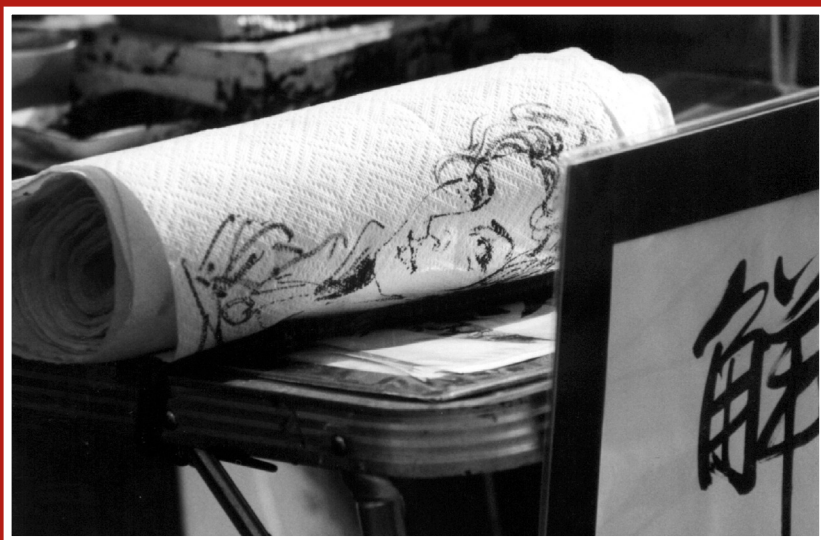


Illinois English Bulletin

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Illinois Association of Teachers of English

IATE is a professional organization for teachers of English/language arts. IATE publishes the *Illinois English Bulletin* and the *IATE Newsletter* and hosts an annual fall conference. IATE is organized by districts throughout the state, each district having a district leader and providing local activities to members throughout the year.

IATE also maintains standing committees that address a number of professional interests and works with other professional organizations to further the interests of teachers. Composed of nearly 1,500 teachers throughout the state, IATE provides a working network for the exchange of teaching tips, current research, and professional development as well as enduring friendships.

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Editor: Janice Neuleib

Publications Unit Director: Tara Reeser

Production Director and Proofreader: Steve Halle

Intern: Alyssa Bralower

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BEST ILLINOIS STUDENT POETRY AND PROSE OF 2011

JANICE NEULEIB

Each year, I read the poetry and prose winners with amazement and appreciation for these young writers. I'm also grateful for their teachers and parents who have done so well in teaching and rearing such literate and sensitive young writers. This year, I was especially impressed with the quality and the quantity of the work. Perhaps I was more aware of the number of students whose parents have come to the US within the last generation. This past year, as I mention in the issue preceding this one, I had the opportunity to coordinate the judging for the NCTE/Norman Mailer High School Teachers' Fiction Contest. At the gala in New York for student, teacher, and professional award winners, I met Indian writer Arundhati Roy whose work I had not yet read. I quickly did read her novel, *The God of Small Things*, and became intensely aware of life in India today.

In the student prose presented here, several of the writers capture much of what Roy evokes of the person crossing borders and boundaries. In "Lotus Pond," Divya Kirti evokes sympathy and empathy with her tale of "mother" who comes from one sort of servitude to another as she changes continents. In "Hope" Adithi Rao begins, "I've long given up on the hope that any non-Indian will pronounce my name properly." She too evokes feeling of otherness. These stories and these circumstances, however, are emblematic of a greater difference I see in this year's stories and poems. The teen and younger writers display something poignant in their prose; a worldly wise quality dominates all their stories. In tales of economic dips, impending divorce, and social and personal danger, these writers tackle what my generation would have described as grown-up problems and concerns. The young writers demonstrate a power and control that comes only from the pressures of the world they see around them. They use their art to speak of their uneasy and unsettled worlds.

As ever, I thank Kevin Stein, Illinois Poet Laureate, for his work with the poetry entries. His essay on the nature of poetry provides a lesson in itself. His exquisite discussion of the nature of poetry, that is, speaking of profound issues through the images and details taken in by the senses and making images that communicate what words alone might not. I appreciate so much his work and his essays. IATE is deeply honored for his work with and for us.

Finally, I'm ever grateful to Steve Halle, Assistant Director of the English Department's Publications Unit at ISU for his editorial work on the *Bulletin*. Thanks also go to Laura Monczunski, Office Manager for IATE, for her work with our coordinators, Robin Murray for poetry and Delores Robinson for prose. To these coordinators, we owe so much. Frequently, and especially this year at NCTE's 100th anniversary, I've

been reminded how much this issue of the *Bulletin* means to teachers and their writers.

**TEACHERS WITH STUDENTS PLACING IN
ANY CONTEST CATEGORY**

Frank Alletto	Tamie R. Holmes
Amy Birtman	Cyn Koukos
Angelique Burrell	David Lange
Gina Chandler	John Lodle
Alexis Colianni	Amy Lyons
Heather Corral	Mark Maxwell
Mara Dukats	Elizabeth Maxwell
Tarrie Dullum	Becky Mueller
Judi Elman	Elaine Mueller
Margaret Forst	Diane Riley
Jared Friebe	Katie Starnes
Carol Gallagher	Karen Topham
Tony Harris	Danny Wilson
Stephen Heller	Nell Wiseman
Kim Herron-Titus	Warren Wolfe
Susan Hersam	Amy Zimmermann
Christine Hicks	Diane Zysko
Richard Holinger	

IATE POETRY RUNNERS-UP

Elisa Jensen, "Running," Grade 7, Dunlap Valley Middle School, Dunlap, Katie Starnes–teacher

Miriam Meksem, "The Rat," Grade 10, Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale, Kim Herron-Titus–teacher

Samantha Patel, "Spinning," Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, LaGrange, Frank Alletto–teacher

Zack Petricca, "Flower Child," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Elizabeth Maxwell–teacher

Clarisse Pinel, "Waterlily / Nénuphar," Grade 8, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher

Charlotte Rew, "Basketball," Grade 7, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher

Jonathan Sanchez, "Final Play," Grade 9, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Birtman–teacher

Grace Tulley, "My 'Scrapbook,'" Grade 6, Monroe Middle School, Wheaton, Carol Gallagher–teacher

IATE POETRY HONORABLE MENTIONS

Scott Bennatan, "Low Things Are Marvelous," Grade 9, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Birtman–teacher

Drew Cross, "The Baby in the Family Photo," Grade 7, Monroe Middle School, Wheaton, Carol Gallagher–teacher

Tabitha Fligor, "in my head," Grade 12, Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale, Danny Wilson–teacher

Nicholas Jenz, "My Haven," Grade 6, Monroe Middle School, Wheaton, Carol Gallagher–teacher

Katie Keirstead, "White Noise," Grade 11, O'Fallon Township High School, O'Fallon, Diane Riley–teacher

Kenneth Keller, "The Water Hole," Grade 11, St. Ignatius College Prep, Chicago, Tony Harris–teacher

Sarah Kitchel, "I Own This Night," Grade 10, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Becky Mueller–teacher

Maddie Levin, "She Goes Every Saturday," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Elizabeth Maxwell–teacher

Ilana Marder-Epstein, "Healing," Grade 10, Evanston Township High School, Evanston, Tamie R. Holmes–teacher

Emily Mixer, "Snowfakes," Grade 8, Monroe Middle School, Wheaton, Carol Gallagher–teacher

Will Oakley, "Near an Equinox," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Susan Hersam–teacher

Allison Penn, "Dear Poem," Grade 10, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Becky Mueller–teacher

Rachel Penn, "My mother told me," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Susan Hersam–teacher

Brett Pepowski, "Wish," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Mara Dukats–teacher

Olivia Perce, "Nearly Seven," Grade 8, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher

Noah Przygoda, "Stupid Wheel," Grade 12, Charleston High School, Charleston, Nell Wiseman–teacher

Isabella A. Sabri, "Rose," Grade 7, Northbrook Junior High School, Northbrook, Heather Corral–teacher

Tibet Spencer, "Teacher Haiku-Monday," Grade 12, Charleston High School, Charleston, Nell Wiseman–teacher

Amanda Volk, "Poisoned Tree," Grade 11, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Margaret Forst–teacher

Natasha Wadhwa, "Clothesline Project," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Karen Topham–teacher

Kurt Zepeda, "EXCESS," Grade 9, Marmion Academy, Aurora, Richard Holinger–teacher

LATE PROSE RUNNERS-UP

Magdalena Anderson, "Frank Butler's Missing Red Center," Grade 7, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher

Rosa Cappetta, "Secrets," Grade 12, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Angelique Burrell–teacher

Amy Choi, "Untitled," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Zimmermann–teacher

Kristin Doerfler, "The Lake House," Grade 11, O'Fallon Township High School, O'Fallon, Diane Riley–teacher

David Felts, "Medicine in My Blood," Grade 12, Belleville West High School, Belleville, John Lodle –teacher

Carter Lawrence Grieve, "A Constitutional Absolute Monarchy," Grade 10, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Becky Mueller–teacher

Medha Imam, "Hidden Beneath," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, David Lange–teacher

Evan Lee, "A Light," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Gina Chandler–teacher

Matthew Nogafka, "Cancer," Grade 8, William E. Dever Elementary School, Chicago, Diane Zysko–teacher

Riley O'Donnell, "Fifty-Fifty," Grade 12, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Alexis Colianni–teacher

Samantha Patel, "The Exterminator," Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, LaGrange, Frank Alletto–teacher

Brett Pepowski, "Cracks," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Mara Dukats–teacher

Kelly Sarussi, "Destination: Now," Grade 12, Rolling Meadows High School, Rolling Meadows, Mark Maxwell–teacher

Rachael Schwabe, “Memorial Day,” Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, LaGrange, Frank Alletto—teacher

Joseph Shayani, “Wake Up as You,” Grade 12, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Alexis Colianni—teacher

Caroline Sudduth, “To Be, or Not To Be Smart,” Grade 10, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Christine Hicks—teacher

Lindsey Thiesfeld, “Left Only With a Memory,” Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Jared Friebe—teacher

Samantha Valera, “John’s Fortune,” Grade 8, William E. De-ver Elementary School, Chicago, Diane Zysko—teacher

Philip Veber, “Ironic Innocence,” Grade 7, Lycée Français de Chicago, Cyn Koukos—teacher

Martha Walker, “Fairy Pearls,” Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Susan Hersam—teacher

Stephanie Lenchard Warren, “The Calm Before,” Grade 12, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Jared Friebe—teacher

LATE PROSE HONORABLE MENTIONS

Maureen Cowhey, "The Rotator," Grade 9, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Lyons—teacher

Isaac Feather, "Mission Trip," Grade 12, Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale, Tarrie Dullum—teacher

Alexandra Harvey, "Night Terrors," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Christine Hicks—teacher

Mika Hlavin, "White Funeral," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Zimmermann—teacher

Nicholas Jenz, "A Disguised Blessing," Grade 6, Monroe Middle School, Wheaton, Carol Gallagher—teacher

Sophie Jenz, "Book Review—*The Path to Power: Margaret Thatcher*," Grade 8, Monroe Middle School, Wheaton, Carol Gallagher—teacher

Kaley Johnson, "The Sunrise Chair," Grade 11, O'Fallon Township High School, O'Fallon, Diane Riley—teacher

Kenneth Keller, "Cheers and Jeers: Sports and...Government?," Grade 11, St. Ignatius College Prep, Chicago, Elaine Mueller—teacher

Momina Khan, "Failed Family Portrait," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Susan Hersam—teacher

Brett Pepowski, "Ashes," Grade 11, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Margaret Forst—teacher

Ellie Revenaugh, "Adeline," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Susan Hersam—teacher

Solène Roullier, "The Deserted Father," Grade 6, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos—teacher

Brenna Shannon, "Blueberry Pancakes," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Karen Topham—teacher

Sam Tonner, "Escaping the Bayou," Grade 11, Marmion Academy, Aurora, Richard Holinger—teacher

Ryan Tupper, "Snapshot," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Zimmermann—teacher

Stephen Tyson, "Seven Reasons Why Every Ten-Year-Old Should Go to Summer Camp," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Christine Hicks—teacher

Natasha Wadhwa, "Voices on the Slope," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Karen Topham—teacher

Daniel Walzer, "Unrestricted," Grade 10, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Warren Wolfe—teacher

Alexis Williams, "I Know Better Now," Grade 12, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Alexis Colianni—teacher

**IN THINGS WE TRUST:
PARTICULARS AND THE UNIVERSAL**

KEVIN STEIN
ILLINOIS POET LAUREATE

Poems are made of things more than ideas or emotions. Sure, idea and emotion lurk in poems, surprising with their swift rise or precipitous descent. But they come costumed in common things and everyday actions. Rarely do they beguile when they appear before us naked, without disguise. Ideas and emotions need this cloaking, even if we're onto them and know their tricks. They need means of passport and transfer, ways of sneaking up on us from the corner of our eye, their habit of crossing the borders of our unawareness and lifting us to something akin to awakening.

And it *is* a kind of trick of mind and heart rooted in attention, our trick as much as theirs. By paying attention to the little things, we inhabit the big notions as if by chance or serendipity. We stumble upon them—unexpectedly, we tell

ourselves—even though that was our hidden plan all along. We are in on the ruse, in fact, sculpting the trick of coming-to-know from the very stuff of our unknowing. It is like the poet who begins her day by saying, “I’ll write a letter to my pal,” when all along she knows she’s actually writing a poem and that the pal to whom she’s revealing herself is none other than herself. “Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain,” the Wizard of Oz bellows to Dorothy and her cohorts. We poets do the same, only we are both Wizard and the travelers hopping to make it home to our personal Kansas.

Malebranche says it well, “Attentiveness is the natural prayer of the soul.” In keeping one’s eyes open, one sees what one wasn’t necessarily looking for—say, Whitman’s notion of the universe unveiled in a blade of grass. This is perhaps the thorniest thing for young poets to grasp, the prickliest weed in the writer’s flower garden. Abstractions, though alluring, are as hollow and fragile as soap bubbles on summer breeze. Grab one in hopes of taking the idea of beauty home with you and see what happens. Better to keep one’s eyes open for the spider’s web shining with dew, spun there within a deer’s hoof print settled in garden dirt.

Poems that announce themselves as being about love, or war, or social justice clang their bells so clangingly I cover my ears and run from the room. And I do this even though I wish fervently to be moved by poems about love, war, and social justice, even though I wish as well to have written poems of my own that speak to these issues. Still, no uber-rhetoric about a generic “war machine” moves us as much as the small thing truly *seen*—a soldier’s prosthetic arm gently spooning ice cream to his daughter’s lips. Which says more and lingers longer within us? I’ve never liked a poem, or for that matter a poet, that favors supposedly big issues and mistakenly disdains the little.

William Carlos Williams puts it straight out in verse, “No ideas but in things.” Williams, a physician—the deliverer of over 2,000 babies into our world as well as the author of countless birthed poems—elaborates this view in his *Autobiography*, “That is the poet’s business. Not to talk in vague categories but to write particularly, as a physician works, upon a patient, upon the thing before him, in the particular to discover the universal” (391). Williams’s poems muster the physician’s attention to particularity of detail as means to knowledge and awareness, a reified notion of what it is to be a human being alive at this precise moment in this individual place. Health of this variety vibrates inside as well as outside of one’s body. The personal holds hands with the communal.

One finds just this sort of attention in all of this year’s winning poems, especially in my choices for 2011–2012 Poems of Special Merit. Misty Clerk’s “The Bed of My Ford,” for instance, trusts in faithful reproduction of what’s found within a locale she knows well. The poem amounts to a catalog of truck bed flotsam, each item ushering in acknowledgement of some loved thing or familial affection. It’s a list poem, then, a mode of self-definition via things of the world. These things the speaker has consumed—just as they have consumed her—as she moves through youth to adulthood. By acknowledging these things, the speaker gives a shorthand narrative of her physical and emotional life derived from “[t]wo hammers and a baseball / bat, tissues from last year’s cold / epidemic.” What’s compelling is the speaker’s deft mixing of tangible things with their intangible emotional corollaries:

...lid to a 44 oz.
 drink, obscenities, indecencies,
 a pocket knife.

No doubt that knife is capable of inflicting less damage than the “indecentcies” to which she alludes. So, as the list wends its way down the page, the reader infers not only joyful elements of the speaker’s life but also a fuzzy narrative connecting her “[b]roken phone charger” and “last week’s crush,” two things that no longer work for her. By the time the poem arrives at its celestial closer, she has evoked the stuff of a life lived. That life is made of things as various as “homemade taco soup,” her grandparent’s smile, and the mattress laid out in the truck’s bed—a moment of intimacy beneath starry sky.

Likewise, Tempest Kipp-Evans’s “Prelude” reflects the foggy-mirrored moment just after awakening, the world outside tiptoeing slowly down the stairwell within one’s half-asleep self. Note how the poet’s use of the second person “you” enables her to fashion a poem at once deeply personal and oddly universal. The “you” addressed in the poem embodies both the speaker’s half-asleep self—a stranger to herself—and the reader’s universal you.

Kipp-Evans’s speaker demonstrates attention to detail and fondness for lists of the sort one finds in Clerk’s poem. Here, the “mourning dove” sings her mournful song perched on “power lines” outside the “misty windows.” The speaker’s attentiveness to things is a form of power in itself, as are these items in their preternatural thingness. “Like the smell of an old book,” the sunlit “yellow” morning entices the speaker to leave her blanket’s warmth and “investigate” a fresh world.

Gradually, in the languid fashion one slips the bonds of the dream self, this speaker assumes her worldly self, ready to take in what she may. Echoing the dove’s singing, the speaker assumes her daily being, lurching toward what “song” the world may offer:

You take shape here
in this strange prompted silence.

Not yet ready to speak, but eager to
listen, as a lone man listens for a
faraway note in a street
to lead him in the direction of song.

Sometimes this cataloging of self and thing occurs when the poet withdraws herself wholly from the scene and serves merely as observer. The self is present paradoxically in absence. Its presence is felt only in the poet's disembodied act of attention. Helen Lant's "The yard was lonely" offers such example. A bland backyard locale featuring only a child's "little blue playhouse" becomes sequentially knotty as it is populated from without. The there-but-not-there poet details this scene via the seasonal interaction of things: a flower, a bush, and that "little blue playhouse."

First, the wind brings a flower seed that roots, grows, and blooms upon the playhouse, its "willowy vines creeping up the walls / And delicate blue flowers / Blooming with the sun." Then, the "spiny" seed of a bush is blown into the yard and nestles next to the flower and playhouse. Over time, the flower ignites the yard with its showy blossoms while the bush grows "thick and coarse," unable to add its own "joy" to the backyard scene.

By now, the reader perceives the sense of a parable playing out in seasonal array. While the lovely flower seems to have "captured" the sky and "bloomed on the vines / Of cirrus clouds," the bush languishes in shade. When winter sends the flower's seeds into others' lives, indeed as far away as "Pennsylvania," the bush stays hunkered down, decidedly not showy but loyal. Eventually, after the flashy flower has died off, the bush presents the solemn gift of its one purple blossom. Its arrival surprises as does a miracle, something blessedly unexpected and redemptive. It is a miracle the poem's absent speaker celebrates demurely with the prayer of her attention.

The meticulously detailed narrative instigates a flurry of questions within the reader. Where is the child for whom this playhouse was once a joy? Why does one feel loneliness in the midst of such fulgent beauty? One wonders, too, about the things unsaid here. Who might the gaudy flower symbolize in the disembodied speaker's mind? Who, then, the stubborn unlovely bush that goes overlooked by most?

The poet's litany of natural things generates a parallel emotional realm of unspoken human aloneness. Childhood happiness appears as fleeting as faded blooms. Even the playhouse itself suffers cracks and worn paint, intimating that the fabric of youthful innocence has been frost-stung and suddenly rent. But none of that is spoken out loud to the accompaniment of the clanging band of big ideas. It resides within the narrative of things given careful consideration. When at the poem's close the dowdy bush offers up one bloom, the story delivers its tacit emotional climax. Readers are left to fill between the poem's lines.

This is the realm of things as agent of idea and emotion. This is the realm where looking outside the self actually inverts the eye inward. This, the realm where a small thing given the dignity of one's attention looms surprisingly large, communal, and universal.

Work Cited

Williams, William Carlos. *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*. New York: New Directions Publishing, 1951. Print.

Poems of Special Merit
2011–2012 IATE Poetry Competition

It is my pleasure to recognize these students' submissions as
Poems of Special Merit:

"The Bed of My Ford," Misty Clerk, Grade 12, Carbon-
dale Community High School, Teacher: Danny Wilson

"Prelude," Tempest Kipp-Evans, Grade 11, Carbondale
Community High School, Teacher: Danny Wilson

"The yard was lonely," Helen Lant, Grade 10, Carbon-
dale Community High School, Teacher: Kim Herron-
Titus

Congratulations to these students and their teachers.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE?

Hey freshman,	I want to cheer for the BEARS!	Hey goth girl,
Hey freshman,	That what I want to be.	Hey goth girl,
What do you want to be?	Hey jock,	What do you want to be?
I don't know yet,	Hey jock,	
We'll just have to wait and see.	What do you want to be?	I want to be a forensic anthropologist, Dead and bones interest me.
Hey nerd,	I want to play pro baseball, At Stanford University.	
Hey nerd		Hey prom queen,
What do you want to be?	Hey preppy girl,	Hey prom queen,
	Hey preppy girl,	
I want to be a technologist, Change the world around me.	What do you want to be?	What do you want to be?
	I want to be a model, With Tyra Banks, oh please!	I want to make everyone jealous, So they wish they could all be me.
Hey bully,	Hey stressed boy,	
Hey bully,	Hey stressed boy,	Hey senior,
What do you want to be?	What do you want to be?	Hey senior,
I want to be a boxer, Take on any challenge you have against me.	I want to graduate school, So I can be free.	What do you want to be?
Hey cheerleader,		I want to be a college grad,
Hey cheer leader,		
What do you want to be?		Because education in all isn't that bad.

Alexa Butler

Grade 9

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Amy Birtman, teacher

THE BED OF MY FORD

Boxes of memorabilia from
high school, lid to a 44 oz.
drink, obscenities, indecencies,
a pocket knife.

Two hammers and a baseball
bat, tissues from last year's cold
epidemic. Broken phone charger,
last week's crush.

Glistening silver toolbox, unused
tampons, half burnt photo of a
boy, love—hatred. A bubble bath,
fallen leaves.

Grandpa's smile, Mom's homemade
taco soup. A mattress for a lucky
night, every star in the sky,
laid on red metal.

Misty Clerk

Grade 12

Carbondale Community High School

Carbondale

Danny Wilson, teacher

AS SHE DANCES

The curtain opens as she
Graces the stage with her frigid beauty
She leaves you breathless, frozen in your seat

As she dances

Her twirling and falling is gracefully chaotic as
Frozen flakes drip from her dress
Landing without a sound on the polished stage

As she dances

She seems to leave a shimmering powder in her wake
Sweeping across the glistening floor
A queen of movement, swirling in her gray mist
Leaving everything crystalized

As she dances

Kendall Gail

Grade 7

Monroe Middle School

Wheaton

Carol Gallagher, teacher

PRELUDE

Sunlight grows and yellows
warming the air left cold around
the blankets

in the morning.

Like the smell of an old book
it instructs you silently to investigate.
Less than a whisper, but a deeper pull
the dark undertones
of a mourning dove's lament float from
power lines.

You rise slowly with a hush in your voice
a hush in the walls
and the
soft translucence of the misty windows.

You take shape here
in this strange prompted silence.
Not yet ready to speak, but eager to
listen, as a lone man listens for a
faraway note in a street
to lead him in the vague direction of a song.

Tempest Kipp-Evans

Grade 11

Carbondale Community High School

Carbondale

Danny Wilson, teacher

THE YARD WAS LONELY

The yard was lonely
With nothing to fill it
But the grass
And the trees
And the little blue playhouse

Through the wind
There swept a seed
Black
And round
And oh so small
And the yard was not lonely
Anymore

The seed nestled down
Into the earth
And grew up the side
Of the little blue playhouse
With willowy vines creeping up the walls
And delicate blue flowers
Blooming with the sun

With the next gust of wind
There came another seed
Cracked
And spiny
And not so very small

It burrowed down
Next to the morning glory
And they grew together
The flower and the shrub
In the shade
Of that little blue playhouse

But every morning
The flowers of the morning
Would bloom in the sun
Shining
Their heavenly blue light
Over the yard
Brightening the day
With their ethereal beauty

But the shrub had no flowers
With which to make joy
And so its bark grew
Thick and tough and coarse
By the side
Of that little blue playhouse

And yet the flowers shined on
As the scent of the spring
Wafted over the yard
And the summer sun
Burst through the delicate petals
Like the sky had been captured
And bloomed on the vines
Of cirrus clouds

But soon the winter seeped
Into the veins and roots of the delicate
Morning glory
Cracking the willowy vines
And shriveling the pale blue flowers

The seeds fell off and blew away
Planting themselves
In Minnesota
Or Pennsylvania
Or maybe a cornfield
In the middle of Iowa

But the shrub stayed with the yard
Through the long cold winter
Impervious
To the ice that fell
On the little blue playhouse
Cracking the roof
And wearing the paint
But the ice could not penetrate
The shrub's thick
Brown
Bark

In time the sun rose
And shone directly
On the little shrub
No longer blocked
By the walls
Of the little blue playhouse
With its flowers hanging down
And casting shadows
On the shrub

The golden light brushed the leaves
Of the lonely little shrub
And it began to grow
Healthy and strong and green

And with the spring
There came a change
And on the branches
Of the shrub
There bloomed
A beautiful
Purple
Flower

Helen Lant

Grade 10

Carbondale Community High School

Carbondale

Kim Herron-Titus, teacher

EXCEPT FOR FOX

All is bone cold in winter,
Frost has spread his blanket through the birches
of the brushed forest;
The sun has abandoned this place—

Except for Fox

He knows the stories and treasures of the ice forest
from ancient tales told by his mother;
There, in the sunken dream of Nature
nothing interrupts the music of the hidden spirits—

Except for Fox

Each paw leaves its own treasure
on the pristine white snow.
What is he looking for?
Nobody knows or will ever know
in the bone-cold winter—

Except for Fox

Anna Loftus-Marcic

Grade 8

Lycée Français de Chicago

Chicago

Cyn Koukos, teacher

THE BALD EAGLE

I glide so smoothly
feeling the wind on
my wings and beak;
I glide so carefully, so well
that I know the breeze's patterns:
its dangers, its secrets.

I know the sun, glinting
off the river; I constantly watch
looking, searching for the fresh
taste of salmon to relieve
my hunger. I know the endless and
vast expanse of blue that is
the sky. I am lost in it,
my gaze ever searching for prey.

I know the clouds, misty and white,
for I soar in their company
for hours wing tips splayed,
feeling their heavy wetness.
I know the change of seasons
that marks the passing of time—
from the icy winter at its peak,
numbing my claws, to
the explosion of life
in the summer when
the cicadas sing.

I know the thrill of the hunt
when I dive at prey: be it
mole or carp, it never escapes
my grip of steel.
I know and remember the last
breath of the sparrow—the last

flop of the dying fish I bring
to my perch. Wherever I go,
my presence commands
respect; for my prey, I am
Death from above.

Solène Roullier

Grade 6

Lycée Français de Chicago

Chicago

Cyn Koukos, teacher

ILLINOIS PROSE 2011

DELORES R. ROBINSON

Each year, my colleagues and I are given the opportunity to interact with area junior high and high school students who visit our college. We appreciate the energy these young people bring to the campus, and we are gratified by the excitement that accompanies their writing endeavors. These students are *eager* to share their work. Hands shoot into the air and wave back and forth each time we ask for someone to read his or her selection. After the most recent Writers' Workshop, one girl stayed after, shyly asking for feedback on her most recent draft, revealing, "I just really like to hear what other people think about my stories."

Sadly, the opportunity to engage with other young writers is something that not every student has. Pressured by cries for "accountability" and squeezed by a schedule of testing and mandated curriculum, teachers struggle to find the time needed in the classroom for the emerging voices of

their students to find their way to the page. It becomes rarer for students to have access to a creative writing class or to have time in their schedules for reflective, personal writing. In the face of school budget crises, extracurricular offerings such as school newspapers and writing clubs are cut, and events such as regional writing and fine art expositions are done away with. How does this affect our young students?

How marvelous that this year's IATE prose writers have been encouraged to tell their stories, to share with others their unique voices. The judges this year saw several stories in which the writer explores relationships within his or her family, culture, community, or school. Many of this year's submissions indicate an awareness of the importance of the ties that bind us to each other, either through blood or shared experiences and feelings. One way to strengthen these ties is to continue to encourage our young people to put their thoughts and feelings on paper and to continue to submit their work for others to read and enjoy.

Here's wishing our teachers and their students the continued ability to tell their stories.

Delores R. Robinson, for the judges at Illinois Valley Community College:

Mark Brown
Lori Cinotte
Jean Forst
Kirk D. Lockwood
Adam Oldaker
Tara Ptasnik
Kimberly M. Radek
Randy Rambo
Nora Villarreal

MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU

I fondly remember the day that my father first introduced me to George Lucas's sci-fi epic, *Star Wars*. As he set the VCR, my dad proudly explained to me that these movies were his favorite films when he was younger, so much so that he saw both *A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back* in theaters at least forty times each. Being an eight-year-old at the time, I wasn't sure what had surprised me more: the rather large number of viewings or the fact that my father was actually telling the truth. Eventually, my father glanced at me, smiled eagerly, and started the tape. We both waited in silence until, in unassuming blue text, words began to appear on the screen.

"A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far way..."

My *Star Wars* initiation was underway.

Almost immediately, I became enthralled by the movie. I paid no attention to the fact that my father was practically reciting the dialogue beside me; it fizzled away into the white noise as Luke and Han discussed the specifications of the Millennium Falcon. I sat in awe during the entire film, and as the credits rolled, I demanded to see the next movie. At the time, I was unaware that *Empire* would not only teach me the ways of the Force but also how to master my own life.

Enlightenment came in a small, green package.

There was something peculiar about Yoda when I first saw him on the planet of Dagobah. He was less than three feet tall and seemed to jumble the words of his sentences, yet he intrigued me. When he spoke, it was as if his words were not just directed at Luke but to me as well. Sure, his knowledge of the Force didn't apply to my life (no matter how much I wished it did), but his wise sayings transcended the film. Yoda stressed the importance of concentration and discipline. He taught me that even if I was smaller or weaker,

I was still capable of accomplishing great things. (This was nice to know, seeing as I wasn't the tallest kid on the court.) One lesson, however, stood out to me in particular.

"Do, or do not, there is no try."

I liked the ring that it had, so the phrase became my own personal motto. Stepping up to the plate in baseball, I always told myself that I would get the hit, not that I would try to. Strangely enough, this change in perspective led to improvements in my swing. It turns out the great Jedi warrior was also an effective batting coach!

All jokes aside, I took Yoda's words to heart. Focus, inner strength, honest effort—these lessons shaped me into the person that I am today, and while I may not have picked up the ways of the Force from Yoda's teachings, I at least learned some valuable skills. Just as a small warning, though. Judge me by my size, you should not, for strong, my training is. A nerd, I may be, but a proud one, I am.

Sterling Beckmann

Grade 12

Belleville West High School

Belleville

John Lodle, teacher

WAKING FROM THE AMERICAN DREAM

Sometime in the early 2000s—The Soft Crash of Waves on Sand

I slide the spoon filled with tasty vanilla ice cream into my mouth as the rays of sun singe my neck and arms. Part of my family surrounds me building sandcastles, reading magazines, and lounging lazily. Meanwhile, my father body surfs down the three-foot waves of Lake Michigan, only to dive back into the surf and coast back in again. Down the beach, children laugh and teenagers knock a volleyball around. Sights and sounds and smells overwhelm my brain with senses. I sit in my chair and let the ice cream fill my stomach.

"Hi, Max!" my aunt calls from far above, on the boardwalk stairs wrapped around the sand dunes, which rise behind me. My grandparent's little green cottage, *Bon Aire*, is nestled nicely among others upon the top of these dunes. Good air rustles from the tips of the waves as I wave back to her, spoon in my mouth. She waves and begins her walk down to join us.

I finish my ice cream and decide to join my father in the chilly blue water. We race in and out of the waves and he throws me over the big ones. We play one of my favorite games where he sneaks up on me under the water and I try to avoid him. We splash in the lake and let the waves carry us to-and-fro. Grabbing a football from shore, we play catch. I make diving grabs, but I can only manage to throw the ball halfway to him.

"Sorry, Daddy," I say in shame.

"Don't worry about it, Max, you've gotta get your arm stronger first. It takes time," my dad replies reassuringly.

We continue for hours and joy shines from my smile. I cannot remember a more perfect day.

August 5, 2011—Standard and Poor's Downgrade

Swathump! The familiar sound of my father's return from the city startles the dormant beehive of our home. Sitting in my room at my wooden work desk covered with a smattering of papers, books, letters, and photos, I can imagine the blaze of activity below. *Thump-thump-thump-thump-thump-thump-thump!* There is an inviting rhythm of quick steps on the wooden panels below as my brothers and my dog surround my father with shouts and squeals and barks and laughter but are replied to with half-hearted greetings. Hearing this, I slowly rise from my chair and saunter down the staircase to satisfy my curiosity.

"How was your day, Dad?" I ask my usual question.

"Could have been better, Max. The markets were like a sea storm today. I don't know if we're heading down the tubes or treading water. The credit downgrade was brutal."

Handling this kernel of knowledge with tender care, I return myself to the confines of my room. As president of a company that trades futures, my father's occupation is helplessly tied to the state of the stock market and the global economy. Although he does not trade himself, the company's performance is influenced by the volatility of markets and every nation's economic policy. A hardworking man, my father often acquires his mood from his day on the job.

I rest in my chair with my hands folded behind my head as I sigh pensively. I check the news on my phone to attempt to glean further knowledge about the downgrade. The first title on my *USA Today* News App reads: "US credit rating drops a notch for the 1st time ever." At dinner, my father chews his food slowly and stares blankly at the wall opposite him. I ponder college dreams and the yawning gap of my future.

November 26, 2011—Hail to the Victors

On this special autumn Saturday, my family attends the Michigan–Ohio State rivalry football game in Ann Arbor, Michigan. A feeling of excitement permeates the air, giving the wind a sharper chill. As we walk around the campus of the university, my father absorbs his environment and reminisces on his time spent traversing the streets of these schools. His eyes glow with excitement.

At game time, we enter the massive football stadium aptly dubbed the “Big House,” slipping through the seas of fans to our seats. We have a great view of the field from high up and even enjoy the padded seats, but they pale in comparison to our seats at the 2009 game. Those brought us close to the action and near the center of the field. We had downgraded.

After a thoroughly enjoyable dinner that night, we return to our room in the hotel to take respite from the whirlwind day. The six members of my family cram into the single room filled with the amenities of two queen beds and a chair. I chuckle as we enter and decide to take my place with a sleeping bag on the floor. This pales in comparison to the dual queen room my father and I shared in 2009.

That night lying wide-awake while my family slumbers around me, I ponder the questions facing me regarding my future. Though they do not represent any true financial burden, our room arrangement forces me to think. I remember the downgrade; the ice cream on the beach. They make the tantalizing prospect of returning to “normal” seem very far off in the distance. They make the future of the US, the future of my family, and more glaringly, my own future seem bleaker than before. It forces me to combat my problems head on. What shall I study in college? How will I make money afterwards? Will I be able to make a place for myself in the world?

What should I do with my life? Do I have what it takes to be successful? Will I provide for my children like my father has for me? The answer to all of these questions resounds deeply through my skull.

I do not know.

Maximilian Montgomery Cornell

Grade 11

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

Christine Hicks, teacher

LOST IN THOUGHT

The desk is smooth under my elbows. Its solid, glass-like surface is still cool, but this does not keep my eyelids from drooping. Seventh hour lasts even longer than first. Most of the other thirty kids are either sitting with their heads down like me or squirming and trying to focus more on the lesson than on their discomfort. Friends with seats near each other talk quietly, never mind who's between them, during the intervals between the teacher telling them to hush. Some of the tallest stretch their legs across the aisle between the desks, which were made with only an average-sized student in mind. A chemistry teacher might describe the classroom as lots of different gases with molecules of varying sizes and attractions being compressed into a very small tank. Some of the gases are similar, however. I gazed at the girl sitting in the front of the room, thinking she might be the same kind of atom as me.

Eventually, even she slides out of my field of vision. Nothing can hold my focus: not the whispers of my classmates, not the familiar words in Spanish my teacher tells us to know by tomorrow. Only the clock on the wall to my right remains in my thoughts, as my classmates and I wait another hour for the day to end.

Memories of freshman year are not my favorite ones: our ninth-grade campus was a sort of limbo, a place in between elementary school and high school. The people haven't moved onward from eighth grade. It's obvious in their high, exaggerated laughter. Their desperation to be accepted and liked is evident in their sycophantic smiles when they talk to each other; real smiles would glow in their eyes, too. Equally obvious is their nervous relief when they get somebody to laugh. They travel in packs with others dressed similarly and clot the sides of the hallways like fat constricting blood flow in

already-narrow arteries. Those who aren't in the hallways stay in their classrooms for the five minutes before the bell, studying quietly and wishing they had a group to belong to. They stare out the windows, wishing they were anywhere else.

Unlike our main campus, every room has windows. The golden sunlight in the early morning reminds the groaning students of just how early it is. The white glow of midday makes the already-sparse grass go yellow and dry. The mud where it hasn't been planted yet turns dusty and cracked. The water in the small pond that sits at the edge of the property for no reason goes down a few inches, revealing more mud. I stare at it from biology class, wondering what purpose it serves. All you can see from the top-floor windows beyond the property is drying corn and nearly identical houses. One can hear the combines harvesting it in union with the lawnmowers cutting the barely existent grass. I call it all ugly, but the correct term is "in development."

The cafeteria is well lit, despite the scorching daylight from the windows. Hundreds of voices order curly fries. Some will cry out in revulsion when they find a green one in the bottom of the cardboard container. Others will say nothing, because they've already thrown out their food in disgust and moved to dessert. Everyone goes on about the ninth-grade campus having an ice cream machine, and everyone leaves out the part about the faces contorted with pain from brain freeze. On the patio, everybody curses the kids with third and fourth-hour lunch for not wiping unidentified smears of food off the tables or picking up their sticky napkins and wrappers, a capital crime the supervisors are blaming on fifth hour. It is closed to all lunch hours before October. Everybody compelled to sit out there with their friends but melting in the blinding glare of the white concrete will later discover that they are relieved, after the summer heat overstays its

welcome. Inside during the winter, flat screen televisions that substitute sound nobody will hear with subtitles that most won't bother to read display documentaries on the History and Discovery Channels. Nobody pays attention until there's a close-up image of a man getting an injection in his eyeball. After finishing lunch, they go to advisory, where they watch student news specials about obesity among minors.

At the end of the day, I'm sitting on the bus, wishing the window could go lower. It seems hot air leaves an enclosed space about as quickly as an unpleasant smell. The thirty-minute ride home with sixty other, louder freshmen has little impact on my spirits. Although most of me is sitting on a vandalized gray seat with no seat belt, my consciousness is still in seventh-hour Spanish, in the back row. The girl in the front of the room is, if possible, slouching more than me. As she straightens and turns around to stretch her back, she has me transfixed enough that I don't care if it's weird to randomly make eye contact. For half a second, the rest of the class might as well be swimming in the pond outside. Unsure what to do, I smile like an idiot, while hoping I'm not smiling like an idiot. Her eyebrows go up and she slowly smiles back. A thrown paper wad brings me back to reality on the bus. The kid in front me spins around and starts yelling when it barely touches his ear. Soon the air is thick with laughter, threats, and insults. I don't hear any of them. I'm too busy smiling.

Jim Gass

Grade 11

O'Fallon Township High School

O'Fallon

Diane Riley, teacher

TURNING TABLE

There was laughter at the table; that's what I remember the most. The joyous noise of happiness rang cheerfully like the Christmas bells that prematurely adorned almost every public venue. I was eight then, so remembering much about that day itself is difficult, as most of my energy was focused on when I was going to get my Easy-Bake Oven. My family sat around our large, dark cherry wood kitchen table. My grandma recounted funny stories of my mom and uncle as children, my dad told funny running stories, and my uncle cracked a joke every chance he got as we gobbled up our Thanksgiving feast. I looked from one head of the table to the next, trying to catch the eyes of my parents. However, as I did so, my parents' eyes were temporarily locked in a stare, one unlike any I have seen ever since, other than maybe in *The Notebook*. Love glued their eyes together, although even for an instant. That was the last time I saw it.

There was frustration. My dad sat at my side at our kitchen table helping me with long division, my tiring mind still unable to carry, borrow, and subtract correctly. I smashed my pencil on the wood of the table, giving up. "You're not going to quit," my dad told me, "I know you can do this. We will stay here until it's done." For the first time, I was really struggling with something. My eyebrows furrowed and my mouth in a pout, I lifted my pencil and tried another problem as my dad walked me through the process a few more times. Finally, the numbers came out even. *I got it!* I tried another. *I really do get this now!* "I told you. You just had to stick with it," my father said as he hugged me.

There was something unique about it. The glossy reddish-brown surface, almost always covered with a tablecloth, was immense. It seemed to spread and engulf my entire

kitchen and dining room area. Skinny, spiraled legs held the immense surface up, appearing like they would collapse under the weight of immense surface atop it. But they stood tall, strong, unfaltering.

As I got older, there was arguing. From my bedroom three rooms away, I gradually began to feel a tension between my parents during their nightly meal. At first it was a slight, but nonetheless audible, murmur coming from the table. I brushed it aside, telling myself it was nothing. As the months progressed, this murmur became louder and louder. Their tension tightened; their patience diminished. The voices from the table easily carried through three sets of doors and sunk into my ears. Whatever homework I was trying to focus on was momentarily ignored as I tried to hear every word coming from the table, before quickly realizing I didn't want to know. After a while, I could shut my ears off from the world at that time of night, or at the very least, from the cherry-wooden battlefield.

There was more. It got worse. It wasn't just during dinner now that the yelling emerged from the table. I would walk in the door after practice, and they would be sitting at opposite sides of the war zone, yelling. Loudly. *Money, jobs, our house, chores, work, retirement, me.* The sound of a fist on wood thundered through the house. The legs of the table shuttered, questioning the unquestionable strength they once had. My ability to shut out their arguing slowly diminished, and I began to have a subconscious need to cope with it, to do something. To be able to control *something* that went on at that table.

There was a pancake. "I'm not eating it. I won't do it."

"You will sit here until you are done with it then." My frail, pale hands, blue veins blatantly discernible, gripped the fork, as if holding on for dear life as I sat at my wooden

torture chamber. My squinted, lifeless eyes were unable to contain streams of scalding hot tears, warmed by my burning fear of the pile of soon-to-be thigh fat in front of me. A year of anorexia had seized all life from them. I tapped the table anxiously with the fork, starring at both objects with hatred, silently begging God to give me a reprieve. "Jill, just eat the goddamned pancake!" "Why is this so damn hard for you?" my parents yelled. I sat there for three hours. Three. For one pancake. Both of my parents' yelling turned into pleading, as they sat down and begged me to just take the couple terrifying bites and be done with it. They agreed on something. I ate the damned pancake. *Two more hours until I have to return to that torture chamber.* Yet three times a day, I returned to that war zone. However internally stressful it was for me, it was the only time my parents were allies in the war.

There was the talk. We sat around the table close together, yet one hundred miles apart. I knew it was coming. It was inevitable. I stared at the lines in the wood, refusing to allow myself to be affected by what I knew I was going to hear. *Problems. Dad moving. Not our fault. Divorce.* I didn't hear much. I could shut my ears off again. I tried to catch either of my parents' eyes, but their eyes refused to meet. They avoided even looking up, at the risk of their glances accidentally meeting. I felt alone and lost on an empty battlefield of cherry. I hate this table.

There is a choice. I mope into the kitchen every morning, pour my bowl of Oatmeal Squares, and walk to the eating area. I sit at the table every day without fail. We have an island eating area. I could sit there. But I don't. Beneath all of the memories of yelling, slamming, pleading, crying, and battling at that table are the faintest of sounds; those of joy: the ringing of laughter and sighs of relief. There are distant memories, and there is a sliver of remaining hope.

Jill Hardies

Grade 11

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

David Lange, teacher

TWILIGHT

The small creature.

Alone.

The august silk envelops the insect, taunting, enlightened with its every weakness and insecurity.

A perfect villain.

The miniscule insect thrashes, twists, turns. Fighting fate's hold. Darkness closes in.

It stops.

Its pulse thins. Surrendering. Exhaling toxins.

It seats its broken frame on top of the web.

Eyes gleam up above.

With a gossamer breath, the insect absorbs the grandeur of the arachnid's masterpiece.

It is a restless night for the creature. Its thorax, like a craft bead, vertically darts across the silk canvas. Longing to harness the noise of its thoughts. Staccato. Motions sudden, rhythmic. Dexterous black legs scurry along. Legato. Its being engrossed in its work. A creator.

The arachnid's inner set of eyes detect and process, aware of the scattered Eyes hovering over its mortal body. It steals glances at the small milky insect, trapped. It senses the agony of its prey, feeding from it. Its fangs secreting their deadly elixir. Ecstasy. Its painfully beautiful creation given a purpose.

Satiation numbs the arachnid's body, settling its intricate limbs. The precise angles and lines of the web glisten in the core of the darkness.

all is calm
in the midst of madness.

Eyes peering down.
Waiting.

An event so miniscule,
capturing the essence of the world.

Nicole Hensel

Grade 10

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Becky Mueller, teacher

THE FAMILY TREE

It was summer, I was nine, and I was standing at the base of the world's ugliest tree. I don't recall when I christened it the witch tree, only that I made sure to steer clear of the spooky tree adjacent to our driveway. The bark, a blotchy burnt color, curled out at odd angles, forming sharp little fingers that clung to skin and ripped clothing if you got too close. I did not like that tree, but it had a new addition worthy of investigation: a swing.

A long yellow rope attached the swing to one of the witch tree's branches, and despite the low moaning sound that came from the wood each time we sat on the horse, we deemed it safe enough. My brother easily sent me whizzing into the air, back and forth. Sun and shadow spun across my skin as the sky grew closer then shrank just beyond my grasp. I was flying.

But I never heard the snap of that tenuous yellow rope, split by the ragged bark of the witch tree. My brief euphoric flight was shattered by the knowledge that the ground was rushing up at me, unforgiving. Shards of rock bit into my right shoulder and leg, holding me where I lay. I must have been in shock because I lay there, motionless, for what seemed like forever.

And then I was screaming. In the distance, our sliding door opened, and the comforting sound of concerned adults flooded in at me from all sides. My dad picked me up, and placed me on my feet, brushing off some of the bigger stones that had embedded themselves in my skin. My mom, always the collected nurse, quickly tested me for broken bones and life-threatening injuries. Apparently, I showed no signs of serious bodily harm. Soon my little drama was downgraded from an Emergency: High Alert to a run of the mill set of scrapes and bruises.

I stood in the yard, alone, tears still wet on my face, arm red and throbbing; why could no one see that I was still hurting? I guess they just forgot to check for internal damage.

It is so easy for me to look at my family and blame them for my faults. To tell my mom that I'm attention seeking because she has always played favorites. To hate my dad for pursuing his passion at the expense of our financial security and my college dreams. To turn my back on my brother for belittling my struggles. To believe that their mistakes have forced me to be selfish and cruel. They are a scapegoat close at hand.

It was winter, I was thirteen, and I was standing at the base of the world's ugliest tree. My family and I had just gotten home from Christmas Eve service, and I was letting my bad mood fester. All day, I'd been an absolute terror.

Nothing that my mom said or did was right, and I made sure that she knew it. Her compliments were sarcastic, her requests unreasonable. As we sang "Amazing Grace" in the dim light of the sanctuary, I persecuted her in my heart.

I glanced up at the bare branches lacing across the clear sky, dividing the infinite into ragged triangles of space. I leaned up against it, feet slowly turning to ice cubes, and suddenly I was happy. While freezing my ass off, I found the first piece of joy in my day. I started back towards my house, but I pulled up short. I heard something, like a low, terrible moan, and it was coming from my house. Through the glass I could see my dad sitting at the kitchen table, the forgotten paper open in front of him.

"Dad, what's that?"

"That," he said, spitting the words at me, "would be your mother upstairs sobbing."

"I don't know what you said or did to her but she is

inconsolable. She won't talk to me or come out of her room. What the hell is wrong with you?"

I didn't have an answer for him. Leaving the light of my kitchen, I stood at the foot of the stairs, looking up into the darkness and knowing that I deserved anything—and everything—my mom was about to say to me. The sound of her crying led me past my room, with the picture of the two of us taped to the door, past my brother's room, lights off and music up, drowning out our family drama. It brought me to the last door in the hall. I tried the handle, but it was locked, and so, around the lump in my throat, I called out, "Mom? Can I come in?"

The crying stopped for a minute, and I heard bedsprings creak, but she didn't answer my calls. I was locked out by a door I had created, and the key I held no longer fit.

It's easy for me to look at my family and take all the credit for my accomplishments. To deny them any role in shaping the person I am today. I can turn my nose up at the little instances where they helped me and deem them unimportant. I was not about to be left behind, and so I walked away first.

Who I've become is infinitely more complicated than just the family I was raised in or the person I was destined to be. I have a role in my family, and I know it well—

I will be the first to storm out of the room in an argument, the last to fall asleep, the first to point out a grammatical error, and the one who could never spell. My parents wrote the script, my brother cues in my lines, but I have the poetic license to change whatever I want.

I can just see the farthest-reaching branches of the witch tree. My roots run parallel with hers, deep into the dark ground where we grew side by side. We weathered

the storms we couldn't manage to avoid, and drank in the sunshine when it came. At first glance it seems as if we stand alone, but if you look close you see that our arms reach far and wide, intertwining with those around us, small points of connection that have changed our shapes. But we are different. She is stuck, too intertwined with her history. My roots run deep, but I am boundless.

Laurel Johnson

Grade 12

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

Angelique Burrell, teacher

THE LYING DISORDER

My brother ticked through elementary school like a time bomb. It was impossible to predict when his fuse would run out, but the cause was usually the same—he would be sitting down to do his homework, after sitting down at school and listening to his teachers. The hours would pass but the math pages wouldn't until my mother would finally imprison him with the dreaded, "don't move from that seat until you're done." Mark, upon finding himself restricted to so small a space, would rock in his chair, break pencils, anything except doing what he was supposed to—until finally the ultimatum was posed—

"Mark, go take a boost. Now." The euphemism for my brother's Ritalin caused the tension in the air to snap like a guitar string. I could predict with near accuracy what was going to be said next—

"I don't NEED it."

"Then why haven't you finished your work?"

"You NEVER TRUST ME!"

"JUST TAKE YOUR MEDICINE!"

—but it was still inconceivable to me how quickly my brother could turn from the smiling, golden-haired boy in our family photos to a snarling animal with matted fur because of something as simple as homework. Things would simmer down, but the coals of my mother's anger would still smolder, until my dad came home to fan the flames back to an inferno. And the process would begin again, ad infinitum. My brother had objections to taking his medicine, usually ignored. It turned him into a shadow of himself, one that didn't joke around with his friends or air guitar to his favorite songs.

It made the kid who could devour a full everything pizza without a sweat utterly devoid of appetite. But more

than anything, he didn't like my parents to mention that he had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and took Ritalin for it, not even among strangers. His self-conscious elementary school sensibilities told him that as long as people didn't know, it would almost be as if he was normal. If he said he didn't need the medicine, maybe one day it would be true.

My mother and father were of the opposite opinion, in that maybe—maybe if he just downed his pills it would all go away, he would get his homework done before eleven at night and didn't have to get up early in the morning to finish it. The medicine would do the work of parenting for them—the long hours going over history problems that only earned resentment, the endless erasing and rewriting of illegible English answers. The medicine could give them the genial, frozen-faced son in the picture. The desire for this lie was so great that I would hear my mother talk of how she was going to “drug him into oblivion” next school year to friends over the phone, and hushed whispers of military school could always be heard from behind closed doors.

At times like that my hands would ball into fists on the other side of the door, where they couldn't see me. For the most part, however, whenever they had one of their episodes I would creep up to my room to hide with my cat. We would curl up on my bed like it was the only island in an ocean of insanity. I would play Linkin Park at full blast and pretend I couldn't hear the crash of a chair as it was overturned or the muffled shouts. Sometimes, I would follow the advice that my father, ironically, told me to do when someone or something was bothering me. I would view the situation as if I was watching a television show. This screaming, tear-streaked boy was not my real brother—these frayed, defeated people were not my parents. They were simply part of a documentary on the secret lives of dysfunctional white suburban homes. I was

only watching them lie and cheat each other from my room, far, far away from their reality.

Our house was big enough to hide in, but even if we were at the four corners of the earth, it couldn't give my father the son who respected him, my mother the boy who would make something of his life without guidance. And it couldn't change the fact that we were a family. It was a lesson learned when the nights spent alone in my room started running together without respite or sign of end, and I stayed up with my ear pressed against the door to hear if the crying had finally died down. It was too late to change what had happened between us, but it wasn't too late to become stronger from it. I couldn't part the sea of their anger by myself, but I could try to make sense of it. I would boil my family down into its reality, no euphemisms, no false promises—I didn't have the strength then, but one day, I knew, I would be the one to step away from the television program and into reality.

Charlotte Kanzler

Grade 11

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

Gina Chandler, teacher

ODE TO AN ANGEL

I'm so flushed with emotion that heat is literally bleeding through the pores on my cheeks. My veins bulge and undulate like waves on the backs of my hands. I know that this happened with no regard to "because." It just did. And yet the question will taunt me forever, like a dog chasing its tail, or that song you just can't get out of your head. It will be on my fingertips when I get my high school diploma. It will be in my suitcase when I go to college. It will follow me down the aisle at my wedding. But it's Ellie. It's always Ellie and I'm beginning to realize it is always going to be Ellie. It's Ellie when the knots twist in my stomach and I drown my thoughts in music to keep my eyes from swimming. She is the static on the radio lingering beneath the electric guitar and keyboard, an enchanting ambient missive between worlds to let me know I'm not alone. It's her in every daydream, when the rest of the world tilts off its axis and it's just me and my memories and the floor. Where is it the floor always takes me to that I always seem to get lost in? And why when I ask myself these questions do I always find myself looking up to the sky?

Ellie is the air I choke in when I'm running 'til my legs resentfully scream for me to stop though no force could ever make me. But my hope has turned itself into a weapon that I use against myself when I realize there's nowhere to run to. There is no map to guide the griever. No manual that portends the duration of this weary agony, if it even ends at all. If lifting one foot in front of the other is even the right move. No instructions on how to cope with the fact that I will never hear her say "Oh, herroo!" or see a new photo of her, or laugh at another one of her jokes. Now she is a movie that plays on repeat on the backs of my eyelids. Sometimes

my eyes play tricks on me, and I think I see her in the halls at school or walking on the sidewalk in town only to find that it's some other girl.

But once I saw you.

Your hair in a bun crowning your head,
Aviators holding onto croakies draping your neck,
The sun reflecting off your smile.

I know you still haunt the world's edges.

Ellie is the hum of the crickets that keep me company on the nights when my mind can't be at ease with itself. The street lamp that reveals midnight's secrets on my ceiling so I'm not floating in its swallowing blackness. She is luminous and she is vibrant, a candle in the dark; the part of me that never sleeps.

Ellie is the last wave that sweeps the lake before it all turns to glass. The memories in the undercurrent of my thoughts. She is the sand that engulfs me as I step into an oasis of sea and sky. I spend my days retracing my footprints, walking backwards on the path that I've traveled. What I would give to live in these engraved memories along the shore. Sometimes it seems like I do. The sky is prettier now that she's in it. The sun rises and sets in her smile. Her breath is the wind, and it carries her voice that knocks the leaves off their feet. But as they flutter to the ground it cradles them, giving them a soft place to fall. I envy the dandelions.

Carry me away with you, if just for a moment
into the melodies of church hymns.

Lead me to the bottom of the ocean floor.

Drown me in the depths of the heavens.

Haley Killam

Grade 12

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Karen Topham, teacher

LOTUS POND

Her sari was red and yellow, the colors of blood and sunshine, the colors of ketchup and mustard decorating the hot dog she was forbidden to eat because it was beef. She was beautiful on her wedding day. My mother is beautiful, always, even though she never learned how to smile at married life. She never learned that she was beautiful until I told her so when we were watching the video of her wedding. She was beautiful on her wedding day in a way that can't be reciprocated, the type of beauty that only comes from true sorrow.

My mother's sari was crimson, a smoldering inferno of blood blazing around her as she signed away her rights. Her blood never belonged to her, says her father. She was passed from man to man, my grandfather to my father, her blood trailing behind her, the white wedding train she never had. My grandmother had my mother deepen her lifelines, the creases in her palm, before her wedding. In the video I could see my mom fiercely fiddling with her hands, scrubbing away the lifetime she would be forced to devote to my father. Her sari was ornamented with gold, the type of gold that only shines properly in the sunshine, but her wedding was at night.

There was no aisle for her to walk along, no Western-style wedding because the only aisle she knew was the aisle of an airplane, the aisle that divides her from my father as they take a crash course in marriage. My parents left their only daughter in India while my father made a name for himself and my mother made a name as my father's wife. My mother's name means *lotus pond* but in marriage it could be replaced with *traditionally quiet*.

Her wedding sari sits now in the closet with a gag over its mouth, the sari that I have only seen in the video of my mother's wedding. I see my mother approaching a man she

could never love and my mother leaving her father, the only man she knew how to love, my mother being passed from man to man, from country to country, consistently separated from my father by aisles of planes, while her children are tied down to the wings, too afraid to learn how to fly on their own.

I am the most scorned child. The child that my mother loves because she doesn't know how to love me. First born in America, second born out of three, third most traditional, she envies me. We sat in a booth at Irving's Hot Dogs and I poured ketchup and mustard over a beef hot dog and handed it to her, demanding that she eat it. I watched her take bites out of it, watched her slowly devour her roots, her traditions, watched her devour the colors of her wedding sari. I stopped eating meat after I watched her cry over how much she liked it. My mother bred me as an American with the way she could not love herself. She bred me American with the way that she wished she could be one of us and with the way she wished she was in love with my father and with the way she wished she could love India. She bred me American with the wish that I could, someday, learn how to love in the way that she learned not to.

I cry when I see my mother. She's beautiful and her beauty knows no bounds, but her confidence lies dry within her. My mother was born in the desert, which is why she is always thirsty, which is why she despises neutral colors, which is why she chose her wedding sari to be red and yellow. Why she chose for her wedding to be at night, so that the desert heat wouldn't get to her before her husband could. She chose a traditional Indian wedding. A wedding which sheds no sunshine, only my mother's blood.

Divya Kirti

Grade 12

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

Jared Friebel, teacher

Plymouth High School

Library Policy

To: PHS Students and Staff
From: Library Warden
CC: Principal Miller and Dr. Cast
Date: 1/27/2012
Re: Library Disorder

Dear students,

Due to the chaos that has plagued the library for years, we have revised library policy.

Beginning next semester, this policy will keep the library a quiet, secure, and productive environment for work.

Current staff will play new roles in the administration of library protocol. To enter, students must be granted access by the bouncer who will administer the initial steps of clearance to the library. Barcodes will now be permanently inscribed on all student arms, and entrance will require scanning under bouncer supervision. Students will then pass through food and drink detectors to prevent any contamination of library equipment. Experienced canine units will ensure that students are clean by scouting for any hidden food. In the case of possible toxic contamination, a specialized team in biohazard suits will remove any threat and restore safety.

If able to pass entry procedure, students will comply with behavioral protocol as implemented by library enforcers who will patrol the interior of the library, ensuring students are academically engaged. To minimize social activity, tables and chairs have been upgraded and are now bolted to the floor to prevent rocking or movement. Additionally, the library is now equipped with decibel

sensors. If noise at a table rises above 30 decibels, an alarm will sound, and the enforcer will remove noisy students from the premises. Should any gesture of insubordination occur during student removal, riot control squads will be deployed, and order will be immediately restored.

No student will be permitted to exit the library during the period. Students will have to wait until the end of the period before they are debriefed and can exit. If any library equipment passes through scanners, the library will go on immediate lockdown, and blast doors will deploy. The Warden will oversee all lockdown procedures from strategically placed rooms outfitted with one-way glass. Once order is restored, the Warden will declare the environment fit for study, and normal activities will resume.

It should be noted that if the Warden notices any suspicious activity, students will be detained and taken to interrogation rooms. These procedures include waterboarding and any other means necessary to prevent subversive library conspiracy and/or anarchy. In the library, all students are guilty until proven innocent.

Finally, there will be a library's most-wanted list posted outside of the library. Any student that has been ejected or has egregiously overdue books will appear on this board. If any banned student attempts to bypass security protocol, they will be detained, and punishment will be at the discretion of the Warden. Punishments may include, but are not limited to snowflake making and hanging of seasonal decorations.

We hope these new procedures will ensure a safe and academically supportive learning environment. As always, we strive to create the most pleasurable learning experience for students and staff.

Malcolm R. Lamphere

Grade 10

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Becky Mueller, teacher

HOW TO SURVIVE IN NEPAL

Wrapped tightly in a wool blanket, Bharati was carried over to a lawn chair in the pre-op room still warm from the last patient, a small girl who, after a pot of boiling water was tipped from a stove by her drunken father, was in desperate need of burn reconstruction surgery. His leg dripped bright red on the green tiling of the pre-op room floor. He wasn't screaming like they normally do. He wasn't even crying. An eerie silence.

Eight years old, he had fallen from a three-wheeled *tuk tuk* on his way to work in the brick factories with his father and brothers. Bharati's father described to the nurses his son's smiling face and readiness to joke about his clumsiness in falling from the *tuk tuk*. He described how Bharati's face seemed to drop, expressionless, after he heard the snap. He described the front, right wheel of a truck following close behind slowly rolling over Bharati's thigh, breaking his femur in two.

I had been to Scheer Memorial before. Twice, actually. Since eighth grade I had wanted to be a third-world doctor, and a trip to Scheer was a way to entertain this interest, to see if this career had any potential. In that first visit, I fell in love with it all. Not only the blood and gore, the exceptional cases, and the personable doctors; I fell in love with the feeling of having purpose. Knowing that you're helping people with your own two hands. And though I was only a volunteer, even the feeling of delivering a fluids bag to the emergency room was enough to get me hooked.

I went back the following year and upon arrival was told to check in on patients, to deliver medicines, and, my favorite, to entertain the children in the pediatric ward. When I left, I knew I had to come back again. And I did. It was on

that next trip, on my very first day after landing, that Bharati came into the ER.

After carrying him from the lawn chair to the surgery table, scrubs wet with blood, Dr. Lincoln prepped Bharati's arm for the IV. A dab of alcohol, a few gentle slaps to his wrist, and one last wipe of alcohol. After dipping the needle in a small cup of disinfectant, he turned back and gently pushed the tip of the needle into Bharati's wrist. He did an awkward sort of twist with his wrist, as if the needle was a screw and needed to be twisted into place. After I asked, the nurse let me know that the needle was slightly curved from overuse. They used it whenever their supplies run out, which had been quite often in the past few weeks. The curved needle, still warm from the burn reconstruction girl before him and countless others before that, lay taped to the wrist of Bharati, administering light anesthetic for the femur reconstruction surgery to come.

Partway through the surgery, as Dr. Lincoln was drilling through bone fragments, his drill made a faint humming noise. He slammed it on a bench in frustration. The tip, the grooved point meant to slowly carve, had been dulled by overuse. Watching from the head of Bharati's bed, I saw his thigh splayed open, the fragments Dr. Lincoln had been working on clearly jutting out, bright with blood, half-dulled by his broken bone drill.

After pouring through shelves and drawers, he stopped searching suddenly and looked to me. His face lit up. "Hannah, go to my garage. Go to the back shelf. Open the tool box..." His house was next door to the hospital. He moved in there only a few years ago and was still in the process of fixing it up. In his garage, he had hammers, nails, saws, wrenches, and screwdrivers. And a working, cordless drill.

The surgery was a success. They put Bharati in a bed in the PIC, and though the bed wasn't made, Bharati was still unconscious, unable to complain, and unlikely to even if he were awake. Dr. Lincoln visited Bharati after surgery, and standing at the foot of Bharati's bed, he surveyed his work. Smiling, satisfied, Dr. Lincoln gave a thumbs-up.

Back at home three weeks after my trip ended, I received a call from Dr. Lincoln. Bharati's leg had become infected. Though Dr. Lincoln didn't want to tell specifics, I asked, persisted even; I needed to know why the boy I had spent every day for two weeks with, the boy that was fine when I left, was now being carted from the hospital by his mourning family. We had gotten through a femur reconstruction surgery with a bent needle and a construction drill, why the hell was it an infection that took him down?

"This morning," Dr. Lincoln said, "Bharati passed away." He said it slowly, let it pour from the receiving end of the phone like thick porridge. Let it all sink in. How they found Bharati lifeless in his bed, his family gone from his side, some to go back to work, some to escape the smell of his putrid, open wound. I asked about Api, Bharati's little sister, who had been by his bedside for the entirety of the two weeks I was there. Dr. Lincoln described how five-year-old Api, alone, had stayed. Api was still standing over him fanning away flies, blissfully unaware that her beloved Bharati was long gone.

Dr. Lincoln told me that Bharati's family couldn't afford the treatment, the simple round of antibiotics. Scheer Memorial Hospital *had* the medicine, but they couldn't give it to him without a payment up front. Instead, they watched. Watched as the infection took over. Watched as Bharati died with his little sister fanning him at his bedside.

After weeks of thinking through it, I realized I couldn't feel mad at Dr. Lincoln. He was a doctor, Scheer Memorial Hospital a sanctuary, but a sanctuary that could only run with strict rules. Rules that, though they keep medicine from patients who can't pay, keep Scheer Memorial Hospital separate from the panic and chaos of the streets of Nepal.

After reasoning through this, I made my way past Bharati's death. But in the process, I abandoned my dream to become a third-world doctor. I had been told I could do something; I could save lives. I would have to be ready to help people every single day. But they didn't tell me I'd have to be ready to *not* help people every single day—to have the means but be stuck watching from the sidelines.

As hard as it may have been to swallow, I came to terms with Bharati's death. He was born and raised in Nepal. His femur was snapped in Nepal. He went to a hospital in Nepal. And as soon as he started showing signs of infection, I should've known he would die in Nepal.

Hannah Lillioja

Grade 12

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

Angelique Burrell, teacher

IMPASSABLE

He walked out the side door a month earlier, after putting gas in his Acura and cleaning his glasses. Now, as I walk down to the end of the driveway with a heavy, metal snow shovel, the caked snow threatens my fingers that ache beneath my red gloves. It's a Friday in February in the middle of fifth grade, or one of the frequent Fridays my dad will drive six hours home from his job in Rochester, Minnesota. My steps are cautious, tricking the icy driveway into keeping me upright. Sleet slaps my left cheek like a poignant hand. I think about my excitement a month before when he left for his new job. It meant a change in scenery at home...right? A regular paycheck...And without any siblings, I would have the whole house to myself (and my mom). Privacy...Score. Who would've thought I'd miss him and feel like he'd be the one skipping out on my childhood when he first left home on a nondescript, gray January afternoon? I join my mom at the end of the driveway with a bone-chilling sigh, and start shoveling the snow that seems too deep, and as heavy as weights.

You can't see the car driving down Greenwood if your life depended on it. The drab white color of his Acura blends in with the dirty street snow, so when he pulls up to us, two bright marshmallows bobbing among the drifts, he beeps his horn. As he steps out of the car and waves, he holds out a Lou Malnati's pizza like a peace offering. He seems so carefree and innocent, which only makes me more irritable. Why do I have to struggle while he just goes off and does whatever he wants? But you know that feeling you get, as you lie down in new snow? Familiar, comforting, engulfing after the initial frosty shock that you brace yourself against? That's how it feels when he hugs me. At that moment, one year after fourth

grade, one month after he started his job, one week after I last saw him, one hour after I zipped my snow pants, one minute after he pulled into his one true home—I realize how much I miss him.

That Saturday and Sunday fly by faster than ever, broken up now and then by short, detached talks with my father about nothing: “So...are you happy you made the gymnastics team?”

“Dad...I was, I mean I made the team three weeks ago.”

Or he’ll pop his head into my room and say, “Oh! What’s the homework plan for today? Do you have a lot this weekend?”

To which I reply, “Um, I usually don’t do homework early on in the weekend. But tomorrow I’ll do some.” He usually attempts to exit the pressure of conversation by disappearing, either to make himself lunch, or to trot away to check the daily news on the computer, or to catch up on some project. How I wish it were different.

Fast forward time four years, through middle school, junior high, and into high school. My pride still keeps me from showing the longing I feel to have a dad at home. But every concert, parent-teacher conference, or family dinner, he is covertly missed. Now that I’m in high school, I sometimes think his absence is for the best. Especially as a teenager having to fight off the rage and stress that accompanies math homework. I don’t need more distractions, like trying to get along with a dad who doesn’t get the chance to understand me. And so the ritual continues, as predictable as a snowfall, from that day those two marshmallows bobbed around the driveway. Every Sunday at three, his Acura pulls out again, its tire tracks looking monotonous and infinite, inflicting pain on the new coat of white on the driveway.

Meg Martin

Grade 9

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Amy Lyons, teacher

BETRAYAL

"Get up, Sitting Bull." The first words I hear when I return to consciousness after a morning meditation. "You're under arrest by order of Officer McLaughlin and the Great White Father for inciting a riot by supporting the Ghost Dance."

My eyes open with such speed—like the Appaloosa mare called "Light" that gallops across the dark plains. I arise, calmly.

The blue-coated soldiers grab me with hungry, meaty fingers, bruising my flesh as they lift my arms and place them forcefully against my gray-haired head. They shove me outside my teepee and into the bright morning sun, so bright in my eyes that I can only make out their dark shapes. Even with the glare I recognize my Sioux brothers!

At the first step towards the wagon, gunfire sparks from all directions. Many fall down, wounded; more are killed even in the first brief seconds of battle. The soldier scout holding my left arm falls backwards; vermilion blood stains his blue shirt. The burning flesh mixed with gunpowder tickles my nose. Once this "Red Skin" was my brother, Bullhead; now he returns to the Happy Place of his warrior brothers and the Great Spirit.

My tribe crumbles to the ground like hunted buffalo. Once they hunted and fought for the honor of the Great Spirit; now they prance around like the white man, who drinks firewater and wastes time and opportunity to strike. Smoke fills the morning air like the locust, concealing sky and sun. Soon after, another darkness hits me. I feel the white man's bullet enter my chest, and I exhale.

My spirit flutters toward the Great Spirit above.

"Sitting Bull is hit!"

These last words I hear before I start to drift away to the land of my ancestors; my vision becomes kaleidoscopic before seeing a great, white light. I hear a voice calling my name: *Thathanka Iyotake*.¹

An unexpected death, committed by the ones I sought to protect. Then only darkness!

I hear the friendly chanting voices of Thasunke Witko² and Moke-tav-a-to,³ who wait for me on the other side.

Peter Winston Michalak

Grade 7

Lycée Français de Chicago

Chicago

Cyn Koukos, teacher

1. Thathanka Iyotake is the Lakota name for Sitting Bull.

2. Thasunke Witko is the Sioux name for Crazy Horse.

3. Moke-tav-a-to is the name used for Black Kettle.

AN UNLIKELY ALLIANCE

The bus was stiflingly hot and overcrowded. I walked through the aisle looking for that one open seat, inhaling the sharp stench of sweat and gasoline: middle school transportation on a muggy September afternoon. At least three kids were packed into every seat, and I began to worry that I would have nowhere to sit. To my relief, I noticed one boy curiously sitting alone, humming to himself and drumming on his legs. He ignored me when I timidly asked if I could sit next to him, instead turning to me and chanting the chorus to “Greased Lighting,” holding up his arms as if he were waiting for applause. He gave me a wide smile that stretched across his entire face, right up to his slightly protruding ears. I couldn’t help but smile back. That was my first impression of Zach, and from that day forward, I not only had a companion to sit with but also a constant friend who taught me so much about patience, compassion, and sincerity. While my interests have come and gone with each school year, Zach’s passions have remained unequaled. His personality is infectious; he is constantly singing, laughing, or shouting out obscure facts about a past president or the LA Lakers. Zach’s enthusiasm inspires me to follow and nurture my own drives and interests.

High school came, bringing a storm of challenges along with it. Zach was no longer the vibrant, happy, middle-schooler of whom I had grown so fond. The special education program was harder on him; he became despondent and introverted. While before he would captivate his peers with his encyclopedic knowledge of US history, now others were wary of him. They would shy away from Zach in the halls, not aware that his angry outbursts were echoes of his teachers’ reprimands. One day, I approached him as he sat alone in the crowded cafeteria. At first, he paid no attention and mumbled

angrily to himself. Introducing the topic of Abraham Lincoln, Zach's face lit up, and he happily began to cite random trivia about our 16th president. His sudden change in demeanor was entirely unexpected. While hearing everything I had ever wanted to know and more about Lincoln, I felt relief that my simple gesture to connect with Zach had brought him back to his gentle core. Since then, he has taken his rightful place at our lunch table while continuing to delight us with obscure facts regarding his favorite subjects. Friendships crystallize in these small moments, which are then continuous and lasting. A few years ago, Zach delivered his most cherished praise, "true girl," to me. While initially I wasn't sure of its exact meaning, I knew that this rare compliment held deep significance. I am grateful to have a friend like Zach, and that, in itself, is perhaps where my passion lies: in knowing the little things about people that make a big difference.

Lauren Nemeroff

Grade 12

Highland Park High School

Highland Park

Judi Elman, teacher

$$1 = 2$$

I remember sitting next to my father in a museum lobby when I was about nine years old. The room was full of windows, and sunbeams streamed between the leaves of the tree outside, glinting off the dark gray granite counter in some peculiar rhythmic pattern. As I sat, watching the light, my father took out the pen and small notebook he always kept in his shirt pocket, and he looked at me, his bright, blue eyes *con brio*, the way they are whenever he's excited to share some piece of knowledge or wisdom.

As I watched, he composed some lines of mathematical equations in green ink. His writing was small and quick, and he paused at the end of each line to think, his pen making little circles a fraction of an inch above the surface of the paper. After half a minute, he tapped the pen on the paper with a final staccato beat and showed me the bottom line:

$$1 = 2$$

For a moment I stared, dazed. Then I grabbed the notebook out of my father's hands and snapped up straight. "That's amazing!" I remember exclaiming. "I didn't know that was even possible! But it must be! You did it. Can you make two equal four?"

As he watched me bounce up and down in my seat, my father shook his head, smiled, and pointed out the trick: he had divided by zero in line four. "Don't just look at the answer," he laughed, "Without knowing the entire process, you can't fully understand the end result."

Years later, when I was 16, I was searching in my father's closet for a scarf to wear later that day to the opera *Die Walküre* when suddenly I spotted in a corner behind his favorite purple shirt several open shoeboxes filled with small, pocket-sized

notebooks of all different colors. I pulled one of the boxes to the middle of the closet and picked up the notebook on top. As I flipped through it, I caught glimpses of words: "Aten," "satyagraha," "general relativity," "musical semiology." There were lines of equations, like the trick ones he had shown me when I was younger, sketches of different shapes and objects, lists of book titles, and even what seemed to be a scribbled order for Chinese carryout.

Two hours later, in the car all the way to the opera, my father's excitement for *Die Walküre* was almost tangible. I listened to his voice crescendo *con slancio* as he enlightened me on Wagner's leitmotifs, his eyes as bright as ever. "There are dozens of them, and each motif is just a fragment of a melody, but when all the pieces are strung together and melded into one, they form a work that's truly beautiful."

But the word "beautiful" did not even begin to approach the divinely intricate and ethereal quality of the opera. The leitmotifs were like emerald leaves embellishing each branch of Yggdrasil, which Wagner's music seemed to nurture into the magnificent central organism that, according to Norse mythology, connects Wotan to Brünnhilde to Siegfried to the tiniest Nibelung*. To us.

After the opera, my father took out his notebook and made a quick scribble. I had been wondering all day about his notebooks: how many did he have, how long had he kept them, what was he planning to do with all the tiny bits of knowledge, and most importantly, why did he take the time and trouble to fill the notebooks just to throw them in the back of a closet? On the way home from the opera, I asked. He looked startled, but then smiled and explained:

"When I went to college, I studied to be a chemical engineer because my father told me I should. But I soon figured out that I didn't like chemical engineering. Because I'd

always loved and been good at music, I decided on a career as a professional jazz saxophonist. All I could see was me, in the center of a huge stage, a big band in the background, my fingers flying across the keys, my eyes closed in bliss, and an adoring audience of men in tuxedos and women in sparkling evening gowns. After six months in music school, however, I realized I didn't have the connections required to make it in the music business, so I doubted I could ever be that star on the stage. I was devastated.

"A year off to work in a library would help, my friends said. But music haunted me. The beautiful symphonies and the living, breathing jazz in my head played all the time. That is when I started my journals, writing down bits and pieces of the melodies I heard. Soon, I began to read the books in the library, and not long after that, I began to hear some artful words and phrases along with the music. As time passed, the words became louder and the music softer. New pieces came to me, beautiful symphonies, played by my own orchestra of knowledge. Unlike in music school, I did not focus on the end result; I learned simply for the sake of learning.

"Finally, I went to medical school because in medicine, there was always more to know and to add to my repertoire. And I loved that for every single fact or idea I wrote down, two melodious new questions arose."

As he paused for a moment, a faraway memory stirred in my mind, numbers in green ink, then a new thought: Maybe one *can* equal two...

My father turned to me once more, "The questions made the most beautiful music of all."

Today, a thousand questions race to the tip of my tongue as I lean over the biology lab bench and gaze at the fluorescent green cells, my eyes gleaming *con brio*. These glowing bacteria,

the results of our gene expression experiment, would probably be mildly interesting to a casual observer dropping in on the class, but they fascinate me because I understand the incredible process by which my lab partner and I illuminated them.

I also understand the vital process by which *they* enlighten *me*. I can almost feel their radiance diffusing into my eyes *con fuoco* as I visualize each concept in the lab lesson, as each tiny spark of an idea fires my neurons into action until my whole head is ablaze and flames stream out of my eyes, bright blue like my father's with possibilities and questions. This is what my father has always wanted for me. Beginning in the bottoms of my feet, I feel a pulse, then a rhythm travels up my legs, chords vibrate through my body, and finally the leitmotif emerges as I immerse myself in the Ride of the Valkyries. Each accumulated piece of knowledge thickens my branch of Yggdrasil, strengthening my connection to the rest of the universe. Learning connects me to this central soul, this source of energy and vitality. When I learn, I am truly alive.

Adele Padgett

Grade 11

Adlai E. Stevenson High School

Lincolnshire

Stephen Heller, teacher

*In *Die Walküre*, Wotan, a god, is the father of Brünnhilde, a valkyrie. Wotan orders Brünnhilde to kill two mortals, a man and his pregnant lover, but Brünnhilde disobeys her father and saves the mortal woman and her unborn child, Siegfried, because she knows that's what Wotan really wants. Wotan, however, is furious that Brünnhilde has acted against his will and punishes her by putting her into a deep slumber. Yggdrasil is the tree whose branches connect the nine worlds in Norse mythology, and Nibelungs are dwarves.

HOPE

I've long given up on the hope that any non-Indian will pronounce my name properly.

As a first-grader, fidgeting in the standard navy blue plastic chairs situated in every classroom across America, I used to wince whenever my name was called. "Ay-dih-thee," my teachers used to call me, "Ay-dih-thee Ray-oh." My friends' names—Abby, Julie, Mikey, Sammy—taunted me, showing off the ease with which the teachers rattled them off and the absence of a confounded glance at the attendance sheet before the teachers read them out loud (which was never the case with my name). I tried to teach everyone at school how to pronounce my name, saying my name "the Indian way," "Uh-dhee-thee" with the soft "th" trademark to Indian pronunciation—emulating the way my parents, my grandparents, my aunts and uncles said it at home. I wasn't as good a teacher as I had thought. The backwards feeling of correcting my teacher—her blond-brown eyebrows scrunching up with confusion and concentration, her blue eyes blinking again and again, her lipstick-coated lips pursing as she tried to figure out how to say my name—soon tired me out. By the time I reached the fourth grade I had ended up concocting a completely different way to say my name, "Uh-dee-tee," utilizing American pronunciation to make saying my name as easy as possible to any non-Indians. "The American way," I called it.

I abandoned the pronunciation of my age-old Indian name, and my Indian roots, in order to fit in with the majority—a process that I would soon become familiar with.

Living in the Virginian suburbs of Washington, DC, I wanted to be as quintessentially American as the gleaming marble statues of presidents past and the apple-pie American

tourists crowded next to the national monuments that we always seemed to visit on our school field trips. Whether or not the statements held any semblance of truth, hearing my friends claiming that they descended from James Monroe or that their ancestors came to the US on the Mayflower whenever we visited the national monuments, I felt gypped. I was born an American according to the 14th Amendment, yet I still didn't feel like I was as American as I should have been.

On the other hand, I never felt as Indian whenever I visited India with my family as I did in the US. In the US, my skin wasn't the only thing that differentiated me from the majority population. Whenever I visited India, my salient feature was my *gori* shining through—how white and *Amrikan* I seemed compared to everyone else. My American accent wasn't the only example of this—the way I walked (too conscious of the grime on the streets), the way I ate (too careful with the rice in my fingers), even the way I looked at other people (too confident and direct) seemed to shout “Foreigner! American!” to all of the native Indians around me.

When I was in the third grade, I tried to use the time that I had visiting family in India to embrace the culture as much as possible. I dressed in *salwar kameez* every day in an attempt to look like as much of a native Indian as I could. I always made sure to coordinate my *pottu* with my *salwar kameez* and my jewelry with my *pottu*. I also completely renewed my interest in Bollywood, doubling the size of my iPod's “Indian music” playlist and begging my mom to go see *Dhoom*, *Hum Tum*, and *Lakshya*, the newest Bollywood films (which she claimed were too “adult” for an eight-year-old child to see).

I used to be envious of my cousins living in India—because they had the ability to be completely multilingual. I was as good as *gori* when I visited India with my family—I couldn't fluently speak, read, or write either Hindi or Tamil.

Whenever my family went shopping, I was told to either speak Hindi or stay silent—speaking English or speaking with an American accent in India would make the vendor charge us three times the usual amount for any goods we purchased. I'd handily use whatever small Hindi phrase I'd recently learned, asking the shopkeeper, "*Aap kaise hain?*" only to balk and shy away after piquing the shopkeeper's interest. My mother glanced at me with reproach—being as bargain savvy as she was, she didn't want to lose money because I'd simply decided to act a bit more "Indian" that day.

My cousins would speak to my grandparents in either fluent Hindi or Tamil, and I'd feel bad for not being able to communicate fully with my *pati* and *thatha*, my grandparents, talking with them in broken English. Even then, I had to talk to them at a slowed pace, breaking up my English into smaller fragments, sometimes even adapting an Indian accent of sorts to communicate with my grandparents as easily as possible. From the simplest of tasks, such as asking my *pati* and *thatha* how they were doing, to the more involving tasks, such as conversing with my *pati* and *thatha* about their respective pasts growing up in Revolution-era India, communication with my grandparents became all the more time consuming and all the less natural.

When I got to middle school, I started realizing how "weird" it was having my favorite artist be T. M. Krishna and my favorite actress be Aishwarya Rai. I soon learned that it wasn't that normal to kick off my Saturday with waking up to the *Suprabhatam sloka* being played at an unnaturally loud volume by my parents and having *paatu* practice shortly thereafter, and it wasn't that normal to have hip-length hair perpetually in a *plait* (not a braid), and it wasn't that normal to bring *chapathi* and *bhaji* for lunch at school. Americans brought Lunchables, Capri Sun, and a bright yellow bag of

Lay's potato chips for lunch. Americans had short hair, preferably shoulder length. Americans watched *Tom and Jerry*, the *Flintstones*, and *Bugs Bunny* every Saturday morning. To Americans, T. M. Krishna and Aishwarya Rai were nonexistent. To Americans, Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise weren't the same person, and the difference between the *Simpsons* and *Seinfeld* mattered—a lot.

My parents expected me to be more Indian than I was, but the older I got in the US, the more Americanized I became. When I was little, my *amma* and *appa* enrolled me in *paatu* classes, South Indian Carnatic music, in order to foster cultural appreciation. They spoke strictly Tamil to me to try and encourage me to speak Tamil back to them. They explained to me each and every Hindu ritual that came along with the multitude of festivals every year, from *Holi*, to *Pongal*, to *Navarathri*, to *Raksha Bandhan*, to *Diwali*, and more. But once I started growing up, spending more time with my American friends and more time at my American school, I started underestimating the value of my Indian culture. I stopped speaking Tamil completely, designating American English as my one and only language. I tried to avoid wearing Indian clothes whenever possible, begging my mom to let me wear blue jeans and a t-shirt to a family friend's party instead. I stopped my *paatu* classes, switching Indian Carnatic music for choir in school. I cut my hair, and never let it grow past my waist again. I staunchly avoided *plaits* whenever I could. I packed solely American food for my school lunches, eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch five times a week.

It was in high school, when I started seeing my little sister go through the same transfiguration I did, that I realized how ridiculous the pressures I put on myself were. While she was cutting the cake at her tenth birthday party, I stood next to her, smiling, and noted our environment. Family, family

friends, and school friends flocked around our kitchen table to celebrate her birthday. Some of her Caucasian school friends, were laughing and singing along with some of her Indian family friends, whom they had just met an hour or two before.

Some of her Indian family friends were wearing American clothes, some were wearing Indian clothes—a few of her Caucasian school friends had even borrowed an Indian outfit to wear to her party. It didn't matter to them how "American" they appeared, or how "Indian" they appeared. It was then that I recognized how pointless it was trying to juggle between the two extremes of being either completely Indian or completely American. I resigned myself to the fact that the internal battle I was fighting was useless, and I began to accept myself for what I truly was—both Indian and American, yet neither truly Indian nor truly American. The realization that I didn't need to be as Indian as my parents, nor as American as my neighbors, brought with it a great sense of relief. So, I stopped. I stopped trying to restrict myself to be solely Indian or solely American, I stopped trying to assimilate into American culture, I stopped trying to appease my parents by being the "good Indian girl" they wanted. I started to become something completely different—myself.

Adithi Rao

Grade 11

Adlai E. Stevenson High School

Lincolnshire

Stephen Heller, teacher

PLAY IT AGAIN, JACK

It sounded awful.

But then, I guess. I shouldn't have expected anything but "awful" out of a middle school band concert. The massive flute section's prepubescent squeaks clashed with the shaky scales of the ten or so low brass players. The trumpets squawked out their quarter notes with a little too much enthusiasm. The off-tempo percussionists could barely be heard over the long line of blaring saxophones. All of the other instruments crash-landed into place wherever they could find room.

I smiled.

This was painful to listen to, but I didn't mind; I hadn't exactly come for an evening of earth-shattering symphony. My brother Jack, a saxophone player, was in seventh grade, and my brother Sam, a trumpet player, was in sixth. It was the first band concert of the school year, and my family and I had come to support them. My mom and dad sat together a few seats down. My other brother, Adam, a tone-deaf eighth grader with no interest in music, sat next to me. He glanced up from his battered copy of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* just long enough to register the cacophony and cringe in the band's general direction. As far as the quality of the music was concerned, he was thinking pretty much along the same lines that I was.

I leaned forward contentedly, resting my chin on my hands, and focused on Sam again. In his bright blue bow tie, he was easy to pick out. He was a short, chubby, loveable little kid, and he was filled to the brim with charisma. He was tapping his size-three feet along with the beat and grooving a little with his upper body. He didn't play the trumpet very well, but he either didn't know or didn't care. He was having too much fun.

It took me a minute to remember where Jack was sitting. Jack, the epitome of calm, cool, and collected, the tall blond boy with a smile I found much too sardonic to belong to a twelve-year-old. Jack could really play the saxophone. The kid practiced almost religiously every day after school. I smirked upon seeing that he was working hard to keep the tempo right, but I had no doubt that he was hitting every note just as it appeared in the sheet music on his stand.

When the concert was over, the whole family piled into our big, black SUV for the ride home. I offered neutral congratulations to both Jack and Sam, and then resigned myself to the back seat. I shut up before I could do any damage.

It was bedtime for my brothers when we got back. I had a long night of homework ahead of me, so I just dragged myself up the stairs and changed into my pajamas. But as I sat down to work, something caught my eye. I swiveled around in my chair and threw a long plaintive look at my bass guitar. I sighed.

My bass wasn't a nice one by any means. The strap was wrapped in duct tape to keep it from fraying and falling apart, and the dark purple lacquer on the body was chipped in places, but the hardware was good and the tone was decent. It was mine, my bass, and I loved it.

Trouble was, I hadn't had much time to play in the past few weeks. I was sure my skills were slipping. I'd played obsessively over the summer, but once school started, I didn't have time. I'd all but abandoned my bass guitar, much to my dismay.

Jack and Sam, who weren't in high school, didn't have that problem. They both practiced daily, and I could often hear their instruments blasting through their closed doors in the afternoons. Sam played by ear a lot of the time, trying to figure out "Yellow Submarine" or the theme song from *Star*

Wars without referring to any sheet music. Jack ran his scales up and down like a madman in every single key, before moving onto the exercises his saxophone instructor had assigned and the pieces that he was playing in band at school. And there was no way around it; Jack sounded *good*.

Until he'd started playing the saxophone, I'd been better than Jack at everything. I was older. I was bigger. I'd been going to school longer. I'd known more than he had about everything, including music.

I scowled at my bass. I hated getting angry like this.

I took a few breaths and decided to tell Sam good night, like I always did. I slipped into his bedroom. The lights were out, and he was snuggled up under his covers, his cute little head poking out from beneath them. "G'night, Sammy," I said, giving him a hug.

He hugged me back. "Night, T," he replied sleepily.

"You did a really good job tonight." A white lie. But what did it matter?

"Thanks, T."

"You really looked like you were having fun up there." Honesty.

"I was."

"I love you, Sam." Complete honesty.

"I love you too, T."

I ducked out of Sam's room and started to go quietly back to mine.

"Hi, T." It was Jack. I froze.

"Hi, Jack." My words were shaky.

"What were you doing?"

"Nothing." Another white lie.

"Oh...okay." He shuffled from foot to foot.

"Thanks for coming tonight." I caught admiration in his voice, and it was agonizing to listen to.

"No problem, Jack," I told him. "I really liked hearing you play." A white lie again. Jack smiled.

"Thanks." He stepped forward and gave me a hug. "Love you, T."

I returned the hug. "I love you, too, Jack." It was honest. But the words felt so forced in my mouth that I wanted to spit them out.

I hated getting angry like this.

Jack went back to his room. I stood alone in the hallway, watching him go. Jack didn't know how I felt, and I sure as hell wasn't going to tell him.

Taylor Rasmussen

Grade 12

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

Alexis Colianni, teacher

WATCH

An old woman stands at the rail of an old wooden porch looking over a vast lake, her body silhouetted by the setting sun. Her back is arched like the weight of the world rests on her shoulders, and her hair is wound tightly into a bun at the nape of her neck. Only a single strand flies loose. The lake stands in front of her, mocking her as she looks upon it longingly. Under the sun's rays, the frozen water shines gold where the blanket of snow has been blown away. The woman shifts her gaze away from the lake to her watch. It is a simple object, just a thin brown band with a neat white face, and yet it's a very old timepiece. As the minute hand rotates around the circular face, it takes with it her life. As she looks on, she realizes that time, the only real constant in this world, will eventually run out.

She sighs and looks back at the lake. *You will always be here. Forever.*

It pains her to know this, to know that some things could carry on forever while others can't. And in the warm sun as the lake's ice begins to crack, as the seasons shifted from winter to spring, it still survives. The long spidery chasms on the golden surface and the few chunks breaking free did not represent the end of the lake, but a new season, a new beginning. The lake shifts seamlessly from winter to spring and continues changing.

She could see herself twenty years ago, standing in the same spot. Back then, she wore her hair long and loose around her shoulders, its thin lengths fluttered in the soft breeze. Her skin was only beginning to crease here and there on her face. Cracks were starting to form close to her forehead and between her brows. They spoke of the beginning of the end and they would never be erased. Her hands didn't tremble as

they rested on the rail that stood between her and the lake, between her and the things she hoped for. Her eyes, so light a shade of brown that they shone gold, reflected the widening chasms as they became more and more pronounced, while her heart ticked away the seconds. Her hand came to rest over her watch and she remembered feeling the faint shift of motion.

She could see herself twenty years before that even. She was smaller and was just beginning to understand what the world had in store for her. Her skin was completely smooth, and her thin brown hair was in disarray around her heart-shaped face. She was just beginning to realize why the immobile lake was so much better than her, why it had so much more potential. She learned this when not long before she grasped her mother's cold, limp hand. She held her hand as her mother broke away from the mass and melted out of existence.

Her mother had always been a strong woman. Nothing ever seemed to unsettle her. She had carried herself with a certain wisdom and mild arrogance that only came with time and experience, and as such, she had never fathomed that her mother could simply cease to exist.

As her mother rested on her bed, her favorite white blanket swaddling her body, she held her mother's hand while she passed on. When she had looked in her mother's eyes, she had seen the most peculiar thing in them: uncertainty. Her mother did not know what to expect, only experience could give her knowledge. She had watched her mother melt into the unknown, and after she had felt unbearably hollow. She had looked upon her mother's white blanket and had longed to wrap it around herself. She wanted to feel a warmth that could fill her emptiness. She wanted to feel anything that could move her away from this season.

A fat tear fell from her eye and onto her wrist. She looked down at the glistening droplet dampening her skin, and then to her mother's dry wrist. She slowly reached and unfastened the plain watch at her mother's wrist and placed it over her own. When the still warm material touched her skin, she could feel the faint grinding metal as gears spun against each other. All she could focus on was that feeling on top of her skin. Their vibrations embedding themselves under her skin and radiating through her. She could feel her body restarting itself, her organs slowly pumping and filtering blood, her lungs taking in fuel and her bones grinding against one another as she shifted slightly. The first thought that ran through her mind after her mother died was: *the clock is ticking*.

It was then that she understood that she would never amount to anything in life, not like the lake. There was no way she could possibly bear each season as it changed over and over again. As a colorful fall changed swiftly into a monochromatic winter, and then a solid winter to a runny spring, her body could not possibly tolerate the rapid changes in forecast. It was impossible to live through the highs and lows that unpredictable weather, and life, brought. There was no way she could ever stand the test of time. She too would eventually melt out of existence.

A large cracking noise echoes through the bay, and the old woman's attention is forced away from her watch and toward the golden lake. It stands completely still while a strong breeze rips the thick blanket away, revealing its broken surface. Her muscles like pistons and her veins like wires compose her all-too-mortal body. With each beat of her heart, the blood running through her acts as a wave, smoothing past organs and wearing them down into oblivion. Just like the gears and cogs in her average watch, her organs would eventually slow to a gradual halt. After all we are just fancy

machines. But as the breeze blows past her and she closes her golden eyes, she feels it in the cracks of her skin. She too stands immobile, if only for a moment.

Olivia Ruggles

Grade 12

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Susan Hersam, teacher

THE ACROBATICS OF FORGETFULNESS

As soon as she pulled open the glass door, Marion smelled the flowers. She wandered around the small shop, periodically burying her nose in petals. The enthusiastic red of the tulips matched the lipstick she carefully applied every night. Then, she'd slip into her dazzling leotard and head out under the Big Top.

Marion loved flying through the air attached to nothing but a harness. She loved the swooping sensation in the pit of her stomach as she folded herself over the hanging bar and made a graceful dive into the waiting embrace of the net below.

But every night after flight, she was grounded by the flowers waiting for her in her trailer. Marion collected the bouquets that her husband sent her, each with a note asking politely for her to come home—signed, Steven. They were always beautiful: roses, tulips, baby's breath, Queen Ann's lace, lilies. And every time, before they would pack up and move on to the next city, Marion carefully planted the flowers behind the enormous candy-striped tent. She tucked them into a bed of dirt before rubbing their smooth petals between her thumb and forefinger, breathing in the smell of lilacs and thinking of home.

What Marion really wanted was for Steven to send a cactus or perhaps poison ivy, something, anything to show that he was angry with her, that he didn't love her anymore. Marion wanted Steven to forget her, to forget her impression on the right side of their bed and the way she would slide her wedding ring onto the small glass ring stand while washing the dishes. Most of all, Marion wanted Steven to forget the pain she had caused him by leaving.

At night, she would lie sleepless in her bed as his face flitted through her mind, remembering the way his mouth

had sagged with hurt as she closed their big oak door. And instead of folding the image of his face carefully into a box, sealing it with packing tape, and sending it to the south of her brain, she forced herself to study his face, memorizing its grief.

Marion pulled her nose from a lilac and, advancing into the greenery at the back of the shop, spotted a cactus sandwiched between two small shrubs. She plucked the small cactus from its perch, paid, and left.

That evening, she carried the cactus and Steven's flowers to a clearing behind her trailer. She dug her fingers hungrily into the dirt, making two holes. Carefully, she gathered dirt around the plants once more, patting the soil securely around them. A breeze ruffled the leaves of the marigolds and a flash of white caught her eye. Detaching the latest note, she opened the small card with her dirty thumb.

"Time to come home," it read—unsigned.

Marion imagined herself a cactus, her arms forever extended, unwilling to bend to meet the dirt. Her needles would protect her, preventing anything from penetrating her thick skin. Still, her old life beckoned. She reached out to stroke the cactus flower, but a needle parried. With her finger in her mouth, she took a deep breath: crushed popcorn, cotton candy, animal excrement, and the thick, earthy smell of the Big Top. Home.

Rachael Schwabe

Grade 12

Lyons Township High School

LaGrange

Frank Alletto, teacher

WITHOUT CAUSE

We were bored white kids living in a rich suburban town. It was only a matter of time before we did something stupid. It was a Friday and we had nothing to do. Plans for food were quickly shot down. *Yo, Maxwell's? Nah, I'm Broke.* For some reason, driving around the neighborhood generated more interest in our teenage minds than just staying at someone's house and throwing in a frozen pizza.

So we clambered into my friend's red Jeep. Seven kids cramming into six seats added to the already crowded interior. A few loaves of bread, some water polo equipment, and laundry detergent tried to deter us from erecting the seat in back. Miscellaneous CDs lounged around on the floor. Black poppy seeds dotted the white seats as if the night sky had flipped its color scheme. Scrunching our shoulders together and folding our legs such that our knees touched, we eventually squeezed in.

Our conversation turned lazily to eighth grade as we drove around; we started talking about how some of us had been the victims of driving eggers. Some kid had invidiously pelted a friend of mine with an egg. All of us had been too shocked to get a plate.

We reminisced the moment, furrowing our brows and shaking our heads. I still couldn't understand how anybody could derive a sense of satisfaction from hitting someone whom they didn't know with an egg. There is a part of us that naturally loves destruction. Sigmund Freud would call it the *id*. It is the part of our mind that contains drive to eradicate life or other objects, directed at "the external world." I don't know what I'd call it, but I do know that breaking a piñata, stepping on a crunchy-looking leaf, and crumpling a paper bag are gratifying experiences.

So get a target. Break the egg on a tree in a forest somewhere. Smash the egg on your own hands. Don't break the egg at all. Why throw it at someone whom you've never seen?

All of these thoughts flitted through my head when we brought up the topic. So naturally I was appalled when one of my friends came up with the idea to buy a dozen eggs and drive around with these mobile projectiles, hunting for "some stupid eighth-grade clique." As if we would be able to tell if they were in eighth grade. Or a clique. Or doing anything other than trying to enjoy their Friday. They didn't even have to be doing something bad; if they simply struck us as jerks, they were perfect targets.

What? No, we can't do that. We'd be exactly what we hated a few years ago. I tried to get my friends to see it my way, protesting to no avail, objecting to deaf ears.

Jewel was close. We went there. We bought a dozen white eggs.

And I was horrified.

I wish I could describe the feeling that came from nailing our target—some kid I will probably never see again, skateboarding along at an easy pace as the sun took an easy pace to set and painted autumn colors on the clouds to match the trees. His friends were walking or skating alongside him with lightheartedness and levity in their step, and I saw him turn towards one of them as he laughed. Facing east, he was no more than a silhouette against the sun; he cast a shadow that stretched far in front of him and reached the car before we could see his face.

Not that we ever could see his face. He was a faceless grudge that my friends held against the world. He was the physical manifestation of the negative stereotypes we harbored against eighth graders in general, even though we knew nothing about him. And in one throwing motion, we

were reduced to nothing more than animals. We had no empathy, no ability to view the boy as anything other than an object, a target, a means of satisfying our *id*. We had neither conscience nor capacity to view the boy as one of us, looking for something to do on a Friday night, enjoying the day before it got too dark. We made arbitrary assumptions on his character, and used those assumptions as justification for anonymously assaulting him.

“Judging a book by its cover” doesn’t quite do justice to how badly we approached the situation. In choosing to ignore any merit the group might have had, any reason why they maybe actually *didn’t* deserve an egg being thrown at them, we became close-minded thugs, bullies without cause.

We slowed down as the sun went slowly down. The victim’s buddy waved, a wordless greeting, a gesture of innocence, a petition to companionship.

And as we got close enough to launch our missiles against the defenseless clique we perceived them to be, I found out two things about our victim.

He has blue eyes, just like me. And he doesn’t like being hit with eggs.

Who does?

Jake Silhavy

Grade 11

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

Christine Hicks, teacher

THE WORLD OF GERONIMO SMILEY

It was indefinable—the amount of space in the locked closet. But the item of interest was that the closet was standard sized, about five feet tall and three feet wide. A once shiny doorknob added the only ornament to the scratched, tired old door. The indefinable amount of space in question was, in fact, an alternate space. Our universe, and all the infinite amount of universes around it, in another dimension, locked in a closet. But what the question he was asking was, “Is it real?”

Pull out, out from the blue globe wrapped in clouds, out from the planets, out from the stars, and out from the universe into the peace of space. But pull out more, out of space, out of the closet, out of the room, out of the apartment, out of the city, out of the country, out of the clouds. Now you see a similar blue planet, wrapped in clouds. This is the world of Mr. Geronimo Smiley.

Geronimo woke up. He did this often, so it wasn’t much of a thrill. But still, he got up, got dressed, and ate some toast with juice for breakfast. He remembered he had an appointment with Algernon, and strode out the door. He didn’t do this often.

He liked to think of Algernon as a friend. Well, sort of. Algernon was technically Geronimo’s shrink, but he’d been treating Geronimo so long that they were practically family. They only saw each other once a month, but that seemed fine for both of them.

As he walked into the office, he immediately knew something was wrong. He could see the back of his own head. There was a tall, black-haired man sitting in the cramped waiting room, and without hesitation, Geronimo knew it was another one of him. The one standing, because he was the kind of person who talks to himself, said, “Oh dear, that’s

not right." And as the sitting Geronimo's head was turning, suddenly, Geronimo woke up. He sighed, and got out of bed.

He couldn't pretend it was the first time he mixed up the world in the closet and the real world, but it always bothered him and brought up the questions. Geronimo, all his life, was full of questions. Am I alive? Who am I? Am I real? Are you real? Are any of us real? What am I for? Is there an alternate space in the closet? If there is, how can it fit? Am I insane? Are we all insane? They nagged at him every day, but he couldn't answer any.

In the real world, at least he hoped, Geronimo did have an appointment with Algernon. He went there now, and when he reached the waiting room, he was glad to see it was only him. Or only one of him, as the case may be. Because of this, he was called into the office almost immediately.

But when he came in to the stuffy office, Algernon was talking to a small professional looking woman of about 30. When Algernon turned his head, he nervously said, "Ah, hello Geronimo. Let me introduce my daughter, Susan. She's learning the ropes, and she wanted to practice on you. I hope you don't mind."

"No, no I don't mind," replied Geronimo.

Right as her father was opening his mouth to speak, Susan cut in, "Good, let's get started. Take a seat Mr. Smiley." Her piercing, but somehow-gentle voice seemed to hit a trigger in his brain that caused his legs to fold by force. He landed heavily in the chair.

Susan started right in, "Is it true that you believe there is another dimension of space in your closet?"

Geronimo was shell shocked, but eventually stammered out, "No, the word believe implies that I'm sure it's real, which I am not."

"Well, is it real or isn't it?"

Geronimo, bewildered again said, "I don't know, you're the professional! What do you think?"

She quickly countered, "How should I know?! It's your mind, your sanity, your closet, your problem. What do you think?"

Geronimo felt very out of balance. The only people he talked to in an average month were Algernon, the woman who brought him his food, himself, and his cat Oswald. He hesitantly answered, "Well it can't be real. Space can't fit in a closet."

"Good, we've established something. We've made some progress."

By this time, Geronimo was sweating and dizzy. Apparently it showed on his face, because Susan seemed to have some mercy and offered him a glass of water.

As he was leaving, he felt a warm fluttery feeling in his stomach that could be the beginnings of an ulcer, or something else entirely. Without thinking, Geronimo rushed back and almost collided with Susan as she was stepping out of the office. With an air of terminal embarrassment, he stuttered, um'd, and blushed his way through, "Would you like to—um—go to dinner—with—uh—me?"

She blinked, stepped back, blushed, and looked surprised, confused, and happy. Then she composed herself and said, "That would be—acceptable. I'll meet you at the Withered Fig at seven o'clock. Goodbye."

She swept out the door leaving Geronimo with a myriad of emotions splashing across his face. He rushed home, smiling all the way.

As soon as he opened the door to his small apartment, the wrongness slapped him across the face. There was something wrong about the space in the closet, he could feel it. He walked to the closet, opened the door, and let himself fall.

Stars and planets flashed by him, and started to become one endless blur. He felt the point of wrongness, and stopped. He was next to the closet Earth. He couldn't see anything wrong now, but it wasn't always immediately apparent. He slid back and waited. He waited for hours. And suddenly he knew what was wrong. The closet sun was slowly moving toward the closet earth.

He didn't know what to do. This needed contemplation. He walked out of the closet. He spent the rest of the afternoon thinking and petting Oswald.

When 6:45 rolled around, Geronimo rummaged around in his apartment and finally found a grey musty suit hiding for shame in a nook. He was reassured though, when he arrived at the Withered Fig to see that Susan was almost as inept at dressing for occasions as he was. She was wearing a garish purple cocktail dress that was probably considered the height of fashion in some neolithic period.

They stiffly said hello and sat down. Her usual self, Susan began the conversation, "You barely know me, and yet you asked me on a date, why?"

Geronimo came prepared this time. He wasn't going to be pushed into saying something he regretted. He answered calmly, "Why did you accept? I might be insane?"

"You're avoiding the question Geronimo."

"And you aren't?"

"Good point. I'll answer your question if you'll answer mine. Deal?"

"Deal."

"Alright, the reason I accepted was because you were the first one interested. All my life, men were for later, and I didn't want later to become too late."

"I asked you out for the same reasons. I haven't really met a woman since Nancy Plimsol in fifth grade."

She laughed and said, "In theory we're the perfect fit."

"Do you think I'm insane?"

"Is that a pick up line?"

"No, seriously."

She touched his hand "Seriously, no, no I don't think so."

He felt it, felt the sun about to hit. He gasped, "I've got to go," and sprinted out the door. He was about halfway home when he realized she was following him. She yelled, "What the hell is going on?!"

"The sun in the closet is about to hit the earth in the closet."

"Oh, is that bad?"

"I don't know, maybe. But I have to do something."

They both ran the rest of the way to the apartment. Geronimo crashed through the door and started heading toward the closet. Susan yelled, "Wait! Let it be destroyed!"

But Geronimo kept running. Susan spun him around, and kissed him. And as she did, Geronimo felt the sun hit him. He felt the burning energy disintegrate every fiber of his body, leaving nothing. And suddenly, Geronimo Smiley woke up.

There wasn't a space in his closet. He was as sane as the next man. Susan and Geronimo looked at each other. Without a word, they walked back to the Withered Fig in companionable silence. This is the world to Mr. Geronimo Smiley.

Jack Spector-Bishop

Grade 8

Northbrook Junior High School

Northbrook

Heather Corral, teacher

SOMETHING IN THE WAY

It was raining, a cool light rain. I remember we needed the rain; it had been dry all year. There were lots of people in the street dancing and celebrating. Everyone was having a good time, and no one had gotten too rowdy yet.

Someone had bumped into you, and you didn't know what to do. Whoever it was was drunk and fell on the ground. At first you tried to ignore him, and then you looked around. I nodded to you and stumbled a bit myself. You walked away. A little bit later I wandered out and found you on a bench. You were playing with a stray dog. I could never figure out how you were so good at bonding with animals and people, for that matter. I hobbled next to you and sat down. After a bit of time, I broke the silence of your peaceful world and said: "So, you're about to get married?"

"Yep, I'm taking the leap in June, you got the invitation didn't you? Oh yeah, and I'd appreciate it if you didn't tell many people about it. I want this to be a quiet thing, and I don't want anyone's feelings to be hurt if they weren't invited. It's not that I overlooked them, I swear. We just want to have a quieter wedding, you know?"

I burped loudly. I always managed to contrast your calm demeanor, but you'd never mention it. "Yeah, I understand. You two make such a...such a...nice couple. Not to mention she's a pretty stunning gal."

"Ha, yeah, well, thanks for understanding. I think I'm gonna head home. You need a ride?"

"No, I think I'll hang around here for a while. I'll see you later though."

"Bye." You patted the dog and began walking away.

I turned over, and looked at the clock above the bed.

Three more hours until work. Three more hours...three more...I moved my pillow a bit and tried to get back to sleep.

It was no use though, and eventually I gave up and walked to the living room. I looked out the big, center-most window and saw that everything had taken on a dark, ashen hue. Nothing resembled itself. Trees, fences, streetlights blended into their surroundings. Everything was drowsy. Nothing moved. I shivered a bit wondering why the cold had permeated into my home.

I sat down beside the remnants of the fire I had lit last night. I put my hands over the center and tried to absorb any remaining heat, but I couldn't feel any. I crossed my legs and rubbed my hands together trying to figure out why it seemed like everything had gone wrong, why I felt so removed from my former vivacity.

The dog came over to me and shoved its paw into my hand. I petted him for a while and slipped away. I thought of how I used to think that I could do anything because—no matter what I did—he'd always set me straight; he made sure I knew the right path. But now that he was gone I wasn't so sure of anything.

I lowered my head and rested it on my palms. A little bit of smoke wafted up to my nose. The smoke kind of reminded me of him. He hated the fact that his mom smoked. She was always coughing and making his clothes reek. Sometimes I'd have a pack of cigarettes, and he'd grab them from me and stomp on them. I could never do anything about that; he would have won any fight or argument easily.

I lowered my arms and laid down on my back. I tried to bring myself back into the present, back to work, bills, people—*conscious* people. I really should try to get more sleep, I thought. So I stretched out in front of the fireplace and closed my eyes.

I was back on the bench again and saw you walking away. I hurried after you and spoke, as fluidly as I could.

"Where are you going? You parked on 14th Street, remember?"

"I know. I think I'll walk home. I could use some fresh air."

"Alright. But, hey, I wanted to tell you something. I'm really glad you're getting married, and I know it's selfish to ask this, but we'll still be friends, right? I mean, even if you're 2,000 miles away?"

"Sure...of course we will. How could we not be?"

"I don't know. I was just thinking about everyone moving on, you know? And now that you're going to, it feels like...I don't know, like everyone's leaving me behind."

"It's not like I'm gonna be dead. Hell, even if I were dead we'd be friends..." You paused a moment, stared at me. And then it seemed like you were looking *through* me. I almost turned around to see what you were gazing at when you said, in the most reassuring tone, "I can always be found."

The words hit me, and I jolted a bit, looked down to steady myself. When I looked back up, you were gone. The dog you were petting stayed though. I bent down to touch it, and, to my surprise, it started wagging its tail and rubbing against me—even though I've never been good with animals.

I woke up as the sun shot its rays through my window and colored the living room. My gaze rested upon the dog—the dog that you had petted, on a night long ago—and that's when I understood what you had said. I sighed heavily, got up, and let go of your death.

Max Spehlmann

Grade 10

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Mara Dukats, teacher

THE HOME OF AN ARCHITECT'S DAUGHTER

I've never had a house, but I've always had a home. I remember the white-washed building in Malaysia that looked over my mother's garden, blossoming with silky, sweet orchids and a trail of violet morning glories that started in the front yard and ended at the rusty, teeth-like gate. Soon the orchids would limp and the glories pucker after the *matahari*, eye-of-the-day sun, rose. The flowers resembled the house, for it too was temporary. According to my parents' word and their hope to leave the living room walls free from Crayola graffiti, it seemed apparent at the time that we did not really own the house.

Then ten years passed. Two-year-old, scarlet scribbles, and unidentified objects maneuvered on the living room's plaster landscape. The house's black, creaky stairs appeared in my dreams when I was seven. On sticky evenings, I napped on the moist, marble floor that kissed my thin, tan arms and cooled and soothed my aching feet in the fourth grade. Regularly, the warm, slightly sour rain that poured on the house's pavement made an irrevocably beautiful sound. I had a home. And it was the first home of many homes.

To leave Malaysia was to leave my childhood. I had to say farewell to my beloved rain, my crispy, hot egg roll that I paid 50 *sents* each and every time for, Fairview International Private School, my best friend Yuxu, Ms. Mala, and treasured mornings of when my sisters and I bid Ayah, my father, goodbye before he set off to work. Even on weekends, Ayah did not come back till ten or twelve o'clock at night. By then, a small head of curly, caramel hair had already settled in a pillow's comfort. Those nights, only whispering kisses touched the limp locks on my forehead. When dawn broke, I could have them. Ayah's hugs and kisses would make my

nose crinkle because of his morning shirt's cinnamon scent and tingling warmth. In late October, I said goodbye to my father for the last time. His earned place at the architectural company required that he stayed while my mother, sisters, and I were to move to my aunt's house in America for a better education. But I could not fathom how anything could be more dignified than these two words—"my family."

Six years passed, but much, much more slowly. When I first came to America, I felt displaced and disoriented as if I arrived on a different planet. Vividly, I remember my first day. Entering the classroom, I was as uncomfortable as I was with wearing a rough, non-uniform set of American clothes. A plastic headband gripped my head, and the sleeves of a sandy, brown jacket wrapped tightly around my frail arms. I needed to bear it because I knew what this jacket meant to my mother.

"Sarah, you'll look beautiful in this on the first day," Mom said. Spreading across her face was a reassuring smile, but her eyes did not seem to follow.

Even so, I could not help but feel the jacket's coarse cloth suffocate the muscles in my shoulders. With stiff shoulders, I shuffled into the cafeteria. Awkwardly, I slid between two classmates, introduced myself, and barely spoke another word. Absorbed by my surroundings, I observed the inhabitants of this foreign world. Creatures around me snorted, laughed like hyenas, blurted some sort of tribal twaddle, and crushed milk cartons as if they were made of tissue paper. For some reason, I developed a headache by the end of the day. I desperately hoped the headband caused it.

In the next few years, I bit my lip and forced a smile. On cloudy days, I fervently stared at the foreign, cold snow settling on my aunt's backyard with the intent of recognizing its beauty. One afternoon, while I sat near the foggy window,

I recalled a fairly popular Christmas song, "Let it snow, Let it snow, Let it snow." I let it snow. I let the jagged, heavy ice cover the fresh, soft grass. I let the garden's tulips' vivid amber fade and roses' delicate petals drop. Most of all, I let the freezing flakes land on my chestnut hair where only delicious droplets of sunshine used to stay. I could not hold it in any longer. In the eighth grade, I broke down and shared my tears. Nostalgia crept into my heart and broke all its strings, letting it drift for weeks.

As the years progressed, I put more trust in my heart and grew strong. After my aunt's house, my mother, sisters, and I moved again. And with each Fourth of July celebration, I sank deeper into American life. Where I resided somehow left a print on me that I would not and could not erase. Moving no longer made me cringe. It was as if the place I left, whether it was the yellow Winchester Apartments or silent Marilyn Circle, I did not leave at all. When I saw a flock of ducks in the backyard, I remembered Winchester Lake's damp, ever-green moss, the mush my sisters and I used as dinner when we played "House." When my eyes met a fireplace, my lips trembled at the thought of my Aunt's buttery pumpkin pie we would eat around the hearth every Thanksgiving. And sometimes, on the porch of the new apartment, my family and I would stretch out on the rickety green chairs after a rain shower. Thirsty, my sisters and I devoured plump watermelon pieces always neatly cut by Mom. We laughed loudly and then choked on the watermelon and laughed again. Somehow, I wasn't thirsty anymore. Memories of Malaysia and Ayah rushed back to me. I knew I found it. I have *always* had this home.

Sarah Suhaimi

Grade 11

O'Fallon Township High School
O'Fallon
Diane Riley, teacher

THE BIG ONE

"Wait! Stop! My hat fell off! Quick!" hollers my dad within a split second of blistering winds tearing the snug hat from his head. Immediately, Mark, our fishing guide, a grisly, unshaven man in his late 40s wearing a torn up Buffalo Bills jacket practically composed of duct tape due to years of wear and tear from work in Vancouver, whips the 17-foot Alumacraft johnboat around a full 180 degrees with reckless abandon and throws the throttle down all the way. The boat's crimson and black Mercury 75 horsepower motor roars furiously and the dizzying fumes of gasoline fill the air. Mark plunges his arm into the 50 degree waters to rescue the yellow-brown Ron Jon Surf Shop "Plair Hair" surfer hat from Wollaston Lake's icy clutches. My dad lets out an audible sigh of relief as Mark hoists the soggy and dejected looking tangle of faux hair up into the chilly air.

Little do I know how this fateful event would single-handedly change my life and spark my fiery passion and love for fishing.

Amidst their celebration over recovering the lost cap, I glimpse an enormous brown eagle fade in and out of sight through the aspen trees. Suddenly, the bird falls into a nose dive and rockets toward the undisturbed navy waters of a hidden bay sheltered from the gale force Canadian winds.

I shout to Mark, "I wanna fish in *there!*"

We idle into the untouched bay and behold a sight that brings every fisherman to their knees—a massive swirl. Scrambling for my rod, I fling my smoky lipless Rat-L-Trap into the water and begin its slow retrieve, adding an occasional pop. After 30 minutes, we have only caught two 31-inch pike, and the sun is starting to fade behind the swaying tree line. Mark decides it's time to leave. But I will have none of

it. I defiantly shout, "One last cast!" and throw my lure so far away that Mark and my Dad sit down and grumble waiting for me to pull my crankbait out of the water for what seems like an eternity. That doesn't quite happen.

My lure bumps off submerged timber on the weedy bottom in ten feet of water and snags a tree. Or is it? My rod doubles over and the drag lets loose a scream so high pitched that it hurts my ears as line tears off the reel. Reality awakens us with a slap in the face: this is the behemoth we flew up to Canada to catch. Attention shifts back to the fish. She makes a mad dash for the deep drop-off, but I hold her back, similar to how Caesar Milan shows dogs who the boss is. Just when we all think the fish has had enough, the inevitable happens. She sinks into the bottom, hoping the tactic will prevent her from having to rise to the surface. Not a chance. The fish and I dive headfirst into a brutal tug-of-war match that lasts over ten minutes. Grinding teeth, tight lines, and nerve-wracking boat maneuvers add more to the tension already on the end of my rod. After fifteen agonizing minutes of overwhelming stress, dodging objects that would effortlessly sever my only tie to the trophy pike, and punishing muscle aches, the beast rises to the surface.

Longer than a school bus and fatter than a Thanksgiving turkey, this Northern Pike is a record breaker. The boat sinks eight inches deeper into the water as we haul the leviathan on board. Stretching 48 inches and weighing 35 pounds, the Northern Pike rivals Moby Dick. Struggling to hold her up for a quick photo, my feet slip off the platform as soon as the flash goes off causing us both to tumble onto the metal hull with a heavy thud.

As I release the fish, I find myself admiring its beauty. The crimson shade that flows from her anal fin down through the tail, resulting from having spawned thousands of new fry

less than a day ago gives the fish a royal, majestic appearance. Bluish-green gills pulsate in and out as she breathes in water. I scan over the sea monster with awe, noticing more and more details with every pass. She gains her strength back from the fight more and more each minute, until with one swift flap of her tail, she dives, and just as quickly as we met, the fish disappeared.

Fishing with my dad three weekends ago up at our lake house on Lake Petenwell in Wisconsin, my dad and I zoom across the water in our sparkling 21-foot beige-colored fiberglass Crestliner, when his hat is torn from his head by a crisp wind. Instantaneously, I remember Wollaston Lake in Saskatchewan, Canada. As we race back to recover the sinking hat, I think...it's happening again.

Jonathon Kent Thielen

Grade 11

Marmion Academy

Aurora

Richard Holinger, teacher

**CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS TO
*THE ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN***

As the written forum in which Illinois English teachers share their ideas, the *Illinois English Bulletin* welcomes all kinds of materials related to the teaching of English.

We seek articles dealing with literature, writing, language, media, speech, drama, film, culture, technology, standards, assessment, professional development, and other aspects of our profession. Any combination of research, theory, and practice is appropriate. Some articles take a formal and conclusive approach, while others are informal and exploratory.

Book reviews, poetry, black-and-white photographs, and line drawings are also welcome.

When you are ready to share your work with your colleagues across the state, please consult the submission guidelines on page 122. We look forward to hearing from you. If you have questions or suggestions for the editor, please don't hesitate to get in touch (contact information on page

124). Thank you for reading, supporting, and contributing to the *Illinois English Bulletin*.

Submission Guidelines

(See page 124 for the editor's contact information.)

- Via U.S. mail, send one clean, paper copy of the manuscript to the editor. See below for manuscript formatting guidelines and information to include in your cover letter.
- Attached to an e-mail message addressed to the editor, send an additional copy of the manuscript in an MS Word or PDF attachment. See below for manuscript formatting guidelines and information you should include in your e-mail message.
- In your cover letter (mailed with hard copy) and in your e-mail message (with electronic copy attached), include the following information: your manuscript title, name, mailing address, institutional affiliation, and phone number. Also indicate whether you are currently a member of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English (IATE). State that the manuscript has not been published or submitted elsewhere.
- Manuscript formatting guidelines: follow the current *MLA Handbook* guidelines for parenthetical in-text citations, the works cited section, and other technical elements; follow NCTE's "Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language"; place page numbers at the top right corner of every page; type and double-space throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and works cited), with one-inch margins all around.
- With both your paper and electronic manuscript submissions, please also include a biographical blurb of 50

words or fewer. (Blurbs for manuscripts with multiple authors should total 50 words or fewer.) Blurbs usually mention institutional and professional affiliations as well as teaching and research interests.

- The *Bulletin* editor will acknowledge receipt of your manuscript via e-mail.

Submission Deadlines

You are welcome to submit your materials at any time to the editor of the *Illinois English Bulletin*. Traditionally, the *Bulletin's* spring issue features shorter articles based on presentations made at the previous autumn's IATE annual conference. Summer issues may be themed or all-inclusive. The fall issue presents the "Best Illinois Student Poetry and Prose." The winter issue is the program for our annual IATE fall conference.

To be considered for inclusion in the spring issue, materials must be received by the editors by the previous November 1.

To be considered for inclusion in the summer issue, materials must be received by the editors by the previous January 15.

To be considered for inclusion in the fall issue ("Best Illinois Student Poetry and Prose"), materials must be submitted electronically through the IATE submission manager (iate.submittable.com/submit) by the previous January 31. Please see page 125 for the two-page special submission guidelines for fall issues. Please note that as of 2005, the poet laureate of Illinois will designate several of the poems selected for publication in the *Bulletin* as "Poems of Exceptional Merit." These poems will be identified in a message written by the poet laureate and published in this issue of the *Bulletin*. The

poets will receive a certificate from the poet laureate in the U.S. mail.

Editor's Contact Information

U.S. mail: Janice Neuleib, Editor

Illinois English Bulletin

Illinois State University

Campus Box 4240

Normal, IL 61790-4240

E-mail: jneuleib@ilstu.edu

Telephone: (309) 438-7858

**CALL FOR STUDENT WRITING FROM
ALL LEVELS FOR IATE'S BEST ILLINOIS
POETRY AND PROSE CONTEST**

DEADLINE: Submit all contest entries electronically through the IATE submission manager (iate.submittable.com/submit) no later than January 31, 2013.

FORMAT: Accepted file types include .doc, .docx, and .rtf.

COVER LETTER: The "Cover Letter" field must include:

- Full name of student
- Student's grade level at time piece was written
- Full name of school
- School's complete mailing address
- Full name of teacher (indicate if IATE member)
- E-mail address of instructor

IMPORTANT: The student's name, the school's name, and the teacher's name must not appear anywhere other than in the "Cover Letter" field.

LIMITS:

- 1) Five prose and ten poetry entries per teacher.
- 2) One thousand words of prose per entry; forty lines of poetry per entry.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FROM THE JUDGES:

- 1) Please see that students abide by the line and word limits. Have them revise and shorten pieces that exceed these limits.
- 2) Please emphasize to students that prose and fiction are not synonymous. Encourage them to explore the possibilities of expository essays, arguments, and personal narratives.

CONTEST COORDINATORS:

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Illinois Valley Community College
IATE Prose Contest

Robin L. Murray
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