully so. Its serenity is not done justice.

Each season has its own distinct palette with which it paints the landscape, and fall’s is the most composed. If a season is nothing more than a set of color and feeling applied to a time, it should still suffice. There is as much to learn from a tree as there is to learn from a blade of grass, for they are nothing more than canvas for which nature is left to paint its masterpiece. If nothing actually has any color and color is all just a play of light on our rods
and cones, it only goes to attest that nature is indeed the crafter of such feats.

As I walked between the trees, swerving inadvertently from trail to trail nothing passed through my mind, and it was bliss. The robins and thrushes sang from upon their perches, and added an immaculate orchestral score to a painting which was already grand. The orchard was situated on miles and miles of rolling hills, and was not conceived of apple trees in entirety. I wandered among the hills for hours, the terrain never becoming monotonous or wearisome. When I finally decided to attempt to find the road out, it was nowhere to be found; although this may have been because half of me hoped that I should never find it. I at this point had not evidence enough to convince myself that this was anything more than a waking dream of which I would soon be again deprived.

If I was in fact dreaming, then I certainly did not wish to wake up; however, I knew as well as any that this was no mere exploit of chemical impulse within my lobes. I was at this point determined to ascertain whether I was in a waking state or not, and begun by walking in one same direction. As I walked, however, I was taken by a small worm peering out of an apple with no apparent regard for myself or my sanity. He exhibited no fright as he lowered himself ever more out of his prolific home, and bent outwards to greet this stranger. I approached with caution, and was certain that this little being had just as much integrity and purpose as myself, or a creature of similar circumstance.

Maybe we are in fact a pawn in their game; think you who have the better life? They are content with subsistence and shelter; we need more trifling and inconsequential things in one hour than they in their entire life. But before I was to compare hands with any worm, it returned to me that I was in fact speaking about a worm and stopped myself before I progressed any further. I was beginning to grow suspicious of my surroundings, and my complacency was fading by the minute. I continued to walk westward towards the setting sun with the utmost apprehension, the sun faded alongside my interest.

I had decided by this point to use the so appreciatively located beacon as my guide out of this wonderful abyss. I did not know what had overcome me preceding my change of venue to make me scorn and fear such a local as was currently dominating both my thought and action, but I regretted ever cursing it. Time seemed to hold no province here; for it seemed only a few hours ago that it was dawn, and now the same sun was almost retired from his long days work. If there was majesty in morning, I don’t know how to describe the dusk. The palettes had again changed their paints and the same leaves that once held a broken green and somber brown, now possessed their captors with even more vivid and brilliant ambers and golds. These benefactors of the setting sun yielded before his glory in ignorance and awe.

The sun had finally taken its leave and his spouse came out from hiding.
to illuminate the night with her bluish hues. The clouds now appeared scattered sparsely throughout the cool night sky. The moon danced among them and the stars to illustrate almost a moving portrait of the nocturnal heavens. The light at night is different from that of day, while the day warms and refreshes the night is calm and composed. I stopped wandering, and found a large tree upon which I could rest my back. I slouched down the trunk until I was firmly set and surprisingly comfortable, and decided to stop trying to find a way out. The wind blew against the leaves and small branches of the trees in an effort to whisper a lullaby of somber. Such absolute contentment has never been felt. As I drifted off to sleep, I had not a worry in my mind, nor a notion of despair.

Up Against It By David Hagerty

Trees By David Hagerty
We women have always dreamed of finding *The Perfect Man*. We bring our dreams to a reality of our own life thinking that there is that perfect man for us somewhere out there. We have fantasized since we were children of a young age about marrying the perfect guy for us, living in an oversized house with a white picket fence, driving around in a Porsche and living the perfect life almost like Barbie and Ken or Cinderella.

Well, what is the definition of a *perfect man*? There is no definition in the dictionary for *The Perfect Man*. I think we all have our own perspective of a perfect man. Since us women are all completely different from one another, we all have our own beliefs and desires.

Here is my own definition. As you read you can think about if you can relate or how you might relate to my definition of *The Perfect Man*.

*The Perfect Man*: An honest good looking man with a high paying job that is or will be a good father and has every respect for a woman. He would pamper me in every way possible, be truly sincere and most importantly, loves me unconditionally.

Example 1: If I had gone grocery shopping, before I got home he would have the refrigerator cleaned out to my perfection before I arrived home. He would have the garage door already opened for me and would have the kids lined up to help him take the groceries in and put them all away nice and neat. Just the way I would.

Example 2: He would get up extra early on a Sunday morning to make a big surprise breakfast and serve it to me in bed. He would know just how I like the food to be arranged on my plate and how much sugar and cream to put in my coffee. It would be just right, *perfect*.

Example 3: If I were sick he would call my boss for me and let me sleep in. He would get the kids ready for school and then draw me a nice hot bubble bath. He would have my bathrobe laid out for me and have a towel in his hands when I get out of the tub and pat dry my aching body. He would have a TV tray set next to the bed with some toast, a hot bowl of chicken noodle soup ad some ginger ale.

*The Perfect Man* would also know my every mood and emotion without having to ask. He would be able to tell just by my facial expressions and body language what kind of mood I was in. He would treat me accordingly instead of trying to find a way to divert the problem if there is one, he would gently ask me if I wanted to discuss the situation. If we were to get into an argument over something stupid, (as we all do) he would admit that it was his fault and apologize even if it wasn’t.
You should be able to trust his decisions and intentions without question. He should be able to tell you his inner most secrets, thoughts and fears. You should always feel and know that his eyes fall upon are you.

The Green River Road
By Kristen Poitras

The green river road where the water flows
From Massachusetts to Vermont, the river glows
The beckoning woods and rolling hills are hovering close by
Where whoooshing water dances, I sigh
Beauty is all I see as the wind blows

Rock statues are common yet not the only thing to pose
Rocks are all around surrounding above and below they expose
Slippery and slimy yet protruding, and quite frankly a tough guy
The green river road where the water flows

The painted colors of leaves in the fall, the cool air arose
When winter is here ice blocks crash into one another in rows
Dripping droplets and the river starts flowing again in the blink of an eye
Green is everywhere as people come rushing in on that hot day when the sun is sky high
My sisters and I travel this road wherever it goes
The green river road where the water flows

Shine like a Star
By Sarah Payson

Life, love, living life to the fullest-full!
A brave star dots the sky in its perennial-ornamental fashion.
The star does not know how or where to go-(should it be mobile).
But winks at us with a glowing, knowing, ember of an idea of whose show it is.
Is it the star’s looking down on us or ours- looking up at it.
When what has happened is long past, and what will happen no longer tomorrow: The sun’s fury escapes us and in the nimble corset of time you sit down and pray.
Life is more than what you did for the light to reach you- it is the light – and God is the light.
So take care and skate in the sky like a star.
Bright like a star—impossible like a star.
Wonderful and lively and lonely, like a crude, beautiful star.
Where did you go, oh ornament of the night. You wear you jacket coolly. Don’t be fresh with the folly of every-man’s life.
You are astute and are as young.
This sky is always above you and you below it—until the day you go skating on the stars.
Pebbles being tossed around a great cauldron of iron and fire—this star is yours and yours it
Shine like the star- make your life amazing.

Harsh Times
By Matt Voltz

She says she loves you, you say it back. You realize you don’t mean it, that you don’t feel the same as you used to. As you embrace her, your mind floats in the direction of someone else. Finally, you come to the conclusion that you need to break it off. The question is, how? There are several ways that one can do this, but they’re all going to hurt both parties, some more than others.

“This isn’t working for me, I’m sorry.” I used that sentence on Hannah, a girl I briefly dated in early 2007. I did it right before school began, without saying anything else. I needed to get rid of her- she was too clingy, thought we were more that we actually were, and wanted to get way too serious way too fast.

Looking back on it, it probably wasn’t the best way to go about it, but it worked for me. I decided to do it the day before, and wanted to do it in a way that wouldn’t hurt her feelings. Thinking about that, I wanted it to be as quick as possible, and not drawn out, so her feelings would be spared that way. For this method, one needs to be absolutely sure that there isn’t the slightest chance down the road that they would want to reconsider the decision. The reasoning behind that is because once it’s done, it’s done. It’s a sort of an emotionless breakup, and the girl will want nothing to do with you after, which is usually the goal.

Make sure that there aren’t a bunch of people around when you do it, because when she breaks into tears and you walk away, every girl will be thinking, “What a jackass.” I was that jackass. I did it in the middle of the entire junior class. It didn’t really affect me all that much, considering Hannah wasn’t well liked by anybody. When you say it, look at her- don’t look at the ground,
or at the sky. You need to know that she knows you’re serious. This method of breaking up with a girl is probably best used when you didn’t have enough time to get to know one another, and to grow attached.

A couple years ago, I was hanging out with my best friend, Cam. He had been dating Melissa, an attractive but extremely annoying girl in our History class. He told me that he really didn’t want to be with her anymore, and he didn’t know how to let her know without hurting her feelings. Well, hurt feelings are inevitable. As men, the only thing we can do to lessen the blow is to break up properly. The path Cam pursued was not the right one.

A couple days after informing me that he wasn’t interested in Melissa anymore, I ran into Cam in the hallway. “How did it go?” I asked him. As it turned out, it didn’t go well at all. He had chosen the coward’s way out. He broke up with her through a text message. This resulted in a knee jabbed into his groin.

The coward’s way out can be broken down into several categories: text message, e-mail/instant messaging, and over the phone. If you have any respect at all for the girl, avoid these techniques. However, if you are too childish to do it properly, there are a few ground rules. First, don’t be rude about it. Sending a text message that is informing the girl that you have no interest in continuing to see her is rude enough. There is no need to rub it in. Basically, say what needs to be said, no more and no less. However, be polite about it.

Second, remember that everything in print, be it a letter, e-mail, text message, instant message, anything that can be forwarded or copied or shared, will be. Don’t divulge any personal information or comment on anything of that nature. The rule of the full six degrees applies here. Eventually it’ll probably get to your teachers, your siblings, your parents, and most likely make its way back to you.

Third, as in the first example, make sure this is what you want. If you think there is a snowball’s chance in hell that you’ll want to get back together with her later on down the road, this isn’t your best option. In her eyes (and most likely her friend’s eyes), you will be labeled a coward. You won’t be worth her time anymore. Which, if you are sincere in your efforts to get rid of her, is your goal.

I mentioned a letter a few paragraphs back. In the “cowardly” category, this is the dumbest. It may not seem it at first, because after all, what’s wrong with a personal touch? Well, considering that a letter can easily fall into someone else’s hands, or not even get to the desired recipient, a lot can go wrong.

If the latter happens, she may not know you want to break up until she hears it from other people. What will she think then? “Why can’t he tell me himself?”; “What’s wrong with me?”; or my personal favorite, “Who’s the
other girl?” Most likely, her thoughts will skip right over to the third option. Which isn’t good if you’re not cheating on her. If you are, that’s still not exactly information you want to be public. But hey, if you don’t mind being branded a cheater, by all means, do what you will.

Cheating. This is frowned upon virtually wherever you may find yourself. It hurts the woman you are cheating on, the woman you are using, and ultimately, yourself. If you are married, and you carry on an adulterous affair, that alone is just cause for a divorce and for you to pay a ridiculous amount of alimony out of the yin-yang. If in the military, adultery is punishable under the UCMJ, the Uniform Code of Military Justice. You can lose rank and pay, and even go to prison. After all that, then you get the privilege of going bankrupt on alimony.

By cheating, you are sending a message to both your present girlfriend/wife and your…other girlfriend. You do not respect women at all. You are not monogamous. That’s a brand you don’t want to have. Women know a lot of people. And those people know a lot of people. And so on and so forth. Before you know it, everyone in your league will know exactly how you treat women, or rather, mistreat. This is the one approach to ending a relationship that one must avoid. By doing so, you can spare the extreme hurt on all three parties (or more, if that is your game), save money, and continue to have endless options of women.

Thinking about it, there is only one good way to break up with a girl. Do it face-to-face, make it a conversation, and it’ll go as smooth as it can possibly go. If you have a good working relationship together, you may find that simply talking about what you want out of it, and what she wants out of it isn’t out of reach. By sitting down and talking, it is possible to save your relationship. It may not fix it right away, but it is a step in the right direction.

If saving the relationship isn’t a viable option, at least you can have a conversation and explain what went wrong, and what you hope for the two of you in the future. She’ll respect you for that. She may not respect your decision to end things, in fact, you may very well be doubled over in pain, but she will respect you for breaking it to her in a way that isn’t embarrassing for both of you.

In breaking up with a girl, there are only a few rules to remember. First, don’t hurt her feelings anymore than absolutely necessary. You may not think anything of it at first, but later you’ll feel guilty, and then worse when she won’t take your calls. Second, do not do it electronically or any way other than in person. It shows how weak you are, and how much you don’t care. Third, respect her and be yourself.
I unlatch the door and lean my body weight into it, forcing it open. It’s like climbing out of a submarine bulkhead. I’ve got to park in the ditch, just off of Drinkwater Rd, in Kensington, so I don’t block traffic. With the truck at such a severe slant, I have to lift the full weight of the door to get out. Not only do I have to open the door but I have to hold it open while I gear up and keep from letting it slam, or make any kind of door type sound. I grab my red, felt, fedora-like hat from my dashboard. I prop it up on my head and run my fingers around the brim… My father is waiting on the other side of the stone wall. At five o’clock on a November morning in New Hampshire it’s still as dark as a pocket. I stumble putting one foot in front of the other. I get caught in devil’s cart rope and trip over dry, brittle branches that crack and pop like firecrackers. My uncle, Chris, and fifteen year old cousin, Levi, are always fumbling around with their guns, bags and gadgets long after my dad and I have met up out of sight of traffic.

“Shh, Patrick watch where you’re stepping. Keep quiet.”

I don’t pay much attention walking in the dark if I’m following someone. With Chris leading our hunting party, I have no concern about direction. I recognize familiar shapes, shadows and changes in growth and cover. The cold, dense morning air stings my nose with each deep, steady breath as I try to maintain a stealthy, controlled pace. The first few hundred yards is uphill, east northeast through tall stands of white oaks. The ground is covered with dry oak leaves. There are so many acorns. If the familiar acorn smell wasn’t so strong, I’d swear the ground was covered with marbles. Once we crest the hill, the oak trees become pines. This side of the hill is beginning to get the glow from the soon to be rising sun. The tall pines look like ladders with their dead straight branches most of the way up the trunks. The only sign of life is the shadow of needles at the top. Within the pines are stonewalls. One wall runs east and west up and over the hill, down the other side to the swamp. The wall was a property line or field border at one time. The wall could have been much higher and held animals in or out. The pines are tall and broad but they’re not more than seventy-five years old. None of these trees were here at the turn of the last century. Drinkwater Rd, was the main artery through Kensington, before state roads like 150, 107 and 84, were paved. Drinkwater Road connects the city of Exeter to the seacoast town of Hampton Falls. Hampton Falls built ships in the rivers and Exeter was an industrial mill town focused on the production of textiles. Land off of Drinkwater Rd, such as the piece we hunt on was all farm land and open pasture as late as World War II.

The tree line doesn’t change at the stonewall either. Stonewalls in the woods like this one, have been here longer than the standing trees, longer
than the hiding animals. Deer have worn travel routes beside and around stonewalls as would people. Vegetation doesn't grow in these places because the ground has been packed so hard. Squirrels and chipmunks move silently on the smooth hard surface of the rocks.

A farmer in the seventeenth century has cleared a new piece of land on his property. He's sold the massive timber to ship companies on the seacoast and saw mills on the river. He's used the smaller wood to heat his home. He wants to plant corn. He's cut wood all winter while the ground has been frozen. It's spring now and the ground is soft. He has a short time to till the ground and plant his crop. As the horse draws the plow forward the blade digs to curl up a windrow of tilled earth. THUD. The horse, plow and farmer come to an immediate stop. The farmer clears off the top of the object with a hand shovel. It's a rock. He digs around it to find its edges. By the time he's found the edges he discovers the rock is four feet in diameter and could weigh upwards of two thousand pounds. He scratches his head and calls for his family and neighbors to help. They hook a team of horses and oxen to a draw bar tied to the rock. Once it's free from the ground it has to be hauled out of the way. The farmer drags the boulder to the edge of his new clearing where it meets his old pasture. He has begun building his stonewall.

It's dark and I can only see the heels of the boots ahead of me. I know the stonewall is to my right and as the ground gets softer, I know the wall is leading us to the swamp. The four of us split up and go off in our own directions. I have no one to follow. The wall has dropped below the swamp and doesn't come back above ground to continue again for another two hundred yards. As dark as it is, I'm not going to fight my way through the blueberry thicket that is the swamp. I decide to follow the higher ground along the swamp to the north. There are no leaves to crackle and scuff. The wet, soft ground is easier to sneak through. The sticks are all water logged and rotting. No snaps and cracks here.

I open my eyes to see daylight. I must have dozed off. I'm sitting under a massive hemlock tree on a knob overlooking the blueberry swamp. All around the tree is clear and the ground is level and smooth. The trunk of this tree must be five feet in diameter. Trees this big aren't seen much. Most of the trees in the area are about the same age. This tree has watched the other trees grow up. Further to the north is another stone wall. I recognize where I am although I've never come across this tree. The wall to the north parallels the earlier wall to the south. The walls run east and west. On the other side of this second wall and a half mile west is a cellar hole, an old building foundation, made of the same stonework. The house or barn had obviously burned or rotted with no visible remains and all that is left is the stone lined hole in the ground that used to be the cellar. In the case of this cellar you can see where the driveway used to lead to the building. The growth is sparse and thin in a “U” shape with the arc of the “U” passing in front of the cellar hole. The driveway fades into the woods as the trees and undergrowth get thicker.
I’m sitting at the base of a tree that could have stood here to see this open land divided by stone walls. The Hemlock has a tall trunk only with a few butt cuts part way up before the full, green canopy. It looks like the tree was pruned at one time before it was left to grow on its own. Thick branches reach out farther than tall. The tree was once in the open. It started its life alone. Immediately after the hemlock the ground drops to the swamp. In the earlier centuries swamps and bogs were dammed off and they ran as brooks and streams. The water could have been higher and this could have been a place for livestock to drink and cool off on hot July afternoons.

*Boom.* The resonating sound of a black powder gunshot breaks the silence. I tense up and heighten my senses. *That sounded like it came from the north. Who went north?* I cradled the rifle in my arms resting it on my thighs ready to raise it.

I see a bright orange Stetson shaped hat moving into the swamp. I hear the sound of rubber boots as the bog tries to hold them in with suction. *Burp, slosh, squish.*

“Well, see anything?” Dad asks me.

“Nothing.”

“I’m going to walk the wall we came in on. Why don’t you walk this one and we’ll meet up where it’s posted. Keep your eyes open and keep quiet. Often times when the deer get pushed out this way, if they don’t cross the road, they stay and feed on the acorns on the hill.”

I see the yellow line of posted signs in front of me. A border, a wall keeping people out. Two walls meet. The stone wall of yesterday meets the legal wall of today. It’s a wall you can’t climb over, or walk on. The animals don’t see it. It’s a force field of yellow squares. The bold black lettering “POSTED,” turns most away before they even read the fine print. It wasn’t here last year. Beautiful rows of piled stones, they were here last year.

Shaking his head and staring at the signs, Dad says, “You never used to see these.”

The things I see and do in the woods are, as my grandfather says, “fleeting glimpses of the passing parade.” His father started saying a variation of that in his old age to describe the changes he saw through the nineteenth century. The changes I’ve seen in just two decades are all the more rapid. With more and more property being posted; what used to be a ride down back roads, through beautiful open country, that you could reach out and touch, is becoming a walk down a narrow hallway, with only windows to look out.
Thom By David Hagerty

Collage By David Hagerty
This Precious Dance
By Stacy Haynes

To dance is to feel something more than what is there, grasping
For thin straws only you can understand. The calm, the collected
The “never had a moment of true happiness” man.
Your lean, delicately constructed, beautiful dancer’s body slices
Through the air surrounding me, landing with such poise,
Such intricate style, such frightening elegance, such grace

That my pearl precious eyes, paled and destroyed by the grace
You always seem to exude, can never, could never, grasp
That which captures your every whim. With such poise
And with such shattered emotions they were collected,
Photographs of endless and bottomless sorrow, each slicing
With the double-edged blade that only a man,

Only you, can wield. You leap and twist, leaving the men
Behind who cannot and dare not compare to the delicate grace
And beauty that only you have so mastered. You slice
Away, taking such care, at the already melting ice of my grasp,
And already I feel you adding me to those you have collected,
Placing me upon your twisted, heightened pedestal of poise,

Destroying what little personality, and ownership, and poise
I have ever held. I cannot hold you, this person, this man,
Whose very essence and soul denies that which is collected
By your admirers, who can’t get enough of your perfected grace.
That which I desire will always and forever be just out of my grasp;
Your touch, your love, each a mockery to that which slices

Through my heart at the mention of your name, slices
Away my own carefully constructed façade of purity and poise.
I can still remember the way your legs moved, hands grasping
For purchase against the competition, dominated by the very man
You, yourself, could not escape. And oh, with what grace
What gentle eyes you looked to me, my unwilling desire to be collected

Along with the rest of your trophies on your shelf, dust collected
On their supple, elegant, liquid frames. Their dead eyes slice
Mercilessly into my heart, stealing the last vestiges of grace
That I have left, destroying my last sanction of salvation, poised
To strike again. But what have I now, now that the only man
Has forsaken me, gentle eyes drifting even as he is the only one I grasp?

And yet, this cannot happen, for to grasp for him is to slice
What dignity I have collected over my years of careful poise.
To never see this man again will be my only grace.
To never see this man again will be my only grace.
I am thirty-four, and my thirteen-year-old daughter is asking me, “Mom, who was your first boyfriend?”

I stop folding laundry. My brain trips over a memory, one that is on the other side of a curtain and muffled by time, but the emotions wrap around me like the silk ribbon in the shave gel commercials. I don’t know what the memory is, except that it is not about my first boyfriend—and then it is gone.

“Do you have a boyfriend?” I ask her back.

“No.” She picks the carpet with the toe of one of her new shoes, which she assures me are very fashionable. “I was just wondering.”

She is lying. Maybe she doesn’t have a boyfriend yet, but there is a boy. As I gaze at her and she gazes at the floor, I wonder how she can look so much younger than I did at thirteen. She does not look old enough for there to be a boy. She’s a stick. A stick with little pointy hips and long legs. A carrot playing dress-up.

I go back to folding laundry, hoping I look casual. “My first boyfriend was Jeff Mallowski. I was four—er, sixteen.”

“What was he like?”

“I don’t really remember.” This is true. I don’t remember. “We were only going out for a few weeks.”

She picks her eyes up. “I mean who was your first real boyfriend.” She creeps over to my bed like a spider and then coils up to perch on the edge like a monkey.

I drop a stack of shirts into the basket and go for the hand towels. Something easy for my hands to do.

“Well…” I pretend to think about it, like I’m mentally thumbing through the ancient book of my life to recall the exact facts, but of course I remember them all. I’m not as old as I thought my mother was when I was the age my daughter is now. “My first real boyfriend was Milo Chevez. He was my boyfriend when I was seventeen.”

“Did he kiss you?” Little pink fireworks explode under the skin on her cheeks when the question pops out. She stares at the floor again, and pinches the rubber soles of her shoes.

“Yes,” I tell her. “So did Jeff Mallowski.” Already there are no more hand towels. I move on to socks. A little harder.

I watch her as she tucks her face between her knobby little knees, at a
loss for what to ask next. This is an unconscious movement for her; it’s naïve, and cute. Thank God I didn’t have an ugly child, I find myself thinking, and then wondering why I think that. I take a deep breath.

“Milo was a good first boyfriend,” I tell her. “And a much better kisser than Jeff Mallowski.” I think for a minute. “Actually, I was his first kiss.”

She’s willing to look at me again. “What did he look like?”

I don’t see what this has to do with anything until I realize she’s hoping I’ll describe something like whatever boy she’s keeping secret from me. “He was short. He had really nice hair—dark, straight. He had it cut so it fell in his eyes, kind-of, and he was always sweeping it off to the side—” I jerk my head to the side, demonstrating how Milo always used to get his hair out of his face. “It had natural highlights, too, so it looked like it was almost black in some places and just brown in others.”

She’s soaking it all up, so I go on. “He had really nice hands, too. He played guitar. Good guitar. And his eyes were big and brown. He had long eyelashes….” I see the socks in my hands don’t match. Maybe socks are too hard for this conversation. I switch to pants.

“How long did you go out with him for?” she wants to know.

“Two years,” I tell her. I can see without looking directly at her that she is impressed. I wonder if she is going to ask why we broke up.

“Mom, can I start wearing make-up?”

I stop folding again and discover that she’s looking at my vanity with intense interest.

“Ask your father,” I tell her.

She looks sulky as she creeps back out of the room.

It’s seven-thirty and the dishwasher is running. I am going to let the big pan soak overnight.

I join my husband on the couch but I sit at the opposite end. I’m still thinking about being thirteen, and boys. If boys didn’t come to a girl’s parents house back when I was datable—to ask the father or mother or whoever was there if it’d be all right to take the girl out—then they certainly won’t now. And that applies even more for kids who are just thirteen.

I think about what Milo and I did together when I was seventeen, eighteen, nineteen. It makes my stomach hurt. She’s just a girl, I think. She shouldn’t be doing that. She’s not as old as I was when I was thirteen.

As if summoned by these thoughts about her, she appears in the doorway. The light’s off in here so she’s just a silhouette between us and the kitchen. “Mom?” she says. “Where do you keep the pictures from yours and
dad’s wedding?”

Again my brain trips. There’s a memory up there, wanting to be remembered. I reach for it, and it slips through my fingers.

“They’re in the brown book in the laundry room,” her father says, not looking up from the TV. I let my eyes fall on him as our daughter disappears from the doorway like a wisp. Again, a wave of indistinct memory. A flash of red, the smell of… Jell-O and Cheerios.

And the memory breaks through the curtain and finds me.

The same little girl, in another doorway from another life; she’s looking up at me with giant eyes and asking, “Mommy, do you love Daddy?”

She’s small and one of her feet points in sometimes when she walks. She is wearing a red and white dress.

“Daddy is my favorite person in the world,” I tell her.

She makes the conscious decision to gape. “You love him more than us?” she’s saying now, eyes popping. She’s bent forward and has one hand on her nonexistent hip. She’s talking about herself, of course, and her two brothers.

I’m picking her up. “I love you and the boys much much more than anyone else in the world. And I love you all the same,” I emphasize. And then I add, “But Daddy is my favorite.”

She thinks about this. In my memory, it’s for a few seconds. Then she looks at me and says, “But how do you know?”

And I tell her, “Someday, you will have a man like Daddy, and he will be your favorite, and then you will understand.”

She seems to accept this. She thrusts her sippy cup into the air for a refill, and the memory ends.

As I come back to now, to this dark living room, my husband appears to be engrossed in the news. But I know he feels me watching him.

“What?” he says.

“Nothing,” I say, and I wonder if he knows about our daughter’s secret boy. Sometimes he seems as dense and oblivious as most women think men are, but occasionally he surprises me with some astute observation, like telling me he knows something’s bothering me when we come home from the theater because my hands are at eleven and one rather than nine and three. “It’s nothing.”

And this is both a lie and the truth. There was something, but now it is nothing. Our daughter has a boy. So what? I had a few boys. And everything turned out okay for me.

I stretch myself out, placing my head in his lap. He doesn’t look away
from the TV at first, but he puts the remote down, and runs his fingers through my hair. He has a beautiful way of doing it—rhythmic, careful, slow. He bites his nails short but I can feel the very edges of them grazing my scalp as he goes. I never remember quite how satisfying this is until he does it.

Just when I'm about to fall asleep, he turns off the TV, and I know without opening my eyes that he's watching me in the dark. I have a fleeting thought that wouldn't it be perfect if he told me now I'm his favorite person in the world? But then I think, no, no; this is better. This is so much better.

And then I am asleep.
“Bubba jumped twenty feet in to the garden.” Thus the code word was descriptively delivered to Joe by use of the telephone. Anyone listening in on the conversation would not know what he was talking about. The message was one designed and picked out personally by Ralph Franklin, the man who delivered the news. Bubba signified that the musician Todd Fleming had finally ended his life. Or the world would come to think he had ended his life. Joe knew different, of course, but no one would ever know that. The twenty feet meant that Todd had expired at the age of 20, and the garden meant that he had ‘died’ in the country of Brazil, while on vacation.

Soon after this secret conversation, the news that Todd Fleming had died struck the public with astonishment. Random people interviewed on the TV said things such as:

“Oh, why?” And, “Why him?” And, “His life is over! What are we going to do now?” Everyone was frantic and the camera would always pan to the tweeny-boppers all hysterical and screeching and howling and crying about how could he die, just how could he die! Twenty years old was old to a lot of his fans who didn’t yet know what it means or feels like to be twenty years old yet, and here he was dead. It was too young to let such a talented figure go to the ground, the grown-ups said a lot. Too young to let someone with that level of talent, (or even otherwise), to die. The story was that Todd was sleeping when his new vacation home on the coast of Brazil had a carbon monoxide leak, and he fell in to a deep sleep and died. He was such a skilled artist that no one could tolerate his death. All weekend, the radio blared his songs and the TV was mired with his images, videos, and interviews. Todd Fleming had released four records so far. He was considered a prodigy on the guitar and drums, and though young, had a huge fan base around the country and the world. He was handsome, cool and intelligent with brown hair, green eyes, and a tenacious smile. He was also skinny and moderately tall with substantial muscles and dressed impeccably. His girlfriend was Beth Williams, the famous actress. Todd and Beth were even actually on the verge of staying together and getting married, and had been together for several years.

“Do you ever wonder,” He asked once, “What it would be like to get married?” She just smiled and shook her head.

“I don’t know sweetheart,” she said smiling. Todd’s mother told him to beware of gold-diggers and questionable women, but Beth seemed to be upright, and Todd did seem to love her a lot. There was something that Todd didn’t have the guts to tell his always-minding-everything mother. There was a secret. Beth was actually carrying his child. A child she would have out of wedlock. She felt that it was a boy, but, five months after Todd passed away,
she had a baby girl. Beth wept at her new child in the operating room, how she looked like her dad, how she looked verifiably exact to her own dad, Todd Flemming. She and Todd actually collectively chose a name for their daughter and only child just before Todd had died. They collectively decided on a name: Natalie Jordan Fleming. She grew to be the apple of her mother’s eye, a real gift, and the living legacy of her father. She had platinum blond hair, a sweet smile, and was tall for her age. All her life, she was told stories of her father, the father she had never known, except for hearing his music, and seeing his image on the TV; the father who had gone to his grave too young.

“Are you the daughter of Todd Flemming and junk?” Sadie, her young classmate asked her once.

“Yes, I guess so.”

“Oh, that’s cool and junk.”

“Once in first grade a boy, named Sampson chided her:

“Your parents had you out of wed-lock,” he said in a sing-songy mocking tone. He actually didn’t know what that meant. He had only heard his parents say it after watching a program about Todd. The young boy didn’t know what it meant but Natalie did. Her heart broke every time she thought of her father dying before he was able to marry her mother. And her heart broke further every time she thought about him dying before she was born. Her heart ached for the father she had never met hand in hand. Her sixteenth birthday was going to be a special one. Her deceased father would be having a Todd Fleming’s best hits album hit the stores on her birthday. It was already seeming to become a best-seller.

“Mom, are we wealthy? Natalie had to ask one day when she was young. She was far from spoiled. Yes there was a lot of money in her family, in her father’s estate, and her mother’s coffer, but she didn’t see any of the money physically. Her mother was all about raising a morally sound, hard-working, intelligent daughter. When she was at the age of 14, she was told to get a job, and got one at Charlie’s Place, a pizza restaurant down the street from her and her mother’s home. Also, she was always told to get good grades; and, she did so without putting up to big of an academic fight. She was a popular enough girl. Everyone in her class was popular though, hers being a small class. But of course being Todd Flemming’s Daughter did carry its prestige! She had been learning to drive for about one and a half years, and her mom promised she would take her to get her license the week after her birthday.

On the way to the D.M.V., one of her father’s songs came on. She was used to hearing his music on the radio, but this song seemed kind of different. It was one she had never heard before.

“Have you ever heard this song before, Mom?”

“No. Well, sort of Natalie. I was going to tell you, but I didn’t know how
to bring it up. There was a lot of stuff that was found in the safe in a secret location at the house and your father were going to live in. The safe was filled with his work—poetry, songs, movie scripts, etc. The deal was that once you turned sixteen, some of the music would be released to the public. This song was one of the caches, I suppose.”

“But, didn’t we just recently put out his ‘Greatest Hits album?”

“Yes, it was planned by his manager. He left a lot of material, and the plan is to make a lot of ‘new’ music with everything that was found.”

“But, mom, he’s dead. Why does anyone even want to hear that stuff? He’s dead.”

“You know, Natalie, he has actually sold more music after he died than he did when he was alive? His music is bringing us a lot of money, and his songs make some people happy. They don’t really care if he’s dead, they just like his music, and it’s kind of neat to hear new music from him. Even if he is dead, he was quite talented.”

Natalie fell silent, and forgot about it. She had heard of other musical artists producing songs and movies, somehow after they had died. Her father had passed away but it always gave her a queer feeling to hear the songs that had come to the public after his death. A half-hour longer and she was waiting in the line at the D.M.V. She was filled with nerves, and couldn’t wait to get her license. She sat for the picture, and ten minutes later, she had license in hand.

After she and her mother got home Beth, her mother, called her in to the dining room.

“Natalie, I know it’s past your birthday, but, I have something I want to give you.”

“What is it Mom?”

Her mother gave her a small box. Natalie quickly and carefully opened the wrapped paper around the box, and opened it. It was a set of keys.

“What’s this Mom?”

“It’s yours. Look outside.”

She did. There, in the driveway of the house was an old Silver-colored Mustang with two black stripes on the hood.

“It was your father’s. I’ve kept it in storage since the day he died. He only drove it for about a year before he passed away. I know I told you that I wasn’t going to get you a car, but I wanted you to have this. This is a piece of your father’s past.

“Outrageously awesome,” she spouted, “Rad,” she spouted “Thank you so
much Mom!"

Now she didn’t have to ride the hideous bus, she mused to herself. She opened the driver’s side door, and sat down on the cushy front seat. It was love at first sight for her and this car, this vehicle, her first vehicle! Not to mention it was her dad’s car at one point in time!

She drove the Mustang to school every morning and every night after school, when she went to work at Charlie’s Place.

One day at the store, it was 5:30 pm. She was asked to go on her 30 minute break. She decided to spend it in her car, listening to the new stereo she had bought with pizza money. She began mindlessly sorting through the stuff in the glove compartment. Then she found something. It was a locked portion of the interior of her glove compartment, the glove compartment that was her very father’s. She hit the side of it, pushing it, trying to open it when it hit her! There was a key Mom sometimes wore around her neck. Natalie had once asked why her mother wore it, what was it for? What did it open? But her mother was never candid. The truth was not even her mother knew where it went. The key was supposedly found on his person after he died. The reason it struck Natalie that it might be the key to this lock was the fact that it was a small key, and this glove-compartment key hole was very little, and unique to what she remembered being a characteristic style of that key.

She was excited! What could be in there? Was she the only one who knew about it? Did her dad keep it secret from her mother and everyone else? It intrigued her. Throughout the rest of her shift, she raced through her professional duties as a cook, and cleaned at light-speed! When she got home, her mother was reading in her bedroom. How would she get the key? Was her mom wearing it? She had to find it! She had to open that compartment! She decided to wait until morning. When her mother went out for a jog, Natalie decided she would infiltrate her mother’s jewelry case and abscond with the key-necklace. Things went as planned, and she found the key!

She walked down to the car with it in her hand. Her heart was beating harder than the beat her father once pounded on the drum when he was young and still alive. She rummaged through the glove-compartment and found the keyhole! She turned the key! It opened easily. Out fell a carefully-folded napkin.

“Junk,” she thought. As she began to throw the disappointing napkin in the neat trash-bin that she kept in her car, she noticed something! Writing! There was something scrolled on the paper in blue ink. The words read: “Still here.” And, was it a name? Yes, she could barely read it but it was unmistakably a name. It read: “Gregory Smith.”

Whoa! What did it mean? This was her father’s car! His Mustang! Who
wrote the note on the napkin? Was it him? Who was Gregory Smith? It was a mystery to her. Then, Natalie almost fainted! She found something else… she noticed a phone number embedded on the flap-opening of the compartment. She rustled her cell phone out of her purse and started dialing the numbers 235-…She stopped. What if some weirdo answered? What if she opened a door that should have stayed closed, literally and figuratively! No, she thought, I was meant to see this note! It had to be true; the key was found on his body. The key went to a secret door in the car her father used to drive, the car went to her. Someone, was sure to, was possibly meant to find the compartment with the note inside. It just so happened that that person turned out to be her- her father’s only child.

“Mom,” Natalie cowered?

“Yes?”

“I was wondering; do you know someone called Gregory? Gregory Smith?”

Her mother swore her to secrecy. Back in Todd’s day when you were a star you were sometimes sighted to be ‘terminated’ from the business, in such a way as to compound and raise record sales and money. It was a choice. One that many artists had taken. It became the route to infamy, millions of dollars, and prestige and record sales beyond compare. The deal was simple and was given to only the most top-selling musical artists in our nation’s media history: Fake your death and get it all. Be sent in obscurity to a tiny island no-one knew or even cared about, and sit back as the money rolled through your door. The only stipulation? You were in almost every aspect dead, except, you were secretly alive. You couldn’t be seen anywhere. You couldn’t do anything. You would not be a part in your family or friends’ life. You were dead. Except, you were still alive. Dead except alive. Todd argued that this was the best thing for them. Was the best thing for their soon-to-be-born child. It would mean a lot of money, fame, and he still would secretly be able to produce music. Beth admitted, this new music that had been found was actually stuff that he had recently written. She never spoke to him after the day she had sadly and reluctantly kissed him and let him walk away. She didn’t know where he went or anything about it- that was part of the deal- to make his death seem very real, she could never contact him or know where he had moved to. He was dead to the world, but Beth Williams Fleming knew he was alive, and now, so did his only child.

She escaped her mother hot-headedly, how could her mother do this to her? How could her father go away without seeing her being born? Go away without seeing her grow up? She griped and bustled about it for an hour, and then decided to call the secret number. She still had a hard time believing that her dad was still alive, but she was ready to confront him. She had to find him! And who was the name on the napkin? Was that her dad, or who? She slowly and pointedly plucked the numbers on the phone’s keypad. 235-4321
her heart was jumping and pounding, her face was white, and her expression was drawn. She was going to hear him. She was going to meet him. Her dad! In her head she vacationed to the island, saw him, talked to him, got to know him, and did things with him. Her mind was running with all the possibilities. Then she decided not to expose the secret to the world, the lie to the world, even though she wanted to, she wanted to so bad, she wanted there to be a place for the still-living version of her father. And then, she was sad. He wanted it to be this way! It was hard, but she would respect his decision to leave the world, to leave her, to leave her mother too.

“Hello?” The voice said.

“Gregory Smith?” she asked. It was if she had given a password. She heard two beeps, and then a mechanical voice crowed the words: Magic Falls Road, Saint Johnston Island.

She escaped to the island to find her father; her dreams of knowing him were probably soon to be realized, soon to become reality. But Joe had made it iron tight. It was as vital to him to keep Todd dead as it was for Natalie to see him alive. Todd had risked a lot telling his fiancé and secretly telling his daughter his address. This would be his address, wouldn’t it? She was going to see him here! Wasn’t she? She found a rock. A dumb rock. A big, shiny, lonely, dumb rock. It wasn’t her father, but she knew he had been here. There was writing on the rock– It said:

“I’m still here. I’ll be watching over you. You are in my heart and mind, and I will watch you grow up and be great. Love, your father.”

She frowned, coarsely. Her dumb dad was not here! Her dumb dad was not here! It was just some dumb rock. It should have been him. She should have seen him, should have been able to hug him, to talk to him; but, it was just some dumb rock! All she had found was this stupid, this idiotic dumb rock! Her father was somewhere! But she would never know where. Somewhere his music was playing. Somewhere, Todd was smiling. He knew Natalie was well taken care of. Somewhere Natalie’s heart was breaking. She knew she would never see him. And somewhere fat-cats were getting bloated off of his music, off of his work, off his life, and they chuckled their stupid faces off as they rolled in the dough.

Zucchini Mediterranean

By Tom Mears

Not only was my wife a good looker
She was a good cooker
It’s now four
Out the door
Pick up the phone
Time to go home
Supper will be around five
When you arrive
1 cup of cooked Navy beans
By all means
Also with some rice
Add 3 cups of zucchini finely sliced
14oz of tomatoes
Add 1/2 teaspoon of dried oregano
One large finely chopped onion
For consumption
Chop up one red pepper
Nothing better
Crush 3 cloves of garlic
That you pick
3 Table spoons of olive oil
Then bring to a boil
Add pepper and salt
Then bring to a halt
Give the dog a treat
For it's time to eat
We are vegetarians
This is zucchini Mediterranean
Everything was just right
For we had a good appetite

Try This Glove on for Size
By Kristen Fisher

Due to the state of the economy, I have this crumby low-paying job
where the owner thinks we are as dispensable as pez candies. I work second
shift at an assisted living facility that for this purpose should stay un-named.
So many people try working here that later end up just another “no show”.
This puts a strain on me and my co-workers because we then have to pick up
the slack. The owner of the company that I work for, well, she could not care
less. She isn’t oblivious to the fact that there are plenty of people desperate
for jobs right now; in fact that’s what she counts on. She gets away with so
many un-just things it is despicable and it makes me really think about what
people do for the almighty dollar. Through all this I still stay cheerful, I keep
my composure and I always try to go the extra mile at my job. That is why the
residents call me “The sunshine girl”.

As I try to make fifteen sandwiches in a hurry, I am thankful it is only
sandwiches I am making today and not shepherd’s pie. I am not even supposed to be here tonight but the new girl quit, big surprise. There are fifteen residents who live here and one care taker on duty per shift. On a day like today I have to read the communication book as soon as I come in, to see what my coworkers have to say while they were on duty and I have to visually inspect that everyone is accounted for. I have to clean the kitchen and dinning room a bit as well as a quick touch up cleaning for all four bathrooms. I have to set all 4 tables for the night’s meal. I have to empty all of the resident’s bedroom trashes and vacuum all the common area carpets such as both the upstairs and downstairs hallways. I have a time span of an hour and a half, on a good day, to get all of this done. I have done all of that today and that is why I am grateful I have only sandwiches to make tonight for supper.

Now that the sandwiches are done and everyone is starting to head down to the dinning room, I try not to scramble around while I play waitress and ask everyone what they would like to drink. Today, all the residents are flocking to the dinning room at once; this makes my job harder. “Why do I put up with this for eight dollars an hour?” I ask myself this question time and time again. The only answer I have is that for the moment cannot find anything better. While I serve everyone their sandwiches, chips and a pickle I daydream about having a decent job with a moderately caring boss. Sometimes, I would rather just work at Kohl’s but then I think about the welfare of the residents. I would miss the residents and it is hard to think about how some workers don’t try as hard as I do to care for these people. I always try to give them the care they deserve.

After handing out their medications as well as their desserts, all of my adopted grandparents search out their rooms one by one. Now it’s time to play maid again and clear the tables of dishes, clean the mats, wipe down the tables and load the dish washer. All of this is not as easy as it might sound, especially when there are usually residents always coming down for something or other that they need my help with. With that done I now have to clean a resident’s room. Tonight’s room cleaning is “Ron” in room 8 and his room is always a complete disaster. I say “Ron” because Ron is obviously not his real name. I do my job and clean his room quickly so that I can go get my resident shower done, tonight is “Margaret’s” shower night and she is easy to help because she does everything herself except for her hair. I get “Margaret” and bring her on down to the shower and set her up. I have some more cleaning to do while I wait for her to be ready for me to help her.

Margaret is ready and waiting for me to wash her hair but I can’t for the life of me find the latex-free gloves! I am so sick of this; sick of never having what I need as an employee to do my job! This is not the first time we have run out of latex-free gloves and last time I had to buy my own for a while. Great, now I am going to get a nasty rash on my hands. I have no choice but to wear these gloves because Margaret has been so patient with me and I feel bad making her wait. Donning these unfit gloves I head into the bathroom.
while Margaret is “waiting to be beautiful” as she calls it and I can’t help but give a little chuckle. If I couldn’t find humor and beauty in the small things life has to offer I wouldn’t have made it this far in life.

As I wash Margaret’s hair my hands start to feel hot and itchy. I ignore this. Now I can see under these devilish gloves that my hands are getting really red. Rinsing Margaret’s hair I notice my hands seem to be getting worse, I have to hurry now. My hands burn like crazy and the redness is spreading up my arms. I am so sick of this! Thankfully her hair is rinsed and I tell her I have to go quickly, she understands and is upset for me.

This is the last time I will go through this. I took those gloves off and I am washing my hands and arms to no avail. My hands still burn and they will for hours because of this rash I now have. This has happened before with these types of gloves. I am not sure if it is the latex of which the glove is made, the powder that lines the inside of the gloves or the combination of the two but it makes for a nasty rash on my hands. Thankfully that is all the gloves do as far as a reaction. The rash doesn’t spread past my wrists but the redness, burning and itching spreads as far as my upper arms.

As the phone rings I try to think of what to say to convince the owner of this place, let’s call her Denise, that this situation is completely ridiculous and that I demand that she reorder the latex-free gloves. I am not the only worker who has complained about these latex gloves time and time again. Finally she picks up the phone as if she has better things to do than to talk to me. I tell her what happened with the gloves and that I cannot work under these conditions. All I am asking for are some gloves. I am not asking for a big bag of money, but she reacts as if that is the case. I have put up with her complete absence of empathy for too long now. Then she says something that makes me laugh so loud that I probably sound nuttier than pecan pie. In my head I go over what she had just said “If you need latex-free gloves so bad why don’t you go get a prescription for some from the doctor’s office?” Unbelievable, this is a new low. She knows that I, like many people, do not have insurance. This is the final nail in the coffin and I can’t talk to her any longer so I hang up the phone. I will not talk to her again.

My next call that night was to the administrator who still tries her best to do things right for her employees. I still remember her trying to change my mind but I wouldn’t take back my resignation. I miss the residents and I still go by to see them about once a week but I cannot work there. They all miss me too and still call me “The sunshine girl”. I talk to my old coworkers when I visit and they tell me the current “horror stories” as they all still call them and they tell me how the owner Denise is still up to her same old tricks.

How Denise manages to get people to want to be hired isn’t a mystery. How she manages to keep her employees should be a mystery, but it isn’t. There are so many people willing to go through hell for a steady paying job and she takes full advantage of that fact. I am just glad I got out while I could.
We have gathered here
For a specific purpose today
And as we sit around the kitchen table waiting
For the others to trickle in
And then we will offer them food
Because people always seem to bring food
In times like these
Even though nobody can think about food right now
We have our work cut out for us
First we have to pick up her things
From the nursing home
And go through everything
Still left from her house
We have them piled in the living room right now
And it strikes me as odd
That we now have
Literally everything
That this amazing woman had
To show for her life
And one of my aunts remembers
That since Gram grew up during the Depression
She kept her money in mayonnaise jars
On top of the fridge
And she also liked to hide it
In the pants of her china dolls
So there we all are
Stripping her lovely dolls
My mother tries to lighten the mood
By saying we “molesting” the dolls
But the truth is that we all
Are hoping to find something
Under the doll’s clothes
Just so we can have proof
That at one point
She did exist
And that she is the reason we are all here
Today
Wishing that the thing that brought us here
Had never happened
The Story of Phil the Neutrophil

By Laura P. Dowling

Oh, no! Can this be happening again, so soon? The alarm is sounding. We all stop what we are doing and look up to wait for our next assignment. This alarm is the signal that our gracious host, Fred, has been invaded once again.

Who am I, you ask? My name is Phil and I am one of the thousands who are here to protect you. I am a Neutrophil and I am a soldier in the fight against infection and disease.

We are the mobile warriors in the battle against infection and invasion. Let me give you a little background information on our Leukocyte army so that you will understand where we all came from and what our symbiotic relationship is. You take care of us and we will take care of you.

Leukocytes, your white blood cell army, are a family of sorts. We all originate from the same ancestors, the hemocytoblasts. Our journey begins in the red bone marrow of your flat bones (sternum, ribs, cranium, pelvis, and vertebrae) and the proximal end of your humerus and femur. Your liver can also make blood cells if you need more, or if other sites are damaged. See how hard your body works to take care of you?

My story began in Fred’s pelvis. I have many cousins and we all work together to keep Fred healthy. As a neutrophil I work most closely with my cousin Mac. Mac is a Monocyte now, but when we are called to action he will finally mature and become a Macrophage. We will help each other to devour our enemy, the invading bacteria. Mac and I work to destroy the invaders while the other battalions within the Leukocyte army have their own tasks.

The Basophils will release their histamines to produce vasoconstriction and induce inflammation. This may sound like a bad thing, but it triggers the release and accumulation of more of our army. The Lymphocyte battalion can actually be found throughout the body. Fred’s larger lymphocytes will congregate in his lymph nodes and his spleen. The smaller troops will travel the circulation highway with the rest of us. They are very important in Fred’s fight against virus-infected cells and any tumor cells he may have. The Lymphocyte battalion is also integral in the production of antibodies. Everybody needs an anti-body to help fight off disease!

We don’t work as closely with the last Leukocyte battalion, the Eosinophils. They have the unique task of battling those nasty parasitic worms that like to build a home in your digestive tract. Yuck!! I’m sure glad they don’t fall under my scope of practice!

As you can see we are a varied bunch, but we are all so necessary to your defense. Isn’t it beautiful when a group of diverse cells can work together to
make our world a better place for all?

Mac is nudging me, I almost forgot about the alarms. Apparently Fred has stepped on a nail and it has penetrated the dermis of his foot. That first layer of defense, the epithelial tissue, has been compromised. There was nothing they could do to stave off the invader, so they have sounded the alarm and our army has been mobilized. We have become true foot soldiers!

Our first task is to leave our barracks and enter the circulatory highway. We will march onto the highway through the capillary on-ramps. These on-ramps will lead us to the arterioles and then onto the artery freeway. Unlike our friends the erythrocytes we cannot simply float down the highway. We roll down it using our lectin-ligand interaction to keep in close contact with the lumenal surface of the vascular endothelium (the highway’s pavement). This adherence will insure that we don’t miss our exit. (Miyasaki, 1998)

The damaged epithelial tissue, along with the first troops to get to the scene, will send out messages so that we can easily find them. A chemical GPS of sorts. These signals, known as chemotaxis, will tell us which arteriole exit to take and then which capillary off-ramp to exit. As a leukocyte, I have the ability to “squeeze” between the capillary endothelial cells to exit the highway. One of our many talents is the ability to be flexible. We can adjust our shape to the terrain and tunnels that we have to go through. (Nano Technology, 2009) Diapedesis, the ability to leave circulation and travel to varied tissues, allows us to reach the target tissue.

The excitement mounts as we get closer to our target. What will we encounter? What type of invader has hitched a ride on that nail into Fred’s body to try to live off the land? These invading bacteria can make Fred very sick as they build their colonies within. It is our job to see that that doesn’t happen. Many of my brother and sister neutrophils have sacrificed themselves within this very tissue in order to give Fred a better chance at defense. You see, the Neutrophil battalion not only fights bacteria, but it also sends troops to all of your body’s tissues to help sustain them.

Most of the neutrophils which manage to enter the blood circulation never see the external environment. Many neutrophils die within the tissues and may provide some nutrition to these tissues (remember the yolk sac origin of the hematopoietic cells?)… By dying within the tissues, neutrophils may also release cytosolic anti-fungal agents which confer protection against mucocutaneous fungal infections. (Miyasaki, 1998)

I can only hope that those who so valiantly gave of themselves before me will have helped to make my battle a successful one.

I can sense the signal, this is my exit. I must ignore the screaming coming from the other end of my world (Fred sure is loud) and concentrate on the task at hand. One look tells us that we do not have enough troops to do the job, so we will all send out signals for more troops. The red bone marrow
will immediately increase production of neutrophils and monocytes to aid us in our fight.

There is no time to waste. I must choose my target and attack. Just before engagement I steal a quick glance over at Mac only to see him bursting with pride as he develops into a macrophage. This maturation will allow him to fight and envelop the enemy. My target chosen, I draw ever closer to surround my enemy. He tries to pull away, but I am much bigger and faster than he. My flexibility allows me to spread out and around my enemy. I can completely surround this bacterium and digest it with my enzymes. This process of phagocytosis is another of my rather unique talents. I will engulf as many as twenty bacteria before I am destroyed.

I must destroy myself through apoptosis in order to rid Fred of his invaders. Apoptosis is cell suicide and it is a necessary means of protection. I look to Mac to help me with this process. Mac is now a mature macrophage and it will be his job to digest me in order to save Fred. Don’t cry for me. Although we want you to be healthy, we do get a burst of excitement when called to battle. We are warriors and as such we like to be needed. So many of our Leukocyte army will march to their death in your defense. If we are not needed to defend you, we will meet our demise right where we start. You see, Fred’s red bone marrow will produce lots of us so that we are available when needed, but some of us will have to be destroyed if our bunk house becomes over-crowded. I came into this world with a job to do and I am proud that I was able to accomplish that goal. We will all leave with great pride knowing that we did our best to protect our host and that we helped him to live to fight another day.
Abby Portrait
By David Hagerty
“Vote for me!”, I cry, “Vote for Erin Erythrocyte!” as I go into the Angio Gram Auditorium. Today, we’re down to the last six contestants in the American Blood Idol competition. I think I have a good chance at winning, except that I may lose votes for not having a nucleus. I’m the only one who didn’t have to use the makeup artist, Wendy Wright, to bring out my color. Sure, all the pink and purple she applies does a good job of accentuating nuclei and cytoplasmic granules, but nothing catches the eye like my bright red! This isn’t exactly a cutthroat competition anyway – we really wouldn’t want any cuts of any kind happening. Then we would all have to immediately stop the contest and rush out on an emergency call to the cut. Not to mention we’re all originally part of the big Heme O’Cytoblast family from the Olde Bone Marrow District, and we emigrated to the blood stream from there. We all know each other and we’re used to working together. One of the judges, though, Vladi Vessel, is so mean! Why, yesterday, he criticized Ernie Eosinophil because he could only kill a really small parasitic worm. At least Paula Plasma is pretty nice. She’s already complimented me on how much oxygen I can carry. The third judge, Freddy Fibrin, is always trying to get us to do something as a group, but none of us are too keen on that. We’d rather just show off our talents individually, and that’s how the competition is going today. One at a time, we have to show the judges how important we are to the body. Poor Pete Platelet got voted off yesterday because he only was made of cell fragments, even though he was fabulous at clotting. Freddy gave him high marks, but Vladi and Paula weren’t all that impressed, and I guess he didn’t get that many votes from the general audience either.

I’m watching now as the others take their turns out in front of the judges. Ernie is going first. He’s ramped up his enzymes for tonight. Oh, wow! He’s going for a roundworm! That is one big worm! Oh, no, he can’t digest it all; he really needs help from some of his friends for a worm that size. Good try, though. As a follow-up, he’s trying to bust out a few of the karate moves he uses on allergies, but they’re kind of weak, in my opinion. Vladi is making big gagging noises for Ernie’s attempt at digesting the worm. No wonder everyone hates that guy! Paula is trying to say some nice things and is admiring his bilobed nucleus anyway. Freddy, as usual, doesn’t have much to say. Next up is Monica Monocyte. She doesn’t have all that much going for her either, except for her size, and a pretty nice-shaped nucleus. Her talent is that she can turn herself into a macrophage and fight infections. Big deal. I know, if the body is sick, especially with a chronic infection, she has an important talent, but she usually doesn’t have to do her job every day like I do. I do feel a little bad for her, though, because the body is pretty healthy today, and she’s having a little trouble demonstrating her talent. All the Bloods...
know and admire what she can do, though, when she has to, so she’ll get
some of the popular vote. Lucky Larry Lymphocyte looks pretty puny coming
after her. He’s about half her size, but Paula is distantly related to him, and she
has eyes for that big nucleus of his, so that will help him. He’s big on fighting
viruses and tumors, and makes those famous T-cells of his, but, like Monica,
he normally doesn’t have to do his job every day. He hangs out more with the
Lymphs than the Bloods, and that’s bound to hurt him in the popular vote,
since only Bloods can vote. I think my biggest competition will come from
Ned Neutrophil, who’s on after Larry. First, he’s got that multi-lobed nucleus.
Vladi makes fun of it, but Paula and Freddy like it. His nickname is “The Slayer”
because he has this great respiratory burst that kills bacteria. I have to admit,
he’s pretty good, and that burst is pretty impressive. All the teenage Bloods
will send in their votes for him – they love the explosions. Betty Basophil is
coming on after him. She has a pretty short life span, and she’s not looking
so great. They should have let her go first. She probably made it to the finals
because the Bloods think she’s so exotic – there aren’t many like her around
the ‘hood. She has some histamine granules that she likes to show off, and
that makes Vladi Vessel swell up a little bit. I can’t tell if he likes it or not.
I like to think they saved the best for last – ME! After all those pale faces
ahead of me, the judges are going to be thrilled to see a little color – bright
red, because I’ll be carrying as much oxygen as possible. I think my shape
will help me out, too – no one else has the same, beautiful concave shape
that I have. First, I think I’ll show off my globin proteins enhanced with red
heme (natural, of course), and then just to set it off, I’ll have a sparkling iron
atom attached to each one. Of course, I’ll make sure a new oxygen molecule
is attached to the iron atoms, just to brighten up my natural red color. Most
people don’t know this, and they are going to be dazzled when they see
me use my spectrin network of proteins to change my shape to fit through
the Capillary Concourse. When I demonstrate how I do that as well as carry
oxygen to the body and carbon dioxide to the lungs, the voters will be so
impressed! Oh- it’s my turn, wish me luck!!

Let Us Talk About the Testicles

By Sandra Terra

Ah, testicles. So enigmatic! Why do they work? The testes are an enigma to most
women.

So, let’s begin!

Why are testes designed the way they are? Why are human males
danglers? One theory is that testes descended from the body for the
purpose of “showing off”, like peacock feathers.
We are a paired of testes that are firm, mobile, oval-shaped structures about 4cm in length and 2.5 cm in width. We lie within the scrotum, a bag formed as an out pouching of the anterior abdominal wall, and are attached above to the spermatic cord, from which they hang, like a picture perfect mural on a wall.

We can only survive if the temperature of our refrigerator is 2.5 to 3 degrees Celsius lower than the rest of the body. Our house serves as a production facility and a “cold storage” for sperm, which likes to chill where it’s the coolest, how about some Bud Light? The muscle fibers within the spermatic cord and walls of the scrotum help regulate the scrotal temperature by lifting us up towards the body when it is cold and relaxing when the ambient temperature is higher.

The arterial blood supply arises from the abdominal aorta, and descends to the house. Venous drainage follows the same route in reverse. Our paired testicular arteries are long and narrow, like the Callahan Tunnel in Boston and arises from the abdominal aorta, which some of you may consider Chinatown with multiple streets to go thru. They then pass down on the posterior abdominal wall, crossing the ureters, like crossing the lanes on Route 95, until they reach the deep inguinal rings and enter the inguinal canal.

As part of the spermatic cord our testicular arteries leave the inguinal canal and enter the house where they supply us, also forming interconnections with the artery to the vas deferens, which is the continuation of the epididymis. Our testicular veins arise from the testes and epididymis on each side. Our testicular arteries course differs from that of the testicular arteries within the spermatic cord where, instead of a single vein, there is a network of veins, known as the pampiniform plexus. (Amber Books, 2007)

Further up in the abdomen, the right testicular vein drains into the large inferior vena cava, while the left normally drains into the left renal vein. The blood supply that we receive originates from high up in the abdominal blood vessels. These resulting long vessels allow for our descent in early life. (Amber Books, 2007)

Each of our testicles are enclosed within a tough, protective capsule, as wearing a jacket to protect us from the cold, the tunica albuginea, from which numerous septa, or partitions, pass down to divide the testis into about 250 tiny lobules. Each wedge-shaped lobule contains one to four tightly coiled seminiferous tubules, which are the actual sites of production of sperm. It has been estimated that there is a total of 350 meters of sperm-producing tubules in each of our testes. (Amber Books, 2007)

Sperm are collected from the coiled seminiferous tubules into the straight tubules of the rete testis and from there into the epididymis. Between the seminiferous tubules lie groups of specialized cells, the interstitial or Leydig cells which is the site of production of hormones such as testosterone. (Amber Books, 2007)
At puberty and thereafter, testosterone is responsible for the development and maintenance of male secondary sex characteristics such as; the growth and development of male genitalia; the pattern of hair growth. The development of a low-pitched voice; the thickness and texture of skin; and the increased muscle and bone mass.

Within our testes there are “radically jumpstarting” sperm that have been hibernating in the cool, airy scrotal sack. It is only when encountering with the vagina that the exposed testicles really get busy, “temporarily making sperm frenetic and therefore enabling them to acquire the necessary “oomph” to penetrate the cervix and to reach the fallopian tubes.
The Big Guy
By Jaime Lockhardt

There is a knock on the door followed by a jolly “Ho! Ho! Ho!” and immediately I know who it is. As the door opens the bells jingle that festive Christmas sound that makes your eyes smile even if your mouth remains motionless.

Holidays at my grandmother’s house are always my favorite. While I do love the presents, the food, the decorations and seeing my whole family come together, that is far from what I consider the highlight of my night to be.

I spot him and watch as he makes his way around the room, passing out bear hugs and kisses. I eagerly await his arrival to me. I wait all year for these hugs; they alone are a present to me.

At this point I still am the baby of the family, and therefore I am spoiled. I always get the best presents, and I always get the most attention. As I make my way through crowds of adults fighting for my affection only one man catches my eye.

Alright, so he’s not really Santa Claus but to my childhood self he is. He looks identical to the man I saw in books, the man who was on every television show around this time of year, and the man I sent my wish list to. It had to be him; he had the beard and everything.

His hair is as white as the delicate petals of a calla lily, his cheeks constantly look as if they are being pinched by an over-affectionate grandmother and his belly bulges out as if he had just finished eating a meal meant for twenty. His eyes are crystal blue and his glasses always rest on the tip of his button nose.

He projects a powerful chuckle that forces him to arch his back, tilt his chin up to the sky and squeeze his eyes shut. He is, of course, dressed in festive shades of red and green, and carrying a large bag exploding with brightly colored gifts. Finally, I see two large black boots at the tips of my toes, with a wide smile on my face I look up.

“Have you been good this year?” he asks me. And there I go, responding with the same answer I give him every year.

“Of course” I proclaim. Then I quickly follow up by giving him a secretly guilty hug and a kiss on the cheek, which begs for forgiveness.

As soon as I turn my back he’s gone; he has disappeared. I ask my mom where Santa went.

“You mean Uncle Mitch?” she questions.

“No, Santa!” I say in my bossy voice.
“He’ll be right back” she continues to tell me.

Now I’m forced to wait for what feels like years. I distract myself by teasing my sister but this game only keeps me entertained momentarily. Then I hear those magical Christmas bells again. My eyes widen, my heartbeat increases, and I jump off my mom’s lap. I race to the door that blocks my view from the Christmas tree, the presents, and most importantly Santa.

I look up at my grandmother guarding the door and put on a display of pitiful puppy eyes. She winks at me, grins, and motions for me to push open the door. I take a deep breath and slowly walk towards the middle of the room. I’m speechless, which for a spunky child seems like an impossible occurrence. The room is covered with lights and ornaments hanging down from the walls and ceiling, and perfectly wrapped gifts create a carpet of colors.

I sit down right in front of his feet, forcing him to pay attention to me, while one present after another is passed my direction. He looks down at me, never is there a moment when a smile is not present on his face. He sits there, sipping on a glass of apple wine, making small talk with everyone around us.

As the carpet of presents shrinks down in size I know that this event is coming to an end. Right when I think I’ve received all the gifts with my name written on the tag he taps my shoulder softly. “I think there’s one more for you,” he whispers. Then he lifts me up, places me on his lap and hands me a shiny rectangle shaped gift with a large golden ribbon.

I tear at the paper, trying not to look too greedy. As I remove the wrapping, I notice big bold letters jumping off this gift’s hard surface. “What does it say?” I ask him.

“The Lost Mitten” he responds. I then proceed to beg him to read the story to me. He wraps his arms around me and opens the book to page one. His comforting toned voice makes me feel safe as I begin to cuddle close to him. As he reads each word slowly to me, he looks down at me, making sure that smile on my face is still nearby.

When the story is over I give him a big hug and race off to show my mother my favorite gift of the night. I sit down in the chair next to her and listen to “thank you’s” being exchanged. All the chaotic present passing has been taken care of, the children are off playing with their new toys, and the adults have found their way over to the dessert wines. Now it’s time for my favorite part, and I know exactly where to find him.

There he is, sitting in his favorite dark teal recliner. His eyes are closed and an angelic grin is on his face. Then he begins to hum and sing softly. He knows the words to every Christmas carol that sings from the speakers.

And there I lay, on the Oriental rug I hate so much. I lay on its awkward combination of peach, sea-foam green, aqua and cream color patterns. I lay on my stomach looking up at his. I lay with the palms of my hands rested on
my rosy cheeks. I examine his every move, and study every motion he makes, every sound his whispers. I lay there for what feels like hours, but I know this time only comes once a year, so I absorb every second of it. Who knows if he will be back next year, after all he is a busy guy.

**Left Behind**

*By Viktoria Nettleton*

As our civilization is coming to an end
We are stripped violently from the earth
We all run in panic to avoid our inevitable doom
But even our once thought sturdy structures
Cannot protect us
These unexpected giants of Armagedon
Terrify even the strongest heros of society
Their faces masked by both helmets
And an oddly eerie blinding light
Our lives bodies loved ones and belongings
Are suctioned from the earth
Into dreadful fiery bins
Hung from these titan’s cloaked backs
Even the birds are cleansed from the skies
For we were the ones left behind

Dec. 2007

**The Fetal**

*By Feri Efandi*

If I can be born to this world to see how beautiful the rainbow in the sky, smell the fresh roses in the garden and breathe the fresh air, it is because “the hard work” of my parents. I start my life in a secret place in my mother’s belly (people called it the fallopian tube) when my father’s sperm met my mother’s oocyte. I have to wait in my mother’s womb for forty weeks to be process
before I come out. I am hoping I can wait for that long.

During copulation, my father expels 200 million of sperm with considerable force into my mother’s vaginal canal. Despite this head start, most sperm did not reach the oocyte, even though it is only about 5 inches away. Millions of sperm leak from the vagina almost immediately after being deposited there. Fewer than 2 million sperm reach the cervix of the uterus and most of them are destroyed by the vagina’s acidic environment. Sperm swim from the vagina into the cervical canal by the whip like movements of their tail. Only about 200 sperm are conducted by reverse peristalsis into and up the uterine tubes, where the oocyte may be moving leisurely toward the uterus. Sperm that reach the vicinity of the oocyte within minutes after ejaculation are not capable of fertilizing it until about six or seven hours later. During this time sperm undergo capacitation, a series of functional changes that cause the sperm’s tail to beat even more vigorously and prepare its plasma membrane to fuse with the oocyte’s plasma membrane.

A lot of things happened during the first through third week after fertilization. I am going down to the uterus of my mother. My mother start makes a placenta to feed me with nutrients and oxygen that I need. The placenta also protects me from microorganisms, because most of them cannot pass through it, but AIDS, chicken pox, many drugs and alcohol can cross the placenta, it can harm me and make me imperfect.

The fourth through eighth week of my development are very significant, because my entire major organ appears during this time. By the end of my eight week development, my entire body systems have begun to develop with minimal function.

During the fourth week after fertilization, my shape and size undergo very dramatic changes, nearly triples. During the fifth week of my development, there is a very rapid development of my brain. By the end of my sixth week development, my head grows even larger than my trunk. My neck and my trunk begin straighten and now my heart has developed four chambered. By the seventh week of my development, my limbs become distinct and this is the beginning of my digits appear. At the start of the eight week of my development, my digits are short and webbed. My tail is shorter but still visible and my ears are visible too. By the end of the eighth week of my development, my entire limbs are apparent; my digits are distinct and are no longer webbed. At this time, my eyelids come together and may fuse, my tail disappears and my external genital begins to differentiate. Now, I have clearly human characteristics, they usually called me a fetal.

Around the ninth through twelfth week of my development, my head is still dominant, my body is elongated and my brain continues to enlarge and now shows its general structural features. Cervical and lumbar enlargements apparent in my spinal cord, retina of my eyes is present too. The epidermis and dermis of my skin become obvious, my facial features present are in
crude form, my liver is prominent and bile being secreted from it. Blood cell formation now begins in bone marrow. My sex is readily detected from my genitals and approximately my length about 90mm.

The thirteenth through sixteenth week of my development, my cerebellum becomes prominent, my general sensory organs differentiated and I start blinking my eyes. Some glands start develops in the GI tract and my kidneys attain typical structure. Most of my bones are now distinct, my joint cavities are apparent too and my length at that time about 140 mm.

Around the seventeenth through twentieth week of my development, silk like hair covers my skin and my limbs reach near final proportion. My mother starts to feel my spontaneous muscular activity and my length approximately 190mm.

During the twenty first through thirtieth week of my development, my eyes are open now, my skin wrinkled and red, my fingernails and toenails are present. My body is lean and well proportioned. My bone marrow has become the sole site of blood cell formation and my length is 280mm at this time. If born prematurely at 27-28 weeks, I may survive but my hypothalamus and lungs are still inadequate.

It is now the thirtieth through fortieth week of my development, my skin becomes whitish pink. Fat is laid down in subcutaneous tissue. Now, I am approximately 360mm in length and my weight is about 7 lbs.

I am ready to come out from my mother’s womb, taking my first breath and see this wonderful world, especially to see what my parents are look like. It has been 40 weeks in my mother’s womb; I only hear my father’s voice talking through my mother’s belly. I am so exciting to see all of them with my little eyes. As soon as I come out, I want to say, “Here I am mommy!! Thank you for delivering me out and thank you daddy for making me perfect”
Nostalgia  By Alex Allain

White Dress  By Alex Allain
The trees are dotted with leaves, and the fall is changing their colors to red. The fall is here, my dear, and the leaves are shedding to the ground as if a bed. A bed of leaves, a bed of grass, a bed of love and a bed of last.

Fill me with your slumber all you falling leaves And leave for me a fitting plot along the line of trees. A place where I can come about and stand down to my knees. And pray to God, my God above and tell him all my needs. Let me sit with the trees and laugh along with this brook and with this stream And call out to God my heavenly father with all of my esteem.

God above, God below; Man above Man below And with both I dream to keep in heart in close and full fellow.

God in hand with man and man in hand with God; I dream of the rolling sea and all the swimming Cod. The fish swim free—They must its true, And the stars swim too in the sky of blue.

A woman can feel capable of everlasting peace, And rant and rave and skate around like a falling leaf.

Dancing on the moon, and skating on the stars— This earth has found meaning and buried many Czars.

But—the trees my king-- and the leaves his men, Here I sit and ponder what has and has not been.

A wall of truth a brook of laugh and a cloud of sweeping breeze, I sit and ponder all these things with these the many-colored leaves.