Authors
Skunk River Review

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Skunk River Review

Skunk River Review is a collection of student writing produced by students who have been enrolled in composition courses at DMACC.

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Scot Bourne

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Information is power. Those who choose the symbols and write the programs, advance the political and economic agenda of a society. They have power. Taking charge of the language requires students to write and think clearly about the symbols that they and others use. Those who own and control the symbols direct the affairs of state. Those who neglect the power of words leave themselves open to manipulation by others.

Tom Beck, Political Science Instructor ♦ Ankeny Campus
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Release Form for New Submissions
Find out how you can submit your compositions for the 1995 edition!
Introduction

The Skunk River Review is a collection of writings by Des Moines Area Community College Students enrolled in composition courses at all levels from Basic Writing to Composition II. Most of the submissions were produced by students enrolled in Composition I. The selections appearing in Volume VI were chosen from essays written during the 1993-94 academic year. As in the past, our goal has been to create a quality publication that represents the student writers at DMACC.

The number and quality of the essays submitted made the selection process difficult. We used the previous years’ criteria -- an essay’s focus, organization, style and originality -- as well as our intention of selecting essays from all DMACC campuses and representative samples from a variety of genres.

To the Student

The compositions in the Skunk River Review are to be read, analyzed and enjoyed. Written by students like you, the selections are examples of college-level writing and may be used as a basis for evaluating your own writing. The skills you acquire in English composition courses at DMACC will benefit you throughout your life. When you study composition at DMACC, you join a community of writers. This publication is intended to make that writing "community" visible to you. Realize that as you refresh your study of English through reading and writing, you have valid and valuable contributions to make for yourself and for an audience of your peers. If you are interested in submitting essays for our 1995 edition, please see the information located on the final page of this volume. We hope the topic selection, style and format of the essays will provide material for class discussion and for your personal inspiration.

To the Instructor

Originally, the Skunk River Review was created to provide DMACC composition students with a vehicle for sharing their writing with a broader audience. While we agree with that philosophy, we have specifically redesigned the format of this volume of the Skunk to make it an anthology of student essays that exemplify the types of essays taught in our classes. We hope these essays can be utilized as models and that this body of work may supplement the main text of a composition course. Because the essays have been written by their peers, students relate easily to the subject matter and enjoy discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the pieces. The Skunk River Review represents a cross-section of teaching methodologies to allow instructors flexibility in its use.
Writing literacy is undoubtedly one of the most important basic abilities that a person can acquire. It is the foundation, the bedrock upon which we build our finer abilities both in academics and in life.

Kyle Ann Campos, Psychology Instructor ♦ Ankeny Campus
A Good Day for a Jump

Jennifer Jones
Composition I

Instead of being at work, mindlessly pouring coffee, I sat, arms and legs huddled together, 3,500 hundred feet in the air in a stalled Cessna plane, nervously anticipating my turn to exit. Only one way existed to exit that high above ground. I had never parachuted from a plane, but when a friend invited me to skydive with him, I startled myself by replying with an unequivocal "yes."

My friend had just vanished from sight in one swift move. One second he had been squatting at the door of the plane; the next he was gone. Besides myself, only the jumpmaster (professional skydiving instructor) and the pilot remained. When I pictured airplanes, I envisioned cushioned seats and carpeted floors. This plane’s interior was bare, like that of a van that’s been stripped of seats and carpeting. I sat on the vibrating floor with my knees knocking against my chest. Above the pilot’s head a bumper sticker read, "Are we having fun yet?"

After redefining my idea of "fun," I found I could answer affirmatively. Everything about the day seemed surreal. We had driven two hours from Phoenix on a deserted highway to end up at this jump site -- Wild Horse West. Right before I sighted the hangar, I had thought we were hopelessly lost. Maybe I was just hoping we were. My eyes fixed on a circle of people performing strange dance rituals. My friend explained that they were practicing formations they would be doing together in the air. Every so often the loudspeaker caused me to jump as it announced, "The meek shall inherit the earth. The rest of us are going skydiving."

After talking to some of the people, I learned they came from all walks of life. They had one thing in common -- an air of confidence about them. I felt they knew something I didn’t, and they could tell from my nervousness that I was completely out of my element. It seemed that I was in the middle of someone else’s dream.

It still seemed like a dream as I realized I was the last one to jump besides the jumpmaster. The jumpmaster motioned for me to take my place at the door. Heading toward the door, I realized I wanted to be in on the common secret the others seemed to share. I found myself eagerly but cautiously checking to make sure that my static line was connected to the
hook inside the plane. After I jumped, this line would follow me and automatically pull the parachute open after it was stretched out (a process completed in about seven seconds).

I had trained for one hour prior to this jump, and now everything I had learned was swirling in my mind. Stepping onto the strut just outside the plane’s door, my mind screamed at my body to settle down. I implored myself to imagine I was just on the practice plane, safely on the ground. I grabbed the wing and looked to the jumpmaster for my signal to let go. I was to arch my body after letting go to give myself the best chance at a straight fall.

The jumpmaster gave his nod almost too quickly. This is it, I thought. There’s no backing out now. I arched my back and threw my arms and legs in an X formation, and I let myself feel the realness of it all. I felt the cold slap of air and the shock to my body as it realized that it was falling at a speed it had never experienced. I hurled off one expletive after another, but I couldn’t hear any of them. My hearing had shut down as if my body had a sensory overload.

Just as I had begun to think that I would be falling at this warp speed forever, I felt another jolt to my body. My parachute had opened and was catching the wind to expand itself over me and slow my speeding fall.

I glanced upward to make sure that all seven air ducts had opened and filled with air, but as I looked, I was awed by the gracefulness of this fluorescent pink parachute floating against the cerulean backdrop of the sky. It seemed so delicate, yet so powerful, as it spread to its maximum breadth.

I grabbed the brake strings and maneuvered myself to the ground, recognizing the jump site from the aerial photograph I had been shown earlier. The ground was rising to meet me faster than I could check my height on my altimeter. I pulled as hard as possible on the brake strings as I noticed my group waiting for me on the ground. They helped me with my parachute, which had lost all its delicacy and was now just cumbersome. They were excited for me because they all remembered the thrill of their first jump. I didn’t feel out of my element anymore. I felt that I could take on the world.

I suppose that was the secret I had been looking for. Sometimes you must voluntarily jolt your system and do something crazy just to remember that you can handle anything. Then, when the unexpected craziness and jolts arise, you’re ready for them. After watching a few other people jump, we finally headed for home to take on the world.
Occasionally when checking the cows or if I just feel the need to, I walk past the big old barn that’s starting to fall apart, through the gate, and into the pasture. It’s a fair-sized one for this part of the country, about 80 acres. When I’m at the far end of it where there are no roads nearby, I can sit under a tree and feel as though I’m the only person for hundreds of miles. It’s almost as if I’ve been transported to the 1800s when pioneers first came here.

I like to wander in the pasture any time of year. It doesn’t matter if it’s raining, snowing, or sunny weather. I’ve sloshed through mud and snow to my knees to look for new calves or lambs. I’ll admit that once in a while I’ve cursed the weather. But, overall, it is enjoyable or I wouldn’t keep going out there. My favorite times to just go for a walk and contemplate are late spring or early fall when the weather is comfortable and the trees are green with leaves.

After walking through the gate, I can look down on the slow-moving creek winding through the middle of the pasture. There definitely isn’t a forest of trees, but there are enough along the waterways and in the fencerows so I can go from one clump to the next on a depressingly hot day without too much effort. The trees are silver maples, black willows, mulberries and cottonwoods mostly. These are fast-growing species that can take a lot of abuse from ice storms, floods, droughts and grazing cattle. Cattle can do quite a bit of damage to trees during the winter or in a dry season when there isn’t much for them to chew on.

As I make my way down the hill towards the water, I head for my favorite cluster of trees. This is where I’ve seen muskrats eating grass by the bank, until I came too close, causing them to dive into the water and glide away.

There are usually several kinds of birds to be seen: great blue herons that look like a holdover from the dinosaur age with their long legs hanging down when they land and take off, kingfishers, killdeer that are very easy to recognize by their call, orioles, indigo buntings which are a very pretty little blue bird, and a few ducks. Another bird that many people may not care to go out of their way to observe (but I find entrancing) is the vulture. If you think about it, vultures and people who raise livestock have a symbiotic relationship. When you have livestock
on a large pasture or range, the sight of vultures circling slowly over one particular area means there could be something wrong. Perhaps a dog has attacked a calf, or a cow died from a disease. Either way, when there is a death, vultures help keep the pasture clean. Most of the time I just enjoy watching them glide and circle high in the thermal air currents, rarely flapping their wings.

Sometimes I’ll sit on an old tree knocked over by the wind or on the bank where there’s a little patch of white sand that I can wiggle my toes in or sift through my fingers. Sometimes schools of minnows or chubs swim by. When I’m by the kingfishers’ perch, it’s fun to watch them dive in the water after these tiny tidbits. After awhile I follow the creek further away from the buildings and road. I keep my eyes and ears open for many things new that day. If the cows haven’t been given free rein over the whole pasture, there may be some corners and edges of untrampled land where wildflowers grow: yellow marsh marigolds in a boggy spot, different shades of purple and pink phlox, yellow coneflowers that reach your knees, white anemones close to the ground that from a distance resemble strawberry plants in bloom.

At the far end I have to stop and turn around wherever our land meets the neighbors’ land. I find the sound of the water rushing over the larger rocks in this section of the creek revitalizing. Usually at this point, I find myself in a state of total peace. All of the excess chatter in my head has vanished and I can just enjoy being alive.
Mom and Dad had decided to move off the farm because Dad was concerned about the money and going into debt even further. They were to sell everything: livestock, machinery, and household goods. Dad wanted to get out of debt. He was going to move to town with anything that would fit in his car and nothing else. Mom wanted to keep all the household goods, but Dad had his mind set.

To get things sorted, boxed and ready for the sale, my two sisters and I would go to Mom and Dad’s every chance we had. Janice, Joyce and I started in the attic, each of us pulling out boxes and going through the things that Mom had saved for us. Joyce and I took items home with every trip. Janice lived in an apartment about 150 miles away, so she would make a weekend of it, always filling her car, only to go home and not have anywhere to store it.

Mom then started sending some special items that she didn’t want to sell with Joyce and me. Grandma, Mom’s mother, took a few things home as well.

By the time sale day drew near, we were all getting very irritable with each other because of the disruptive routine. Dad was upset with us girls because we had taken several things home with us. Most of the items we took were things we had stored at Mom’s and some old memorabilia that meant a lot to us.

"Dad, what about the appliances?"

"Sell them all."

"Won’t you need them when you move?"

"No! I said sell them all!"
The day of the sale came fast. There were neighbors carrying out boxes and furniture, while others pulled the hayracks out and filled them with hand tools and small equipment. Then there were the tractors, wagons and other farm equipment to be lined up. What a madhouse. Everyone was confused. "Hey, where does this go?" someone asked.

"Over there."

"Mom, does this go, too?"

Mom was upset, seeing everything she had worked so hard for being put out for sale. She didn’t know where to go next. Everything was changing; nothing was the same.

Joyce, Janice and I bought things that we didn’t want anyone else to have. Some of the neighbors passed the word around that we were also buying items. When we were bidding, few people would bid against us, knowing we were buying memories. It was hard to see strangers carrying away the things that were ours.

My boys didn’t understand. They couldn’t figure out why all the furniture was in the yard, along with all the boxes. "Mom, what about our toys?" They had discovered the box of toys they played with at Grandma’s house. Jesse wasn’t afraid to ask the questions that no one else would. Where? What? Why?

As the day grew to an end, the crowd began to go home, taking along our prized possessions. The hayracks were emptied; the sheds were vacant, all the machinery having been sold; the front yard was bare and the grass tromped down. The house, too, was nearly bare with only a couple of boxes placed here and there, waiting to be carried to my car. My sisters had gone home and Dad was outside when Mom asked, "Where do I go from here?" I didn’t know what to say. I, too, was lost.

I went home and cried. I had no idea it would be so hard to see them move off the farm -- our home -- to town, even though they were moving closer. It is hard to visit them now in their new home because there is nothing to do, and it is not our home.
Nice View

David Dennis
Composition I

Twirl me about, twirl me around
Let me grow dizzy and fall to the ground
Mary-Chapin Carpenter ♦ Only A Dream

On a hot summer day in the innocence of my youth, a Wild Mouse would scream, a Scrambler would twist and shout, and a rickety, old wooden rollercoaster would bump and grind us to the limits of our sanity. Little old ladies and gentlemen would sit in the shade on any of the multitude of park benches, feeding the pigeons and smiling at the children running relentlessly about from here to there -- wherever "there" would happen to be the next time -- possessed with the spirit of youth and infinite energy. The blue, almost perfectly cloudless skies would shine and smile on our faces. You see, we WERE young, and we DIDN'T have a care in the world, and life WAS just about as perfect as perfect can be because it was a hot summer day in the innocence of my youth at Riverview Park.

The trees towered above everything, in some cases even over the rickety, old wooden rollercoaster; the grass was the definition of the word "green." The litter from the pop and popcorn containers, the snowcone and cotton candy holders and the ice cream bar sticks never seemed to be seen on the ground; some mysterious force would clean up all the junk before it had the chance to become an eyesore. At least that's the way I remember it.

My friends and I would run like mad dogs to wait in line for the next ride; whether it be the Himalaya, which would take us on a continuously circular up and down joyride, constantly increasing speed until it got so fast we were pinned to the outer edge of our "car," all the while being rocked by intensely loud heavy metal music; or the Scrambler, the spider-like contraption that would orbit us around and around and every time we got to the circumference we would see a completely different angle of the park, and every time we came back in there was a certainty of collision with another "car," which somehow never happened; or the Wild Mouse, a steel mini-rollercoaster that would jerk us and throw us around and, believe me, we HELD ON because we all knew the story about the kid who let go and flew out of the "car" and ended up "splat."
But the most important ride there, the gem, the crème de la crème, the center of our circumscribed universe, was the rickety, old wooden rollercoaster. The best seats were either the front or the back. The front seat was cool because we were there first, front row center stage. The back seat was cool because, going around all the turns and dives that rollercoasters are renowned for, we would actually become airborne. Not just the G-force pulling us up off our seats, but the whole damn thing would leave the track! We’re talkin’ serious rush here. Of course, there was the ever-present fear of God that the whole damn thing would just break while we were on it, it being a rickety, old wooden rollercoaster and all, but it never did. We would race to the gate to get to either one of these treasured spots on the coaster, carefully calculating the number of people in front of us, faking politeness, letting others go ahead so we could get the right seat. And we would ride it over and over and over again until we got bored.

There were actually other attractions than the rides at Riverview. There was the haunted house that my friends and I were either too old to enjoy -- yeah, right, like this is supposed to SCARE me -- or too young to enjoy, when our prepubescence did not endow us with the skills or true desire to pick up girls and let them scream and hold us tightly at the sight of the fake monsters. The house of mirrors was kinda cool. We would walk through a maze of mirrors and clear glass, trying to avoid walking into something solid, and at the end there were all kinds of carefully curved mirrors that would totally distort the visual image we were looking at. Of course, we got to know the way through the maze by heart.

Riverview closed sometime in the mid-70s, a few years after Adventureland opened. At the time, it wasn’t really any big deal — nothing I could do about it. We would constantly compare the two parks: Adventureland we had to pay to get in; Riverview we didn’t. Riverview we had to pay for each individual ride; Adventureland we didn’t. (I was shocked when Mom and Dad took me to Disneyland -- we had to pay for both!) At the time Adventureland first opened up, it wasn’t much bigger than Riverview nor did it have many more rides, so the comparison was kind of a tough call, although Adventureland had a ski lift, which was an added bonus.

The land that Riverview once occupied is now being renovated for either business or park land. I seem to remember reading in the paper that city planners want to put some kind of business park in there, but I’ve visited the site and it looks like it might be a real park. The area is right off of the bike trail west of Birdland Marina, so I’ve ridden down there on a couple of occasions and the place is so desolate, despite the efforts to make it "something" again. Just being there brings a flood of memories pouring in. I can tell exactly what used to be here and what used to be over there; it’s eerie -- chills-up-the-spine material. Riverview will never be Riverview again in this world, but it will forever be Riverview in my memories.
After seven months of hard-core training, aerobic exercising, and low-fat dieting, it was time for the ultimate challenge -- time for competition. Not in a sport like baseball, where a "million-dollar arm" will get you a multi-million-dollar lifestyle, nor racing, a sport where a good set of legs and a fancy-shmancy outfit are a must. I am speaking of a sport with very little recognition. This is a sport that demands 100-percent dedication, both mentally and physically, to be eligible for the title of winner. Go to any local gym and you will find this athlete, the one respectfully known as "The Bodybuilder."

As I waited for the competition to begin with the other bodybuilding fans, I found myself squirming in my seat with anticipation, like a small child awaiting his first birthday party. Just as I was beginning to wonder if there was ever going to be a show, a short, overweight, bald man in a navy blue, pinstriped suit walked up the steps of the 50-foot slab of wood they called the "stage" and over to the podium hidden in the corner.

"Ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to the North American Natural Bodybuilding Association's Second Annual Bodybuilding Championships." The lights dimmed, and a spotlight hit the pale skin of the spokesperson. "Let's get the show underway!" bellowed the fat man. "Here are your six judges for tonight," he said. Six individuals were introduced, and six shadows from a small table near the front of the stage slowly rose from their seats, waved to the crowd and sat back down. Out of respect and proper upbringing, each judge received low applause from the crowd. The voice of the announcer rang in my ears, "Our first class of men tonight will be the Novice Men: Short Class."

With that introduction, 10 men walked onto the stage, spaced themselves shoulder-width apart, and faced the crowd with very wide, very powerful stances. From the ceiling of the auditorium, a section of lights shined down on the stage and gave life to the massive group of men the judges dared call beginners.

Of the monsters up on stage, number eight was the one who had my attention and
Jeff Long

encouragement throughout the competition. His name was Tony. He was a five-foot, six-inch pillar of strength whose incredible muscle definition was surpassed only by his powerful aura of confidence. He was also my best friend.

After the judges announced the first pose to be performed, the battle over appropriate size and definition began. Tony was exceptional. He had a body that would make Atlas, a god during the time of the Greeks, bow down in respect. Tony's 18-inch arms were a perfect complement to his bulging chest. He had a washboard stomach, a bullet-proof back and legs that would make him the envy of bodybuilders at professional levels. As the race went on, the crowd showed their enthusiasm with Tony's performance by yelling and clapping. "GO EIGHT!" and "YOU GOT 'EM, EIGHT! POUR IT ON!" were the most frequent responses by the strangers in the stands. Just as I thought it wouldn't get any better, the fat man spoke, "Gentlemen, please exit to your left and prepare for the musical routine." The lights on stage disappeared and music filled the air. He continued, "Ladies and gentlemen, there will be a 15-minute intermission before the second half of the show."

The musical routine is my favorite part of any bodybuilding competition. Each contestant, posing to a small selection of music of choice, is on stage for a period of 60 to 90 seconds. The creativity and grace displayed on stage during this short period of time can help determine the final decision regarding first place.

When it was Tony's turn to perform, he quickly walked to the middle of the stage, bent down on one knee, and assumed a position closely resembling Auguste Rodin's statue, The Thinker. The crowd screamed and whistled with approval. The speakers of the auditorium crackled as the low hum of a guitar emerged. As the first thunderous beat emerged from the loudspeaker overhead, Tony raised his head and smiled, as if he had found an answer to the question The Thinker had debated since the day of his creation. During the next segment of music, Tony rose to his feet and turned his back to the crowd. He raised his arms above his head and flexed his upper body, displaying the beauty a person's backside can possess if he or she works on more than achieving a cute butt. His second turn consisted of a half-turn toward the crowd, his arms at his side at a 90-degree angle, his hands clasped together. He flexed his calf muscle nearest the crowd. His profile represented a sense of power and self-determination seen in very few men today. As the music started to fade, Tony faced the crowd with his arms fully extended, smiled and then bowed to the crowd, displaying his shoulders for all to see. The crowd exploded with excitement. The clapping and whistling continued long after Tony had left the stage.
The Bodybuilder

About 10 minutes after all of the musical routines were finished, one of the shadows from the judges’ table came up to the stage and handed a small slip of paper to the spokesman. "Ladies and gentlemen, the judges have reached a decision on tonight’s winners. Will the following contestants please come out on the stage?" The crowd started to murmur about who was going to be called. "Number six, number nine, and number eight," echoed across the crowd from the loudspeakers above.

Tony and two others came to the stage and stood by one another, each with a smile and a look of excitement on his face. "Third place will go to ... number nine, George Martinsdale of St. Paul, Minnesota!" said the obese man with a smile. My heart rose to my throat as the next words came from the announcer’s lips. "The winner of the Second Annual N.A.N.B.A. Championships is number eight, Tony Danielson of Des Moines, Iowa!" Tony accepted his trophy from the sponsors of the competition; he then shook the hands of the other finalists as they were walking off the stage. Tony stood in the middle of the stage with his trophy by his feet. The fans cheered and cameras flashed as he waved to the crowd.

As the next group of competitors was being introduced on stage, Tony came down the aisle and sat in the seat next to me. "That was a lot of fun!" he said, as he accepted my handshake. He looked at me, smiled and said, "A winner never quits."

"And a quitter never wins," I answered, remembering a saying above the door to the gym at our old high school. Having been Tony’s best friend as long as I have, his win made a part of me feel as though I had also won. We finished watching the rest of the show and left that night to return home victorious.
Clarkstown Junior High School was very large as junior high schools go, even for the East Coast. Clarkstown Junior High consisted of about 4,200 seventh- and eighth-grade students from the cities of Congeries, New City, West Nyack, Valley Cottage and Bauvelt. The vast discrepancies in the socioeconomic status of these cities were easy to see in the student body. The student population was so large that attendance was taken by IBM computer cards that looked like U.S. Department of the Treasury checks with a green line at the top and rectangular holes punched in them in an indecipherable pattern. The student ID number and class number were more prominent than the name of the student.

Clarkstown Junior High is made up of A through D Wings with E Wing being added during my eighth-grade year. A Wing and C Wing are two stories tall; D and E are three stories. Each is built around an inaccessible courtyard. Some of the halls run along the courtyards and some of the classrooms are adjacent to the courtyards. Each wing has its own principal and an attendance office. B Wing contained six cafeterias, four gyms, two chorus rooms and two band rooms, the home economics rooms, the art rooms, the main office, the nurse's office and the library.

Clarkstown Junior High School holds a memory that I have been content to have remain as a skeleton buried in the darkest corner of my closet. Until now. On the very rare occasion that something brings this memory to the surface, I have always had the freedom to push it back into the closet of my mind and forget it, or at least remember very little of it. Today, I have decided to open the closet and exhume the memory, trying to piece together what I am able to remember. After all these years of perfecting the ability not to remember, this is both a difficult and unsettling task.

In 1968, I started my eighth-grade year at Clarkstown Junior High School, which always started on the Tuesday after Labor Day. The first few weeks of school were always tense. The sheer volume of inexperienced seventh graders and the new-to-the-area eighth graders gave an appearance of total chaos to all facets of the school day. Because I was able to rely on last year's experience and knew my way around, some of my tension was relieved. But nothing could possibly have prepared me for the drama about to unfold.
From the Closet Comes a Skeleton

This year there seemed to be many more groups of kids than I remembered from the year before; some almost had a "pack" quality about them with designated leaders, distinctive styles of dress and ATTITUDE. I vaguely remember the hippie pack with its "flower-power" emblems, love beads and its rebelliousness. (They wore jeans to school only to be sent to the office to await slacks or a skirt to be brought by Mom). I have a much more vivid memory of the African-American and the Mexican packs. I had friends who were African-American, but they were just as leery of the packs as I was. I wasn’t really bothered by the hippie pack (I even liked some of their styles.) and I tried to avoid any unnecessary contact with the African-American and Mexican packs, but it was the Puerto Rican packs that brought terror to my very core.

The Puerto Rican packs (and there were a number of them) seemed to consist of the largest and the oldest of the student population. (This may be due to the New York law requiring attendance in school until the completion of eighth grade or turning 16.) It seemed that any time there was rumor of a bloody knife fight, it included the Puerto Rican packs. They gave the impression they were not to be messed with. In class, they commandeered the back rows of the room. Everyone knew it and no one was willing to sit in their row.

At about 10:30 on a Thursday morning in late September, we had all settled ourselves in room A204 (A Wing, second floor on the courtyard). Mrs. Kats, our social studies teacher, was ready to begin class. As usual, about 10 minutes into the class, the Puerto Rican contingent entered the room and headed to their back row to take their seats. Thinking back, something unusual had happened then -- they all came in as a huddled mass, four surrounding one, shuffling their way to the back of the room. They usually quieted right down to take their naps. Today was different. Today they were talking to each other in their native language, sounding excited and like they had something to celebrate. Within seconds we heard a scuffling sound and suddenly a yell, "Hey, Teach!" And then we heard a jumble of Puerto Rican and cursing. As if on cue, the entire class whirled around toward the noise. We were met by the blunt end of a crudely sawed-off shotgun. I don’t remember doing it, but I’m sure I screamed along with the others. I can even now feel my throat constrict and my ears throb. All I could do was think about my mom and dad. I vaguely remember wondering that if they killed me, would my folks keep my rabbit or give it away.

We sat motionless forever, facing the front, our heads down, trying to behave as best we could for eighth graders. From my desk in the front of the second row from the door, I could see the clock. I had done pretty well for the first 45 minutes, then I felt the sting of tears. When would this end? Would they really kill us? Never and probably. One of the pack came toward the front of the room with a snowmobile mask over his face, climbed on a chair and broke the clock with something, maybe the handle of a knife or maybe another gun. No longer able to keep track of my final day, I squeezed my eyes shut and cried.
Sometime during that first 45 minutes we heard classes change. Looking back, I don’t think classes were changing. I think they were evacuating the building. With every minute (or lifetime) that passed, more and more soft crying could be heard. Mrs. Kats tried again and again to talk them into letting us go. They just cursed at her in Puerto Rican.

The tension was becoming enormous; the air in the room was becoming almost too thick with sweat to breathe. Even Mrs. Kats’ voice was starting to sound uncertain. It was then that I knew we all would die.

Suddenly, and sounding like God himself, a voice called out, "Put down the gun!" The voice identified itself as a police officer. Minutes passed. No response. Again, "Put down the gun!" Again, no response.

In one accelerated yet protracted moment, there was the incredible sound of glass shattering, of shouting, screaming, crying, of desks overturning and then, as suddenly as it started, there was quiet -- quiet as if time had stopped. I was too afraid to open my eyes. Once my heart stopped pounding in my ears, I realized that I could hear everyone in the room breathing. The Rockland County Emergency Rescue team had rappelled off the roof, into the courtyard, and ultimately entered our classroom through a window.

No one was hurt. The five Puerto Rican kids were led away. Mr. Gallo (one of the science teachers), the principals, the nurses, policemen and medical personnel all burst into the room. Only then did the real crying start. We were all asked four or five questions by the police before we were allowed to meet our anxious parents at the bus area in front of D Wing.

There was no school on Friday.

I am a little surprised that I can’t remember the names of any of the boys involved. Maybe it’s better that way; that’s how I’ve dealt with this event, by perfecting the art of not remembering. You see, in 1968 there were no psychologists or counseling teams to help us sort through our feelings, nor did we talk about the incident amongst ourselves. My guess is that for 31 other people my age and one retired teacher there are moments when this memory seeps its way to the top of the pile. Whether they choose to relive it each time, or bury it away in the closet where it won’t be a bother, like I did, I couldn’t say.
Heartbreaker

Rob Winget
Basic Writing

One of the worst heartbreaks I ever sustained was at the hands of Lauren, the one-year-old daughter of my then girlfriend, Ann.

At that time, Ann and I had known each other for about three years. We went together for the first six months, broke up, and then reunited one-and-a-half years later, just one month before Lauren was born.

I remember well the day of Lauren’s birth. It was a sunny afternoon in late August, and I was just stepping out the door to embark on a three-day fishing trip with some friends when the telephone rang. At the other end of the line was Ann. She was lying in a hospital bed. With a soft, exhausted voice, she muttered, "It’s a girl."

Later that week I held in my hands the queerest object I had ever encountered -- a baby. I couldn’t believe that this tiny, helpless creature wriggling under the pink blanket was actually a human being. She yawned, her opened, toothless mouth barely the circumference of a penny. Entranced by her wandering blue eyes, I sat motionless, drinking in every coo and sputter in utter amazement.

During the six months that followed, Ann and I grew closer together and, ultimately, romantically involved. My affection toward Lauren grew also. The three of us became quite a trio; whether it be shopping through the malls, or just doing busy work around Ann’s apartment, we enjoyed spending the time together.

Occasionally, Ann would show subtle signs of stress due to hours of never-ending motherly duties, so I would volunteer my services as a babysitter, which she always warmly welcomed. Of the few parental responsibilities I shared, babysitting was my favorite. It was as if a teenager’s parents had gone on vacation and left the car keys.

To pass the time, Lauren and I played a game I called "kick rocket." I would lie on my back with her clinging to my lower leg. By thrusting my knee toward my head, Lauren would shoot through the air until her bright giggling face was an inch away from my nose. After
taking off and landing 200 or 300 times, we would slop spoonfuls of strained vegetables all over everything (occasionally slopping a spoonful into her mouth) until Lauren's angelic eyes grew heavy and she fell asleep.

One lazy Sunday afternoon, I stopped by Ann's apartment for lunch before I proceeded to my dad's where I was to spend the day. Lauren and I played kick rocket on the living room floor while Ann prepared shell pasta with Velveeta cheese and pureed peas. Lunch was quiet. There had been a fight the night before between Ann and me and, for a reason I cannot recall, we were drifting apart. Thoughts of impending doom made the air thick with tension.

"Well I'd better be going," I said, breaking the silent gridlock.

"Yeah," Ann replied. "Be sure to tell Dad 'hi' for me."

After a quick hug, I waved bye-bye to Lauren as I opened the door. Lauren slowly rose to her feet and began bouncing toward me. I quickly stepped across the threshold, and just as the door latched shut, Lauren cried, "Da-dee!" I froze.

Dumbfounded, I stood motionless with my hand still on the doorknob. I remember thinking, My God, what do I do now? Dazed, confused and very freaked out, I tore my hand from the doorknob and turned away. Thoughts of peace and happiness that usually accompanied thoughts of Lauren turned to sorrow; for in my broken heart, I knew there could be no turning back.

Soon after that Sunday, Ann and I broke up. I didn't see Lauren again until two years later, and when I did, I barely recognized her. Thin blonde ponytails stuck out each side of a head that had once borne fuzz. The fat, wobbly legs that I remembered were thin and strong enough to run effortlessly.

"Lauren, this is Robbie. Do you remember Robbie?" Ann asked.

Lauren looked at me shyly, and playfully answered, "No."

With a lump in my throat I chuckled, "That's okay Lauren ... I remember you."
The Death of a Child

Lonnie Schulz
Composition I

Death is sometimes brutal enough to make a vivid impression upon the mind. The death of a child is something that is seldom forgotten and changes your life forever. The day I killed a child still lives forever in my mind and in my heart.

The day started out as any day in the jungles of South Vietnam. I awakened to the oppressive heat, the sound of buzzing insects and the smell of rotting vegetation. February 14, 1971. A day that would live forever in my memory. At approximately 6 a.m. I was summoned to the group commander’s office to receive a mission briefing. I received instructions for my first assignment. I was to penetrate deep into Cambodia to find and terminate a rogue U.S. agent.

I was assigned a tracker to help me locate the target since this was my first time out in the jungle. At approximately 8 a.m. the tracker and I were transported to a small air station where we boarded a C130 Galaxy Star-Lifter. We were each handed our equipment, along with a parachute. I examined my parachute and found it to be a black, steerable, paraglide T10. I then proceeded to examine my equipment. For this mission, I carried a small pack consisting of first-aid kit, food and water for one day, and one change of clothes. I also carried a weapon of choice, a 340-caliber, Weatherby Big Game rifle with infrared scope which I would use to complete my mission. To complement the ensemble, I wore jungle fatigues with black jump boots. Last but not least, I carried a Colt 45-caliber automatic pistol, just in case things got bad.

We were to make a HALO-style jump, where you exit the aircraft at 30,000 feet and free-fall until you reach 1,000 feet, at which time (it is hoped) you deploy your parachute. My jump was made without any major incidents.

The tracker and I were on our way to the target who was less than three miles away. It was almost 5 p.m. by the time we reached a small, grassy clearing about a half-mile from the village where my target was located. My tracker would stay there with the radio and establish
contact with our return departure coordinator. I would go on alone to complete the mission I was trained to do.

Many thoughts were coursing through my mind as I neared the village. Would I be able to terminate my target? Would my training be sufficient enough to keep me alive? Only time would tell. I knew that if I failed in the mission I was sent to do, a lot of good soldiers would die.

I reached the village at 6 p.m. I was still too early, yet I had located my target. I decided to wait where I was until the time to act. The heat of the evening was making my body drenched with sweat. Was it really the heat, or was it the fear I felt deep inside?

I reached forward and parted the branches of a tree. There in front of me was the center of the village and my target, the man I had been sent to terminate.

Thoughts of the past raced through my mind, thoughts of growing up in eastern Kansas on a small farm, going to boot camp, going to Special Forces training school and finally going to the elite sniper training. I was the "best of the best," according to my classmates and my instructors. I had graduated all training with top honors. Now I would find out if I really had what it took, if I measured up to everyone's expectations.

I raised the rifle and looked through the scope mounted on top. The man seemed so close I could almost reach out and touch him. I started to squeeze the trigger. It was then he turned and looked right at me. I pulled the rifle deep into my shoulder, took a deep breath and squeezed the trigger. The sound of the rifle was loud in the silence of my mind as I saw his face disappear in a cloud of red mist. The moment had arrived and I had performed my duty to my country.

Many years have passed since that day. Still, I lie awake at night with sweat pouring out of my body from nightmares that haunt my dreams. Many targets were sought out and terminated during the 18 months I spent in the hellhole called Vietnam. The first kill would live with me forever. I had not only killed a man, but I had killed a child. I had killed the child inside of me. You see, that day I was only a child, really. I was 18 years old. That day a child had died, too -- the child inside of me.
Bad Omens

James McCarthy
Composition I

At the airplane’s hatch stood the stewardesses who had been so polite and friendly to us on the long flight. They tried to smile and wish us well, while streams of tears rolled down their faces. I took this as a bad omen for what lay ahead.

Struggling up the aisle, under the weight of my combat load (machine gun, rounds, gas mask, etc.), I stepped out onto the ramp. The intense sunlight nearly blinded me. I felt the scorching heat, which I took for the backblast of the jet engines. As we formed into ranks away from the aircraft, I realized the heat I felt was an ordinary summer’s day in Saudi Arabia.

From the airport, the platoon was "meched up." To the average citizen, this jargon may seem foreign, but when you serve in the Marine Corps, you soon learn that "meched up" means that you travel in mechanized vehicles, which for us were Amtracks -- large, metal-tracked vehicles in the shape of a box, that hold eighteen Marines. The platoon was packed into these large, metal boxes and transported to our B.P. (Battle Position, a series of holes dug into a 360-degree perimeter, to provide all-around security from attack). As we were traveling to our B.P., I took a look at the sea of brown sand that stretched out in front of me as far as my eyes could see. This land was dead, barren of life; there were no trees or animals which were dear to me because I was a farm boy from Nebraska. It was almost hard to believe that somewhere in the distance men were living in holes, willing to kill and die to keep such a place.

And so began our routine for the next several months. First, we would settle in a B.P. and dig "fighting holes" (armpit-deep holes dug and reinforced with sandbags to protect us from incoming artillery barrage and rifle fire). The second stage of our routine consisted of infantry tactics and exercises, which entailed long runs in gas masks that could bring the most seasoned athlete to his knees. And finally, after being in the same spot long enough to make our fighting holes seem comfortable, we would refill the holes with the same sand that we had sweated over removing in this Godforsaken land! We would then pack our gear, get into the "meched" vehicles, and move closer to the front.
The magnitude of the situation hit me one day when an intelligence officer, one of the personnel who gathers information about enemy capabilities, came to our B.P. The officer was displaying aerial photographs and using charts to illustrate the staggering troop numbers, tank, artillery and chemical weapon capabilities. I took this as a bad omen.

After hearing all of this information, I decided that it would be a good idea to write a will. The writing did not take a great deal of time because I was only 20 years old and hadn't amassed much wealth. After completing the will, I wrote a short letter to accompany it that said goodbye to my family and friends. On the back of the envelope, I wrote the following instructions: "In the event of my death, or being listed M.I.A. (missing in action), send to addressee." I placed it at the bottom of my pack, hoping that it would never be sent.

One morning I was awakened by the "Doc" (one of the Navy corpsmen attached to Marine platoons; their duties are to administer first aid to the wounded). He towered over the hole in his six-foot-five grandeur. He wore glasses that made him appear scholarly and accompanied the intelligent refinement with which he spoke. He informed me about the experimental pills we would be taking. "The two packets I am giving you are Anthrax and a nerve-agent pill. These will help your body build some immunity in case the Iraqis use these agents against us."

The Doc then told me the hourly intervals at which to take the pills. "I will be back later to remind you to take them," and he turned to walk to the next hole. I took this information as a bad omen.

After six months of waiting and continuing with the routine which had ruled our lives, President George Bush, the Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces, made good on his threat to engage military action against the Iraqi forces because they had not pulled out of Kuwait by the specified time. And so, the air war began.

Ken Martin, my fighting hole partner and best friend, and I sat in silence watching the flashes of light on the horizon from the Coalition air raids against Iraqi military targets. Ken was a colorful character, to say the least. He was never called by his given name. Instead, he was called "Bart," after his "Bart Simpson" tattoo, one of the many tattoos that graced his large-proportioned body. Spitting out his chewing tobacco, Bart broke the silence.

"Do you think that we will be going in soon?" he asked, already knowing what my response would be.
"Yeah. I can’t imagine that it will be too much longer now. Are you worried much?"

"The thing I am the most worried about is being shot up or gassed so badly that I will be sent back as a vegetable. If I end up in that kind of shape, I want you to finish me off."

I told him that I felt the same. With a nod and a handshake, we cemented our pact. This pact was never mentioned again, both of us confident in the other to keep his word.

After all the months of waiting, it happened. We got the word that we were going in. We filled in our holes one last time. To make more room in the tight constraints of the "meched" vehicles, we inventoried our belongings, casting out the nonessentials. Magazines, letters from loved ones, Christmas gifts and other personal belongings perished in the raging flames. We stood around the fire in unison, watching our links to the outside world disappear. We put on our combat load, which had become a part of our anatomies. We boarded our "meched" vehicles. The whine of the engine and the screech from the radio broadcasts of military transmissions were the only things that broke the silence at first. Eventually, talk followed, then loud chatter and finally, singing of cadence and the Marine Corps Hymn.

We traveled some 50 miles, and then were told to disembark. The "meched" vehicle came to a grinding halt. The door creaked open and we ran out, screaming like wild men. We plopped down on our stomachs and "sighted in" our weapons. We saw "them" -- not the fanatical horde of barbarians as I had envisioned -- but sick, malnourished men, marching in columns, carrying white flags. As we moved forward, we noticed they were all carrying pieces of paper in their hands. The papers were propaganda dropped by the U.S., depicting an Iraqi soldier surrendering and going back to his family. On the back, in Arabic, was a message stating that anyone presenting this paper would not be harmed. They clutched these pieces of paper desperately.

The second day was the beginning and the end of the Iraqi offensive. Our platoon was patrolling from bunker to bunker in search of the enemy who were holding out when, from a distance, we heard the rumble of armored vehicles. We knew instantly the sounds were not from American military vehicles. The pitch from the noise of the engines and vibration from their tracks was distinctly different than our "meched" vehicles, which we had become so accustomed to hearing day in and day out. The unmistakable buzz and crack of impacting rounds confirmed that this was the enemy. Frantically searching for cover from the hail of incoming fire, we hit the ground. Fifty meters to our front was one of the massive Iraqi trench lines. Flat on our stomachs, arm-over-arm, the sand rubbing our skin like steel wool, we
reached the ridge of the trench, all of us knowing that our protection was only temporary. For once the enemy was upon us, we knew our rifles and light machine guns would be useless against heavy armor.

Our salvation from the armored vehicles came in the form of American tanks and Cobras (helicopters) which made quick work of these resisters. We watched this great aerial and ground display as if we were in some huge amphitheater watching a scene of a play act itself out.

We disembarked from the "meched" vehicles for the last time in the war at the Kuwait City Airport. The platoon was taking prisoners as we had the previous days of the war. Each prisoner was holding onto his piece of paper as it was his very life. Realizing they were not going to be harmed, they were overjoyed. One even kissed Bart, to which Bart reacted with much disgust!

Radio transmissions broadcast the conclusion -- a cease-fire had been declared. A feeling of relief came over us. For with the end of the war, we, like the Iraqis, had been freed from our bad omens.
The Landing

Patrick Blaskovich
Composition I

It never seemed to fail; just as soon as we would all sit down to eat, the ship's boatswain would come over the bitch box and blow his damn dog whistle and yell, "Emergency flight quarters! Emergency flight quarters! Flight crew has declared an in-flight emergency. All hands man your flight quarters stations." For us that meant it was time to go to work again.

Everybody's face would become ghost-white with fear and their bodies numb. All one could see was a flash of pissed-off, unshaven, half-dressed "airedales" (the name the ship guys gave us) making our way out of the galley, out of the berthing compartments, (or any other hiding place we could find to hide for the 15-minute nap) dashing up to the flight deck.

One deck up in the hangar, while we were all gearing up (boots, gloves, floatcoats and helmets) to go out on deck, my det-chief came to me and said, "Pat, grab your crew and get your ass on deck ASAP. Number two engine flamed out so the helo will be inbound in five minutes."

Looking across the hangar at all my rundown shipmates as they were fumbling to get their equipment secured, I could tell how badly none of them wanted to go out on deck; none of us had slept for days, except for maybe 15 minutes in between flights, and we hadn't showered for a week. Unfortunately, there was no time to be miserable, nor time to be arguing with the lucky ones who were going out on deck.

"Okay, you guys heard the chief. Brian, Jerry, Gene and Smitty, suit up! Grab your chocks and chain and meet me out on the deck." It took me longer to get ready because I was the LSE (landing signalman). I had twice as much equipment to wear, mainly this sound-powered phone I had to wear around my neck so the tower could scream at me while the helo was landing.

Once out on deck, we had to go through the usual procedures to check the deck lights and aircraft line-up lights, drop the safety nets, and complete a "fod walkdown," which is navy slang for examining the flight deck for debris. Usually, the guys took care of that while I was establishing communications with the tower.

"LSE, are you done dicking the dog down there yet?" the tower yelled over the phone.
"LSE, aye, light check and fod walkdown complete, manned and ready, " I replied.

"10-4 LSE. Stand by for further instructions."

This was the fun part, the waiting.

Out on deck and to my far right was the safety observer. This job was held by the highest ranking enlisted man, usually the laziest. His job was to alert the smash-and-crash team to come and put out the fire and to be the leading witness to what went wrong with the landing -- that's if he doesn't get blown to pieces with the rest of us.

Over in the left corner of my side was the chain team, each with greasy, rusty chains draped over their shoulders, chocks in hand. They stood motionless as if petrified by the thoughts going through their minds. Their job consisted of running up to the helicopter just as it landed, chocking the wheels, pinning the landing gear and chaining the helo to the deck. This is the job that is given to new guys to break them in.

In front of me was a small strip of steel called a "flight deck" and after that, all ocean. All in all, we had about 100 square feet of deck to work with, not much room for mistakes. All of us were scared to death. Constantly. When a plane came in on one engine, it had only enough power for one landing attempt. If it missed the ship, the flight crew would surely be killed. If it came in too fast and struck the side of the ship, there was a good chance that all of us would be killed or blown over the side and lost in all the confusion.

"LSE, November-Whiskey Four Five inbound, two minutes out, left-seat approach, starboard line up," the tower mumbled over the phone.

"LSE, aye, I see the helo in the pattern," I replied.

All there was to see was the faint blinking of the anti-collision lights slowly approaching. As the plane approached more closely, everyone got more nervous. I was pacing; the chain crew was fidgeting, cracking their knuckles, talking to one another, anything to loosen up. I hated landing planes on nights like this: the ship pitching and rolling at a ratio of seven to five, the crosswinds blowing salt spray into my cuts and onto my goggles, blinding me. But most of all, I hated nights when there was no moon. Without the moon I couldn't see the airplane coming in. Under the circumstances, the only way to see the plane is to wait until it's right on top of you and hope the deck lights reflect at least enough of the plane to see the landing gear. (Pilots often forget to put the gear down.)
The tower came over the phone again to reconfirm the helo’s approach. *No kidding, the damn thing is right in front of me!* I thought to myself. I still couldn’t see anything except for the lights, but I could hear the rotors whipping through the air and the whining of the engine screaming at full power.

I looked over at the chain team and yelled, "Are you numskulls ready to go?" I got a thumbs-up back and said to myself, *Oh shit, here we go.* I lit my wands and gave the helo a wave, "I’m over here!" Then I started to signal it in. As the plane came closer, the sound intensified; so did my nerves. I kept repeating to myself, "Relax, Pat. Breathe. Take it easy. Keep your signals steady."

By this time, the chain team was getting prepared and the tower was going ballistic over the phone, most of which was being drowned out by the sound of the rotorwash and the engine. At this point, I started ignoring the tower anyway. The helo was coming in with difficulty, fighting to maintain altitude and to carve its way through the fierce crosswinds coming over the deck. On the other hand, we were all fighting to stay standing. The deck was going from horizontal to vertical and the rotorwash was pushing everyone backwards.

This was the sticky part -- trying to time the deck that is pitching with the plane that is trying to land. If my timing was off, the deck could drift up and collide with the helo, creating a catastrophe. I was thinking to myself, *Just another second. Hang in there. After this last pitch, I’ll bring you in. THERE!* I sent the signal to the pilots. Both arms waving downward followed by crossing them. The helo slowly staggered in. Everyone was tense. My arms were flying everywhere. Then BOOM! The plane crashed to the deck with that beautiful sound of 14 tons of machine dropping from the sky. "GO! GO! Get in there," I told the chain crew with signals. They all dashed into the darkness under the helo’s turning rotors, working frantically to chain the violently shaking machine to the deck, then filtering rapidly, one by one, to the false security of the side of the hangar where I was standing.

I gave the pilots the thumbs-up to proceed with the shutdown of the aircraft, assuring them that the chains and chocks were securely fastened. While the engine dropped off-line and the rotors slowly wound down, we were all smiling and shaking heads and waiting for flight quarters to secure (go to bed). The adrenaline rush, which had mostly overcome our fears earlier, was still fluid in us. All we knew was that we just kicked ass and kept from becoming another statistic, beating the odds for another day. And we did it all to prove that we were the best damn squadron in our air group, and so we’d have to do it all over the next day.

"Secure from flight quarters. All hands prepare to set flight quarters again at 0430. Good job, air-det."
As I walked around the old feed truck, the icy northwest wind was slashing at my face. The mercury in the thermometer was dipping lower by the minute. With the sun going down against clear skies, I knew this would be a bitterly cold night. I was searching for any early signs that the cold weather was becoming too much for this truck to handle. In a couple of hours I would be giving it that very test because I was leaving to pick up a load of cattle feed in Minnesota.

After a thorough inspection, everything appeared in good order. I shrugged off the fears that had been building up inside of me. Although I had driven well over half a million miles in this rig, there was no reason to doubt its performance now. The truck was very reliable. Some considered it to look like a piece of junk, but this rig had never let me down. I knew every inch of this truck, and felt confident I could leave for Minnesota without facing any major conflicts.

Since early morning, forecasters had been predicting actual temperatures of 35 degrees below zero, and a windchill factor of 100 below. Warnings had been issued to stay indoors and not to venture out into the cold throughout the day. Countless truck drivers had turned down the chance to haul this load. It was just too cold for them. It was for me, too, but the idea that nobody wanted this load made me want it that much more. It was an invitation I couldn’t pass up. Before I knew it, I had agreed to deliver the load of feed by 7 o’clock the next morning.

As I walked into the feed store office, I was hoping Larry had decided to go with me. He worked at the store where I would be delivering the load. If Larry finished work early, he would usually ride with me. We had enjoyed each other’s company on many trips to Minnesota.

Larry and I share many of the same interests. He likes country music; so do I. Not only do we have the same interests, we also think alike. Somehow, we have developed the
Freezing Behind the Wheel

ability to answer each other's questions before they are asked. As I stood in front of Larry, I could see by the look in his eyes that he really didn't want to go.

"Well, are you?" I asked with anticipation.

"No," Larry muttered hastily.

"Come on! I've got some new country tapes!" I pleaded.

"It's too cold," he insisted.

"Larry, nobody else wants this load! Look at it as a challenge!" I stared at him with a look of pure determination.

That's all it took. The fire I saw in his eyes had me convinced he wanted to try this madman's adventure as much as I did.

The next hour was spent at Larry's place trying to get on as many layers of clothing as possible. We tried different combinations, whatever it took to stay warm. We both knew the heaters in the truck weren't very good, so dressing as warmly as possible would be the key to a successful trip.

Once we were positioned in the truck, we put sheets of cardboard between ourselves and the doors. Sleeping bags were wrapped over our legs and more blankets stored in the sleeper compartment behind us. The high-energy food Larry brought along to help keep us warm consisted of only two candy bars.

"That's not much of a survival kit," I said.

"I only had a couple of bucks. What do you expect?" Larry retorted.

I looked at my watch and said, "Well, we can't worry about it now; the place where we need to load closes at midnight, and it's already 9 o'clock."

"I'm ready. Let's go!" Larry yelled as we slammed the doors of the truck simultaneously. A cloud of smoke bellowed out of the chrome stack as we drove out of the parking lot.
The radio announcer tried one more time to warn us to stay off the roads and stay indoors. Larry looked at me and laughed as he shoved a tape into the cassette player. A few minutes later we were down the road, singing along with Willie Nelson and feeling like we were kings of the road.

About a half-hour had passed and we decided to eat the candy bars Larry had brought along. This decision was based on two key points: the truck was running fine and we were hungry. Besides, it was already getting cold in the cab and we needed that high-energy food right away. There wasn’t a need to be concerned about this truck! Even my own tension that I had experienced from the start was quickly fading away. A sense of pride was building inside me toward the old feed truck for doing this job so well.

Having such a large windshield in this type of truck made it difficult to keep the frost off of it. It started forming in the corners and grew like a virus across the whole surface. The defrost mode never had worked well. Before long, all that either of us had to see through was a small circle in the center of the glass.

We made it to our destination on time. After loading, we went inside to get warmed up. This also gave the truck time to get warmed up inside the cab. The guy who loaded the truck thought we were nuts for being out on a night like this. He was probably right. When we were warmed up, we headed back toward the feed store again. This night was looking like another routine run.

It was shortly after we left that I realized our night was far from being just another routine run. Larry had been telling me how cold he was on the trip in. That’s because he had the wind on his side. Now it was on my side and I could understand why he had complained. It was no secret that the cab was getting unduly cold inside. Not only could we see our breath, we were also both shivering, and it was evident when we talked to each other.

Larry checked the fan switch on the heater to make sure it was still working. It wasn’t. Quick calculations assured me that not having heaters would only be a minor problem. After all, we were dressed for the weather. Another hour, and it would be all over. By the way Larry was acting, I could tell he didn’t share the same views. He had become less and less talkative as the night progressed.

More blankets were grabbed from the sleeper to ward off the cold that was becoming almost unbearable. My fingertips and my toes felt like glass marbles, ready to explode if I were
Freezing Behind the Wheel

to hit them on anything hard or frozen.

As we pulled the last of the blankets out of the sleeper, the catastrophe that both of us dreaded the most finally happened -- the engine died. Not only did we lose engine power, we also lost all electrical power. Everything went black!

Without looking at Larry, I could feel his eyes were upon me. I didn’t know what to say or do. As the truck slowly rolled to a stop, I steered it off to the side of the road. We just sat there with neither of us saying anything. The hum of silence was looming out at us, getting louder and louder. The ticking of Larry’s watch was rather faint at first; then it, too, grew louder and louder as the seconds progressed. When it sounded like a time bomb ready to explode, Larry shattered the silence. He spoke with a strained, tense voice, piercing the darkness that separated us.

"We’re not going to hug each other in the sleeper to stay warm, are we? I don’t want to have anyone find me dead in the morning, hugging you!"

"Don’t worry, I’ve got everything under control; that won’t happen. I wouldn’t be caught dead hugging you, either!"

I didn’t have a clue what was wrong. I thought I knew this truck like the back of my hand. I was prepared for the fuel to freeze up. I had more filters, fuel additive and the proper tools to handle that problem. But this was an electrical problem. It was not a result of the cold weather, or so I thought. All I could do was stare frantically at the dashboard, trying to figure out what the problem was. Larry was counting on me, and I had let him down. It was all my fault. Why had I asked him to ride along? Why didn’t I go alone? At least it would be my problem. If anything happened, it would be just me -- not Larry, too.

Arguing with myself all night wasn’t going to get the truck started again. The truth was, even if I didn’t know what to do, I needed to try to find the problem, and fix it fast! Larry was depending on me to get this truck running again. I considered Larry my best friend and I was not going to let him down!

It took a lot of self-control, but I finally opened the door and jumped outside. Wow! I thought it was cold inside! That was nothing compared to this. The wind immediately made my face so stiff I could barely move my mouth. My eyes started watering instantly and the
drops froze to my cheeks. I crawled under the truck with a flashlight and tried to check the batteries. Maybe they got too cold and exploded. I didn’t know if that was possible, but it sounded like a good line of reasoning.

I wasn’t under the truck two minutes when Larry joined me. He must have figured if I was brave enough to try to find the problem, so was he. Only a true friend like Larry would oppose elements such as these to help get us out of the mess I had gotten us into. Nothing was said. Just the look we gave each other told the story that we were in this together.

We had to get back inside the truck every couple of minutes or so to get away from that piercing wind. When we could move our faces again, we would take turns jumping out, trying to find wiring that may have snapped off. The cold had us in a race with time. The longer the truck did not run, the less chance we would have to get it started again. By now, the time was about midnight. We estimated we had about six hours to go before someone was likely to come along the stretch of road we were on. If we were to die trying to get the truck started, at least we would die trying to stay alive.

Exactly how salvation happened, we’re not certain. We were both back inside the truck, wrapping blankets around our legs. Suddenly, the lights came back on. I looked at the dash and my heart sank for a second. I realized I had probably hit the master breaker systems switch with the blankets. I knew the problem was there. It’s a safety switch to prevent an electrical fire. When this switch is pressed, all power is disconnected from the batteries and the engine. Why I hadn’t thought of this before, I’ll never know. The solution was right at my fingertips the whole time. An hour had been spent stranded in unbearably cold weather for nothing.

The next few stressful minutes were spent trying to start the engine. It turned over ever so slowly. I was afraid there would not be enough power to start.

"Come on, you piece of junk! Start!" The sound of Larry’s voice yelling as loudly as he could prompted me to do the same. Before long, we were both yelling.

"Come on, you piece of junk! Start! Start! Start!"

Finally, that familiar and very gratifying sound of the engine roaring could be heard. Revving the engine sounded better than any music we had listened to all night.

We continued back to the feed store, still miserably cold, but glad we were on our way.
We shared a new respect for each other. We had taken the winter elements head on, and we had come out winners. Most importantly of all, we had done it together.

As the old feed truck headed back to the feed store, the radio wasn’t blaring country tunes like it usually did. There was no singing. Just the sound of the engine droning loudly. Truly the only music we wanted to hear.
"The social worker talked with me today. I assumed the doctor figured she was better at handling bad news. Medicare will allow two more days, and then it's a mandatory discharge. The social worker recommended a nursing home, but there's a catch. It has to be a skilled nursing facility because of the Hickman catheter," I explained to my half-sister who demanded daily updates of Mom's condition. This is ridiculous. Makes me feel like I'm 10 years old. More money down the drain on phone calls. I'd feel better if I thought she really cared. Thought she did. Guess the truth came out when she asked, "If she's going to die, why have the surgery?" Didn't think three pain-filled weeks versus surgery left a choice. Wonder what she'd do if it happened to her? Bitch! No wonder the kids call her "Aunt Rag!" My grip on the receiver tightened as she grilled me about whys and cost.

"I thought you knew how to take care of the Hickman?" she asked. "You and the doctor seemed so-o-o sure that it was needed! Can't you take her to your house and take care of her? How much will a nursing home cost? How long will she need to be there? A month, a week, how long?" she badgered. How do I know? Be really nice if you just once asked how she was.

I tediously explained the physical therapy, the necessity of a 24-hour-a-day RN, and the liability any facility would face if I cleaned and irrigated the Hickman. The receiver was getting a permanent set of fingerprints as I continued the explanation. "Mom's really upset. How would you feel after 21 days of radiation and two sieges of chemo?" She started crying. The really bad news is we don't have a choice of facilities. There's only one with an opening. The longer the conversation continued, the more I felt the floor was sinking and the walls were about to tumble in and put an end to me and this conversation. Why do I feel like I'm going to cry? Too much pressure? Money questions again? Lack of sleep? Damn! Hold it together, Morris!

Plugging ahead, I continued, "I have an appointment with the facility tomorrow at 10 a.m. Please say yes! "Could you possibly come to Des Moines and look at it with me?" Please. Please, say yes. Make me think that you care. Her reply, after a long hesitation,
was no surprise. "I'm sure you will figure something out. Be sure to check the cost and call me tomorrow. Bye." Bitch. *Hope your kid treats you like this someday. It's like Mom doesn't count. Thanks for all the help. Yeah, I know, Mom, don't make waves. Keep the peace.* Dave, my husband, and I talked it over during breakfast the next morning. We considered the possibility of turning the dining room into a hospital room. The pros and cons were weighed. The cons won. We didn't know enough about rehab to take on a project of strengthening weak muscles. Eight small meals a day? Who would be there to prepare them and encourage her to eat? Our mom-and-pop print shop required my attendance at least six hours a day to set the type and do the bookkeeping. Private duty care? That would really set off Aunt Rag because of the cost. The roller coaster of cancer was speeding up, and I was emotionally and physically crawling; searching for the right alternative was becoming a career. The clock seemed to race at 10 a.m.; the car traveled too fast; the headache grew worse.

The reception area of the care facility was bright, cheerful and tastefully decorated in earth tones with splashes of blue for accent. Hanging beside the reception desk was a gold-framed Resident's Bill of Rights. The receptionist greeted me with a huge, bright, red smile and nodded continuously, turning the dangly earrings she wore into a metronome, as I explained Mom's condition, inquired about cost and the rehab department. *This will make Aunt Rag happy.* Miss-Happy-I've-Got-Rhythm paged the administrator over the intercom and invited me to have a seat. The chair I selected wasn't large enough to let me nestle down, out of sight. *This is really the best alternative. I don't know how to do all the things that are needed. I'm not a professional. Too much emotion and love could be hazardous to her health, even if I mean well. That's the key word . . . "mean." I feel mean. I don't mean to hurt you. I mean to do the right thing. Do you know what I mean?*

A tall, big-boned, imposing figure loomed in front of me, making me feel as small as Alice in Wonderland after "Eat me." *I wonder who she plays for, the Vikings? Bet that big bun in her hair hurts inside the helmet.* The mental image of her, sprinting toward the goal post in her old-maid-aunt-librarian shoes made me smile when I shook her hand. *Jeez. Cold, sweaty palms. I can tell Mom's really gonna warm up to you! Oh, yeah, all four feet, 10 inches and 95 pounds.* Miss Viking extolled the virtues of the facility and never offered the promised tour. Did I misunderstand? No. In the most professional, most polite tone of voice I could muster, I asked, "Would it be possible to see your facility?"

Miss Viking countered question with question. "Is this private pay or Title XIX?" *Charity? Do I look like a deadbeat? Didn't the social worker talk to you? Didn't you*
I felt compelled to look her squarely in the eye, straighten my shoulders and respond with as much dignity as possible through clenched teeth and tight lips, "Private pay." Miss Viking’s attitude made a quick, almost-as-fast-as-the-speed-of-light, 180-degree turn. The grand tour began before I could adjust my attitude. And the magic words today are "private pay."

A wide, double door led us into the institutional-green facility. What is that smell? Oranges? The rehab room had parallel bars, fake stairs, a treadmill and a lot of wheelchairs and walkers stacked together in the corner. Some of the wheelchairs had funny-looking trays over the front and no footrests. Commodes were stacked halfway to the ceiling. Why do they stack commodes in the rehab room? Don’t they use them? Lemons. Lemons and oranges. Wonder who uses the funny wheelchairs? Miss Viking was already out the door after her parting remark, "And that’s our rehab department." Needs to trade those shoes in for cleats as fast as she moves. 10:15. Where is the rehab department? Do they do it earlier? Later?

"We’ll have to use the stairs; the elevator has a problem, and the repairman hasn’t been here yet," she said over her shoulder while striding toward the stairs. "Maintenance people seem to be very unreliable these days. It shouldn’t be a problem with your mother. The elevator, I mean. If the ambulance people won’t carry her up the stairs, we’ll just set her in a wheelchair, and we can carry her up to the room. For what you’re going to charge, no elevator? "She will have such a lovely roommate, and I’m sure your mother will just love Marie. Marie Faust. She has really been lonely since Mamie passed on." Passed on to WHAT? That smell, stronger, almost sickening. Yuck. "Marie wanted to move over by the window, but I told her she’d be having a new roommate soon enough. Marie is bedfast, so she wouldn’t get much use of that window. She’s been with us now for, oh, let me see, seven or eight years, I think." You think? Don’t you know? Wonder if she is Title XIX or private pay? Bet you’d remember if she was private pay.

We reached the top of the stairs and turned left. Thinking I should be communicating, I asked, "Is Marie verbal and alert?" Miss Viking stopped abruptly and looked down on me. "Oh, my yes! Too much so, some days." Never heard of anyone being too alert. We entered a room and whisked by the first bed. "And this is our little Marie. Marie, I’d like you to meet your new roommate’s daughter, Mrs. Morris. I understand that your mother will be coming this afternoon, right." It wasn’t a question; it was a statement. There wasn’t much to see out the window, so the tears welling up in my eyes didn’t hamper a lot. A roof and a gas station. "Right," I answered.
The Care Facility

I signed all the appropriate papers and made arrangements for the ambulance transfer. She's a woman of many talents. I didn't see all those papers. Almost out of thin air. Wow.

After the last signature, I asked about visiting hours, if the therapy would begin tomorrow and the amount of calories in the eight small meals. Miss Viking informed me the scheduling would take an extra day for rehab, and the calories would be the 2,800-per-day diet.

She extended her hand and said, "Dear, we'd really rather you didn't come tomorrow. It takes a little time to get our residents settled in, you know? Just a little adjustment period." Great. Mom's not going to like this and now you don't want me to visit tomorrow. How much adjusting will there be in one day? She really depends on me. Or at least she did. Miss Viking was slamming a rubber stamp on all the papers and didn't even look up. "You may decide you don't want to come. A lot of our residents don't have many visitors. Some families feel it just upsets them. It really helps some families to have us shoulder their responsibilities. More freedom for them, you know?" I don't want freedom. I just want to be able to take her home. I REALLY don't like you! I REALLY don't like myself! If I cooperate, she will get stronger sooner. Cooperate. You've got the only game in town here. Cooperate.

The next day and a half dragged by in slow motion. As I walked into the facility the same strange citrus odor swathed me like a blanket -- a heavy, unpleasant blanket. I ran up the stairs and turned left, then right into the room. In such a hurry, I didn't notice the light on above the door. "Hi, Marie. Hi, Mom!"

Marie looked up with disappointment on her face and tears in her eyes. "Oh, it's you. I've had the light on for 20 minutes for a bed pan, and I can't wait much longer. Your mom's not here. They came and got her about 6:30 this morning, and I haven't seen her since. Could you give me the bed pan?" Right. Empty bed. Find an aide. Get the bed pan. Where's Mom? Rehab? For eight-and-a-half hours? Wrong!! One thing at a time.

The search for an aide took five minutes. Well, at least Marie has her bed pan. The blue-clad, weary-looking aide, who was giving a shower to a gentleman strapped in a wheelchair, suggested I look for the charge nurse. The charge nurse, found after another five-minute search, suggested I look for the Director of Nursing. Wonder if Marie is still on the bed pan? This is a zoo. All I have to do is find the keeper. Where in hell is my mother? Why doesn't someone, anyone, know? Don't panic. She can't walk. She's here. Where? God, I hate this place. The D.O.N.'s face changed from a "what-do-YOU-want" look to panic. You don't know where she is!! The building-wide search was led by Miss Viking calling the game
plays, and assisted by the D.O.N., who, in turn, enlisted five aides who conducted a frantic, room-by-room search. The intercom blared, "ALERT!! Condition Alert!!" More blue uniforms appeared and searched in rooms that had previously been searched, almost running over one another in the process. Miss Viking’s neat bun had started to unravel; wisps of hair clung to her sweaty neck. The air seemed electrically charged with tension. The faces of all seemed frozen with panic. The search seemed to stretch on forever.

The rumble of the elevator went unnoticed. The door opened, and a janitor pushed out a wheelchair. The royal blue robe we had given Mom for Christmas was the only thing I recognized. Mom? The janitor, totally oblivious of the frantic search or the worry-strained faces, said, "This here lady has been a-sittin’ down by the elevator in the basement since I came to work at seven. Thought you might be a-wonderin’ where she was."

She was slumped down in the wheelchair, held up only by the restraints around her waist, wrists and ankles. Did you think she was going to run away? Pick her nose? Oh, God! I knelt in front of the chair and reached forward to hug her. Her hands and feet had turned an ugly, dark blue and swelled so large the restraints were half-hidden by the surrounding blue flesh. There were traces of dried tears on her thin cheeks. The mouth sores from chemotherapy had bled and mixed with saliva, leaving a rusty, dried track from her mouth to her chin, then dropped off to her chest and lap. What have you done to my mother? The odor that rose from the chair meant no bed pan here, either. That's the smell. Urine and air freshener. She looked up with unfocused, pleading eyes. "Help me. Please. Help me."

The emotions that raged inside me -- anger, fear, hate, love, guilt -- spilled over, mixed up and came out as babbling hysteria during the phone call to Dave. This isn't real. It's a bad dream. The welcome voice was very real. "Come home. Get a grip. You call the hospital and get a commode, a bed and whatever else you need. I'm coming in to get Mom. What kind of place is it, anyway? We sure as hell can't do any worse than that place. Besides, if we make a mistake, it will be out of love, not neglect."

That's what I want to hear. I love you. Sure glad you're there. You always say the right things. I'm sorry, Mom. Don't these people care? I promise you'll never be in a place like this again. I promise. I forgot to call Aunt Rag! She didn't call me. She could have spent $1.75 for a call, if she cared. Yup. We figured something out. Is Marie still on that damn bed pan? Why doesn't someone care?
There are those who may feel writing should be limited to English or communication skills classes. It is my responsibility to challenge students to learn. I will do that in a variety of means including writing. If students are not literate, their work reveals that problem; they and I become frustrated. Education becomes boring to them and they may try to reason their inability away by stating they did not understand the assignment, they will not be writing in their career anyway, or it’s the instructor’s fault. Unfortunately, too many times this has been the case and the students then fail. I wish I had the time to teach college students not only to write, but also to read. I do not, so I, too, add to the failure. Failure begets failure.

I believe literacy is critical. Writing across the curriculum should be a required part of every college class.

*Lyla Maynard, Psychology Instructor* ◆ Ankeny Campus
People
To be honest, I barely knew her. She was just this entity that clouded my mind each time I walked through the door of her 100-year-old, black-and-white stucco house. The fragrance of the magnolias by the front door instantly vanished as the stench of the salve she used for her arthritis overwhelmed me. The dimness of her living room (it was more like a death room) always seemed to remind me of a tomb, with no fresh air or sunlight.

Mother told me she was dying of Parkinson’s disease. At the time, I had no inkling as to what that was, or who she was. She was just an old woman, some aged stone that had probably once been a rock of security, but that eventually crumbled in the face of agony.

I can remember the first time I met her. I was three years old, and the world was still a vast and unexplored universe to me. My mother, my three sisters and I had just journeyed across the states and settled in South Carolina, where my mother’s beau resided. In my mother’s hopes to build a family, she introduced my sisters and me to Griffin, who was a nice man, but a poor replacement for a father. Grif, as he was called, felt that (as his new family) we should each accept his mother as part of the family unit.

That meant a visit to the old woman was impending.

In the chilly solemnity of the evening, we all walked over to Grif’s aging mother’s house. She did not invite us in, nor did she look any of us in the eye. She sat on her torn, green sofa and drank from a dirty plastic cup half-filled with fruit juice. She did not greet her son, yet he talked animatedly to her about us girls, then indicated my mother standing quietly to one side. Still the old woman sat, glancing dispassionately at us.

I was numb. I felt no antipathy for this woman, nor did I like her in any way. She didn’t act human. She had the cold, blank stare of a wounded boar. Her whole aura emanated frozen indifference. She obviously just wanted to be left alone with her old bones and bruised composure, which was fine by me.
Margaret Murphy

We left the house quietly, having accomplished nothing.

I forgot about her for the weeks to come. We were all very busy unpacking boxes and familiarizing ourselves with our new home. I made some new friends around the neighborhood and began the ever-important task of establishing myself as someone "fun to play with." The time swept past with not a single thought about the dying mother.

Then one sunny afternoon, my mother announced that we were all going to visit Grif's mother again. I felt the air closing in on me, suffocating. I did not want to go back to that house, see that woman, smell the acrid scent of death. I thought about ways to get out of going. Having a tantrum would not work, for I would only succeed in being grounded, thus missing out on the neighborhood fun. Instead, I swallowed my discomfort and once again walked over to the mausoleum.

As before, she did not greet us. She lay on her sofa, sipping out of her dirty, plastic cup and ignoring her surroundings. The house was darker, and the feeling of being smothered by the dismal atmosphere was intensified. I couldn't wait to leave, which we did, and sooner than before.

Again, we achieved nothing.

The weeks flew by in a blur, and it was time for my sisters to go back to school. I was another year older, but not old enough to attend school with them, so I spent my time with my mother, following her around wherever she went. I was her little shadow.

Then the time to visit that woman reared its ugly head. It was early in the morning, and the sun was brighter than I had ever seen it in my short life. My mother had to deliver some papers to Grif's mother because Grif was out of town on business.

Once again, I followed my mother, though less enthusiastically than usual. We walked to the crypt, and my mother sat down on the green couch, next to the woman. She handed her the papers, murmuring something I couldn't understand. There was an instant transformation in the old woman. I was amazed when she looked directly into my mother's eyes and smiled! She looked alive and immediately started reading the papers. For nearly five minutes, my mother and I sat in silence while that woman sat, her eyes bright and shining, and read the documents in her frail, shaking hands. When she was done, she looked into my eyes and said, in a soft, raspy voice, "How are you today?"
Griffin's Mother

I was totally taken aback. This usually saturnine creature had actually spoken to me! The light in her eyes, the warm smile -- they were the qualities of a stranger's face. At a loss for words, floundering in the face of an unexpected discovery, I mumbled that I was fine, thank you, and that was the end of our conversation. She and my mother spoke politely for a few moments and then we left.

We had accomplished something, but I did not know what.

While we walked back in the dewy grass of the morning, I turned to my mother and inquired as to what had just happened, what strange event had occurred.

"Sometimes families don't get along, and it takes a while to sort out all the bad feelings. Mrs. Lewis (that was the old lady's name) just received a letter from her other son. They haven't spoken to each other in years, honey, and she's very happy that he wrote to her."

When we arrived home, I was puzzled, but felt fresh and renewed. At such a young age, I could not understand what my mother meant, so I spent the following years "living my own life." When I was nine years old, Mrs. Lewis died. I was saddened by this loss, but I never realized the significance of knowing her until recently.

Faced with the prospect of dying, every human being needs to know that his or her life on earth has meant something. All loose ends must be tied up before it is time to pass into the second stage of life. Mrs. Lewis was tormented by the fact that she might die before she had the chance to bury any hard feelings between herself and Grif's brother. That was why she was always so solemn and depressed. Life had no meaning for her until she was assured that her son still loved her.

I learned an important lesson from her. As a result, if I experience some bad feelings between myself and a loved one, I am not able to relax until we have resolved the problem. I appreciate even more the close ties I have with my family, for I know these ties are precious.

To be honest, at the time, I barely knew her. Now I feel as though she was an important part of my emotional growth. Maybe someday I'll visit that house. I'll smell the magnolias and walk through the dim lighting of the rooms, and the memory of her will come back, and I'll thank her.

I'll thank her for the wonderful lesson she taught me about life . . . and death.
Dealing With a Disease

Kary McClain
Composition I

I began drinking at a fairly young age. I come from an Irish family that likes to drink and have a good time. Whenever the uncles all got together, they drank, and the kids also usually had a few. It was all in good family fun, but now the family is full of alcoholics.

My dad believed in old wives' tales for treating ailments, but the only cure he practiced was alcohol. Whenever I had a cold, I got a glass of Irish Cream to make me feel better. Actually, it got me out of his hair so he could enjoy his evening. However, as I got older, Irish Cream wasn't enough. I began drinking hard alcohol. This began a constant circle of events: I drank, woke up with a headache and drank to get rid of the headache.

After my freshman year in high school, it really began to affect my life. I hardly ever went to school, and when I did make it, I was usually drunk. My grades dropped dramatically, so I got kicked off the softball team, which was my pride. I felt I had nothing left, so I moved out of my parents' house to live with my sister in Missouri. My grades improved, but the drinking did not stop.

I ended up graduating from an alternative school and went to college in Missouri. I went to classes for about two weeks and then just partied the rest of the year. Needless to say, I flunked out and was not allowed to return for a semester, and then only on academic probation.

So I worked three jobs for six months and earned enough money to pay for school, only to repeat the previous year. Fortunately, it wasn't all bad; I met my boyfriend, who still puts up with me after three long years. Then I decided to move back home to save some money and get an apartment so he and I could live together.

However, my mother came to terms with what she had been guessing for the last few years. She said that I couldn't move home unless I sought treatment for my addiction to alcohol.
Dealing With a Disease

Apparently, my boyfriend’s parents felt the same way, and he was also sent to a treatment center. We both were sent to in-patient treatment centers for a 28-day program. When we graduated from treatment, we moved in together in downtown Denver.

Treatment planted the seed of guilt into both of us, but it didn’t cure us. We stayed sober for a while, then we got bored and began to drink again. But this time we both felt guilty the whole time. Things got progressively worse, so we decided to move to get away from all of the problems. (The grass is always greener on the other side.) When we found that the problems followed us, we moved again. We continued moving about every three months until we had no money left and ended up homeless in Denver, and my mother had no sympathy. That was it. That was as far down as I could go and keep on living.

Thankfully, we pulled ourselves out of the slump one more time, and decided to move again. We wanted to get away from all of our friends and the city, so we moved to Van Meter, Iowa. I am finally attending school and passing all of my classes, but the plague has followed me here, too. So what do I do now? I know there is something better out there, but how do I get it?

This may sound familiar to a few people, maybe not to this extent, but familiar all the same. Drinking and having a good time is one thing, but when it starts to destroy your hopes and dreams, it has gone too far. I have finally admitted to myself that I can no longer control my own life. Alcohol controls it. My boyfriend seems to be dealing with it better than I am, but he is near his family and friends, and I feel I have no support, being so far away from home.

I have been offered a lot of advice from friends and family, and believe me, I’ve tried them all: just drink on the weekends (but I drank enough on the weekends to make up for the rest of the week and ended up blacking out the entire weekend); limit your intake (this seems like a great idea, but for an alcoholic, it just doesn’t work that way); stop hanging around with people who drink (well, it is very hard to find anyone my age who doesn’t like to drink). A friend’s father, who is dying of cirrhosis of the liver, said to me, "Just quit. I do it all the time. I don’t drink on Sundays." I went nowhere with this advice and kept ending up in the same hole that was getting harder and harder to pull myself out of.

I had already dumped all of my friends and felt I had nowhere to go. My boyfriend threatened to leave if I continued drinking, so I quit. Unfortunately, I’ve been a total "bitch" whom no one can stand to be around. Recovering alcoholics call this a "dry drunk."
Now, the only solution left is to attend Alcoholics Anonymous. I’ve been to a few meetings, but I haven’t ever really given it a chance. It’s worked for thousands of people; why do I think I’m so special, and that it won’t work for me?

The book they read in AA is the "Big Book." It has stories from people with very similar problems over the past 100 years. AA has changed these people’s lives.

The 12-step program is supposed to be the key. You begin by admitting you are powerless over alcohol, then turn yourself over to a "higher being." It says "God" in the steps, but I am agnostic, so I have to make up my own. Then, you admit all resentments and regrets about people, and, in possible cases, apologize to any person you have hurt. There are a few more steps, but these are the major ones. These are supposed to lead to a spiritual awakening that will change your life.

It sounds pretty "off-the-wall," but it has worked for many who were a lot worse off than I. It doesn’t all make sense to me, but, as they say, "Don’t knock it 'til you try it." Anyway, everything I have tried so far hasn’t worked, and what harm can it do? At least I would have someone to talk to with similar problems, someone who wouldn’t be judgmental. I’ve got nothing left to lose.

I’m going to try this, one day at a time. By attending meetings and following the steps, I’m told that I will have a spiritual awakening. This doesn’t mean that God is going to speak to me -- it just means that I will see things in a different light and feel an inner peace. I will react to things differently and realize that I cannot change the world, which will be a huge load off my mind. The motto of AA is: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

If AA can do these things for me, I will be indebted to the program for the rest of my life. I just want to feel whole again.
Chocolate Is Sweet

♦ ♦ ♦

Cynthia Gioffredi
Composition I

Most of my life I wondered why dogs were referred to as "man's best friend." Canine companions -- barking, smelly, hole-digging, drool machines -- what good were they? What kind of a person would allow a dog to set up residence at her owner’s feet or occupy a place of honor in the family vehicle? The relationship between people and dogs was incomprehensible to me, and it was a situation I fully intended to avoid.

I believe I am a fair person, and when the approach of my daughter’s eighth birthday coincided with the death of her cat, I put my personal feelings aside and surprised her with a puppy. I carefully and objectively considered the situation and was confident I could tolerate a dog for the sake of my child. Amazingly, what was meant to be my daughter’s dog has become my favorite pet, and with each passing day, I love this animal more than I dreamed possible.

This canine has ruined the carpet, chewed the corners off our coffee table, devoured countless shoes, shredded my favorite chair, destroyed the back yard and left me in financial ruin, but she has undeniably won a place in my heart. I jokingly threaten to shoot her every day or two, and when I repeatedly ask myself what it is about this creature that makes her so special, I find there are no easy answers.

I was steadfast in my resolve to settle for nothing less than a purebred dog. After much research and consultation with experts, I made the decision to acquire a Labrador retriever. Labs rank number one in popularity and make great family pets and excellent companions for children. They are intelligent, gentle, affectionate, easily trainable and loyal. We assigned the name "Duchess Mocha Cinnamon Star" to our dog and proudly filed her AKC registration papers with our other important documents.

These papers lost their importance when it was determined that "Chocolate" (our shortened version of Duchess Mocha Cinnamon Star) is half Doberman, and the emphasis I once
placed on a dog's purebred qualities seems unimportant now. Chocolate is a remarkably goodlooking dog, and the Doberman breeding has endowed her with an extra measure of protectiveness which I find endearing. Dobermans and Labs are very similar in personality and size, and they both make good pets, so I'm content to be the co-owner of a "Labradobe."

Chocolate is a year-and-a-half old and has endured some major medical problems. At the age of six months she had a needle surgically removed from her stomach and less than three months later came close to dying from an intestinal obstruction. Chocolate suffers from an assortment of allergies and will be dependent upon various medications throughout her entire life. Her allergic reactions range from mild to life-threatening and are in response to spring grasses, flowering trees, sutures, bee stings, flea bites, distemper vaccinations and various dog food additives. She is restricted to Science Diet dog food and has a grocery bill of $100 a month, and, thus far, her medical expenses have come extremely close to exceeding mine.

Chocolate has more personality than some people I know. The veterinarian describes her human-like qualities as "almost spooky" and, personally, I sometimes feel our household has evolved into an animated comic strip. Chocolate snores, chews her nails and belches loudly after meals. She considers all bath water an open invitation to a pool party and even has her own bathrobe. This furry four-legged "human" prefers to sleep with her head on a pillow and drags a stuffed animal around at bedtime.

Chocolate is a communication expert and has the most expressive body language I have ever seen. She makes full use of her tail and eyes, while vocally expressing her feelings with a series of grunts, groans and barks. Chocolate lets me know, by wagging her tail and placing a paw on the front doorknob, that one of the cats wants to come into the house. When she needs to relieve herself, she stands motionless at the back door, and if she wants to go outside to play she does a dance and nudges the door with her nose. Chocolate does not hesitate to show her affection and once jumped through the bedroom window to greet me as I returned home from school. I have yet to find any human companions this uninhibited in their declaration of love for me.

I no longer worry about my alarm clock malfunctioning because Monday through Friday at 7:30 a.m. sharp, Chocolate drags my blankets off the bed and gives my face a lick bath. My daughter is dismissed from school at 3:15, and on school days Chocolate drags her leash to me at 3:30 p.m. in anticipation of a car ride. Whether she is a creature of habit, a highly intelligent animal or both, there is no doubt her sense of time is incredible.
Squirrels and rabbits no longer ravage my garden, and I feel safe leaving my daughter home alone for short periods of time. When strangers approach the house, our 80-pound marshmallow transforms herself into a vicious-looking guard dog. In actuality, Chocolate uses her teeth only to eat and play tug of war, but appearances can be deceiving, and I find this deception very charming.

Chocolate is a wonderful companion to my daughter, and Heather has trained Chocolate to come, stay, sit, heel, lie down, roll over and catch, while Chocolate has taught Heather a great deal about patience and responsibility. In the winter, we harness Chocolate to a sled, and she transports Heather through the snow, while in the summer Chocolate serves as a swimming companion. Chocolate joins us for holiday festivities, and we celebrate her birthday with a party. Because she has become so much a part of our lives, it would be inconceivable not to treat her as a member of the family.

I’m sure Chocolate is a worthless mutt in the eyes of most people, but her gentleness, loyalty, intelligence, protectiveness and affectionate nature make her priceless to me. My friends, parents and neighbors see Chocolate leading me down the bankruptcy trail and continually say to me, “What are you going to do with that dog?” I answer them the only way I can -- I tell them I’m going to love her until she dies.

I hope Duchess Mocha Cinnamon Star will live a long time because she is an outstanding dog, and life would not be the same without her. I finally understand the sweet peculiarities of dog lovers and will be the first to admit Chocolate is definitely "(wo)man’s best friend."
Clark Watkins (personal communication, December 7, 1993) is a dicey 93-year-old who declares, "I will never get old; I will die young. All I want to do is live. But, if I do get old, I want to have a lovely funeral." His keen sense of humor, compassion for others, intelligence, perseverance and, above all, his zest for life are inspirational. "I've had lots of interesting things happen to me," he points out, "because wherever I am, I stay active."

Born in Tulare, South Dakota, on March 10, 1903, to parents Moses and Olive Watkins, Clark's life has been anything but boring. "Mother said it (the day of his birth) was a bad day. I think she meant the weather," he laughs. With pride he displays portraits of his family members on the walls of his small apartment at The Mayflower Home in Grinnell, Iowa. Included are a paternal grandfather who assisted slaves' escapes from the South via the Underground Railway, and a maternal grandfather who rode with Abraham Lincoln on Indian patrols in northern Illinois.

When Clark was a junior in high school, his father died. "That's when life got tough," he mused. He went on to attend college at Des Moines University in Des Moines, Iowa, from 1923 to 1925. His dreams of becoming a teacher were dashed, however, when the Depression began and his mother had to sell their farms to avoid foreclosure. "Life got tougher," he added ruefully. He lived with his mother until she died in 1930.

The Depression proved to be a harsh taskmaster, yet Clark learned the value of perseverance. "I watched my father, mother and baby sister die. Afterwards, I didn't let it ruin my life. I just went on," he declared. Following his mother's death, he moved to Dubuque, Iowa, and worked at odd jobs. Life was still difficult, but Clark proved to be an astute learner. "Now I'm never unhappy, unless there is a specific problem," he observes.

Never easily downtrodden, Clark was always ready to take action in an effort to cope with the struggles life presented to him. "It was Christmas Eve," he reflected. "I had a little something to eat, but it wasn't very good. I decided that if I got arrested they would have to feed me, and I could demand something good. I walked up and down a main street in Dubuque,
Nonconformist Nonagenarian


Clark married, and he and his wife, Hazel, had a son. During the Second World War, he traveled, selling books. On one trip he was at a restaurant in Kentucky and a tramp came in, obviously hungry. He ordered the tramp first one cheeseburger, and then another. Later that day, dressed in his suit, Clark decided to take a shortcut through a mountain tunnel. Prior to entering the tunnel and naive to the ways of hobos, Clark hid his $375 in his shoe.

A group of hobos was gathered around an open fire, warming themselves while making a hobo stew. One of the hobos commented that Clark should share his money with them, dressed as he was. A voice in the distance loudly proclaimed, "Leave him alone; he’s my friend," to no avail. The other tramps speculated that Clark probably had money in his shoe. The man who had spoken reached into the fire and took out a burning log. Brandishing it menacingly, he shouted, "I TOLD you to leave him ALONE; he is my FRIEND." The man was the same tramp Clark had purchased the cheeseburgers for earlier that day.

Clark thanked him and walked on through the tunnel, but confessed, "I never had such a hard time keeping my feet from running in all my life."

Clark held a variety of jobs, including selling Maytag appliances and working as a salesman for the Des Moines Register. Then, for 20 years he was a partner in a car dealership in Grinnell. At the tender age of 65 he sold his share of the dealership.

"From then on I just worked wherever I could get a job. I’ve never really honestly retired. I didn’t have anything else to do, so I went to Remp’s Auto Parts (in Grinnell) and told them I needed a job. We didn’t discuss wages, but I knew they’d pay me enough to live on; at the age of 65 you can’t expect a kid’s wage. The owner said ‘Okay,’ and handed me a broom. He said, ‘The first thing we do around here is sweep up,’ so I started sweeping. I took about three swipes with that broom and he took it away and told me to come on because they always went to town for coffee. I was there for years and years as their bookkeeper."

After that job, he presented himself to the owner of The Longhorn Restaurant and brashly pointed out that they needed a cashier. He began those duties the following week. Finally, he agreed to work as a part-time maintenance person at the Mayflower Home, a position he only recently relinquished due to health complications.
Janice Stewart (personal communication, December 7, 1993) has known Clark during her 19-year tenure as secretary of the Grinnell United Methodist Church. "Everybody likes Clark," she said fondly. "That sense of humor of his gets him lots of places, and his biblical knowledge is astronomical." She noted sadly that his physical health is waning, but, even so, he still gets out. For example, he frequently visits the church to debate theology with the minister.

Clark has always been well-known in Grinnell for his eloquence in public speaking. As a result, he was asked to deliver a speech at the Hospice organization. His late wife was their first client. When he completed his speech, a member requested that he give Hospice some constructive criticism. Obligingly, he pointed out that he would prefer they not refer to clients as "terminal." A lady countered that it was simply a matter of semantics, and Clark refuted in his typically humorous manner. "Madame," he said, "I could relate your appearance to time in totally opposite ways. First, I could look longingly in your eyes and tell you that when I look at your face, time stands still. Or, I could look you straight in the eye and tell you that you have a face that would stop a clock." He got no further arguments that day.

Clark has had to give up his car because of limited vision, and walking this time of year can be precarious, so he says his social life is pretty much limited to the Mayflower Home. "This place is swarming with women. They're not really looking for a husband, just company. But they're just girls, around 85, and not good company. They're the most uninteresting bunch," he observes distastefully, "and worst of all, they don't like to dance!! So my women friends are mostly wives of my men friends."

Sage wisdom about life? Clark says he feels best when he is doing something for someone else. "You're not happy by trying to make yourself happy. The happiest years of my life were when I could make my wife happy. My philosophy in life is that you're here to do something for somebody. But don't do it to try to gain something for yourself. Do it because you want to."

Paramount in importance to Clark is volunteering at Marcia Bachman's second grade class at Davis School where he helps students with reading. "I love those kids, and love to be around them. When I've done something for somebody else, it gives me much pleasure," he asserts. But what is ahead for this nonagenarian with failing eyesight, poor hearing and limited ambulatory ability?

Clark only has a couple of "little things," like enrolling in the local community college to learn how to write children's books. Then, there's that stack of poetry he has written that
Nonconformist Nonagenarian

he really needs to get organized, typed and published. One of his poems best sums up the spirit of this marvelous gentleman:

To Senior Citizens Over Seventy

Feel like you're getting older?
Don't give up; stand up tall.
Find you can't advance?
Don't retreat, just stonewall.
You have lived a life sublime,
Shook the hand of Father Time.
Better a has-been,
Than a never-was-at-all.
First Love

Melody Abell
Composition I

Denny was home visiting his family when I started work at Crest Haven. Many times I had to walk past his room in the evenings, and I would wonder what was behind that closed door. Was this person really as much of a troublemaker as they all had said?

Long before we met, I had heard stories about the young man living in the nursing home where I was working as a nurse’s aide. He refused to conform to nursing home rules by staying up late at night watching TV and never wanting to get out of bed until almost noon. He absolutely refused to eat his meals in the main dining room with the rest of the residents. All this meant that the aide working on his wing had to make adjustments in her schedule. It also put a bee in our charge nurse’s bonnet because she insisted on uniformity within the ranks. She was a very rigid person who did not like variation from her routine. Like a drill sergeant, she expected the rest of the troops to fall in line and, to her, Denny was inspiring mutiny.

Then one evening a package came for him, and I had to leave it in his room. Did this man have some kind of weird torture chamber behind the door that sat in wait for a naive aide to walk into his trap? Finally, I would have the chance to see what was kept hidden away from the rest of the world. As I opened the door, the aroma of incense engulfed me. It was sweet and spicy at the same time. The room was cast in a shadowy blue. The curtains were drawn so no sunlight could peek through. The room was small, with a hospital bed along one wall and a TV on a table at the foot of the bed. Along the other wall was a huge stereo with large floor speakers. I’m sure if the volume was turned up high enough, it would rattle the patient’s dentures out of the cup in the next room. On the floor between the stereo and closet was a large box crammed with albums of the most popular rock groups. There was Bob Seger, Foreigner, and R.E.O. Speedwagon, to name a few. Denny had black-light posters all over his walls, along with a black light. At the side of his bed was a bedside table and a stand that held his lifeline, his telephone. There was also a small sink and mirror in the corner behind the TV. Except for the obvious items, the room bore little resemblance to a nursing home. I was amazed at how
normal the room looked, and yet puzzled that there were no photographs of Denny, his friends or his relatives. My curiosity was aroused. I had to know more about him.

About a month after I had started working there, the prodigal son returned. I got my first glimpse of him as he wheeled past the nurse’s station, followed by his entourage. Their arms full of boxes and suitcases, they followed him to his room. Although I couldn’t see his face, I could tell by the way he forcefully pushed his chair down the hall that he wasn’t happy to be back. He said little to the nurses and nothing to the residents who scattered out of his way. After a short time, his family members left, and he was alone. I didn’t see any more of him the rest of the evening because he stayed behind that closed door.

The next evening was when Denny and I were introduced. Lucky me, I was the aide working on his wing and in charge of taking care of the tyrant, along with the regular residents. He was a little bit intimidating; I had never taken care of a young man before, and my shyness came across as bitchiness to him. Nothing I did was up to his standards: I didn’t help him into bed right, I didn’t hook up his catheter bag correctly, according to him. Before I was out of that room, his complaints with me were getting very trivial, even as far as fluffing his pillow. We respectfully disliked each other.

Denny was in his mid-20s, had dark brown hair, brown eyes that could melt my heart and long eyelashes that would make any woman jealous. Although it was hard to tell, because he was always in a wheelchair, he was six feet tall, with long arms and legs. When he was seventeen years old, he had broken his neck playing football in a homecoming game. The injury to his neck made him a quadriplegic, meaning he had no use of all four limbs. Denny’s hands were closed and folded. The muscles had atrophied, and the only way he could open them was by flexing his arms, which allowed his hands to open enough to wrap around a can of beer. It took both hands to eat, drink and wheel his chair. Sometimes the muscles in his legs would spasm, usually while he was trying to readjust his position in his chair. He would nervously try to control them without drawing attention to himself, while his legs shook and rattled with a will of their own.

Denny’s appearance was very important to him. His jeans had to be Levi’s, and his shirts and shoes were always with the current fashions. His favorite shirt was a Pittsburgh Steelers football jersey. Doing his hair was worse than doing a woman’s; it had to be just right, and only Old Spice cologne would do after he shaved.

Time went by, and Denny and I became acquainted, eventually growing closer. I discovered that he wasn’t a tyrant like everyone else believed, but a man trying to get some
control over his life. He fought to have some independence, but because of state Medicaid laws, Denny was forced to live in a nursing home or lose all his medical and financial benefits. In turn, he discovered that I was truly shy and not a bitch. We had a new understanding between us.

We spent many hours in his room after work. We listened to music with the black light on or watched football on Sundays. Each time our feelings grew stronger for one another. One Saturday, Denny, I and Rusty, a friend of ours, decided to go on one of our adventures. We drove to Chariton where there was a little park with a small lake. As we unloaded Denny, Rusty decided to go into town on a beer run, leaving Denny and me alone looking out over the lake on a beautiful summer day. We were falling in love, and the setting seemed intoxicating. I didn’t see a man in a wheelchair; instead, I saw a man who loved me. We decided to stay together on that day. Somehow, we had to find a way. The rest of the day was full of smiles, laughter, hugs and hope for the future. Rusty drove us home as we sang with the songs on the radio. It had been a day like I had never had before. No one else had made me feel this way. Denny was my first love.

Then, the way any first love goes, the relationship came to an end. Sometimes the obstacles were too great, but when love is new, nothing seems insurmountable. We were young and naive. Denny’s limitations were far greater than just his physical disabilities, and his future was entangled in the red tape of the state. I wanted to move to Iowa City to become a nurse, but not without Denny.

There was a way around state regulations; Denny and I could move into our own apartment. There was a catch, though; all of the medical and financial needs would be my responsibility. I had only a high school diploma, and it would have been impossible to earn enough money to support us both.

We were trapped, like birds in a cage wanting to be free to fly away on the breeze. Instead of leaving, I made my choice to stay with him. That choice was the beginning of the end for us because in a small town, there was no way to improve ourselves financially without an education, and without money we would not be able to live on our own. Our future was limited with no chance for our relationship to grow outside of the nursing home.

Another young man started working at the nursing home several months later. Jeff quickly became friends with Denny, and the two were inseparable. The three of us would hang out together in the room and go to the local bars after I got off work in the evenings. I had no feelings for anyone else, but Jeff soon changed that. He pursued me and made me fall in love.
First Love

with him. Jeff was persistent; he could see that my relationship with Denny was coming to an end, even though I didn’t want to admit it to myself. I fought a strong battle of wills with him. Not wanting anything to do with Jeff, I rejected him completely. After all the late-night phone calls and the many times he would come and sit with me on my dinner breaks at work, Jeff wore me down. He gave me the time and space that I needed to understand my feelings for Denny. Jeff helped me realize that loving Denny was okay, but that I couldn’t change our circumstances, and that it was time to let him go. I married Jeff on May 5, 1979. We have shared many highs and lows over the past 15 years, but one thing remains -- the love we have for each other.

It has been many years since I’ve seen Denny, but I think of him often. Jeff and I have four children of our own now, and I wonder if Denny is married and happy. I hope so. Still, I look for him in crowds, waiting to catch a glimpse of a wheelchair. There is still a certain kind of love for him in my heart. Denny was my first love. He taught me how to love without fear and with honesty, and for that reason he will always be with me. I wonder if he ever thinks about me and watches for a glimpse of me in the crowd.
"Big?" I asked.

"Yes, big. Do you think it's getting big?"

Ginny, my spouse of nearly sixteen months, was referring to her now-growing bottom. In fact, everything was growing, for she was with child, and usually any gain on her small frame appeared exaggerated. How or why this conversation started is a mystery to me. This morning, as most Sunday mornings, I was engrossed in another story on some faraway lake where the fisherman was about to cast a barbed replica of his prey's preferred food atop the water.

"Well, do you?" Ginny interrupted again.

I thought, now's the time, the time for truth. No, maybe a fabrication! It seemed living with her gave me an understanding of how she would act in any given situation, so I knew that changing the subject was out of the question. Humor. Yes, I chose humor. Humor has steered me clear of many tight situations before; humor has always been my ally. Whenever the advancing forces have begun to overrun my blockades and threaten my army, humor has always sent them scurrying back to the bush. "Well, honey," I said, "it kind of reminds me of something I saw once a long time ago."

"And what was that?" she asked.

Ginny knew what kind of response was coming, for the grin on my face was starting to grow, rapidly enough that I was conscious of it. It seemed she always knew when I was going to make her laugh. "A '37 Ford coupe."

"A what?"
"A '37 Ford coupe."

"David, you're calling me a Ford?"

"No, dear, I'm saying your rear reminds me of the back end of a coupe."

"A coupe? How so?"

"Well, dear, this car was a real piece of automotive engineering genius. It was sleek, well-rounded, fitting to the frame, kind of put there for people to admire as they followed along behind it, in second place. It had all the extras in just the right places."

Ginny smiled and turned toward the window as if she were trying to picture the coupe on the front lawn. She moved to open the curtains a little further, and as she did, suddenly-awakened streams of light, as if sent from heaven, encompassed her. The minute particles of dust that had been hiding in the curtains appeared trapped eternally in the streams, and surrounded her as if they were entities, drawn to the nucleus of her growing womb. It was true she was getting big, but not big in the way she had questioned me about. Big in aura, big at heart. As she stood and the entities, one by one, fell to the floor, I could somehow feel the heat of the sun's rays that were warming her. I remembered the warmth of my grandmother's kitchen and how through the long winter months she would bake breads, and I remembered the sense of safety and security I always felt in my grandmother's kitchen as she puttered back and forth from oven to pantry.
David Bidwell

I was also reminded of Ginny’s recent accident when she lay at the water’s edge, cold and in shock, her color starting to blend with the surrounding lifeless sand and rock. Through some miracle, a long-forgotten resuscitation technique worked to bring her back from a journey she was much too young to be taking. Even on that day, it was not as clear to me as it was on this day; Ginny’s beauty was overpowering. Everything around her at this moment was just background. It was as though she were made of porcelain, standing as a museum’s centerpiece, overshadowing all other pieces. I realized all time before this moment was a series of excursions. Without a destination, my journeys heretofore seemed insignificant.

As Ginny turned from the window, she was still smiling, a beautiful smile. As she walked toward me, I wondered, should I step outside myself and into another’s body, a body that easily speaks of love and passion, of romance and chivalry? As she continued to walk past me, she stretched out her hand. Slowly her warm, small fingers danced through my palm and off my fingers. Ginny noticed my eyes had not left her, and as she was just about to leave the room, she stopped. "A Ford, huh?"

"No, a ’37 coupe."
It was a large, wooden scrapbook with an oval hole and the word "Memories" on the front. In the hole was a photograph of my dad, who had a long, slender face, brown hair and deep, ocean-blue eyes. A beautiful smile uncovered all his discolored teeth.

On the next page was a funeral announcement for him and a picture of his tall, thin frame leaning next to the church we used to attend. He wore a pair of tan pants, a khaki-colored shirt, a brown tie and a brown sports coat. His right hand was in his pants pocket, his left arm dangled at his side and his right leg was slightly bent.

He helped to build that church and was a volunteer song leader. His favorite song was "Love Lifted Me."

I can remember one Sunday when I was about six years old. I was sitting in the middle of the church on a cold, metal folding chair. The sermon that day was about selfishness. In order to practice what I had learned that day, I was going to pick my dad’s favorite song instead of mine when it was time for requests.

"In Jesus Christ’s name, Amen," said the preacher. My dad stood up and slowly strolled to the front of the church with his U.S. Navy songbook in hand.

"Before we sing our final song today, are there any requests?" he asked, as he did every Sunday. I raised my hand. "Yes, Carey?"

"‘Love Lifted Me,’ page 134," I said. My dad looked at me with lifted eyebrows and a crooked half-smile.

"Please turn your songbooks to page 134, ‘Love Lifted Me.’ Ready, one, two, three.
Love Lifted Me

Carey Kanute

'I was sinking, deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore.
Very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more,'"

sang my father.

I enjoyed watching him stand and lead in front of the 30 people in our church. His hand moved in the same motion a director's hand would if he were leading a choir. Up, left, down, right. It excited me to think I was part of the choir he was directing.

"But the Master of the sea hear my despairing cry.
From the waters lifted me, now safe am I.
Love lifted me. Love lifted me.
When nothing else could help.
Love lifted me."

When the song was over, he sat down and started rapidly flipping through the pages of the book. I knew then that I had chosen his closing song. It was a funny coincidence, and I laughed happily to myself.

The preacher said a few words and then my dad returned to the front of the church. When he saw me laughing, he smiled back and announced the closing song.

I understand why "Love Lifted Me" was my dad's favorite song. He was an alcoholic who made many mistakes and looked for chances to improve but never found one. When he was sinking deep in sin, he counted on people who loved him to safely lift him out of the troubled waters.

When I closed the wooden scrapbook, I knew I would never forget my dad or the energy in his voice as he sang "Love Lifted Me."
She still plays on my mind. When I think of her, I visit once again an earlier chapter of my mind. I visit once again an earlier chapter of my life.

It was a hot, August afternoon in 1974 when we first met. Drawn by a common interest in making music, we gathered in Stan’s basement. We all wanted the same thing -- a place in his rock 'n' roll band. I was the last to arrive.

Stan introduced me to the rest of the group -- four guys and a girl, Becky, who played rhythm guitar. I was thankful I wasn’t the only girl, but her outward appearance gave me the impression that we didn’t have much in common.

Becky was about five-foot-six and had a medium build. A red electric guitar hung in front of her and both arms rested on it. In loose fitting jeans and a man’s shirt that hung out, she almost looked like a guy. Her straight, dishwater blonde hair fell a few inches below her shoulders and was parted on the side. Her bangs, of the same length, were tucked behind her ear on one side. She was fair-skinned with a few freckles and wore gold wire-rimmed glasses. No make-up. No jewelry -- except a man’s watch. She looked tough but not mean. "Hello," she said. It was short and matter-of-fact with little expression on her face. She took a drag from a cigarette. A beer was close at hand.

As the afternoon progressed, I felt more and more uncomfortable -- like an onion in a petunia patch, as my mom used to say. My attention was focused on our differences. The others were older and more experienced. They smoked and drank. They dressed differently. Their musical language was foreign to me. They probably didn’t go to church. I was having second thoughts about this. I wanted to leave because I felt out of place, but I stayed because I wanted to sing.

Stan, the band’s leader, had a way of putting people in their places. I soon discovered that he (and the guys) determined the agenda for practices. Becky and I were just a guitar player and a singer. I thought they wasted too much of my time and, apparently, Becky thought so, too. One night, while waiting for the guys to decide the agenda, Becky and I looked
at each other, shook our heads and rolled our eyes. Looking disgusted, Becky unharnessed the
guitar from around her neck, put it on the floor, walked over by the pool table, grabbed a couple
of pool cues and came over by me.

"You wanna shoot some pool?" she asked nonchalantly as she held out a cue stick.

Not knowing how to shoot pool, I shook my head and said, "No."

"Aw c’mon," she coaxed.

I didn’t want to admit it, but I had to fess up. "I don’t know how."

"Well, ya won’t ever learn unless ya try," was her quick response. A smirk was
breaking on her face as she offered the cue stick again.

"Oh, all right," I said reluctantly, "but don’t laugh at me if I don’t hit any of those stupid
balls."

"Okay."

She handed me the stick, demonstrated how to use it, and explained some of the rules
of the game. Then she made me give it a try. After several unsuccessful attempts at making
a shot, I finally made one, and Becky seemed as pleased as I was.

After a few practices, we decided to start riding together. We spent many hours in our
cars -- my ’65 Dodge Dart and her dilapidated Buick boat -- driving to and from practices and
 gigs. Those rides provided the perfect opportunity to talk and to get to know each other. We
talked about our families, friends, plans for the future, past experiences and day-to-day stuff.
We laughed, cussed, yelled, cried and listened. Sometimes we were quiet in our own thoughts.
Our differences, that once seemed glaring, gradually faded and didn’t really matter any more.
Without realizing it, I began to appreciate her outlook and approach to life -- even though they
contrasted with my own.

Becky didn’t have a "regular" job. Playing guitar in the band was her main source of
income. Sometimes she would work on a farm, trim trees, paint houses or do some other odd
job around town to make a few extra bucks. Still, she didn’t worry about money. I would
have.

When my dad died in November, she was there for me. She let me be sad. She let me
be mad. A couple of weeks later, on my eighteenth birthday (and finally legal), we celebrated by going up town to Jo Bob’s, shooting some pool and having a couple of beers. Knowing I hated twangy country-western music while she loved it, Becky introduced me to Gordon Lightfoot’s mellow folk music by giving me one of his albums for my birthday present. I liked it.

One time I drank too much and was in no condition to drive. Becky took my keys, drove me home in my car, helped me to bed and walked six miles back home. It was then that I really began to realize how much she cared. She wrote poetry and shared it with me, and even though she didn’t like to shop, she went shopping with me.

Becky lived with her mom, Thelma, and helped raise her younger sister and brother, Susie and Wade. She didn’t see her dad much because her parents were divorced. On many occasions, Becky wished that she had her own place and lived by herself, especially when Thelma would “bug” Becky about wearing a dress or more feminine clothes. Thelma wanted Becky to date and "settle down" with some guy, but when Thelma got on that subject, Becky would get very upset. Becky didn’t want to find some guy and settle down, but Thelma didn’t seem to understand.

"It doesn’t matter. I don’t care what other people think," she would say. "I’ll live my life the way I want to. If somebody doesn’t like it, that’s their problem -- not mine." Maybe it mattered more than she wanted to let on. Maybe that’s why she drank.

After practice one night, we both were ticked off with Stan, so on the way home we stopped at the Inn on the Corner for a couple of beers. Randy was there. Becky knew him, so we sat down with him and he bought us a round. We talked for a while and he asked me, "Do you want to go for a ride on my motorcycle?"

I looked at Becky, shrugged my shoulders and answered, "Sure, why not?" We weren’t gone long, but when we returned, Becky seemed upset even though she denied it.

Not long after that, the band split up and I graduated from high school. Becky came to my graduation and the party afterwards. Randy and I began spending more and more time together. Becky and I spent less and less. The time we did spend together wasn’t quite like it used to be.

I went off to college in the fall. Once in a while, when I was home on weekends, I would see Becky driving around the square in her "new" car -- a retired ambulance. Sometimes we stopped and talked, but usually we just waved. The following summer, Randy and I were married. Becky didn’t come to the wedding.
Months later, hearing she had cancer and was in the hospital for treatment, I went to see her. It was awkward. Our words seemed distant and empty. Our lives were different again. I cared about her, but I didn’t know what to say, how to say it or how to show it. I think the same was true for her.

Becky died on November 28, 1981. She was 26. As I sat on that wooden folding chair in the funeral home parlor, among all those people who had gathered to pay their last respects on a cold, rainy, blustery December day, I felt alone. The "good ol’ days" were gone. The warmth of her life that once warmed me had turned cold; now her life was no more than ashes in an urn on a walnut pedestal. Regrets. No formal good-bye. I felt numb. No tears. Life goes on.

Many years later, as I listened to Gordon Lightfoot croon on my new CD, I felt short of breath. Strange emotions filled my chest. Tears welled up in my eyes. What was happening? I held my chest and cried. My loss was realized; I felt the pain of her absence. Becky had left a deep impression in my heart, and I missed her terribly.

Not long after that, I went home to visit my mom. We sat at the kitchen table and reminisced about my senior year of high school. We remembered Becky. Hesitantly, Mom shared with me that years back Becky had told a mutual friend that she loved me. Mom seemed concerned.

"What do you suppose she meant by that?" She paused. "Do you suppose she was a...," her voice trailed off. She didn’t complete her thought out loud.

"A... homosexual? A lesbian?" I asked.

"Well, ... yes. Do you think she was?"

"I don’t know. I really don’t," I answered. "It’s possible. We never talked about it, But even if she was, it doesn’t matter. She was my friend and she never said or did anything to cause me to think otherwise. She was a very special person who was there for me during a difficult time in my life. In my own way, I loved her too -- and still do."

A woman of few words, Becky spoke from the heart -- in actions that spoke louder than words. She taught with love.

I’m glad I finally listened.
As I lifted my share of the casket, I was amazed at how heavy it was. This was the first time I had ever touched one. The deceased, a friend of mine named Vern, was a massive man who had never missed a meal in his life, at least not until three days ago when he died of a heart attack.

Vern had always been somewhat of a loner. There wasn’t a single soul anywhere that he would trust, not even his own wife. His family despised him so much they had felt content to let the county bury him with a generic funeral. Why I had agreed to be one of the six pallbearers, I’ll never know. The other five were strangers. Why had I felt compelled to offer my services? As the five other pallbearers and I carried Vern out of the funeral home, we were straining against the burdensome weight of the casket. As we headed down the sidewalk toward the hearse, I began to reminisce about the day I first met Vern.

One day I showed up at his door in response to an ad in the paper. He and his wife, Daisy, had a sleeping room for rent for $30 a month. Unfortunately for me, I chose to ring their doorbell during the noon hour. After ringing the bell several times, the door flew open and there stood Vern. He was in his underwear. His cumbersome belly, hanging over an imaginary belt, stretched his sleeveless t-shirt to maximum proportions. It was doubling as a bib, for there were many different types of food stains on it. Two days growth of beard yielded the same color as his uncombed, matted grey hair. His face had fried chicken smeared from his mouth down to his corpulent jowled throat. I perceived it wasn’t a good time to embark on a lengthy conversation. Since it was already too late to turn away, I smiled and tried to look important.

"What do you want? Can’t you see it’s dinnertime? Why do people always bother me when it’s time to eat?" he snapped, glaring at me through glasses barely sitting on the end of his nose.
"I’ve come to inquire about the room you have for rent," I said rather timidly.

His scowl softened slightly, and he stepped back, beckoning me inside. He pointed to a chair at the kitchen table, and I sat down. He returned to his meal and said not another word until he finished eating. I watched him gorge on three large pieces of chicken in just a matter of minutes. I decided I might not wish to rent a room here, but then I changed my mind. A college student like myself would not be put off by a disapproving old man with vulgar table manners. When a loud belch echoed through the house, I knew he had finished.

After dinner, I followed him upstairs to take a look at the room. As we climbed the stairs, he was constantly muttering under his breath. I couldn’t hear everything he said, but it was clear by his grumbling that this was a major inconvenience for him.

"I’d leave you to look around, but I’m not so sure you probably won’t try to steal something," he scoffed. Then, holding out his hand, he said, "That’s 30 bucks in cash. I don’t want a check. I don’t trust you, and I don’t trust banks. You had better get your stuff moved in here by tonight, or I’ll rent it to someone else. People are knocking down the door to get this room."

I looked around the sparsely furnished room. It didn’t look too bad. A writing desk stood by the window which boasted a view of the street and the river. A single bed sat in the corner with a nightstand close by. I would have my own refrigerator, too, right in my room. The room would work out just fine. The problem was this old man. Was he just trying to be tough with me, or was he always this crabby? I just stood there, in the middle of the room, trying to make up my mind.

Vern broke the silence and yelled, "Well, I haven’t got all day! Do you want the room or not?"

"Yes, sir. I’ll take it. I’ll have everything moved in here in a couple of hours. Yes, sir," came my hasty reply as I handed him three brand-new, 10-dollar bills. If I humored him a little, we might get along. There was nothing to lose if it didn’t work. His eyes lit up at the sight of the three bills. He took the money and gave me a big smile. It looked like we were off to a good start.

The more I thought about the day we began our unique friendship, the more I wondered if I was the only friend Vern had. If there had been others, they should have been compelled to be here now helping me, instead of these five nobodies.
We secured the casket inside the hearse. The six of us got into the third car in the procession. Waiting to begin our ride to the cemetery in the country, I began admiring the fancy Cadillac I had just gotten into. It reminded me of a conversation Vern and I had some time earlier about cars.

Vern drove a blue Fury III Plymouth station wagon. That car was a piece of junk from the first day I laid eyes on it. Every weekend Vern would go to the auto parts store and pick up some cheap rust-covering product for his car. When he had tried almost everything, he mixed up some Portland cement and patched rust holes with that. This adhered rather well and lasted longer than anything else he had tried. The only problem with using cement was the weight. The rear of his car became so heavy it sagged down and ruined his shocks and springs. I offered my help on various occasions, but it was to no avail. I saw him under the back end of the car one day. I was coming from college and stopped to taunt him a little.

"Why don’t you get rid of that junk heap and buy something decent, like a Cadillac," I jeered.

"Just who do you think you are, coming around here like you’re a know-it-all? I don’t see you driving one. You don’t know squat. There isn’t anything wrong with the car I’ve got. I can’t afford one of those fancy cars. You won’t catch me dead in one of those things, anyway," he bellowed. There wasn’t a chance to hand out another snide remark. He stalked into the house and slammed the door. Previous experience told me the episode would be forgotten in a day or two. He might get upset easily, but you would never hear him mention it again. That’s just the way Vern was,

That’s the way I would have to remember Vern from now on, for it was slowly sinking in that he was really gone. The cars in the procession suddenly lunged forward, startling me for an instant. I sank back into the seat. I looked out the window of the Cadillac toward the lavishly finished, black hearse. I was thinking of what Vern had said.

"Well, sorry Vern, ol’ friend," I muttered under my breath, "but you’re in one of those fancy cars now."

The funeral procession turned into the driveway of the cemetery and made its way to the other side of the hill. The tent was set up, awaiting our presence. There was a pond at the foot of the hill. I heard one of the other pallbearers talking about fishing. Once again, my mind wandered.
Remembered Events
One day when I was through with school, Vern asked me if I wanted to go fishing with him. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. For Vern to ask anyone to go fishing was considered a definite privilege by his standards. I accepted. Loading our gear into his station wagon, we headed for his favorite fishing hole. It wasn’t far away. Before long, we were on the shoreline of a peaceful lake, sitting on folding chairs on the sandy beach.

We unpacked our gear and began baiting our hooks. I had only one pole, so I made the first cast into the lake. Vern liked to fish with three poles and wouldn’t cast any of them out until they were all baited up and ready to go. It always took him several minutes to get them ready. When Vern used his hands, his pinky fingers would stick straight out. He never used them. This just drove me nuts. I had wanted to tease him about it on several occasions, but something inside told me not to. I wondered why a slob like Vern acted like a highly cultured being when using his delicate, lady-like hands. Another of life’s unanswered questions was my only conclusion.

As I gazed into his tackle box, I suddenly became aware that he had three of everything in there.

"Oh, Vern?" I asked cheerfully. "Why do you have three of everything in your tackle box? That’s a peculiar habit to have."

"What do you mean, peculiar habit? It’s none of your business, anyway. I’ve been fishing longer than you have, and I have very good reasons for buying as many as I want. I know exactly what I’m doing." His face was beet-red and tense. "You’re always trying to be a know-it-all. Now shut up or you’ll scare the fish away," he stammered.

I started to argue but stopped short. What was the use? I shrugged it off and continued to fish. We spent the rest of the afternoon fishing without any more talking, and without any luck catching fish. Of course, it was my fault they had been scared away.

I hadn’t known it at the time, but I had hit a nerve about his obsession with buying everything in threes. I asked Daisy about it one day, but she didn’t want to be bothered by it, nor did she care. I tried to dismiss it from my mind. Sometimes older people do strange things. I would have to let it go at that.

When the procession stopped, I, with the five nobodies, emerged from the car. We
escorted Vern into the tent that was set up over the gravesite. It was a modest tent, barely large enough to surround the casket and accommodate a scant crowd of people. The service was about to begin. The five other pallbearers, Vern’s wife, the minister and I were the only people who were present. When we had the casket in place and were positioned in the back of the tent, the minister began to speak.

An air of closeness in the tent was a bit stifling to me. It reminded me of that tiny, dark room that Vern had in his basement.

It was a small room, about eight feet wide and 10 feet long. Vern would spend hours in this little room with the door locked shut. Nobody was allowed in there. I had always been curious about what was in that room. On several occasions I had seen him stashing sacks of merchandise from K-Mart in there. How he could spend so many hours by himself in such a little room was beyond any rationale I had.

One day, when Vern was at work, I wandered by the little room. I noticed it was unlocked. At first I resisted the urge to look inside. Then, realizing no one else was around, I opened the door, stepped inside, and closed the door behind me. I searched for the light switch and flicked it on. A single, low-watt bulb hung from the ceiling, creating a dull glow and casting shadows in every direction. The air was stale and musty. A pungent odor that implied the presence of mice was unquestionably robust. Warped wooden shelves lined three of the walls from the ceiling to the floor. Boxes and sacks filled each shelf to overflowing.

After searching through some of the sacks, I found them to be a collection of many years of treasures. Many of the sacks contained dated sales receipts from several years before.

Fishing equipment filled the left wall. Tools were on the right. The shelves on the third wall in front of me held coffee cans, neatly placed in a row. The floor was filled with additional items that had either fallen off the shelves, or no longer fit where they belonged. A narrow path snaked around the floor so every sack or box could be accessed if needed.

As I stood in the middle of Vern’s secluded room, it gave me the feeling of being cooped up in a tiny box. I felt isolated from the rest of the world. It was somewhat peaceful, yet almost too quiet. It was a lonely feeling.

Gazing nonchalantly at the shelves before me brought on an astonishing discovery. There were three of everything. I opened the sacks on one side. Three fishing reels, all the same
Russell Jungling

brand. Another sack yielded three lures, all the same. On the right, three Black & Decker drills, three sets of screwdrivers. There were definitely three of everything! I walked over to the coffee cans and opened one up. It was full of money. So were all the others. It was then I remembered he didn’t trust banks. As I stood there, bewildered by my findings, I felt guilty about looking through Vern’s belongings. Suddenly, the door flew open. It was Vern.

"Caught you right at it, you no-good thief," he screamed. "Get out of here. This is none of your business. Don’t ever come in here again. Empty your pockets and get out of here."

After satisfying him that I had taken nothing, I timorously left the room and went back upstairs. A few seconds later I could hear the pounding of a hammer. There were constant outbursts of swearing with my name being mentioned many times. Shortly after the noise stopped, he left the house. I crept back downstairs to see what the pounding had been about. He had put more locks on the door, big, heavy padlocks, three of them.

The minister’s voice intensified persistently, bringing me out of my trance. I tried to listen to what he had to say on Vern’s behalf. However, moments later, his voice again was deaf to my ears.

I stared at the casket and surmised how it was a lot like his private room in the basement. Away from the rest of the world, it was dark and hidden, a place where everyone would leave him alone, the way he wanted it to be. Now he could remain locked away from the rest of the world forever.

After the service ended, the other pallbearers who had volunteered their services paid their condolences to the widow and left. Daisy watched as the minister left in his car. When we were alone, she turned to me and asked if I would escort her to pick out a monument for Vern’s grave. I acknowledged that I would by nodding my head. We left together for the funeral home.

There were sundry shapes and sizes to choose from. I hadn’t realized the many different options that were available. This, my first time to experience such an endeavor, was giving me an eerie feeling inside. As I studied the gravestones again, my eyes fell upon a stone I had overlooked before. It was a small, guileless stone, set off to the side. It looked languid and sad, almost as if it were trying not to be noticed. I pointed to the gravestone.
"There, that one; Vern would want the one with the wreaths on it," I said with authority.

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, I'm sure. Trust me. He would have picked that one," I answered back. "There isn't a doubt in my mind."

"How can you be so certain?" Daisy asked unpretentiously.

"It's simple," I said assuredly. I looked at her with a smile and said, "It has three wreaths on it."
Reviews
When I tell anyone I’m an English teacher, the response sometimes is: "Oh, I liked English," but usually it’s "Oh, I was never any good at that." Often the "never-any-goods" add that they can’t spell or use punctuation correctly, or could never think of anything to write about. A book I read recently, Don Ricks’ *Winning the Paper Wars*, has some very convincing answers to why there is still so much bad writing and so many unsure writers. Ricks, a former university English professor, now helps corporations set up writing improvement workshops for their employees.

The main message of Ricks’ book reminds me of Mina Shaughnessy’s student-centered approach to inexperienced, reluctant writers. The first step in Ricks’ method is to get rid of everything that keeps a person from clear communication. According to him, there is too much BOG: unclear word mazes created by business or government workers. These "bogs" come from a preoccupation with correctness, chronic fear of writing, or a premeditated use of words to maintain confusion or hide the awful truth.

Because Ricks even questions the wisdom of a "uniform correctness," English teachers who read his book might wonder if they are supposed to let students commit comma faults. I also realize that most teachers already value message over mechanics -- and I know that being a poor speller or punctuator is not an advantage. However, reading *Winning the Paper Wars* did remind me that my priority is to encourage people to express themselves and solve problems using their ideas and words.

*Pat McNair, English Instructor* ♦ Newton Campus
David Letterman was not joking the many times he called the NBC executives "pinheads." What else could you call the people who decided to groom Jay Leno to fill the coveted position as host of *The Tonight Show* rather than ask the obvious successor, Letterman, to fill it? Letterman’s new program, which appears opposite *The Tonight Show* seems to be a celebration from beginning to end. Letterman walks out casually enough, one hand in his suit pocket, the other pointing grandly toward Paul Schaffer and his band. He stands on the same stage from which Ed Sullivan and countless other legends have entertained America and smiles that goofy, gap-toothed grin he’s so famous for. It doesn’t look so goofy now, though. It’s more shrewd than anything. Letterman knew he had a great show -- all that was missing was the audience and showcase it deserved. *The Tonight Show* would have provided him with these things, but his new show provides so much more. It has given him the respect he deserves.

Letterman seems to bask in this newfound respect. The stage and special effects have an air of triumph to them. Everything is on a grander scale. The nightly "Top-10 Countdown" is preceded by a huge "Top-10" logo flipping about the screen. The set consists of towering buildings in the background, complete with fire escapes. At the beginning of the show and after each commercial break, we’re shown a wide-air shot of the entire set to remind us of the immensity of it all. At the center of the extravaganza sits Letterman himself, reigning over this late-night kingdom he’s created.

Upon hearing about Letterman’s switch to CBS, many of us loyal subjects worried whether Paul Schaffer would stay on as acting prince. Letterman without Schaffer would be worse than Charles without Di. Just saying they have good rapport is not enough. The ease with which they joke back and forth gives us the idea that their friendship continues even after the credits are run. Schaffer’s show-biz persona complements Letterman’s down-to-earth nature. Schaffer, with his outrageous outfits and personality, helps Letterman seem even zanier. Their senses of humor are so in tune that if Letterman had no guests at all, they could still handle the show between the two of them.
Dave’s Kingdom

On some nights this might not seem like such a bad idea. The biggest complaint some critics have is that Dave is too tough on his guests. He’s been called an "asshole" by both Cher and Shirley McClain. This mainly seems to happen to those guests who take themselves too seriously. While other talk show hosts may make jokes about stars like Madonna when they’re not on, they fawn over them when they’re guests. Letterman, on the other hand, takes advantage of having Madonna as his guest to ask her, "Just who haven’t you slept with?" To some viewers this may seem rude and make for awkward television, but to most, it makes it fun. The audience is always behind him through each uncomfortable moment, cheering him on and taking his side. When the celebrities realize that they only need to laugh at themselves with everyone else to relieve the self-imposed tension, the interviews can become fun for them too.

What really sets this talk show apart from the others, though, are the comedy skits. Letterman’s comedy skits are original and spontaneous compared to Leno’s tired, over-rehearsed attempts at humor. Letterman doesn’t believe in being stuck within the boundaries of his set, as enormous as it may be. Some of his best comedy segments occur when he sends cameramen to neighboring businesses. He’s at his best when he’s conversing with the average person. He quickly sees the humor in others’ mundane lives, and he has the unique ability to translate that humor to the viewers. Unlike his treatment of the rich and famous, he always makes the average person feel at ease and special. We’re made to believe that he does, indeed, find them more special than the likes of Madonna. He enjoys being silly with them as if to say, "I’m not really a big star. I’m just like you." While watching him, we forget about his $42 million contract and the power he holds with CBS, and we believe that he is one of us.

While this may be true, he certainly gets to have more fun than we ever do. He tosses watermelons and televisions from the rooftop just to see what they look like exploding on the ground. He can call the vice-president to ask the outrageously absurd question of what he ate for breakfast that morning. He sends his own mother overseas to cover the Olympics. Most of us would enjoy doing these things ourselves, but obviously cannot. Even if we could, it probably wouldn’t be quite as funny as when he does it.

It’s this license to do what he wants that we viewers both envy and love. He’s had the freedom to not only call his bosses “pinheads” on the air, but then quit, have them beg and fight to get him back, and then go on to get a better job elsewhere. Most of us can only dream about being that free. In a way, Letterman is giving some of this to us through his rebellious form of comedy. When he’s calling his bosses names, he’s really calling all anal-retentive, uncaring bosses everywhere "pinheads." In turn, we don’t need to leave our hard-to-come-by jobs or even our living rooms to experience the silliness and freedom that is Letterman’s world.
Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman

Margaret Murphy
Composition II

I'm sure there are many individuals who can remember, as children, saving up pennies and nickels week by week just to buy the new Superman comic book the minute it came out. I'm just as certain these same individuals could recall camping out in front of the television watching that same superhero in black-and-white. Perhaps, as they got older and wiser, they had the privilege to see their favorite man of steel on the movie screen in color. Had they stuck around, today they would once again be able to watch the paragon of truth and justice on the TV screen, but this time in color.

Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman is the result of a society which thirsts for a combination of fantasy and reality television, where real emergencies are documented by the previous captain of a futuristic starship. Lois & Clark combines the hard-hitting reality of life in the newsroom with the comic-book fancy of the proverbial white knight.

This new caped crusader is played by Dean Cain, who is a cross between Rhett Butler and the American Flag. With his glasses on, he could just as well be a young business entrepreneur -- take the glasses off, and he could be a Chippendale stud. Either way, he is a large improvement from the fumbling, clumsy Christopher Reeves of the movies. Reeves was the embodiment of the arrogant and somewhat effeminate man of the 80s, whereas Dean Cain is the quintessence of the sensitive and virile male of the 90s.

For every Clark Kent, there is a Lois Lane and this time the gutsy, outspoken reporter is played by the exceptionally talented Teri Hatcher. With a spark of determination in her eyes and an aggressive, Chihuahua-style stance, Teri is the epitome of the tough-nosed, albeit attractive, Miss Lane. Though she is far prettier than Margot Kidder, who played Lane in the movies, it would seem that Kidder wins the race on who is the better woman for the job. Kidder, with her raspy voice, was a realistic and believable actress, and she contributed much to the image of newswomen. She was neither weak-kneed nor without protest when she found herself caught between a rock and a bad guy.
The acting in both the television show and the movie is and was terrific, but not the only comparable element. Superman does a lot of flying, hence numerous special effects are required. *Lois & Clark* has superb technology on screen. Superman actually appears to be flying in the night sky against a background of city lights and skyscrapers. In the theater version it was obvious that Christopher Reeves could not defy gravity any more than Newton could. True, the technology of the 80s was not as advanced as that of the 90s. Even without the special effects, the performance of the actors on the television show is a large improvement compared to the movie.

*Superman* (the movie) was a very serious and straight-faced picture of the double-edged superhero. There was very little comic relief. In the television show, one cannot help but laugh when young cameraman, Jimmy, walks into the office of Perry, the editor of the *Daily Planet* where Lois and Clark work, and finds him in a yoga position that is akin to the shape of a pretzel. Perry, who considers himself worldly, says in a booming voice, "The Rain Forest, Jimmy. The sounds of nature promote harmony in all living things. There are no animals with high blood pressure." What a brilliant observation, Einstein. Even quirkier are the behaviorisms of Superman’s nemesis, villain Lex Luthor. When he needs someone to talk to, he saves money by not speaking to a therapist. His best conversations are held with his pet bulldog with whom he shares a glass of wine. Is he insane? Perhaps . . . but dogs are "man’s best friend."

Still not convinced that *Lois & Clark* is the show to watch? Ponder this: the tried and true red, white and blue has a new angle. The producers added a few more stars. Tracy Scroggins plays a new and unusual addition to the cast: the seductively kittenish Kat, a gossip columnist who’d like to dig her claws into the impervious Kent -- and who can blame her? Clark has to have a support group and his parents are played by Eddie Jones and K. Callan. They’re warm and loving, and, in my opinion, the ideal parents. They support Clark in everything he does and they are a big improvement over the Huxtables.
Nevertheless, *Lois & Clark* is not flawless. What few imperfections there are in the show, such as the occasional politically incorrect statement or social faux pas, are forgiven. When Clark says to Lois, in reference to his tiny hometown of Smallville, "You can joke, but take away Middle America and what have you got?" Lois replies, "Art, music, theater." What an offensive statement! Is there not art, music and theater in small towns, as well? Said in the spirit of humor, however, the viewer cannot help but forgive and forget this slightly ignorant statement.

All in all, *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* is poignant and hilariously realistic in comparison to *Superman*, the movie(s). Each show is a chapter in the discovery of the world’s greatest superhero. It grows on a person and, in time, I am sure it will be considered as thrilling as such sci-fi shows as *Star Trek, Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Buck Rogers of the 25th Century*. Of course, don’t take my word for it. Ask your boss, while he’s relaxed and stretching to the sounds of the Tropical Rain Forest, if you can have Sunday night off. Sit at home in your pajamas, fix yourself some popcorn and prepare to be dazzled. Otherwise, you may regret it.
For 23 years there has been a fierce battle of pride taking place at stoplights and on showroom floors between two interpretations of the pony car theme. The ideal pony car delivers sporty styling and high performance at an affordable price, a virtual pipe dream for auto manufacturers and performance enthusiasts alike. The Camaro Z-28 and Mustang GT were the first attempts to capture the pony car spirit and are, therefore, the first and most bitter rivals to wage war on back-street drag strips and in corporate market shares. The recent releases of completely redesigned Cameros and Mustangs have renewed the oldest of all pony car duels and a comparison between their styling, performance and cost is the only fair way to determine the new generation's victor.

Styling is the first and most obvious difference between the 1994 Camaro and Mustang. The Camaro styling team abandoned all previous styling cues to create a thoroughly modern design. There is not a single harsh line to be found on the new Camaro as all planes and contours have been smoothly blended into a predatory form that sits low to the ground and begs to cheat the wind. The front air dam looks as if it could devour endless miles of empty highway or interstate in record time, and politely dust the occasional Mustang along the way. In short, the Z-28 looks as if it is traveling at 100 miles per hour while benignly parked.

Those who designed the Mustang took an entirely different approach by researching the car's classic lineage for inspiration. This is significant because it led the design team to drop the hatchback and coupe rooflines in favor of a fastback style. This allows the roofline to smoothly flow from its highest point almost to the car's rear end in a gentle slope rather than dropping nearly straight down or at a severe angle as in previous models. This styling cue breaks away from the previous Mustang's boxy appearance and echoes the 1965 Mustang Sportsroof profile. The new Mustang also features artificial brake cooling ducts mounted immediately behind the door and in front of the rear wheel, a styling nuance that was used on almost every classic Mustang. Overall, the new Mustang GT is a pleasant blend of classic and modern design elements to create a closer interpretation of the pony car theme than the previous 14 years have been able to offer.
Styling cues and design teams aside, neither car would be able to claim the distinction of being a pony car without fulfilling the promise of performance. The Camaro Z-28 inherits the Corvette LT-1 powerplant. The Z-28 is electronically controlled and has a 5.7 liter V-8 that is mated to a six-speed manual transmission. Its performance can deliver 275 horsepower to the driver who may convert that power into a dizzying trip from zero to sixty miles per hour in 5.4 seconds and continue to accelerate to a top speed of 156 miles per hour. In comparison, the Mustang GT is powered by a 5.0 liter, high output (HO) V-8 that drives the rear wheels via a five-speed manual transmission. The 5.0 liter, HO powerplant has changed very little in the last three years, and this is reflected by the engine’s grudging delivery of 215 horsepower. This means that the driver must wait 6.1 seconds to reach sixty miles per hour from a standing stop. The same driver is also limited to a top speed of 137 miles per hour. Thankfully, there is hope for the Mustang enthusiast. The aftermarket has had ample time to develop reliable, effective and affordable bolt-on performance parts for the 5.0 liter HO, but at an additional cost of both time and money to the owner.

Finally, no battle between the Camaro and Mustang would be complete without a look at their sticker prices. A base model Z-28 will cost $17,269, while options to enhance luxury can boost the price to $20,590. In comparison, the base price for a Mustang GT is $17,750. Luxury items can drive the price up to $19,150, and those who plan to upgrade their car’s performance can expect to pay still more in their pursuit of speed. While it is true that not everyone can afford a new Camaro or Mustang, both cars (even a Mustang with bolt-on speed parts) cost considerably less than exotics and imports that offer similar styling and performance for roughly twice the price and above. The Camaro’s swooping styling and packaged speed, or the Mustang’s classic design cues and potential for custom-built performance can be had for close to $20,000, and that allows them both to claim the pony car title in today’s market. They are both worthy opponents, and either one deserves the fierce loyalty that these cars inspire.

For the closest interpretation of the pony car theme, the Camaro Z-28 is a clear winner. Its styling is much more aggressive and smooth, and while it does hold a slightly higher sticker price, it also offers a staggering performance advantage over the Mustang, which requires time-consuming modifications at an added expense to compete with the Z-28 at stoplights and on twisty backroads. A rivalry that is over 20 years old does not die easily, however, and there is already talk of a more powerful powerplant for the Mustang’s next model. When a quicker version of the Mustang GT appears, it is inevitable that another comparison will be in order and the vicious battle for pride will continue.
Even though some fear that the art of writing will be diminished because of word processing and other written communication technology, after 20 years of teaching composition, I see more students of more diverse abilities producing more writing at DMACC than I have ever seen before. As we move from the era of telephone communication into cyberspace, there will be an increased demand for students to write clearly, concisely, and correctly.

Jan LaVille, English Instructor  ◆  Boone Campus
Humorous Accounts
The Camping Trip I'll Never Forget

Dawn Schmidt
Basic Writing

It was the middle of April in the year 1974. I had gone camping with Amy, a friend of mine, her parents and some of their relatives and friends. We were all at Lake Ponderosa for the weekend.

It was Saturday and Amy and I were out in the boat, drifting all around the lake. We were fishing... oh, okay, we were drowning worms. The fish weren't interested, definitely not in our lines, anyway. We had been out on the lake most of the morning and the better part of the afternoon when we decided to go back to shore. Once on shore we docked the boat, tied it up and headed back to the campsite.

When we arrived, everyone was roasting marshmallows and hot dogs. I thought roasted marshmallows sure sounded good.

"Hey, Amy, let's find some sticks and roast some marshmallows," I suggested.

"Sure, but Mom's already got some sticks," Amy replied. "Let's get the marshmallows." She grabbed the sticks and I grabbed the bag of marshmallows. We put them on the sticks and then placed them over the open flames. We were goofing around, not paying attention to the marshmallows, that is, until mine caught on fire. I brought up my stick to blow out the fire and, plop, the burning, hot, sticky goo landed on the end of my nose. Have you ever looked down your nose and seen flames?

I hadn't noticed it before, but the stick Amy had given me had a curve in it. That's why the marshmallow fell off the stick. I reached up with my right hand and brushed it off, but not before I had burned six layers of skin off the tip of my nose.

The movie, The Towering Inferno, had been released earlier that month, so that's why
Amy's dad came up with the cute remark he had to make. "Did you guys see that?" He laughed loudly. "The Towering Infernose." I was so embarrassed, I wanted to die.

Amy's Aunt Barbara gave me some first-aid cream. My nose had a constant burning, stinging to it, but I tried not to let anyone else know. For the rest of the evening we played cards and dice until it was time to go to bed.

I lay awake most of the night, wondering how badly I really had burned my nose. After all, it's a fact that the nose is smack-dab in the middle of your face where everyone can see it, like it or not.

When everyone got up the next morning, they were all kind of giggily. I had a feeling it was my nose, and that feeling was confirmed right away when Amy's dad got up.

"Well, good morning, Rudolph, how are you feeling this morning?" he chuckled. "Hopefully, better than you look." I had no idea that on the end of my nose I had an almost perfectly round scab. Amy's mom told him to quit picking on me and get ready for breakfast. Then she turned to me, grinned and asked, "Honey, what would you like for breakfast?" Before I had a chance to answer, Amy came running and bellowed out loudly, "Anything but roasted marshmallows."

"I'll second that," I added. I sheepishly spoke of the night before, while Amy's mom cooked a huge breakfast of pancakes, bacon, sausages, toast and milk. We all had a good laugh as we ate breakfast. Afterward, it was time to pack everything and head back home.

When I got back home, my mom met me at the front door, and she burst out laughing. "You look so funny," she smirked.

"Oh, yeah, and I feel real funny, too, Mom. Just knock it off, please," I grumbled. She had to laugh every time she'd look at me for the next couple weeks.

The next morning at school was even worse than I had expected. Most of the kids teased me, in one way or another, but if an award was given out to just one, no doubt about it, it would be Mr. Nau, the art teacher. He kept trying to guess what I did to my nose. "I know," he suggested, "you were grinding meat in a meat grinder and you got your nose too close, right?" I didn't get a chance to answer before he went on to a new idea. "Oh no, now I know," he teased. "You were painting a fence that had a knot hole in it and you stuck your nose in it."
The Camping Trip I’ll Never Forget

He was quite a comedian.

I lived through it all, although I have a little different shape to the tip of my nose. But now my nose has an unusual sensitivity to changes in the weather. In the summertime, my nose is the first thing to get burned, and in the wintertime, it’s the first part to freeze. I think I’ll invent the nose mitten.

I learned a couple of valuable lessons about marshmallows and life on that camping trip. First off, if you are going to roast marshmallows, find your own stick and make sure it’s straight. Secondly, and possibly the most important of all, if you happen to do something that really looks funny to the people around you, hope it doesn’t hurt too much because you need a really good sense of humor about it. Stop and think; if you put the shoe on the other foot -- if you would have laughed at it happening to someone else -- then you have to be able to laugh at yourself.

It took me many, many years before I wanted to roast marshmallows again. When I finally did, for some reason they didn’t seem to taste as good as I had remembered them tasting years ago.
When I was very young, at that age when kids climb trees and recklessly ride their bikes, I ran with the best of them. No stunt seemed too dangerous. No activity seemed too difficult, and no one enjoyed danger and excitement more than I. I'd seen the movies. When somebody was hurt, they went to the hospital, and all their loved ones gathered around them and told them how much they loved and missed them. To my juvenile mind, such things were romantic. When I got hurt on one of my adventures, I was ready to go to the hospital and be worshipped. Strangely enough, however, hospitals won't admit a person for an infected scrape on the shin. So I went through life dreaming that one day I would be in some tragic accident and all of my family members would assemble around me in concern. Who would ever have guessed that my dream would come true in such an embarrassing fashion?

I am not allergic to very many things. If I were to get stung by a wasp or a fire ant, I would not bloat up like an over-filled water balloon. I can gorge on seafood to my heart's content and not become explosively, violently ill in the middle of the restaurant. But, upon reaching the fourth grade, a Navy doctor from my hometown of Charleston, South Carolina, prescribed sulfa, a common antibiotic, for my ear infection. As a result, I broke out in minuscule, crimson dots that covered my entire body from forehead to toenails.

My dear, sweet, panicking mother took me to the local hospital, where I was led to a small room and examined by a doctor wearing tennis shoes and a tie with ducks and cows on it. He smiled and cracked tacky "knock-knock" jokes while he poked, probed and prodded.

"Well, young lady, if I didn’t know better, I’d say you fell into a patch of poison ivy. But since it’s the middle of December, running around naked in the middle of a forest hardly seems logical," he teased.

After nearly an hour of my having to endure his presence, he grew serious. (I’d hardly thought that was possible!) He called in two of his fellow colleagues -- they were just as annoying -- and asked mother and me to leave the room.
The Danger and Intrigue of Childhood

As I reclined on the waiting room sofa, I thought, "What fun! I am the object of everyone's attention. My family is deathly worried that something is wrong with me, and before I know it, they'll be flocking to my side, showering me with gifts and tears. What more could a brave heroine ask for?"

But my fun ended immediately after the three wise men beckoned us back into the office. I was presented with shocking news.

I had three weeks to live!

"It would seem, from reviewing your records, that you have Kawasaki Syndrome. We've had three cases in the last month, and they have all passed away within three weeks."

Okay, I was not going to hyperventilate.

The next two hours were spent signing forms and moving into my room. The orderlies forced me to wear pajamas with choo-choo trains on them. As if that were not embarrassing enough, they took a picture of me in my unmentionables. My humiliation was complete.

For two days I had needles stuck in nearly every body part, took medicine that must have contained bats' wings and eye of newt, and ate the hospital food, which was healthy and full of vitamins, but tasted like pencil lead. The routine never changed. Family and friends rallied around me sympathetically, as they had in my daydreams, but it didn't please me. I was ready to forget the whole thing ever happened and go home.

On the third day, the doctors finally decided there was the possibility that they could be wrong. What a concept. Navy physicians wrong? Right! At any rate, they reviewed my records, and that's when they found out that my mother was allergic to sulfa-based drugs. These brilliant mathematicians then put two and two together and came up with four.

On the fourth day, I was injected with a strong dose of sulfa. Jackpot! I was not dying after all. It was merely an allergic reaction to my medicine. At 2:45 p.m., I was released from that hellhole. I never wanted to go back.

My experience in the hospital was not as much fun as I had always thought it would be. I couldn't enjoy the fact that my family was deathly worried because I was too scared at the thought of dying.
A week after the incident, a friend of mine wanted to go roller skating. Normally, no matter what might be going on that day, I would agree to go skating and prepare myself to do real physical battle. But, for some reason, I declined and suggested we play a mean game of Barbie dolls, instead. I’d pretty much learned my lesson.

From then on, Barbie and Ken were the poor, tortured souls who wound up in traction for weeks on end.

Some habits are hard to break, you know . . .
Food For Thought

Rochelle Hesseltine
Composition I

As I pull into the parking lot, I mentally scan my seemingly endless "Things to Do Today" list with hopes of crossing off one more item -- once we're done here. Opening the door of my van and feeling the sting of icy sleet as it pellets my face, I pull up my hood, zip my coat and race toward the entrance of the store in an effort to protect myself from the attack of the cutting wind and sleet. Sensing my presence, the doors slide open as if by magic and offer an invitation for safe retreat. I pass through the doors and sigh in relief. (It's really nasty out there.) I grab a cart to get on with my mission, but soon realize the attack by the elements is replaced by voices from within and without clamoring for my attention.

"Mom, can I push the cart?" a voice whines from behind.

"He got to push it the last time. It's my turn," another voice protests.

"No, I didn't!"

"You did, too! And you make those stupid race car noises and almost run into people. Mom, don't let him push!" (Don't tell me what to do.)

"Pleeeeeease, Mom?" (The battle has begun. Oh, goody.) I pushed the cart.

The next set of doors magically glide open to reveal a wonderland of material pleasures and experiences that are there for the taking, but for me, the shopping experience can be like a nightmare.

Red dotted words scoot across a black background: Play more than . . . one favorite date . . . on "Lucky Day" . . . and all your . . . days could be . . . LUCKY. (I could use a string of lucky days, but the odds of that happening are slim to none.)

Posters and displays promise to take us Far & Away to The Secret Garden (Oh, doesn't that sound nice?) or to a Field of Dreams. Beaches stretching for miles On Golden Pond invite
us to relax along the shore. (Aah, warm sunshine. I could handle that.) Staying Home Alone listening to The Sound of Music while eating Fried Green Tomatoes offers a change of pace from a hectic routine. (Hmmm . . . getting away from it all would be nice, but not likely.)

The Rug Doctor claims to have the solution for that worn, low-luster carpet at home. (My living room carpet sure needs to be cleaned.) A dose of the Doctor’s cleansing power would be "just the thing" to brighten that carpet’s dull appearance. (But that will have to wait.)

Wearing a white jacket and tie, surrounded by rows and rows of bottles and boxes, a man dispenses the latest in potions that have been concocted to cure all ills. I step up to the window and lay my money down. (Wish I could use this money for something else. Oh, well, I’ve got to breathe. I wonder what it’s like to breathe without help -- guess I’ll never know.)

Look at those! Bright hues of strawberry reds, orange oranges, lemon yellows and celery greens dazzle my eyes and draw me closer to the fruits and vegetables clothed in color. I imagine the delicious taste sensation that lies within each piece. "Mom, can we get some strawberries?" Renee pleads. (They do look good.) The strawberries find a new home in the cart. (Yum! I hope they taste as good as they look.)

Colorful metallic balloons, fresh-cut flowers, blooming and green plants are reminders of childhood and the gentle breezes, greening landscapes and warm, carefree days of spring. (I don’t feel like spring today.)

The fresh meats evoke a longing for the summer sun and the pungent smell of hickory smoke wafting in the air. The taste of grilled burgers, steaks and chicken are but a faint memory now. Today, the meats are merely slabs of cold flesh in a cooler.

Subtle, seductive voices coo from the liquor cases. The multitude of beers and liquors offer an escape from the reality of the "real world." "I can help you. I’m your friend. You don’t have to feel stressed out. Let me refresh you," they seem to say. (Oh, be quiet. You guys are liars.) Their cooing is with a forked tongue. Giving in to their sweet words can have disastrous results. If you’re not careful, you’re hooked. Your "best friend" can become your worst enemy.

A hand with long, white, slender fingers and brown fingernails is extended from a display case and beckons us to come closer. Packs of cigarettes are whispering songs of deceitful pleasure. "Come closer. We won’t hurt you. Don’t be afraid. Try us -- you’ll like
As we near the checkout counter, we’re met with a deafening barrage of voices. Hershey’s Kisses, Snickers, Butterfingers, M&M’s and their host of friends demand attention. “Buy me! You love me! Choose me! Take me! Buy me!” they all shout and scream. (CHOCOLATE!!!) The battle for sanity and resistance intensifies. (I’ve got to get away from here!)

We rush through the express checkout lane, trying to escape the madness. And then, a thought hits me. We forgot something. (Oh, great. I thought we were almost done.)

Who would be willing to re-enter the war zone? Renee offered to go. Ross whined, “Can I have a quarter?” (Just give him a quarter so he’ll be quiet.)

I sat on the bench trying to recover from the unnerving experience and watched other people in the checkout lanes. One woman looked as harried as I felt. She was trying to corral a curious preschooler, keep her eyes on a toddler grabbing at things and making attempts at getting out of the cart and, at the same time, bag her groceries. (I remember those days. It doesn’t seem that long ago.)

Another woman stood alone with a blank stare on her face. She paid her money, bagged her groceries and left. Expressionless. (Have I looked like that?)

With out-of-style clothes and unkempt hair, another woman was a picture of neglect. She looked angry. (Is that what I used to look like?) Her eyes looked like all the life had been drained out of them. (How sad.)

Then I saw him. (There’s something different about him.) Something singled him out. (What’s different about him?) He was smiling. (That’s it!) Smiling as he waited in line. Smiling as he paid the clerk and talked with her. Smiling as he bagged his purchases and exited the store. Smiling. So simple.

His smile confronted my (bad) attitude. Suddenly, I realized that I had been listening to negative messages throughout the day and my outlook on life was affected. Remembering that I had a choice about my attitude, I made an instant decision to change it. I thought of the simple things in life that give me pleasure: smiles, hugs, kisses, children, flowers, balloons -- to name...
a few. I smiled, grateful for the reminder. My long list of things to do didn’t seem as important any more.

Leaving through the "magic" glass doors, I felt the cold snowflakes as they lit on my face. Refreshing. And, as the children bickered on the way to the car, I smiled (and shook my head). Somehow, grateful.
If I Were a Man

Amy Jorgensen
Composition II

If I were a man, my life would be different. Not only would I be bigger and stronger physically, I would see things from a different perspective and people would treat me very differently than they would treat a woman. Society would expect me to be strong, hard-working, unemotional, and I would be looked up to and respected just for being a man. There would be many positive aspects to being a man, but there would also be many negative drawbacks.

If I were a man, I could buy a car without getting ripped off. I could also get my car repaired without getting ripped off. I would be in love with my automobile and treat it as if it were alive. I would wash and wax it every other day and park it miles away from other cars to prevent nasty door dings. I would always drive with the top down and the stereo blaring, attempting to impress women.

If I were a man, I would go to the gym and lift dangerous, oversized weights to impress the blonde on the stair climber. My huge ego would result in my throwing out my back, bending over in pain and looking like an idiot to the blonde on the stair climber. I would read my “Swimsuit Edition” and believe that those kind of women really exist. I would also believe that those women would really go out with me. I would be dreaming.

If I were a man, I would be obsessed with sports and I would know every statistic that relates to baseball. I would never miss the Super Bowl, and I would relive my high school football days over and over again. I would tell stories about the big game, which would grow more exaggerated every time I would tell them. I would have friends who would do the same. It would be a never-ending competition and we would be stuck in the past.

If I were a man, I would have a cluttered home or apartment unless I had a lovely wife to clean up my mess. I would believe that socks and underwear belong on the floor and that a bed never needs to be made. “Why make the bed?” I would say, “I’m just going to sleep in it again tonight, anyway.” I would not care about neatness or organization, unless I was going to have company, then I would stuff everything on the floor into the closet.
If I were a man, I would live on macaroni and cheese unless I had a wife to help me fix dinner. I would eat fast food for lunch, unless I had a wife who would pack a healthy meal. I would believe that beer and potato chips are part of the four food groups. I would also believe that grilling out is a manly thing to do.

If I were a man, I would have a huge stereo system which would be hooked up to the ultimate speakers. My speakers would also be hooked up to my TV so I could get the full stereo effect. I would buy mass quantities of CDs and laser discs and would show off my stereo system to my friends. They would be jealous and my head would swell.

If I were a man, I would go to nightclubs and use fast pick-up lines to meet women. I would probably use the wrong lines and get smacked in the face. I would be totally confused by women and why they do the things they do. I would then give up on relationships and decide to just remain in love with my car. I would have a paranoia about dancing and I would go home without meeting anyone. I would be depressed, but I would not cry. Men aren’t supposed to cry, you know. I would think that it sure is rough being a man, and I probably would be right.
What do Marilyn Monroe, your mother and your wife or girlfriend all have in common? They are all women. But what these women have in common is much more than the naked eye can see. Could it be the way that you and I feel about women that needs to be addressed here? To me, women represent beauty, inspiration, envy, sensation and companionship. I believe that men as a whole take these qualities for granted. I know that I've taken for granted some or all of these qualities in women. Maybe it's only when that special woman is gone from our lives that we start thinking about the things she did or said that touched us or inspired us to become the men we are today. My father died two days after my ninth birthday and it was a wonderful, intelligent, loving mother who taught me about letting go and going forward in life, despite the many setbacks that can happen along the way. These are difficult lessons to learn when you're nine, but with the right teacher anything is possible.

The beauty of any woman can be the most under or overrated aspect in her life. "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," said the wise man. How a woman looks the first time you see her leaves a lasting impression that may never disappear. All of us have certain anatomical features that we find attractive and these features are very important to us because that nose, those legs, hips, breasts and so on can, to some extent, make or break a relationship. If the prominent feature is acceptable or surpasses our fondest desire, other irregularities such as one dimple being deeper than the other or even a slight limp can go by unnoticed. It's true I have a particular fondness for a warm, inviting smile. One of my dearest friends, Susie, talks about the fact that, at times, she is overweight, but only when she mentions her weight do I give it any thought. Susie's smile is delightful and she is a joy to be with; so to me, her weight isn't a main factor in our relationship.

What a woman is like inside is another important part of beauty. Internal beauty is a true intangible of life. The type of person a woman is doesn't show up tattooed on her forehead. "You can't judge a book by its cover," said another wise man. A beautiful woman is always
Greg Glowacki

noticed before a plain woman. No matter what any man says, he notices the beautiful woman first. I do, and there's no reason not to admit it. Honesty along with kindness, caring, a sense of humor and intelligence can only be seen when you know the woman. Be she plain or beautiful, the true test of beauty is what goes on inside her heart, her mind and her soul. My friend, Susie, is not someone you would say is beautiful to look at, although she is attractive to me. Susie's true beauty radiates from inside of her and it's inside where we should always look because true beauty never fades with time.

Women are inspiring. How many of us men have been inspired by women to create, to persevere or to just be ourselves? Inspiration may start with something as simple as your mother telling you how good you are and continue with your wife or girlfriend saying the same. Women push men to their outer limits. Women make men paint, write books and poetry, sculpt, heal the sick and spread the word of God. The admiration, approval and acceptance of men by women keeps men going. A woman has pulled me out of the doldrums and into a creative mood many a time. This paper is proof of that. I spent an afternoon talking with Susie about this paper, and during the course of our conversation Susie said to me, "If you are sincere in what you are trying to write, write it. Whether people like it or not, you tried and that's what counts."

Do men envy women? I believe men do. One reason men envy women is emotion. Men don't show emotion the way women do. I tend to hold back on the emotional end of life and I'm sure that other men do, also. Women, to me, don't seem to have a problem showing how they feel in private or in public. Women, being more emotional, are not dull. This is not to say that men are dull; it's just that men seem to lack some spontaneity. Maybe men are afraid to show their feelings due to peer pressure, being made a fool of or just thinking that being too emotional is not very manly. Women cry at sad movies, scream if a mouse runs across the floor and shriek at the sight of a bug (especially if it's big). Men tend to associate these traits with weakness. I have to admit crying at a sad movie or two and I hate bugs a lot, but mice don't bother me. I envy the fact that women have an ability to differentiate colors. Being colorblind, I am amazed at how my sister, Cheryl, can pick out colors that have greenish hues or tints to them. There are shades of blue, gray and brown that I would never have suspected had green in them, but they do, according to my sister, and we all know that sisters never lie.

The sensation of touching a woman is remarkable. To hold a woman's hand is one of the most simple and significant pleasures in life. To touch or hold a woman's hand allows me to get to know her better. If I touch or squeeze a woman's hand and she responds in kind, it's a sign that she feels comfortable with me, that she appreciates being thought of or liked well.
Women Will Never Be a Fad

enough that I want to hold her hand. Sometimes it’s the little things that we do or say that can bring both men and women an immense amount of joy. I always enjoy the first time I sit next to a woman and our knees touch. If one thinks about it, knee-to-knee touching can be exciting, maybe even an icebreaker, if things are a little awkward. How about when our hands meet during a movie as if we’re both reaching for that large box of buttered popcorn the two of us happen to be sharing? Accidental touching is great! Now, what about the first time I noticed the perfume she had on or the smell of her hair? We don’t always think about how lucky we are to be sitting or standing next to a woman who just plain smells great. I just close my eyes sometimes and daydream, or better yet, say I go to a party with my favorite lady and we get separated from each other. It’s a very crowded room and she’s not very tall, so I look around but to no avail, and then, suddenly, a familiar scent drifts by -- the rest is history.

Companionship is something we all need. I cherish the time I spend with all the women in my life, both family and friends. Companionship, whether it be friendship or on a more personal and intimate level, is something I have always sought and always will. To find the woman with all of the right qualities is not an easy task. I’m sure that men and women alike have all of the good qualities, it’s just that we don’t use them. Susie has been my friend, a kind and trusting friend, for almost 20 years and we get along amazingly well. At first, I thought it impossible to be friends with a woman, but if you base a relationship on honesty, trust and compassion, men and women can be friends. In fact, the first friend I had when I was a little kid (I was about five years old) was a girl. Her name was Debbie, and she lived in the apartment downstairs. Maybe Debbie is the reason why I get along with women so well; my first exposure to a girl was a positive one. Relationships are a give-and-take adventure in life and all I can do is try to find the woman who gives and takes the same as I do.

I can truly say in all honesty -- women will never be a fad.
Researched Positions
Good writing is simply clear thinking. However, moving from your first musings on a topic to removing your final copy from the printer isn’t so simple. It requires first grappling with what you know, and then pinning down what you think about what you know. In my Composition II classes this semester, we focused on one broad theme -- Christopher Columbus: the man, the myth, and the effect of myth on the Americas -- so that students could immerse themselves in a variety of viewpoints. They report this thematically focused approach helped them considerably with their own thinking and writing because they understood the major issues.

Sharon Small, English/Humanities Instructor ♦ Ankeny Campus
I'll be the first to admit that the special effects in cartoons are so life-like that an adult can easily be swept up in the action of these shows. So when the new, animated Batman series first aired, I was right there, staring at the screen. What color shading! **Pow! Jab!** What dramatic theme music! **Punch!** What? What in the heck was my three-year-old doing? With a quick kick into the air, my toddler was a miniature superhero, complete with moves and sound effects. The show had been on for only five minutes and my little three-year-old was the object of all of my attention. I should have known that if a cartoon that was packed with action and combat would appeal to me, then it surely would have an even bigger effect on a preschooler.

A person cannot turn on the television today without seeing some sort of violence. Whether it is the action in the Friday night thriller or a shooting-spree body count on the local news, violence, combat and death claim the boob-tube. Most preschoolers have access to the television. The average preschooler spends 2 1/2 hours per day watching TV (Nielsen). He or she spends less time eating, napping or even conversing with others. Young children, hooked on television, might not be able to recite their own complete address, but would certainly call out their favorite TV show titles to any listener. Children are exposed to violence on television more in our society today than ever before with the hundreds of stations available through satellite programs. HBO, Cinemax and Showtime all feature R-rated movies before 7 p.m. I am not saying that it is okay for older children to watch TV violence, but it makes sense to be concerned about what children see from the very beginning of their viewing life.

The soap operas that attract many teen and adult viewers are not usually thought of as violent. Domestic disputes, rape and gun use on these shows are increasing. This increase is driven by ratings. The problem is that a toddler will be drawn into the action of a mugging scene on *All My Children* even if there are ample toys within reach. An awful truth is that soaps are aired during the waking hours of preschoolers, and networks rarely flash signs to warn parents of parental guidance beforehand.
One of the most disturbing sources of violence is cartoons. It is not uncommon to set a small child in front of the Saturday morning cartoons with the hope of getting some quiet work done. All parents know how important quiet time is, but do they know that cartoons show as much, and sometimes more, violence during 30 minutes of time than the average nightly drama? Many of the best-loved and most-remembered animated characters are victims of gross mutilation. Tom Cat is decapitated in one scene by a cute Jerry Mouse. Less than three seconds later, Tom appears fine and is again chasing the mouse that caused his horrible injury. The relationship between these animated characters is sadistic. Mice do not wield axes, guns or butcher knives, and cats do not recover from decapitation.

Commercials are easily tuned out by adults. For children, however, commercials are difficult to ignore. The bright visuals, jingles and fast talk grab attention. One commercial tells parents to buy their kids the best water gun on the block. It shoots 30 feet and is so powerful that it has 50 pounds of water pressure. The advertiser makes it sound so appealing to the child, but the safety precautions are never mentioned. Many video advertisements now address serious issues related to family, sex and drugs. Wear condoms! Just say no to drugs! This is fine in most cases, but should a preschooler learn about these issues from his/her parents or from the media?

Newscasts show some of the most graphic violence. Television stations seem to be in competition to get the most raucous video to air six times during the day. The L.A. riots were aired repeatedly in April of 1992. I remember being scared to turn the television on that night in Long Beach. The stations kept interrupting sitcoms to show savage victimization with live coverage. Parents can explain to youngsters why events shown sometimes happen in our world. Even so, some news events leave me speechless.

Preschoolers see the same violence in a different way than adults or older children do. First, they learn from television shows. Preschoolers do not have the ability to decipher the "good" from the "bad" that is filtered into their minds. Until the age of eight, movement and sound effects are primary attention-holders. Dialogue matters more to children at about eight years of age. Preschoolers do not realize there can be a transformation of one character into another; a Dr. Jekyl/Mr. Hyde figure would be thought of as two separate individuals. There is not yet a middle or abstract area in their young minds (Greenfield).

Violence can have different effects on different children. The same children who have not gained the capacity for the abstract cannot differentiate between what is fiction and what is reality. Since preschoolers believe the television is always telling the truth, they begin to fear
what is real and concrete to them. If a cartoon character can be run over by a steamroller and live, then why can’t a real person survive? When a TV movie shows inanimate objects coming to life to terrorize a small town, preschoolers begin to think inanimate objects can terrorize (Greenfield).

Every story must have a conflict, and this is true of any televised incident, also. Too often the way to solve this conflict is through violence. The adventure and action of war appeals to young children even though they are not capable of realizing the tragedy that war brings with it. Commercials for G.I. Joe action figures often show a war between the good and the bad. Manufacturers get the attention of the child and reinforce the attitude that fighting is a natural way to solve a dispute.

Nightmares and fear of taking initiative might be also be effects of exposure to television violence. When preschoolers’ minds are bombarded by all of the “bad” out in the world, they begin to think the world consists of only corrupt happenings. Television news shows also often concentrate on what is going wrong in our world, thus distorting the minds of the youngsters. Many studies have been performed for concrete proof of the effects of television violence on preschool-aged children. In 1980, child psychologists J.L. Singer and D.G. Singer studied three- and four-year-olds for one year. They found there was a definite relationship between aggressive behavior and violent television viewing. They concluded television violence leads to more aggressive behavior, rather than that aggressive children decide to watch more violent television (347).
See No Evil

Children's minds are open to so many things. Sometimes the wrong sights and sounds get into the little sponges in their heads. We, as parents, regret allowing them to see or hear such things. There is a cause for every effect these little people act out. Good parents can protect their children from some of the evil described here because the media and entertainment industry does not.

Works Cited


* NOTE: While the editors acknowledge there are variations in style guidelines for research papers, we suggest page numbers should be included in the bibliographic entries noted with asterisks above. Page references are also be important within the internal text documentation.
Over the years Americans have been faced with many conflicts. We have rallied to the support of our armies as they have done battle from the halls of Montezuma to Tripoli’s jagged, rocky shores. We have witnessed many hard-fought battles: World War II, Korea and Vietnam, to name a few. Though these conflicts were fought with great fervor and emotion, I doubt if there was much more intensity generated in these military engagements than is encountered in the everyday battle between parent and child.

Many families have been bewildered, embittered, separated and eventually torn apart because of the condition that is presently known as the generation gap. We all know what the generation gap is; however, no one is quite sure what can be done about it. We are aware that each generation has agreed to disagree with its predecessors, no matter what the issues may be.

Many parents try to handle the situation by simply ignoring the problem completely. Take, for example, Janelle, in the essay "The Lives of Teenage Mothers." Janelle was left to fend for herself in her own tiny basement apartment by her seemingly uncaring father. Marek’s essay leaves us with the impression that there was little concern for the young mother prior to or after the birth of her baby (Marek 36). It seems as if the two were related in address only. Many children who are left alone will inevitably seek affection from whoever is willing to provide it. If receiving affection and what passes for love to these lonely teens requires certain reciprocals such as sexual favors, it may seem worth the high price these unfortunate youths are asked to pay. For parents to give up on their rebellious offspring is the worst thing that they can do. It has been my experience that children really are aware that we love them when these confrontations come about. When you stop trying to steer and nurture your child is when doubts set in.

At the other end of the spectrum are the parents who try to force maturity and adulthood on their children. These youths are given freedoms and responsibilities beyond their maturity levels. According to the essay "Childhood’s End," by David Elkind, children are no longer seen as young adults who need certain sociological development with their own peers devoid of adult interference, but they are constantly smothered by well-meaning parents in every aspect of their
Parent and Child

lives. They are coached to perform at professional levels in summer baseball, football, basketball and hockey camps. There is no longer the fun aspect of youth. Children are pushed into adulthood far before they are ready. Young girls are dressed up in makeup, stockings and high heels at earlier and earlier ages. Young men no longer have to wait to achieve certain levels of age to don adult apparel. Many are dressed like their fathers while still in diapers (Elkind 66). We dress them to appear as little adults. We chide them for behaving as children. "You are too old to act like that," we say, yet they are behaving exactly as they should.

While on the surface this behavior may seem harmless, it is having disastrous effects on society. Our obsessions with adult behavior in children is driving them toward teen pregnancy, stress, drug use, juvenile delinquency, robberies and murders (Elkind 71, 72). Elkind suggests that we allow children time to be children. Let them have the experiences and pleasures of youth. Give them the time they need to develop into well-balanced adults.

While we surely must set goals for our offspring, we ought to remember to keep our goals and their goals on a realistic plane. Many fights are encountered in families when teens feel they are not given a choice in the decisions being made concerning their lives. If it is a parent's duty to help each child achieve his or her God-given best, this cannot be accomplished when battle lines are drawn and parents force their will onto the child.

At times, however, parents must exercise their power and authority. Like the time a few years ago when my nine-year-old, then six, wanted to quit school in the first grade because "I have enough education, and school is getting in the way of my playtime and cartoons." Or when my then 15, now 22-year-old daughter announced to the family that she wanted to become a rock star singer. She, too, wanted to quit school, get a tutor, tour the country and get married to the leader of the band. All I had to do was sign the necessary forms and she was on her way. Needless to say, she did not leave. I firmly put my foot down.

In most cases, we should be able to reason with our teens. Too many times serious conflicts arise when goals set by unrealistic parents are forced on children. Many parents are looking at things they would like to do with their own lives, instead of the best route for the child. We should always have realistic views of our child's abilities. There is little use in forcing a person into a field such as music if there is little talent and less inclination in this direction.

In the fictional essay, "Two Kinds," by Amy Tan, she was forced to play a piano against her will (Tan 80). Tan rebelled at every opportunity available because all she ever wanted to
do was be an "ordinary" child. Tan's mother had other ideas. She was determined to make this unwilling child into a prodigy and she was not about to accept any answer other than "yes." Her unwillingness to listen caused a great fight between mother and daughter (84, 85). Had Tan been allowed a choice of instruments, she very well may have turned into the prodigy her mother so desperately sought. While she might not have chosen piano, whatever instrument she selected would have been more enthusiastically approached than that stupid piano, which was clearly chosen for her.

A few years ago, I found my son had extra-special talents in music. I began to steer him in the direction of music, but I let him choose the instrument he would play. He has made drums his instrument-of-choice. Now, at the age of nine, he has become quite an accomplished drummer.

Children are a lot less likely to rebel against goals set for them if they feel they have a part in the decision-making process. Too many times I have seen parents waste money on goals that were based not on the teen's abilities or interests, but the parents' own desires in life. Well-meaning parents often fail to take into consideration the child's talent in a given area; thus, we find a pressured teen with little inclination and even less interest in a chosen area. Herein lies the infamous generation gap, erupting not from philosophical differences but from a lack of consideration and communication between parent and child.

Confrontations can be brought to a minimum if: 1) parents will allow their children to feel as if they are a part of the decision process; 2) allow children to be children for as long as it takes for them to mature naturally; 3) always give the child a choice, avoid ultimatums and rigidity, leaving room for an honorable retreat. After all, even the lowly worm will fight when it is cornered.

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Is Teenage Toiling Worthwhile?

Daryl Uhlenhopp
Composition II

A lot of 16, 17 and 18-year-olds participate in a different kind of extracurricular activity. They pursue it vigorously after school, on the weekends and throughout the summer. What are these teenagers doing? They are working in grocery stores, fast-food restaurants, retailing stores, bakeries and movie theaters, just to name a few. Are these jobs rewarding for young people? What’s to be gained from them? Are these jobs menial, dead-end roadblocks? Are teenagers wasting their time while working these jobs? No. Contrary to what some people believe, these types of jobs can be very beneficial to teenagers.

The first step in making the job a rewarding experience is parental involvement. When a teenager makes the decision to seek employment, the parent or parents should ask questions such as: "Why do you want a job?" "How will you handle your studies and social life?" "What type of work is it?" "Have you researched the job?" and "What are the hours?" These questions should lead to an informal agreement which states that accepting and keeping a job depends on the teenager’s ability to meet academic and family duties (Salk 103). Also, to ensure that the job becomes a positive element in the teenager’s life, all involved should be aware of the child labor laws. These laws protect the teenager’s rights and offer recourse if problems arise. For example, while school is in session, some states limit the hours a teenager can work in one week. Taking these types of precautions is good because the teenager is about to enter into the real working world, an eye-opening and learning experience that can prove to be very valuable.

What do young people know about the world of work? Many know little. They see the smokestacks of the factories, notice the glass windows of the office buildings and hear about work-related subjects on the television, radio and occasionally from relatives or parents. However, by becoming employed, they experience the routine of labor first hand. From it, teenagers can get their priorities set, learn to become organized and set up a schedule as well as plan for the future. Upon receiving a paycheck, teenagers can learn the value of money, how hard it is to come by and how fast it can disappear. They can open up a savings account and take pride in learning how to manage their securities efficiently.
Furthermore, by working, teenagers can obtain a sense of direction and identity. Do they want to make french fries, sell shoes or wash dishes the rest of their lives? While working, maybe they'll see how important education is to succeeding in acquiring a better-paying job in a different environment. Maybe they'll toil at their math, reading, writing and science classes with more vigor. In addition, while on the job, teenagers can learn how to perform under various levels of stress. During peak stretches of demand, they can condition themselves to stay calm, cool and collected while satisfying the customer's request. Apart from learning patience, understanding the value of the dollar and obtaining knowledge of how to handle fast-paced situations, the teenager gains other valuable assets -- assets that build character, a positive attitude and accountability -- assets that future employers like.

Forget what you've heard, read or assumed about "McJobs" and other customer service-related jobs as being a bad sign for the teenage work force. They can be a great learning experience. Human resource people from insurance companies, to utility companies, to entertainment companies believe so, too. Read what they have to say: "Fast-food experience is a big plus." "It shows motivation, initiative, people skills, and cash-handling skills." "From these types of jobs, people learn skills we take for granted, such as what it means to work, to get up in the morning, be on time and plan your day" (Wildavsky 129). Also, with so many broken households, many teenagers lack adult role models. The only place they can learn about teamwork and taking directions is at work. It is also unfair to say that teenagers shouldn't work when some teenagers "need" to work. Because their family financial situation is in such dire straits, the teenager's paycheck is used to pay the electric bill, the gas bill and other daily necessities such as food, clothing and shoes (Springen and Waldman 81). Be it from necessity or desire, teenagers who work are learning values -- values that will help them to compete and climb the ladder of success and become responsible citizens.

Saying customer service jobs are menial, dead-end roadblocks and serve no purpose isn't correct. A lot of people who start at the bottom move closer to the top. They get promoted into management positions and earn a good living. These jobs can serve as a venue of opportunity. When it comes to making money, wouldn't you rather see teenagers learning the value of a paycheck as opposed to having them solicit illegal drugs or commit crimes such as robbery, burglary or larceny? Fast-food and other customer service-related jobs can help ensure that teenagers don't squander away their own future. They'll see and learn what it takes to get ahead, and they can use their job-related experiences to help make this happen.

No, teenagers do not come away from their jobs empty-handed. They acquire qualities like reliability, trustworthiness, a willingness to work and learn, to interact as a team and to
Is Teenage Toiling Worthwhile?

take responsibility for any mistakes they might make. Today, in America, over five million teenagers work. Besides earning money, they are developing skills and gaining values that can help provide for a healthy, comfortable and productive adult life.

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One Woman’s Report of Domestic Abuse

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Anonymous
Composition II

When I was in high school, a very shocking thing happened. I was out with a friend of mine and her boyfriend and the two of them began arguing. Out of the blue the boyfriend stopped the car and punched my friend in the face. I’m sure my mouth was hanging open in utter disbelief. My friend began to cry and told him to take me home. I called her up the next day and tried to talk some sense into her. Well, it didn’t work. She remained with him for several years, getting beaten about once a month. I had a real problem dealing with what I had witnessed, in addition to knowing she continued to stay with him. This was a crime and he was a criminal. Why, I wondered. I knew I would never get in that situation. Or at least I thought I wouldn’t.

About five months later, I took a job at a telemarketing company that seemed to be booming with business. My boss was exceptionally handsome, not to mention funny and considerate. And he appeared wealthy. After a year of working with him, I thought I knew him quite well as a boss and as an individual. Finally, he asked me out on a date, and I accepted. Wow, did he treat me like a queen -- fancy dinners, picnics and strolls out at the lake. Oh, boy, was I in love! I moved in with him a couple of months later. It took only two days until the rules started coming. I was not to wear certain clothes and not to go out with friends. We went out one night to Chi Chi’s and toward the end of the evening, after a few drinks, he was sure I was staring at another man. When we left the building, I was a few steps behind him, and I could tell he was just fuming with anger. He whipped around, grabbed my jacket and shoved me into the cement wall of the restaurant. He didn’t stop there; he took hold of my hair and smashed my head against the wall. That is all I can remember.

I woke up on his couch with a vase of a dozen roses in front of me. He began to apologize profusely and eventually I felt he was sincere, so I forgot about the incident. My story doesn’t end there. In fact, I could go on and on for 20 more pages about all of the different ways he manipulated me, physically hurt me and mentally scared me. He almost threw me off his motorcycle once, stuffed a blanket down my throat to keep me from calling for help,
One Woman's Report of Domestic Abuse

and so on. I pressed charges a couple of times, but he just kept coming back. You may be wondering why did I stay with him, just as I had wondered about my friend only a year before. The answer is not easy to formulate. I believe it involves many aspects, including society's fear and ignorance to accept the problem and deal with it. There needs to be efforts made to make people aware of domestic abuse, and to get them to talk about it, and, finally, to create the kind of environment where the women in these situations can feel comfortable when they do try to get out.

Within the last year or so, I have tried to make some sense out of the position I was in. I decided one way to do that was to learn more about others in this same kind of situation. I attended a seminar at DMACC where I learned of some pretty incredible statistics on domestic abuse. In 1993, every 15 seconds a woman was beaten. During the five minutes it takes to read this essay, at least 20 women are being beaten. That makes a total of six million women abused last year. Four thousand of these women were killed because of domestic abuse (Conference on Domestic Abuse). What do you suppose these women have done to deserve their beatings? Perhaps they went to a neighbor's for a cup of milk, or maybe left the bathroom dirty. These are some very realistic options.

Let's, for a moment, look at the characteristics of an abusive relationship compared to those of a nonabusive relationship. First, keep in mind a violent or abusive relationship centers around power and control, while a nonviolent or nonabusive relationship revolves around equality. In a violent relationship the man will probably use economic, emotional and physical abuse. He will be the one to give an allowance and the woman will know very little about the economic standing of her household. He will use head games, make her out to be crazy and beat her in order to keep her in line. He will threaten her and intimidate her and keep her isolated so he may have complete control, in addition to keeping her from going for help or calling the police. For two years this was the make-up of my life, while all along I wished and dreamed about economic partnership, respect, trust and support, negotiation and fairness. Those are, of course, the characteristics of a nonabusive relationship. Yes, it all seems rather elementary, but why, then, do so many women get stuck in these abusive relationships?

Besides the abusive partners' promises to change, problems with economic resources, threats, and fear (a woman's chance of being killed is raised by 75 percent when she tries to leave according to data provided at the DMACC Conference on Domestic Abuse), there is another element going on that helps us to give reason about why women stay in this devastating position. Researchers Overmeier and Seligman investigated the learned-helplessness theory which is defined as a state in which people or animals give up and quietly submit to punishment.
they had previously been unable to escape. In their research, they used dogs to investigate this condition. First, they exposed each dog to a series of inescapable shocks. The dogs in the control group were not shocked. Next, each dog was placed in a shuttle box. This box had two compartments, separated by a low barrier, and the floor of only one of the compartments was electrified. When the control dogs were placed in the electrified compartment, they ran around frantically, trying to escape, and eventually jumped the barrier into the non-electrified compartment. When the experimental dogs received the shocks in the shuttle box, they ran around for only a few seconds, then lay down in the corner and whined without making any attempt to escape (Myers 105). One thing is clear from such research: constant and unavoidable punishment will eventually cause people and animals to give up attempts to escape, and they will quietly submit to pain.

So before we pass judgment on those women who stay in abusive relationships, we need to consider and empathize with their position. We need to talk about this growing problem of domestic abuse and not tolerate it or make allowances for it. I was amazed at one of the responses I got from a fellow classmate concerning this topic. He said that a woman usually enjoys the person who beats her. I encourage everyone to look at the facts. This is not a joke or something to be taken lightly. And in response to another comment that women need to get their priorities straight, let it be known that for most of these women, their first priority is how to get through each day alive because the legal system and society have let them down.

What kind of a woman falls into these relationships? I am not sure there is one particular type of woman. I do think it is easier to describe the abuser, and that seems to shed some light on the fact that it can and has happened to women of all races, to women of varied economic backgrounds and social standings. For whatever reason, all abusers usually have the characteristics of being charismatic, manipulative and intelligent to some degree. Often, these men are those considered, at first, to be "too good to be true." And, later, when the truth does come out, the abuse is understood by the women to be a phase or perhaps it was something she did, because, after all, he was so wonderful. The first blow is difficult. Not only physically painful, but also it makes a woman reevaluate herself. If she doesn’t get out at this moment, she will be beaten again and again.

There have been laws put into place that do recognize the victim of an abusive relationship. The problem, though, is when a woman is living in an abusive relationship, she often becomes so entrenched in the situation that she cannot distinguish between violence and what she deserves. On the other hand, women at the beginning of this kind of relationship often see that it is wrong and go to the police and report their case. If a woman doesn’t have proof of the violent act (bruises, cuts, etc.), nothing happens. If she does have the markings, the abuser will be arrested and will spend a maximum of one night in jail. He then uses this as the
perfect opportunity to say he has "seen the light," and to revert back to the manipulation he used at the beginning of the relationship to win over her heart. If the police are called to the home during the confrontation, they will break it up and talk to each person individually. The victim is asked (even if it is apparent by blood and bruises that she has been beaten) whether or not she wants to press charges. During this time, the other officer is asking the abuser what happened. If the abuser says, "She's crazy. Look what she did to me," and shows the police his own marks (done with his own hands or by the victim in self-defense, unknown to the police), the abuser has the right to also press charges against the victim and she will then be handcuffed, fingerprinted and put in a jail cell to think about her wrongdoing. An abuser knows this from the start and will use this knowledge to keep his victim from making the call in the first place.

Outside of the relationship, there are usually people who care. There are people who want to help. Every situation is different, and in order to help, there needs to be communication. People cannot tell victims of abusive relationships to get out and leave it at that. They cannot say this is bad for you and you deserve more and leave it at that. The options for a better life need to be told and retold. There needs to be group support. All of the people who are closest to the victim need to support the victim in whatever decision she makes. If she decides she is not ready to leave him yet, she is not. Meanwhile, phone numbers and addresses of support groups need to be given to her at every opportunity. In addition, she needs to be told that if she is in a situation where she needs the police, to yell "rape," not "help," because if the fight is construed as a "family matter" by outsiders, the response rate is somewhere around 30 percent; whereas, if it is construed as two strangers fighting, the response rate is about 75 percent (Campos).

Society has a hard time dealing with the issue of domestic abuse. Those individuals who haven’t had any personal experience in regards to domestic abuse can’t understand it. "Why don’t they just leave?" is a common retort, and then they close their minds to other options. Those people who have been raised to "stand by your man" may see it simply as a part of life. Others are too squeamish to hear all of the details. Possibly some have been taught that it is okay to hit a spouse. Victims of domestic abuse also know these differing opinions about their situation, and who knows which one(s) will have to be faced when the victim takes the first step to get out. The key to all of this, inevitably, is that it is the victim who must decide when it is time to go. Let's make this process as easy for the victim as we can.

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It was a typical winter afternoon with a fresh coating of snow on the ground. The children had just come home from school, and the cat, Bugsie, had chosen to go outside rather than tolerate the noise of play and cartoons. Once, when I looked out the window, I noticed she was sitting in her favorite place in the back yard, calmly looking out over her domain. All of a sudden it sounded as if someone were trying to rip the screen off the front door. I ran to open it and there was my cat, claws into the screen, terrified and bleeding. Leaving the cat with my daughter, I went out and followed the trail of blood to the back yard; it ended about three feet from my back door. I knew where it happened. Now I had to figure out what happened. Back in the house I located the source of her wound. She had been shot. Bugsie recovered, but we, as humans -- the most advanced of the animals -- need to put more action into stopping the torment pets and stray animals encounter.

Lately this issue has been ignored, other than when the local news chooses to run a segment on the owner of a puppy mill who has been arrested. Children learn much from observing the behavior of adults. Showing care and concern for other creatures would be a valuable lesson for them to see. It is time to make the words "treated like an animal" a positive phrase.

Slowing the exponential animal population is a major need. There are so many births that not all can be cared for properly. The most effective method to accomplish a population reduction is to spay or neuter pets. According to Dr. Judith A. Conlin, executive director of the Animal Rescue League of Iowa, in six years one adult dog contributes 67,000 puppies to the dog population; one cat, after seven years, 420,000 kittens. If a pet is unaltered and allowed to roam freely at times, it is probably contributing to the stray animal population.

The Rescue League now requires that all pets be sterilized prior to adoption. Tim Covin, shelter director for the Rescue League, told me of this recently passed law. As of July 1, 1993, it became a law in our state that all dogs and cats sold or adopted through an animal shelter or
Treated Like an Animal

pound be sterilized. It depends on the age of the pet if this is done before adoption or the owner shows proof that it has been done when the animal reaches a certain age. A shelter that fails to comply with this law can be fined or after three violations lose its license. An owner who fails to comply can be fined or required to return the pet.

Conlin also informed me of this statistic supplied by the Humane Society of the United States: Each day in the U.S. approximately 10,000 humans are born compared to 70,000 puppies and kittens. Although most people like animals and have at least one pet, it is unlikely that most of us would be able to care properly for seven pets per person in our homes. Prevention of these births is the answer not only for those who are annoyed by strays, but also for those who have the desire for all animals to have good homes.

The Rescue League destroys unadopted pets because they are unable to care for the massive number of animals in need. I understand there may be no choice at the present time, but if people care enough to put action into controlling the animal populations this euthanization would not be necessary. Although the motivation cannot be compared, as I visited the animal shelter I couldn’t help but think of human life during World War II being eliminated by a similar method.

One facility in Iowa, to my knowledge the only one, is a no-kill shelter. It is Animal Lifeline of Iowa. Located in rural Carlisle, it is able not to destroy animals by limiting the number taken in. Ava Bothe, who runs the facility, explained they have the capacity to take in 23 dogs and 10 cats with no limitation on kittens since they are easily adopted. As Bothe and I were talking we agreed it’s surprising so many people still believe the "old wives’ tale" that pets should have one litter before being spayed or neutered so they maintain a "good" disposition. My own two cats are proof that this is not true. The mother cat is somewhat of a grump. Her baby continues to behave like a kitten, even at three years old. Both cats have been spayed.

It is not just through decreasing the stray population that the hardships animals endure will subside. A decrease in numbers would not affect the kitten that died because a nine-year-old’s mother thought it was normal for him to twirl his pet around by its tail, faster and faster. It would not have prevented my daughter from running in hysterical because she had failed to stop a group of teens from lighting a cat on fire and tossing it down in a field. They considered it sport to watch it run, on fire, until it stopped, dead. To lessen the numbers of strays would also not end such situations as a family moving in the middle of winter, leaving their dog chained outside, until a neighbor cannot stand to see it starving and freezing any longer. It will not stop the boy’s parents across the alley from replacing his pets after he mutilates them. Preventing these situations is a matter of inspiring people to have regard for life.
Linda Crawford

The Animal Rescue League has formed a group to inspire this regard. It is called the Education Committee. This group's efforts are focused on teaching children in classroom settings how to properly care for their pets. A quote by Bradley Miller Cited in Tailwaggers, sums it up: "Teaching a child not to step on a cat is as valuable to the child as it is to the cat."

Some may think it a misplaced priority to consider the welfare of animals to such a degree, when humans are in similar situations. Our concern for lessening the hardships humans endure can cause us to be blinded to the need of ending the deprivation and violence all living beings endure. Compassion for life includes all forms. In considering this, it seems caring for animals inspires caring for humans. In turn, respect for all living things makes our communities safer places for all.

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One little, two little, three little Indians..." That was a popular nursery rhyme when I was growing up. I can vividly remember Indians being a part of my childhood. I remember playing cowboys and Indians with my buddies -- sometimes as a cowboy and sometimes as an Indian -- and I always enjoyed scalping my enemies. I used to play with a plastic Geronimo doll that had a feather headset, chest armor, a tomahawk and a long, brown rifle. He was one of my favorite toys. Back then it was simple: Indians were a famous part of American history and I thought they were cool.

As I grow older, I realize there is a lot more to history than what I have read in my high school textbooks. In reality, many books have glossed over the truth and left out important details to avoid being too controversial. Now I can remember reading on that box Geronimo came in how he was a fierce Apache warrior, but there was never any reason to explain to the five-year-old consumer why he became so ruthless. That toy box never mentioned how "in 1858, a raiding party of Mexican troopers murdered Geronimo's wife, mother and three children" (McNickle 28). This trauma is believed to have spurred Geronimo's 30-year reign of terror on the northern Arizona and Mexican territory.

My high school history books never mentioned how the Cherokee nation was plunged into a state of legal limbo by the ruling of Supreme Court Justice John Marshall. Justice Marshall bent to political pressure in 1831 by allowing the "Sovereign State of Georgia filled with God-fearing, tax-paying Americans to remove the Cherokees from their gold-bearing land" (Deloria 90). Sadly, there are more Americans who will remember the song "Cherokee Nation" than will remember how the State of Georgia duped the Cherokees out of their land. And when they hear the name "Sequoyah," many Americans most likely think of trees instead of the man who developed the first Cherokee alphabet (Spencer 344).

We tend to forget the Indians are as much a part of the American culture as apple pie and Chevrolet. We should value our native brothers because they are the living descendents of our forefathers. Indeed, the Cherokee, Sioux and the Nez Perce gave as much to this country as did
Washington, Jefferson and Franklin. How long would the colonists have survived without the gifts of corn, beans and squash from the Indians? Where would Lewis and Clark have ended up without the help of Sacajawea, the Shoshone guide who lead them through the Bitter Root mountains and helped them survive the harsh winter there?

I have yet to find a history book that tells the story of Wi-jun-jon, Pigeon's Egg Head. As a chief's son, he was chosen to travel to Washington with a peace delegation. He met the president and viewed cities, forts, ships, steamboats and many other examples of the technology in the white man's world. When he returned to his tribe and related all he had seen, his people laughed at him and called him a liar. The tribesmen could not believe that such things could exist anywhere except in the imagination of a very powerful medicine man. So Pigeon's Egg Head was called the man of lying medicine and he spent his days telling these great stories. When the elders could tolerate his fables no more, they had Pigeon's Egg Head killed so that his evil lying medicine could not infect the tribe (Catlin 195). Had it not been for the writings of George Catlin, no one would know the fate of Pigeon's Egg Head.

"Many of the newspapers during the 1800s added to the public contempt of the Indians" (Deloria 92). In 1867, the Kiowa and Comanche tribes signed a treaty to move on to the Pig Pasture Reservation in southern Oklahoma. This portion of the Southwest was prime grazing for cattle brought up from Texas; consequently, many cattle ranchers enlisted the media to voice "public" support of leasing the reservation out for grazing. To many readers this seemed like a better way to use the land. However, before the government granted the Indians permission to lease out their land, the Texas cattlemen moved their herds onto the reservation for feeding. These cattlemen relied on the propaganda effort to lessen public opposition to this unauthorized use of the reservation. For more than 10 years, the U.S. Government refused to allow the Comanches to lease their land to these cattlemen to help support the needs of the reservation. During these years the cattle were able to graze on the reservation, yet the Indians received no down payment in return. This was no accident. "It goes along with the national opinion of the time. The Indians were not capable of making their own decisions and the government did not want to take on the responsibility of providing for them" (Hagman 80).

As a 20th century American, I have no way of knowing the absolute truth of our history or the reasons behind our treatment of the Native Americans. Furthermore, I cannot trust the records of history to be 100 percent inclusive and accurate. I do know that we cannot try to hide our mistreatment of the Indians as some textbooks do. Everyone needs to know where the pitfalls lie so they can be avoided in the future.

As a little boy, my thoughts were pure and I held no hatred toward the Indians. As an adult, I am embarrassed by the way the Indians were treated by the "God-fearing, tax-paying
1994: A White Man's View of the Indians

descendants of the 'Gentlemen' from England who had been unloaded on these shores a century earlier because they needed a place to pray" (Deloria 81). Does the knowledge of historical events enable us to make better decisions for the future? I can't say for sure. But I do know that my preconceived childhood notions about Indians were a lot easier to live with.

"... seven little, eight little, nine little Indians. Ten little Indian boys." I wonder if my parents still have those plastic Indian dolls?

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Looking Down the Barrel of the Gun Control Issue

Welcome! Welcome to warm memories of the heroes and heroine of my childhood: Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, Annie Oakley, Wild Bill Hickock, Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, Calamity Jane, Buffalo Bill and the Lone Ranger. I have such vivid recollections of waking on Saturday mornings and rushing pajama-clad to the living room, barely able to contain my excitement over the prospect of seeing which villain my television hero would conquer that week. Sometimes these benevolent heroes rode dazzling stallions, magnificent horses with their necks arched proudly and heads held high while they reared and tossed their manes in anticipation of the ensuing pursuit. Other times the heroes were more subdued. They relied on their wits (and, occasionally, a comic-relief sidekick) as they moved with cat-like stealth through the woods, intent on quelling their sinister adversaries.

The stories were different, but in the final analysis they all equated the same message: "Good will triumph over evil." One common factor these upstanding men and women shared was that they all carried guns: six-shooters, rifles, shotguns -- whatever was appropriate. However, they only used their weapons as either a means of defense or as a way to overcome evil; they never used them in contemptible ways to inflict pain or suffering on defenseless victims. Their weapons were an extension of the persona of justice and fair play.

In contrast, welcome to the stark reality of "Doug's world" in 1993. Doug is a 16-year-old at Father Flanagan High in Omaha, Nebraska (Hull 21). He purchased a Remington semi-automatic 12-gauge shotgun with money he earned doing yard work. The transaction occurred in a dark alley from the trunk of a car belonging to an anonymous gun dealer. Smiling, Doug explains affably that "if you have a gun, you have power. That's just the way it is. Guns are just a part of growing up these days" (Hull 21). Yes, indeed, Doug is now someone who commands respect. One of his prouder litanies is of a random drive-by shooting he committed in his own neighborhood; "I saw this dog sitting on a couch in this big window above the front
Looking Down the Barrel of the Gun Control Issue

porch, so I just shot him," Doug confides casually. "I'm not sure what kind of dog it was, but he fell out of the window onto the porch [and] I could hear him yelping as we ran away" (Hull 23). As Doug offhandedly rationalizes, "Parents just don't understand that everything has changed. You can't just slug it out in the school yard anymore and be done with it. Whoever loses can just get a gun" (Hull 23).

Unfortunately, in his own nauseating way, Doug is right. In the United States right now there are over 211 million firearms in circulation -- "nearly one for every man, woman and child in America" (Post 21). What is even more ghastly is that gunshot wounds have become the leading cause of death for both white and black male teenagers in this country (Lacayo 47). But wait! That's not all. "Gun deaths, including suicides, now total more than 37,000 a year, and handgun homicides have reached 13,000 a year" (Morganthau 33).

Violence connected with guns is not an isolated phenomenon that can be ignored. Tune into television today, and whether it is a drama, a documentary, or, God forbid, the evening news, someone has committed or is committing a violent crime that involves a gun: rapes, drive-by shootings, carjackings, drug crimes, robberies, thefts or random acts of violence. Consistently, the presence of guns is involved.

One of the most frightening aspects of this tragedy is that we have become desensitized to the insanity. If violence hasn't happened to someone close to us, it seems irrelevant. But don't get too comfortable with your indifference because "one in three Americans has a friend or relative who's been shot" (Post 21). It is my firm belief that, as a nation, we must do something to contain the proliferation of guns in our society because if we do not, this nation will eventually self-destruct.

Historically, gun control has always evoked heated debates in this country. On one hand, most police departments and educational organizations favor extremely tight regulation of handgun availability. On the other hand, we see bumper stickers on cars flagrantly vowing that "I'll give up my gun when they pry it from my dead fingers" (Dumaine 186). One organization that is bitterly opposed to gun control is The National Rifle Association.

With well over three million members, the NRA comprises one of the most powerful lobbying groups in the United States today. They claim not to be pro-gun, but anti-crime (Beck 22). Their primary concern is maintaining the status quo; traditionally, they are known for refusing to back down in any way regarding preservation of our constitutional right to bear arms. They are a political powerhouse that many politicians are wary of angering. For example,
Colorado Democrat Ben Nighthorse Campbell and Montana Democrat Max Baucus recently voted in favor of a ban on semiautomatic assault weapons. Neither of these men has to run for re-election again until 1998. Yet, NRA Executive Vice-President Wayne LaPierre reportedly warned them that, "We [the NRA] have a real long memory" (Lacayo 47).

Unquestionably, this great nation was founded on freedom and civil liberties. Yet some liberties, like the issue of our citizens' right to possess guns, continually pose a greater and greater cost to a country that is spiraling out of control with criminal violence that permeates every segment of our society.

Do you remember what it was like when you were in school? What was your greatest concern? Were you worried about getting caught with chewing gum or cigarettes, whether you would get detention for skipping study hall, or just wondering if that jerk you used to go steady with was ever going to get his or her stuff out of your locker? These worries are trivial compared to what kids have to deal with today. I can't begin to imagine what it must be like for our children to wonder if someone is going to bring a gun to school. According to *Time*, information from the National Education Association indicates that "an estimated 100,000 students carry a gun to school" (Hull 22). Would you want to be a teacher or administrator these days? Let's see, should we allocate that extra money for gym bleachers or should we invest in that metal detector for the front door to the school? Just think what it must feel like to have to institute a rule that your students are allowed to only carry see-through backpacks in an effort to deter gun possessions. Oh yes, then there's that idea that arose at the last school board meeting to have off-duty policemen and parents patrol the halls between classes as a signal that weapons will no longer be tolerated. And finally, remember that we have to get the policy straight; we must call the police before we proceed with expulsion of students in violation of the weapons rule.

It is my view that more stringent gun control laws are better than the mayhem that exists on the streets today. I am not alone in my thinking. Gallup conducted a poll in 1991 and 78 percent of the participants of the poll believed laws governing the sale of handguns should be tougher (Dumaine 186). Opponents of gun control laws argue that criminals generally do not go through legitimate channels to obtain weapons. Yet a Justice Department survey of state prisoners indicates 27 percent of them purchased their weapons legally (Lacayo). While this may seem an insignificant number, tougher gun control laws would have averted the criminals from obtaining those firearms.

Some progress seems to be looming on the horizon. The Brady Bill was legislated in
Looking Down the Barrel of the Gun Control Issue

December of 1993. Sarah Brady headed up this movement. Mrs. Brady is the wife of Jim Brady, who was wounded by a handgun during an attempt on former President Ronald Reagan's life. The Brady Bill requires a five-day waiting period before purchasers can be issued handguns. This allows time for the purchaser to be screened for criminal records or mental problems. Furthermore, President Bill Clinton is taking a more aggressive stand on the issue of gun control than past presidents. Mr. Clinton "has already directed the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms to tighten its policies on federal gun-dealer licenses, and various attempts are underway to ban assault weapons" (Morganthau 34).

These measures are a beginning, but more must be done. We have to act now; the time for ambivalence has passed. This society cannot and must not allow the gun control issue to escalate any further. As parents, we have to teach our children responsibility and values. As adults, we have to accept responsibility. If we absolutely must have firearms in our homes, we must see to it that they are secured. Letting our elected officials know where we stand on this issue, we need to make our voices heard in arenas where public policy is dictated. If seeing blood splattered all over your television screen doesn't particularly please you, speak up to television networks and their sponsors. Money talks. We need to rethink our infatuation with guns. They are not cool; they don't put us in control. They are deadly, and unless handled by capable individuals in controlled settings, they cause people to be way out of control. Grassroots innovations like gun buybacks should be supported and applauded. We must allow our law enforcement officials to be armed to the same extent as those they are trying to protect us from. Don’t automatically dismiss any new gun legislation as ineffective or assume it’s simply a case of "Big Brother" trying to get his fingers in more of your business.

If these reasons don’t impress you, let me acquaint you with an anonymous young man, Donna Britt, profiled in an essay published in the Des Moines Register. This nameless youth was a senior in high school, just hanging out one night when he was shot and the bullet entered his neck and severed his spine. The following is a synopsis of Britt’s reflections and parts of their conversation: "[the young man said that he would] like to see more attention brought to the problem of guns and stuff. . . . So many people in wheelchairs, people my age, I discovered a whole new world.' And I don’t know why, on a typical frenzied Saturday at the mall, one young man’s enforced stillness hit me so hard. His eyes flickered like the light on the wheels of his metal chair. But his body stayed still as a stone.' . . . 'When I got shot, I thought about dying. . . . but I’ve never cried,’ he insisted. Shouldn’t we examine the value of our escalating romance with brutality? Is it worth not doing everything in our power to keep each child now walking around on two legs from ever saying what this young man said when I asked him what he dreams: ‘I don’t really dream that much. But when I do, I’m not in a wheelchair’" (Britt 9a).
Works Cited


I view writing as a craft, not an art. Just as with any craft, for example, woodworking or knitting, there are logical, proven ways to become better. One is not a born writer -- nor a cabinetmaker or knitter. Anyone wishing to learn a craft needs to follow certain steps. These steps need not be followed in identical order, but the list below may help illustrate a common way to learn and improve a craft.

♦ Take a class. Most of you are doing so now to become better writers.

♦ Read books about your chosen craft. For writing, Peter Elbow's books, especially *Writing Without Teachers*, are the best I know.

♦ Practice.

♦ Watch and ask advice of more experienced craftspeople. Your writing instructor and the Writing Lab advisers are examples, as are students in your class who have experienced more writing success.

♦ Practice.

♦ Study the best of the craft. If you were learning to make desks and cabinets, you could attend a woodworking show. At the state fair you could view expert knitting products if that were your interest. Where writing is concerned, read, particularly essays. The work of Joan Didion, Brent Staples, Donald Hall, and thousands of other terrific essayists is available free in almost every library. Your textbook for composition undoubtedly has numerous essays to sample.

♦ Practice. Going through the entire process is important, however that works for you. Experiment with different approaches to writing.

♦ Copy. This doesn't mean plagiarize. It means imitate, use others' work as a model. Ben Franklin learned to write better by writing in the style of his favorite writers. Try writing two essays on the same topic, one as Gloria Steinem would, one as George Will would. There are old, long-dead essayists who are tough to read but excellent models (Wollstonecraft, Bacon, Montaigne). Sample them if you dare.
♦ Writing as Craft ♦

♦ Work with other students. Whatever the craft, you can gain by helping other learners and receiving help in return. Their mistakes can aid you; your mistakes can aid them. Their successes can help you; your success can help them.

♦ Take more classes. If you’re in Composition I, try Composition II next. Just as if you studied beginning knitting or woodworking at a community center or local high school and now are ready for intermediate.

♦ Practice. WRITE!

♦ Share your work. A thoughtful and meaningful essay is a wonderful gift to give. Better yet, exchange essays with friends and family, perhaps on the same subject.

♦ Even as you struggle, appreciate your progress. Enjoy your growing ability to wrestle with a topic, come up with a coherent and specific thesis, and clearly elaborate your reasoning, enhancing it with examples or other evidence.

Remember that performance in a craft can be improved. Anyone who can hold a pen or work a keyboard and knows words can write. Those are the basic tools. The improvement is up to you.

Ruthanne Harstad, English Instructor ♦ Ankeny Campus
What's In a Name?

Just where is the Skunk River? In the interest of geography, we have reprinted this 25-year-old illustration from the October 5, 1969, edition of the Des Moines Sunday Register's Picture Magazine. Our thanks to the newspaper and to the State Historical Library of Iowa.

What do you think? Can you make a case for a DMACC/Skunk River connection? On its placid journey to the Mississippi, the river runs for 260 miles from its inauspicious origins about a mile north of U.S. Highway 20 near Blairsburg in Hamilton County. Flowing south, the river runs parallel and to the south and west of Interstate 35. Branches of the river run through Polk County and Jasper County where the Ankeny, Urban and Newton campuses of DMACC are located. In the 1800s, more than 40 mills lined the banks of this useful river -- flour mills, grist mills, saw and woolen mills. Now only one lonely mill remains at Lynnville (see back cover), though it is powered with electricity instead of water. We challenge the readers of this publication to think about the river. Perhaps you'll want to write about it. Define its significance for us today? We leave the search for answers to these questions to you. Happy canoeing!
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We are anxious to publish writings from students enrolled at all DMACC campuses. The Skunk River Review respects equality of opportunity guidelines.
Cover photo: Scot Bourne

A DMACC photography student, Scot Bourne, made this picture during a July 1994 field trip to Lynnville in southeast Jasper County. The photo was taken from a sand bar on the North Skunk River at the "Old Mill." The site is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and tours of the 146-year-old mill are offered occasionally by the local conservation board. Part of the structure is still used today for a livestock feed-grinding operation.