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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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INTRODUCTION TO THE BEST ILLINOIS STUDENT POETRY AND PROSE OF 2010

JANICE NEULEIB

This year's poems and prose by young writers speaks in particularly poignant voices, as Kevin Stein's introduction so aptly illustrates. These young writers capture moments and memories for their readers, often leaving a hint of a tear. The poems take snapshots of experiences that not only capture the young poets' lives but that also recall for the reader life as it once may have been. The prose pieces especially touch on loss and challenges that the writers have either known or imagined. Again, the stories of a dying grandparent and a grieving parent, of a lost opportunity to excel, or of a demanding music teacher that forced excellence, and others like them show vividly how well these young writers handle both imagination and textual creation. As always, the *Bulletin* editor wishes to thank the teachers who have worked with these students and who have submitted their work for

judging. Heartfelt thanks from all of IATE go to Robin Murray, Poetry Coordinator, and to our new Prose Coordinator, Delores Robinson, for their commitment to all the students and teachers who write and read so diligently. Their work with the judging is an important and much appreciated contribution to IATE and to the students of Illinois. Finally, we all offer thanks to the judges who took the time and energy to read and evaluate the student work. They represent the best of IATE commitment to future writers.

In addition, thanks go to Kevin Stein, Illinois Poet Laureate, for his ongoing work with the judging of the poems receiving special mention for the year. Stein, an amazingly talented and generous poet, initiated this practice of selecting and noting poems each year. IATE expresses gratitude to Stein for his work and appreciation for his contributions to the State of Illinois and its writing community. His essay this year particularly highlights the students and their work but also gives a vivid insight to Stein's own view of the nature of poetry, an *ars poetica* essay.

We wish to thank and say goodbye to Sarah Haberstick, former production director for this journal, and welcome our new director, Steve Halle. Many thanks go to Steve for his work on this, his first issue. IATE appreciates the commitment of the Illinois State University English department and the university for providing such an outstanding and efficient director to implement the production of each issue of the *Bulletin*. Thanks also to the student interns for their tireless work with the close reading of the text of this issue.

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

Sarah Alsene	David Lange
Sarah E. Avallone	Karen LeMaistre
Amy Birtman	John Lodle
Angelique Burrell	Mark Maxwell
Amanda Coffey	Becky Mueller
Alexis Colianni	Simone Neal
Mara Dukats	Mindi Rench
Tarrie Dullum	Diane Riley
Judi Elman	Mike Rossi
Jared Friebe	Kate Sullivan
Carol Gallagher	Karen Topham
Heidi J. Hann	Jan Wiezorek
Tony Harris	Danny Wilson
Stephen B. Heller	Nell Wiseman
Christine Hicks	Amy Zimmermann
Cyn Koukos	

IATE POETRY RUNNERS-UP

Soizic Allain, "A Lone Dog-Un chien seul," Grade 8, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher

Kevin Doherty, "If You Give a Seal a Sundae," Grade 9, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Birtman–teacher

Kristen East, "Muse for Hire: Voyage," Grade 12, Rolling Meadows High School, Rolling Meadows, Mark Maxwell–teacher

Kenneth Keller, "Ode to Pencil," Grade 10, St. Ignatius College Prep, Chicago, Tony Harris–teacher

Caroline Kerr, "Yellow Bird," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Mara Dukats–teacher

Brianna Roy-Rankin, "Like Father, Like Son," Charleston High School, Charleston, Nell Wiseman–teacher

IATE POETRY HONORABLE MENTIONS

Emily Alcaraz, "Snow Angel," Grade 7, St. Matthias Transfiguration Catholic School, Chicago, Jan Wiezorek–teacher

Yosan Alemu, "The Battle," Grade 6, Monroe Middle School, Wheaton, Carol Gallagher–teacher

Maddie Baker, "The Game," Grade 9, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Birtman–teacher

Marney Grimes, "Pastorale," Grade 11, Oakland High School, Oakland, Amanda Coffey–teacher

Alyson Gwaltney, "Where I'm From," Grade 8, Marion Junior High School, Marion, Simone Neal–teacher

Stephanie Jones, "The Tree with the Tire Swing," Grade 12, Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale, Danny Wilson–teacher

Lizzy Kosin, "Flash," Grade 11, Lyons Township High School, LaGrange, Kate Sullivan–teacher

Ryan Mann, "My Grandma's Girdle," Grade 6, Marquette Academy, Ottawa, Sarah Alsene–teacher

Allison Penn, "Who Am I, You Ask," Grade 10, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Becky Mueller–teacher

Melanie Vo, "A Career, A Future," Grade 8, St. Matthias Transfiguration Catholic School, Chicago, Jan Wiezorek–teacher

Hannah Weil, "I'm Comfortable Here," Grade 12, Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale, Danny Wilson–teacher

LATE PROSE RUNNERS-UP

Billy Bauder, "On Hot Pursuit," Grade 9, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Birtman–teacher

Hannah Borowitz, "Social Acceptance," Grade 10, Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale, Tarrie Dullum–teacher

Meredith Christian, "Purple is Everywhere," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Jared Friebe–teacher

Claire Dunderman, "Clause and Effect," Grade 12, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Alexis Colianni–teacher

Gemma Groch, "The Evolution of My Father," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Jared Friebe–teacher

Lindsay Hansard, "Unanswered Questions," Grade 12, Belleville West High School, Belleville, John Lodle–teacher

Ashley Hollenbeck, "Online Privacy," Grade 8, Marquette Academy, Ottawa, Sarah Alsene–teacher

Arianna Kiriakos, "Sometimes When You Look Around, You Forget to See," Grade 10, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Mara Dukats–teacher

Divya Kirti, "Don't Freak Out, But I've Got Three Kids in My Backpack" (a response to Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried"), Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Christine Hicks–teacher

Jane Merker, "Telegram," Grade 11, Lyons Township High School, LaGrange, Kate Sullivan–teacher

Peter Winston Michalak, "Maniac Magee: Oblivious yet Awesome," Grade 6, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher

Mahum A. Mirza, "Facebook Motto: With Great Positives Come Great Negatives," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, David Lange—teacher

Liam Montmorency, "Algorithm," Grade 10, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Judi Elman—teacher

Jori Richman, "Observe," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Karen Topham—teacher

Chloe Sacks, "Me Versus We," Grade 12, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Judi Elman—teacher

Elizabeth Ann Shaw, "Learning How to Talk," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, David Lange—teacher

Elise Terlato, "Tending the Vines," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Zimmermann—teacher

Grace Walsh, "A Chance Conversation," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Jared Friebe—teacher

Laura Wenzel, "Untitled," Grade 8, Marquette Academy, Ottawa, Sarah Alsene—teacher

LATE PROSE HONORABLE MENTIONS

Kate Appelbaum, "Now Boarding," Grade 12, Neuqua Valley High School, Naperville, Mike Rossi-teacher

Anna Bleck, "Bee or Firefly?" Grade 9, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Birtman-teacher

Samantha Driemeier, "Bacon and Bands: An Emobeans Tale," Grade 12, Belleville West High School, Belleville, John Lodle-teacher

Andrew Figueroa, "My First Trip to Crystal Lake," Grade 8, St. Matthias Transfiguration Catholic School, Chicago, Jan Wiezorek-teacher

Natasha Galperin, "What is Fear," Grade 10, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Judi Elman-teacher

Andrew Holowka, "My Favorite Place," Grade 8, St. Matthias Transfiguration Catholic School, Chicago, Jan Wiezorek-teacher

Jack Henry Kelly, "The Boy Who Cried Dirt," Grade 12, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Angelique Burrell-teacher

Taskeen Khan, "Together We Can," Grade 7, Hadley Junior High School, Glen Ellyn, Heidi J. Hann-teacher

Tempest Kipp-Evans, "A Trip to Remember," Grade 10, Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale, Tarrie Dullum-teacher

Jori Richman, "The Flood," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Karen Topham-teacher

Andleyn Russel, "My Own Invitation," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Stephen B. Heller-teacher

Alexis Schad, "Shelter," Grade 11, O'Fallon Township High School, O'Fallon, Diane Riley-teacher

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

Rachel Sisk, "Leafy Wonderland," Grade 10, Carbondale Community High School, Carbondale, Tarrie Dullum–teacher

Drew Swisher, "Procrastination," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Zimmermann–teacher

Claire Walker, "First Fig, First Friend," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Christine Hicks–teacher

Kevin White, "Peaceful Paradise," Grade 11, O'Fallon Township High School, O'Fallon, Diane Riley–teacher

POET AS GUIDE AND TRAVELER

KEVIN STEIN

ILLINOIS POET LAUREATE

When I rang the bell, my niece's three-year-old daughter met me at the door, plush-stuffed penguin crooking her arm. She took my hand in hers. It was Wednesday, hump of the week, bland as Sunday's warmed-up mashed potatoes—the morning headed into and out of, the long middle of a trip one sleeps through if lucky, a thing to be looked past. To Mia, it was anything but. Today was everything there is and all that might be. It *is* present tense, noon clouds sculpting an elephant prancing on a mushroom's tilted cap. If I'd look, I'd see.

Mia gave me a tour of her room, her house, her mind—each space more capacious than the last. Nothing hid too small for her attention or loomed too large for her embrace. Each room offered limitless treasure we two could never exhaust: here, dust bunnies and Dr. Seuss; there, magenta dolphins swimming sunlight slanted through the window's billowing curtains.

She was my guide, I her fortunate traveler.

Poets aspire to a realm of wonder not unlike that which Mia inhabits by grace of her youth. The farther removed by age from this state of wonder, the farther poets have to travel to reconnect to it. Youth poets straddle this line, one foot still planted in the land of awe and the other grounded in irony's terrain. Some admit me to realms I have overlooked; others map a favorite spot for which I've lost the path. In the process youth poets achieve what all good poets do—they fashion the familiar suddenly exotic, and the exotic intimately familiar.

They take my hand in theirs and off we go—to where I'm not sure and for what purpose, who cares? It's a jaunt we're on together, the way Frost in "The Pasture" entices his readers to join him as he clears the field's clotted stream, coyly cajoling, "You come too" (1). In this way the solitary act of writing shakes hands with the solitary act of reading, poet and reader making of both a paradoxically communal event.

Speaking and listening, writing and reading, hearing and seeing—these erect the elemental framework of literary community in which two become one. The merging itself is necessarily fitful and momentary. Then, surely enough, we find ourselves alone again. This time, however, we awaken amid a locale transformed by our going there together *and* by our being here alone. Dean Young describes this poetic effect in his *The Art of Recklessness*: "The continuous necessity and obligation are to reconnect, to break through detachment and its numbing alienations back to the fundamental synaptic mad hopping hope, the life of poetry, its primal surge, where we truly begin again and again" (166).

That's why, after reading a good poem, we feel simultaneously connected to the world and alone in it. This is the residue of ecstatic experience—the buzz and its hangover, the lightning and its sudden-after black. In its Greek root, *ecstasy*

means to be transported, and thus to stand outside of oneself as result. Even one's too-familiar face seems strange, freshened thus fresh if not new. In the ecstatic moment's sprawling wake, all logic bobs up and down, unmoored and unwelcome and unsatisfying. That is the work of a work of art.

Among this year's splendid winning poems, several invoke this aspect of poetic travel, especially the works noted here as 2011 Poems of Special Merit. Margaret Young's "Six" begins the journey, leading readers back to their own youthful Christmas eagerness and exhilaration. Young, at the ripe age of an eighth grader, achieves remarkable detachment from the child she was (and hopefully partly still is). Her speaker revels in the mystery and emotional frenzy felt when sneaking a peek at Santa's deliveries: "Drooling, I tear a little at the paper." She compulsively repeats, "I was six," her refrain brimming with wonder and its past tense "was" hinting at coming adulthood. While the speaker celebrates Cinderella Barbie's allure for her six-year-old self, she simultaneously recognizes it as quaintly fantastic when viewed from her current vantage as a teenager.

A similar sense of being older than one's years permeates Sarah Comar's "The Legacy." Her speaker focuses on a house's "[l]ittle notes. / Eerie sounds" that gain profound significance once a loved one who lived there has passed. These notes stand in for the voice of the lost, tonguing the song of a voice that "once belonged to a mouth." For her speaker, that home, once so comforting, now shudders with the unnerving voice of absence. She hears in its creaking the "sweet melody of death," something both sweet and decidedly not. For her, a space once so familiar now clatters exotic.

The speaker of Lucy Edwards's "Poverty" also ponders an altered sense of what *home* means in the context of modern society. After late-night work, she drives her usual route home

upon streets she thinks she knows well. Hers is the kind of drive taken zombielike, the body going through the physical motions while her mind wanders the waves of radio tunes. Tired after a night's labor, the speaker might well be forgiven for being tuned out, oblivious to all but the magnetic pull of her bed covers yanked up under her chin. But as Dean Young suggests, the best poems "break through detachment and its numbing alienations" (166), and here the speaker comes to "recognize" a homeless man as her brother human. His eyes and hers link, and she sees through them. Her act of seeing binds two beings in momentary community.

The final two Poems of Special Merit engage physical landscapes in ways that the previous poems explore emotional geography. The first presents a cityscape in which the natural seems foreign. Tannaz Pourboghra's poem features every child's favorite "flower"—"Dandelions"—whose bloom adults consider merely a detestable weed. Planted by a young girl's blowing its "cotton-white / seeds," the dandelion raises its triumphant head from a New York sidewalk crack. The speaker's personifying the dandelion as "stubborn" and "striving" lends it qualities not unlike those imagined for the solitary figure walking the late-night street of Edwards's "Poverty." Both figures, if noticed at all by the populace, appear unwanted, shunned, and disdained. Too easily they are dismissed as trash fit to be tossed away then forgotten. Not so fast, this poet cautions. She implicitly conjoins the human and the natural, imploring her readers to reconnect themselves to their fellows.

Instead of tracing nature in an urban scene, Jane Merker's "An Abundance of Frogs" sets out on the trail of the human within the natural world. Curiously, the poem is catalyzed by the presence of absence, by what's not there—the human. Perhaps it's better to talk not of human absence but of

human immersion in the bucolic landscape, for the poem offers a litany of signs that “allude” to a child’s escape from her “house” into an idyllic environment. The speaker’s musing offers “signs” of rapturous journey, a path from the mundane to ecstatic reverie brought on by amphibian symphony:

But there was an abundance of frogs,
 of frogs,
 of frogs,
 but there was an abundance of frogs.

Within the poem, these lovely, emphatic repetitions echo the frogs’ exuberant songs, evoking joy and bottomless yearning. They sound a call for connection and proffer proof of its possibility.

Arguably, poetry’s fundamental impulse is to lead poet and reader to “reconnect” to what sustains us. How, though, is the poet to serve as both guide and traveler? Ah, there’s the rub. For that to happen, the poet herself must be transported, and yet she must enact as well her readers’ transportation. Doing so invites (as well as requires) the poet to reside simultaneously in wonder and discovery, in unknowing and knowing, in questing and arrival—valuing each in equal measure.

Congratulations to all of this year’s IATE-winning poets for aspiring to do just that.

Works Cited

- Frost, Robert. *The Poems of Robert Frost*. New York: Holt, 1969. Print.
- Young, Dean. *The Art of Recklessness: Poetry As Assertive Force and Contradiction*. Minneapolis: Graywolf, 2010. Print.

Poems of Special Merit
2010–2011 IATE Poetry Competition

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

“The Legacy,” Sarah Comar, Grade 7, Northbrook Junior
High School

“Poverty,” Lucy Edwards, Grade 9, Lake Forest High
School

“An Abundance of Frogs,” Jane Merker, Grade 11, Lyons
Township High School

“Dandelions,” Tannaz Pourboghra, Grade 12, Carbon-
dale Community High School

“Six,” Margaret Young, Grade 8, Lycée Français de
Chicago

Congratulations to these students and their teachers.

ILLINOIS POETRY 2010

ROBIN L. MURRAY

Each year students from across Illinois submit their poetry and prose for consideration by the *Illinois English Bulletin* editorial staff. And each year, readers receive a broad spectrum of submissions, sometimes ranging from Chicago to Carbondale and from third through twelfth grades. This year is no exception. We received a plethora of fantastic poetry from students in grades six through twelve and in schools across the state—both the Chicago area and the larger “downstate” area. The poetry certainly represents Illinois because it includes writing from students in a variety of Illinois schools. It also represents Illinois because it so aptly illustrates Illinois as a particular Midwestern state with both urban and rural influence on its residents.

The work of Vachel Lindsay and Carl Sandburg demonstrates this dual-mindedness of Illinois. Students from either Chicago or its suburbs or from more rural communities in

Central or Southern Illinois are rooted in a sense of place, and that sense of place influences these students' poetry.

In rural areas, a determined pioneer spirit still underpins community members' sense of themselves and their homes, for example. Students from small town schools in Central and Southern Illinois maintain connections with families whose ancestors tamed a grassland wilderness, remaking two million acres of prairie into one of the world's most agriculturally productive landscapes. Jane Merker's "An Abundance of Frogs," Tannaz Pourboghra's "Dandelions," Holly Antonik's "When Shadows Creep," and Jessica Yin's "Forbidden Snow" draw on this sense of place as situated in and with the natural world.

In the Chicago area, the influence of hardworking immigrant cultures lingers, connecting city citizens to Carl Sandburg's view of Chicago as the City of the Big Shoulders:

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders (Sandburg)

Students from the Chicago area attempt to define themselves as individuals, writing to capture a sense of self, but they also respond to the urban life around them, with its both positive and negative consequences. Sarah Comar's "The Legacy," Lucy Edwards' "Poverty," and Margaret Young's "Six" highlight this more individualized view of humanity as part of a perhaps more urban culture.

All of these poems, like the poetry of earlier "Modern" Illinois poets, "when studied with care and an avoidance of either sentimentalized myth or exploitative, abstracted homogenization provide a way into our country's landscapes,

rural and urban, where [as Illinois writer John Knoepfle explains] 'there are some like figures / on a cave wall' Those figures have known these places before us, and when we see with greater complexity the range of their responses to our region and to modern life, it may indeed 'teach us and we change'" (Wright 227).

Works Cited

- Knoepfle, John. "Vachel Lindsay's Springfield Home." *Poems from the Sangamon*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985. Print.
- Sandburg, Carl. "Chicago." *Carl Sandburg Chicago Poems*. Andy Barr Productions, 1998. Web. 16 Aug. 2011.
- Wright, David. "Modernism and Region: Illinois Poetry and the Modern." *The Midwest Quarterly* 34.2 (1998). 215-227. Print.

WHERE SHADOWS CREEP

The deep, weary ghosts creep
upon others of their kind and the small window
of light, burning the darkness away like
the fire atop of the twisted arms of the forest floor.

Monsters find their prey among
the moss-covered prisons
that rocks so passionately despise
while hoping to be free.

The rushing, watery graves surround them
while trying not to be touched
by the forest monsters who wall in
the bank of the woodland creek at sunset.

Keeping everyone in their hiding places
where they are not to be seen,
they couldn't wait for their punishments.

The predators so cold, they move
from side to side with their wicked laughter
watching as wet liquid
encases their victims' cracked, dry, hard skin in icy drops.

With green, red, and orange
umbrellas covering their distorted hands,
the deep shadows move away.

The groundlings, who hope not to see
the deep shadows again,
try not to become deep shadows as they grow.

Holly Antonik

Grade 6

Monroe Middle School

Wheaton

Carol Gallagher, teacher

THE LEGACY

Her voice once belonged to a mouth.
It never finished singing its song.

Now her voice lingers
in the halls of the house
while the sweet melody of death
accompanies it.

Little notes.
Eerie sounds.

She sings perpetually in our midst.

The windows shudder like the frightened child.
The faint song stings like the winter wind.

The animated voice carries on.
Her song is never ending.

A song never dies with a person.

Her voice lives
in the halls of the house
while the sweet melody of death
accompanies it.

Sarah Comar

Grade 7

Northbrook Junior High School

Northbrook

Mindi Rench, teacher

POVERTY

I listen to the radio
So late, nearly two in the morning
In my car gazing out the window
Returning home from work

When I recognize a man. Alone.
Dragging his feet along the street.
He begs for money

He wears a big, white, dirty shirt
With a soup can in hand
His beard the color of dirty snow
With drooping eyes

I wonder if he could, would he steal my car?
But he's too weak
He wouldn't be able to run away.
Poor man.

He drags his feet even slower now
I watch his eyes through the darkness
They pierce through

Such depression, that for a second
Family, food, warmth
Doesn't enter his mind

Sadness. You don't realize
the extreme. But it is on my mind every day.

Lucy Edwards
Grade 9

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Amy Birtman, teacher

AN ABUNDANCE OF FROGS

Perhaps
the shadow across the lawn
would allude you
to some sort of conclusion
following the scattered popsicle sticks
around the maple tree
and back to my house where
the "Piggy-wig stood
with a ring at the end of his nose"?
Or maybe the flight of the robin
weaving spirals in the sky
will point out the branches where
the two monkeys chortled
and shorts got stuck
on dull stubs
and laughter echoed for days?
Maybe the sprinkled bread crumbs
with hints of peanut butter and
grape jelly, trailing into the forest
with no acknowledgement of the geese
and the caterpillar and the buck,
bounding away at the loudness,
and apple juice spilled on the dead ground?
But there was an abundance of frogs
 of frogs,
 of frogs,
but there was an abundance of frogs.

Works Cited

Lear, Edward. "The Owl and the Pussycat." *Edward Lear Home Page*. Web. 16 Aug. 2011.

Jane Merker

Grade 11

Lyons Township High School

LaGrange

Kate Sullivan, teacher

DANDELIONS

Bright and exhilarant
yellow weeds poke
out of a
sidewalk crack on
a busy street
in New York.
Planted by
a simple
blow of the
cotton-white
seeds,
by a little
girl who
believes it's
a beautiful flower,
plucking it from
the wet grass
and making
a wish.
Unwanted in
the city,
a woman in
high heels kneels
down to grab
it, tossing
the stubborn, striving
plant into one
of many
silver cans.

Tannaz Pourboghra
Grade 12

Carbondale Community High School

Carbondale

Danny Wilson, teacher

FORBIDDEN SNOW

A lover's blush across the heavens spread,
Timid sun creeps shyly out of bed
Like twisted dancers frozen branches sway
To welcome morning light, chase night away
Misty breath, a chilling whisper kiss
Silver sighs as Ceres's daughter miss
Nature's grace, a butterfly in flight
Tiny falling angels fill my sight
Floating, drifting, lightly sparkling wings
Fairy dust bare Earth sweet peace it brings
Like rose towards sun, my petals slowly reach
Begging freedom, barriers now breach
Vision clouds, my soul the window fog
Foul glass, alas, forbidden Eden block.

Jessica Yin

Grade 10

Libertyville High School

Libertyville

Karen LeMaistre, teacher

SIX

Tiptoeing down the stairs on
Christmas Eve, *needing*
a glass of water
and maybe...

Out of the corner of my eye,
a shimmer coming from the hall closet,
the ajar door invites me:
all my presents!
I was six.

Checking the tags twice, signed by
Santa Claus himself,
carefully picking a rectangular box
holding it to my ear, I
shook it.
Guessing—
Could it be?
Cinderella Barbie?
I was six.

Cinderella Barbie with long, golden locks
tied neatly up in a bun,
The most elegant jewelry—
coated with diamonds, rubies, and sapphires—
and a beautiful, light blue gown
she could wear at the Prince's ball?!
Drooling, I tear a little at the paper.
I was six.

Hearing a creak inside the kitchen and faint moan,
I sprint up to my bed

holding tightly onto Teddy.
I pray that I will fall fast asleep,
and *Cinderella* will be waiting for me in
the morning, not replaced
by coal...
I hide under the covers,
six.

Margaret Young

Grade 8

Lycée Français de Chicago

Chicago

Cyn Koukos, teacher

ILLINOIS PROSE 2010

DELORES R. ROBINSON

Stephen King's 2000 publication *On Writing* is a primer on the basics of good writing and also a memoir of his development as a reader and writer. In it, he pays homage to the people and experiences that shaped him and, by default, shaped his fictional worlds. He recognizes the inextricable bond between teachers and learners and the imaginative places they create and share on the page. Teachers instill the skills students need to make their writing clear, but it is then up to the student to develop his or her voice and individual style. As King writes, "At its most basic, [writing is] only...a learned skill, but do we not agree that sometimes the most basic skills can create things far beyond our expectations? We are talking about tools and carpentry, about words and

style...but...you'd do well to remember that we are also talking about magic" (131).

And so we must thank the many Illinois teachers who have shared their students' magic with us. As one of 2011's youngest prose writers, Peter Winston Michalak, recognizes in his literary analysis of the award-winning adolescent novel *Maniac Magee*, the best stories have "a character that people can smile at," and the judges, indeed, enjoyed the thought-provoking, sometimes funny, sometimes sad, but always interesting voices and worlds brought magically to life by this year's students of writing.

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

Mark Brown
Lori Cinotte
Tara Coburn
Kaushalya Jagasia
Nora Lethiot
Kirk D. Lockwood
Adam Oldaker
Kimberly M. Radek
Randy Rambo

Work Cited

King, Stephen. *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000. Print.

21.5*
(AN ADDENDUM TO JERRY SPINELLI'S CHAPTER 21
IN *MANIAC MAGEE*)

For about a month after Jeffrey Maniac Magee left the East End of Two Mills, Amanda Beale did nothing. She resented everyone in the East End, everyone who chased Jeffrey away and everyone in the black community who watched and did nothing for the white boy who lived with Amanda and her black family. She hated herself; she hated Mars Bar, who taunted Jeffrey. She hated the old coot, who begrudged Jeffrey and sent him to his "own kind" in the West End.

She cried every night, not only for Maniac, but also for her *Encyclopedia A* and for herself. She moved back into her bedroom where Maniac had stayed, but it reminded her too much of Jeffrey. Even when the hot sun shined in during the day, the world felt cold and bleak.

Until school would resume in September, Amanda considered herself lost, dead, and gone. She neither played anymore with the neighborhood kids, nor with her siblings Hester and Lester, and not even with the family dog Bow-Wow. She spent the days in her room with the shades drawn, curled up under the covers and reading every book from her library over and over, by the little light that seeped in from the outside world.

* Amanda Beale had attempted to make the black community accept her white friend, Jeffrey Magee, by winning the Cobble's Knot Contest. Having won the contest, Amanda and Jeffrey rejoiced until they noticed the confetti raining down happened to be pages from her beloved *Encyclopedia A*. Mars Bar was responsible for its destruction because he was jealous of Jeffrey and Jeffrey's acceptance within the black community. Shortly afterwards, Jeffrey ran away for good to protect the Beales from further aggression.

At night she'd eat half of her dinner; Mrs. Beale still made too much food now that Maniac left. Amanda remained mute because this time she knew Maniac would not come back to the Beale home. She would not speak a word to anyone, not even to Mrs. Beale. She would only shrug, nod, or shake her head in communicating. She completely forgot what her own voice sounded like. She had no feelings except for sadness.

Then, slowly she began to resent Jeffrey. After all, *he* had left *them!* *He* could have been braver and could have withstood everyone's horrible commentary and actions. *He* could have believed and realized that she and her family loved him, anyways. But, *he* was a coward! She would *not* welcome home a coward. Not anymore!

It was a regular day, at least for Amanda. For breakfast she had eaten a piece of toast and a glass of milk. For lunch she had eaten half of a PB and J sandwich. She lay across her bed as usual having just finished reading *A Wrinkle in Time* for the third time. It was now four in the afternoon when Mrs. Beale cautiously entered Amanda's room after having baked cookies for Hester and Lester. She was brimming with a big secret.

"Amanda?" she asked quietly.

Amanda glanced up from her new book, *Little Women*. Her eyes asked, *Yes?*

Mrs. Beale responded, "Your father and I—We have a surprise for you!"

What? said her skeptical eyes.

Mrs. Beale smuggled a smile. "We are getting you a new *Encyclopedia A.*"

No tone appeared for her voice; all emotions were suppressed. Next, her mouth made a large "O," then closed, and the widest grin reappeared on her face. It was an immortal

smile that flashed across Amanda's face. It had been the widest grin her mother had ever seen her make. At least she would have it for comfort.

Magdalena Anderson

Grade 6

Lycée Français de Chicago

Chicago

Cyn Koukos, teacher

THE MODERNIZATION OF *ROMEO AND JULIET*
ACT 2, SCENE 3: THE BALCONY SCENE—LINES 49–85

Characters:

Juliet Capulet—a dreamy and lovely teen

Romeo Montague—a spying and loving youth

Setting:

In the streets of Los Angeles. Outside the first floor window of a luxurious apartment. A young teenage girl is standing alone by her bedroom window without knowing she is being watched. Romeo has been eavesdropping on Juliet as she talks out loud to herself.

Romeo: *(Stepping out from behind a garbage dumpster after hearing Juliet repeating his name with disappointment.)* Yo, what's up, Juliet? I have been listening to you, and if I heard what you said correctly, you want me to change my name... That's cool. I will never be Romeo.

Juliet: Who's there? Show yourself!

Romeo: Sorry beautiful. I cannot tell you my name because that name is your enemy. If I could type it on a computer, I would break the computer! Well...except if it's the new Mac that just came out. It's awesome!!!

Juliet: *(Intrigued with the thought of it really being Romeo, but still questioning his voice, a tad.)* I've heard that voice before—Aren't you Romeo, Romeo Montague?

Romeo: Negative! *(He jumps for the window and is an inch from Juliet's face.)*

Juliet: *(Slightly backing away from the quick move.)* Be careful! You almost knocked me out. Leave! If anyone sees you here, you're dead meat!

Romeo: Even if they find me here, I wouldn't care because at least I would be with you.

Juliet: (*Scared for his safety.*) They'll kill you!

Romeo: (*With dreamy voice.*) I'm not afraid of *them*; I'm only afraid of your rejection.

Juliet: (*Flattered.*) No, of course, I don't reject you! I just hope they won't find you here.

Romeo: (*A bit cocky.*) They won't see me in the dark. DUH!

Juliet: (*Wondering why she didn't think to ask this earlier.*) How did you know I lived here?

Romeo: I googled you. And by the way, I was wondering... is your name *GOOGLE*?

Juliet: (*Laughingly.*) No, why?

Romeo: Because you are everything I'm *searching* for.

Juliet: Awwwww...

(*And before she can finish her sigh, he makes his move and sweeps in for a quick kiss.*)

Wallerand Bazin

Grade 7

Lycée Français de Chicago

Chicago

Cyn Koukos, teacher

GENERATION TO DEGENERATION

As I turned the corner, I saw a woman who I had never seen before. For a moment time froze. I was not prepared for this. She needed a walker just to move across the room to greet us. She moved slowly, each step a struggle for her hunched-over body. Her wrinkled skin was almost sagging off her bones. November 14th, 2010 will be a day I never forget. When I opened the door to room 417 for the first time since her fall, I expected to find her the same as before. I had been informed of her injuries and their severity, but the image in my mind still portrayed her as the last time I had visited. I expected to find my old Nana, whom I had grown to know and love, but was instead greeted by this impostor.

Prior to her accident, my grandma, Elizabeth Carver Mason, was resilient. When my mom was a junior in college, my grandma was diagnosed with lupus. Lupus is an autoimmune disease. In addition, this past spring she began her battle with breast cancer. Due to her lupus she was unable to enter radiation treatment. Consequently, my grandma never lost her hair. If you saw her, you would not even have guessed she was sick.

I remember my grandma like this: strong, brave, adventurous. These memories are quickly crumbling with the realization that she no longer fits this description. These memories are tarnished with recent observations of frailty.

We all took our seats in the dining room. It was full of elderly people, more than I had seen in a very long while. I used to come visit and think how everyone looked so much worse than she did. Now she fit right in. As we returned from the buffet, our china plates filled with omelets, fruit, and ham, a common question arose: what did we want for Christmas? My mom immediately shot a glance at Nana.

"Mom we went over this. I told you what they all wanted. Twice."

"We most certainly have not."

As my Nana denied my mother's claim, I saw that Nana actually did not remember and the realization that she never would.

My grandma always gave odd-but-extravagant Christmas gifts.

Sixth Grade: A pair of clay cat earrings

Seventh Grade: A necklace pendent of an oriental child's face

Eighth Grade: A ring set with my birthstone

Ninth Grade: An eye-lit dress she had gotten for me from Italy

Tenth Grade: A red wallet for carrying my soon-to-be-acquired driver's license

Now, I am left wondering what I will get this year. How will she remember to find me a gift if she cannot even remember simple conversations?

My grandma and I were not closer than most teenagers are with their grandparents. She only lived about thirty minutes away, yet I only really saw her for major holidays or special events. I was always too busy to talk on the phone about school or sports or friends. I mean, I could talk to her anytime, but it always seemed as if the homework or project that was due the next day took priority.

My Nana's friends came over to our table. They causally struck up conversation, and my Nana began to introduce us, her grandchildren. I was sitting to her left, and before she began, she paused. Her eyes searched my face for a moment.

"And this is my granddaughter, um..."

"Madeline, Mom," my mother worryingly interjected after a few seconds hesitation.

"Yes, of course. Madeline."

About a month ago, while walking down the hall, my grandma stubbed her toe. As insignificant as that might sound, it was all too serious for a woman of her condition. She fell, messing up her back, fracturing her hip, damaging her brain.

My grandma's doctors informed my mother that often times dementia, a disorder regarding memory loss, could be caused by such an event. This was what was happening to my Nana; I just never expected her condition to diminish so quickly.

I had never felt so exhausted from eating and completely unprepared for what was to happen next. One small complaint about dinner in the car ride home was enough to set my mother off.

"Would you stop complaining about your life for five seconds! What do you not understand? My mother is dying!"

Just like that all the sadness that she had been suppressing overcame her. Her eyes began gushing with tears, leaving salt-stained trails down her cheeks. Unable to see the road, she pulled the car over to the shoulder. She regained her composure. No one uttered a word. The only noise was the clicking of the blinker.

There is something so unnatural about seeing a parent cry. They are supposed to be the strong ones, right? They are meant to take care of their children and tell them everything is going to be all right, not the other way around. My mom, the invincible woman who does everything for me, was cracking under the circumstances. I did not know what to say.

I can only imagine what has been running through my mom's thoughts these past few weeks. All the things she wishes she had done differently and all the things she still wants to do before it is too late. I wonder why my mom and I are still getting in fights even after my grandma's accident. Why am I not nicer to my mom after everything that has happened? What is it going to take? If the slow deterioration of my grandma is not enough to cause a change in our relationship, I doubt anything ever will be.

I would like to say that I apologized right then and there for being a lousy kid, but to tell the truth, I did not. I did not say anything, neither of us did. Instead, I turned on the radio and let the music drown out the silence.

Madeline Beja

Grade 11

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

David Lange, teacher

LOOKING INTO THE PAST

“Every breath you take. Every move you make...” The Police’s smash hit thumps rapidly from an 80’s cassette player in a dark bedroom. I can vividly picture my mom and aunt singing along and dancing to the song as teenagers. One of the salient memories my mom has shared of her deceased sister holds a distinct place in my mind and captivates my thoughts every time I hear the song.

Now, as I listen to the ever-popular hit on my iPod, the pace of my thoughts varies directly to the beat. I stare down at an antique table, across a collection of worn-out photographs. My gaze falls upon a porcelain doll face, complete with two gleaming eyes and a delicate nose. The mouth is shaped into a wide smile I recognize all too well. My mom looks down proudly at a face peeping from a colorful bundle resting in her arms. Mom territorially holds Sonya *Masi* close to her young frame, admiring her newborn sister’s silk features. Roses and marigolds surround the sisters, unleashing scarlet reds, magentas, and golden yellows into the renowned heat of Indian summer. Alongside the brilliant colors of the garden stands a chocolate brown trunk with coral-colored leaves and vibrant green mangoes. The tree thrives in its youthfulness.

The upbeat scene in the picture contrasts with the somber tone of the stories my mom often tells of her past relationship with her sister. I remember a particular car ride to school in which Sonya *Masi* came up in the midst of a discussion. My mom, at the time, was telling me off for “bullying” my younger sister. I can still envision Mom turning to me with disheartened eyes and saying with more than a hint of remorse, “You know, Annika, I used to bully Sonya so much.” Mom’s grief is fresh in my mind as my hands, magnets surrounded by metal, fall upon another photograph, this one slightly frayed.

Charcoal clouds loom above the cool blues and greens of the ocean. Mom and Sonya *Masi* stand apart from each other; their body structures are almost identical. Mom's face is crinkled into a scornful expression, her hands on her cheeks in a mocking gesture. Her teasing attitude is directed at her younger sister as water splashes from beneath her kicking foot. Sonya *Masi* stands opposite Mom; her dark eyes sparkle as they look up at mom with fondness. The sisters' dark hair blows in the breeze parallel to the ocean's surface. Mom's long, pin-straight hair flows freely from the back of her head. Sonya *Masi*'s short, curled locks curve around to the front of her face, towards mom. In the distance, large foams of white muster, threatening a high tide. I turn the photo over to find scrawny black etchings that read "*Karishma, age 11, and Sonya, age 7, Goa 1979.*"

Like the ocean's tides, going to and fro, my mind drifts back to the car ride with Mom.

"Your Sonya *Masi* was a truly selfless person. Although I teased her, she continued to admire me as her older sister." Mom's tone was full of melancholy, her eyes were moist, and her face gloomy...fresh in my mind and almost coming to life in a photo that now catches my eye. The background of the photo is mostly a blur of reds and pinks, yet I can make out a familiar chocolate-brown tree. The once-sturdy plant now droops, weak and grey. The branches curve downward; coral leaves and vibrant mangos are nowhere to be found. The focus of the photo, however, is a close up of the sisters. Mom looks stunning; her sharp facial features have matured beautifully. Gold jewelry hanging from her ears and neck catches light in various angles. Her colorful wedding garb complements her fair skin and dark features. Yet tears occupy the shadows beneath mom's eyes, which are full of realization and grief. Mom's eyes stare right into those of Sonya *Masi*. I look over

Masi's now-familiar face. Her tear-encompassed eyes are a carbon copy of Mom's. *Masi's* naturally beautiful features are highlighted by a sheer golden sari. The sisters sentimentally gaze into each other's eyes as if wishing time would stand still, as if they would never be able to look into each other's eyes again.

I flip the photo over: "*August 26, 1993, Karishma's wedding.*"

I clutch the photo, subconsciously piecing together its frayed edges, and eagerly try to remember as much as I can. After her wedding, my mother moved to Bombay with my dad. Sonya *Masi* stayed in New Delhi, where the sisters had grown up. *Masi* died on May 13, 1994. My mind instinctively recollects the remainder of the car ride.

"After my marriage, your *Masi* and I rarely talked; whenever we did, we ended up in fights. One day, I got a call from the hospital in Delhi saying that Sonya had been in a car crash. I still remember my last words before she died, 'Good. I hope she learns a lesson and breaks a bone or two.'" Mom's words trembled as she forced them out.

"Annika!" My memories reclaim a spot in the back of my mind as I hear a familiar voice. I turn around to look at my younger sister. Her sparkling brown eyes are the same as mine, her hair a shade darker. Her smile extends up to her nostrils as she affectionately calls my name. As I gaze into her eyes, a thick mahogany tree trunk catches my attention through the parallel window. The sturdy-but-aged tree hosts coral petals and budding fruit, the same way it had in its youth.

Saisha Chadha

Grade 10

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Mara Dukats, teacher

WILD THINGS

And twenty-seven years later Max was still a wild thing. Although since his mother had burned up in the car accident he was trying to be more relaxed. That's what the pills were for. Now he took two every morning—one for the ADHD and another for the depression. At night he had three: the same two from the morning and then another to help him sleep. He always took all three at the same time, chasing them with a cool glass of water, the liquid racing the hard objects to his stomach. He could take them dry if he wanted to. Sometimes, forgetting to fill a glass before he ascended the stairs, he had no choice but to. He could feel them going down, the lack of water slowing their descent. His mother used to cut the pill (just one then) into tiny pieces and slip them into his applesauce at breakfast.

That morning there was no applesauce to be found. Max opened his eyes to find that he had awoken in the forest again. The sun shone silently between the branches, its rays piercing Max's irises. He cursed before picking himself up, rubbing the dirt off his flannel pajamas. The past night's events ran through his head: turning off the television, taking the pills (no water this time), and drifting into sleep. It was always the same; he never remembered the journey into the woods. A sudden wave of nausea swept over him, and he scrambled towards a collection of vegetation before vomiting.

It was a half mile or so back to the house, and having no sense of the time he hurried back. He always drew glances crossing the major intersection. This morning a particularly interested child waved from the backseat of her family's minivan, clutching a plush monster at her side, her drool running down the tinted van window. Max jogged the length of the street, the hard cement scratching the bottoms of his bare feet.

Pacing up to the driveway he saw that his neighbor's car was already gone. He was late. He rushed through the unlocked front door and took the stairs two at a time. His work clothes were already set out, and he fastened the final button on his shirt as he walked out the door.

Arriving home he was greeted by a deer standing alert on his front lawn, its ebony eyes reflecting the starless sky. He got out of his car slowly, careful not to frighten the animal. He tiptoed towards the creature, its eyes suddenly meeting his. Max reached out to touch it, but it darted away, leaping over the picket fence and into the vastness of the night. The fur of the animal caught a gleam of moonbeam, illuminating its sleek build as it disappeared forever. Max stood still for a few passing moments waiting for the deer to return, knowing that it never would.

Max slid into his house and slumped onto the couch, flicking on the television. The web of pixels strung together an image of animals on the Savannah. One group of animals was attacking the other group, eventually dining on its members. Max watched enthralled as the animals tore into the flesh of the other creatures. His vision became cloudy as his mind slipped into sleep. His pills sat on the counter untouched, as the stripped bones of the animals burned under the hot African sun.

Max dreamed about his mother that night. She wore a wolf suit, her frazzled hair peeking out from beneath the hood. She walked with him through the thick forest. Max was afraid at first, but his mother's voice eventually calmed him. They reached a glistening lake of applesauce. Golden waves with cinnamon troughs rolled toward the auburn beach. A thin wooden boat waited for them at the end of a dock. After Max carefully climbed into the structure his mother pushed

him into the depths of the waves, their cold touch sending a shiver up Max's spine. As he swirled around in the sauce his mother whispered softly, "Stay away from the monsters Max. Stay away from the monsters," before hoisting the sail and floating away into the infinite horizon.

Alex Convery

Grade 12

Lyons Township High School

LaGrange

Kate Sullivan, teacher

DEEP DOWN STRONG

The room spins, and I feel as unsteady as ever. My stomach tightens and my intestines growl. I walk through the rooms in my grandparents' condo, but all I see is remains of my grandfather. Remember him? The one who passed away on July 4th at 2 a.m. The musty mix of Cuban cigars and chips. I turn around to see my grandma standing in the doorway tissue in hand, eyes filled with tears.

"I miss him," my voice sounds shaky.

"I miss him too," she says in the faintest whisper.

I walk towards her. I wrap my arms around her and tell her that it will be okay, and that I am always here for her. But the truth is, I live in Chicago and she lives in Florida. As I pull back I tell her that I am going on a walk and that I will be home by dinner.

I slide my earphones into place and blast my music. It feels so nice to be alone in the cloudless sky because there was no one there to start crying. Letting my endorphins out. I'm on my second mile but I don't feel a thing. I end on my fifth and for the first time a cramp actually feels good.

When I arrive on the beach I hear the waves crash in the background. I feel my toes submerge into the sand. I feel frightened because I do not know what is next for me or for my family. Will we fall apart? Stop talking? What about my grandma? Will she be okay? I feel sea shells snap from beneath me as collapse to the warm sand. I let myself sink and go far from reality. This is where I am, or was, happy. Now I am reminded of the trips my grandpa and I used to take when he was still happy. When there was no Walking Pneumonia, when he smoked less, but his body could not take it.

I sit on my towel, scared to go home to see my grandma crying, wishing there was something I could do. But the only

thing I can do is be strong. Something I have never tried before. I am afraid to start now. I breathe in and out, practicing repetition. It is almost like I am afraid to say his name because it is going to launch buckets of tears. To be honest, that makes me furious. He is in better care where he is, and yet everyone is busy laying blame. But I start realizing I do too. I sit in my bed trying to think of ways to blame myself. I have found plenty, but deep down I know that this has nothing to do with me. And for the first time in my life I feel strong.

Kelsey Donohue

Grade 7

Northbrook Junior High School

Northbrook

Sarah E. Avallone, teacher

CANTA Y UNE TU VOZ

Dear Adela

She couldn't pronounce my name. So on the second day of the trip, she grabbed my hand and pulled me over to the stairs. With a stick of pink chalk she wrote "Audrey = Adela." And that was that.

I have come to love my Honduran name so much more than my real one. Perhaps because it means more than myself. Adela means "Push me on the swings." or "Come play!" or "Please, please don't leave me." It means "Goodbye" and it means "Hello!"

Adela means "love."

I wish you were still here.

Her name is Candy, and she was nine years old when we met. I was ten. It was my first time coming to the Hogar, which is an orphanage in Comayagua. When we first pulled into the Hogar, I did not yet know that I would be returning for years to come or that I would meet my best friends inside those gated walls. Instead, I was overwhelmed by the muddy shacks, the naked children, and the line of crying mothers outside the tiny hospital. It was my first real confrontation with poverty.

When the bus entered those gates, dozens of brown hands began to slap the windows. We were escorted in by a milling crowd of children, squealing in fast-paced Spanish. The doors opened to a general cry of excitement, and, as each person left the bus, they were claimed by the crowd.

She claimed me. I might have mistaken her short hair and angular body for a boy's, except for the faded pink dress, which kept falling off one shoulder and revealing the sharp protrusion of her collarbone. Her hand slipped into mine,

and I looked into those wide charcoal eyes for the first time. They glimmered with joy.

My mama visited me yesterday, and I showed her your picture.

Most of the children were orphaned by Hurricane Mitch, which blew through Honduras in 1998 and killed almost 7,000 people. Some of them, like Candy, still have parents and are living at the Hogar for other reasons.

On my second trip, I discovered that Candy's mom was still alive. When Candy was six, her mother had a psychotic breakdown in a grocery store. The orphanage chose not to share the details of this event with us, but we know that Candy and her brother were removed from their mother that day.

Ironically, the Hogar is one of the safest and happiest places for a child to grow up in Honduras. So when Candy casually mentions her mother, I get scared. There is the ever-present possibility that her mother will try and take her away.

The Hogar is too quiet without the Americans.

I cannot imagine the orphanage being quiet. A rowdy soccer game is forever raging, where six-year-old girls manage to kick my ass. A set of wide, concrete stairs is constantly being decorated by chalk murals. And the toddlers somehow always escape the nursery and run around in a herd, searching for candy and warm laps.

Yet, the exuberant atmosphere of the Hogar does not define my friendship with Candy. The first year, she was painfully shy and I was painfully awkward. It did not help that I speak no Spanish: our conversations were always slow and punctuated by frantic searches in my Spanish-English dictionary. We ended up spending most of our time lounging on the hillside, watching the soccer game in silence.

Secretly, I sometimes wished that Candy would find another person to latch on to. It was frustrating to sit on that hill and watch my brother play with a troupe of adorable, giggling little girls.

I hate myself for ever having those thoughts.

School is okay. I don't like Josef any more.

Our friendship was slow, but it blossomed. She taught me how to make friendship bracelets, and I taught her how to French braid. And year after year, Candy fought her way to the front of the bus to be the first to grab my hand.

We watched each other grow up. By age thirteen, Candy was wearing her hair in a magnificent heap of braids and already acting like a woman. Effusive and proud, she had completely transformed from her former shy self. I had lost my braces, experienced grief, and learned to be confident. With these changes, our friendship became more real. In a few magical instances, we found places where our lives overlapped. One day on my last trip, I was humming the FIFA World Cup song, and Candy joined in with the Spanish lyrics. We talked about boys, and at the fiesta on the last night, we giggled and pointed out the cute ones (including the tall and shaggy-haired Josef) like I would with any of my friends at home.

Sometimes it is hard to understand why I live the life I do, when Candy, who is an infinitely stronger and better person, lives in a world where shuttling luggage at the airport hangar is a high-paying job and 13.7% of pregnant women are under nineteen.

When I turn eighteen, I will be going to college, paid for by my loving parents, and will educate myself for any career I choose. When Candy turns eighteen, she will be released into a world dominated by poverty and crime, with no one

but a mother who abandoned her in a grocery store when she was six years old.

I love you.

I think about these facts often, but never when I am with Candy at the Hogar. Instead, every year, I rejoice in hearing her voice call “Adela!” above all the others, and the instant comfort of holding her hand.

I love you, too.

Audrey Glaser

Grade 11

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

Jared Friebe, teacher

A FIGHT WORTH HAVING

My brother Kyle's smile has always been one of my favorite things about him, but on that night the sloppy grin he gave me made it feel as though a hole had formed in my chest. It was lopsided, twisted oddly off to one side as if he couldn't fully control his mouth, and his slurred words managed to only convey the message that he'd had a little too much to drink. Again. He stumbled a little, walking slowly to our car destined for a concert 15 minutes away, but I kept my nerves, and frustration, at a simmer. "Relax Laurel," I told myself. "He's just being a college kid."

On my first day of high school, the only person I wanted to talk to was Kyle. He had left for college a week prior to my big day, and the 3 hours separating us seemed like an eternity. After going to a small school for so many years, the thought of hundreds of new classmates terrified me, and only Kyle could understand exactly what the transition was going to be like. I picked up the phone to dial his number, and the second I heard his voice, my fears died down to a manageable rumble. I had an ally and a guide, and no matter how nervous I was, it was going to be alright.

The concert was held in a relatively small venue—a restaurant with a little back room that held small-scale shows. The room was dark and shadowy, empty of furniture except for a few tables, tall and thin, holding solitary candles that gleamed through the gaps in the crowd. It had the kind of atmosphere that made you drop your voice and tread lightly, that is, if you were aware enough to pick up on the subtle mood of the crowd. Kyle was completely ignorant of such sensitivities, and upon entering the room he first screamed his love for the performer, and then ordered himself another

drink. I was incredibly grateful for the shadows that managed to cover up the crimson embarrassment flooding across my face.

My father, at one point, had a good relationship with his brother, but never during my lifetime. They were close as kids, brought together through a combination of unimaginable tragedies and quiet triumphs, but as the years passed they drifted apart, as so many siblings do. Somehow, without either one knowing, their distance turned into miles, and the miles to unbridgeable gaps, and 30 years later, when my uncle dropped dead suddenly at 59, it held all the weight of a stranger's death.

My embarrassment faded away as the night went on, only to be replaced by a deep sense of betrayal. This concert was supposed to be our last celebration before Kyle left for his final year of college, and looking at him, all I saw was a self-centered kid unaware and indifferent to the fact that I was even there. He didn't care that I was embarrassed when he screamed so loud the performer had to stop in the middle of a song to tell him to shut up. He didn't care that he spilled beer all over me when he knocked a table over, or that he accidentally pushed two older women to the floor. He didn't care that my friend wanted to call her mom to come pick her up, or that multiple men in the crowd were being restrained by friends from pummeling him. He just didn't care.

On the morning of my dad's birthday, the very first thing I did was call Kyle. He didn't pick up; 6:45am doesn't even exist to a college student, so I left him a message. "Hey Kyle, sorry if I woke you up, but I just wanted to remind you that it's Dad's birthday. I know you're busy, but it'd kill him if you forgot. Okay, bye." A few

hours later I got a text message: "Thanks Lu. Totally would have forgotten without you."

On the car ride home, hot tears streamed from my eyes. Embarrassment and betrayal had come earlier, eventually passing, and all that was left was fury. Kyle had sworn, not only to me, but to my mother not to drink too much, and here he was, passed out in the seat next to me as I tried to navigate my way home through dark and unfamiliar streets. He mumbled a question about whether or not I was mad and I spat out an obviously sarcastic "Oh yeah, we're totally fine." The moment we got home, I tore upstairs to my parent's room and let the story coming spilling out of me in a rush of tears and anger. I finished and sank to the floor. All my strength had deserted me.

My dad and I had never screamed at each other like we had that night, and in a fit of rage, I had stormed out of the house and into the freezing January air. Eyes red and swollen from crying, I looked around feeling more alone than I'd imagined possible on my friendly street. With trembling hands I reached for my phone and dialed the first number I could think of. When Kyle answered, all I did was cry and scream and tell him how unfair all of this was, and he just listened. He was there for me, on that quiet street, to talk me down from that ledge and back into the home where I belonged.

It's understood in my family that if my mom is screaming and my dad is quiet, then you are really in deep trouble. That night, my dad didn't say a word. My mom and Kyle yelled for an eternity while I hid behind my locked door, but I didn't have any energy left to fight, and from the shouts across the hall, I knew that nothing short of a war was being waged. Kyle called for me to come and tell him to his face

that I was upset, to explain why I didn't feel comfortable even looking him in the eye, but shame and fear kept me rooted to the spot. It felt like my family was splintering apart, and it was my fault for not being able to handle this situation. My mind was racing with all the problems I had caused when my phone lit up with a message from Kyle, "Hey. I hope you die." And right then, so did I.

A week before my brother was supposed to leave for his final year of college he came into my room early in the morning. "Hey Lu, I need help cleaning out the car before school. Want to help me out? I think some of your stuff is in there too." I sleepily replied with an annoyed 'yes', but suddenly realized that this was the first time we had talked since the concert. I wasn't mad anymore. I wasn't embarrassed or upset or frightened. All I knew was that I missed him, and here was my chance to win him back. He needed me now, if only in a small way, but I needed him too.

Laurel Johnson

Grade 11

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

David Lange, teacher

RAINBOW ISLAND

I stared at my reflection in the mirror and a 5'9" tall, lanky girl with wide, green eyes stared right back at me. My name is Lavender Cameron. I'm fourteen years old and have the tendency to blink feverishly when I'm nervous. Quite frankly, this happens a lot.

"Lavender, are you ready yet? You don't want to be late for your first day of school!"

"I'm coming, Dad," I called back.

Dad dropped me off at school every day because he felt like busses were loaded with bullies who might pick on me. My father is a successful lawyer, and he's the only person that lives with me in the big house we reside in. My mom is an account coordinator for an international import company. Because of Mom's career, I only see her on special holidays.

I grabbed my pink and black Adidas backpack from the soft fuzzy rug on my floor and dashed down the flight of stairs, being thankful for the first time that I had long legs. I hopped onto the seat of my father's jet-black Volvo and he paused.

"Lunch money?" he asked. I rummaged through the small pocket on my backpack.

"Check."

"Science notebook?"

"Check."

"Breakfast?"

I shoved my bowl of cereal in his face, too exhausted to verbally respond.

"Okay, we're off to school," Dad said as he sped away.

I dragged my feet across the floor to Pembroke High School, anxiously waiting for what was to ensue. The school was enormous and the entrance was bordered with

rosebushes. I finally reached the school's front door to my despair. The ground was tiled marble, the ceiling was embellished with a beautiful, twinkling chandelier, and there was a grand piano placed in the corner of the lobby.

Looked more like an extravagant hotel to me.

I felt so nervous that my mind was clouded up. I had moved to New York City over the summer and didn't know anyone who was going to this school.

Think, Lavender, I thought, what do you need to do next...? Aha, go to class!

My schedule was squeezed in my clenched fist. After a few minutes of blinking frantically, I deciphered the crumpled paper and went to first period, Honors Geometry. The teacher was a short man with a bald spot. I figured that he looked friendly enough.

"My name's Mr. Cherry and I would like each of you to tell the class a bit about yourself," he said.

Screech! A brunette girl blushed and pushed her chair back in.

"Umm...hi everyone, my name's Amanda and I'm from Pembroke Middle School," she muttered, staring at the floor the entire time. The girl reminded me of what others probably perceived me as: shy, intimidated, insecure. The next person to introduce herself appeared as similar to the previous girl as a tropical rainforest is to a bare desert.

The girl was curvy with big blue eyes and flawless porcelain skin. Aside from her beauty, I envied one attribute about her the most: her height. She wasn't too tall or too short. However, my perfect impression of her was shattered like glass when she spoke. Her loud, high-pitched voice pierced through my ears. "Hey, my name's Tia and I'm actually new here. Make me feel welcome everyone!" she demanded before tugging on her black skin-tight dress. Tia carried on telling us

her life's history and bragged about how her parents owned hotels in Dubai. I clamped my hands against my ears, not paying much attention to the plump kid with the enormous glasses staring at me. It was as if the shattered glass pieces were being ruptured over and over.

Mental note: ask Dad for pain relievers as soon as you get home, Lavender.

The day was similar to what typical first school days are like. The teachers bombard their students with an extravagant list of rules, and students adjust to where their classes are located. I finally got my locker to open and piled my textbooks into my backpack. Relief flooded through me when I saw that Dad was already waiting for me in his Volvo. Now I wouldn't have to awkwardly wait alone on the bench.

"Hello Lavender; how was your day?" he asked.

"It was okay. The school is so fancy though. What is a piano doing in the main lobby of the school? I mean, why can't I go to a public school instead? That would be less nerve-racking."

"This prep school seemed to meet your standards when I visited it. You'll get used to it soon."

I melodramatically sighed in response.

I jumped onto my queen-sized bed with the canopy which still remained from my princess phase. I gazed at the ceiling and played the whole day in my mind like a movie.

What if no one likes me at school? How am I going to survive living here for the rest of my life?

I worked on memorizing my locker combination and Pembroke High School's map for the rest of the evening.

RING!!! I fumbled for the alarm clock in the darkness and sluggishly found my way to the bathroom. I fled down the stairs to the kitchen.

"Good morning," Dad said as he ruffled my hair.

"Good morning, Dad," I responded. Dad insisted on saying good morning to each other no matter what day it was; it was one of his weird policies.

Beep-beep-beep! While I was punching in 0:45 seconds to warm my glass of chocolate soy milk, I caught sight of myself in the microwave's door.

"Oh no, you ruined my hair!" I cried.

I sprinted back up the stairs and fussed with my wavy brown hair until it looked smooth and glossy. I glimpsed at my boyish figure and for a moment, I wondered what it would be like to have a curvy body. And to not be so tall. And—

"Lavender, I'm sure it doesn't take that long, even for you, to fix your hair! We're going to be late," Dad called, interrupting my train of thought.

Thursdays were one of my favorite days. They were just one day away from Friday which meant freedom from gym and supplementary sleep. I put a smile on my face and walked to class. Tia was sitting on her desk surrounded by all the guys in our class, except for the plump boy with the glasses. She scanned me up and down like I derived from an unknown species.

"Look guys, the beanstalk's made her way to class," Tia snickered; her voice was an unpleasant mix of haughtiness and ridicule. Too shocked to come up with a retort, I took a seat as far away from everyone and pretended to be interested in my book, *A Little Princess*. The plump boy with the enormous glasses patted my back and I tried smiling at him, but I know it probably ended up appearing forced and bizarre. My merciless blinking habit instantly came to play, and my face was submerged in crimson.

I was in my large pink and white bedroom, keeping myself occupied with homework. If I let myself stray away from congruent triangles and sig figs for one moment, I knew I would lose it and start crying. After I was finished with my homework, I peered at my diamond-encrusted watch. It read 6:30 p.m.

How could I be done so quickly? I asked myself disappointedly. I didn't want to have any free time today. I have a habit of thinking about my day and analyzing every aspect of it. It's a mentally exhausting job, and I don't understand why I'm not paid for it.

I spun in my swivel office chair for a while until the light bulb of my brain glowed. I had read an article stating that yoga helps when one is stressed—the ideal solution for poor me! I sat in Indian style on my fuzzy, pink rug.

"Omm..." I chanted obnoxiously for a few minutes. I opened my eyes and stood up. I wasn't standing on my fuzzy rug; I was floating on a fluffy cloud. My green eyes widened as I became aware of the sparkling rainbows encompassing me. A tiny fairy tickled me on my nose and giggled, "Heehee," and flew away. I jumped off the cloud, in spite of myself.

"WHOA," I yelled at the top of my lungs. Downy whiteness passed in front of my eyes as I fell for a long time. To my surprise, I landed on a pile of lush grass that was as soft as Mr. Teddy Bear at home. I literally could fly wherever I was, and so I flew to the milky-white river and looked down at the stream.

I gasped, nearly choking on my own saliva. The girl gaping at me looked like an enhanced version of me. Her height was mediocre, her hair was polished and tame, and her figure wasn't boyish at all. Unconsciously, my finger extended towards the girl, and I touched the river. Rings of water formed around the spot I had delicately touched. My

mouth twisted into a wide grin as I stared at my reflection. *That's me, I thought breathlessly, I look so amazing...*

The stars came out of hiding and winked at me. I gazed up at a small, turquoise fairy soaring and wondered how my little meditation quest landed me here when the sky did something very peculiar. I raised my eyebrows while the stars arranged themselves into a motion picture, displaying none other than how my life would be if I was perfect. I watched my beautiful self mocking a really tall girl, and my jaw remained dropped until a glowing, little fairy conveniently fluttered by and pushed my jaw back into normal position. My eyes were glued to the sky as a perfect-looking me smiles at my fake friends and scowls when they turn their backs. I watched myself hop into Dad's Volvo and immediately turn my iPod touch on to "Beautiful Dirty Rich" by Lady Gaga without even acknowledging my dad's presence. My "perfect" life droned on, and I started dashing away from the sky.

I ran until the strength in my legs was completely gone and stumbled upon the milky-white river. My chest was heaving as I panted for air. I grabbed a fairy the size of a Blue Jay and sporadically asked, "Where am I?"

"Buzzz..." the fairy responded.

"Gee thanks, that helps immensely. Can you guide me to the place from where I got here?"

"Buzzz," the fairy bobbed its mini head and flew in little loops, leaving a trail of rainbow specks. Not being able to resist, I reached out and stuck a speck in my mouth.

"Hahaha! Your wake tastes like Skittles! You know what? You deserve a nice name. I'm going to call you Fabio." I laughed, popping the fairy's specks into my mouth as I tried to keep up with its rapid pace.

"Buzzz," the fairy cried and motioned towards an illuminating corner in the sky.

"How am I supposed to get up there? My flying powers somehow faded after I stopped watching that abhorrent movie," I informed the seemingly clueless fairy.

"Buzz, buzz, buzz!!!" the adorable fairy flew behind me and pushed with all its might. "Buzz-achoo!"

Rainbow particles clouded our vision after the fairy's series of sneezes had stopped. The fairy shoved me up and I was gliding through the air headed to the luminous spot in the sky.

"It worked! Thanks Fabio!" I hollered back.

I was thrust back into my cherry-blossom-covered bed. The gap I was thrown from glimmered for a bit before fading into a fleck of colorful dust. I jumped out of my bed and ran to my chestnut vanity with the oval mirror. My excessively tall slender figure was back. My eyes pierced through the mirror as I stared at myself. For the first time upon looking at myself, I genuinely smiled.

"Lavender? Where are you?" Dad's voice rang through the silence of our home.

My father stood in my doorway with his head peeked in.

"Dad!" I exclaimed and threw my arms around him.

"I'm glad to see you too," Dad said with a puzzled expression on his face, "I've been calling for you for the past hour. Were you sleeping?"

"No..." I said, narrowing my eyes.

So it really wasn't a dream, I thought.

Dad shook his head. "You still haven't mentioned where you were at," he said sternly.

"No, you don't understand! I was teleported to this extraordinary place; it was totally out of this world!" I blabbered excitedly.

"Oh really? What did you do in this 'extraordinary place'?" Dad asked sarcastically.

"I could fly, and the star clusters arranged themselves into a movie of what my life would be like if I didn't have any physical flaws. I tried running away, and I met a fairy, Fabio, who helped me find my way back," I affirmed.

"Lavender, you told me these type of stories when you were five. I thought you might've grown up by now. Well, at least you're creative," Dad said.

I was tired as my grandmother gets at amusement parks, so I didn't bother to induce him into believing me.

"Maybe I just need some sleep," I said, plunging into bed.

"Good night, Lavender," Dad said, stroking my hair, until he thought I had fallen asleep.

"Buzzz!"

My eyes shot open and I wildly searched my bed, in case my iPhone was on vibrate, but my phone was carefully placed on my chestnut nightstand.

Maybe I'm just hearing things, I contemplated.

"Buzzz!"

I peeked through my right eye without moving an inch. Fabio was resting on the corner of my pillow, sprinkling my cherry-blossom sheets with rainbow fragments and the reminiscence of the terrible person I would be without my "imperfections."

Maybe not being picture perfect wasn't so bad after all.

Ummehaani Kamran

Grade 10

Carbondale Community High School

Carbondale

Tarrie Dullum, teacher

JOURNEY THROUGH LICE

I have lice.

At this exact moment a multitude of insects are burrowing and scratching, making their own Victorian-esque homes on my scalp without contemplating the state of the housing market. Standing, my full height of 3'2" complete with overalls and pig tails, I wait in a corner. I have been quarantined. No one comes near, but all of the day care population stares at me from afar. Uncomfortable in the spotlight, I raise my hand gently and scratch.

Ooooooh, that feels good!

Mom and dad handled the epidemic with the candor, swiftness, and surprising grace of the CDC. Mom was all business. She stood with me in the shower and stripped my hair clean of all life. Rambo, even fully equipped with machete, could not have managed the massacre my mother led with that ridiculous little comb.

Upon exiting my parents' bathroom, wrapped tightly in a fuzzy red towel, I began my trek toward my room. The whole period of humiliation and rough delousing had left me exhausted. I entered the room and flicked on the lights. Yellow glaze illuminated every corner.

It was bare, naked, and purged. My bed had no sheets. My closet had no clothing. My pillows had no covers. Worst of all, Christy was missing. Christy is a snow leopard (A fake one I mean...a real missing snow leopard would have been truly frightening.) She was a small, old, dingy stuffed animal I had received from my great grandmother a few years previous.

I filled my six-year-old lungs with air and let out an inhuman wail.

My father, who had been strangely absent during the traumatizing shower experience, materialized behind me. I

spun to face him and was met with Christy's small, dirty mass in a tightly sealed plastic bag.

Snatching her roughly, I crushed her into my chest. Automatically my fingers rushed to open the seal, but my father sternly stopped me. Christy's black, glassy eyes pleaded with me.

I loved her more than anything. I mean, imagine someone you love. Imagine your wife or husband, your best friend, nay, imagine your newborn son Jimmy in a small plastic bag. It was cruel, and it was painful.

Grainy images of the shower replayed in slow motion. Weighing the alternative, I decided that it was not like Christy had lungs...

So, the following week I spent time with Christy. I sat with her, spoke to her, and tried to explain the predicament so she would not feel rejected or unloved. She slept beside me in her see-through prison, and the plastic always managed to get stuck to my face in the middle of the night. It was a labor of love.

After the week of isolation, Christy, and all of my other stuffed animals, were able to escape and breathe sweet freedom. A majority of the kids had also forgotten my infestation and accepted me back into their kickball group.

When I was finally able to hold all of my sweet, slightly stained toys, I realized some very important lessons. If I ever love something, anything, I should always hold it as tightly as I can. I should always cherish that something or someone. And, I should never wait until I am infested with bloodsuckers to realize that I take whoever, or whatever it may be, for granted.

Becky Killian

Grade 12

Belleville West High School
Belleville
John Lodle, teacher

ADOPTING AN IDENTITY

Inside the envelope are letters and pictures. My mom says they're from my biological parents and that idea doesn't process because the handwritten letter from my bio-father looks so much like my mom's handwriting that I think she's playing some sort of trick on me. She's not. I flip through pictures of Chimene and Richard, these accidental lovers, and of the two half-siblings I never knew about. It's surreal; I feel only half awake as I flip among the pictures and wonder who these people are and wonder who I am because of these letters.

My biological mother uses an abundance of "teehees" in her structurally strange, typed letter because apparently she's funny and laughter can't be captured on paper. I can't connect with her "teehees." I can't see any humor in the impersonal black ink. I can't connect with a person whose letter is like a resume, a list of altruistic hobbies and likable characteristics. Yet, I look at this paper and see myself in her love of books, her terrible humor. And I feel almost a sense of...relief.

I don't see myself in my parents. They don't read; they don't like the kind of movies I like. They don't share my atheism, my cynicism, or any personality quirks. I wasn't sure how to entirely love my parents when I felt disconnected from them.

And now I'm reading about this woman, seemingly so foreign, this woman who's training for the Iraq War and likes to plant, whose first love is God followed by her husband John, this woman who's half like me. Only half, but that's half more than I can say for my parents.

I sift through her memories printed in the dull-colored ink. Then I move on to Richard. I already like him. He gave me actual pictures, glossy, without fingerprint smudges, true and genuine, just like his handwritten letter that tells me he

took time and effort in this compilation. I almost feel like an intruder looking at his best friends, his brother, his beard that makes him look like The Dude from *The Big Lebowski*. Richard begins by feeling obligated to tell me that I wasn't a mistake, that there was a good reason why I was brought up by a different family, blah blah. I don't need comfort from a man I don't know.

But I do know him. It's terrifying to the point where my hands begin to shake.

I know him because I'm the carbon copy of him, from his cheekbones to his aspirations. Our canines are identical, our eyes mirrors, our dimples cousins, our smiles duplicates. As I read the letter, I grow more and more dumbfounded. I want to major in film, and I think NYU is just about the most amazing school there is. So when I read that he majored in film production at NYU, I'm literally scared. The similarities don't stop there. We're both adopted, we both love movies to no end, we like math, we like Judaism, we're both this and we're both that. This letter is staring me in the face, telling me that I'm not random, that it's okay to not be like my family because I'm not exactly a part of them.

Richard is rather poignant. No one has ever told me that I'm special the way Richard is telling me I'm special. He writes, "Your existence in this world means a lot to me. It's difficult to put into exactly the right words, but it's kind of like...when you were born, it validated my existence. No matter what I did or did not accomplish from that point forward, there would always be you."

My mom told me she's scared that, when I'm upset, I lock myself in my room and look at the battered envelope and dream of a life with a family that would accept me. I don't. I hadn't even touched the envelope for a second time until

last week, trying to write this paper and remember why my bioparents are still important to me.

I understand my mom's fear that I might get along with my bioparents if I met them and abandon her to have a spectacular relationship. But I think my mom's fear is irrational. She's my mom. It's not as though I'd go running off with some woman I didn't know only because she gave birth to me. My biological mother wasn't the person I talked to every day after school about my day. She wasn't the person that drove me to all the soccer games I never even played in. She wasn't the person who bought my Christmas presents, who wasn't afraid to touch me when I got the flu because I didn't want a flu shot, who searched online for weeks to find a replacement for my exact striped Ralph Lauren comforter that I ripped unintentionally while taking a nap. Chimene had nothing to do with my life, nor did she have the right to because she had never been a part of my life.

I don't know whether or not I want to meet my bioparents now. When I was little, I nearly begged for a different life when Hinsdale was too small or too dull for me; I dreamed of the day I would reunite with my bioparents and have a new, wonderful life where I belonged. But now I'm off to college in a semester—I'm forced to have a different life. I don't feel that longing anymore, the sort of longing that requires endless amounts of hoping and pining for something not quite in your reach. Because the thing is, I'm sure my bioparents are wonderful people. They sound like wonderful people. But I don't need or want their approval. I don't need or want a relationship with them. I know they exist. And that's enough for now.

Mackenzie King

Grade 12

Hinsdale Central High School
Hinsdale
Angelique Burrell, teacher

DANCERS DON'T CRY

It begins with a text message.

My phone wakes me. In my early morning haze, I'm able to glean three words from the message: Katie, died, car. I call my best friend, Darcy. She picks up the phone, bites back a sob, and says, "Dani, I have to tell you something. Miss Katie is..."

"I know, but...w-what happened?"

She sniffles. "There was an accident." She tells me about how Katie went to Governors State University last night to watch the girls from our old dance studio perform. Darcy tells me the gates didn't go down. "A train hit her car, Dani. She's dead."

This isn't real. Katie isn't dead. Katie's the dance teacher who asks you what you're being for Halloween. She makes up ridiculous words to songs. She's smiley. She's happy. She's the opposite of dead.

I manage to tell Darcy I'll call her back and hang up.

There are already articles online about the dance teacher who died last night. I read them all. I want more insight, but they only give me facts. None of them tell me anything new. None of them tell me how to feel. None of them tell me why.

I want this confusion to go away. Please, make it go away. I'll give anything.

I remember I have a dance competition today with my new studio. The girls won't know what happened. Even if they did, they wouldn't understand. None of them knew Katie. I need to wear my brave face, but when I get to the Pheasant Run Inn's convention center, I see ghosts everywhere.

I'm fifteen. Today was supposed to be a fun day of competition at the Pheasant Run Inn, but Miss Katie is holding back tears. She

tells us Annie can't perform today because she received her first round of chemotherapy. We all hold back tears.

Miss Katie pulls out a letter her friend wrote to her before he died of cancer. She reads it to us and cries. It's wrong to see Katie without a smile. We join in, scared for our friend's future.

She tucks the letter away and tells us that the dance she choreographed for us, "The Sound of White," is dedicated to her friend who had written the letter. It's our first time performing the number, but she says we'll do well because we'll be dancing for Annie.

I relive it all—every step I take in that convention center, only now with the knowledge that Katie will never take a step ever again.

She's dead. Katie's dead.

My hands tremble as I cry and hastily get ready for a dance. I keep my mouth closed and my eyes down as I head backstage. Everyone at my new studio is Catholic, so we pray before each performance. I can't do it, though. I can't pray to a god who let something so horrible happen. I walk away from the group, but I feel their eyes. My own eyes are blurry with tears that threaten to spill.

I let them.

One of my current dance teachers assumes I'm crying over some trivial mistake I made during a previous dance. She laughs and tells me, "There's no crying in dance."

She couldn't have been more wrong.

Most of the week passes by in a tearstained whirl. Eventually, the weekend comes. I have a competition at Governors State University. I know I'll have to cross the tracks she died on.

As I near the tracks, I feel my heart hammering in my chest, and I start to shake and cry. I see the maintenance crew working on the electrical wirings of the crossing; my blood boils. I blame them for Katie's death. They failed at their jobs.

They knew there was something wrong with the signal, but they couldn't save her.

It's their fault.

I'm sixteen. I'm battling depression. As my depression grows, I stop going to dance classes that aren't mandatory. The few times I am at dance, I hide behind books. I feel like I could disappear, and no one would care.

Some dance teachers blame me for my depression. Other teachers hassle me to go back to class. Only Katie seems to be concerned. She smiles as she tells me that it's okay to take a break if I need one.

She says it isn't my fault. It happens.

I want to scream at the workers. I want them to know they're murderers, but my mother soothes me by saying she brought flowers to lay on the tracks.

I wanted to do this, but as my mother cries and fumbles with the flowers, my patience wanes. She's weak, yet mothers are supposed to be strong. I want to go, but my mom wants to pray. Her praying to a careless god makes me angry with her for bringing the flowers. It's a stupid idea. The flowers are just going to die anyway.

I'm seventeen. Other than Katie joining us, it's a regular day of tap class. We start with a round of improv, and Katie smiles and cheers us on, proud of us.

When class ends, I give Katie a hug. It's been a while since I've seen her, and I realize how much I miss her. Her smiles. Her happiness. Even her ditzy tendencies.

"By the way," I say to her. "Thanks for everything. I mean... words don't even cover how grateful I am, and I'll never be able to repay you for what you've done. I just need you to know that I appreciate you."

She smiles at me and says my words mean a lot.

I never spoke them.

That day was probably the last time I ever saw Katie, but I'm not even sure. I doubt I even said anything to her. I know I didn't appreciate her. I've regretted that day ever since I woke up that morning to that text message, and I've cried countless tears since.

Danielle Labotka

Grade 12

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

Alexis Colianni, teacher

IT MAKES SENSE

Hatred is venom. I don't remember when I was infected, when my heart turned inside out and I began to imagine her death. It started slowly, first numbness, until it surrounded me and coursed through my brain and my heart. Now it defines our relationship. It warps what I see in her, I know this, yet I hate her still. Knowledge does not cure it. Common sense is nothing next to the hatred in my veins. There is no antidote.

I hate her so much I envision killing her, repeatedly. The scene plays in my mind: the last words, the regret, the fear, the end. Over and over. She disgusts me to the point of physical repulsion. But I'm not crazy. I won't kill a person just because they have some physical flaw. In this case, it's more than that, more than her freckles and crooked fingers. It is all of her, her entire being, that disgusts and disappoints, that drives me to this. Yet I know I can't kill her, I know I can't. My morals are better than that. I'm a Christian.

In fact, I understand that it's not her fault that she isn't perfect. No one's perfect. It's the way her parents raised her. It's the way her environment shaped her. It's circumstance, sociology, psychology. Science. It's only science. It's the laws of nature that she should be such a way, and that she should be hated. And that I would hate her in the first place. Darwinism, maybe. That's science too, isn't it? Only the best should live. The failures should die. Science. She is indeed a failure. It makes sense.

I imagine all the ways I could kill this rather terrible girl. Jamie. The world would be a better place without her. Everyone agrees on that. I would shoot her during school, sneak in a gun and make a big scene. But, that would probably create security issues for the rest of the school. I don't want our school to implement metal detectors or anything.

Then people would be angry at me, instead of rejoicing that I finally terminated Jamie Plath.

Her hair is long and always braided. And that annoys me. Maybe I could strangle Jamie, with her own hair. That would be funny, wouldn't it? I could just cut it off, as a warning. One swoop. Change things up a bit. Maybe it would change her. Or maybe she'd stay exactly the same, like she always does.

I could never get away with it. I could never get through the guilt of knowing I was taking away a girl's life. What would her parents think? If she has any friends at all, what would they think? I could never do it because the second before she draws her last breath I would be overwhelmed with guilt.

But the *should*. The *should*, that damn *should*. I *should* be able to kill this girl. I *should* be able to get away with it. I hate her so much...

I hate Jamie, my enemy. She's a thorn digging into my heart. Not to mention her really ridiculous smile that makes me want to gag. What does she have to smile about? Nothing! She doesn't deserve to smile, with that chipped front tooth from when she fell onto the pavement in fourth grade.

And that voice. That tiny, irritating mosquito voice that buzzes in my ear and makes me cringe. That stupid, fake laugh. It isn't pleasant, it is only too loud and too long and too contrived. Artificial like the rest of her.

I hate her completely, with every ounce of myself. She is so conceited, and for once I want to show her what people really feel about her. I'm not making this up. People constantly criticize her. Dark. Loser. Idiot. Moron. Failure. That's not the worst of it.

When we were all younger, she was the kid everyone teased, and rightfully so. Teacher's Pet. Fatty. Lamie. It was

fun and easy to snicker as she walked by. It hasn't changed. That's what they all told her and it's what we still tell her. We all think she is useless. That's how it is, she is completely useless, so why does no one do anything about it when they should?

Should. That destructive word. The potential and all the waste of it. This girl was full of *shoulds*, if not defined by them. *Should* do this, *should* do that. *Should* be and *shouldn't*. And she wasn't and wouldn't and couldn't, even if she tried. She never was, is, or will be good enough.

My internal, murderous monologue isn't as quiet anymore. It used to be a whisper, the faintest hint of an idea, now it is filling the cavities of my mind.

Completely taken aback by this terrible thought, I work to correct it. It isn't her fault she is who she is. But, if I should accept her, I'm just as bad as she is.

My mind screams and tears in two while my thoughts melt. Inhibition is drowned out by Hatred, which holds my hand and tells me my actions are justified. Science, remember?

I have to do it. I have to kill Jamie Plath. Everyone will celebrate. It will be the best thing I have ever done. I take my dad's hunting rifle from the garage. Now's the time. Of all the "should-dos," I finally will.

So I do. I take the gun and point it to her head. The scene actualizes. She cries and searches for reason. Her pulse quickens and venom pounds through me, surrounds me, envelops me. The reason is found. The last words, the regret, the fear, the end. All in front of me.

The venom takes over; I pull the trigger; I kill myself.

Andrea Lakiotis

Grade 12

Neuqua Valley High School

Naperville

Mike Rossi, teacher

HANNAH'S WORLD

The noisy hallways filled Hannah's ears with the sounds of doors slamming, teachers scolding, and students chattering. She felt Lucy's comfortable and friendly hand tightly wrapped around hers. Mom had been preparing her for this day for a long time. She was too itchy in her new jumper dress as she clomped and stumbled around in her new shoes. She reached her free hand up to the hair tie tightly holding her pigtails in place, but then stopped herself and put her hand back down. She knew if she ruined her mother's hard work, she would be very disappointed. She looked up to Lucy, who responded with a reassuring smile. With a surge of confidence, the two of them walked into the classroom together.

The tiny room was almost busier than the halls. Loud posters, strategic nametags, and large windows swirled in Hannah's head. Several small areas of perfectly organized desks sat together in clusters. She held Lucy's hand a little tighter. Her thoughts were abruptly interrupted when a tall, slim lady with blonde hair and too-red lipstick moved to the front of the room and announced in a sharp voice, "Children! Please find your name tags and take a seat!" Lucy quickly found her seat. It was located in the corner, far away from the door. Hannah's thoughts began to jumble. She couldn't find her name anywhere close to Lucy's. It wasn't near the group of tiny desks. Her heart sank a little deeper with every step she took. At last on the other end of the tiny room she found the small paper with her name neatly printed on the lines. Her hopes dropped as she sat down. She looked back up at Lucy. The tiny room was much larger from this angle.

The bustling stopped, and finally when the room had come to a hush, the blonde lady got up to speak, "Welcome to first grade! My name is Miss Anderson." She paused to

write her name on the blackboard in large, circular letters that made Hannah cringe. When she finished off with her sharp N at the end of her name she turned back around and said, "We can have a very good year together, but first, we are going to talk about some rules." There was no yelling, no running, and no talking back. You had to be polite at all times, and say please and thank you for everything. By now, it was getting difficult for her to keep her eyes open. You could not interrupt anyone and always had to raise your hand if you had anything to say. The list seems to go on forever. Hannah learned that if any of these rules were to be broken, the offender would receive a time out. This was a whole new world to her. She was missing kindergarten already. She could play with Lucy all day without fear of strict order or being left alone without her good friends. She couldn't handle getting used to them both at once.

Miss Anderson was now passing out sheets of paper and crayons to all of the students. At last, Hannah smiled. She loved coloring. The blank pieces of paper let her create anything she wanted. Coloring didn't involve rules. It didn't involve boundaries or separation. Nothing that had happened today could restrict her from her joy of coloring. As Miss Anderson began giving her instructions, Hannah picked up a blue crayon because it was her favorite color. She began her work before she had listened to a word of her teacher. By the time Miss Anderson had said, "Now begin!" Hannah was already in a different world. Blue became the sky and a gentle river. Green was transformed into a grassy meadow, which was inhabited with a broad spectrum of colors like rosy red and gentle pink flowers. Little animals played in the branches of trees. There was even a rainbow forming near a waterfall on the distance. To top it all off, she drew a large sun resting among puffy, happy clouds. The place where she

could be anywhere she wanted and still be happy and comfortable reminded her of Lucy across the room, but Hannah was content with her coloring.

In an instant, Hannah was pulled from her content world as soon as she felt Miss Anderson hovering over her shoulder. She said, "Dear, didn't you hear my directions? I asked you to write out your name, and then draw something you like to do. It's fine. I'll get you a new sheet." And to Hannah's horror, Miss Anderson, without thinking, swept up her glorious meadow drawing and left it on her desk for later disposal and retrieved a new blank piece of paper. The other children had all become very quiet as they watched her face turn bright red and tilt to the floor. Even Lucy looked up and watched the scene play out. Miss Anderson dropped the new blank sheet onto her desk. "There you go sweetie. What do you say?" Her voice was sweet, but it still made Hannah's skin crawl. "Thank you," she said, watching the floor as the rest of the room swirled. The carpet looked worn out and stepped on.

The rest of the day seemed to go by, leaving Hannah behind. She was quiet all the way through the games and activities, not wanting to make a fool of herself again. Now and then she would steal a quick glance at Miss Anderson's desk, where her picture was resting. She felt bitter towards Miss Anderson. How could she take away the picture that had made her so happy? Had she done something wrong? Was it really all her fault?

The bell rang at last and Hannah got up and pushed her chair in, just as Miss Anderson had instructed. She dismissed them at last. Hannah was one of the last to leave the room. Staring at the floor and her brand-new, too-big shoes, she left the room and once again entered the noisy hall. From behind her, she heard a familiar voice, "Hannah! Wait up!" and she turned around just in time to see Lucy running up

to her. At last, Lucy took Hannah's hand, and they walked away from the classroom together. As they had made some distance from the room, Lucy slipped a tiny, folded piece of paper into Hannah's hand. Cautiously, she unfolded it, only to be greeted by her meadow of rainbows and animals and a blue sky and gentle river. Surprised, Hannah looked up at Lucy, who only smiled and held her hand a little tighter.

Claire Martin

Grade 9

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Amy Zimmermann, teacher

METAMORPHOSES FROM A CATERPILLAR INTO YET ANOTHER CATERPILLAR

Fat Pencils and Old People Smell

I remember kindergarten, the kingdom of the small that smelled like crayons. In one corner were the pixelly computers and in another our elongated desks, modified to mold together as one table to emphasize teamwork.

Some days we worked on spelling words, which I looked forward to. Ever since my dad read poetry, novels, the daily news, whatever was at hand, to me at night, I had wanted to do it by myself, to possess this great power that could create worlds and people out of words and paper. I remember writing in my kindergarten memory book that reading was one of the skills I most hoped to learn, along with Rollerblading.

Our teacher was short and squat, old, and everything a kindergarten teacher was supposed to be—mean, fun enough not to be considered mean when parents were near, strict and to the point. She wrote letters and words on a big white sheet of paper. I was so excited to copy the shapes down on paper that I took more time contemplating them than practicing penmanship.

Every so often we were given challenge words. We didn't have to memorize them, but they were there and lurking, every month or so, looming on the far bulletin board. One week, the word *because* appeared. It didn't seem too difficult.

I took time to remember it. The *b* and *e* were easy enough, but the *cause* was harder to engrain in my mind. Especially that surrogate *a*, which I figured had once stood next to the *be* but decided to run away with the *c*. It was a little like how the dish ran away with the spoon, but not quite. *B* and *e* were a natural pair, already coupled together in the hopeful word *be*. It seemed only natural that *a* would follow—it had

a similar sound, and a similar shape. But *be* did not want to be separated from its faithful companion by adding another letter, so *a* was taken in by *c*, seeing that *c* already knew the cruelty of *be* and could shelter *a* from its selfishness.

It seems a curious way to remember a word, turning each letter into a character, but as a kindergartner it made plenty of sense.

"I can spell *because*!" I remember blurting out to a friend, eager to show off my acquired knowledge.

"Really?" I remember my friend commenting in a half-awed, half-sarcastic tone. As many childhood friends are, we were nice enough to each other, but held vicious rivalries simultaneously. Any advantage gained was sure to be taken into serious account by all.

I remember gladly shoving my paper in his face, words scrawled there as I sat beaming. He looked at me in disbelief while I allowed myself to bask in the bright sun of temporary pride.

Some Group That Is a Privilege to Be a Part of, or at Least That's What They Told Me

We would gather in the far end of the hallway where the steps met the top floor, a reverse waterfall. Ushered by someone else's mother, we sat around a makeshift table in tiny, unnaturally orange, blue, yellow plastic chairs. The older, fourth grade classrooms nearby were either noisy or eerily silent with a teacher's voice preaching a pedantic sermon over them all.

The mothers took out their little green books. We took out ours, titled *The Green Book* (perhaps the author drew a blank). In it, the world was dying; the president sent people to populate another planet. When they got there, there were silvery water and moth people that hatched out of cocoons.

But what I remember best was the way others stared as we discreetly left our classrooms like we had fluffy antennae or leathery wings.

Oh Ulysses

We read about Ulysses in the seventh grade. He had some pretty interesting adventures fighting off giants, having his men turned into pigs, not to mention a trip to Hades. I loved mythology, so I couldn't get enough of it. I didn't know that there were other versions, as all the Greek myths I had read had been the same; I did not know what an epic poem was. Then we came back to that odyssey freshman year in high school.

Rather than a classic story form, the tales of Odysseus (and to think, I thought his name was Ulysses) were written in verse. There was nothing really poetic about it as far as I could tell. It didn't rhyme (at least not in English), the language was choppy as the waves his boat sailed on, not to mention most of the characters turned out to be failures. I mean, a seafood diet isn't too bad, and if these guys had known what a luxury it was perhaps they wouldn't have eaten the golden cattle. But one hankering for ribs and everything's off.

Every chapter was a struggle to stay awake, as I often read at night by the heater in the freezing family room. Though most of his exploits were the same as I had learned in seventh grade, they seemed to be dragged out too long. Perhaps this was on purpose to reflect Odysseus's long journey, but, to a student, if a book is long and boring, it is long and boring. And that is that.

He struggled, indeed, on and on, this poor soul, from island to island, land to land, god to goddess. Ships were fixed up, my pencils wore down to stubs, and I blindly grabbed new ones. Sons of gods and unknown enemies awaited him,

as I trudged from class to class every weekday, hoping my teachers could at least be in good moods. At the same time I could not help but feel a cruel chill creep up and whisper in my ear that I was to suffer the same fate, as I sluggishly turned the page.

Jane Merker

Grade 11

Lyons Township High School

LaGrange

Kate Sullivan, teacher

THE CRASH

I tap my fingers impatiently on the steering wheel of my blue Ford Explorer. I'm running late for Tuesday night dance class. Again.

Beep...Beep...Beep. My alarm clock pesters and prods at me to strip off my cocoon of blankets and start the day. Feebly, I try to sit upright but instead drown back into the sea of soft pillows and mindless solace. The most movement I can muster is a slam to the snooze button. *I'll get up in fifteen* I tell myself. Thirty minutes pass, and I am still dormant, completely oblivious to the responsibilities that await me. When I finally begin to regain consciousness, my mom's voice chirps, "Riley, your breakfast is ready!" The smile that hopes and gives and fights is dashed into a frown when I yell back down, "I don't have time." I hear her frown as she warns me about the dangers of starting the day without a meal, I see her frown as I rush past her to pick up a paper I almost forgot from the printer, I feel her frown as I bolt out the back door.

I swiftly make a left turn onto Homes Avenue as I join the line of impatient cars. The red glare of the stoplight mocks me as I watch another minute pass. I'll never make it in time. Green light.

I shift apprehensively as I wait for Home Access Center to load on my screen. There are only two weeks left in the quarter, and every day is a ticking bomb that will lead to my eventual explosion. I glare at my grades on the glowing display but their glares back at me are infinitely harsher and more intimidating. They taunt me, they say I'll never win, they tell me to give up now. I used to fight them back with

uppercuts and right jabs. I used to be the boss of my grades. Now I let my grades be the boss of me. I sigh with grief and raise the white flag. They win.

My foot presses on the gas, my eyes look ahead, but my mind is elsewhere, busily searching for the perfect excuse for my tardiness. Maybe I'll say I got stuck in traffic. Maybe I'll say I came straight from a school club. Maybe I'll say I wasn't feeling well.

"Yoo-hoo!" my Yia Yia yells from my front hallway. I close my eyes warily but plaster on a smile when she wraps her frail arms around me. I nod in agreement to the things I didn't hear, and I laugh at the jokes I didn't get. I am there with her in that front hallway, but I am not *there*. My real attention goes to the buzz and chime in my coat pocket. I tell Yia Yia that I have to use the bathroom but really escape and sneak a few text messages to friends. As soon as I return to her, she has to leave. I feel the buzz again as I walk her to the door and sneak in a half glance at the message as I wave goodbye to her.

Yellow Light. I can make it.

Clothes strewn on the floor, homework littered on the desk, bed unmade, I hadn't always been this sloppy. The stresses of junior year accumulate, and the copious amounts of nothing accumulate with it. My dad calls me into my room one day and points his angered finger at my clothes, then at the bed, then at the homework. "When will you get rid of the junk in your life? When will this room be cleared? When will your mind be cleared?" I cast my eyes down. I do not know. He then gives me an ultimatum, "You have two paths

from which to choose: the path of accountability, or the path of denial or disarray." I meekly promise the first path, but as soon as he leaves I chose to leave my clothes on the ground.

The car ahead stops so fast I hit the brakes. Too late.

What did I just do? Shame, dread, and fear consume me. I have no control over my trembling hands that struggle to punch 911 on my phone. The armor I use to hide my problems is ripped off, and I am left exposed and defenseless in front of an audience of angry cars. They drive around us, shooting glares like bullets to my pride and waving wild gestures. There are no excuses I can use, no distraction with which I can divert my attention. My mom comes to the scene and sits in my car. I apologize profusely to her, but with a look of distress she says, "It's not the accident, Riley; it's so much more than the accident." All I can manage is a feeble nod. As we wait for help I walk over to the other driver, and she embraces me in a hug. "Mistakes happen," she assures me over and over. But in my eyes, cloudy with tears, the mangled fender is no unlucky mistake. That fender is a last cry to make a choice, calling me to either take control of my life or accept the event as a misfortune and remain in a downward spiral.

The accident that stranded me at the corner of 55th Street and Route 83 earned me a police warning for "failure to reduce speed to avoid an accident." I may not have braked in time to avoid that collision, but the crash served as a wake-up call, spurring me to slam on the brakes in my own life before the damage escalates beyond repair.

Riley O'Donnell

Grade 11

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

Christine Hicks, teacher

UNTITLED

I was beginning to understand the saying that growing up is hard to do. Adults don't see the world the way children do. We have a lot to lose.

Gavin, in all his four-year-old glory, radiated optimism. I often wondered if even the passing of a summer breeze could cause him to be struck with fresh, uncontrollable inspiration to move. To jump, to speak, to completely change direction. It was an innocent, passionate spirit that had me completely captivated. Just by being around him, my constant inner battle over life's loose ends seemed less threatening, more manageable. I was less vulnerable, more hopeful. And, as I recognized the fiery spirit shining through this small child, I saw mine fading out. I went from knee deep to neck deep before I could re-grasp the spirit I was slowly squandering. Gavin brought me back.

The washing of hands is a complex, attention demanding process. The step stool is positioned perfectly beneath a deep sink so that fifteen miniature pairs of hands covered in paint and caked with clay can be cleansed. Organization is key. Each child climbs up the step next to the counselor and waits for the rushing water to come. Water-soap-towel. Suds and small streams of water cover the counter top. Water-soap-towel. The clean kids start to form a line by the door. Water-soap-towel. The blue-eyed boy remains loyally by the counselor as yet another kid steps up on the stool. The little boy starts to dance. He hops from one foot to the other, and, as he hops, he sings. The sweet little murmur reaches the ears of the counselor: "I see a little silhouette of a man ..."

Whipping out "Bohemian Rhapsody," by Queen, was like whipping out the big guns Gavin-style. If I didn't already adore him, there was no question about it now. If you haven't seen a four-year-old perform that song, I highly recommend

it. There was nothing to do but laugh. I laughed, and Gavin began to laugh at how hard I was laughing. What he didn't know was that he turned that song into a time capsule for me. Every time "Bohemian Rhapsody" comes on the radio or is shuffled through my iPod playlists, I am reminded of Gavin and how, in that exact moment, he felt the urge to sing. So he did.

The counselor scoops up the World's Smallest Queen Fan and follows the train of children out the door and up a flight of stairs. "You are a nut," she whispers to the blue-eyed boy, endearment tearing through the lingering chuckles.

"Yup," the boy says with a sigh and a smile, "I'm a cashew."

And what a nut he was. He was a precious, sweet little boy that could charm you with his exuberant expressions and investigative personality. He was everything wonderful and warm about life trapped in a tiny body. He was an open book. How could I not love him?

But the best part about my time with Gavin was that he loved me back. And I think I am starting to see why.

It is eight thirty in the morning, and a yawning counselor squats down to catch the blue-eyed boy running at her. As soon as he is back on solid ground, he takes a step back and sits down at the counselor's feet, staring at her, expecting her to follow suit. As she sits next to the boy, he tells her today they look the same. "Grrreen," he says as he tugs on their matching green tie-dye t-shirts. Twins. Today, the boy explains, they are twins.

I know he saw the space inside of me where the cherished impulsive, optimistic spirit vacated. He saw where I was empty. I know this because I felt it. The more I let Gavin shatter my expectations, the more I could feel the emptiness subside. The more I thought of the four-year-old, the less I let preoccupation drain me. I was learning to be whole again, and Gavin was the one leading the way. Somehow, in the back of

his mind, I think Gavin's biggest art project during the week of art camp was getting our trust in self, our inner spirit, to match just like our tie-dye shirts—twins inside and out.

I keep the memories of art camp stacked neatly in the back of my mind in case I ever feel the need to fill the Gavin-shaped hole in my heart. It was one week. That's all. One week of art camp, an amount of time barely suitable for learning the basics about a person. But somewhere along the way, Gavin offered more than just his favorite color or stories about his big brother, Nathan. In the unexpected moments between painting masks and piecing together a collage, Gavin would talk about his dreams. He would talk about learning, and he would talk about adventures. Most of all, he talked about his tree frogs. When he spoke, I could *feel* the belief in his voice that everything he could imagine was possible. That feeling was almost tangible; it was like a resounding echo of an object creating impact with another object. It was raw and unprotected. I didn't think it was possible to see such a limitless horizon. I didn't think it was possible a heart could be so open to unwavering faith, to the promise that the future holds. I had a lot to learn.

Jennifer Oetter

Grade 12

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

Angelique Burrell, teacher

HAVING A DREAM

From the day I was born, I have always had a dream. Dreams are an important part of life, but not everybody achieves his or her dreams for various reasons. I have had many dreams within my short lifetime, and I have reached a conclusion. Just like most things in life, dreams have a purpose: they set our goals.

When I was a small child, I dreamed that I would be a fireman. Those big, red trucks and the cool suits intrigued me. I always wanted to ride inside the truck with its blaring sirens and its flashing lights, to slide down the pole, to own a Dalmatian, and to rescue people from burning buildings. One day I told my mom about my dream, and she said that if I wanted to become a fireman, I had to train.

Later that year my brother and I received raincoats that resembled a fireman's. That's when my training began: my assistant (my brother) and I slid down the stair banister for our pole, threw on our uniforms (the new raincoats), and ran outside to the *fire*. Grabbing the garden hose, we drenched the garden until my mom came outside to stop us from drowning her plants. My training sort of ended that day, but my dream had set my goal. As a little child, I thought I was going to pursue it.

As I grew older my dream changed. At the age of eight, I wanted now to be an international baseball superstar. I would be the best player for the Cubs, the all-star pitcher who only got strikeouts, and the one who led the Cubs to a World Series victory!

I was playing baseball in a league called Hamlin Park. I almost always got placed on the best team, but that came at the expense of my playing time. Nevertheless, my dream and my dad pushed me to try harder. The extra practice sessions,

the encouragement from my father, and the will to fulfill my dream developed my abilities. So, the coach finally allowed me to pitch. Although my first time on the mound was an absolute disaster, over time I became one of the better pitchers in the league and achieved a few strikeouts. My dream could not do everything for me; I still needed a lot of practice and a lot of work.

That dream faded away like many do when reality kicks in. I finally realized that I just was not quite good enough when we received last place in a tournament.

I now have a new dream: to attend a great school, to become a doctor, and to make some money so I can live a productive and happy life. I hope that this is a dream that will finally reach fruition. It seems more achievable than my previous dreams.

Already my dream pushes me to receive good grades so that I will be able to attend a good medical university. Although this dream may be challenging to realize, I strongly believe that with my dream propelling me I will be able to turn my dream into reality. I know that it will take a lot of hard work and that I may hit some bumps along the way. Understanding reality and myself, I may even change my mind about this profession and even pursue a different career.

Nevertheless, having dreams is a good thing. They help establish goals in life and motivate one to pursue them. Although they can change throughout life, this can be a positive aspect as they develop abilities and therefore guide one to live a more fruitful and productive life. Without dreams we would never push ourselves to reach for higher achievements. Once we obtain our dreams, however, we might want something more. Therefore, having dreams is good; but just like anything else, one must pursue his or her dreams with balance and realistic expectations.

Connor Olsen

Grade 8

Lycée Français de Chicago

Chicago

Cyn Koukos, teacher

**THE MODERN ARTIST:
THE INTREPID HERALD OF A NEW ARTISTIC AGE**

I worked only by candlelight. For the most part, I did not eat—I allowed myself only seven grains of rice and seven ounces of water each day. I made each brushstroke deliberately, fervent sparks of inspiration and creation running through my fingertips as I spilled my soul over the snow-white canvas. I used a brush with bristles made from only the finest peacock eyelashes, and with a handle carved from the shoulder blade of a Brachiosaurus. In order to acquire the necessary inspiration to paint my masterpiece, each morning I meditated for three hours, performed interpretive dance for four, and spent two composing heartfelt ballads for the theremin, all before putting brush to canvas.

The first line, a revelation born of great insight and purity, lay approximately ten-and-a-quarter centimeters to the left of the right edge of the canvas. It took me five hours to complete. I slaved away in near darkness—the torturous flickering of the candlelight adding to my frustration—for what seemed to be an eternity, drawing a trembling hand downwards in a single stroke, perspiring madly all the while. Upon finishing this first line, I rested for three days, during which I did not allow myself to look upon the painting.

On the morning of the fourth day, in a sudden flash of brilliance, it occurred to me that the painting should contain a second line. As an act of unexpected inspiration, I placed this second line at a right angle in relation to the first. I dipped my peacock-lashed brush into a crystal dish filled with paint made from red wine and crushed rose petals, and I took to the canvas, the burning passion flowing through me again as I smeared the lavish red substance in a decisive leftwards streak. I toiled through the night—at times, it seemed as

though I had run out of inspiration and could not go on, but I persevered with a grim sort of courage, determined to finish. Two days later, I did.

During the creation of the two final lines, I ate nothing but the petals of the pink chrysanthemum, and I drank nothing but air. As I painted—to help nurture my creative state of mind—I listened only to Mozart’s Symphony No. 25 in G minor, and I kept the curtains drawn, so as to blind myself from everything not derived of inspiration. Throughout this period, I did not sleep, use the restroom, or wear socks. My mind was geared towards nothing but pure creation, and as such I could spare no time for the unnecessary. A tornado passed near my house, followed by a small earthquake, and I did not notice, absorbed as I was in my art.

After three more weeks, I finally completed my life’s work. All four lines, crimson and sleek, lay at right angles to each other, filling the canvas with a vibrant, four-sided expression of pure beauty—of love and imagination manifested in a delicate and thoughtful composition—of life expressed through the blood-red stain of my soul. It was beautiful. It was tragic. It was everything art should be. After hanging the canvas to dry, I was so emotionally drained that I fell into a coma for three months, after which I painstakingly signed, framed, and sold the painting to a modern art exhibition in New York, where you can still see it if you wish.

Allison Penn

Grade 10

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Becky Mueller, teacher

DEAR DRAGONFLY, LOVE MEGGERS

Dear Dragonfly,

August 25, 2006

"The date is a funny thing, isn't it? Whenever we write it, we think of it as the right-now-right-here present. But when you look back, you see it as a lifetime ago. I found papers in unpacking dated 2002. Funny, isn't it? I guess that the bottom line is, every moment is a gift: That's why they call it the present."

I am pleasantly surprised when I receive her first letter in the mail. I decide to call and ask about her new neighborhood, her new school, and her new friends.

It's awful, she tells me. I hate it. I miss Hinsdale. Eventually, the conversation drifts towards earlier memories. We talk about the day we first met. When I ask why she called me that day—that Indian summer morning in the 4th grade when her mother, who we had never met, randomly called our house to arrange a play date—she laughs.

Hearing Megan's laugh over the phone is not the same as hearing the real thing in full Technicolor. There is a kind of hollowness to it, an attempt at sincerity, almost like an effort to fool her broken heart; but truly, it is empty of soul in its entirety. I suppose moving to a city 700 miles away from the home she has always known is already taking its toll.

I called you, she says, because you were the only "Q" in the phone book.

September 21, 2007

"On our last trip to Six Flags, I bought you something. I have a matching one. It's tacky and tourist-y and overpriced and not all that pretty. Actually, it's hideous. But it's perfect."

I still have the necklace. It is not nearly as awful as she describes. True, the thread chain is cheap, and the clunky

clasp is difficult to manipulate. The pendant, however, has a childish charm. It is a dragonfly—a tribute to the nickname Megan dubbed me in the fifth grade (my glasses looked like the wings of a dragonfly, with my nose forming its body and an emblem of our friendship. The tiny stained-glass wings are a swirl of purples and blues, our favorite colors.

It was a good-bye present really, a naive, adolescent method of maintaining the bond of our friendship as she was forced to trade Millennium Park for Central Park. Surely, we figured, possessing these matching tokens would permanently fuse our friendship into an inseparable bond. Since she has given it to me, the pendant has chipped in several places and the glass has lost its luster. I am not sure how. I never wear it out because, frankly, there is truth to her statement; it is certainly not the prettiest thing I have ever seen. Even Megan admits that the pendant stays hidden under her shirt when she chooses to wear it.

Still, sometimes I wear it at night, those purple-blue glass wings resting on my chest while dreams of summer and flying and New York City haunt my sleep.

April 27, 2008

"Payton Randolph was the first true American president. Only one in 20,000 paperclips is actually used to clip papers together. It's possible for a 13-year-old girl to rip a phonebook in half. We live in a wonderfully weird world."

At first I laugh at her quirky obsession with colored ink. Every paragraph of her letters—sometimes every *line*—is a different color. Strawberry pink, neon orange, sea-foam green, Razzmatazz—I imagine she has an entire collection of gel pens in a cup on her desk. Some are new, eager to put their fresh ink to college ruled lined paper. Others have the rugged

qualities that signify true love; the favorites have chewed caps, and the last dribbles of ink are nearly dried out on their tips.

I find this idiosyncrasy rather amusing until I realize I am writing my math homework in sparkly emerald ink.

December 13, 2008

"Have you read the original Peter Pan? You should because everyone in the world should. I believe in fairies. I wish everyone else did. If I had a wish from a fairy, I know what it'd be. For my eyes not to be so tired. To be happy. To be able to see things and find real beauty. To not be like this (so unclear). That would be my wish for me. My wish for the world would be respect. Mutual respect, enough to care. Respect for the environment, animals, the past: Respect for people."

If the multicolored ink is an indication of Megan's ever-changing moods, then the doodles and notes scribbled in the margins reveal the purity and virtue of her heart. There, in the corner, is a drawing of a lily, each petal drawn meticulously so that even a simple doodle seems to embody a rare and beautiful perfection. In the left margin is the address to a website; *Save Darfur!* she writes next to it. In the right margin, she has hastily scribbled the lyrics of a song: *"I was born/to tell you I love you..."*

There are so many instances—like when reading the newspaper—when I find myself ashamed to be human. Yet there is always a voice in the back of my head encouraging me to remember those of good faith, the beauty of a simple doodle, and the power of fairy dust.

July 12, 2009

"There is no getting around it. I seem to be addicted to writing you letters. One day when you're 105 and going senile you'll still be getting letters from someone you can no longer remember. Perhaps, if I continue to outlive you, envelopes will find their way to your grave."

And still I will soak up every line until I know your
words by heart, Megan.

Love, chocolate, and concern,

Meggers

Julia Quintero

Grade 12

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

Jared Friebel, teacher

THE FAMILY STAIN

Whether or not one chooses to acknowledge it, each person belongs to a family. Traditions and values differentiate within each family tree, but undoubtedly, the relationships of a person's family define one's character. Writer Pearl S. Buck stated, "The lack of emotional security of our American young people is due, I believe, to their isolation from the larger family unit." This theme is presented in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* as he examines the strain on people and their families when they defy their family ties and isolate themselves from their relatives. Roth argues that individuals become less stable when they lack strong and positive familial relationships.

Through Coleman Silk, Roth proves that the instability from nonexistent family relationships results in a loss of one's own identity. In his attempt to pass for white and gain more freedom, Coleman entirely disowns his family, and in doing so rejects his heritage, "All he'd ever wanted from earliest childhood on, was to be free: not black, not even white—just on his own and free" (120). However, Coleman's action against his mother was so definitive that it completely restricted him from ever going back to his family. So, like Faunia Farley's "crow that doesn't know how to be a crow" (243), Coleman is neither here nor there: he does not find happiness and freedom with the black community he escapes, but also does not fit in enough to find a satisfying identity in the white world he joins. Thus, Roth proves that people's loss of individuality can confine and confuse them. Roth exhibits Coleman's instability through his negative relationships with his students, his children, Delphine Roux, and Nelson Primus: all people who do not know of Coleman's hidden past. Thus, Coleman's negative relationships are caused by his insecure

identity, and this identity confusion is caused by his lack of strong familial relations.

Similarly, Roth builds on the idea of loss of identity through Mark Silk, who dearly exemplifies how people who abandon their family regret this decision and have a difficult time coping with the consequences. Taking after his father, Mark does everything he can to separate himself from his family. He becomes an Orthodox Jew, drops out of college, and does not speak to his father. Essentially, “because of unshakable enmity for his father, Mark had made himself into whatever his family wasn’t—more sadly to the point, into whatever *he* wasn’t”(61). The irony presented here is that Mark is exactly like his father as he distances himself from his family and makes himself into an ambiguous identity like his father did. Their relationship is severed, and, like his father, Mark loses his identity with their separation. Additionally, Roth highlights Mark’s insecurity through the grief he displayed at the end of Coleman’s funeral:

That was how Coleman’s funeral ended—with all of us immobilized this time by watching Mark go to pieces, helplessly flailing his arms in the air and, through a wide-open mouth, wailing away...Mark Silk apparently had imagined that he was going to have his father around to hate forever. (314)

The use of words such as “helplessly flailing” and “wailing away” seem to compare Mark to a small child having a tantrum. In comparison to his siblings, Mark has the largest outcry at the funeral and is the most distraught. Roth uses this distressed language in order to reveal Mark’s insecurities and remorse for denying his own father. Additionally, the final statement in this passage calls Mark’s own sense of identity into question. He built a large part of his existence around

hating his father. Now that his father is no longer there, Mark feels as if he lost both his father and his own sense of self. In the short run, Mark may have been able to deal with the separation from his father; however, his reaction at the funeral proves his emotional instability and explicit regret for destroying his relationship with his father.

With the instillation of Delphine Roux's character, Roth furthers his demonstration of the way in which one may feel isolated if he or she does not have familial support. Nathan Zuckerman, the story's narrator, never actually meets Delphine; thus, he must reconstruct Delphine's past in order to explain her actions and mindset. Interestingly, Roth has Zuckerman invent an unhealthy mother-daughter relationship in her past which leaves Delphine with a strong feeling of isolation. Delphine prides herself on not conforming to her family's traditional values and carving her own path in America:

It was Delphine's mother who embodied those values, who imposed them on a household, who would have enchained her only daughter to those values from birth to the grave had her daughter been without the strength, from adolescence on, to run from her as far as she could. (275)

Delphine feels that she has escaped being "enchained" by her family, and is proud of the strength she had to run away. However, she still finds herself "all but isolated in America" (272). Rather than enjoying her freedom away from home, she longs to go back. She has one friend and can hardly relate to any men. She confesses her love for Coleman Silk in writing, yet she effectively destroys his career and reputation. For a woman that prides herself on her strength, Delphine appears vulnerable because she is so lonely. When

Zuckerman invents Delphine's damaged family history, he uses it to provide an explanation for her instability through her feelings of isolation.

Roth wrote *The Human Stain* as a cautionary tale of the emotional turbulence when one lacks familial support. Through Coleman Silk, Mark Silk, and Delphine Roux, Roth displays how this absence of relationship can cause people to be unstable by losing their own identities, living with regret, and living in isolation. Roth's concern with unstable family relationships is important because people's first relationships within their homes build a foundation for all other interactions in their lives. If trouble exists in these relationships, then people cannot develop to live harmoniously. Thus the instability resulting from negative and nonexistent relationships will damage a person forever.

Haley Sonenthal

Grade 12

Highland Park High School

Highland Park

Judi Elman, teacher

THINGS WILL ALWAYS END

I got home and did my homework quickly because I knew we had something to do tonight. I figured out what that was when we got in the car. The car became silent, no one spoke, no one could believe. Driving through town, you were able to hear the softest noises through the silence. It threw me off; I didn't expect it at all. I shook with fear and sadness. I never realized that everything comes to an end, even people.

We drove on and on during mid-March. The trees were growing leaves and birds were just coming back from the South, chirruping away without a care in the world. They don't know the real horror of worlds. They don't know how life can throw a curve ball, and some of us aren't lucky enough to move out of the way before we get hit hard.

When we got there, I realized I wasn't the only one who was sad. Compared to these people, my reason was silly, childish. Eyes puffed with red. People who looked like they hadn't slept since they heard the terrible news a week earlier. The room was filled with "I'm sorry" and "Would never imagine!" I walk, remembering great times. Times I laughed, and I think, "How will I ever get over this, ever laugh again?" Everything has to end, even sadness.

Sometimes you don't know what to expect each day. Ever since that day, I look at the calendar like a doorway. Which days are going to be opened easily, or which days will I have to work hard to open the door? Pushing and shoving till it's opened and the day is complete.

Paige Tuttle

Grade 8

St. Matthias Transfiguration Catholic School

Chicago

Jan Wiezorek, teacher

AN EMPTY GLASS

"More water, sir?"

Startled at the voice, he looked up and saw the waiter looming over dutifully with a dripping pitcher of water. He nodded and watched the ice rise to the brim of the glass. Filled, once again, he thought emptily. The glass was filled, but still empty; the water gained could not replace the water lost.

The waiter disappeared without him noticing. He continued to stare straight ahead at the strategically placed entrance. He ignored the empty chair before him. He was distant, absorbed in his mind. He became lost in the memories, the sound of her voice in the morning, groggy and sweet, but he couldn't think of that. That was the past.

As slow as a cat's yawn, the second hand on the clock above the door moved. The noise, inaudible to the average patron, became louder and louder to him. The noise crept into his thoughts and caused him to remember her unpunctuality.

As if waking him from a dream, the bell sounded, signaling her arrival. She crossed the floor without urgency and filled the naked chair. She spoke first.

"The omelet looks nice," she said, glancing at the daily specials listed on the blackboard.

"Sure it does."

"I haven't had one in a while."

"I know. So," he drew a breath. "How is it?" he asked.

"It's fine. I'm fine," she said.

A silence spread like butter on whole wheat toast. It melted into the crevices, and sensing the uneasiness, she spoke again.

"How's Corine?"

"She misses you," he started and began to raise his voice with impatience. "She asks every day when her 'mama' is coming home. Do you know how hard it is for her?"

"I had to go. She needs to understand," she said flatly.

"It was the wrong time. She's in the kindergarten play. Did you know that?"

"That's great, but you know I won't be able to see it." She looked down at the white tablecloth and began tracing circles with her fingers.

He watched her fingers move and thought how he wished to hold her hand again, but again, that was the past.

"You could—" he started.

"I can't," she stated firmly. Her words were stale, unmovable, though his wobbled on jelly.

"You missed her first loose tooth. I had to play tooth fairy. When I crept to her bedside, I stepped onto her xylophone—the one your mother gave her—and created such a noise that her eyes began to open, and she groggily asked how the tooth fairy could be a man. She didn't remember it the next day. You could have been there," he stared at her hard and craned his neck to get a better look. Unaffected by his words, she was still looking down with apathy, tracing methodically.

He continued, "You didn't see her learn to ride a bike. I had to buy two boxes of those Dora Band-Aids and we had to open nearly every Band-Aid because you know how she only likes to wear the ones with the monkey." He paused. "We flew a kite the other day,"

She looked up.

"We flew a kite," he repeated.

"Oh."

"There was the right amount of wind. Corine took hold of the handle and ran as fast as she could. I could barely keep

up with her. She was doing it for her mom to see, she said. She knew how much you loved to fly the kite. You always said you wanted to be free."

She was looking down at the tablecloth again.

"She was doing it for you. Don't you ever miss her? Don't you ever miss us? I miss the days when we could laugh about anything. We could laugh about omelets!"

"I still like omelets," she said calmly.

"No, you don't." His voice was slipping on syrup and dripping onto the table. "You don't care and you didn't care."

"I could not care. I couldn't keep living like this..." Her mouth was agape with her palms up toward the speckled ceiling. She continued, "Do you remember how hard it was for me? Do you remember after she was born? Do you remember my frustration you couldn't understand? You couldn't hear my thoughts and I'm glad you couldn't." Her words were stale alphabet Cheerios falling into an empty bowl, hitting the sides with a rattle.

Emptiness. She was empty, and so was he.

He closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair.

"More water, sir?"

He opened his eyes to his drained water glass. It was bare except for the two lingering ice cubes frozen together.

"Are you waiting for someone?" the waiter asked and motioned to the lifeless chair.

"Oh, no. Sorry, it's only me," he replied wearily. "Thank you."

He opened his wallet for a bill for the waiter and saw picture of Corine and her innocence, her lively, green eyes. How she looked like her mother. He looked to the speckled ceiling, wondering. Perhaps she was watching them now. She cared. She had smiled and laughed, but once emptiness replaced fullness she couldn't be completely filled again.

Lucy Vernasco

Grade 12

Libertyville High School

Libertyville

Karen LeMaistre, teacher

QUIT

"Beethoven was a passionate man, and his fervent personality transformed his music into a labyrinth," my piano teacher claimed.

"How so?" I asked.

She thought for a moment, and then answered, "Look closely at those 64 frenzied and difficult notes in the Beethoven Sonata you are now playing. They represent his frustration for not being able to create satisfactory music and demonstrate how passions for good music can modify it into a daunting force."

I stood alone in front of a white door, shaking with anticipation. Finally, I generated the guts to knock it.

The door was wrenched open by my new piano teacher, an aged woman with heavily-muscled hands. They had ugly blue veins poking through the skin. They scared me.

"Come in," she said. As I shuffled into the house, two huge Steinway pianos burst into view. I immediately sat down at the nearest piano, trembling.

As my piano teacher closed the door, she introduced herself. "My name is Ms. Tsien. I expect my students to be the best."

She ambled over to a bookshelf and pulled out a sheet of music.

"Play this exercise twenty times," she ordered.

"Wait, you expect me to play this *twenty times*?" I retorted.

"Try it!" she answered.

I began to struggle through the exercise. At the seventeenth time, my teacher stopped me.

"Your music is barely satisfactory," she declared. "Because of this, I will give you a basic piece."

I was relieved. She was going to be easy!

"Even though I am assigning you the basics, I am still expecting you to practice at least two hours a day," she said.

Yeah right, I thought to myself. With this easy piece, I can practice maybe ten minutes a day. "Thank you, Ms. Tsien!" I gushed.

She raised her eyebrows and said, "Remember my warnings."

"Composers have reputations for being passionately spastic," Ms. Tsien asserted. "Richard Wagner epitomizes this reputation."

"Didn't he have anti-Semitic passions?" I inquired.

"Yes," she answered. "Such passions can evolve into short tempers and explosive personalities," she added.

Screams. That's all I remember from my second piano lesson. All that week I had simply practiced seven minutes a day.

I swaggered up to Ms. Tsien's door and rang the doorbell incessantly, impatient to show off my music. She finally yanked open the door.

"You seem happy. Did you practice?" she asked.

"Of course!" I bragged.

"Let's see your music then," she replied.

I strutted towards my assigned piano and seated myself. "Go on!" she urged. I began to play the piece and managed to hit many notes correctly. I smiled wider with each passing note.

Until I hit a wrong note.

My piano began to screech with wrong notes. Ms. Tsien suddenly screamed.

"What are you, a piece of wood?!?"

Ashamed, I looked away from her.

"You failed an *elementary* piece."

I squeezed my eyes shut.

"Quit."

Tears rolled from my eyes.

"Please. Get out."

I was not good; I needed to change.

I practiced four hours a day the next week.

"Ah, Mozart," my teacher sighed.

"What about him?" I asked.

"He was a prodigy. He was internationally famous. But it all started when he played for a council of people," she dreamily replied.

"A recital, right?" I wondered.

"Exactly!" she replied.

Weeks of torment. Ms. Tsien screamed and yelled and cried. Lessons were nightmares.

As the year progressed, she signed me up for an annual student recital. "Don't fail!" she declared after signing me up.

I practiced five hours a day up to the day of the recital.

During the recital, my teacher enthusiastically applauded after every student's performance. *She won't do that for mine.* I mourned.

Then my turn suddenly came.

I sat down at the piano and began to play. I closed my eyes and let the music flow.

As I opened my eyes and allowed the last note to fade off, I looked at my teacher. She beamed at me and announced, "Students, play as well as Jeff!"

My piano teacher actually *praised me*. Maybe her criticism *helped* me.

Ms. Tsien then ran up to me.

"Jeff, there's a major piano competition next month. I think you may win."

I immediately registered the next day.

"I want to teach like Carl Czerny," my piano teacher said *one day*.

"Why?" I wondered out loud.

"He always forced students to play better by reminding them of their weaknesses. Because of this, he produced the best pianist of all time: Franz Liszt," she answered.

It was the day of the competition.

As I tried to loosen my starched collar, I glanced nervously at my competitors.

Ms. Tsien suddenly appeared behind me and whispered, "Don't be a piece of wood."

As the competitors before me played, I repeatedly thought to myself, *I will not be a piece of wood!*

Finally, it was my turn. I charged right up to the piano, completely forgetting to bow to the judge. I just sat and played.

As my finger left the last note of my piece, the competition judge applauded wildly. She turned towards me and proclaimed, "You are our first place winner, Jeffrey Yang!"

"Nowadays, we have the great Lang Lang," my piano teacher said. "He did not become a virtuoso without pain."

"What was this pain like?" I asked.

"Lang Lang had a vicious father who pounded him every day. He was pressured immensely. But he was also motivated by his own passions to succeed," my teacher replied.

My piano teacher was not a normal teacher. She went to extremes teaching me how to succeed, from slamming on her piano to calling me obscene names. I could have quit, but my anger and passion had driven me to continue my lessons under her instruction.

Thanks to my teacher, I developed passion and determination. It was not easy, but I managed to develop them through the chaotic lessons. Without the help of my teacher, I would still believe that practicing seven minutes a day is sufficient.

Jeffrey Yang

Grade 11

Hinsdale Central High School

Hinsdale

David Lange, teacher

FETCH

Master grabs the neon sphere off the ground. My hazelnut eyes stare at it with as much anxiety as the last time. They are big and full of excitement, and I can see that Master understands my message just by looking at my eyes. He holds it back. My weight shifts onto my haunches, hoping to fetch the ball in mid-flight.

Then, suddenly, Master flings his paw releasing the sphere. Flying through the air, I dash the minute it leaves his flesh. Side by side with the toy, I jump up. *And voila! Caught! Oops*—It slides by my fur, barely missing my mouth. As soon as I realize, instinct kicks in. *Hurry to the ground. Continue to search.*

The sphere bounces and flies again. I am ready to jump up, knowing I am going to catch. *So close, almost there.*

“Halt! Sit!” Master yells gruffly.

I obey, the ball rolling across the mysterious, hard black river.

“Good boy! Now let me go get the ball,” Master says easily, while petting me behind the ears. Master looks down one side of the hard, black river and then to the other. He hurriedly walks across to the other side and retrieves my ball.

My tail begins to wag. He’s got it; I am hopeful the game continues. *Throw the toy; get toy. Throw toy; get toy...*

This time, Master crosses the hard, black river. He does not look; he just begins to stroll casually. Hand reaches backward and then proceeds forward, releasing the sphere once more past my head. I turn and chase after the sphere.

Vroom! Ooooph! Then deadly silence prevailed.

I caught the rubber sphere, and I obediently turned and headed toward Master.

Remembering Master's command, "Halt! Sit!" I patiently sat by the side of the hard, black river waiting for Master to awaken.

Margaret Young

Grade 7

Lycée Français de Chicago

Chicago

Cyn Koukos, 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 132. 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 134).

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

Submission Guidelines

(See page 134 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 mailed to the special editor for that issue and postmarked by the previous January 31. Please see page 135 for the two-page special submission guidelines and contact information for fall issues and page 137 for the required enclosure. 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

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

DEADLINE: Postmarked no later than January 31, 2012.

FORMAT: Typed copy is preferred. 8^{1/2} x 11 paper is mandatory (one side only). Copy must be clear, legible, and carefully proofread, and must not include drawings or illustrations.

LABELING: Each entry must be accompanied by its own cover sheet stapled to the entry, which states:

- 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)
- Email address of instructor

IMPORTANT: The student's name, the school's name, and the teacher's name must not appear anywhere else.

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.

REQUIRED ENCLOSURE FOR STUDENT
POETRY AND PROSE ENTRIES

When submitting manuscripts, include a signed statement to read:

To the best of my knowledge, the enclosed manuscripts were written by the students whose names they bear. I have submitted work by the following students (give complete list of students represented):

<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
(Name)	(Title)	(Grade)

<hr/>	<hr/>
(School)	(Instructor's Email)

(Teacher's Signature)

MAILING: Send prose to: IATE Prose Contest
Delores Robinson
Illinois Valley Community College
815 N. Orlando Smith Ave.
Oglesby, IL 61348-9692

Send poetry to: IATE Poetry Contest
Robin L. Murray
Department of English
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Avenue
Charleston, IL 61920