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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 2007

JANICE NEULEIB

First, I want to thank Ron Fortune, my coeditor and now emeritus professor at Illinois State University (ISU), for his long service both to the *Illinois English Bulletin* and to IATE. It was Ron who made it possible for IATE to move from the University of Illinois to ISU. It was Ron who helped set up a support system for IATE and who continued to provide his encouragement and talents throughout IATE's years at ISU. His work on the *Bulletin* is greatly missed, but I wish him happiness and wonderful work in retirement.

Then, as usual, I want to thank our poetry and prose editors: Robin L. Murray and Kimberly M. Radek. This regular issue of the *Bulletin* could not exist without their hard work and the work of their volunteer judges. IATE continues to be appreciative of and excited by the participation of Illinois Poet Laureate Kevin Stein for his work with the poetry contest and

for his contributions to the *Bulletin*. Stein notes in his piece that young people are more and more interested in poetry. I'm sure that part of that interest comes from his participation in the writing that these youngsters do. Stein's contributions continue to encourage and energize Illinois' young writers.

IATE owes continuous thanks to Sarah Haberstick whose constant work and vigilance ensure this journal's quality and promptness.

As a longtime reader of AP exams, I know how difficult it is for youngsters to take risks with writing, even when the explicit guidelines call for these risks as the AP guidelines do. The young writers in this issue have taken wonderful risks. They have taken the risk of being funny in a charming way as Nora Gabor does in "36. Electronic Love," a poem to her iPod. They take risks in dealing with the difficult subject of death and in writing a play, as Adin Lenahan does in "Death Dreams of Mourning." They also tackle massive and difficult mythic subjects as Andrew Capillo does in "Blut and Krieg." It is a joy to see that these Illinois writers are willing to venture into dangerous territory and come out with artistic successes.

None of this writing could happen without the encouragement of the IATE teachers who take the time to encourage their writers with thoughtful assignments, careful reading and response, and well-deserved praise. Then, and finally most important, they submitted their students' work for review and judgment. These teachers deserve our praise and admiration for being there for these risk-taking students.

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

Jennifer Arias	John Lodle
Jim Barnabee	Mark Maxwell
Giovanni Benincasa	Paul Muenchow
Amy Birtman	Stephanie O'Hara
Glen Brown	Diane Riley
Andy Davis	Lee Roll
Judi Elman	Brad Ruda
Margaret Forst	Sara Sher
Carol Gallagher	Stephanie Solis
Elizabeth Hartley	John Stephenson
Stephen Heller	Kate Sullivan
Rebecca Hodgkin	Karen Topham
Elizabeth Holding	Charlene Wagner
Paul Kemp	Nell Wiseman
Cyn Koukos	

IATE POETRY RUNNERS-UP

Taylor Carso, “Missing Goggles,” Grade 6, Monroe Middle School, Wheaton, Carol Gallagher–teacher

Joseph Eveland, “Winter Is Like a Blank Painting,” Grade 9, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll–teacher

Katelyn Fidler, “Fall Leaves,” Grade 11, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll–teacher

Jasmine Gill, “Fame Is Like,” Grade 7, Monroe Middle School, Wheaton, Carol Gallagher–teacher

Rosy Phinick, “Bloomingdale 1963,” Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, La Grange, Kate Sullivan–teacher

Kayla Rees, “Waiting,” Grade 8, Princeville Elementary School, Princeville, Charlene Wagner–teacher

IATE POETRY HONORABLE MENTIONS

Bill Angel, "Life Was Peaceful," Grade 8, Northbrook Junior High School, Northbrook, Rebecca Hodgins—teacher

Sarah Boots, "On the Tendency to Expect Too Much," Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, La Grange, Glen Brown—teacher

Wesley Brazel, "Chemistry Abstraction," Grade 8, Princeville Elementary School, Princeville, Charlene Wagner—teacher

Taylor Carso, "Mirror of Color," Grade 6, Monroe Middle School, Wheaton, Carol Gallagher—teacher

Ilana Emer, "*Amor Fati*: Embrace Your Fate," Grade 12, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Stephanie Solis—teacher

Alexandra Fields, "Young Love Magic," Grade 12, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Jim Barnabee—teacher

Angela Gaddini, "Backyard Beethoven," Grade 12, Rolling Meadows High School, Rolling Meadows, Mark Maxwell—teacher

Morgan C. Henry, "Silver Cane Game," Grade 12, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll—teacher

Emma Michalak, "Tiger Shark," Grade 7, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos—teacher

Emily Miller, "Un-Reality," Grade 12, Rolling Meadows High School, Rolling Meadows, Mark Maxwell—teacher

Calvin Lange Muenchow, "Ode to Silence," Grade 8, Hickory Creek Middle School, Cicero, Paul Muenchow—teacher

Ian Murray, "Wild Winds," Grade 7, Monroe Middle School, Wheaton, Carol Gallagher—teacher

Brittany Olinger, "Fantasy Feast," Grade 9, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll—teacher

Rosalina Perez, "Climbing Up Your Walls," Grade 12, Evanston Township High School, Evanston, Elizabeth Holding—teacher

Rosy Phinick, "Guerra," Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, La Grange, Kate Sullivan—teacher

Willow Spencer, "Butter Churin'," Grade 12, Charleston High School, Charleston. Nell Wiseman—teacher

Adam Swiatlowski, "Stars Shone Bright," Grade 12, Northside College Preparatory High School, Chicago, Giovanni Benincasa—teacher

Caleb Ryan White, "Grandpa, It's Me and You," Grade 11, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll—teacher

Lauren Wolek, "Goggles and Gas Masks vs. Bloody Chicken Wire," Grade 12, Rolling Meadows High School, Rolling Meadows, Mark Maxwell—teacher

IATE PROSE RUNNERS-UP

Elissa Barsky, “Barefoot,” Grade 11, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Judi Elman–teacher

Stefanie A. Borntreger, “Coming of Age,” Grade 9, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll–teacher

Kristen Brutscher, “Nama’s House,” Grade 11, O’Fallon Township High School, O’Fallon, Diane Riley–teacher

Diana Chen, “The Yellow Rose of I-Hville,” Grade 12, Vernon Hills High School, Vernon Hills, Paul Kemp–teacher

Lauren Clatch, “How All Things Work,” Grade 11, Vernon Hills High School, Vernon Hills, Paul Kemp–teacher

Sophie Friedman, “Deep behind the Glasses,” Grade 8, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sara Sher–teacher

Brett Glasner, “Feeding Time,” Grade 8, Edgewood Middle School, Highland Park, Sara Sher–teacher

Allie Glyman, “Iguana Bait,” Grade 9, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Amy Birtman–teacher

Jamie Hausman, “Lakota,” Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Stephen Heller–teacher

Lisa Jorfald, “Not Today,” Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Margaret Forst–teacher

Alex Kitts, “Potholes,” Grade 8, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos–teacher

Anna Krueger, “For the First Time in Years,” Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, La Grange, Kate Sullivan–teacher

Erica Newman, “An Unholy Temptation,” Grade 12, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Jim Barnabee–teacher

Katrina Palak, “Peachy Surprise #209,” Grade 12, Lyons Township High School, La Grange, Kate Sullivan–teacher

Will Putzbach, “Mother Bird,” Grade 12, Rolling Meadows High School, Rolling Meadows, Mark Maxwell–teacher

Courtney Seymour, “Telecommunication,” Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Margaret Forst–teacher

Claire Simon, “Doing More than What Is Expected,” Grade 9, Evanston Township High School, Evanston, John Stephenson–teacher

Graicey Van Spankeren, “Recess,” Grade 8, Northbrook Junior High School, Northbrook, Rebecca Hodgin–teacher

Ally Tucker, “Personal Statement,” Grade 12, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Stephanie Solis–teacher

IATE PROSE HONORABLE MENTIONS

Bill Angel, "Adventure at the Holt Hideaway," Grade 8, Northbrook Junior High School, Northbrook, Rebecca Hodgins—teacher

Peter Bassick, "When the World Stops," Grade 11, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Karen Topham—teacher

Laura Corona, "A Crack on the Wall," Grade 12, Evanston Township High School, Evanston, Elizabeth Holding—teacher

Amber Davis, "The End," Grade 9, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll—teacher

Jake Feeny, "Today's Forecast: Surprisingly Sunny," Grade 12, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Jennifer Arias—teacher

Elisa Graff, "Tales of Lisa Carrington," Grade 12, Evanston Township High School, Evanston, Elizabeth Holding—teacher

Aliya de Grazia, "Sadder Wine," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Stephen Heller—teacher

Brian Gutman, "But My Hands Seem Tied," Grade 12, Highland Park High School, Highland Park, Stephanie Solis—teacher

Jimmy Harper, "Crack," Grade 8, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos—teacher

Ethan Lindauer, "Strong Feelings on Steroids Muscle Their Way to International Stage," Grade 11, Vernon Hills High School, Vernon Hills, Paul Kemp—teacher

Jenny Mercer, "Comfortable Darkness," Grade 10, University High School, Normal, Andy Davis—teacher

Alex Padovano, “Bella Figura,” Grade 11, Vernon Hills High School, Vernon Hills, Paul Kemp—teacher

Katrina Palak, “Tearing Threads,” Grade 12, Evanston Township High School, Evanston, Kate Sullivan—teacher

Rosalina Perez, “The Abandoned Building,” Grade 12, Evanston Township High School, Evanston, Elizabeth Holding—teacher

Elizabeth Rowe, “Firelight and Futures,” Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Stephanie O’Hara—teacher

Amanda Marie Smith, “The Letter,” Grade 9, Oakland High School, Oakland, Lee Roll—teacher

Gabriel Staton, “The Dark Horses,” Grade 8, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos—teacher

Abbey Stoller, “What Our Pledge of Allegiance Means to Me,” Grade 6, Monroe Middle School, Wheaton, Carol Gallagher—teacher

Luca Tresham, “Racing,” Grade 8, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Cyn Koukos—teacher

Lindsay Wallis, “All Mine,” Grade 12, Rolling Meadows High School, Rolling Meadows, Mark Maxwell—teacher

**MELODY AS MEANING:
THE POEM AS SONG AND LAMENT**

KEVIN STEIN
ILLINOIS POET LAUREATE

The young understand in their bones what we old folks too often forget: A poem is a musical thing, songlike in voice, melodic in chiming lines, rhythmic in thumping metrical beat. Faced with the intoxicating whimsy of, say,

Jack Sprat could eat no fat,
his wife could eat no lean,
and so between them both, you see,
they licked the platter clean,

the young dance as much as speak the lines. None ponders the Sprats' odd eating habits; none frets over the Mrs.'s fate given her questionable diet. None resolves to eat everything on her/his plate tonight because people are starving all over the world. The musical throb and chiming rhymes are

sufficient in themselves, satisfying in ways both mysterious and redemptive. We old folks need Edward Sapir to remind us, “Poetry everywhere is inseparable in its origins from the singing voice and the measure of the dance.”

One might well argue contemporary music has both (a) contributed to poetry’s cultural decline and (b) catalyzed its resurgence among American youth. The first case is easy enough to make. Along with the novel and the advent of film drama, popular music wrested the public’s attention away from poetry as the pinnacle of aesthetic expression our grandparents considered it to be. In recordings and live performances, music offers its audience a rich blend of sound and sense that elevates to levels of ecstatic senselessness, word and note the means of ascension and revelation—not to mention the source of seemingly boundless pleasure. Poems, or perhaps better, the wrong poems, can’t compete with this multivalent appeal to the senses.

Yes, one achieves similar release listening to classical music, but most young folks regard the classics with the same scrunched-faced derision they offer broccoli or homework. So, how has popular music worked its surprising magic, as I contend, fueling poetry’s supercharged engine among young people? Two things account for resurgent interest in poetry among youth: technological innovation and musical evolution. The recent flurry of audio and video personal devices has given young people a way to see and hear *what* they want *when* they want. No doubt the iPod and iPhone, the emergence of YouTube, and the Internet’s various social-networking sites have afforded young folks the means to inhabit a cultural locale awash with image and sound. And they can share among “friends,” both real and digital, nearly everything they do, say, and see. The public square, once a physical site bound in both place and time, has given way

to a digital public commons. Music has benefited from and aided this evolution, especially hip-hop and rap, which have, despite their sometimes questionable subject matter, succeeded in reigniting young folks' devotion to rhyme and narrative. A story well told in image and chiming language, they're rediscovering, is both memorable and pleasing.

If anything, young people are increasingly invested in poetic expression that bridges the chasm between stage and page. Their experimentation with spoken-word and performance poetry is connecting poetry with its ancient origins. Poetry is, at root, an oral and performative art. Though I love the company of a book, I also recognize the book was once the iPod of its generation. The book has served us well for several hundred years, and it will continue to do so in one form or another. But for poetry to flourish, not merely survive, it must embrace new modes of bringing together the poem and its reader or listener. Even the middle-aged postmaster of my small village of Dunlap owns an iPod, and hers contains not only songs but also poems—audio poems she's downloaded to listen to when driving to and from work. This is why I edited the audio CD poetry anthology *Bread & Steel*, a gathering of 24 Illinois poets reading from their works (<http://www.bradley.edu/poet/breadandsteel>). My hope is teachers will bring *Bread & Steel* into the classroom, thus embracing poetry's oral appeals and thereby persuading students that poetry's always hip.

It's no wonder we see evidence of these changes in our students' poems. Poems express the world young folks see and daily move through. This year's IATE first-place winners exhibit a surprisingly lush awareness of the musical phrase. A few of these poems, those earning my citation as Poems of Special Merit, both employ melodic lines and reveal the poets' sensitivity to music itself, as well as to the means through

which music reaches many of us today—via the iPod. For one poet, the rain itself plays a “Street beat,” a “hip-hop drip drop.” Another sings a sprightly tune to her iPod, her “little pocket deity.” One ten year old worships an iPhone he comes across on a running path, tempted by reverence and “true wanting.” He thanks his good fortune and ponders taking the device home with him, feeling within himself “a slight tremble” that sets his morals against the culture’s acquisitive greed. Still another describes her encounter with the punk musical scene, detailing the exotic allure of its “salty communal ocean.” The poet’s deft touch is itself musical, offering up lines rich with “Blitzkrieg Bop” and “fragile vinyl” that one wants to trill over and over, just for the fun of it. Lest we become dizzy on this swirling carnival ride, we come to one young poet’s tribute to a fallen sibling, a poem rendered in striking detail of refrigerator alphabet letters, sippy cups, and skin the color of “creamer in Dad’s coffee.” Such a poem reminds us poems lament as well as celebrate. All poems are acts of remembrance against the rush of time and forgetfulness. What a poem sings stays with us, both memorial and song.

Poems of Special Merit
2007–2008 IATE Poetry Competition
Cosponsored by Kevin Stein
and Patti Blagojevich, First Lady of Illinois

These submissions have garnered recognition as Poems of Special Merit:

“Listen to the Rain,” Ade Ajanaku, Grade 6, Lycée Français de Chicago

“Megan,” Amber Davis, Grade 9, Oakland High School

“36. Electric Love,” Nora Gabor, Grade 10, Evanston Township High School

“Ten,” Jimmy Harper, Grade 8, Lycée Français de Chicago

“Snake Skin,” Anna Krueger, Grade 12, Lyons Township High School

**ILLINOIS POETS AND POETRY 2007:
CONTINUING THE LITERARY TRADITION**

ROBIN L. MURRAY

One of my graduate students is examining what it means to be an Illinois poet through a study of Carl Sandburg's and Edgar Lee Masters's lives and work. According to this student, because "both were raised in central Illinois, ... the language, speech patterns, political issues, and imagery of central Illinois found their way into almost every piece of their work. Both were masters of capturing the physical beauty of the region and the depth and feeling of the people, both ordinary and extraordinary, who lived there." For her, the Midwest shows itself in these poets' works, even when they broach more universal issues like warfare and Abraham Lincoln or leave the rural "down state" for Chicago (as Sandburg did for most of his life). Masters is most well-known for his Spoon River poems, especially "Lucinda Matlock," the most anthologized of his works.

Sandburg's Chicago poems highlight urban landscapes drawn with natural images found in central Illinois. Voices in "Clark Street Bridge" sing "Softer than the stars, / Softer than the mist."

And, in "They Will Say," the speaker contrasts the city workhouses with the nature they erase: "You took little children away from the sun and the dew, / And the glimmers that played in the grass under the great sky, / And the reckless rain...."

Illinois Poet Laureate, Kevin Stein, continues the traditions of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Illinois poets, connecting individual experiences with the landscape of the Midwest. In "Beanstalk," for example, Stein uses images that move back and forth between the universal and the local, highlighting his own connection to place:

Ask the crashed finch, flushed by the neighbor's
flabby tabby—tuft of feather on windowpane,
wing dust as serrated as our bread knife.
Worth what, a couple good rhymes.

More importantly for us, the Illinois poets highlighted here, from grades five through 12, combine rural and urban visions of the Midwest, emphasizing nature and character, even when contemplating philosophical issues like life, love, and death. All these authors contribute to our understanding of Illinois poetry and to an awareness of poetry housed and nurtured in "place."

LISTEN TO THE RAIN

Listen to the rain: *drip drop*

Listen to the rain: *drumming and humming*

On the street—Street beat

On the roof—Water proof

Listen to the rain: *thump thump*

Listen to the *hip-hop drip drop*

Oh....

I love the rain!

Ade Ajanaku

Grade 6

Lycée Français de Chicago

Chicago

Cyn Koukos, teacher

MEGAN

March 20, 1995–December 16, 1996

Ashen snowflakes

Fall—

I'm three years old again
and I'm saying,
"Wake up, Megie Meggs."

I walk to the kitchen,
to the refrigerator—
covered in green, red, and blue
alphabet letters.

I open the door,
grab the apple juice
Mom poured into sippy cups
last night.

I go back to our room;
you are still asleep.

I put down the juice
on the little pink table.
"Come on, Megan,
wake up."
You don't budge.

I remember
the color of your skin...
like creamer in Dad's coffee.

and your lips—
like purple grapes.

I can't go back
to our room.
Something tells me I shouldn't.

I look at the snow,
numb.
Staring in a trance.

I didn't cry then;
I cry now...

Amber Davis
Grade 9
Oakland High School
Oakland
Lee Roll, teacher

36. ELECTRIC LOVE

Oh how I love thee,
My little treasure of melody.

My faithful pocket traveler,
Though costing me every dollar.

The way you sing me lullabies,
Allowing sleep to shut my eyes.

Only you know how to give me a cheer,
With plastic caressing my inner ear.

You always surprise me,
With your spontaneity.

You are well worth the wait,
When your battery has gone sedate.

I simply give you a spark,
And once again you are singing like a lark.

Oh iPod how I love thee,
My little pocket deity.

Nora Gabor

Grade 10

Evanston Township High School

Evanston

Elizabeth Hartley, teacher

BASEBALL ROOKIE

He stands
Like a lone soldier
The cavalry
Watching from behind the backstop
He is surrounded
And laughed at
A joke to the booing crowd

Embarrassment
Like a cloud over his head
Driving his crumbling heart
To beat faster
And faster
Redness spreading
Across his strained face
Forcing a lame smile

The cavalry
Still hiding
Sleeping in safety
Bears
In a warm cave
While the cub
Alone
With all hope lost
Is forced to fend for himself

He stands
Like a lone soldier
Unwilling to back down
Rookie

Emma Grisanzio

Grade 5

Monroe Middle School

Wheaton

Carol Gallagher, teacher

TEN

North of the river on Thirteenth,
I found on the side of the path one summer day
An iPhone with music blaring
From its earphones, lying there,
Willing me to take it.
I was ten.

Admiring the clean, perfect screen,
The exceptional quality of the
Speakers: I picked it up
With a reverence that
Comes with a true wanting.
I was ten.

It slipped so easily into my pocket,
Ready to continue proudly down the
Path ahead, I thought about the luck
That I had. On that path I felt a
Forward pull, a slight tremble.
I was ten.

Then, I heard a moan behind the tree
In the cool shade. I walked closer to him—
The owner—who desperately reached for
My water bottle. He gulped and gulped,
Then took back his iPhone with mumbled
Thanks and started his running down the path again.
I stood there shaded:
I was ten.

Jimmy Harper

Grade 8

Lycée Français de Chicago

Chicago

Cyn Koukos, teacher

SUMMER LOVE

Waves crash into the pebbly shoreline
Everything swept away until the next summer
Ready to resurface like the old Petoskeys found along the coast

The sun slowly descending behind the lake
Reflecting its delicate rays onto the blue
Plays hide and go seek with the world

I remember

Lying together on a soft bed of sand,
You slip your hand through mine
Like the grains running through my fingers

Your touch awakening me
Fireworks sparking over the pier as
Your eyes mirror the luminosity

Dune grass tickling my leg
You lean in for a kiss
An innocent embrace.

The moment our lips meet
The corners of my mouth begin to curl
I feel your fingertips play with and comb through my hair

Sun concealed under a blanket of stars
Every essence of you fills my soul as the water vanishes
Lost in the moment, the firecrackers disappear around me

It's free falling this time.

Wanting nothing more
Than being here with you
'Til the last wave crashes down.

Ashley Hartman

Grade 11

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Karen Topham, teacher

SNAKE SKIN

(after John Dickson)

The first two punks of my life,
breathing chords of "God Save the Queen,"
cat-slinking past me towards
the swirl of people
cramming into the burnt ashtray of
a venue. I'm transfixed by their
gravity-defying hair, with
neon splashes erasing all traces of
blonde and brunette.
"Martians," I think softly so they
won't hear and melt me with
charcoal-lined eyes.

Sometimes they wear black leather jackets.
Sometimes they wear only flesh.
Always, they create a harmony when they walk
of jangling chains, clinking silver studs,
rustling buckles of boots above
the knees. Stinking of smoke, beer,
and something dead like an old
snake skin. Would they
burst into flames in bright
sunlight like vampires?

But inside the dark they are kings, gods.
Whirling, raging, punching flesh and
air and bone to get a touch of something as
real as the rasp in the singer's voice
or the warrior pound of the drums.
Like some archaic dance, a

“Blitzkrieg Bop,” they thrash
around and through and above the waves
of living mass. Sweat pours over them,
a salty communal ocean. Lights
flash in their eyes, stream through their veins.

And in the midst of the turbulent sea
a pierced girl clutches at her own Cobain.
The metal in his lip meets her soft
forehead; he will guard her
like his precious, fragile vinyl.
We all wear down to the
same, delicate skin.

Anna Krueger

Grade 12

Lyons Township High School

LaGrange

Kate Sullivan, teacher

FOR EVERY TIME

If I wrote a poem for every single minute I was confused
about you

I could make a book in a day

And keep on going

'Til your image fades away

out of my heart

If I drew a heart for every time I was in love with you

They would go on and on

And go off the page

'Til I found out you didn't love me

and my heart filled with rage

If I wrote a song about you for every time I was lonely and
without you

I wouldn't have many

Because you're in my heart and mind every single minute

Even if you don't feel the same

Or maybe you do

But it all relies on my lucky penny

To create a "me and you"

Emily Stern

Grade 7

Edgewood Middle School

Highland Park

Sara Sher, teacher

ILLINOIS PROSE 2007

KIMBERLY M. RADEK

In a well-crafted speech given this past winter, Senator Barack Obama addressed the history of racism and its effects on our country. He called for all American people to begin sharing their experiences with each other, so that we might all better understand how Americans—both like us and not like us—live, for the noble purpose of conquering the social problems we all face in our society. In his prose, Obama reminds us that, in spite of our nation’s constitution, “words on a parchment [were not] enough to deliver slaves from bondage, or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States.” He recognizes that words must be used and arranged with skill before they can be strong enough to influence their audiences to feel or to act. Before we can have the “audacity to hope,” we must first have the writing skills necessary to express our positions and to share our experiences and beliefs; only then

can people's hearts and minds be affected. That skill, that craft, is what we value and teach, and it is what our society seems now to need desperately. It is a skill, a craft, that our students are certainly learning, as is evident in the winning prose submissions this year.

This year, our Illinois writing students have shown that they have the skill, the willingness, and the audacity to enter into our cultural debate. We appreciate the skill with which Ariel Goodman convinces us to go "Beyond the Call of Duty" as we live our lives; we applaud Nathaniel Cha's willingness to remind us "to hold back our ideas and listen to others..." before we commit to our actions, and we cheer for those students who are audacious enough to express opinions that might not be popular, because they remind us how important it is to always allow people to have a voice in their own lives, as Keith Weissman does when he advocates for the right to choose to eat food that he knows is bad for him. These students, and all the others, have written and shared their stories and their lives with us, making our own stories and our own lives immeasurably richer. As Obama explains, our children "must always believe that they can write their own destiny." We are once again thankful that you have chosen to share these stories and these destinies with us.

Kimberly M. Radek,
for the judges at Illinois Valley Community College:

Lori Cinotte
Koshu Jagasia
Yelena Kajevic
Kirk D. Lockwood
Randy Rambo
Delores Robinson
Carol Zebron

MY NAME

Supposedly, my name means “crowned,” but most days I feel anything but. I don’t mean in the sense that I’m worthless or pathetic or depressed all the time, rather that I prefer to keep myself under-the-radar remarkable. I was born in the Year of the Monkey, which apparently means I’m affable. I don’t think I could come up with a better word, and I’m not just saying that because it’s so cute sounding. I try to be the salty-wet pillow, the fist of triumph for another’s victory, or the smooth familiarity of warm coffee on a cold November morning. Maybe it’s just my lyrical soul talking, but I try to show love under all conditions.

One thing I know about Stefanie Ann Borntreger is that the person who named me didn’t want me. Now, that sounds dramatic. I should say he didn’t want a *female* me. My brother, five years old at the time, was ready to throw the tantrum to end all tantrums because the new brother he had hoped and prayed for would not be coming home from the hospital, just the little unnamed girl. My parents had a few names picked out—all of which I would just about choke on today—but they let Jason, the kindergartener, decide what I would be called for the rest of my days.

Up until this point, Jason had had a babysitter named Stephanie. Stephanie used to piggyback him all the way to long picnics by the glittering pond on those days that you would have been crazy to stay indoors. She took him everywhere, and he would follow her around until the sun turned silver, he loved her so much. And for that reason alone, Jason decided he could tolerate a baby sister if her name was Stephanie. (My parents saved me from total Plain-Janeity by switching the *ph* for the less common *f*, not that anyone minds.) Thus, my fate was sealed.

I've never actually met my namesake, but she sounds like a person to live up to. Stephanie gave of herself to help out a family who needed an extra hand. I know that *she* showed love, because how else would she have put up with my bottle-rocket-energized big brother? Patience and grace is what it takes to bear the name and whatever else life throws at us.

Despite my deepest ponderings, *Steph/fanie* still means "crowned." Maybe Stephanie and I wear a different kind of crown, a kind that helps us hold our heads up even when we're under fire. It isn't a flashy crown, rather one that sits low, where people far away might not notice it at first glance. Only those who pay enough attention and stick close enough see that there is royalty in humility. It's a crown I am terribly proud to bear.

Stefanie A. Borntreger

Grade 9

Oakland High School

Oakland

Lee Roll, teacher

BLUT UND KRIEG

His helmet feels tight on his head, an embrace he finds comforting, recalling the countless times he would have died without its sturdy steel. Beads of sweat fall into his eyes, obscuring the battle before him; yet his senses are as sharp as a knife. The scent of fire carries along the wind as he feels the first blasts of heat from the raging inferno that was once a small village. Screams of the dying mingle with the war cries of his soldiers as he mutters a quick prayer to Thor. Time itself seems to stand still, and before he knows it he is on solid ground with axe in hand and thirty hardened warriors at his back...and then he wakes up; it was only another dream.

For Grishnackh, this dream was not bizarre at all. Of his thirty winters serving the Æsir, the gods of his people, Grishnackh had known nothing but constant war. Grishnackh had been but a child when the mad King Neromos usurped the Norwegian throne and sparked almost thirty years of civil war with still no end in sight, and so he was considered an old man by his comrades in arms. A united Norway had only recently been established less than a century before by Harald Faarfagr, who defeated the various petty kings across the land with ease. But it was for a free Norway that Grishnackh and his comrades risked their lives for, fighting for their rights to preserve their culture and way of life.

Rising from the frozen ground and scraps of wolf fur that had been his bed, Grishnackh trudged over to the center of his camp where a great fire was burning. The sun had not yet risen, but the camp was very much alive, especially near the light and warmth of the fire. Finding a place to sit on the ground, Grishnackh removed the furs clinging to his battle-worn fists and tried to return life to them with Halfr's Bane. His hands were as cold and scarred as the lands they had served, and the rest of him was no less fierce. His years

-serving the Æsir did not come without a price. Scores on his dark, leathery skin served as trophies and testaments to his fighter's spirit. On his wide shoulders perched a short neck and a ferocious face. His chin was broad, like his father's, and he had not shaved in days. A wide nose inhaled the cold wind of the wintry north, and his eyes, a lonely color of gray, had seen more than their share of death and devastation. He wore his hair, as bright as Sif's golden locks, long and tied it back with a leather strap. Among the battered band of rebels, he was an inconspicuous as a sheep in a herd.

Out of the corner of his eye he caught his comrades going about their duties in solemn silence: carrying logs to be burned, gutting and skinning the remains of wild animals for food and furs, and sharpening cold iron on rough stones. He heard the cries of a baby and the soft lullaby of its mother from somewhere on the other side of the fire, a gray blur obscured by the smoke. The previous night had been a grand display of celebration and defiance toward the rebels with endless talk of the riches to come. He didn't need to ask his superiors of news from the other branches of their army to know his allies had lost a major battle, the stark contrast between that night and the previous night left no doubt in his mind.

Grishnackh knew just as well as anyone that the odds of victory were against him and his rebel comrades. The dream of a united Norway was merely a product of greed, a promise of wealth and land to the victors. Although the hearts of his enemies weren't in it, dreams of prosperity attracted many from the rebel's cause, and over the past thirty winters that gap steadily increased, until the rebels soon found themselves grossly outnumbered. But what they lacked in quantity, they made up in quality. Grishnackh knew his countrymen; with a strong cause to stand behind, they would fight until their last breaths left their bodies. It would take Odin himself to

take from the rebels the defiance their people had cultivated since *Miðgarðr*, the world of man, had been created from the remains of *Ymir*.

And it was to Odin Grishnackh's thoughts and worships were directed today more than ever. In Grishnackh's mind, the religion of his kin wasn't a system of belief or faith, like the men from the south, who blindly followed behind one god, had tried on numerous occasions to convince him. It was merely fact; the history of the world was as obvious as night following day. All Norsemen knew from the time they could understand words that Odin, along with his brothers *Vé* and *Vili*, slew the ice giant *Ymir* at the beginning of time. From his blood they created the oceans, lakes, and rivers. From his bones, stones were scattered as far as the eye can see, and, from his brain and skull, the gods created the clouds and heaven. But most importantly, Odin, the greatest of the all the gods, created seven worlds from *Ymir's* flesh. *Yggdrasil*, the World Tree, connects all these seven new worlds together with the two primordial worlds of fire and ice, *Múspelheim* and *Niflheim*, respectively. In its branches is *Ásgarðr*, the world of the *Æsir*, *Múspelheim*, and *Álfheimr*, the realm of the alfs. Below is *Miðgarðr*, the world of man, as well as the lands of the giants, *Jötunheimr*, and the *Vanir*, *Vanaheimr*. And among the roots is *Niflheim*, *Svartálfaheimr*, the realm of the dark alfs and the dwarves, and finally *Hel*, the realm of the dead.

It was the fate of *Miðgarðr* that Grishnackh was fighting for, the other worlds concerned him very little, as it was very unlikely he would ever meet one of the stealthy alfs or a seclusive dwarf, and the giants were too caught up in their war with the *Æsir* to take notice of the workings of man. Returning to his bed he snatched up his shield and spear. Inherited from his father, his shield proudly wore countless

battle scars, a tribute to its quality. The spear was much less impressive, but trustworthy all the same, and deadly sharp. Grishnackh also tucked a small seax under his furs, strapped on a tunic of boiled leather to protect his chest, and grabbed the tight helm he had long ago outgrown. His gear was the standard set of weaponry, as could be seen scattered across the camp. Many soldiers preferred a sturdy bow or a well-forged axe to the long reach of a spear, but only the wealthiest wielded swords or full body armor. Chewing on his rations of jerky, Grishnackh prepared to set out with the army at the crack of dawn. Still with time to spare, he decided to warm himself once again by the fire in preparation for the long day of marching ahead.

Strapping his shield across his back he began to walk again in the direction of the bonfire. Suddenly, a horn blew in the distance, crisp and clear, even over the bustle of the camp. Everyone fell silent and still. A second blow of the horn washed over the camp. The men skinning game dropped their kill, and even the baby ceased to cry. The horn blew again, and the camp burst into life. Women, children, and men too old to be of use fell back towards the side of the camp opposite the horns as soldiers rushed for their weapons. Three horn blows meant only one thing: approaching enemies.

The soldiers of Neromos, knowing they would not be blessed with a swift ambush, descended on the camp from opposite sides in a fearsome display, but Grishnackh and his comrades were all too prepared. There were no newcomers to battle amongst them; no cringing faces or thoughts of flight. The sound of colliding steel could be heard all across the camp, although Grishnackh was too close to the center of the camp to join in the skirmishes on the outside. Striving to calm his racing heart as he waited for the battle to come to him, Grishnackh cast his eyes up to the sky. The heavens swirled

with the black smoke of the camp's fire, but a steady eye could catch glimpses of bright sky and long, thin, white clouds, the branches of Yggdrasil. Above them was the world of the Æsir, Ásgarðr, with the gates of Valhalla and Fólkvangr spread wide to accept the spirits of those who would die bravely today in battle. All of a sudden a lightning bolt was hurled from the clear sky, through the black smoke, and scorched the earth where it struck. The smoke, beaten back by the force of the fiery bolt, cleared to show a chariot drawn by two goats descending from the sky on a rainbow bridge. Dazzled by the spectacle, Grishnackh quickly came to his senses and realized he was in the presence of Thor himself, driving his chariot across the magical bridge Bifröst, which stretched from Ásgarðr to Miðgarðr. Leaping from the chariot still high above the ground, the impact of Thor's landing caused the ground to shudder and crack.

Against all odds, the god of battle himself, who had defeated giants of unimaginable power, had decided to cast his lot in favor of preserving the old ways of life as he began to fight against the invaders. The feeble humans were no match for Thor, his legendary hammer Mjöllnir, and the inhuman strength granted to him by his belt, Megingjörð. The thunder of his blows roared across the field and quickly the battle became one sided. As soon as the soldiers of Neromos realized who they were fighting, they broke formation and fled into the night. Thor himself, shining in the darkness like a golden beam of light, gave no pursuit, but merely climbed back onto his chariot and flicked the reins, signaling to his goats Tanngrisnir and Tanngrjóstr to ascend once again into the heavens.

Silence and disbelief among the rebels quickly gave way to roars of victory. The dawn will bear witness to a great feast of triumph. The dead, both of rebels and followers of

Neromos, whose spirits now stand among the Æsir in Valhalla or Fólkvangr, will be buried. But there will be no grieving, for they died an honorable death in battle. As for the living, thirty winters of war, Grishnackh's entire life, have finally given way to victory. Soon the tale of Thor's deed will spread among the soldiers all across Norway, bringing new life to all the rebels, and crushing the hopes of their enemies; for to oppose the will of the gods is to assure one's own destruction.

Andrew Capillo

Grade 12

Evanston Township High School

Evanston

Elizabeth Holding, teacher

LISTENING FOR THE WAKE-UP CALL AMIDST THE NOISE

Sigh. Have you ever felt like you were just plain bored by everything? When you felt almost as if you were still asleep, waiting to “wake up” and live your life? If not, I congratulate you; you have accomplished what humanity strives for: purpose and happiness. But for those of you who do, have you ever asked why or how you lack meaning in your life? Well, I can’t say anything about meaning itself, but I will say that in order to find it in one’s life, one must think. In order to find meaning in one’s life, one needs to reflect and to listen to his or her inner voice. But how can anyone do so with all of the noise? As Americans, we live in a culture where music, conversation, cell phones, and plain, ambient droning bombard our ears almost twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Has anyone realized how damaging noise can be to the mind and soul? Has anyone realized how important listening is? I know, from personal experience, that I have; some of the greatest writers such as Ray Bradbury and William Golding would agree as well. Perhaps they also realized how noise has become a drug for society.

Okay, I admit that, technically, I don’t use drugs. What I mean is, I do not smoke, I do not drink, nor do I inject myself with God-Knows-What. But I do listen to music, and, considering how dependent I have become on it, one could say that it is like a drug to me. Since as far back as I remember, I have worn headphones in my ears whenever I had the chance. I always remember that whenever I took the bus to school, my headphones would be plugged in my ears, caressing my eardrums with guitar riffs, beating drums, and distorted sound effects. As I reflect upon such times, I realize how I was unable to think with the noise pouring into my head. Indifferent to pain and pleasure alike at such times, perhaps I was getting small taste of what real drug addicts endure.

It kind of reminds me of *Fahrenheit 451*, where Bradbury uses words and language like paint and a brush to create a grim and bleak portrait of the possible future. In the story, we meet Guy Montag, who realizes that something is wrong with the world he lives in. The government burns books and continues its conquest of more land. Yet, it is almost as if the government drugs its citizens with the noise of television and radio. In fact, Montag's wife, Mildred, has two earplugs that constantly stimulate her ears with numerous voices and music simultaneously (sounds frighteningly familiar). With all of the noise, Mildred no longer cares to think critically; she simply can't concentrate long enough. Evidently, with noise droning in people's ears, they start to forget about "why" and focus merely on "what" and "when." And just like these people, I too have damaged my mind by letting it sleep in an ocean of noise.

Of course, in order to think clearly, one must also accept the fact that listening is very important. But, how much do people actually listen? Everyone loves to speak, that is for certain; but how many people are willing to listen to the speaker? If everyone wants to and tries to speak at once, no one understands anything, and in the long run, nothing gets done. In psychology, there is a term for this: the commoner's dilemma. In a nutshell, the dilemma states that if everyone goes for the same thing, no one will get it, and, in the end, everyone loses. Using this principle, if everyone wants to be heard and speaks out, none of their voices will be heard. Another example of consequences of not listening is Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, where a group of shipwrecked boys try to make a society on the island. At first, everyone is so excited that he tells everyone else his ideas. But because everyone is talking, barely anyone listens to the actual advice. And as a result, the boys gradually turn into savages, unable to think

about anything besides satisfying their stomachs and their bloodlust. From this, one can see how Golding used this dark story to warn people. After reading of how the boys lost their innocence, one can infer that Golding used his story as a metaphor for humanity. Like the boys, we as humans are presented with a vast, beautiful world that is full of opportunity and wonder. Yet, in our enthusiasm and excitement, we all shout out ideas of what we can do and by doing so, we never actually pay attention to what others say. And as a consequence, we stumble blindly and eventually lose our innocence like those boys. But if some of us are willing to hold back our ideas and listen to others, perhaps we can make the best of the plethora of opportunities presented before us.

So, what are you? Are you “asleep” or “awake?” Do you know what you want to do with your life? If you already have meaning to your life and do not need to think about how you live your life, kudos to you! But for those of you who are bored and feel as if life has lost meaning, I implore you to take some time, get away from all the noise this world has to offer, and simply think. Would it hurt to turn off your cell phone and iPod for ten minutes and just listen or think? Because you just might wake up and realize that beyond the noise, there is a beautiful world full of purpose waiting for you.

Nathaniel Cha

Grade 12

Adlai E. Stevenson High School

Lincolnshire

Jennifer Arias, teacher

SUBTRACTION

I sat on the far left end of the ivory brocade couch in our living room while my mom lay with her head resting on the opposite armrest, her toes barely grazing my leg. As she stared with her eyes fixed on the ceiling, I looked at her and how she had changed. The new clothes she bought for her scrawnier, weaker figure had become far too large so quickly and hung off her body like weights. The yellow tint to her skin had grown more prominent, more noticeable, and I found myself spotting strands of her hair anywhere that she had gone. Even more noticeable than that, though, was her lost enthusiasm, her diminished spark. I had become dependent on her being my unconditional cheerleader and loved how she was the only one who could get my conservative dad into the silliest of moods. This started to fade even before she was diagnosed only six months earlier, and the chemo made it disappear altogether, creating an emptiness that seemed would never be filled again.

My brother and dad entered the room, snapping my attention back to the present, and seated themselves in two armchairs adjacent to the couch my mom and I sat on. We all glanced at each other, not sure who would be the first to speak.

"Kids," my dad began, lacking the usual assertiveness in his voice. "We talked to the doctors yesterday..." His voice stopped abruptly, and I noticed tears welling in his eyes, something I had witnessed for the first time only six months earlier. I held my breath, thinking that maybe before I was forced to inhale once again, I would wake up from this nightmare.

I felt the lump magnifying in my throat, losing the battle with myself, denial versus truth. My dad regained his composure and broke the silence once again.

"There's nothing they can do," he finally let out in a sob. "She's...she's..." I knew what he was going to say, and I didn't want him to finish the sentence.

"No," I whispered, barely audibly, feeling the first of endless tears stream down my cheek.

"She's going to die," he finally managed to let out.

I turned to my brother, who sat with his face in his hands. I glanced at my dad, who sat silently as tears streamed down his face, his chin resting in his hand, slowly shaking his head side to side while staring at my mom. My breathing started to become unnatural, choked, strained. I looked at her feet in my lap and thought of how they only had a few more steps to take before they would never walk again. I caressed them in my hands and finally, after what felt like an hour, looked at her.

She lay with her eyes closed and her hands folded, resting on her stomach. The pain she felt physically was evident in her expression, but her emotional pain trailed along her face in streams of tears. This position that she was lying in was how I imagined she would lie in her coffin, and the sobs I had been stifling finally came at full force, breaking the silence that everyone else had managed to keep. Each family member responded to my wails, and we came together as a family of four, a comfortable square, on the couch for what I now knew would be one of the last times. One question screamed in my head, begging for an answer. *How can I—we—go on?*

One short week later, the four of us found ourselves in the same position at St. Patrick's Church; my mom lying while my dad, brother, and I sat near. This time, though, three of us would leave without the other, beginning what seemed like a new life altogether.

The organ began to hum as the service came to an end and I walked down the aisle toward the back of the church,

following my dad and brother, forming a triangle that would become familiar to us in due time, as we stepped closer toward the jagged unknown together. I passed familiar faces with strange faces of sympathy and began to ponder the formerly unthinkable notion my mom had spoken at our gathering the previous week.

“I wouldn’t be leaving if you couldn’t go on without me.”

Kelly Day

Grade 12

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Margaret Forst, teacher

PACIFIER

Standing under the dimmed fluorescent lights of Neiman Marcus, her long French-manicured nails glistened like shiny smooth caps resting atop her long thin fingers. She ran those perfectly kept fingers between the cashmeres and knits that lined the narrow metal racks, occasionally running her hand down the garment toward the tiny hanging price tag with neatly printed black numbers, usually with three digits, which caused most to place the overpriced piece back on the rack, wondering what it was that made that specific, solid-white, cotton shirt so out of their price range. For her, it just meant more reason to try it on.

I saw women like her every day from my post behind the smooth, granite, checkout desk. I knew their types: the ones who dragged their perfectly matched children around the mall, diverting their attention from a crying child to the high-end collections; the ones who kept their children buckled tightly in their strollers instead of letting them run loose, for fear they'd be embarrassed.

She carefully draped the wool cardigans, silk shirts, and Ralph Lauren t-shirts over her left arm, being sure the delicate fabrics weren't pulled by her flashy diamond tennis bracelet. With her right hand she loosely gripped the foam handle of the blue stroller her child squirmed around in, ripping his fuzzy blue socks from his tiny, wiggling feet. He kept twisting around in his seat, as if trying to catch a glimpse of his mother with his big, round, hazel eyes, but each time, the tiny belt that kept him in place yanked his body back to the forward-facing position.

Her cell phone vibrated from the depths of her black-and-white, quilted Chanel bag, and she reached in, flipping the sleek silver cover open, ending Mozart's short performance.

"Donna! Of course I'll do lunch tomorrow. I have tennis at eleven, so how does one sound? That little salad café? Sounds perfect. I am watching my weight, you know. I'll call the babysitter," she said in a volume meant to broadcast her conversation to the rest of the shoppers. That was something I always noticed about these women. It didn't matter if they were ten racks away from the checkout line, I could always hear which fancy restaurant they were lunching at tomorrow, what time their manicure was scheduled for at the new, chic salon, which babysitter they would call frantically claiming something horribly important had come up. She clicked the cell phone shut loudly, rubbing it against her pink linen blouse, wiping away the marks those manicured fingers had left.

"Ma'am, can you please ring me up," an older woman with a pinkish tint to her hair said to me, slightly annoyed.

"Yes, sorry I was just," I cut myself off, reminding myself this woman, like most customers, had no interest in what I was just thinking about or doing. "Six hundred and eighty dollars is your total," I said, retrieving her Mastercard from her wrinkly, outstretched hand and running it through the scanner, never taking my eyes off the other woman and her child.

She walked in front of the stroller, her spike heels clicking on the shiny tile floor. She turned to assess the rack marked DKNY. As she turned, a red wool arm from the pea coat she grabbed in a size four whipped the wiggling child in the cheek. The itchy material that jacked the price up to eight hundred and fifty dollars caused the child to immediately puff up his milky cheeks and release a piercing scream.

Resting the pile of clothes on the rack, very annoyed, the woman dug into her smooth leather bag, retrieving a small cylindrical container with a circus scene on the side. She peeled off the green plastic top, and placed the container in her child's outstretched hands.

"It's okay, Mommy brought a snack," she said in a voice lacking the sweet, soft pronunciation she had used on her cell, retrieving a Cheerio from the container and slowly extending it into her son's wet mouth. He accepted the snack, chewing slowly as she wiped the saliva from her manicured hand with a Kleenex.

The boy balanced the little circular loops between his tiny fingers, depositing them onto his rosy tongue until the container was empty. Satisfied with the massive collection of clothing, the woman shoved the stroller with her bony hip, pushing it toward the glowing sign that read "Fitting Rooms" in black cursive print.

The impact of her thin body against the stroller caused the boy to drop the container, sending the elephants and clowns rolling down the aisle. His eyes welled up in an expression already familiar to me, as he let out a short scream. The woman looked down at her son with desperate eyes and reached once again into the pocket of her bag, her hand coming up with a pacifier.

"Mama, my," he began, cut off abruptly by the clean fingers shoving the red pacifier into his tiny, opened mouth.

I wondered what he was going to tell her. I wondered how many things he tried to tell her, but she missed, resorting to the pacifier and preferred silence. The boy accepted the plug, falling asleep slumped against the nylon side of his stroller. The woman proceeded to the checkout, and I scanned the shiny tags beneath the red flowing laser.

"Would you like anything gift wrapped?" I asked, following Neiman's customer-friendly rules.

"No need, it's all for me," she responded.

"Your son is adorable," I said, leaning my tired body over, affectionately cooing at her sleeping child.

But she didn't respond.

It was Kathy this time, and they were already chatting away.

Alexandra Fields

Grade 12

Adlai E. Stevenson High School

Lincolnshire

Jim Barnabee, teacher

BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

In the chorus of the song “All at Once” by the Fray, there is a line that says, “Sometimes the hardest thing and the right thing are the same.” This statement speaks—in its own simplistic and straightforward way—to many situations in life, one of them being whether a person should go beyond what is expected of him or her. I realize that I have used those Fray lyrics as guidelines much of my life: auditioning for a play I did not think I could make, apologizing to someone for something hurtful I said or did, making decisions about how to act and where I am headed. Going beyond what is expected of a person is a definite challenge. Then again, what is life really, but a wheel of challenges, trials, and milestones to surpass? Exceeding expectations has its great rewards as well, chief among them being pride in one’s accomplishments, ultimate success, and often the benefit of others involved. It is those rewards that motivate me to try to exceed the expectations set up for me whenever I am able.

Throughout the ages, pride in oneself, one’s family, or one’s country has been a sought-after human emotion. People like to establish ties to something or someone they can feel proud of. In sixth grade I was taught how to crochet. It was a long and frustrating process with tears and yelling and stress, resulting in the completion of one ragged patch of unevenly stitched yarn. However, I was determined to go beyond my mother’s expectation that that one patch was all I would ever create. I struggled for three-and-a-half months crocheting many patches. My stitches became more acceptable, my hand more sure as it twisted through the yarn. And when the enterprise was complete, I had a new blanket and an excess amount of pride in my work. Characters of the Middle Ages went beyond what was expected of them as well—on somewhat more of a heroic scale. In “The Song of Roland,”

Roland was determined to defeat an army 20 times the size of his own. This was definitely unnecessary, and he could have simply called for help from the French King Charlemagne. But his pride in his fellow French soldiers and his own ability to lead them to victory won him over and caused him to take the fatal risk. However, death by noble fighting and protecting one's country was considered great chivalry at the time. Roland died with honor and pride, the ultimate goal for which he had set out in the first place. Going beyond what is expected gives a person a sense of pride—regardless of the magnitude of the act.

Exceeding expectations can also lead to success, a thing craved by most people. Five years ago, my brother and I worked up the courage to ask my parents if we could get a dog. Amazingly, they agreed, but only if we consented to help out and do much of the work that having a pet entails. Little did they know, we were intent on keeping our word. We bought books about different dog breeds, argued over names for countless hours, and looked online for shelters from which to buy. A few weeks later, in January of 2003, our family was packed into the minivan and on our way to Seneca, Illinois, to pick up our new "baby" from the shelter. The success of this effort was enormous; Montana has been a happy member of the family ever since. I learned that putting in more effort, not doing only that which is necessary, leads to ultimate success, or at least brings a person closer to reaching his or her goal.

In the famous medieval story *Beowulf*, the young and somewhat unimpressive Beowulf set out to kill the evil monster Grendel to stop him from devouring humans. He accomplished this right away, but instead of returning home, he determined to surpass the boundaries set up for him. Beowulf went on to heroically risk his life in the killing of

Grendel's mother, going way beyond the call of duty. In the end, he received his just reward: becoming king of his people for 50 years and reigning in a time of peace. While it is true that not everyone will become a hero by doing more than is expected of him or her, one is sure to gain success in some form or another.

The final reason why one should exceed expectations is that it often benefits other people. The selfless act of doing something unsolicited for someone else is a positive thing for all involved. In the medieval poem "Chevrefoil" by Marie de France, the protagonist Tristan went beyond what was expected of him for the sake of his lover Iseult. He risked his life, returning to Cornwall despite his exile, just to be with the queen. This famous poem tells the story of the sacrifices people often make because of love and the great expectations they surpass.

Last spring, I went with my friend and her family to work on a charity project where we packed boxes of food for the poor. We had to wake up at three in the morning to get to the warehouse. We stood in the assembly line, tossing bags of onions, frozen chickens, potatoes, bottles of grape juice, and more into boxes for four hours. By the end, I was exhausted, freezing, and thoroughly thrilled to think of the people who would now have food for at least a few weeks. I definitely exceeded the expectations many had that it was possible for me to wake up that early or even go at all. I learned that going beyond what was expected of me for someone else, even for complete strangers, gave me the exhilarating feeling that I had made a difference.

Doing more than what is expected of a person is certainly not always easy. But the rewards that accompany it—namely pride in one's accomplishments, success, and the possible benefit of others—are satisfactory. These rewards

complete the wheel of challenges and trials in life, bringing the cycle of hardship and triumph to a full turn. Roland, Beowulf, and Tristan are all literary examples of what can be accomplished by exceeding expectations. But those feats are not confined between the pages of a book. They are not so remote or impossible. Some people go beyond what is expected of them every single day, letting no one's preset boundaries stand in their way.

Ariel Goodman

Grade 9

Evanston Township High School

Evanston

John Stephenson, teacher

A GRAVE TOO DEEP

Strange, the things one remembers. Odd, the way our minds capture the most random of details during times so crucial. I remember the feel of his soft, sticky hand held loosely in my own. The surprise I experienced when he wrenched his chubby fingers from mine, using the force that only an overly excited four year old can muster. His small, clear voice ringing through the street: "Park, I see park!" I also remember the violent way in which my heart lurched when I saw the fast-moving car making its way across the concrete, the driver blabbing animatedly into his cell phone, one hand on the steering wheel. And, then, right before the collision, the last whole glimpse I had of my little boy: his crop of yellow hair flapping in the chilly April breeze as he waddled away. I shut my eyes at that point, trying to stop the inevitable with just the power of my mind. The next time I dared to look, my vision was clogged with blood and bone and my own shrieking.

It was these morbid thoughts that tortured me on the day of his funeral. I had cried a true river of tears by then, experienced the consequences through itching eyes, an aching throat, and a throbbing heart. And so I sat on the cold first-row pew of the church, dry-eyed among a sea of sobbing mourners. I tuned out the eulogy and the blessings uttered by the gentle priest. Instead, I conjured up the memories I had retained from that day—surrendering myself to a most torturous antagonist: guilt. Why had I let go of his hand? Why didn't I chase after him and throw myself before the car?

After what seemed a millennium, or maybe just a matter of seconds, it was over. The funeral was over. All I had left to do was stand above his grave and pound dirt over his coffin, a tradition that ran in my family. I considered this the ultimate punch, the crux of all ironic cruelties. But at least it

would be done in solitude, with just myself and my husband there to acknowledge the fact that the pride and joy of our lives was dead.

With my husband's hand swaddling my own, we made our way slowly up the center aisle toward the great wooden doors of the church, intending to head for the cemetery. Yet, as we walked, my ears picked up random snippets of conversation. A woman said to her husband, "Jerry, would you mind throwing in a load of laundry while I run to 7-Eleven to get some milk?" An elderly man said pleasantly to his friend, "Are we on for golf next Sunday, Mr. Lawton—or are you afraid of losing for the third week in a row?" The friend chuckled booming in response.

I stopped. It was impossible that the people around me were talking. Laughing. Discussing regular household matters. They were not continuing their lives normally. No. They were not functioning. Certainly not. They would live, yes, but they would never return to their selves prior to the death of my son. Oh, no. They wouldn't dare.

But as conversations similar to the ones I had just overheard began to waft toward me, I realized it was true. They actually had the nerve to resume. They actually had the nerve to live their lives in spite of the fact that my yellow-haired baby could not. They had the nerve to get over it.

It was then, thirty-four years into my life, that I understood the true structure of the world. The world, you see, is composed of much, much more than each individual. One person's time to live is so insignificant, so utterly worthless in the scheme of things. Sure, we trouble ourselves with everyday frivolities the world has to offer, like exercising and shopping and tying our shoes and renovating our homes. But really, these are just things we have created over the years—things to occupy ourselves until our time in this world is up. These are

the things we call technology, science, advancements. Objects, diversions, meant merely to entertain and fill the short void of time we are allotted. But no individual, no human being, can truly change the world. We are simply too outnumbered, too inconsequential, to do such a thing. Because when we die, the earth continues to orbit the sun. New people are born, filling our space as nonchalantly as if we were never there to begin with. We fight wars and launch rockets, but to what end? Eventually we will be forgotten, no matter what we do. My baby was forgotten the day of his own funeral.

By then, our lugubrious party of two had reached the gravesite. The plain, wood coffin wedged into the ground made me want to break down, end my life right then and there. But I knew that I would do no such thing. However worthless a life may be, my alarm had yet to ring. So I gave the earth a strong jab with my long shovel, preparing to sprinkle the first of the dirt on his grave. It's a curious thing, this burial of the deceased. It's as though we are actively promoting the fact that our beloved are gone and must be erased from memory. Boom. The hard-packed earth hit the coffin, the noise a mere echo of my painfully booming heart. I imagined him crying in there, for he always hated loud noises. Thinking briefly of my future, I wondered how I would move on. I lacked a true desire to live. Boom. The second shovelful resounded loud as the first. But I knew that I would live nonetheless, if only to draw out the memory and avenge the existence of my little yellow-haired baby.

Ariel Goodman

Grade 9

Evanston Township High School

Evanston

John Stephenson, teacher

OVER THE HILL AT FIVE

"It's the little things in life." One of the greatest quotes ever uttered, reminding us that it's not important what college we went to, or what our jobs are, but more importantly, it is those little moments that truly shape our lives.

My grandparents owned a cabin in northern Minnesota, right on Little Jesse Lake, about an hour outside of Grand Rapids. Every summer, each of their children, my aunts and uncles, would pick a week to spend there. Many wonderful memories were made at the cabin: getting left in the middle of the lake, carting water up the hill for cooking, using the outhouse because there was no plumbing, grilling chicken, and getting away from suburban life. But by far, the most vivid memory from my childhood was with my grandpa.

My grandpa was very special to me. We only got to see each other maybe four times a year: Christmas, Thanksgiving, one weekend in the spring, and the weekend at the cabin during the summer. When we went to visit, he was up for work at the turkey processing plant by four a.m. so that he could get home by two or three in the afternoon and spend the rest of the day with us. The older he got, the harder and harder it was on his knees to walk around. So, every memory of us outside is that much more important now.

The cabin was situated on a hill overlooking the south shore of the lake. This hill was huge, especially to a five year old; every time we had to go up or down, it seemed like I was climbing Mount Everest. Our second weekend at the cabin, my grandparents always came to visit us.

One year my grandpa asked me if I wanted to roll down the hill, I just looked at him like he was crazy. No self respecting five year old would roll down a hill—we walk down hills, we run down hills, we jump down hills, we fall down hills—but why would anyone want to roll down a hill? But,

seeing as how it was my grandpa who asked, I decided why not, I would give it a shot. I laid down at the top of the hill, but was promptly told that proper rolling attire consisted of long pants and a long sleeve shirt, "just in case." Just in case? Just in case of what? I wasn't planning on rolling anywhere cold, but I complied with yet another weird request.

After a quick wardrobe change, I was back at the top of the hill ready to go. I looked at my grandpa, trying to figure out how one rolls down a hill, but he just smiled at me. I took that to mean go, so I went.

Rolling, spinning down the hill, the grass hitting your face, tickling your nose. When you're rolling, nothing else in the world can bother you. You can't see where you are going, your brain can't comprehend the sights or the smells that change so rapidly from grass to sky to grass to sky to tree trunk, then it does a wonderful job of understanding. When you stand up, or try to stand up, the way the whole world spins, preventing you from moving in a straight line. As a five year old, being dizzy means one thing: you do it again. So, I scrambled back up Mount Everest and watched as my grandpa rolled down the hill past me. Unfortunately, the five-year-old stomach can only take about seven trips down the hill before it starts to get a little queasy, and a little...eruption ended the rolling for the day.

Rolling down the hill isn't really about rolling down the hill though. Rolling down the hill is about the memories that can never be replaced. Now, my grandpa is unable to get down on the ground, roll down the hill, and climb back up because of his knees. Now, the giant hill isn't as giant as it was to the five year old. Now, that five year old is "too cool" to roll down the hill, unless he is back in northern Minnesota with his grandpa. Sure some people have stories about saving the world, helping an endangered species, touching someone

else's life, or some other spectacular feat. But to me, rolling down the hill is better than any of that. At the time, it was just a memory with my grandpa, but, looking back, rolling down the hill is really about so much more, but at the same time, so much less. It is a way to live, but also a way to get away; it is a way to go through life, but also a way to get through life. Rolling down the hill is really about letting everything go, not being concerned with life, and just rolling with the flow.

Erik Halverson

Grade 12

Adlai E. Stevenson High School

Lincolnshire

Jennifer Arias, teacher

AN ARCTIC PARADISE

Gentle and crisp flakes slowly fall from the wintry sky. Mounds of powdery white crystals envelop the ground. Small puffs of smoke emerge from chimneys all along the white road. Aromas of steaming hot cocoa linger in the toasty and warmth-filled homes.

The first thing I do every morning is look out the window right above my bed. On the rare occasion that the earth is covered with a gentle white sheet, like a clean blanket covering a bed, I rush downstairs. Rapidly searching through our front closet for my buried snow gear, I eventually come across the essentials for snow play: snow pants, winter coat, hat, boots, and waterproof mittens. I dress until I am a bundle of warmth and then scamper out the door.

Once outside, the sight usually overwhelms me. After just one night, the whole world can be transformed from a cold and gloomy array of the outdoors into a wintry and white wonderland. The white specs are still falling down, and they gracefully collide with my jacket. After a quick inspection of the intricate design of the miniscule flake, I collapse onto the ground to gaze up at the sky. Puffy clouds are oozing their precipitation out onto the grateful earth. How perfect!

Yet, the day ahead of me still has more room for perfection, and ice skating is the one thing that will fill it. As I gently slip on the stiff and cold leather shoe equipped with a sharply finished blade, I scurry over to our skating rink. It is just a simple pond that has frozen over, yet it still possesses many magical qualities. The chilled sheet is as smooth as a spotless satin dress. It is an outstretch of naturally made flawlessness, no crack or dent within my sight.

There is so much contrast between the pond in the winter and the pond in the summer, that it makes it hard to comprehend that they are one and the same. I ascend onto our

pond, making precise slits into it. Gliding across the crystal floor makes me feel like I am a floating ice princess. I am in control of my movements and my gracefulness. I am in control of the blanket of ice underneath me and the chilling air above me. But most of all, I am in control of myself, which is now feeling free in this frosty season.

Every once in a while, it's a good thing to take a step back from all of the hustle and bustle in your life. Just have some "self" time to relax only, and appreciate everything that you have. Snow, for example. Time is one of mother earth's most stunning creations reflects so much serenity, tranquility, and restfulness. And isn't that what everyone needs a little of?

Rachel von Holst

Grade 8

Northbrook Junior High School

Northbrook

Rebecca Hodgin, teacher

THE MIDDLE WAY

Every moral dilemma, whether it leads to a virtuous outcome or a sinful one, is governed in part by temperance. All other virtues rely on temperance because it requires one to focus on moderation, thereby assuring that other virtues can exist, for too much of a virtue is as detrimental as the corresponding sin itself. The person who is too kind will eventually be exploited by people of lower moral standing, leading the overindulgence in his or her virtue to serve as his or her downfall. The person who is too humble about his or her skills will not fulfill his or her purpose in life, since he or she will never make the world fully aware of his or her capacity. The person who forgives too easily will no doubt fall victim to the same mistakes time after time because he or she is unable to punish his or her transgressor and assure the cessation of his or her misdeeds. Truly, temperance is the foundation of all virtues, for without it, one would invalidate all benefits the virtues may offer through overindulgence. Yet, temperance also has its place in everyday life, whether it may govern eating habits, time devoted to leisure, or even the ardor with which one pursues work. Temperance is the grey area between pure abstinence and unrestrained gluttony that all must seek to assure a moderate, sustainable lifestyle.

In fact, the lifestyles of American celebrities are lucid examples of failing to practice temperance. Our icons frequently fail to control their wants regarding nutrition, luxuries, and leisure, leading to myriad problems that land them on the front pages of tabloids. Failing to restrain their cravings for food, some celebrities struggle with eating disorders. Many become addicted to drugs and alcohol after extended periods of use, and are forced to spend weeks in rehab. The overindulgence in pleasure usually cripples the careers of our celebrities because, instead of advancing their art further, they

are forced to deal with numerous problems that arise out of their hedonistic lifestyles.

Although a life filled to the brim with pleasure is not a temperate existence, neither is a life bound by statures of extreme severity. Americans make the mistake of holding temperance synonymous with pure abstinence. In reality, an ascetic lifestyle is not necessary to reap the everyday benefits of temperance. We often choose to associate temperance with conditions akin to the *agoge* of Sparta, where young boys were barely given enough food to survive, taught to disparage luxury and leisure, and forced to devote most of their time to military training. Such an extreme form of self-denial is outside the threshold of temperance and even proved to be detrimental to Sparta in the long run, because few could survive such an austere existence. Temperance preaches moderation, thus when one takes temperance beyond its scope, it ceases to have any value.

To assure a balanced existence, one must tread between the two extrema of temperance by neither becoming a slave to one's desires, nor choosing to abstain from all the pleasures in life. Essentially, to practice temperance is to follow the middle way, comparable to the teachings of Buddha, who asked his disciples to focus on improving their abilities and gaining knowledge instead of succumbing to the temptation of various vices or, even worse, completely abstaining from life and choosing to live in poverty rather than putting one's purity in peril. To practice temperance is to eat for sustenance and sometimes for pleasure on special occasions, rather than surrendering to the demands of an insatiable stomach, or, on the other extreme, following an unforgiving diet; it is to live in comfort, sleep in a warm bed, and wear clothes that fit well, but not to needlessly spend exorbitant amounts of money on showy clothing, nor reject all material possessions

as corrupting influences; it is to find a balance between time spent at work and time spent in leisure or with family, it is neither to stay home and watch television all day, nor to spend so much time at work that it takes precedence over friends and family. However, despite the simple idea of balance that lies behind temperance, human nature makes practicing temperance a complex and difficult process.

Humanity's strength, its desire to improve and achieve greatness, is also its weakness. Truly, the achievements of humanity stem from its desire for greatness, yet in seeking greatness, one also seeks power and diverges further and further from the middle path. Just like Icarus, who met his demise when he flew too high to the sun in an attempt to show that man could exist on par with the gods, people of contemporary society are drawn to the riches of the elite and are corrupted by their lofty goals. To reach the top of corporate America, Americans focus on work to such an extent that all else becomes secondary, and they work themselves to death by failing to balance work with other aspects of life. Others, who still retain a shred of the old Wild West miner mentality of "get in, get rich, get out," choose an alternative, yet just-as-destructive path to greatness, by taking unnecessary risks instead of working hard in a balanced manner. Sadly, few will ever be satisfied with a moderate lifestyle of temperance, leading the majority of Americans to sacrifice a balanced life in search of a more hedonistic lifestyle.

Although temperance offers a more balanced lifestyle that is far more sustainable than the lifestyle of a typical celebrity, and one that is more enjoyable than an ascetic lifestyle of a Spartan, Americans are far too drawn to the vast amounts of pleasure a life of excess and luxury promises and thus sacrifice any balance in their aspirations. As long as our society continues to overemphasize pleasure and to

label temperance as pure abstinence, the way the temperance movement hoped to purge the country of alcohol, instead of advocating its restrained and moderate use, temperance will not find many followers in American society.

Alexei Iouchkov

Grade 11

Adlai E. Stevenson High School

Lincolnshire

Stephen Heller, teacher

LAST GOOD-BYE

I knew that it was her. In flesh and blood, she was there. I knew, though, that she had passed on, over Odin's solitary wall of death, onto the other side. I loved her dearly, and I knew she was in a better place, but no, here she was visiting me. My grandmother was right there. The laws of life had been absolved, exempt, yet I was experiencing reality. I walked over to her, slowly, in the serene, white room. I touched her arm, and the feeling rushed through my hands—a feeling of such absoluteness that it seemed unreal. I felt her sad eyes gazing into my own. The scent was ever so familiar, like lilac indented on my brain. Captivated, I wanted it to last forever.

Why was she here? Was this a punishment to me for not feeling any remorse at her weakest times? Must I feel the way that most do? That eerie sensation I had experienced on her last day had returned. She was so far away from me, and I felt so helpless, so impotent. But now she was right in front of me. A heavy rush of air blew in from the lone window on the bare, white wall. I tried to ignore it, but it overpowered me. The hands of God had come to take her away. I stood my ground, though, for she had to stay. I refused to let her go like this. I began to panic. Feelings of chagrin, of vexation, overwhelmed me. "Don't leave!" shouted voices in my head. The wind became stronger and stronger; it gained power and wouldn't stop. I yelled, "Stop! Stop!" but it seemed that nobody would hear me. And she just stood there. Her sad eyes hypnotized me. I gazed deep into them and saw all of the memories I had with her. A distraught feeling came over me. Serenity enveloped me. Momentarily, the wind subsided as the presence of God surged, filling the room with unquestionable power. Still, I felt her pain and her need for my approval. I grabbed her thick arm and stared into her eyes for what seemed an eternity. As the cocoon of wind swirled

around her, I stood motionless. It didn't disturb me, and I merely watched. She began to become translucent. I drew closer to her as if we were connected by Titan's rope of space. When I reached out my hand, there was a vacuum—she had departed. Yet, I knew that I had done the right thing. It was her time. She was gone, and I had let her go.

Deniz Kahn

Grade 8

Northbrook Junior High School

Northbrook

Rebecca Hodgkin, teacher

DEATH DREAMS OF MOURNING

[AMY, 21, and CHARLOTTE, 14, sit on a bench in a graveyard. Both are dressed in mournful black and stare down at the grass solemnly, though AMY seems restless and tired of mourning. She tries to break CHARLOTTE's gaze; however, they are interrupted when ERIC, 22, approaches the bench. CHARLOTTE stands sharply and walks off. ERIC watches her and then sits beside AMY, stretching out his legs. AMY seems offended by his blatant attempt at seeking comfort.]

ERIC: Do you think she's scared of me?

AMY: Who, Charlotte?

ERIC: Yes. Every time I go near her, she runs away.

AMY: She's not scared of you. [pause] She hates you.

ERIC [*feigning sadness*]: Why? Because she thinks I killed Mom?

AMY: I wish you would stop telling people that. They're starting to believe Charlotte really thinks that.

ERIC [*suddenly serious*]: Doesn't she?

AMY: She's not mad at you for anything to do with Mom. She's mad about what you said...what you said before she went to Aunt Cindy's.

ERIC: What did I say?

AMY: That she was the sacrificial lamb.

ERIC: I don't see why she took that as an insult.

AMY: She just did.

ERIC: She's too sensitive.

AMY: Why shouldn't she be? She lost her mother.

ERIC: So did we.

AMY: We both know that's different.

ERIC: Why?

AMY: You and I know what a bitch she was.

[*The two share in a bout of extremely inappropriate laughter.*]

AMY: Do you remember the time she killed the dog?

ERIC: She didn't kill the dog, she just let it out.

AMY [*pointedly*]: She killed the dog. She blamed it on the house painters, and I threw eggs onto the garage, and they had to repaint the entire thing. I started screaming at them, telling them they'd have to give our dog's body back so we could give her a proper funeral...and it turned out mom killed her. I felt so terrible, especially because they were Ukrainian and had no idea what I was saying.

ERIC: But if they were Ukrainian, they didn't know you were yelling at them.

AMY: They were Ukrainian, not stupid. They knew I was blaming them for something. The middle finger means the same thing in every country. [*She thinks for a moment.*] Do they use the middle finger in Ukraine?

ERIC: I think you mean the Ukraine. [*pause*] She did worse things; Mom, I mean. [*He waits for AMY to respond, but she doesn't.*] Like after that Polish store opened where the Mexican grocery used to be, and Mom told everyone she missed the Mexicans because the Polish place was like a Hitler youth camp.

AMY [*distantly*]: She did worse things than that.

ERIC [*impishly*]: I bet I have more scars than you.

AMY [*giving in to the sick game*]: No you don't.

ERIC: You wanna strip down and check?

AMY [*laughing*]: No! You can't strip in a graveyard; it'll wake the dead.

ERIC [*solemnly, but with a tinge of humor*]: We wouldn't want that, now would we? [*pause*] I think we should tell Charlotte.

AMY [*suddenly serious*]: Why would we do that?

ERIC: So she'll stop hating us.

AMY: Hating you, you mean?

ERIC: She doesn't just hate me.

AMY: She was sitting with me, wasn't she?

ERIC: She was lonely.

AMY: She doesn't hate me, Eric, because I don't celebrate Mom's death. I mean, I don't miss her the same way Charlotte does, but at least I know how to fake sadness.

ERIC: But why do you want to do that when you can just as easily tell Charlotte the truth?

AMY: Do you really think she's going to believe us? Why would she believe that Mom would do all of those things to us and do nothing to Charlotte?

ERIC: Because Mom went to Aunt Cindy's when Charlotte was just a little girl; we don't even know if she never touched Charlotte—Charlotte might just not remember.

AMY: She would remember.

ERIC: Do you remember everything?

AMY: I do.

ERIC: Then how can you not tell Charlotte?

AMY [*quietly*]: What difference does it make now?

[*There is a pause, AMY looks off stage left. Her expression suddenly changes.*]

AMY: Charlotte is coming, go away!

ERIC: I'm sick and tired of her avoiding me.

AMY: Just give her time. It's not like you like her company anyway.

[*ERIC smiles as if to agree and gets up, going off in the opposite direction from which CHARLOTTE enters. She sits beside AMY, with a blue ribbon on her chest. She holds out two ribbons to AMY.*]

CHARLOTTE: I got these for you and Eric.

AMY: Oh, we don't need them.

CHARLOTTE: You have some?

AMY: Yes.

CHARLOTTE [*sharply judging her*]: Why don't you wear them?

AMY [*briefly forgetting herself*]: We chose not to. [*regaining herself*] What I mean is, we think it's silly...a blue ribbon. It's not very...mournful.

CHARLOTTE: I don't understand you.

AMY: I know.

CHARLOTTE [*beginning to cry*]: Are you even sad?

AMY [*struggling to lie*]: Of course I am.

[*She wraps her arms around CHARLOTTE, but CHARLOTTE quickly breaks free.*]

CHARLOTTE: People are waiting for us. You should find Eric and we should leave.

AMY: All right, I'll get him.

[CHARLOTTE stands, wiping her face, and then walks off. ERIC comes back on, almost playfully, dancing around the bench in an attempt to make AMY laughs. She does.]

ERIC: Is it all right if I come out now?

AMY: I think that dance did it for you.

[ERIC laughs and plops down next to her. He grows a bit more restrained.]

ERIC: How is she?

AMY: Appropriately devastated.

ERIC [*in a voice beyond his years*]: Oh, she's young yet.

AMY [*taken aback*]: You talk as if we aren't...

[ERIC smiles thinly and rests his head on AMY'S shoulder. She then rests her head upon his, and the two sit quietly, no longer talking or joking.]

Adin Lenahan

Grade 12

Rolling Meadows High School

Rolling Meadows

Mark Maxwell, teacher

THIS IS THE PLACE OF MY REBIRTH

Three.

The number.

Three of us walk to Three Oaks Hill to climb our gnarled and old friends, telling secrets and listening to music that no one else would ever understand. Smiles, laughter, and the three steepest places to roll down the hill; three different tries with three different headrushes. Six eyes spinning the world outside. Three stumbling, chortling teens.

Three distinct personalities to create a bond I thought would never disintegrate.

One. My young, fair-haired, poetic revolutionary clothed in American Apparel. One constant, uncontrolled smile to help fight off the terrors of being alive and knowing the awful, burdensome truth about people and politics and the world.

Two. My romantically apathetic, platonic love with two thick black frames whose one crooked grin would only surface at uncountable jokes that only made sense to the three of us; fascinations with plums and coffee and Threadbare shirts made him two of two in the grand scheme of my counting. Two of the two who made my one beating heart melt constantly.

Three. Me. Bandana'd in rainbows. Constantly fulfilled by their voices, the allowance to discuss my life without cold biases. I could argue, now, each point I felt close to my heart; there must have been at least seventy-three. Philosophy would have been impossible in one or two...but three. Three to build me up. Three to open me up. Three to let me finally fall in love.

Three classes that I did not share with my two, save one writing workshop with my one apathetic love. Three classes in which I mostly stood alone without my other two...the

puzzle pieces to make us the three that we were. Three classes that pulled me apart and put me back together, shaped me, fed me, gave me what I had needed for so long.

Three lighters used throughout our time for discussions in the tranquility of the Japanese Garden, three lighters to burn through the lazy afternoons. Three lighters, but only one made it to the one bench on campus that truly made me feel alive, to the one sentence that put everything in perspective: "THIS IS THE PLACE OF MY REBIRTH." Two of us, now. One lighter. One poetic revolutionary and one girl covered in rainbows, desperately, secretly in love. One apathetic Threadbare love, alone on his own. One secret. Two philosophers. One love. Two together looking at one piece of graffiti which we both believed and loved.

It only takes two people to share a cigarette.

Our three weeks in Minnesota in the eighth month of my eighteenth year at first seemed like three hundred and sixty-five days. Five days before our leave, life and time flew by in a whirlwind of milliseconds like embarrassed eye contact and saying good-bye even when each day together seemed to add three to the time I was part of three.

Three people who met through unexpected tears, evidence of a shared pain. Three who climbed trees, burnt money, and napped in the Libe. Three people. One coincidental meeting. One summer. Three weeks. Unlimited opportunities to say what I should have said, needed to say, but didn't.

One last denial at a crowded Minneapolis airport. One more crooked, sly grin before one turned back walked to one flight gate waiting to send him home to Denver. Three pieces of my one summer puzzle to take me to my gate, to send me on my one way. One first and final hug from the one of the two who started the revolution in my head. Twenty thousand tears shed on one airplane, on the last plane home.

One house and one bed. One place to live for three hundred more days. One place to mourn the lost. Two letters sent, two received. Five letters sent, zero received.

The only math problem I seem to understand is:

$3 \div [\text{miles apart} - \text{lack of (vision} \times \text{voice} \times \text{physical nature)}] = 0.$

Equals dust. Endless dust. Zero. Endless.

Zero.

The number.

Elizabeth Martin

Grade 12

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Brad Ruda, teacher

TO FORGET

As humans, it is our nature to forget—to forget trivial facts as well as universal truths. Generations pass in what amounts to a blink of the cosmic eye, a momentary flicker in the darkness, without a thought. Death is the inevitable conclusion for kings and beggars alike, for strong and weak, for men and women. No force more all-encompassing exists on this earth, and likewise, no force goes more overlooked. Nevertheless, when Death’s gnarled hand reaches out from the shadows, there is no entity more ruthless.

I pass through the doorway of my father’s house on a sunny Saturday afternoon in mid-April, ignorant of the lurking darkness closing in around me. I walk down the grey-blue carpeted stairs like I have done hundreds of times before and stare at the figure sitting on the leather sofa. There is a man there, someone I can’t bring myself to recognize, some frail doppelganger, some sick joke. He smiles and beckons me to his side.

The man is little more than skin and bone. His cheeks are sunken and his skin is pale. I sit down. The leather squeaks. Silence. What can I say? What am I supposed to say? In a voice that’s hauntingly familiar, he asks how I’m doing. It’s impossible to look at him. I say that I’m fine, and we sit in silence. I lean over, and my head falls into the crook of his arm; my vision blurs, eyes hot with tears. He turns my face toward his. His eyes hold me there. They are the same as before, unchanged in a defiant stand against the disease that has eaten away the rest of his crumbling foundation. They are that same blue, that same deep blue with the streaks of brown. They have watched over me since birth. How can I be so afraid to look, so unwilling to recognize this man who is so serene and beautiful? My father. He brushes away my tears. “It’s going to be alright.” That beautiful lie; the words

wrap around me with artificial warmth. *Thump, thump*—fresh tears crash against the leather. He holds me. “I love you so much.” I love him back with everything I am. I feel the heat of his skin against mine. Time stops.

But not for long. I have to go. The world won’t wait for me. I promise to see him next week. He promises to be there. Life goes on as normal, classes continue as they had the week before, I fall back into normalcy. The routine is broken by a phone call.

On a Tuesday morning in mid-April, my father dies, and I’m not there.

Words can’t express the feeling; it transcends sadness, despair, misery. Emptiness, a drowning emptiness that swallows me whole and spits me out a shell.

That night I lie in bed, eyes wide open and dry, trying to look through the ceiling. It is the time of night that seems ruled by a mixture of clarity and fantasy alike, a time when thoughts from the mind’s deep abyss come forward. My heart and my logic wage relentless war.

—Why did this happen?

—Why do you think? He smoked for thirty years.

—Yeah, but he was quitting.

—What does that have to do with anything?

—I don’t know, but, I mean, it’s not fair.

—Life isn’t fair! You’re acting like a stupid child. You know better.

—I *am* a child!

—Not anymore.

That night I dream I’m back at school, walking through the white, tiled corridors, images of fluorescent lights shining up off the floor. I walk into my homeroom class. The orange, fuzzy material of the temporary walls feels rough against my hands. In the back wall there’s a gap I haven’t noticed before.

I walk closer and see my father standing there in a blue-green plaid shirt. I run, heart bursting with joy, into his arms. I shout, "Thank God, it was only a dream, it was only a dream!"

The alarm clock buzzes. My heart sinks. Today is the funeral—I have to go. I arrive in the funeral home after a silent car ride. A young man discreetly points to the room I am to enter. The walls are a pale yellow. My father lies in a dark brown coffin against the opposite wall. There are so many people I have never seen before, and most are crying. I hate their tears. Who are these strangers, and what right do they have to cry here, when I, his son, can't? I don't have the urge to shed one tear, my eyes as dry as the night before. Crying can't come close to expressing how I feel. Tears can't fill the gaping hole in me. All I can do is stand like a statue against the wall, eyes locked on the profile rising over the top of the open casket, wanting only to be lost in those blue eyes one last time. A man in a suit walks by and closes the lid. I will never see my father again.

In the years that have passed since that day, I have struggled to hold together what memories I have of him. I quickly forgot the feel of his skin. The way he smelled left soon after. Sometimes, however, in varying places, at random times, it will come back to me in a wave of buried emotions. I still recall his voice, but it grows quieter and quieter as time passes, speaking only the common phrases that I never thought twice about. I refuse to forget his face and his eyes, though. Time will never take from me those two blue rings that looked through me that day. Now I stand on the road of time, constantly moving forward, constantly looking over my shoulder as the landscape behind goes out of focus. I dream to remember it all, but sometimes wish I could forget.

Zach Nakashian

Grade 11

Vernon Hills High School

Vernon Hills

Paul Kemp, teacher

JUST LIKE NOUGAT

It was ten o'clock in the morning, and I'd just finished watching one of the coolest television shows: *Big Bad Beetleborgs*. Man, how I wished I could be one of those suave, badass, villain fighters, serving bad guys a huge plate of justice with a side of attitude adjustment. After watching the show, I put on some clothes and went outside to "the hill," where only the social elite hung out everyday after school. Looking around the area, I didn't see anyone, so I figured it was still too early to be outside. All of a sudden, everything in sight went black, and I felt hands covering my eyes. A warm breath massaged the back of my neck, and I immediately knew it was Patricia. I remembered her touch from when we "accidentally" rubbed hands while playing tag. Her skin was the smooth, rich center of a Milky Way bar. Pure nougat. Well, at least that's what I thought at time. Every chance I got to look into her endless eyes, I found myself in a pure stupor. My vocabulary reduced to the primitive sound of "wow." Patricia's face glowed as brilliantly as a porcelain doll's. Her voice always seemed to resonate at the exact frequency of my heartbeat. Sometimes I swore that her voice was what kept my heart pumping, the blood flowing through my body. Her hair cascaded down her back seamlessly with the fresh smell of her mango Barbie shampoo. This girl was without a doubt the Eighth World Wonder; the second-best gift from God, after Jesus, of course. Yeah, I may have only been eight years old, but I already knew all about true love from the soap "stories" my grandmother watched every day at three o'clock. In fact, I was an expert in love. I knew it all.

"Guess who?" she said as I ran my fingers over her hands, feeling every crevice of her nougat skin. Usually when Patricia played this trick on me, I would guess right, and she'd get upset that I wouldn't let her win. This day was different. I decided to play along with her game.

"I don't know. Who is it?" I asked.

"It's only your best girl friend in the world!" Patricia shrieked.

I pulled her hands off of my face and she began to laugh. Angels with their French horns graced down from the heavens and played the timeless Nat King Cole version of "L-O-V-E" to the sound of her laughter. I stood in my own pile of drool, soaking up every second of her happiness; my ecstasy. After momentarily disappearing through those pearly white gates of paradise, the autumn leaves brought me back to reality, their crunching intensity under her feet. I felt the shock of an icy chill standing there on "the hill." Just when it was getting good, I was thrown back into the real world.

"Guess what I found out?! It's only the best thing ever," Patricia screamed with excitement.

"I don't know. Just tell me!"

Would she finally confess her love for me like I'd always wished? Would we get married to run off and spend the rest of our lives under a cherry blossom tree in Tokyo like we'd always talked about? Oh yeah, I knew this was it. This had to be it. She was going to tell me that she was playing with her dolls and she suddenly realized that she was Barbie and I was Ken. The perfect couple. What else could it be? I'd never seen her so excited about anything in my life.

"Okay. So, I just found out I'm going to spend the summer in Arizona with my grandparents! How cool is that? I've never been to Arizona. They always come here to see me and my brother. How awesome is that?!" she ecstatically told me.

KERSPLAT. The sound of my hopes crushed in the hands of the girl with the nougat skin. The sound of my heart being run over by 60 million trucks on a broken gravel road. I couldn't help but to think, "How could she? After all those years of love I gave her!" No doubt that those sappy

soap shows messed up my childhood. This sucked. But nonetheless, my naivety took over and I felt as though I had to confess my love. I couldn't contain it any longer. I could no longer live a lie.

"Patricia..." I said cautiously.

"Yeah?" She questioned me.

I'd waited over a year for this very moment. I was as nervous as a serial killer confessing to the father for the very first time during Sunday morning mass. This was the day I was to become a man. No turning back.

"...you going to Arizona is—"

My brain was egging my heart to spit out my confession. The truth was on my lips. And then, all of a sudden, it slipped. And smacked the pavement. Hard.

"So amazing! Wow, you're gonna have so much fun. I'm so jealous of you. I've never left this place. You better not forget me! You're so lucky." I lied foolishly.

"Yeah, I know. Oh please, how could I forget you? You're my best boy friend ever! I wish you could come. That would be even more fun." Patricia whined.

She had no idea how badly I would have given up everything in my life to spend that summer with her. I imagined us together in the dry desert heat at an oasis making sand castles. Spending the rest of our lives away from "the hill" without our family. My daydream was cut short once again when Mother Nature smacked me back to my senses with the startling pelt of a raindrop. I jumped.

"You okay?" Patricia asked me.

"Yeah, I'm okay. It's gonna rain. We better go inside."

"Actually, I have to go home. I'm leaving tomorrow, and my mom says I need to pack all my things. I just stopped by to tell you the awesome news," she said with an apologetic face.

I couldn't believe it. She was leaving to another state for two months and had decided to tell me the day before she left? I knew God had it out for me. How could He separate me from my love? Unfortunately, I had no choice but to accept my fate. The raindrop brought reinforcements; water poured from the clouds, and we were covered in water as if we had jumped into a swimming pool with our clothes. I felt as though I weighed a ton; the burden of the moment with the weight of my water-soaked, grey jogging suit fixed my feet into the gravel of the pavement. Patricia stepped to me and began to give me a hug.

"Tim, I'm going to miss you so much. Who will I have to talk to everyday?" A tear swelled in her eye.

"Patricia, don't worry. I'll be here when you get back. It's not like I'm going anywhere! Just go to have fun," I said in a strong voice, but in reality, my heart had turned into ashes.

"Bye, Tim. I'm really going to miss you." She squeezed me tight.

I began to feel her heartbeat synchronize with mine, and her feelings toward me were no longer a mystery. She didn't have to confess it because, at that precise moment, I knew she loved me.

"This isn't goodbye. I'll see you when you get back," I said cheerfully.

We held each other close and I took a long whiff of the mango waterfall of her hair. It never smelled so good. We let each other go then; I watched her run through the rain back to her building.

After that day, I never saw Patricia again. Turns out she moved to Arizona to stay with her grandparents while her parents worked through a divorce. They didn't want Patricia and her brother to face the "real world." The "real world"

where love isn't always the priority. The "real world" that took the girl that I loved away from me.

Kismet deals her hand with an icy shoulder. Since the day that Patricia left, I never spoke to anyone of our relationship or the experiences we shared in life. No one else can ever come between us because those untarnished memories will link us together forever. My heart tells me that she has not forgotten the countless experiences we shared despite the years we've spent apart. Our hearts will always beat in synchronization because first love knows nothing about long distance but reaches an infinite depth.

Timothy Pauldon

Grade 12

Rolling Meadows High School

Rolling Meadows

Mark Maxwell

PEACEFUL EXPLOSION

The spinning of the tires as they glided over the imperfections of the state highway hummed in the back of his mind as he drove on. The sky was an intense shade of crimson, the sun just about to set. Besides the position of the sun on the horizon, he had lost all track of time. He might have been driving for three minutes or three hours...or three days; who could know? Blinding headlights poured in through his windshield as they crested the small hill over which he was passing. The opposing vehicles reached his in an even rhythm, one after the other, never missing a beat. The monotony of it all made his mind more blank than the smooth concrete passing under his tires.

And that was just it: his thoughts had finally stopped whirling with the rapidity with which they had been circulating in his head for the preceding weeks. All in his world was quiet. There was no music on the radio, no idea being chased around in circles by all of its risks, but only the constant low humming of the wheels. Finally, it was peaceful.

It really shouldn't have been. But he had finally realized that he had a much higher degree of control over his own mind than he ever had imagined. He could make his mind slow down to the crawl at which he had been moving for the past few days, and, apparently, even all the way down to this gradual halt of ideas he had finally reached on the road. The sensation of the forward motion of the car suddenly seemed so wrong and foreign because his mind had been left several miles back down on Highway 62. The car was proceeding westward, but his mind remained stationary in the middle of the road, countless other vehicles colliding with it, flattening it more and more with each blow of rubber on flesh, until it became one with the pavement. No wonder he wasn't thinking rationally tonight.

But one concept was clear in his mind. The cease-fire between the warring factions of right versus wrong, kind versus selfish, logic versus desire, had ensured that this thought would be the only one he would ever know again. It shone like a beacon, guiding his car towards the setting sun, and then a little south, right as he reached his destination. His hands were firm on the steering wheel, his foot directing the speed just like it normally would. The world was operating on the status quo.

He was close, he could just sense it. He didn't know exactly where he was headed, but he was confident he would know it when he saw it, so he wasn't worried. Worry would have been too much emotion for his no-longer-present brain. But now his hands were tingling, itching to turn soon. The time was near.

His mind slowly ground back into a low gear. It wasn't enough for cognizant thinking, but he found himself retrieving images he hadn't known he still possessed in his head. There were flashes of his mother and father playing with his sister in the pool when she was three and he was five, while he sat on the chair that stuck out two feet past the end of his legs, watching with a pang of jealousy. A memory appeared from when he was eleven in one of his early days of middle school. He walked down the deserted, silent hallway alone, his cheek blisteringly red from when he had left the house that morning. Then he saw himself sitting on his bed when he was about fourteen, examining the bruises that he could never let the world see. He was overwhelmed by not only an image, but what he thought had to be the last rush of emotion he would ever experience, when he was reminded of the first time that the pain he felt had been inflicted by his greatest and most terrible enemy—his own hand. It wasn't really an emotion he could explain. It was the anger at the

world, blended with the peacefulness that the sting brought him, combined with the guilt he knew he would feel the next time he saw her.

She flashed into his mind. How could she just stand there, poised in his cranium, wearing that gorgeous black and red dress she had worn all those months ago when she was with him? Her perfection taunted him, and the images' rapidity increased. There were flickers from that last night, right before she got out of the car. He saw her seductive, green eyes staring intently into his, slowly edging closer to him. He saw himself hesitate, sensed himself subconsciously draw back. He felt the sting of her palm, his cheek once again momentarily the same intense shade of crimson. He saw her dress whip out of the door, heard the car shake as she slammed the door in his face. Then they were in their English room. She hung back after everyone left just so they could hold hands without having to worry about what other people thought. He saw himself glance at her cautiously, hands in his pockets. The light rose across their peaceful faces as the sun rose that horrific morning they had lost track of time and forgotten to go home, the growing daylight conveniently stopping them in their progress. Soon he no longer remembered specific days and times, but merely lost himself in the scent of her perfume, the reflection of the stars in her eyes, and the taste of her sweet, salty tears as he kissed her to try to make the world better, all the time knowing that it was really his own presence that was pulling her world apart.

The tears were streaming down his face as he oscillated between frustrated anger and bitter agony. He hadn't even registered the wetness on his cheeks, because it had become such a normal piece of his world. This had gone on for too long, he didn't know how much longer he could stand it. He had known that he was a time bomb, just ticking away the

seconds until it would explode, taking away every horrible memory, every awful thing he had done, and every ounce of regret that he had ever felt, all to be gone in a minute.

Then the timer that was his heart gave a loud *thud*—the countdown had begun. He knew it was almost the time to turn. The peace washed over him again as his hand tightened on the steering wheel and his foot sunk to the floor. That last charge of emotions had exhausted itself, as if it knew that its time was up. His final vision was of the cars passing him in the opposite lane, their shining exteriors reflecting the barely visible sun in an oddly hypnotic way. As he took the forty-five degree angle at high speed, everything went south for one last time.

Danielle Pullan

Grade 11

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Karen Topham, teacher

TRAVELING THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

I was all ready to go to the airport; my multicolored suitcase was packed, and I was wearing my favorite blue t-shirt with pink flowers. Standing in the playroom with my mom and grandma, I felt nervous waiting to leave. I was going to have to fly alone to meet my dad in Cincinnati for my grandpa's funeral. I was so scared, but I had to keep telling my seven-year-old self that everything would be okay. It would be okay that I was leaving my mom home on bed rest with twins; it would be okay that I would be driving in a taxi with my grandma, and it would be okay traveling on my own. The taxi pulled into the driveway, and I started to cry; what if everything wouldn't be okay? I sniffled a good-bye to my mom and gave her a hug. I remember thinking that I wouldn't let go of her and that I would just stay home, but I knew that I had to leave, so I reluctantly released my grip and dragged myself into the taxi.

We arrived at the airport and went inside to stand in security. It was always a little nerve-racking going through the sensor because I always got scared that I would set it off, even though I knew I wouldn't because I didn't have anything dangerous. All of a sudden, I was standing in line to board. How my legs got me from security to the gate, I did not know. My heart started racing so fast that I could hear it, and my palms turned clammy. When we got to the place where they scanned tickets, my grandma explained the situation to the lady. She then gave me a pin, so the flight attendants would know I was alone. I said good-bye to my grandma while holding back my tears. I was so scared, yet I didn't want to make it hard for her. I gave her a huge hug and walked to the plane without looking back.

A flight attendant escorted me to my seat, and I was happy to see that it was a window seat; I loved looking

out the window. She then explained to me that if I needed anything I could tell her, and she would help. Even though I didn't ask, she stopped by throughout the flight, and we chatted. She mostly asked me the usual questions like how old I was and how school was going. I was very grateful for the conversation because it made the flight go by faster. Before I knew it, the pilot was announcing on the speaker that we were about to land. I started to get uneasy again because I was worried that my dad wouldn't be there waiting for me and that I would be lost and not know what to do. As I walked off the plane with the stewardess, I started to get a lump in my throat. I kept telling myself that he would be there and everything would be okay. I was so anxious that I almost ran out the walkway. For a split second I thought my dad wasn't there, and the tears started forming, but then I saw him and ran into his open arms.

When we got to my nana's house (where we were staying), I took my luggage inside and looked around. Now that my grandpa was gone, it had a lonely, empty feeling inside. I said "hello" to Nana; unsure what to do, I gave her a hug. I didn't say anything because I didn't know what to say.

That night I went to bed early, but I had trouble going to sleep because my head was still reeling with "what ifs." What if the taxi had been late and I had missed my flight? What if I had set off the alarms in security and had gotten arrested? What if my dad hadn't been there...and so on. My "what ifs" slowly drifted away, and I peacefully went to sleep.

The next morning I was the first one up, so I quietly explored the room while my dad and Nana were still sleeping. It was my dad's old room and there was a lot of neat stuff. I found a baseball trophy, some stickers, and a yo-yo. After a while I got bored, so I woke my dad up. He told me he would meet me in the kitchen. The kitchen was one of my favorite

rooms in the house; it always had a welcoming feeling and held wonderful memories. It was this room that I had once eaten the most delicious pancakes in the whole world, made with love by Papa, my grandpa. That morning, though, we did not have pancakes; we had English muffins and eggs. Only then did it finally hit me that Papa was never coming back, and I would never have those pancakes again. I looked at my plate and felt the sadness in the air, and I lost my appetite.

A black limo came to pick all of us up at 9:30; I was so excited because I had never been in a limo before. I stepped into the stretched-out car and joined my other relatives. On the way to the funeral, no one really talked, so I occupied myself counting the lights on the ceiling, keeping my excitement to myself.

When we got to the funeral home we went inside to attend the service. My dad said that it would be an open-casket, which meant that at one point, if I wanted to, I could go up and see Papa. At first it seemed kind of disgusting, but then I wanted to because I had never seen what a dead body looked like. So, during the service, I wasn't really paying attention, I was mostly thinking about what Papa would look like. I wondered if he would be dressed in a white gown like the one he wore when I went to see him in the hospital.

I snapped out of my daydream when I heard my dad crying. I had never seen him cry before, and it made me sad just looking at him. I silently gave him a hug to show him I cared. I then realized that my other relatives were quietly crying too; I started to feel guilty that I wasn't more upset. I tried to make myself cry, but then I rejected that idea because I felt my tears should come naturally. I felt badly for my relatives, so I asked my aunt if I could do anything, and she gave me smiling "no." I then got an idea; I asked for her Kleenex box and started handing tissues politely out to my relatives who

were crying. They smiled at me because it was quite a riot to see me being “Kleenex lady.” I was glad that I could make them smile; it made me feel better.

Near the end of the service we got to go up and see Papa. I went up with my dad and was holding his hand the whole way, partly for his comfort, and partly for me because I was so unsure what I was going to see. I looked into the casket to find Papa dressed in his nicest suit; he didn’t look dead at all, just as if he was peacefully sleeping. My dad said that I could touch his hand, and so I slid my hand under Papa’s. My stomach did a flip-flop. His hand was so cold! I quickly took my hand out and gave one last look at my grandpa. I whispered to him that I loved him very much and then my dad and I walked back to our seats.

The service ended, and we walked outside to the grave. There was basically just more talking, but I respectfully stood there until the end when I shoveled some dirt onto his grave. The shovel was very heavy, and the dirt made a muffled thud on his casket. I watched everyone else do it until the ceremony ended. I felt uncomfortable walking back to the limo; I felt confused and shameful that I hadn’t cried yet, and I asked my dad why. He said that is was okay that I hadn’t cried yet and that I would when I felt like it. He also told me that I didn’t need to cry to show that I missed Papa and cared about him, which made me feel a lot better.

The rest of the day passed, as did the rest of our visit. My dad and I said our good-byes and got in his car to drive home. I was happy that I wouldn’t be traveling alone this time. The car ride wasn’t that fun; it was raining and the time was slowly ticking along until the phone rang. My dad answered the phone, and I watched his reaction; he looked really stressed out, yet happy at the same time. He got off the phone and told me my mom was going into labor with the

twins! We were only about an hour away, so we would probably arrive just in time. As we drove forward to new lives, we were getting farther and farther away from death. I didn't realize until now that I was immersed in the circle of life.

Emily Stern

Grade 8

Edgewood Middle School

Highland Park

Sara Sher, teacher

THE NAME GAME

People usually don't choose their name at birth, so you have to take what your parents give you and run with it. William Scotland Townsend. Oh, what a glorious name. If you say it with an English accent it sounds quite important. Apparently, I was named after my great-great somebody. I have no idea who the hell he was but he definitely had a great name. William is somewhat of a common name, but if you look at it deeper, it is actually one of the most unique names on the market.

First of all, Will starts with the only letter in the alphabet that has more than one syllable, W. So most people can say "What up G" or "What up C," but my name is slightly lacking in that department. No one wants to walk around going "How's it going...ummm...Double...U." If "Double U" doesn't sound right to you, there is still the option of "Dubya." However, to understand the relation between William and "Dubya" you have to be, in George Bush terms, a rocket surgeon. William is for normal people, and Dubya is for Dick Cheney's puppets.

Another unique thing about my name is that there are so many uses for it in the English language. One might say that Will is perhaps the most useful name in the world. Will Will use all his will power to willingly write his will to his son Willy who lives in Wilmette? Try to fit *your* name in that sentence and you will get many awkward stares. How many times does your name appear in the dictionary? Not as many as mine; I guarantee it.

You can never get bored with a name like William. One day I can be William, the next Will, the next Bill, Billy, Willy, Guillermo, Willy Wonka, Will I Am, Willis, Wilbur, Willy Billy the Hillbilly, Billiam and the list goes on.

People often really appreciate their name because it has an important meaning. Well, my name has a very important

meaning according to the always trustworthy *urbandictionary.com*. Will is defined as being the “hottest, sexiest man alive” and “he makes my motor run.” I’m telling you no lies. I don’t know whose motor I am running, but I am quite proud of it.

Once you are finished admiring the complexity that is the name William, you can move on to the middle name. I never fully understood the use of a middle name, but if it’s there, why not have some fun with it? My middle name is Scotland. Whenever I reveal that, people always ask if I’m actually Scottish. Well the answer is a big fat NO. I happen to do a pretty lousy Scottish accent, but I’m not bloody Scottish. I happen to really like the movie *Braveheart*, but once again I am not Scottish. Well, if I’m not Scottish, maybe I represent Scotland in a different way. All I know is that Scotland is a cold, damp place filled with bagpipes and men who wear kilts. Usually when I get out of the shower I am really cold and my hair is damp, so I guess that counts. As for bag pipes, I sometimes get hiccups that remotely, in some far-off way, sound like a broken bagpipe. I won’t even go into detail with the kilts. Another big thing associated with Scotland is the myth of the Loch Ness Monster. It is supposedly a large, menacing creature that causes panic in the murky waters of Loch Ness. The only connection that I can make is that I had a roast beef sandwich for lunch.

Finally, onto the last name. It is not Thompson, or Townshend, like the guy from the Who, or William Tienson, like some college brochure listed me. Imagine yourself going to *town* to *send* a letter. Put it together and...VOILA. Someone thought my family started the postal service when I told them that, but that’s a whole other story. You can also imagine that back in the day, my family was the outcast of the village since they lived on the town’s end or something like that.

So there is no super special reason my name is the way it is, other than it's from some old, dead guy that lived on the end of town who was also not Scottish, and I'm very proud of that.

Will Townsend

Grade 12

Lake Forest High School

Lake Forest

Karen Topham, teacher

E**V**IRGIN

Until a few years ago, I was a virgin. Teased and tormented by my friends, I walked through life ashamed, because I had not yet experienced the grandeur and splendor that is...*eBay*.

Yes, that's right; I was an inexperienced prude when it came to online auction Web sites. My friends weren't the only ones who took notice, though. One day my father sat me down and gave me that age-old talk—you know, the “it's-normal-to-be-scared-your-first-time-but-it's-okay-to-press-the-button” talk. So, armed with my dad's speech and the knowledge that *PayPal* was sufficient protection, I set out on my own.

For quite some time, I had been lugging a duffle bag back and forth to my dad's on the weekends; that was an episode in itself. This bag was big; it was ugly, and it was blue. (Not unlike the orthopedic bootie I was forced to wear after experiencing minor toe complications sophomore year.) But late one night, I found the perfect solution to my style-cramping dilemma: a suitcase. Not just any suitcase, however; no, I'm talking *vintage* suitcase. I found I was immediately drawn to models dated around the 20s and 30s. Tweed exterior with a shellac finish, stitched leather handle, polished brass feet, satin lining; the word “nifty” is called to mind.

I spent the night scrolling through pages and pages of prospective suitcases, but try as I might, I couldn't bring myself to actually place a bid. Something was nagging at me; it was that inherent fear of electronic exchange. I was afraid of internetcourse! After all, the World Wide Web is foreign. It's impersonal. It's absolute. I mean, people lose their identity online; they lose all sense of personal connection, and, by God, I wasn't about to lose my virginity to a sweet-talking suitcase from Minnewaska, Minnesota.

Maybe it was the fact that I was pale and sweaty, knuckles white with consternation, or maybe it was the fact that it was three o'clock in the morning and I was still staring bleary-eyed at the computer screen, but nevertheless, my father, again, took me aside and gave me one of his little speeches.

"Press the damn button," he said. And that's all he said. I tried in vain to come up with an excuse; there was so much more to this than just clicking the mouse, but every reservation I had was immediately shot down by his unyielding logic. As my clammy finger pushed down on the plastic button, I couldn't help thinking, *This is wrong. I feel as if I'm signing a pact with the Devil.* It did feel that way for a while, too, and then I received a little notification that said, "You are currently the highest bidder."

Obsessively clicking the refresh button to check that I was still in the lead, I watched the "hours remaining" turn into minutes, the minutes into seconds. Finally, after four excruciating hours of deafening suspense the auction ended and I pressed refresh one last time. "Congratulations! You have won this auction." I finally realized what I had been missing out on; so this is what my friends were talking about. This was exhilarating; this was fun; this was...sexy.

Now, a vintage suitcase, a three-piece suit, a pair of oversized sunglasses, and numerous other off-the-wall purchases later, I consider myself more of the experienced stud muffin persuasion when it comes to online auctions.

Ben Watts

Grade 12

Belleville West High School

Belleville

John Lodle, teacher

THE PURSUIT OF JUNK FOOD HAPPINESS

Schools in Little Rock, Arkansas are doing whatever it takes to control and scrutinize students' weights. That includes monitoring weight and telling them what they can and cannot eat. They are even talking about citing and punishing the parents if their children are overweight. Personally, I don't think that is right. What the schools are really doing is obstructing students' rights to pursue happiness through junk food. Of course, they are doing it by making overweight children feel badly about themselves, not to mention they are blaming the parents for their children's weight issues.

Think about it: schools have no business feverishly monitoring and controlling their students' rights to pursue pleasure through food because they are essentially being told what to eat and what not to eat. Deciding what to eat is one of the few rights children actually have! Since when did the schools gain the right to control what goes into my mouth if it isn't illegal? Whose body is it anyway? In social studies classes, teachers claim this country is a free country, where people have the right to pursue happiness. But tell me how free would this country be if people could only pursue happiness though indulging in "healthy food?" That wouldn't make many students happy, I can tell you. I know it wouldn't make me very happy either.

Eating "healthy food" might not even be very healthy for the kids who get lunch every day at school. On the other hand, eating too much of one kind of food wouldn't be very healthy either. Even if schools provided so called "better options," it would probably be more of the same food, only looking healthier. On the positive side, junk food can make kids feel good about themselves. If schools take that away from kids, it would probably make many of the students feel

pretty distressed. I would be upset if they took my junk food away from me.

I'm guessing you may not have thought of this, but some kids actually need the fat from junk food. I heard recently that kids can really use those calories and fat because they might be burning a lot of them through exercise or they might just need it for proper growth and nerve development. It would be terrible if the school's starvation plan backfired on them and the kids who were told they were too fat now needed to gain more weight in order to survive. That is an important reason why the schools should stay out of the way of their students' rights in the first place.

Additionally, schools should not be controlling and categorizing their students by their weight and making those kids who are above the average weight feel badly. Telling kids that they are fat can ruin their self-esteem. I sure wouldn't want to be told that I am fat. It's just not right for the schools to be sending that message. It is not even their place to do that. How much fat a kid is carrying around is a very personal matter. Think about it: who would go around telling other adults that they are fat? Some kids might be coping with their weight by hiding it or tricking themselves into believing that they are not fat, but if the schools come around and tell them that they are fat and require them to do something about it or else, it might send those poor kids whirling back into reality where they wouldn't be very happy. Likewise, if the schools are telling kids to do something about their weight, why don't they offer support in some way other than taking away their happiness? Since when did schools gain the right to tell kids that they are fat and force them to do something about it? It just doesn't make sense to me. Kids shouldn't have to change themselves just so they look good in the school's eyes. Aren't students supposed to be accepted at school no

matter what? Of course, maybe students don't really want to change themselves because they are happy just the way they are. I know that I don't want to change who I am. Students should be allowed to be who THEY want to be.

Furthermore, parents should not be blamed for their child's weight. It really might not be their faults if their child is overweight. There are many reasons why a kid could be overweight. It could be that extra weight runs in their family genes. Of course, the students' pounds may have been caused by a health issue, such as hypothyroidism, diabetes, or even the side effects of medications. Further, kids may even need to gain a few pounds for sports inside or outside of the school system in order to be able to play.

Interestingly enough, many kids have access to money, and that money can buy them all the junk food they want. Parents are blissfully unaware of all of the junk food kids can buy when they aren't looking. Kids know exactly how to hide it to eat later. I know. I do that. Consequently, parents should not be punished for their kid's weight. It doesn't make sense when so many other factors can be responsible.

Keep in mind that schools really should not be reaching out and controlling students' weights or students' access to junk food. Aren't there more important issues schools need to worry about besides whether or not students are a little bit overweight? It is ridiculous to think that parents should be punished if their kids gain weight. It might actually not be the fault of the parents, and schools need to realize that punished parents would not be the most supportive PTA members. Most importantly, let's ask ourselves, should the children of America be deprived of junk food happiness? I don't think so.

Keith Weissman

Grade 6

Monroe Middle School

Wheaton

Carol Gallagher, teacher

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

DEADLINE: Postmarked no later than January 31, 2009.

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)

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.

