We are continually accepting submissions for upcoming issues of *Connections*. If you have poems, short stories, essays, memoirs or other writings that you would like to see published, submit as a word attachment to one or both of these mailboxes:

- mdufresne@devry.edu
- rlawrence@devry.edu

We also accept drawings and photographs.

We look forward to your *Connections* submissions!

Robert Lawrence
Michael Dufresne

Cover Photo by M. Dufresne
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2012 STORY CONTEST WINNERS

1ST PLACE: A Warrior’s Entry by Mike Duce

2ND PLACE: The Alley Way, by Rita Roberts

This issue features contributions by Yorkville High School students from Ms. Valdvogel’s creative writing class. These students participated in the DeVry/Addison Young Writers Workshop, conducted in February, 2012 by Professors Lawrence, Hayes and Schumacher. “Fools Gold” and “Storm” were written prior to the workshop; the other pieces were composed during the workshop. The contributors: Sophie Bolaños, Danny Bertucci, Ryan Barkauskas, Ryan Barkauskas, Shannon Kicher, Alisyn Ledermann, Christina Reynolds.
The Alley Way

by

Rita Roberts

As I walked the few short blocks to work that morning, I noticed how October had brought with it cooler, crisper, fall-like weather. I also reflected on how the week had gone so far and how busy it had been. I knew if I made it through the day things would slow down, but I had to make it through the day first. I knew it was going to be a long, busy, and possibly crazy day for me, but I am always up for a challenge. It was undeniably the height of the political campaign season and we, in Iowa, were in the spotlight that day. President Clinton was scheduled to make a visit that afternoon to the newspaper across the alley from where I worked.

As I started to turn down the long, dark alley that led to the employee entrance that I usually used, I was stopped by all of the delivery trucks and people that were occupying it already that morning. I decided it was best if I used another entrance that day. So I turned around and walked the extra half block or so to the brightly lit, red Marriott sign where I entered work.

“Good Morning Mrs. Roberts,” I heard from the bell captain on duty.

I turned toward the familiar voice and was welcomed by Felix, our head bell captain. He looked ready for the day dressed in his black pants, crisp white shirt and red jacket.

“Good Morning Felix,” I replied. “I see things are already busy this morning,” I said as I walked past.

“Sure are,” he said with a smile on his face. “I have a feeling this is nothing compared to the surprises that we could see later,” Felix said in a questioning tone.

“You may be right. But there is nothing wrong with a few surprises or a little excitement, right Felix?” I said with a little chuckle as I continued walking through the lobby toward the door that led to my office.

“Oh we will see about that. Be careful what you wish for Mrs. Roberts,” he said with a big smile as he opened the door for me.

Once in my office I put down my things and noticed a memo that was sitting on my desk that read, Important Bulletin
for Today – Thursday, October 4th. I picked it up and started reading through it. I pulled out my bright green highlighter and started highlighting the events and the corresponding times that concerned me. I knew staying on schedule was going to be the best way to avoid any problems or surprises.

“One more announcement for today Mrs. Roberts,” said Jim from the front desk as he held out a sheet of paper. I took the paper and started to read the announcement. It was a reminder that the back alley employee entrance was not to be used between 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. At that time the President would be gone and we could resume using it again. That was the door I usually used; however, I had a strong feeling I would be leaving well after that for the evening so I didn’t worry too much about it.

As I completed one event and moved to the next, I noticed how smooth and fast the day was going. I entered the lobby and detected a heightened level of excitement that wasn’t present earlier. I suspected President Clinton had arrived next door.

“The President’s limo just drove down the alley,” Felix said as I walked past.

I looked at my watch and replied, “Right on time too, that doesn’t happen very often.” I continued throughout the remainder of the afternoon, as I had earlier in the day, making sure everything was running smoothly.

“Have a good night Rita,” I heard Kelly, one of the girls in my department say.

“Is it that time already?” I asked.

“Yes,” Kelly said. “Are you leaving?”

“I have a few more things to do before I leave. Have a good night,” I replied.

“See you tomorrow then. For the most part I think the day went well, no big problems and no real surprises,” Kelly said as she grabbed her things and started to leave.

“And that is okay with me,” I said as she walked out.

I completed a final check of the events scheduled for later in the evening and finalized a few last minute things. Once I was certain everything was in order, I went to my office to grab my things so I could head home for the night. I reached for my jacket and started to put it on as I looked up at the clock. It
was just past 5:00 p.m. Making note of the time, I left my office and headed toward the back alley door that I usually used. I grabbed for the handle of the heavy, grey, steel door that led to the dock. I pushed it open and took one step out onto the raised cement platform.

“Freeze!” yelled someone.

“Stop right there!” I heard someone scream. “Don’t move!”

My heart skipped a beat as I frantically looked up to see a big burly man dressed in black to my left, and another even bigger man to my right. I stumbled as I tried to get clear of the door.

“Don’t Move!” one man yelled as he raised his gun. *

“What are you doing here?” the two said at almost the same time.

I could feel my whole body shaking. It took me a minute to focus and for a brief period of time I was unable to speak. I could see that the men were dressed in black from head to toe. They wore black pants, black boots, black shirts, and black jackets with Secret Service written on the front. Both men had a black bag strapped to their back, an earpiece in their ear, and each held a gun. I managed to get out, “Rita Roberts. Here let me show you my ID.” Not thinking clearly I started to reach my hand into my right jacket pocket where I had my Marriott ID.

Do not move or reach for anything,” one of the men yelled. “Do you understand?

I was trying to analyze what was happening when suddenly, out of nowhere, I saw a third man rapidly approaching me. In a matter of seconds he covered a great deal of space and was now standing within just a few feet of me with a gun in his hand.

“Ma’am do you hear us?” one of the men in black snarled.

“Okay, Okay, I won’t move,” I said. I was trembling as I started to put my arm back down to my side. “I thought you wanted to see my ID?” I heard squeak out of my mouth.

Careful not to move anything very far or very fast, I made sure my arms were by my sides so the men could see them. I could see one of the men talking to someone through a microphone in his ear. He stopped talking and started signaling
to someone. As the man was waving his arms the gentleman who was closest to me took one large step and was now right next to me. He startled me and I must have moved the slightest bit, because I felt him grab my arm.

"Who are you?" he said as he looked down on me.

"Rita Roberts, I work at the Marriott," I replied. "I have my ID. It is in my coat pocket, if you want to see it? Or you can call someone and they will tell you."

The man was now relaying the information to someone via his earpiece. As he continued to have hold of my arm, I could not help but notice how big and tall he was. It seemed like a long time that we stood in that one position, but in reality it was probably only a minute or so.

"She is okay. I just confirmed she is an employee of the Marriott," the man in front of me yelled to the man by my side.

*Yes, that is what I have been saying.* I thought to myself, realizing I should not speak out loud with the three men, all with guns, still so close.

"Ma'am," the gentleman said. "Stay here with me for just another minute or two and then we are clear."

*Clear, clear from what,* I thought to myself. "Yes sir," I replied. As I continued to stand next to the gentleman I tried to get my legs to stop shaking and my heart to stop racing. As I was trying to compose myself again, I could see his name was Mitch, according to his jacket.

A brief moment later the two agents that were in front of me started communicating with someone. Simultaneously they both rushed to the door that was right across the alley from where I was standing. I must have moved slightly with the commotion, because as a reflex Mitch grabbed my arm again. He guided me a few steps back so we were away from the stairs that led down from the raised platform we had been standing on. Just as he moved me back, a large black SUV came pulling into the alley. Directly across from me a small door opened and out came a group of four or five men dressed in dark suits. The men looked around for a minute then made a hand motion toward the open doorway. The men were partially obstructing the doorway but I could see another gentleman was walking out. He was turned slightly away from me, but I could see he was quite tall and had a head of greying hair. He remained there
for a short time and then he turned toward the SUV. I could see clearly now that it was President Clinton. He stood between the doorway and the SUV talking to a few people who had followed him out of the building. He looked distinguished dressed in a dark grey suit and red tie. He had a big bright smile on his face and seemed to be engaged in a friendly conversation. I continued to stand motionless next to Mitch and watch the President, in awe of how close we were. He was taller and larger than I had imagined and there was an air of confidence and power about him. He seemed larger than life, yet his relaxed demeanor with the small group of people made him seem somehow less intimidating. They continued to talk and laugh until one of the men in the dark suits announced it would be time for the President to depart. With that the President began shaking hands with the people around him. President Clinton was very charismatic and spent a brief moment talking to each person as he shook their hand.

“Don’t move,” I heard Mitch say to me.

“Okay,” I replied still trying to comprehend what was happening. The President was now getting into the backseat of the black vehicle which was only a few feet from where I was standing. A brief time later the window rolled down as I stood spellbound. Inside I could clearly see the President sitting in the back seat. He looked up in my direction with a smile on his face and waved to someone. The SUV then drove off.

That someone had to be me, I thought. I was
the only one in sight except for Mitch who was still hanging on to my arm and was looking in the direction of the other agents.

“The President is gone,” Mitch said into his microphone. “A little late, but he is on his way. We are clear,” he said.

“Okay, you are free to go,” Mitch said to me as he released my arm.

“Thank you,” I said as I tried to get my legs under me so they could carry me down the stairs to ground level. I slowly descended the stairs and started walking down the alley toward where my car was parked.

“Ma’am,” I heard from close behind me.

I turned around and looked up to see the three men now standing together, only a few yards from where I was.

“Sorry for the inconvenience, but you really surprised us,” I heard Mitch speak.

Oh you don’t know surprised! I thought to myself. “I understand.” I said to the gentlemen with a little smirk on my lips as I started down the long alley.

As I thought back to how my day had begun, I couldn’t help but recall my conversation with Felix and thought to myself... Yes, Felix; be careful what you wish for!
Urban Echoes

1
Hip hip hooray
We want jobs.
Bang, boom, clank.
The sound of a steel ball hitting
Sweeping the white cobweb.
The crowd rallies tonight.
Shout out to the golden hero
Celebration, peace and harmony

2
Stone wants to be heard.
Crying on the landing sounds
Like pouring rain.
Sniffles, sniffles
A quitting time, quitting
We saunter round the dark block
Plunk, plunk, plunk, plunk, plunk
Come right back again.

3
Late for a meeting
I haul down the gray pavement
Tick tock tick tock.
Black panthers are growing
Blue birds are chirping.

Urban Echoes was compiled by Professor Lawrence from a HUMN-303 poetry workshop led by Tom Roby and Jenene Ravesloot. Contributors: Daniel Cahill, Julian Cazares, Stephanie Delagarza, David Ho, Lloyd Johnson, Mark Musni, Aaron Paras, Katherine Payida, Jasper Sulit
Frozen Apple
by
Ernest Mack

It was 4:45 in the A.M. on Tuesday when I heard the alarm clock blasting the tunes of the morning. I rolled over and reached for the snooze button so that I could catch just a few more winks before I would have to rise from my slumber and prepare for another day. I knew that I had some preparations to do before I headed to airport to leave on my journey to New York. I was a Technical Instructor for a software company and had to teach sessions there for the remainder of the week. I also was a single father of four children living with me ranging from 11 to 15 years of age. So, I had to make sure that they, as well as their caretaker had final instructions for rest of the week of my absence.

I arrived at Reagan National Airport, checked in and boarded my 6:30 am Delta Shuttle flight to LaGuardia Airport in New York. I travelled so frequently all over the world so this short, hour or less flight was going to be a breeze. I had done this flight so much that I knew most of the flight attendants and they knew me. “You again, Mr. Mack,” asked one of the flight attendants as I made my way to my seat. I replied with a smile and of course a wisecrack of my own. As the plane barreled down the runway and we became airborne, I leaned my seat back and put on my Bose noise-cancelling headphones and began to listen to jazz saxophonist David Sanborn with my eyes closed just “chillaxing.” Before I knew it, I heard the pilot making the announcement that we were on our initial descent into New York City.

“Bring your seats to an upright and locked position and stow your seat tables and also please turn off and stow all electronic devices as we prepare for landing,” the flight attendant’s voice emitted over the planes intercom system.

As I often do, I began to feel the energy of the city, as it has always been one of my favorite cities. I have always enjoyed Manhattan. I was there the previous week teaching classes in the World Trade Center and was going to be returning to that site the following week to teach more classes. But on that day
my destination was Long Island to teach at the corporate offices of Canon USA. After touchdown, taxi, and disembarking the plane I claimed my luggage, hailed a Yellow taxicab and was on my way.

Upon arrival at my location, I paid the taxicab driver and headed inside. At that point it was roughly around 8:15 am, and I had plenty of time before my class started at 9:00 am. I announced myself to the security officer, stated my purpose for being there and gave them my business card and the contact person’s name, which was Kim. He called Kim to let her know I had arrived and she immediately came to meet me in the lobby to escort me to my classroom. Kim was a tall, slender young lady with long, curly, brown hair. She exhibited a very pleasant and jovial personality. She walked with confidence and surety of her very existence. After shaking hands and exchanging a few pleasantries, we headed toward the classroom. Once we were in the classroom, Kim showed me what I needed to know regarding logistics and also where everything was. After a few more minutes of small talk, Kim left me to finish my preparation for the start of my class. It was almost “Showtime”!

Nine o’clock rolled around and I was still the only person in the classroom. Typically people would have already begun to trickle and sign in, but at that point…nothing. I was expecting 12 people for this class. I continued to wait patiently but now it was around 9:25 am and not a soul had shown up. I checked my calendar to make sure my dates were correct and sure enough the dates were correct. But now I am asking myself, where is everybody? Do I need to start making phone calls to see what my next steps should be? Well just about ten minutes after that, finally a student showed up. I was delighted and perplexed at the same time. Before I could ask him about everyone else, he said to me, “I think everyone else is going to be running late for class because of some accident in Manhattan.”

I replied, “What kind of an accident?”

He said, “Apparently a plane has accidently crashed into a building in Manhattan.”

My first thought was that he probably meant a helicopter or maybe something like that. My reply was, “What do you mean
a plane has crashed into a building in Manhattan? Which building and do you mean maybe a helicopter or something?”

He said, “No…the report on the radio said it was a plane and the building was one of the World Trade Center towers.”

I was still thinking that it a helicopter or maybe a small private commuter plane or something of that nature. I immediately tried to go onto the internet to see what I could find out and it was not working. He told me that there was a television in the break room and that we could probably find out something on the news. So we headed that way.

We arrived at the break room where there were a number of people glued to the television and totally immersed in the newscaster’s report. The first thing I noticed was a look of horror and shock on their faces, and I knew immediately that there was something seriously wrong. As the words and images being projected by the television became clear to me, I also took on that same look. There was an eerie silence that gripped the room and the people that were in it. No one spoke a word. You could only hear the television and see the images of these unconscionable acts being perpetrated right before our very eyes. There were people scurrying through the streets to escape the explosions and the debris that accompanied the disaster. There was smoke that consumed the air and bellowed into the sky. There were images of people covered with white soot from the smoke looking like they had been rolling in flour. There was also charred glass that rained down from the exploding windows of the towering skyscrapers as though there was a hailstorm occurring on a bright sunny day. In addition to that, there were the absolute unimaginable images of people jumping from the windows of these skyscrapers in a desperate attempt to escape the intense fire and heat that engulfed the offices they occupied. Some of the people were holding hands as they jumped to the impending death that awaited them below. As there were people running away in fear, there were the brave men and women of both the fire and police department, as well as some civilians running toward the disaster in an attempt to aid and assist those who were injured during these horrific events. Despite this horror, we stayed glued to the television absorbing all we could in order to try to make sense of what was happening. I then slipped out to return
phone calls from people that had been calling to check my whereabouts and how I was doing. After that, I returned to the room just in time to hear the reports of a plane that had crashed into the Pentagon. My focus immediately shifted to my kids. At this point I frantically began to contact them and their caretaker, as my home was not too far from the Pentagon. I eventually was able to make contact and my fears were quelled.

September 11, 2001 was certainly in the category of “A date, which will live in infamy,” as coined by former President Franklin D. Roosevelt after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. It was like the Big Apple had been brought to its collective knees and the people were “frozen” in fear.

This was a pivotal point in my life for many reasons. One, it opened my eyes to the vulnerability of the United States to a terrorist attack. Two, it reaffirmed my understanding that tomorrow is not promised to any of us. I think we sometimes get complacent about our approach to being appreciative of our mere existence. Thirdly, it allowed me to see first hand the resolve and the strength of the people of our nation. The incidents of that day and the fallout from the days that followed really galvanized the people of this country. I remember going down to the blood bank to give blood the day after. I could see the people rallying around one another in an effort to offer assistance in any way they could. We absorbed their best shot and we came back swinging. As we come up on the eleventh anniversary of this heinous act perpetrated against our country, I am reminded that we can survive anything if we just work together for the good of humanity.
Three Haiku

Scorching black top
Broken chalk leaves blue fingers
Looks like rain.
—Ryan Barkauskas

Trees, leaves all fall off
Kids rake to jump and fall in
Just to rake again.
—Danny Bertucci

Powdery snow
Swirling in the wind
Showers the air
—Christinah Reynolds
I turn off the ignition of my rumbling Jeep and as I am about to get out of the car I stop to take in the sight of the neighborhood I’ve seen a dozen times before. The people across the street have their usual Christmas decorations up, covered in a fresh layer of snow from the night before. I turn to my right and admire my grandparent’s home, the place where I have so many fond memories. The same place I have spent every Christmas Eve for as long as I can remember. However, this Christmas Eve is different, this Christmas Eve will be my grandmother’s last. I look up and realize my mom is watching me from the window and waving for me to come inside. I grab my bag of presents and step out into the frigid Chicago air.

I walk through the front door and I am greeted with a wave of warmth, along with the wonderful smell of food cooking in the kitchen. I place my gifts under the tree and head over to say hello to my family. I am welcomed first by my mom.

“Merry Christmas, Baby, what were you doing sitting out in the cold,” my mother asks.

“I was just taking a minute for myself, getting prepared. How’s gram?” I respond.

“She is doing pretty well tonight, she has been asking for you, why don’t you go in and see her,” my mother suggests.

I walk down the ever familiar hallway to find my grandparent’s bedroom. My grandma is propped up in her wheelchair and immediately looks delighted as I walk into the room. I smile wide, but a pang of sadness tugs at my heart. She looks radiant in her black dress covered in silver sparkles; I just hope she feels as well as she looks.

“Hey gram! You look amazing,” I say as I place a gentle kiss on her forehead. She nods her thank you and reaches for my hand. The rare disease my grandmother developed has left her without the capability to control her muscles, which makes it very hard for her to talk as well as any other normal activity. In the past years I have watched her condition worsen, as it started with her losing the function of her right hand and progressed throughout her entire body. My grandmother begins
struggling to tell me something, but with her condition it just sounds like mumbling to me. I strain and try as hard as possible to make out her words, wishing with all my might I could figure out what she wants to tell me. Her 24 hour caregiver steps up and with her thick Pilipino accent says, “You are her favorite.” My eyes begin to fill with tears but I so desperately want to act strong in front of my grandma. I stand so my face is out of her line of sight, I wipe away my tears, take a deep breath and say, “I love you grandma, how about we go join the party?” She nods again with her agreement.

I push her wheelchair out of her bedroom and we make our way out into the living room. I catch sight of my mother and I know she can read the sadness on my face. I place my grandmother in a spot facing the Christmas tree which she loves dearly. Weeks before tonight, the family gathered in this same place to help decorate the tree. My grandma was the supervisor and gave a nod for the ornaments she wanted placed on the tree. I subconsciously wonder to myself if my grandmother is scared. I know I am scared of losing her, but is she scared to leave? To push thoughts of the inevitable out of my mind, I make my way downstairs to greet the rest of my family. Although the atmosphere is filled with the holiday spirit, I can’t help but think that everyone has the same thing on their minds tonight. My mind begins to drift back to previous years here in this home. One Christmas Eve I will never forget was when I cut my finger open. I probably wasn’t more than 6 years old. I was opening one of my presents when the cardboard of the box sliced into the tip of my finger. My grandmother ran to my side to help me. She was a retired nurse and knew just what to do to comfort me. I remember feeling completely at ease knowing she would take care of me. In no time my grandma had me all clean, bandaged, and back to my presents.

The night goes on as it usually does lots of eating, drinking, and opening of presents. When the night starts to come to a close, the whole family gathers around for our annual group portrait. Once again I feel a slight change in the atmosphere as I think everyone knows one thing: this will be my grandmother’s last Christmas Eve portrait. I try to squeeze in as close to my grandma’s wheelchair as I can, and I give her a big, happy grin. She smiles back with a nod. A moment later we are all staring at
the red blinking light on the camera and smiling wide. I know for certain I don’t need this portrait to remember tonight. This special moment with my family, especially my grandma will be etched into my mind forever.
A Warrior’s Entry

by

Mark Duce

Dedicated to Phatasaire

The wind was cold and frosty as it pushed against the windows of Edan's room making them crackle. The walls of his room creaked from the pressure that the wind was giving them. Edan walked up to his window and pushed the small curtain aside and looked outside at the ports. The ocean water was swishing and swaying, smashing up against the docks. He ducked down to look at the sky and see the direction of the clouds. They were being pushed by the wind and heading north in clumped groups. He stepped back from his window and returned to the backpacks on the floor near his dressers. An array of clothes was on the floor and shuffled around his room. As he reached for his backpack, the door to his room opened slightly and the scruffy face of his father peered in.

“Edan,” his father said glancing around his son's room. He pushed on the door gently to let part of his body through. His eyes were jetting back and forth on his face, searching for something.

“What is it, Dad?” questioned Edan as he got up and took a few steps to the door. He stopped as his father had reached for the long, silver rod leaning up against the wall. The chain dangling from the top of it scratched along the wall and clanged with the rod as the crescent moon sickle at the end of it swayed back and forth.

“I need your weapon for a bit,” Edan's father said as he carefully lifted the weapon. He grabbed a hold of the chain and sickle with his other hand. “We’ll be leaving in about fifteen minutes. Try to pack light.” His father glanced at the mess of his son's room and chuckled at it. He left the room in a hurry. Edan shut the door and returned to the backpack on the floor.
“I can't believe that today came so fast,” Edan said in a low tone. He shuffled through one pile and took out a few shirts, each of a single color and packed them neatly into the pack. He let out a small sigh and began to speak again.

“My name is Edan Iceroot. I live on an island that has been waged in a war for the past few decades now. Sections of the land have been split up amongst two major sides and each day, I hear about fights that break out between them.” Edan paused for a moment and folded up two pairs of pants, stuffing them into the pack next to the shirts. “Each year, these two sides have hundreds to thousands of new recruits come in from all parts of the land, wishing to join their forces in the war. Furia is one side that wishes to purify the land by eliminating anyone who doesn't follow their leader's ideals. Calmare, the other side, has their own ideals as well and wish to prevent the land and possibly the world from being destroyed. It's a never-ending cycle of give and take.” Edan's voice dropped and quickly
became silent as the door to his room opened a second time. This time, his mother had peeked into his room before coming.

“Good. I wanted to make sure that you weren't changing.” Her voice was calm and gentle as she carefully shut the door. “I was wondering who you were talking to and I thought your father was in here.”

“I was just talking to myself,” Edan replied to his mother as he got up. “Dad came in here and took my weapon for something. I'm not sure what.” His mother nodded in response and reached down to pick up some of his clothes by the door.

“Your room is never a mess like this. You do know that your father mentioned not to bring too much clothes with you. You have to travel light.” Edan looked around his room at the mess and a cheeky smile came up on his face. He rubbed the back of his head, ruffling his own hair in embarrassment at the mess he made.

“I know,” Edan said with a chuckle. “I was only going to get a shirt or two with pants to match. I was trying to find something specific and I ended up tearing up my whole room.”

“If you need some help dear, I can help you.” His mother placed the clothes she had grabbed before on Edan's dresser, folded up and neat. She knelt down to the floor and helped sort through his clothes, picking out T-shirts, shirts, pants, shorts, and his dress clothes. She eventually started to joke with her son about some of the clothes he should take with him. He became flustered at the idea as his face beamed a chestnut color at the thought. His mother chuckled at her son's response as she helped clean up his room after they had finished packing his backpack near-full. As they had finished to put Edan's clothes into folded piles, the door to Edan's room pushed open again.

“Ella? Are you in here?” Edan's father said as he looked into the room. “Oh. You are in here.” He changed his focus to Edan for a brief second. “Edan, let's go.”

“What is it?” Ella asked her husband. Edan got up and grabbed his backpack, slinging it around his shoulder and onto
his back. He walked past his mother and father toward the door.

“Ella, I need to know which herbs are which,” Edan's father said as he checked to make sure that his son had everything.

“Of course, Hart.” She said as she approached the door and looked back at the room. “Can you believe that...eighteen years have truly gone by?” Hart looked at Edan's room. The posters of famous members in both Furia and Calmare were plastered on the walls. By the desk near Edan's bed, clusters of papers with sketches and plans were amongst the wooden desk. He glanced at his wife before running a hand through his sleek, black hair.

“Yeah. I can't remember all the kicks to the face I got from him while he was training,” Hart replied as he rubbed the sides of his cheeks. Ella leaned up against him, bringing him close for a hug at the memories, racing through her mind. Hart returned the gesture as he walked with her out of Edan's room.
The weather had calmed down some as Edan stepped outside and surveyed the ports. The ocean was still restless from the wind tossing it about and the docks were soaked all the way to the actual ground. The door behind Edan creaked open and Hart stepped outside, inhaling the air deeply.

“Ah. Smell that fresh air,” Hart said as he turned his attention to Edan who was waving a hand in front of his face.

“Smells more like the bottom of the ocean,” Edan said as he began to follow his father, east down along the docks.

“You've been crammed in your room this past week since the storm started. So, I can't blame you on your sense of smell getting mixed results.” Hart pointed to his nose for a second with a silly smile on his face, trying to get Edan to smile back. It worked and they continued down the docks. Out in the distance along the cliff-side, the towering buildings of the Calmare headquarters were visible. Even through the low clouds fogging most of the water and land, the headquarters was still visible in the muggy weather. It seemed to shine brightly with its white and blue flags waving in the wind. Its presence made most people feel safe, even if they lived within Furia territory. But here at the trading ports, no fighting or quarrels between either side were allowed. Even though each side owned respective sides of the docks, Furia with the North and Calmare with the South, it felt like everyone could live in harmony. This was one of the reasons that Edan didn't wish to take part in the war. He wanted to find a way to end the war and make everyone live in harmony. But, with his father's status, he wasn't even able to take classes with either side. These thoughts raced through Edan's mind as he looked out at the towers of Calmare headquarters, unaware of his surroundings and almost about to walk off the edge of the docks. He was stopped by an extended arm from his father.

“Woah! Edan!” Hart said as he dragged his son back from walking off the dock. Edan glanced back at his dad and then at the edge of the docks. “Almost had to fish you out of the water
there. Watch where you're going. Come on, we're here to pick something up.” Edan only nodded in response as he followed Hart off the docks and onto somewhat dry land to a home and shop barred up with rusted metal plates. Smoke could be seen coming from a chimney pipe; it smelled thick and strong, like melted metal. In fact, that's exactly what the smoke was coming from.

“Rusty! Yo, Rusty! Are you in?” Hart hollered as he entered the shop part of the home.

“Aye! You don't need to shout. I'm not deaf...yet,” replied a rough voice from inside the shop. A tall, muscular figure pushed aside a long, dusty drape before the door to the back of the shop and entered the room they were in. He wore a soot covered apron that had its pockets full with hammers, pliers, and some other jingling objects. He wore a thick, charred gloves and welder's helmet. He pushed up the helmet, revealing his rugged face and a serious expression which instantly changed to a cheerful one at the sight of Hart.

“Hart! Good to see my main man,” Rusty replied as he gave Hart a hard pat to the back. “Let me guess. You came to pick up some armor or did you just drop by to give me a holler.” Rusty's eyes caught a glimpse of Edan's and he reached out to give Edan a hand-shake. “Well, look at you, son. You look just like your father when he was eighteen. Put 'ere there.”

“Yeah. I came to check up on the armor. I suppose it wouldn't hurt to see an old soldier too.” Hart chuckled at Rusty's glare before he received a hand-shake in return from Edan.

“Thanks sir,” Edan said in a calm tone as he lost his train of thought and shook Rusty's hand.

“Polite as usual,” Rusty replied as he returned his attention to Hart. “I'm no older than you, Mr. Knight. Grab some gloves from the counter and you can help me put the finishing touches on the armor.”
“Umm...Rusty?” Edan asked Rusty with a rather nervous tone to his voice.
“What's up?”
“Is Thomas here? I remember him telling me that he'd be working with you.”
“Oh yeah. He's in the house working on something. Not sure what. He wouldn't tell me.”
“Alright. Thanks,” Edan replied as he went to the door on the west side of the room and entered the house.
“You and Ella raised him well,” Rusty said as he turned back to Hart. “Speaking of Ella, how is she doing?” Hart glared at Rusty, whose curiosity was trying to hide his real reason for asking. Hart gave him a punch in the shoulder as the two friends laughed it up before heading to the backroom of the shop to finish up the armor.

Inside the house, Edan removed his shoes before walking into the house and set them by doorway's entrance to the kitchen. There were dishes in the sink and on the counter, as a sweet aroma filled the room. Something cooking on the stove and the bubbling from the pot could be heard from the doorway.
“I got it!” a voice echoed throughout the house as a short figure, slid into the kitchen and turned the heat down on the stove. “Don't worry, Uncle Rusty. I got it all covered.”
“Hey Thomas,” Edan replied to the person who turned around in an instant, a smile beaming on his face from corner to corner.
“Edan! Oh man! It's been so long!” shouted Thomas in great joy as he quickly gave his friend a hug like a kid brother, squeezing him tightly for a moment. “I heard about you getting initiated as a knight under the Furia army. I had thought you wanted to be part of the Calmare army, like your mom.”
“They wouldn't let me because of my father's history as a Furia knight as well. But, my mom still taught me about being a
healer under Calmare’s wing.” Before he could let go, Thomas dragged him out of the kitchen, through the hall, and down the steps to the basement.

“I’ve gotta show you something I’ve been working on,” Thomas said as he let go of Edan’s hand at the foot of the steps. All along the floor, there were boxes and baskets filled with crafting supplies from chisels and gems to leather and thread. Thomas stopped by the desk at the wall and started shuffling, quickly to finish his project. Edan walked carefully across the room and stopped behind Thomas, who quickly turned around holding what appeared to be...pants.

“You know how archers wear chaps of all types for protection at their legs,” Thomas said in a joyful voice. “Well, there have been many different ways to reenforce their armor to make it more durable while at the same time allow them to maintain their mobility. Rather than wearing metal armor, they wear leather chaps for protection. And well...” Thomas paused

_Eowyn_, by Kelly Peterson
(Winner, DeVry Addison Digital Arts Contest, 2013)
for a moment, looking down at the chaps in his hands. “...I wanted to help you...like you helped me.”

Edan's eyes widened when he had heard this from Thomas. His friend was roughly three years younger than him and he was once a quiet, shy kid that was usually picked on a great deal when he was younger. Edan had first met him after his father started to train him at the age of 13, roaming the docks to help his uncle with errands.

“Thanks Thomas,” Edan said as he accepted the chaps. “What type are they anyway?” He moved over to the bathroom that shut the door to change into them.

“You’re welcome. Well, I was thinking of calling them studded chaps because I added rounded pieces of steel into the leather and made the chaps much more durable than what most people can acquire.”

“You are aware that the idea already exists, right?” Edan said as he walked out of the bathroom. He wore the chaps over his pants and the chaps fit perfectly after he tightened the strap on the belt loops.

“I know the idea exists, but mine are better.”

“It feels a bit stiff to walk in.” Edan waddled back and forth to get over to Thomas.

“It'll be like that for a while. You have to wear them a bit to soften the leather for movement,” Thomas said as he tightened a loose seam at the side of the chaps. “There. All done. I hope that they'll aid you, Edan.”

“Thomas, you're pretty good at this,” Edan said as he walked around and stretched some, trying to get the feel for the chaps.

“Ah thanks...” Thomas said.

“EDAN! LET'S GO!” Hart's voice echoed throughout the house, shaking Thomas and Edan in surprise.

“Looks like your dad is ready to depart with you,” Thomas said as he started up the steps with Edan following. “Be careful out there, okay?” Edan glanced back at Thomas as they reached
the kitchen. With a smile on his face, he ruffled Thomas's blonde spiky hair as if he were his brother and gave him one final fist-bump before heading to the door to get his shoes on and leave.

“Dammit, where is he?” Hart questioned impatiently.

“Hart, cool your jets. I'm sure he was just talking with my nephew is all.” Just as Rusty had said that, the door opened and Edan came into the shop, wearing the chaps Thomas made.

“Alright. I'm ready.”

“Not entirely,” Rusty said as he took the plated armor and handed it to Edan. “Put that on. Let me see if my work fits your desires.”
Edan accepted the plated chain armor and carefully put it on, making sure no chain rings got clumped up. Once he had it on, Rusty looked him over to make sure everything fit well before giving him a thumbs up.

“I'd say I did a perfect job with your armor. It fits you well and you look like a true knight ready.” Rusty smiled as the door from the house opened up and Thomas came walking in.

“Edan. You left your bag downstairs,” Thomas said handing it to him.

“Thanks Thomas,” Edan said to him as he slung the pack over his shoulder and turned his attention to Rusty. “And thank you for the armor, Rusty.”

“My pleasure, Edan,” Rusty said with a big grin on his face. “Good luck out there.” Edan nodded with a smile on his face as his dad waited at the door. “Come on,” Hart said more impatient than before. “We can get to the Sacred Lake before sundown if you could hurry up.” Edan said his final good-byes to Rusty and Thomas and headed out the door, to chase his father home.

Upon reaching home, Edan saw his mother by the door in the arms of his father, who was getting ready to leave. He approached the house calmly and stopped before his parents as his father held out the rod and chained sickle to him.

“Polished and hand-guards attached,” Hart said as Edan detached the chain and sickle from the rod before strapping it to his back. He coiled the chain up and pocketed it in his pack and slipped the sickle onto his belt. His mother approached him, wrapping her arms around him for one last hug and good-bye.

“Be careful when traveling and always...always stay your sweet self,” Ella stuttered as tears started to form in her eyes. “I know that you didn't wish to become a part of any side. But Calmare doesn't wish to have you in their rankings and Furia...well, your father has made sure that some of his allies look out for you.”
Edan nodded in response as tears had slid down his face.

As she let go of her son, Ella turned to the small table with several plants on it and retrieved a small satchel. “I know that you wanted to be a healer like myself and instead you became a knight to protect. This satchel belongs to me and I used it for several years, even after you were born.” Ella handed the satchel to Edan. It was like a small pouch that opened up to three pockets, each capable of holding a small object or item that was for medical usage. It had a blue and red stripe that wrapped around the center of the satchel and on the flap that closed it, the logos of both Calmare and Furia together like a ying-yang symbol.

“Thank you, Mom.” Edan quickly hugged her one last time as tightly as he could. Hart remained on the sidelines, waiting for Edan to go and as Ella had let him go. Hart nodded once, smiling from ear to ear. Edan tightened the strap of the rod and his pack before walking up to his dad.

“Alright. We've lost a bit of time,” Hart said looking up at the sky and then to the horizon. He faced north, licked his finger, and measured the wind's direction. “If we move quick, we can get to Sacred Lake just after sundown. Are you ready?” He looked at his son who looked back at him with a strong-willed glare.

“Yeah,” Edan said in one full-sweep. Hart nodded to his response and dashed off north. Edan glanced back at his mother's face one last time, before turning toward the direction of north and following his father to their destination.

A few hours later, Hart led on heading north as he and his son followed the shoreline toward the Sacred Lake. The wind was lighter against them than back at the ports, and the air was crisp. Hart was farther ahead in a stride as Edan trailed behind. The weight from the armor and his pack was dragging him down. He could feel his heart pounding rapidly in his chest cavity and breathing was becoming a problem. In the instant that Edan felt like collapsing, he saw the ground suddenly move
away as he was being moved upward. His father had come back and lifted him onto his back.

“You're slow,” Hart said as he picked up the pace.

“Well...I'm not used to wearing armor and running.”

“You'll want to get used to it over time. For now, let me do the running. I'm used to the weight.” Hart chuckled to himself as Edan showed an annoyed expression on his face. Hart was moving fast after a bit of momentum was under him. It was like his legs didn't even have a second of space between them. Edan was amazed that his father was capable of moving at this speed and still carry him with ease. As they kept moving, Edan looked out at the sky and watched the clouds pass by and the sun peer through them, tinting them orange. He couldn't help but wonder how things were going to go and if he'd be able to see his grandfather's idea come true: a world without the war and both sides coming to an agreement. How could that happen by getting into the side that wants to destroy the island? No, protect the entire world, recreate a better place... While Edan was lost in thought, the wind was just a light breeze and he could feel that they weren't moving anymore.

“Do you see it?” Hart said as he pointed out off the cliff into the distance. Willow trees were blocking the view in the distance, but beyond those the light glistening colors of the lake could be seen. “The Swamp Lands are ahead of us. So, we'll have to be careful. Once we get into the range of the Sacred Lake, then that's where we'll be safe.”

“Isn't the Swamp Lands a Furia territory? I should be fine,” Edan said, inquiring his father's statement.

“I'm considered a traitor to Furia, Edan,” Hart said. “We have to move quickly and swiftly through it.” Edan nodded in response as Hart lead them down the sides of the cliff and rushed forward, straight into the swamp lands.

As they entered the swamps, the musky air of the area passed by their noses and the light of sun dimmed greatly. Hart
could feel the moment that they entered the territory that they were definitely not alone.

“Stay close,” Hart whispered to Edan letting him down. Edan followed closely behind as they walked through the swamp. He walked ahead of his dad, climbing over knocked over trees and branches. Hart grabbed Edan by the arm and dragged him back quickly as a trap had triggered and a net from the ground flipped into the air.

“I said to stay close, not go ahead of me,” Hart said. He stepped over another trap and helped Edan over.

“For a small bit that we have to cross through,” Edan started, “there are a lot of traps here.” *It’s like someone was expecting us to go this route,* Edan thought to himself as he kept his eyes opened on their surroundings.
“Well, there's a lot of explanations for it. For now, watch your step.” Hart stepped forward and from the corner of his eye, another trap had sprung. From the right of them in the brush, a curved dagger shot out from the brush toward Edan, before he could react. Hart turned around to push his son out of the way, just as the dagger passed Hart's face leaving a thin slice mark.

“Whoa! Thanks Dad,” Edan said as he got up. Before Hart could say a word, the trees and bushes rustled revealing three rogue members. Two grabbed a hold of Edan and the third pulled Hart away.

“Well, well, well...” said the lead member, twirling a knife in one hand. “Look what we caught boys. Hart Iceroot, traitor to Furia army. And what brings you to passing through our land, hmm?”

“We're just passing through,” Hart said in a stern tone.

“Dad...” Edan muttered as the other two held him down.

“Dad, huh?” the leader said with a smirk. “Well then...let's see how he likes seeing his traitor father killed then.” The other two let go Edan and quickly knocked down Hart. “Any last words, traitor?” Hart struggled to move as Edan got to his feet, keeping his head low. Edan felt scared out of his skin on what to do. He kept thinking over and over that he wasn't strong enough to help. He watched from the sidelines as his father fought off the two lackeys, smacking them down with his bare fists. The leader tried to get in a kill, but failed every time with every trick.

“I see why they said you'd be difficult to kill,” the leader said as Hart dodged around a tree and smacked the leader one in the face. The leader glanced over at Edan. “But, this time...you have a weakness.” He dashed over to Edan, wrapping his arm around his neck. “If you don’t want to see your son die first, I'd suggest you cooperate.” Hart remained still ready to strike after he saw Edan, trying to struggle and failing to do so. The leader drew the dagger closer to Edan's neck and Hart backed down. As he
had done so, the dagger from the leader zipped right into his left shoulder, pinning Hart to the tree behind him.

“Ah. I missed,” he said throwing Edan aside and drawing out another dagger. “But...this next one won't.” Edan rubbed his neck where the dagger point had been. He wasn't for killing. He never had it in him to do so. But, the anger from this moment built up in him and Edan didn't want to see his own father killed by such a pathetic person. It was then that he completely snapped. His consciousness wasn't even clear on what was going on. He just did it.

“Hey!” Edan shouted at the top of his lungs. The leader stopped his dagger inches from Hart's chest, only to get a long silver chain zip past his face and smack him back.

“Insolent kid!” yelled the leader, rubbing the spot he was hit.

“You're going to regret...”

“Regret what? Your smart mouth. I don't think so.” Edan glared back at the leader who was gritting his teeth.

“What just happened? That kid was just scared a second ago. And now...his eyes show a completely different side to him.” The leader muttered to himself under his breath, Edan had stared him down with rod in hand. “Heh...you've got guts, kid. I'll give you that. But, you don't stand...” He stopped mid-sentence to notice Edan jerk the rod in the opposite direction it was being held and the long chain zip past the left of his head. It was in that split second that he turned around to see the silver sickle blade coming at him with a faint tint of blue and not enough time to react. It was a clean slice. The sickle came back to Edan and he held it looking down at the widened eyes of the leader's head.

“You shouldn't talk so much and keep your eyes open for any changes in battle.” Edan remained still as the mouth of the head shut in shock and the body dropped to the ground. Edan walked over to Hart who was sitting on the ground, putting pressure on his wound.
“Edan...” Hart muttered trying to sum up the words. But, he kept mouth shut as they both continued north to their destination.

As the two had stepped out of the swamp, Edan collapsed to the ground. Hart quickly picked him up and continued the rest of the way for them. When he awoke, Edan was propped up against a tree with the vast lake glistening before him. The night was calm and there was not a cloud in the sky to show the blanket of stars up above. He quickly jerked upright when he remembered his dad taking a hit.

“Whoa, tiger. Relax,” Hart said with a bandage around his shoulder. “You passed out when we got out of the swamp. I brought you here and you've been out for a good hour or so.”

“How are you? And...what happened? My memory a bit faint...” Edan was confused as his dad glanced over at his weapon.
“You let out your serious side to your personality, or at least that's what you called it. You turned that jerk leader into a vegetable with no remorse.” Hart turned to look at his son who had his head between his legs. “Oh come on. You did it out of rage to protect me. And I have to say, even though you're modest about your own strengths; you're truly something.”

“But...I don't wish to fight. I wish to...”

“I know, Edan. At this point in time, I'd say the same thing. But, there is no group willing to defy both sides to bring them together.”

“Then, why can't there be a group to do so now?”

“I never fully stated that there is a group that doesn't exist. Oh, they exist and for quite some time now. Just not many people know about them.” Hart helped Edan get to his feet and re-equip himself with his stuff.

“So...” Edan started with a stutter. “Where do I go from here?”

“Further north, but leave that to a friend of mine.” Hart waved his left arm toward the trees in the distance and after a few seconds, a figure dropped down from them and ran right up to Edan and Hart. “This is Mace. He's a scout that I used to hang out when I was out on missions for the army. He'll take you to their headquarters.” Mace showed a single hand as a gestured greeting and turned pointing toward the mountains, ready to go right away.

“Dad...”

“Edan...out of all the time I spent training you and time you grew up. I can't say no more than that I'm proud to see what you've become. I do hope that tides will come to an end and that maybe, just maybe, the war will end. Heck...you never know. I might be drafted into that revolutionary group that's hidden or you might be. Still...” Hart paused for a moment to catch his breath and swallow the tears. “...you're my son. And I'll always...” His sentence was abruptly ended by Edan tightly hugging him in return.
“I know Dad. You'll always love me and so will Mom.” Edan held onto his dad for a long moment, to embrace that last comfort he had with his family.

“Mace, are you crying?” Hart said as he looked at the scout who wiped his eyes and waved his hands to deny it. “Yeah, right. I saw it.”

“He can't talk?”

“No. He can talk, Edan. He chooses not to and uses gestures more than anything.”

“Oh,” Edan replied as he walked up to Mace. “Well...I'm ready to go.” Mace held out his left hand to Edan and Edan grabbed it, holding on tightly. He glanced back at his dad through happy, tearful eyes. “Bye Dad...”

“See ya, sport,” Hart replied just as his son vanished with Mace's immense speed into thin air. “Take care.” Hart looked up at the sky filled with gleaming stars and hoped that things would go alright for him. At that last moment, several stars had zipped through the sky twinkling with the rest in the night. This was the beginning of new chapter for Edan and the start of many adventures.
Song of Myself

by
Kulsoom Ahmed

I am like a paintbrush, the master of masterpieces, the embodiment of creativity,

So full of bursting potential, with only a requisite for the ability to express myself,

A caress of my bristles could transform a painting, giving life and color to an empty canvas,

A reflection of things hidden inside, an outlet for pent up feelings and emotions one has to vent.

The bliss, the cheer, elation and love, superlative passions for which there is no parallel,

And ones hardly shallow, the ones you wish would just go, depression, suffering, sorrow, and woe.

My strokes so different and unique, coalescing to reflect the one special me

So many possibilities of pictures to paint, thinking of them I begin to feel faint.

Various colors, hues, and mixtures to paint with, choosing gets more difficult as they expand.

My head is still spinning, but what can I say? I wonder what I will end up with today.
“Screen check!” Barked the intercom in a monotone female voice. A young man who sat in front of a wall of screens began the routine morning task.

Screen 1a. Possible signs of decrease in video quality. Check visual status daily.
Screen 1b. Slight energy discharge. Add to monthly repair cycle.
Screen 1c. No change.
Screen 1d. No change.

This would go on until every one of the forty screens of the Watcher’s station had been cleared. The simple screen check test guaranteed the city’s Watchers that no sector of the Watch Grid would fall to time’s deteriorating effect. Early every morning and late every evening the empty voice would give the order: Screen check! It may sound easy but the job of a Watcher was anything but. Diligence, precision, acute awareness, and an unwavering determination were several of the many qualities a Watcher required. There were just as many physical tests as there were mental ones to gain the title of Watcher. The life of a Watcher was never glamorous but there was no denying the amount of power a Watcher contained. They alone were the eyes that determined the life or death of many during an incident reported by the Enforcers. In fact most Enforcers, brutes of the law, followed direct commands from Watchers. Obtaining such a position meant you were above petty ordinary civilians. In a city where every public street and open window was monitored, freedom was an illusion. Those that did not serve the law enforcement would never know. People never asked how the Enforcers of the City gathered their information. The Watch Grid was a secret and those select few behind the screens gained a truer sense of freedom that no one else would ever know. No one to watch them, no one to influence their decisions, just the simple routine created by a genius programmer over one hundred years ago. They say the programmer was actually related to the great Controller
him/herself, but those are rumors. Watchers know better than to believe those.

Everyday would bring in more of the same: wake up, nourishment, physical betterment, screen check, watch, nourishment, watch, screen check, nourishment, sleep. This solitude would break weaker souls, but Watcher’s like 1-0-R had motivation that could never be broken. His name was Ray, and at age twenty-two he was the youngest Watcher of the City’s over century old history. Watchers were chosen based on mental tests that proved their focus as well as a strict policy that the citizen has no living relations. Ray fit both qualifications nicely save for a slight issue. Emotional tests suggested that he could become a risk, but higher officials deemed the risks minimal at best. Anger and guilt, as the Logical Officers stated was “difficult to remove, but far easier to control.”

At the age of ten, the promising C-Class citizen Ray watched the death of his sister and parents. His family was crushed when a disturbed supply truck driver intentionally drove his truck off the road upon pedestrians. As the report recounted the young boy noticed the strange actions of the driver. “I could’ve signaled for help” was listed in the report countless times. His family died, and after mental assessments were made, the young boy was recruited into the Watch Grid. Swallowed with guilt and pain, the Watcher training and support from the City rebuilt the damaged young boy into an impressive man of unquestioning loyalty. It was quite the surprise then, to even the Council, when Ray brought down the entire Watcher network.

The day was November 15th, City year 117. The day began like any other. Watcher 1-0-R left detailed reports like every day before. The reports stopped at nearly half past noon. 1-0-R studied like always.
Screen 2b. No report.
Screen 3j, possible street theft in progress.
Screen 4m. No report... Screen 4m rapid visual deterioration. Repositioning screen 3t. Screen 3t high angle view blocked. Repositioning Screens 2i, 1q, 4r. Screen disturbance spreading through all viewing angles of Screen 4m.
“Watcher 1-0-R, do you require assistance? I have noticed heavy repositioning activity in your sector,” inquired Watcher 2-7-M.

“No. I’m fine,” snapped 1-0-R as he left the intercom. “I don’t need you idiots slowing me down anyways.” Quickly he swapped over to the machine language of his computer console and located the problem. Someone had broken into the system and inserted a weak virus to that sector’s screens. “Do I need assistance?” thought the near perfect Watcher. “I need no one,” muttered 1-0-R.

Repositioning the other screens was simple enough work and in only a few minutes everything had returned to normal. A status report would be required for so many screen movements and so he began to recount the situation in the data log. Screen 4m at 12:15pm showed visual… Ray stopped. Was that a flash
he thought? Watcher 1-0-R looked up at his many monitors. His eyes scanned back and forth. Just when he had reached the last screen the corner of his left eye caught another flash. Quickly! Damn it! I can’t be seeing things, it must be the virus, reasoned 1-0-R. Just when he was about to switch back over to the machine level of his computer’s systems did he look up to see the flash on Screen 4m. Some strange bright green line had appeared for only a moment. “Screen 4m playback last ten seconds in frame-by-frame,” barked the Watcher.

Patiently he waited. Frame. After frame. After frame. “Pause!” The green line was no longer a green line. It was a message. Watcher 1-0-R read it over and over at least twenty times. He turned his chair to face the back wall of his Screen room. He closed his eyes and continued to play the words in his head like a leaf caught in a whirlpool. His face carried a look of great distress; his eyes slightly watery, his mouth expressionless. With a long deep breath Ray turned around. “Screen 4m, capture screen, place on personal monitor. Return to live feed.” For the first time since Ray started at this Watcher post he took the time to actually analyze what the Screen was showing him. Screen 4m was positioned at the front of a dead end alley. Instead of looking out to the street, the screen allowed a perfect view of a plain alley. In the alley was nothing more than garbage receivers and a sewer entrance at the end of the stretch of dirty concrete. Nothing special here, thought Ray. His eyes began to move away from the screen, but something drew them back. A shadow moving quickly became three figures moving quickly into the alley. One was small enough to be a young boy. The other two were larger men in peak physical conditioning wearing the all black uniform of Runners. Just as the two Runners had caught up with the boy the screen went black. Watcher 1-0-R was ready to signal his intercom when the message from earlier returned. The green text on the black screen was even easier to read than before. He read the words slowly and took his hands away from the intercom. He waited.

The screen returned. The Runners had disappeared; the boy was still there though. He wore a cloak of some kind that covered his whole body nicely but the hood was now down. The boy looked straight at the Screen, staring deep into the eyes of Ray. The dark blue eyes, the bright blonde hair, the boy
looked so innocent. Ray did nothing but wait for the boy to make some move. The boy responded by revealing his wrist, on it was some sort of metal bracelet. His other hand proceeded to tap against the bracelet and to Ray’s surprise more green text glared across the screen. This time it was new words instead of the repeat from before.

TURN THE VIRUS BACK ON. Watcher 1-0-R, rubbed his eyes in frustration. What was he doing? This boy must be a major threat: Runners after him, his ability to hack into the City’s Watcher systems, all signs pointing to an obvious conclusion: this boy is an enemy of the City. Once again the screen flashed the first set of words on the screen. This time with a short sentence tacked onto the end. Ray’s mask of control disappeared and water began to collect in his eyes. His eyes may have been watching the screen but Ray’s mind did not comprehend anything in his field of view. For nearly three minutes he did nothing. Then the message changed and Ray’s eyes eagerly took in the change of words.

YOU HAVE TWO HOURS TO DECIDE. The screen went black again for a few moments and when the image returned the alley was empty. The young Watcher switched off his mind and went back to watching the screens. Screen 1a. Screen 1b. Screen 1c. In the first hour he repeated this process 128 times. He could not report anything, only watch. Time passed slowly, each minute felt stretched to three times the length. Not once did he receive another message, no more visual disturbances; the day continued on as if the prior events never occurred. For a short while 1-0-R began to believe it himself as old habits of his training attempted to kick in. His hands struggled to get off his keyboard and onto the intercom. One simple button press and he could report the incident. Or could he? Half the day has been unreported, and the recordings of these messages would surely convince the Enforcers and the Council that he had doubts. He could be thrown into a rehabilitation program… Observers tinkering away at the brain until the correct results arrive… But no! The boy, the intruder, maybe he has merely been playing with my mind, he reasoned. His words can’t be true. Ray was quickly losing control of himself and was about to lose it when he caught eye of the
screens and once again returned to the known world he had grown into. Screen 1a. Screen 1b. Screen 1c.

The two-hour deadline had nearly arrived. As much as 1-0-R’s routine had calmed him down, his mind was still a powder-keg ready to blow. The City saved him from the suffering of losing those he loved. Yet one simple sentence, one seed of doubt made him question everything he knew or maybe everything he believed. He looked down to his personal monitor at the screen capture. The words had already became a part of his brain, but having his eyes go over every letter made it all that more powerful. The time had come and he closed his eyes. His thoughts had finally come to the conclusion that he had known all along. The choice he had to make. Does he do nothing or do something? For twelve years he had watched. For twelve years the world had passed by, as the memory of his family faded. For twelve years the people he cared for were gone because he watched, because he did nothing. He made a promise twelve years ago, yet was always afraid to keep it, always afraid to lose more. Twelve years was a long time, but watching had to come to an end. Ray, formerly Watcher 1-0-R, did something.

GLAD YOU CAME AROUND. MEET ME AT LEVEL B5, ROOM AA34. YOU’LL GET YOUR ANSWERS. Ray went to his small private room attached to the Screen Room. Quickly he gathered what few belongings he had, including a picture of his lost family, sealed the room and walked out into the hallway. The lights of the room dimmed and many of the screens had already lost all visibility. The virus was well at work. Hours had passed before an Observer had located the source of the virus and proceeded to enter the dark Screen room of Watcher 1-0-R. Only the personal monitor remained unaffected. The screen was black, the words bright green.

TWELVE YEARS AGO YOUR FAMILY WAS MURDERED. YOU WERE TOLD IT WAS A MENTALLY BROKEN MAN. THAT WAS A LIE.

THE CONTROLLER KILLED THEM.
Dolls

by

Paul Edrian Castaneda

When I woke up it was night and I was lying down the floor. I felt numb when I rose. Found myself in a long hallway in the hotel that I stayed in. I dragged myself, limping my way towards the window. The sky wasn’t fully cloudy, not enough to blot the magnificent shine of the full moon. From looking down I felt a bit uneasy when I watched the streets.

There weren’t any cars, but what got me the most was that the entire sidewalk, as far as I could see from the window, was lined with lit candles. I didn’t find much sense about the candles. I mean who would put candles in the streets? I didn’t dwell into that thought so much. Other than the candles, there wasn’t really much to see, in both aspects since the candles were the only light source in the street.

Photo by Zachary Coulter
I looked at a room close to where I fell, Room 333. I touched my pocket to see if I had the key with me. The tag on the key said 333. Why doesn’t this feel familiar? I know I went to a hotel, but I don’t remember the room I was in until I saw this key. I wanted to go inside to make sure if it was my room, but I didn’t feel like going. I don’t know how to explain it, I just feel like going in there. From the corner of my eye I saw something move at the other end of the hall. I didn’t get a good glimpse, but I know I saw something. I carefully moved towards the other and of the hall. I failed to notice earlier that the lights in this hall were candles and that every door I was passed didn’t have a number. I wonder why it was like that.

Upon reaching the end of the hall I got to a stairway. I giggled at the level of architecture when I saw the stairway going up went into a wall. I couldn’t imagine why they would stop making stairs. The floor I was on should be the last floor. I looked by the rails. I didn’t know if I was going crazy, but from the way my key told me, I should have been on the third floor. But the stairway is so deep. It’s like it goes on down forever. The red light what the “bottom” didn’t help. I couldn’t see if it was a light or just a red floor, but it was bright. Instantly my eyes darted at a hand that just glided on one of the railings. I carefully rushed towards the spot I saw. Each step felt heavy. Every step I take sent a sharp pain on my right leg. It felt odd that for every level of the spiraling staircase I go, there isn’t seemed to be a place I can see the other floors. This stairway was continuously going down without a stop.

I reached the spot where I saw the hand from. Anywhere beyond it was more stairs that was blocked with chains and a sign that said “Do Not Enter.” It didn’t look like the person would go this way; I mean the way this place was blocked was even hard to get around. Those chains were bolted into the wall. The door beside it seemed logical enough. I slowly opened the door and found myself in a library. The library was surprisingly big. It’s impressive considering this place didn’t
look fancy that they’d have a library that rivaled building meant to only house books. Again the candles where on the shelves lighting the place. I wheezed a little bit as I continued to walk. I found a chair to sit on near one of their tables. Finally some rest. I looked around me to find anything interesting. I got a little bit frightened when I saw a bunch of mannequins were positions not to far behind me. I really don’t like them, creeps me out especially at night. I don’t think I would be able to find anyone here this way. I felt like I should just scrap the idea of looking for that person. I pulled out my key just to mess around with it.

Room 333. Gosh I can’t remember the number of the room I got when I came here. It’s best to keep this close to me, so I can ask the person in the lobby about this. I hear a thud behind me and drop my key. I turned my head to see one of the mannequins toppled on the ground. That’s very creepy. I think I over stayed in the mannequin filled library. I reached down towards the floor to get my key. Suddenly I saw a pair of legs sitting across from my from what used to be an empty chair. I quickly looked up. I didn’t see anyone. I took another look down and saw the pair of legs again. Then when I looked up there was no one there. This is crazy really, my mind playing tricks at me? That’s preposterous. I decided to grab my key.

The moment I reached for it, I turned my head and saw a pair of green orbs. I immediately froze. These orbs were eyes and they were on a mannequin kneeling under the table, looking at me. I grabbed the key and stumbled back. I rose as quickly as I could, seeing the mannequin looking at me. I stared at it; it was a doll. The joints and the uncanny feeling you get when you look at their face. I started moving back, bumping onto one of the mannequins. I jolted turning around. Their heads were positioned to look at me. This was getting ridiculous. I could honestly say that I was scared. I didn’t think any further. I just ran, ignoring the pain in my right leg. I tried my best to get up to the floor I was on; each level of the stairway I passed had a
doll situated in the corner. That didn’t do me so well mentally. I tried to ignore them as I hurried up the stairs.

I got to the top, out of breath. I wasn’t done. I rushed over to the end of the hall where my room was. I got my key and opened it. I entered my room quickly, slamming the door shut, locking it. I breathed a sigh of relief. Then I thought to myself why did I run to my room instead of the lobby? First of all I didn’t remember where the lobby was or getting there. It was most definitely the blocked path in the stairway. I guess I was going to be in this room for a while. Making sure the door was secure, I finally turned to walk to my bed.

I cringed in fear, stopping myself from moving an inch. I was back in the library, facing the long table. The dolls were sitting on the chairs and the mannequins were standing around them. Everything was looking at me. Candles on the table lined up and a cake.

The table wasn’t too far away so I could read what the cake said. It said:

“Happy Birthday, Father.”

I blacked out when after reading it, only to wake up instantly. It was morning and I was back in the hallway again. I tried to stand up, but it felt difficult to do so. I tried to stand on my right leg, only to stumble. I pushed myself up and looked at my leg. I remember now. I lost my right leg. It was when my house burned down.

The cause was a candle tipping over. I looked around and saw my crutch. I was only dreaming. I must have passed out from partying too much. I remembered now that it was my birthday yesterday. The people in the hotel were kind enough to celebrate my birthday. I finally got what that nightmare came from. It all started making sense to me. The dolls were probably the children that lived here. I leaned on my crutch and pulled out my key. Room 333. Yeah, it was just a nightmare. I went to my room so I could finally lie down on a bed. I closed the door and moved to my bed. I stared at the floor to gather my
thoughts. I looked up to see a gothic dressed doll with green eyes looking at me; on her dress bore the number 333.

I was wrong. This place wasn’t a hotel. And I never had a key. There weren’t people in here. They’re just dolls and mannequins. This was my house. How could I have forgotten that I was alone? How could I have forgotten, everyone died in that fire? This leg was supposed to remind me of that day. Why didn’t it remind me of the whole thing? How could I have forgotten about my family? I sat there silently looking at the doll who was staring at me. These dolls were so beautiful. They almost reminded me of someone. Before I slept I looked at her and I thought she was smiling. I ignored the idea and lay down to sleep. That nightmare was better than this world. When I dreamed, I thought I was back in that nightmare. Yet I looked at the cake in front of me. “Happy Birthday Father,” It said. I looked up and around, beautiful ladies. A beautiful woman with green eyes came up to me.

“Father, you suddenly fell asleep, are you alright?” I wasn’t back in the nightmare. Rather I came back from a dream that came from a nightmare.

“I’m fine.” She smiled and pointed at the cake. One of the children walked up to me. Make a wish she said. 80 years. I might be going crazy. Growing old sucks, but looking at the woman with green eyes, and the children around me, it was worth it. These Dolls were the light of my candles.
A Look into the Young Life of Peyton Sawyer

by

Nicole M. Leone

It was summer of 1981 and two people were meeting for the first time. Frederick and Cindy were having a great evening at a house party. Cindy invited Frederick back to her house for more fun, however, Cindy ended up passing out, leaving Frederick alone at her house. Kathy, Cindy’s younger sister, ended up entertaining Frederick for the rest of the evening. Kathy was a senior in high school and Frederick, a little older, thought she was really cute. The two starting dating casually because Kathy was leaving for college at the end of the summer. By Kathy’s senior year of college, Frederick and her decided it was time to date exclusively. By this time, Kathy had already fallen for Frederick and there is suspicion that he felt the same way.

Fast forward three years later; wedding bells are playing and people are celebrating a marriage founded by accident, entered into with caution and blossomed into true love. Without even knowing it, they were setting a path for their future. One that involved having a baby, or three. Five years and two kids down the road, Kathy found herself pregnant for the third time.

Something was off. The day wasn’t going according to planned. The two kids, Christopher, 5, and Ali, 3, were getting along, too well. Kathy was getting ready to go grocery shopping and the kids actually wanted to go. Kathy got everything packed up for the trip to the store when suddenly her stomach took a turn and she ended up sick in the bathroom. “When was the last time I did that so early in the morning? I don’t remember drinking that much last night,” Kathy thought to herself. Weird. Kathy cleaned up and got the kids to the store. While walking up the toothpaste aisle she spotted a pregnancy test. Kathy did not suspect she was pregnant but thought, “What the heck?” Later that afternoon while the kids were napping, Kathy took

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1 The names of the characters in this story have been changed for the sake of privacy.
the test and to her surprise, it was positive! Kathy couldn’t wait to tell Frederick when he got home from work.

Things were moving quickly; more quickly then she remembered. Last time Kathy thought about it, it was just before Thanksgiving; now it was almost August and her baby girl was ready to come out. Kathy and Frederick wondered what their baby was going to look like. Would she be tall, like him; would she have blue eyes, like the other kids; whose nose would she have, etc.? At their second ultrasound, during month six, they found out they were having a girl. As always, there are risks with pregnancy, but the fetus seemed to be growing and developing at a normal rate in utero. Kathy, only 30 years old, still worried about genetics, however. Even though both sets of in-laws were still alive, diabetes, hypertension and breast cancer ran in the family. Even with these health issues, Kathy never experienced pre-eclampsia or gestational diabetes. The only thing Kathy suffered through was morning sickness, craving potatoes, and gaining twenty pounds over the course of nine months. Finally, before they knew it, it was time. Thankfully, due to Kathy having two previous C-section births, she was able to pick the day when the baby was going to be born. As Kathy thought about it, she chose August 14th; it was a day she was able to get a babysitter for the other children. The surgery only took a few hours, the quickest of the three. Kathy and Frederick waited nine long months to hold their precious girl and she was beautiful. Weighing in at 7 lbs, 2 oz and 19.5” long, Peyton Marie Sawyer* was perfect.

Kathy and Frederick decided then that they did not want any more children. They had three beautiful babies. Three days after being born, Peyton was able to go home. Ali was excited to meet their new sister. Christopher didn’t care. Peyton got her own bedroom, full of wonderful things from the baby shower. Unfortunately, this happiness would be short lived. Peyton became a very colicky baby. She could never be consoled. For six solid months, Peyton was unhappy. Kathy took her to the doctor’s every week, thinking there was something wrong with her little one. The doctors could never find anything. They claimed she would “grow out of it.” Just when it would seem that there was no hope in cheering up Peyton, she smiled at six months. Shortly after the first smile, Peyton became less colicky
and was just plain crabby. She was weened off breast milk and onto solid food, like carrots, around the same time.

“For parents and children alike, physical growth is a topic of great interest and a source of pride. Parents marvel at the speed with which babies add pounds and inches, and 2-year-olds proudly proclaim, ‘I bigger now!’” (Kail, 2010, p. 91). This statement couldn’t have been more accurate. Within one month, Peyton was crawling, standing and cruising all over the house.

![Laundry Assistant by Robin Luxton](image)
(People’s Choice, DeVry Addison Digital Arts Contest, 2013)

By eleven months she was able to walk on her own without assistance. Peyton, already saying “momma” and “hi,” began to develop a larger word bank and by one year old she knew enough words to make sense and was able to communicate her emotions better. These portions of development are part of the first front of sensorimotor development, as explained by Jean Piaget. “At about 8 months, infants reach a watershed: the onset of deliberate, intentional behavior. For the first time, the “means” and “end” of activities are distinct” (Kail, 2010, p. 130). This adaptation and exploration of the environment was essential to Peyton’s growth. Although her growth and
development, such as height and weight, were in the 50th percentile, the next big step was trying to get Peyton to become potty trained. This took a long time. The other two children were trained by the age of two but Peyton still experienced accidents until she was three.

Due to Kathy’s being a stay at home mom, Peyton formed an almost immediate attachment to her. Kathy was there for every need, want, hurt and happiness. Peyton’s attachment went beyond what Erikson describes as normal. Peyton would not let Kathy do anything without having to be a part of it, including reading a magazine, talking on the phone, going to the bathroom or the grocery store. According to Erikson, a sense of trust in oneself and others is the key of human development. Newborns leave the warmth and security of the uterus for an unfamiliar world. If parents respond to their infant’s needs consistently, the infant comes to trust and feel secure in the world.

Of course, parents cannot always be there for their child. They have a life of their own as well. Kathy and Frederick loved bowling and were in a league. Once a month, her parents came over to watch the kids so they could go bowling. Peyton did not like this once bit. She would cry and be unconsolable most of the hours her parents were gone. This mistrust, as Erikson describes, adds value to the child. With a proper balance of trust and mistrust, Peyton should be able to acquire hope. Peyton reached the reciprocal relationship with her mother at 18 months, as the book suggests. Her attachment moved right through elementary school as well. Kathy decided to go back to work when Peyton entered kindergarten. Kathy directed a daycare. Peyton knew she could trust her mom to pick her up and bring her home everyday. The daycare was not far from where she was going to school. After that first year, Kathy went back to teaching first grade. She taught at the school where Peyton was attending. If Peyton was having a bad day, she was able to go to her mother right away and tell her about it.

In as little as two years, an infant progresses from reflexive responding, like sucking a thumb, to actively exploring the world, understanding objects, and using symbols (Kail, 2010). Babies are now able to wave as a gesture of saying good-bye. This also set the stage for Piaget’s pre-operational thinking
theory. As aforementioned, Peyton would go see her mother if something was wrong. It didn’t matter that her mother may be busy, she only saw the problem from her own eyes and was unable to determine that her mom might have other things going on. The same thing would happen when Peyton would cut her sister’s hair. She couldn’t imagine why anyone else would be upset by this because she thought it was fun. Ali and she got along great as children and always had each other to play with, so Peyton did not need imaginary friends. Her cognitive development was fostered through learning in school and playing pretend at home. With her mother as a teacher, she was able to create environments where her children can discover, for themselves, how the world works.

During this pre-operational period, Peyton played soccer. At the age of four, she was wearing cleats and making friends. The complex emotions she gained at the age of two (pride in growing bigger) had now carried into her athletic career. When she scored a goal or made a great pass, she was praised and felt pride. When she fouled or lost the ball, she was scolded and felt guilt. From social referencing, she was able to determine the gravity of the situation based on the facial expressions of others. These guilt and failures did not deter Peyton from playing soccer, however. She, instead, wanted to be better. She learned how to regulate her emotions on and off the field. She loved playing and, to this day, still does.

Her gross and fine motor skills were developing rapidly at this age. Not only was she running around, playing soccer, she was riding a two-wheeler and driving her mother’s van into the garage. Yes, you heard right. Her mother needed to run in the house and grab something really quick. She left Peyton alone in her car seat with the van running. Peyton was able to unbuckle herself from the car seat, open the door, get into the driver’s seat and put the car in drive. It drove right through the closed garage door.

As Peyton entered the world of school, she found it hard to adjust at first. She made the newspaper because she wouldn’t stop crying at her preschool graduation. On her first day of kindergarten, she had to literally be pulled into the school, away from her mom. She kicked and screamed the whole time. First grade was a little better. She met a girl named Chloe who had
red hair. When children first start making friends, they do it based on physical characteristics (Kail, 2010). Chloe, like Peyton’s mom, had red hair. That may be why she liked her. They also had class together so they had something in common. Unfortunately, Chloe moved away after first grade, and that left Peyton without a close friend. However, she knew two girls from her mom’s class and in second grade, they became best friends. Tiffany, Melanie and Peyton were almost inseparable. These three girls lived near each other and hung out outside of school. Surprisingly, Tiffany and Melanie were not weirded out by seeing their first grade teacher outside of school. Usually, during middle childhood and adolescence, you do not picture your teacher as having a life outside of school.

At the beginning of fourth grade, Peyton switched schools. She left her best friends and other memories behind. It was her choice to go to a new school. She had other friends from soccer who went to a public school, rather than a private one. The friends she thought she had there ended up turning on her and she didn’t know why. At the age of ten, friends are made based on trust and assistance (Kail, 2010). So although school work came easy for Peyton, making friends did not. With the emergence of hormones and puberty, girls were not the same from day to day and could not be trusted. Jaclyn was Peyton’s best friend for most of junior high but ended the friendship when she thought Peyton was changing, which may or may not be true. Maybe Jaclyn was the one changing and didn’t know how to deal with it.

In 2006, at age eleven, Peyton’s mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. She was only 42 at the time. As her mother recalls, each member of the family who has had breast cancer, self-diagnosed before going to the doctor. Kathy was no exception. Kathy’s sister, maternal aunt and cousin all had breast cancer as well. The first round of chemotherapy and radiation with a lumpectomy put her mother into remission for five years. Peyton did not know what to think about it and did not cry. At that age, children still do not understand the effects of cancer and the outcomes that can happen. From 2011 to current day, Kathy has been treated for Stage IV breast cancer with METS to the right lung.
Puberty came at age twelve for Peyton. It happened during a sleepover at her house with a friend, Emily*. When she went and told her mom about it, her mom said, “Go ask your sister for a pad.” Peyton felt like her mom was interested and during the interview, her mom assured her she was concerned but in reality it was no big deal. Every girl goes through it. Peyton’s menstruations were extremely painful. She craved pickles the week before her period. By the age of sixteen, Peyton was on birth control to help curb the acne associated with puberty. Thankfully, there was not much weight gain. Peyton only grew a few inches in four years. She inherited her mother’s short stature, only being 5’6”. Since Peyton has remained active throughout her childhood, playing soccer, she is considered “thin.” Her BMI falls in the normal range for her height.

The reoccurrence of the aforementioned cancer sent Peyton into a depressive state. She cried a lot and had to talk to a counselor at school. Eventually, Peyton needed to be hospitalized for her depression to avoid committing suicide. Not only did Peyton have her mom’s sickness to deal with, she was in high school, perhaps the worst place for a young girl who doesn’t know where she fits into the world just yet. Although Peyton had friends at school, she hated it there. She chose to graduate early because everyone was “annoying, mean and petty. There was too much drama.” There were some highlights about school that Peyton will never forget, including buying her own first car at the age of sixteen with saved up money from working part-time at a bowling alley, no less. She also dated a boy for eight months. This is who she lost her virginity to at the age of 15. She thought she loved him and he loved her. They both realized they were not right for each other, but at the time it was the end of the world for her.

The future looks bright for Peyton Marie Sawyer. She had been accepted to Viterbo University in Wisconsin. She wants to major in social work because of the people who helped her in her time of need. She knows, for sure, that she does not want to go to school forever. She will do what she has to in order to get a good job. She wants to continue to play soccer and have a family someday. Wilmington, North Carolina, on a farm, with three kids, dogs, cats and a pig is where she sees her life
heading. She picks Wilmington because her favorite show, One Tree Hill, takes place there.

There comes a time in life when we turn away from childhood and adolescence and aspire to being adults. Today, a mere eighteen years later, the youngest daughter of three has emerged from a tiny zygote into a beautiful woman. The next chapter of her life is bound to be even more exciting as young adulthood begins. Peyton took us on a journey through her life’s milestones, journeys, and hardships. Feelings of pride and accomplishment accompanied by feelings of embarrassment and bewilderment are now just exhilarating moments of her past. Even though this is one life among billions, similarities can be found in our own life, including walking, talking, first day of school, driving, dating, and finally graduating. For Peyton, the whole world is ahead of her. Her best days are yet to come.

Reference
Inspiration
by
Chris Foster

As humans we have a need for companionship, a need to fill this gap we so passionately feel. We search and search our whole lives for our other half that sometimes we lose out on experiences just for the chance that one person you meet might just be the one to fill the void. We take chances and risks just to have the opportunity to finally be complete, to no longer feel alone. Truly what we are looking for is that chance to change, that chance to be more than self-serving. We look for a person that would present an opportunity to allow ourselves to change, an opportunity to be inspired to do more with ourselves.

There was a moment in my life when I thought my search was over, when I thought I had found that one person to fill my void. Well, sooner or later I found out I was right: that person melded themselves into my life and changed me. That person gave me inspiration to be better than what I was, to do more with my life. I will never forget the time spent with that person, the time where everything just felt right. It was a time of great accomplishment. It was a time of great love. It changed me in almost every way. This person gave me an opportunity to indulge in knowledge, to open my eyes to new adventures, to feel something so magical and share it with someone dear.

But like all good things, every story has an ending, and this one just happens to as well. That person was my main inspiration in life and losing that inspiration was a really hard thing for me; it drained me of everything. Every day is a struggle to try and find a new inspiration, but there is one thing that did get left behind. The one thing that was left behind was hope, hope for tomorrow, and hope for another.

Photo by Cassie Libel
I am From

by

Shannon Kicher

I am from Jim and Carol, my stability of life.
I am from Jimmy and Erika, the ones who will always be there for me.
I am from the steel city, from the hilly city of Pittsburgh, the town I will always call home; rooting on the Steelers will always be my joy.
I am from cheerleading, my day in and day out, the world that defines me, the girls, the coach, my teammates, the ones that keep me going, taking over my life in a good and bad ways.
I am from goals, accomplished and unaccomplished, from always being ready to set new ones.
I am from Steven, from the one to whom I gave up 3 years of my life, the one who I would not be able to live without, from him who I surround my world with.
I am from grandparents, the ones who meant the world to me, from the ones who made life possible and I miss every day.
I am from silence, keeping my thoughts to myself, from being shy.
Ho ho ho hum.

by

Anonymous

Hum-drum
boredom,
dumb drum,
like chewing gum.

New day? Repeat.
Walk the street
slower than a heartbeat
like a bum on sorry feet,
same deal, no deal.

Do you feel?

You got your spiel,
you spin your wheels,
on your treadmill life
of washed out teal:

Where are you going?

Blow your sorry snot.

You know you’re not All That.
Your momma’s Technicolor dreams for her baby princeling
have come to naught, swept into corners and forgot:

You fill your precious time driving strip mall pizza pie
for a dollar tip while the hungry needle slips to the E.
Don’t go blaming the economy
for where you happen to be.

Screw destiny. You are where you choose, what you see.

Get up off your knee.
Step up and be the man. Reach up to be the WOman.
Become the fearsome creature: human.
Climb out of your comfort zone.
In the realm of The Unknown
lies the You only you can own.

Take that dare. It will cost you more than cab fare
to get to where you can smell the golden air
and be the who you never knew.

Beyond your childhood dreams your future beckons,
shimmering, it gleams, drawing the timid you from sleep
to yourself,
complete.
Fools Gold

by

Sophie Bolaños

All that glitters is not gold. Why would someone say “All that glitters is gold”? Silver glitters: not gold. Bronze glitters: not gold. Even fools gold glitters: not gold. People who look for glitter usually pass over gold. Because honestly, gold doesn’t always glitter and glitter isn’t always gold.
Hope
by
Josselyn Escobar

My family and I moved in to Addison when I was 8 years old. I didn’t know anybody in my neighborhood until I saw this girl outside of her house riding her bike in the driveway. She looked very friendly and fun to play with. She came by me and introduced herself. Her name was Mary and she was also 8 years old. We started hanging out every day and got closer and closer as the days passed. We went from hoping to marry our prince charming into teenagers hoping we could have classes together up to senior year of high school. Hoping we could go to the same college, go on double dates, hoping we could achieve our careers together. Hoping we could be inseparable, telling each other everything, going to the mall, learning from our mistakes and being there for each other. Hoping we could be each other’s bridesmaid and hoping we can be best friends forever.

Mary’s mom is like my mom. She would give me advice and be there for me if I ever needed anything. Recently, however, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. My heart was shattered into little pieces, and tears rolled down my cheeks almost every day. The hopes Mary and I had shared suddenly evaporated; everything we ever wanted changed in one quick second. I didn’t see how we could hope for all of our dreams to happen when she was hoping to survive breast cancer.

Hope and faith are all we can rely on. We hope chemo is her hero. All I want is to wake up each day knowing she continues to fight this battle. She is hoping she can win; she is fighting for her life. Everything that is so precious and beautiful in life can be taken away in a quick second. She has taught us to never lose sight of the things we have, to appreciate life in every way possible. To continue hoping we can live the life we always wanted.
Colorado
by
Alisyn Ledermann

Colorado. In general. Not the flat barren places that surround the border. I’m talking about the mountains. The city of Denver. The atmosphere. The way people treat one another. The air that you breathe in. The way you feel when you are just doing nothing. The lightness of everything. The way that you feel. The mountain cliffs surrounding you. Watching the clouds float through the peaks. The sudden rainfall. The fact that you can get burned when it’s freezing out just because you are thousands of feet closer to the sun. Watching the sun rise and set through the mountains. The way the light sneaks between the peaks and rests on anything it can get on. The feeling of being so small next to something so naturally large. Rock. Everywhere. The animals that live there. Migrations of elk in the winter. The mammoth carcass they found not that long ago. It’s historical. It’s beautiful. The rings on the mountains. The lines from past floods. The history that the mountains hold. It’s something that cannot be replicated. It is like heaven on earth. A place where anyone could be happy. Even the most doubtful and sad could feel joy and comport here. It’s light. Like air. Like a feather. No judging. A clean slate. The feeling of standing on the top of a mountain can easily be compared to the way the people feel on the moon. You feel empowered. Important. Youthful. Nothing can kill the moment you will feel then. You feel a if you can see everything. Everything in the world. The green trees turn into blankets covering the rocks. Peaks of white on the tops of mountains even thought it’s 80 degrees out and your skin is frying. Ice caves. It’s 95 degrees and there are caves that still have piles of snow everywhere. The water is frozen. Chunks of ice everywhere.
I’m just letting you know . . .

I have

made off

with that willow in your yard

The one that has

been growing

for years.

Forgive me,

for it was so dainty,

so beautiful,

and so easy to blow away . . .