Connections 2014

A magazine of creative works by students of
DeVry University and
Chamberlain College of Nursing
Addison Campus and Metro Area
Connections 2014

EDITORS:
Susan DiLillo
Michael Dufresne
Kelly Peterson (CCN alumna)

We always welcome submissions for future issues of Connections. If you would like to share your original poems, short stories, essays, memoirs or other writings, submit your work as a Word attachment to one or both of the email addresses below. We also accept drawings, photographs, and any other creative work that can be published in print format.

sdilillo@devry.edu
mdufresne@devry.edu

We look forward to your Connections submissions!

Connections is available in full color at http://www.add.devry.edu/literary_magazine.html

Cover photo by Kylie Dean

Connections is an annual production of DeVry University, Addison Campus and includes the creative work of DeVry and Chamberlain students in the Addison Metro. All communication should be directed to Michael Dufresne (mdufresne@devry.edu).

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2013 STORY CONTEST WINNERS

1ST PLACE: When Mercy Found Me by Kelly Peterson
2ND PLACE: Driving While Black by Tedric Jackson

2014 PROSE CONTEST WINNERS

1ST PLACE: Farms Meet the City by Joe Kessler
2ND PLACE: The Belittled Janitor by Jasper Zornoza
Driving While Black
by Tedric Jackson

It was five years ago and spring had finally sprung. It was a beautiful afternoon. The sun was shining bright, and the beauty and aroma of spring blossoms were in the air. For months I had been anxiously awaiting for spring to arrive so that I could take my new car out of storage. The winter before, I had purchased a luxurious 2008 Lexus SC430. It was a sporty, black, hard-top convertible. Had I known the profiling that would come along with its ownership, I may have reconsidered my purchase. The seasons had changed, but I was about to realize that some racial perceptions had not. It was a disappointing truth that I had to face.

As I merged onto the highway, the voice of my GPS said, “Continue on I90 East.” I was cruising in the left lane at about 65 mph. With the top down, I could feel the wind in my hair. Periodically looking in my rear view mirror, I noticed an Illinois State Police car approaching from behind. After confirming my speed, I was confident that I was not violating the posted speed limit, and it was without purpose that he was behind me. I signaled to change lanes.
to allow the officer to pass, but as I changed lanes, so did he. He continued to follow me and I became nervous. It was not until I saw the flashing lights reflecting in my rear view mirror that my stomach dropped as if I was on a roller coaster preparing for the stomach-turning descent. I reduced my speed and pulled over to the shoulder of the highway.

After I pulled over, I rolled down the window before turning off the ignition. I was continuously checking my rear view mirror anxiously awaiting his arrival. The officer approached my car and asked to see my license, registration, and insurance. I was polite and complied with the requests of the officer. He then asked a series of questions: “Where are you on your way to? Why are you going to Chicago? What do you do? Who do you know in Chicago?” He continued to ask irrelevant questions without explaining why he pulled me over. My then nervousness quickly turned into aggravation. Although we both knew I had done nothing wrong, I felt as if I was being interrogated. His failed attempt to deliberately provoke me led him back to his squad car.

Frustrated by his harassment, my heart was beating outside of my chest. I sat in my vehicle trying to maintain my composure, waiting for an explanation that was belated.
but deserved. I was burdened with a negative presumption that I had to disprove before being able to establish mutual respect. Despite the significant racial progress our society has made, I was treated with a level of suspicion because I fit the “profile”. I was a young black man driving a luxury vehicle. Therefore, it was assumed that I must be involved in illegal activity.

After running my plates and license, the officer returned to my vehicle. He continued to antagonize me with questions. Speaking through the passenger window, he asked, “Who owns this vehicle?” I refused to answer because he could see that the name on the registration matched the name on the driver’s license that he was holding. After failing to find probable cause, the officer snapped my license in half and said, “With a car like this, you can afford to get a new one.” He threw the two pieces in the passenger seat and sarcastically said, “Have a nice day!” With rude boldness, he walked back to his squad car. I was in disbelief at what I had experienced. I thought the law was supposed to serve and protect not to harass nor target people because of the color of their skin.

As the officer returned to his squad car, I restarted my vehicle. I signaled to re-enter the highway. As I looked into the rear view mirror I could see fields of cotton, a painful legacy of slavery and segregation, a time I thought we had overcome. I was not judged by the content of my character or by my success, but instead identified and targeted because of the color of my skin. These acts of racial profiling keep our society suppressed.

As I focused back on the road ahead, I was shaken with disappointment. Although we’ve come a long way since the days of slavery, there are still clear signs of discrimination. I continued my travels with the hope that one day change will come. I glanced in the rear view mirror again, this time facing the truth.
Baseball Field
by Eddie Mazur

It is the place where friends, family, and enemies come together. When you walk up to the fence, you can just feel your inner child running free. When you suit up the nervous feelings you have feel like butterflies in your stomach. Those who are confident release those butterflies and play the games of their lives. When you step on the dirt, you will never want to leave. The game you commit yourself to becomes a lifestyle. Though all good things come to an end, you can do nothing but enjoy the moment you are in. Fresh air on a sunny day is the perfect weather for a perfect game. Walking onto the freshly groomed field for that afternoon game is the best way to spend the day, surrounded by friends, brothers, and mentors. When the competition begins emotions run wild, and the best way to play is by capturing all emotions and playing based only on your instincts. When the game comes down to the final frames, the sun is setting and the lights glow on the worn field. Baselines disappearing, cleat prints covering the infield, and the torn up outfield grass all showing the dedication put in by the teams. At the end of the night, one team rises above the other, the team’s trophy gleams off the lights, the celebration begins, and the field now becomes a memory.
Untitled
by May, Chinese student at
Hubei Normal University; Huangshi, China

Clear streams wander through the vast green field.
The sky is pure blue.
While clouds float leisurely.
Azure sea water sings gently.

It seems that there is no limit among the sky,
The earth and the sea
Hills are well-placed on the field
Sapphire-like lakes scatter here and there.
Golden sunshine streams and sparkles on the sea.
Standing on the cliff,
One may have an impulse to jump off
And hug the pure sea water

Photo by Kylie Dean
My Lotus Lake
by Chau Le

People have memories that are sparked by many situations. Places often make people remember experiences from the past. Many places hold memories for me: the sea, school, and foreign countries. One particular place that reminds me of my childhood is my hometown’s Lotus Lake.

The view from the shores of Lotus Lake calms me every time I see it. Closet to the shore is the lake’s smooth surface, blue by day and sparkling black at night. My favorite time to stand on the shore is midsummer at twilight, when I watch the water’s blue darken and become more general, blotting out the day and all its troubles. I listen to waves lapping the dock and think my thoughts, or just let my mind clear. On night with a bright moon, I stare out of the path of light across the water, losing track of time and sometimes even myself. Farther out, on the opposite shore, a forest of pine trees reminds me of the cool shade I enjoyed while hiking there. The pine smell is the first thing to trigger the memories. Evenings when there is still enough light, I look for the break in the trees where the main trail starts, thinking of the many times I have walked it. During the hottest, most trying summer of my life, the cool beauty of the trailside trees, ferns, and moss soothed my nerves and brought me back down the earth. Beyond the forest are rolling hills, soft gray in the morning and near dusk. The expression “old as the hills” comes to mind, and it
feels like a just description, not an insult. The soft gray hulk of them makes me think of an ancient, huge, and eternally sleeping creature – something that predated me by millions of years and will outlive me for millions more. For some reasons, I always find these thoughts comforting. Therefore, standing on the shore of Lotus Lake is the best for me than any medicine.

For me, Lotus Lake is not only a pleasant place to relax. It is also a friend - a dear and close one who shares joys and sorrows. I spent most of the time flying colorful kites, playing hide and seek, and swimming with all my naughty friends. I still remember how happy I was when I became the winner in the game searching for crickets and grasshoppers. But the funniest moment that I would never forget is playing the tag game in the rain. Every time I look at the rain, I always wish that I could turn back time to play that game with all my friends on the shore again.

Thanks to Lotus Lake, my swimming skills were honed at a very young age. I can vividly recall a time when my father told me not to go to the lake alone because it
was dangerous. But he never knew that I was always practicing my free-style swimming in that lake. All those memories are so real that I feel like they just happened yesterday.

Lotus Lake is the one and only to hold my most beautiful memories. The memories and favorite places are different for each person. I recommend one thing to you: if you don’t hate to be photographed, you had better take a picture of yourself in your favorite place. It will help remind you of your memories. I hope you have good memories in many places.
Untitled
by Jennie Stephens

Looking up in the sky today
Gray smoke clouding the sun
I see a soul flying high
And feel an ache in my heart.

Was it a friend or my family
A stranger, but so much in common

Snowflakes falling down to land on my nose
But they don’t melt, only smear
Another tear for another number
Lost among the sea
Not of sadness, but of thanks

Their sadness has ended
The end of their sickness and working no more
Still waiting my turn, I cry for you

Photo by Ashly Thomas
The sun was setting over the farm, sending rays of golden light across the living room floor. The warm breeze was gently playing with the curtains of the open window, filling the room with the sweet smells of spring. I was lying curled up on the couch, listening to the rhythmic ticking of the cuckoo clock, trying to keep the storm clouds in my head from overtaking me. I could feel the pain in my heart start to intensify as I recounted all the heartache that I endured over the past five years. I couldn’t stop a tear from rolling down my cheek as I thought about all the tests that God had put me through – it didn’t seem fair. I closed my eyes, wishing with all my heart that something could take the pain away. I heard someone enter the room, but I didn’t open my eyes. I couldn’t. I felt someone kneel down next to me and gently put a soft, cool hand to my damp cheek. “Sweetie,” I heard a soft, loving voice say. “What’s the matter?” I slowly opened my teary eyes and looked into Margie’s kind blue eyes. I shook my head, because I didn’t know how to put my pain and emotion into words. Margie sat down on the couch, put her cool hand on my forehead, and looked at me with concerned eyes. “Tell me what’s going on, honey,” she said. “Tell me what’s wrong so I can help you.” I took a deep shuddery breath, not knowing where to begin on my
laundry list of concerns and fears. I have many questions, but few answers. I just don’t understand.

I don’t think I will ever understand why bad things happen to good people. I will never be able to comprehend the logic that God uses every day, so I don’t even try anymore. When I was a kid, I thought that good things happened to good people and that bad people would be punished in some way. Barney taught me to be nice to my friends and that kindness would make everything okay. As a teenager, I got a small taste of the cruelness of reality when I suffered a severe bout of depression during my senior year of high school. The dark storm clouds in my head seemed endless and I thought I would never see the sunshine again. I didn’t understand what I had done wrong to deserve such heartache and suffering. Despite the gloominess, I always fell back on my childhood way of thinking: bad things didn’t happen to good people. I had always heard growing up that life is an unexpected journey, but I didn’t realize at the time just how unfair it could be. The storm eventually dissipated as I started college and entered into adulthood, but the clouds never truly went away.

I never thought that I was the poster child for a “good” person, but I knew that I was not a bad one either. I made the usual teenage mistakes, but always tried my best to make good choices. However, on February 24th, 2008, my innocence was taken from me forever when I was diagnosed with a very rare and aggressive bone tumor in my cervical spine. At the tender age of nineteen, my carefree way of life was gone. The tumor not only
threatened to take away my mobility, but threatened to end my life as well. It was able to be successfully removed, but the surgeries were sheer hell. It felt like someone was pounding industrial sized nails into the bones of my neck with an oversized mallet! It was the worst pain that I had ever felt in my life.

In addition to the physical agony, I had to deal with the emotional suffering and the inevitable buildup of those ominous storm clouds. I felt completely helpless, like I was a prisoner in my own body. There aren’t words to describe the horror that you feel to learn that a quarter inch of bone may have been the difference between life and death. The doctors made it clear to me that I was extremely fortunate that the tumor was discovered when it was. If I had delayed going to the hospital by even a few weeks, the outcome could have been disastrous.

While the tumor was successfully removed, I am left with permanent daily reminders of the ordeal through chronic back/neck pain and nerve damage. Now, an optimist might say that there is always a positive to look for. For example, I did not die nor am I paralyzed. I had access to one of the best spinal surgeons in the Chicagoland area and he knew how to save my life. Just to be clear, I know all that. However, I still could not understand why such a bad thing had happened to me and I wanted to know why. Why did I have to go through such a gut-wrenching experience? Why did I have to be the one person in a million to developing this particular tumor? Was God in a bad mood on my birthday? What did I do wrong to deserve such suffering?

While I was at home recovering from the entire ordeal, I found out that another family had been torn apart by the cruelty of life. I was sitting in bed late one night, browsing through various social networking websites, and discovered that one of my former softball teammates had passed away suddenly. One moment she was alive,
practicing with her drill team in her high school cafeteria, and the next moment she was dead on the cold, hard floor. Lauren was only eighteen when she died. She had everything going for her: a beautiful face, spunky spirit, loving parents, three older brothers who supported her, plans to attend Northern Illinois University after high school to study dance, and dreams of opening her own dance studio one day. In the blink of an eye, all of that was gone.

Lauren died from a common heart condition – a mitral valve prolapse. She had been diagnosed with the condition as a child, but never gave it a second thought. She didn’t need to. This type of heart disorder is usually benign, and patients experience long and productive lives with no symptoms. For reasons I will never understand, God decided that Lauren’s time in this world was done. He left her parents without a daughter and her brothers without a sister. He left her St. Charles dance team stunned and heartbroken. He left school officials wondering if there was anything more they could have done to prevent a young life from ending so suddenly.

After I found out about Lauren’s death, my mind was reeling. Why did someone so young and so beautiful have to die so suddenly? I can’t imagine what it must have been like for her parents to get that phone call from the hospital, telling them that their only baby girl was gone forever. After all, it could have easily been me. I could have been me who collapsed suddenly had the tumor had gone into my spinal cord. It could have been me, pale,
cold, and still in the casket. It could have been my life that was cut tragically short. There were nights where I would cry, both for Lauren and for myself. Lauren’s death really affects me and I don’t know why. There were times where I feel guilty that I had lived and she had died. Why was my life worth more than hers? Why did God call her Home and leave me in this dark, miserable world? It wasn’t fair. It still isn’t.

I can’t imagine being in Lauren’s parent’s shoes, knowing that her life could have been saved had an AED been used. I couldn’t understand why God would want to do something so tragic – why did she have to die? We were never close friends, but we were softball teammates for a season. Her father was a wonderful assistant coach and I can’t understand why such a good man had to go through such a horrific tragedy. I don’t think I ever will.

I never fully healed from these emotional wounds – the pain had cut too deep. However, time continued to march on and I had no choice but to follow. Before I knew it, I was walking across the stage to receive my college degree in psychology. I then had to make a critical decision – what was I going to do next? I was torn between furthering my education in psychology or to finally pursue my high school dream of becoming a nurse. For me, the decision wasn’t difficult. I thought about the nurses who took care of me when I was broken and terrified and wanted to give back to those who helped me. I wanted to be the light in someone’s darkness.

Eight months after I graduated college, I enrolled in nursing school. It turned out to be a very difficult program, but I enjoyed the challenge. The first two years were great – I felt like I had found my niche in life. I made new friends, did well in my classes, and got a part time job on campus that I enjoyed. Life was going great. During my third year, however, the dark clouds started to form over my head again and I couldn’t get away from
Little mishaps seemed like giant failures and simple stressors turned into major meltdowns. I felt like I was trapped in a dark room with no windows or doors. I could feel the walls of the room closing in on me, slowly suffocating me. There were times when I didn’t know if I could go on. I wasn’t sure that I wanted to go on. I felt like God and everyone else had forsaken me - I had no one to turn to. I felt all alone, even in a roomful of people. I couldn’t do it anymore.

I finally stopped my rambling long enough to catch my breath and slowly turned my tearstained face to look up at Margie. “Oh Margie, why me? Why did all this shit happen to me? Why did my life have to be turned upside down by a tumor and depression? Why do I have to go through all this?” Margie started to answer, but I couldn’t stop asking questions. “Don’t you ever ask why? Don’t you ever want to know why bad things happen in your life? I mean, have you ever asked why Beth, your only child, was born with Cerebral Palsy? Have you ever asked why you and Paul have to go through so many challenges on the farm, like the Maple Sap House burning down or rain flooding the crops? Don’t you ever want to know why bad things happen?”

Margie looked thoughtful for a minute before she answered. “Sweetie, when I was in Training School for the Salvation Army, I experienced my fair share of challenges and I questioned every single one of them. And you know what? It made me nuts! I couldn’t go on living like that. I had to make a change.”
I shook my head forcefully. “No!” I exclaimed. “You don’t understand! Dammit, I have been trying to fight these feelings for a long time and I still fail. I can’t do it anymore! I can’t do it!”

Margie took a deep breath and firmly patted my shoulder. “Sweetie, look at me,” she said with a firm voice. I shook my head again and buried my face in a pillow. Margie sighed. “Okay, then let me ask you a question. What do you see when you look at Beth?”

The question threw me off for a minute and I had to think before I responded. “I see Beth,” I said slowly. “I see a beautiful, intelligent young lady who is filled with spirit, perseverance, and a drive to be successful. I see that smile that can light up an entire room.”

A smile crept across Margie’s lips. “You don’t see the wheelchair? You don’t see the Cerebral Palsy? You don’t see the disability?”

I slowly lifted my head off the pillow and shook my head for a third time. “No. I see my sister. A wonderful person who has a body that doesn’t work correctly. Someone who has to fight every day to be normal.” As these words sunk it, the tears began to flow again, stronger than before. “It’s not fair, Margie!” I sobbed. “Why did
this have to happen to Beth? She doesn’t deserve the pain and suffering! She doesn’t deserve all of the adversity. Why does such an amazing young woman have to suffer from this disorder? Why did God have to make life so challenging for her?” Questions kept swirling in and out of my head, faster and faster until I felt like I was going to explode. “Oh Margie,” I choked out, “why does God have to be so unbelievably cruel? Why did I have to go through so much pain in my life? Why did Lauren have to die? Why do bad things happen to good people?”

Margie listened, then wrapped her loving arms around me and held me close. I could hear her gentle heart beating into my ear as I sobbed into her blouse. I could feel her hand gently rubbing my back and her head laying gently on mine. In that moment, I was safe in her arms – I didn’t want her to ever let me go. Margie let me cry for a little bit, then gently lifted my chin to look me directly in the eye. “I want you to remember something, sweetie,” she said in a soft voice. “There is a positive to look for in any situation, no matter how bad it may seem at the time. God doesn’t make mistakes. He knows what He is doing.”

Margie began to stroke my hair as she explained that my tumor experience might have been a gift. “You were meant to go through this, baby girl. You were meant to use that empathy to help others. It will make you a better nurse. You were chosen to go through this for that specific reason.” I felt Margie’s arms around me tighten as she explained that a positive thing had resulted from my depression and dark room. “You don’t have to go through any of this alone, Sweet Pea. God saw you struggling and brought you to us. We wouldn’t have gotten to know you if it wasn’t for this dark time in your life. And you know what? We love you so, so much.” It was much harder for me to see the positive in Lauren’s death – I didn’t think that anything good could come out
of it. Margie looked thoughtful for a few seconds. “Honey, Lauren didn’t die in vain – she died to save others. She raised awareness of AED’s in schools and the importance of heart testing in young athletes. She has done her job on Earth. Now she is in Heaven – she is with God.” Margie’s eyes began to well up as she recounted Beth’s life. “Bethy is a gift with a very specific job to do. She is supposed to teach people how to smile and to spread happiness to others. She is supposed to teach other perseverance and determination. Paul and I were given Beth so that we could love her unconditionally.” I saw a tear roll down Margie’s cheek as I turned to look up at her. “We have to trust in God,” she said in a wavering voice. “We have to trust that everything happens for a reason.”

Suddenly, Margie had a revelation. “Sweetie,” she said thoughtfully, “let me ask you something. Why did you reach out to me for help when you were struggling with depression? Why did you decide to message me on Facebook one night and tell me everything that was going on? After all, you didn’t really know me very well. We had hung out for a few days at the DuPage County Fair, but we really didn’t know each other. Why me? Why did you decide to let me in?”

I paused for a few moments, not sure how to answer. “I don’t know,” I said slowly. “I remember it was March 1st and I felt like I was all alone in the world. I felt like I needed someone to talk to. Anyone. I saw that you were on Facebook and I felt the need to contact you. I don’t know why I contacted you specifically. I just felt like I needed to – like it was the right thing to do. I can’t explain it. Nothing has been the same since that night.”

Margie smiled. “That’s God, honey. He knew that you needed someone and He lead you to us. And we are never going anywhere. We love you deeply and are never going to let you go, no matter how hard you try to push us.”
away.” I took a deep, shuddery breath and nodded. “Questions are not bad, Sweet Pea,” continued Margie. “Wanting answers is not bad. I don’t ask why did you chose to talk to me that night. I could have, but I don’t. Instead, I chose to embrace the results rather than question the motives. I chose to help you, support you, love you, and always be there for you. I love you like a daughter. And you know what, Sweat Pea? That is all that matters.”

Margie held me for a while and let me feel her tender, motherly love. I slowly began to feel a sense of peace begin to wash over me and the darkness began to lift. Margie gently kissed my forehead, then looked straight into my eyes. “Bad things are always going to happen, sweetheart. There are many things in this world that we can’t control. However, we do have choices. We can choose to look for the positives rather than dwell on the negatives.” I let the power of the statement sink in as I lay my head on her chest and closed my eyes. Suddenly, I thought of my favorite quote from The Lord of the Rings and how our lives are a sum of the choices we make. In chapter 2, as Frodo realizes that the great ring of power has come to him, he bemoans his fate to Gandalf who replies, “So do I and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to do is decide what to do with the time that is given to us.” I realized that I wasn’t just a passenger in the game of life – I have some say on how it turns out. I don’t have to sit still and watch time pass me by. I have a choice. It is fair to say that challenges presented themselves to me throughout my life, especially in the past five years. I still won’t say that the tumor was a blessing, but it certainly taught me resilience, determination, and gave me a different lease on life. It is also hard to find the positives with depression. However, if I hadn’t been going through a rough patch in nursing school, I wouldn’t have gotten a loving and supportive second family. If Beth didn’t have a
disability, she wouldn’t be the sweet, caring, and loving sister that she is. I still can’t say that a lot of good has come out of Lauren’s death, but it did teach me to appreciate the time I have. You never know when your time might be up – God doesn’t always give warnings. As Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “Yesterday’s history, tomorrow’s a mystery, today is a gift. That’s why they call it the present.” I have my present. Now it’s up to me to use it.

I was planning to end the story there, but it doesn’t end there. I wish I could say that Margie’s words instantly made everything better and that her love caused the feelings of pain, guilt, and despair to instantly go away. I wish I could say that the clouds vanished and were replaced by a clear blue sky. Unfortunately, this hasn’t been the case. The journey of recovery is just that: a journey. I used to tell myself, I’ll get there, I’ll get there... Now, I wonder where “there” is. Is it a place where everything is perfect and there are no more tears or questions? Is it a place where tears and fears are replaced by joy and laughter? I don’t know the answer to those questions and I doubt I ever will. What I do know is this: I am still struggling. Every day is a battle. Some days, I come out victorious and feel like I can conquer the world. Other days, I am struck down and defeated by the burdens of everyday life. I know in my heart that it is important to look for the positives in life, but it isn’t easy for me. The scars on my wrist may have healed, but the scars on my heart still bleed.

Despite all the turmoil, I continue to battle on. I still wake up each morning and face the day ahead, even when that alone seems like a daunting and overwhelming task. I may be a broken person living in a broken world, but I know that I am not the only person to feel this way. I know that there are others out there on similar journeys, many of whom are afraid to share their story due to fear of
retribution or judgment. I used to be one of those people, afraid that the world was going to look down on me based on the feelings that I felt. It takes a lot of courage to be honest with yourself, and even more to write it down on paper and share it with the world. However, if sharing my story can help even one person, then it will be worth it. None of us have perfect lives and none of us have lives without pain, but nobody should ever have to suffer alone. Nobody should have to feel like their life is meaningless or worthless, like I do sometimes. After all, life is a journey, not a destination. There may be no “there” for me to travel to, but I will continue to trust God, lean on Margie for support, and continue on my journey, one step at a time. As J.R.R. Tolkien says, “It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to.”
"Everything has beauty, but not everybody sees it"

Confucius
“When all the world is overcharged with inhabitants, then the last remedy of all is war, which provideth for every man, by victory or death.” This quote from Thomas Hobbes’ Leviathan is a grim prediction of the future of mankind that is shared by many environmentalists. As it stands, the world’s growing population and shrinking farmlands are forcing modern technology to its limits in order to increase the yield of crops that farms can produce. While this technology has gone a long way towards feeding the world so far, the United Nations predicts that the world population will reach 9.6 billion by 2050, and with 80 percent of the world’s farmable land already in use, that poses a very real issue (Mendleson 1).

World hunger has been an issue that has faced mankind since our inception, and has only gotten worse as we have begun to grow and expand. Energy and waste management has also risen to the top of environmentalists list of concerns in recent years. One of the major contributors to the growing food, energy and waste issues can be found within the cities that house so much of our population. Cities require vast amounts of electricity and food to function properly, and they produce an equally vast amount of waste. Since cities dominate so much of the surrounding land to provide housing for their denizens, the solution implemented throughout history has been to supply food to the cities from nearby farms. This time-honored system comes with some equally time-honored issues; transporting the food from the nearby farms can be a costly, time-consuming logistical nightmare; it also means that the city is completely dependent upon outside sources to keep it fed and happy, and this can also put a strain on the farms. The most obvious solution to this problem is one that has only been
made plausible by new advancements in technology; grow the food in the cities themselves through a process called vertical farming (Skyscraper Fresh). While vertical farms have sprung up in multiple cities across the world, The Plant in Chicago plans to be a test site to see if vertical farming combined with new green technology can create a truly self-sufficient city-based farm. Vertical farming projects like FarmedHere and The Plant should receive more support and encouragement as they may be the key to alleviating the nation’s hunger and energy issues.

Put simply, vertical farming is the process of growing food inside of a multi-story building, with crops on each floor. The idea for vertical farming is most commonly attributed to Columbia University microbiologist Dickson Despommier and his first class of students from 1999 who were examining the issue of growing food on the rooftops of New York (Fairley 1). The students found that growing food on rooftops alone would only be capable of feeding around two percent of the population, until Despommier suggested growing food inside of buildings, sort of like greenhouse skyscrapers (Fairley 1). In 2005 Despommier
posted the results of the experiment online where it sparked world-wide discussions and no small amount of interest (Fairley 1).

Since then the concept of vertical farming has been added to and implemented in a number of cities across the world. Most common vertical farms consist of rooftop gardens along with multiple level plant farms inside of the building that are surrounded by LED lights that mimic sunlight, and a complex rotating water system to keep the crops alive (Fairley 1). Some vertical farms have even begun to include fish tanks where fish are raised alongside the crops, that way the fish waste can be used as a form of fertilizer for the crops through a process called aquaponics (Marks 1). Some more advanced farms now implement a new method called hydroponics, a process through which plant life is grown in water instead of soil (Marks 1). Aside from just producing food vertical farms also help to regulate building temperature and keep the air inside of their parent buildings clean and fresh (Marks 1). While maintaining an indoor ecosystem can be a daunting prospect, it allows for much greater control of plant life than traditional outdoor farming methods (Marks 1). The indoor environment means that vertical farmers have no cause to fear for their crops in even the most severe of weather conditions (Marks 1). Growing crops through vertical farming also helps to conserve and manage water much more efficiently than in traditional farming methods, which help to curb one of the most persistent issues that conventional farmers are faced with (Marks 1). Perhaps one of the most widely welcomed benefits that vertical farming offers is that the indoor environment means that so long as vertical farmers maintain their buildings well, there is no cause for them to implement either insecticides or herbicides, meaning that all vertically farmed crops are organic and all natural (Marks 1).
One of the most revolutionary of these vertical farms is a work in progress based in Chicago called The Plant (The Plant). The brainchild of environmentalist John Edel, The Plant is housed in the former Peer Foods factory and is geared towards demonstrating a new system of closing energy loops to keep The Plant completely self-sufficient (Fulton). While still a work in progress, plans for The Plant intend for the 93000 square foot facility to house local businesses as well as the traditional crops that most other vertical farms contain (The Plant). Edel hopes to attract local bakeries and a brewery as well as a kombucha brewery to The Plant (The Plant). In addition to the various businesses it is in the process of acquiring and assembling a massive anaerobic digester and separate heating and cooling system that will take The Plant completely off the grid (Fulton). This new system of closing energy loops is dependent upon each installment of the plant supporting and reinforcing the other (The Plant). The Plant plans to utilize a hybrid of hydroponics and aquaculture to maintain and improve the relationship between the plant life and the fish that will be raised inside the facility (The Plant). Plant life will be grown both inside
the facility and outside the facility and will be watered through the fish tanks so that the waste from the fish will provide nutrients for the plants, and in turn the water that the plants clean will be recycled back into the tanks for the fish to live in (The Plant). The spent barley from the brewery will be used to feed the fish, and all waste from the bakery as well as the spent grain from the brewery will be used to fuel the anaerobic digester which will break down the organic waste through a process that breaks waste down and converts the end result into a product called biogas which will then be combusted to generate the electricity which will power and heat the plant along with all of the businesses that it will house within (American Biogas Council).

In spite of the numerous benefits and promising potential that vertical farming has shown so far, there are many who are skeptical of the process as a whole. Some of the various concerns that are centered around vertical farming deal with the taste and quality of the crops that are produced, as well as the amount of energy it would take to keep the plants alive year round (Cox). Many skeptics argue that vertically grown plants must be inferior to those that are grown on conventional farms because they rely more on artificial lighting to stay alive and therefore have very little direct contact with the sun (Marks 1). The largest and most frequently argued issue with the vertical farming model is centered on how plants would be able to acquire enough sunlight to survive (Cox). Skyscraper grown plants would be subject to positioning of the sun to the building at all times, not only would the glass windows block a large portion of the sunlight that the plants would need to absorb, but the plants would block each other due to the angle at which sunlight would penetrate the building (Cox). This argument reinforces itself by claiming that the amount of energy required in order to successfully grow and maintain a large yield of
nutrient rich plants such as fruits and non-lettuce greens, does pose a very real and severe issue for the vertical farming method (Cox). While critics don’t argue that artificial LED lighting can be used to grow and maintain plant life for an extended period of time, they do contend that the amount of lights and the energy required to power them far outstrips the potential yield of plants that could be produced (Cox). It is also argued that a major flaw with the vertical farm plan is that even if vertical farms were to be implemented in the various empty and unused cities across the world, it would still be impossible for vertical farms to produce enough food for the cities to become self-sufficient, they would still need to rely on outside farms in order to feed themselves (Cox). Critics also argue that growing the plants in such close quarters would not be enough to eliminate the issue posed by pests or disease. The fact that the plants would be in such proximity would actually help disease to spread from one plant to the next even faster than on conventional farms (Cox). These complaints and more make up the largest portion of the opposition that vertical farming faces.

While there remain a number of dissenters who argue that vertical farming projects such as FarmedHere consume too much energy while producing too little yield, when compared to conventional farms they are at least helping. The implementation of vertical farms is still a fairly new concept that will require some tweaking over time. The idea of actually succeeding in producing the kind of self-sufficient closed loop system that The Plant envisions may seem far-fetched, but the implications and benefits of such a system are worth the attempt. Many existing vertical farms across the world have begun to show substantial yields at decreasing costs thanks to LED lights and some ingenious building designs (Fairley 1). Currently, it may be unrealistic to imagine that even if The Plant’s closed loop system manages to prove successful
that vertical farms could manage to completely replace conventional farms or solve world hunger. Even if vertical farming does seem like an implausible solution to the age old problem of vertical farming, it shouldn’t be discounted just because the science behind perfecting it is a work in progress. Large scale vertical farming projects like FarmedHere have managed to continually produce large yields of crops while implementing new ways to keep costs down (FarmedHere). The influx of fresh vegetables that these projects have managed to produce has already begun to supplement city food stores and supply local restaurants and markets (FarmedHere).

“Heron Hideaway” Photo by Kelly Peterson

From the research, it seems clear that vertical farming projects should be met with greater backing until it is proven that vertical farming cannot hope to create a sustainable indoor farm. In fact, even if The Plant proves to be unsuccessful in implementing the closed loop system, vertical farming should still be shown more support. Vertical farming doesn’t need to solve world hunger or completely eliminate the need for conventional
farms, it only needs to continue doing what it has so far accomplished, help to alleviate the burden placed on conventional farms. As Despommier said "It's the same situation we faced when we announced to the world that we were going to the moon, Pour money at the problem, and you see what happens." Perhaps vertical farming projects like The Plant really are little more than a pipe dream with the technology currently at their disposal, but if it’s possible to successfully put a man on the moon then successfully putting a farm in the city shouldn’t be too much of a stretch. Maybe vertical farms hold the key to solving the world’s hunger issue and maybe they don’t, either way, they have shown promise in helping to alleviate the issue and with further support and backing may prove to be an even more valuable asset.

Works Cited


“Catalyst, you’re on in five minutes,” yelled the stage hand as he meandered through the darkened hallway behind the stage. We had five short minutes until we made our first actual performance at the battle of the bands.

“Alright man, you ready for this?” our first guitarist Jordan asked with an excited yet reserved smile on his face. We damn well better have been ready by this point. Our last four rehearsals in our drummer Mike’s damp, unfinished basement were dedicated to this one song. “Yeah dude, I think we got this,” I answered back. As I grabbed my bass and slung the strap around my neck and shoulder, I looked at the pads of each of my fingers. I was now regretting the two hour practice we had earlier today as the hardened calluses on the tips of opened back up into fresh blisters. my fingers

Ken, our second guitarist, snuck up behind me as I was grabbing my cables out of my case. “Yo, hey, Spence!” My head turned up quickly as I turned around to see who it was. “Don’t forget to wait for the drums to start back up after your intro solo to come in.”

I answered back quickly. “Yeah dude, I got it. You gotta remember to not come in early there though.” He looked a bit annoyed that I called him out as he scratched his head, shifting his shoulder length orange, curly hair. “Listen, just chill out. We’ve rehearsed this shit so much by now I’m pretty sure we could all play it backwards.”
Just then, we could hear the distorted guitars and of the punk act before us abruptly cut out. The silence of the act finishing quickly exploded into a cacophony of screams and applause.

“Sounds like they nailed it,” Mike chimed in, with a little bit of a disappointed undertone in his voice. “We better step this up.”

The stage hand signaled for us to set up. We walked single file through the dark hall to get us onto the stage. The red curtains were closed and only the work lights were on making it difficult to see. The audience had died down to a murmur as the transition continued.

As I approached my bass amp, the bassist from the group before me was still pulling his gear.

“That was sick man, nice playing,” I stated, trying to be polite.

“Yeah,” he said as he turned his head up. He grabbed the rest of his gear and stood back up next to the amp. He turned around, almost smacking me in the face with his neon-green, hastily spiked mo-hawk and just made his way off stage.

“Jackass…” I muttered to myself. But now it was time to focus. I plugged in my ¼” cable to the amp and started a sound check. The newly formed blister on the tip of my index finger decided to burst open just as I played my first note. The practice earlier today seemed to do more harm than good for me as I now had to play on fresh skin.

“Just play through it, you gotta forget about it man,” Ken suggested as he saw me inspecting the damage.

Now that everyone was set, our time to light this place up was finally here.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” the announcer started over the PA system, “gear up for Catalyst!”

The curtains flew open and I was able to catch a quick view of the crowd of 700 people or so just before the
lights sprang on, blinding and scorching the stage like the mid-summer sun. The crowd started cheering as we got ourselves ready to play.

Mike gave me four clicks on his drumsticks for tempo. I played the first note of the intro solo as the sound of my bass swallowed the auditorium. I quickly forgot about the pain in my fingers while the adrenaline coursed through my body. Eight bars later, the heavy distortion of the guitars punched through the audience. Shortly after, Mike rolled in with a thunderous fill on drums.

I tried to look out in the crowd to see their reaction now that we were under way, but the luminosity of the lighting was too strong to make anything out.

Finally, the end of the song approached. We all looked at each other to sync up our last hit. Nailed it. The curtains started to close slowly. The lights were slowly fading. The crowd erupted again, just like the last set. But they were so loud that we couldn’t even talk to each other on stage. We began to strike our gear off stage. As I looked at my bass to unplug my cable, I noticed a drop sliding down the shiny black face of my bass. I looked at my fingers, which were now stained with my own blood.

“Well ain’t that the most metal shit?” Mike tried screaming over the crowd. We wandered off stage as the crowd finally died down. We only had one more sets until the results would be announced.
We ended up hanging out in the green room for the last set. Exhaustion had finally settled in. Before we knew it, the last set was done and the votes were in. We watched on the main monitor in the green room to hear the results. “With the votes in,” started the announcer again over the PA “We can now announce the winner of the 2007 battle of the bands.” I was sitting on my chair, barely enough to keep me sitting up. “The first place this year, with the closest vote margin we’ve seen here in a while is between Catalyst and A-phunk. It is with great joy that I give first place and $500 to….” His pause lasted longer than waiting in line at the DMV. “…A-phunk.”

“Dammit” Jordan yelled, throwing his empty bottle of water across the room. Everyone in the group was pissed off. They quietly picked up their gear and headed to their cars. As I packed my gear up, I could only think of how the crowd reacted. With a reaction like that, it was confusing as to how we didn’t win, especially with our preparation and determination. But as I was leaving, I couldn’t help but smile a bit. We played a flawless performance and we melted some faces. For a first gig, I’d say we kicked some serious ass.
“Do You Know That I Love You?”

by Frances Endencia

“Do you know that I love you?”
My father was lying in a hospital bed…
My heart jumped, deep inside I told myself “No, dad.”
I held his hand instead.
“Take care of your mother.” He tried to say something, but something held him back. That being said, he dozed off.

I was in the VA hospital. Without asking for my opinion, my father had consented to a new type of heart valve surgical replacement. They removed his heart valve and replaced it with a metallic valve about six months ago. To prevent complications of blood clotting, they used Coumadin as a blood thinner. When I found out about it, I was shocked. This is the same ingredient they use as rat poison. The drug causes internal bleeding in rat poison. Apparently, they give minute doses to humans for people with heart surgery or treatment.

As I sat beside him, I began to remember my brother’s birthday, six months ago.

June 21, 2008.

Two weeks before Jeremy’s birthday, Dad made the cheerful announcement while we were having dinner.

“The doctors want to do the right side of the heart. I am scheduled for heart surgery on Jeremy’s birthday.” The doctors informed me there is a high possibility I will not survive the surgery.”

Dad always wanted to be a doctor. As an orphan who had to work himself up, he could not afford to go to medical school. Growing up in America when racial prejudice existed, nobody wanted to give him a permanent home. By the time he finished high school, he had gone
to 17 schools. At the age of 14, he ran away from his foster parents, got a job and finished school on his own. Grandpa was Asian - brown, and grandma was white. At that time, whites were not supposed to mingle with other colored people. There was a “white” restroom, and a “colored” restroom. Things changed as immigrations started bringing other people from other countries to America.

I never met my grandma. The only thing I know is they took all her children away from her. In dad’s last visit with her, he described her to be a living vegetable, a byproduct of medicine. It was during a time when it was usual and customary treatment for licensed medical doctors to take out a piece of brain from their patients. Perhaps, it was done to make grandma incapable of taking care of her own children, a dark side of American Medicine.

Since dad could not be a medical doctor, he was so proud that I became a veterinarian. At least part of his dream came true. To participate in the medical development, he decided to donate his body to science. So, he was willing to participate in medical-surgical studies.

“Dad, look at your own medical record! You’re a guinea pig!” I exclaimed.

“Coumadin is rat poison…How can they give you rat poison as treatment!” It was hard for me to explain to him that there was something wrong.

“You have had your gallbladder removed, intestinal resection BECAUSE of Coumadin; heart valve removal in your left side. AND WHEN DID YOU GET A HEART CONDITION? All you have is muscular dystrophy. You NEVER had a problem with your heart!”

“He had his heart evaluated,” my mother tried to explain. “He was told he had a slow heart rate.”

“Why not use a pacemaker then?” I queried.

“This is a new heart treatment.” Dad replied.
“And what did they do? You cannot have surgery when you are on Coumadin. You will bleed to death.”

“They stopped my Coumadin treatment for a month before the surgery. On the operating table, they froze my body to subnormal temperature to slow down the circulation of the blood. Then they took out the valves on the left side and replaced it with a metal one. I cannot go to a room with a magnet, since it will stop my heart from beating.”

“And remember, if I do die, just donate my body to science. This way, there are no burial costs. VA will pay for any fees incurred.”

I was furious, scheduling a life threatening condition on Jeremy’s birthday. He finally agreed to have it rescheduled a week after.

“Do you want to hear my heart?” Dad asked.

Tic Tic Tic. In a quiet room, his heart beat loudly.

As I saw dad, asleep, I decided to go home. I was an engineering student, and I had exams in two weeks. I was having a hard time studying and keeping an eye on dad. I was on the path to a change in career.

My sisters were coming from out of town. It was then that I decided to concentrate on school and then I can stop a session to take care of dad.

February 14, 2009

The whole family was coming from out of town. I decided to clean up the house to prepare for their arrival. We all agreed to visit dad that night.

Dad was scheduled for radiation therapy that morning. I was contemplating whether I should stay with him or clean the house. I decided to do house work and visit him with the rest of the family.

The whole family was there. Even dad’s long lost sister came. We were all together. But time was running out.
Every August means the start to the new school year. Teachers awaiting their next group of kids, kids lining up outside of the school, “new” students are looking for new friends, and “old” students looking for their longtime friends. All in all, everyone is waiting to start a new chapter in their life. We all used to be in that position, especially me, and it just happened to be that one of my friends at my grade school was the Janitor, Mr. Neil. I have known Mr. Neil all of my life, and I have to say he is one hard worker. He makes sure that the school is presentable inside and out for everyone. I respect him for that, but sadly, others (co-workers) do not feel the same way. Mr. Neil would like to be respected for his hard work, but his co-workers keep pushing him down the social totem pole because of his job.

If you asked students from any school what their janitors looked like, many would have no idea because they look down on the person who cleans up after them. Nowadays, students would say a typical janitor would probably be a Mexican who speaks little English. Sadly, as stereotypical and racist as that sounds, that is what society has come to be and how they would label janitors today. Mr. Neil on the other hand is not Mexican and can speak English very well. Mr. Neil is actually just a natural born white American. The best way to describe a man like Mr. Neil is that he looks likes the Michelin Tire mascot! As funny as it sounds, that’s the best way I can describe him. Mr. Neil is tall in stature, and round around the waist area, but by no means is he fat. His hair is like that of John Travolta in the movie Grease, except instead of being black and luscious, it is grey and luscious. If there is one thing I have always noticed about him, it would have to be the glasses he wears every day. The glasses are not like those
of Erwin form the Disney show, *The Suite Life of Zach and Cody*. Instead, they look like aviators, just without the tinted lens. The kids at the school where he works had a similar description. My sister and her classmates said that Mr. Neil looks like the old grandpa from the movie *Up*, but with a happier attitude on life. The last trait that this janitor portrays is that he works so hard at making the school clean and in tip-top shape. He never seems to quit working and is always ready to take on the next mess.

What’s wonderful about Mr. Neil is that his history of being a janitor is not written in the work he does but instead in him. In other words, he is his own history. When you look at the man you can see it in his eyes and body, the toll that he has taken from the countless hours of work. His eyes show the countless years of dedication at making things clean at the school. He has seen the simplest of messes to the “grand daddy” of messes, and crazy, happy kids to super sad kids. From his body, you can tell that he is worn out to his wit, but still continues to push. He would like to stop working but he has a family to support, just like any other parent.

The co-workers don’t believe that cleaning up a school every day is that hard. They believe that it is more of a
chore that has to be repeated. The teachers believe that teaching students is a much harder task since they have to make every kid be successful in school. Now technically that is true, since the education needed for a teacher vs. a janitor don’t compare. According to Miller, “to become a teacher the general requirements are a bachelor’s degree in education, student teaching experience, and a teaching certificate” (Miller, 2010). Now the degrees and requirements do vary depending on the age group.

According to the website Snagajob, “a janitor does not have any educational requirements” (“Janitor,” 2010). The teachers win in the regard of formal education, but the teachers lose out on being a hard worker. Janitors actually work more hours for less pay than teachers do. According to Snagajob, the average pay is about “$10.31 per hour” (“Janitor,” 2010). It’s a sucky job for minimum wage, even though janitors work just as hard as or even harder than other employees.

Now Mr. Neil has told me that his belittling is only caused by a few teachers, but is now growing into all of the teachers. I feel for the man some times because you have to imagine being in his shoes for 60 hours out of the week cleaning and repairing. I just wished that his co-workers could just open their eyes and see that he is working just as hard at his job as they are. Mr. Neil has done everything he could possibly do, bringing up the situation to his boss and even talking to the teachers that pick on him about it. What Mr. Neil gets in return is laughter or no response.

Sadly, Mr. Neil is still working this job and is still facing the same situation but with a twist. As a friend of his, all I can do is give him advice. I tell him to “ignore the haters and push forward because someday you will be on top.” He took this quote to heart and is now looking even happier than ever. With Mr. Neil’s situation, this can be relatable to many people, working with co-workers that
think that they’re better because of their status in the workplace. I just wanted him to see that when the going gets tough, he should just keep pushing till the end, because, who knows, “You might have the final say in it.”

References


Trapped
by Anthony Catalano

Trapped inside these walls
That seems everlasting and tall.
It’s hard to keep faith every night
I close my eyes knowing not to cry and
question my God.

I pray for a better tomorrow,
Knowing change comes from deep within.
I’d rather they come now more than ever,
But if I could rewind back the hands of time I
wish we got out.

I bend my knees and pray toward the sky.
The sun is now setting showing colors of
yellows reds and oranges,
For darkness will soon come.
Until then I wait and pray,
For I am no longer trapped inside these walls.
Volcano
by Ruben Soriano

The wind struggles to reach the top; his wide shoulders washed the beauty of the sky. At the pick, the green trees dance as the wind caresses the limbs. This is the place where peace came to mind, where the sense meets the soul, and the need of the man are minimized to hear and feel the beauty of nature. The incline way to reach the top creates a challenge, but the desire to conquer is imperative to dominate nature’s course. The natives tell stories about this place; some still believe that the warrior that rested under the white cover is protecting them. As the spring comes to and the flowers bloom, the locals march to the top to show respect for the blessing that nature has provided them.

In the winter the cold feels like your bones are being crushed, but the majestic view provides you with a moment to realize how insignificant you are compared to the power of nature. The rough way to reach the top may be complicated for some, since oxygen is not at the same if you compare it to sea level, but once you reach the top and take a look at what you have walked to get there, the sense of accomplishment is great along with the view that lay before you. This is my experience and how I visualize my trip to Ixtlacualt, an active volcano located at the skirts of Mexico City.
Being shot is a truly unique experience. Combat alone is an experience few have ever experienced, but getting wounded is on a whole other level. When I got hit, there wasn’t anyone cheering my name or cool theme music playing in the background. Real life is far less glamorous.

My platoon was finishing up what had been a routine patrol in Logar Province, Afghanistan, when a strange set of events took place. An individual on a motorcycle began acting very strangely when we showed up. He drove around us in circles, all the while studying our position and talking on a cell phone. When we approached him about his behavior, he was clearly uneasy and kept looking around as if backup were on the way. We suspected he was edgy because he thought we already knew about his dealings with the local troublemakers we were trying to find.

The reality is that we had no prior intelligence about any specific individual we should be on the lookout for. Intelligence or no intelligence though, this guy’s behavior warranted investigation. After a short series of questions, we decided he needed to come with us for further questioning on our compound.

We had no idea at the time, but we had just stirred the proverbial hornets’ nest. We had a little over two kilometers to walk back to our base of operations, Combat Outpost Baugess, a short trip that without enemy contact wouldn’t even take a half hour to complete. Unfortunately, the enemy didn’t need a half hour; ten minutes was enough.

The mid-day sun was perched high above us in a forever blue sky. If not for the energy-draining heat, it would have been a perfect summer day. With our prisoner in tow, the platoon began marching back to base,
confident we had captured another bad guy in our own private War on Terror.

We quickly found our pace, followed by an enormous dust cloud that both encircled and clung to the platoon. Dirt and sand in Afghanistan isn’t the same consistency as the top soil native to the United States, not even the kind found on American Beaches. Afghan sand is baby powder fine, and billows high in the sky like a smoke cloud. The slightest disturbance creates a plume that only the blind can miss.

Without warning, rocket propelled grenades came screaming into the platoon and AK-47 rounds were kicking up dirt all around us! We had been in more than our fair share of firefights. Enough to gauge what is heavy resistance, and what is negligible. This was out of the ordinary. The volume of gunfire and explosions was enough to grab everyone’s attention and make us wish for better cover.

The enemy wanted their guy back and they wanted him bad. We quickly organized into a lazy “W” formation and began returning effective fire. Though it made us feel
better, it wasn’t quelling the enemy’s attack. Even though we immediately radioed for air cover, it would be a while before support in the form of Apache helicopters would be on station and we couldn’t just wait in place until they arrived.

Our Patrol Leader, Staff Sergeant Camacho, began yelling, “Bound back! Keep moving!”

His order meant that we should continue our withdrawal back to the compound while providing overwatch for any moving elements. Soon we were moving, one element ready to provide cover fire in a moment’s notice while another leapfrogged behind them. The concept is simple on paper, but dangerous and tiring in the real world. Even on flat, open terrain, bounding is both confusing and exhausting.

We were doing it under intense enemy fire with a ton of obstacles in our way. We had to go over or around qalat walls, through multi-tiered and well irrigated orchards, and contend with the steep grade and oxygen depriving high-altitude Afghanistan is well known for. After a few minutes of bounding around each other, the gunfire died down and we found ourselves speaking in whispers instead of barking commands. The sound most evident was the platoon’s heavy, labored breathing as we fought to catch our breath.

A minute later, a lone Apache gunship entered our airspace and began raining withering fire on any and all suspected enemy locations. Their favorite hiding spot was behind a wall, or better yet, inside a building. Sometimes though they were foolish enough to crouch behind a bush or tree, a trick that might work against a foe confined to the ground. An Apache gunship though has no blind spots; it is a formidable foe.

We had the upper hand, and our attitudes reflected it, but all was not safe. A few lone gunmen opened fire and I immediately felt some of the worst pain I have ever felt in
my life. It felt like someone had swung a sledge hammer as hard as they could and hit my left forearm with it. Not only that, but the hammer had hit dead center on my funny bone. I immediately dove to the ground, writhing in pain and praying no one else was hit.

It wasn’t long before our medic, Doc Duffany, was helping me get my bearings and patching me up.

“Carrick,” Doc yelled, “you alright?”

“I’ll live,” I replied. “How bad is it?”

Doc eyed my forearm for a second. “Not bad. Blood loss is minimal.”

After a few minutes I was bandaged and ready to move. The enemy had sent a small party forward to harass our withdrawal; a gutsy move considering our aircraft would easily spot them and take them out. They hung around for a minute, before realizing it prudent to get out of Dodge before the Apache got fixed on their location.

Soon, I was back on my feet and ready to continue the mission. Some had offered to carry my gear, but I refused. I didn’t want unnecessary burden to be placed on anyone in case the enemy tried to come after us again. It was painful, but I made it back under my own power and was soon flown to the nearest hospital to have the bullet removed and receive further treatment.

Though it has been a long time since that incident, I can see it clearly in my mind as if it were yesterday. Thinking back on it, it is the normality of the situation that strikes me most. Not the pressure of the moment or the pain of being hit, but the fact that it didn’t play out the way it does in movies. I think anyone would agree that being wounded in combat is anything but ordinary, but to those who have experienced it first hand, the moment is never what you are expecting.
Rosemary is a woman with a sturdy 5 foot healthy stature, and has a complexion of smooth, dark, honey. On this chilly, windy, cloudy day she is cultivating her garden of rocks and flowers acquired through her life. She is quick to volunteer each memory of how she acquired each beautiful rock and flower. She never would have had this garden of memories if it were not for the brave decision she made 50 years ago to leave the safe haven of sisterhood. After a decade of her defining years, Rosemary chose to be the first to leave the sisterhood with the faith of a fresh start. With the smell of rain in the air and ominous clouds threatening to open, she continues working and does not stop; she is a determined woman and has her mind set to finish what she started.

The youngest of four children, Rosemary lived in a single-parent household in a low-income Chicago neighborhood. She spent her time after school at a safe haven known as “The Settlement.” The Settlement, run by the Cordi-Marian Sisters, had a mission to reach out to and help women and children. The sisters would divide the children into groups and teach them to sew, needlepoint and weave rugs. They also offered piano, guitar and accordion lessons. The boys were able to do wood working and play baseball and basketball. They always had something fun to do. Rosemary felt loved by the Sisters and enjoyed everything The Settlement had to offer. Doing the things she enjoyed in an environment where she felt loved enticed Rosemary to want to share her experience with others. At the young and impressionable age of 15, Rosemary joined the sisterhood of the Cordi-Marians.

The Cordi-Marian sisters had recently acquired a piece of land in San Antonio Texas and sent Rosemary there
along with other newly joined sisters known as novice sisters. The novice sisters needed to learn how to be self-sufficient because in the end they would be sent out into the world to be missionaries helping women and children. They used the land as a farm and had cows, pigs and a vegetable garden. Rosemary worked alongside a dozen other novice sisters and what one would consider work, Rosemary considered enjoyable! “We had fun with everything we did; we would joke around a lot, play a lot; we even had fun when it came time to be silent. Summertime would be fun picking the corn, but before the corn came up we pulled weeds row by row. We would milk the cows and make cheese. We made our own clothes from used clothes donated from the Good Will. We made our own meals from our garden. Most of us never had a boyfriend before; we were still innocent and still kids.”
Rosemary made the best out of every situation and built lifelong friendships in the sisterhood.

Entering the Cordi-Marian sisterhood also meant taking a vow of obedience. The Mistress of Novices taught the sisters that everything they did was to be done to the best of their knowledge and ability. “You are doing it to please the Lord. When you are done you step back and ask yourself if what you did is truly your best. If it is, then the Lord will be pleased.” They drove this mentality into Rosemary. Telling Rosemary what to do, and her being able to accomplish everything, gave her a sense of security. She had a blind faith and believed that if whatever she did, she did her best, in the end everything would be okay.

There were rules and bells for everything. At 15 years of age rules and guidelines made life predictable and comforting; as she matured the rules and bells became hindersome. They had one rule in particular that left a lasting impact on Rosemary; the Head Mistress filtered the mail. One day a letter did come in for Rosemary informing her that her mother passed away. The Head Mistress withheld this information from Rosemary to not distract her from her vocation. When Rosemary did learn of her mother passing an emptiness and sadness overcame her. Headaches set in from periodic to daily. Since one could only receive medicine if granted permission, sometimes Rosemary just had to deal with the headaches because they denied her request. They told her not everyone has access to medicine and that part of being in training to be a missionary involved learning to accept and be without.

Over time the rules became too much for Rosemary. When she started to question her faith she knew it was time to leave. She would be the first to leave the Cordi-Marian sisters. Bravely Rosemary told the Head Mistress that being a Cordi-Marian sister was not working out for her; she was homesick. Without trying to change her mind
they accepted her decision. With her mother no longer around and no home to go to, Rosemary, though worried about her future, held to her believe that if she did her best God would be by her side and she would be okay.

After a decade in the convent, at the age of 25, Rosemary left the Cordi-Marian sisters, went back to Chicago and moved in with an older sibling. Her actions inspired other sisters from the convent to also leave, and they too went back to Chicago and were able to reunite with Rosemary. Some became roommates and helped each other start new lives. The bonds formed 50 years ago still exist today.

While visiting her lifelong friends over the years, Rosemary has been known to take a flower or rock from their gardens for her garden at home. Looking back into her garden as a gentle rain begins falling Rosemary remembers the path that brought her here. Her garden is a living and growing reminder that when you do something to the best of your ability and you know your action will please God, anything is possible.

Drawings by Kulsoom Ahmed
I really wonder on what the hell is going on in the world. Maybe everything in life happens for good. Everyone is searching. I am worried. I don’t know where to start. I am concerned. School makes me nervous. I will have to prioritize. Stress, goals, a good choice, a new wife. Now that I’m here I don’t want to leave till I finish. To make sure I don’t let myself or my loved ones down – my end of the bargain.

It’s difficult for me to wake up early. Rainy days make me sleepy. I can’t be productive as I want to be. What is really important right now? Is it the band, the boyfriend, the jobs, or school? How am I going to live with Charlie? Everything changes: The way the rice is cooked, the way we go to school, and the way we live. We are free to go to school and where ever we want. I’m sure there will be a realization in a few weeks, but for now I do not see it. Life is not just about studying but it is also about learning from your mistakes. I wonder if I have gotten better. I miss my mom. I wrote a quote for her last night saying, “For the world you were just one, but for me you are the whole world.” Maaa… I’m still getting used to it and getting with the flow. I think great things will happen.
The poem on the previous page is a compilation of words, phrases and sentences written in a reflective exercise on change by students in Professor Dufresne’s September 2014 COLL148 class. Contributors include Monica Breitweiser, Michael Cianciolo, Dim Suan Cing, Shawn Dorsey, Eliazar Flores, Alexandra Garibay, Chris Hedlund, Iliya Iliev, Adeeba Khan, Rudabah Khan, and Samrah Khan.
Connections 2014
http://www.add.devry.edu/literary_magazine.html
mdufresne@devry.edu
630-652-8244